

Student Views on the Use of L1 in the Foreign Language Classroom

Glen Clancy*

La Trobe University, Australia

Abstract

The use of first languages (L1) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Japanese Universities is often a source of robust debate. In recent years, there has been an increase in counterarguments against the L2 monolingual EFL classroom and a strengthening of support for L1 usage. This study examines the views of students receiving tertiary English language education on the use of the L1 in English classes. The analysis suggests that students studying English as a second language (L2) in Japanese universities overwhelmingly preferred the use of L1 to aid in the facilitation of learning in EFL classes. Moreover, there were notable trends in attitudes between differing levels of student L2 proficiencies. The results reveal a negative correlation between desired L1 application in EFL classes and the L2 proficiencies of the students, and a discrepancy in the desired objective for L1 application for different student levels of L2 proficiency. These findings suggest the approach adopted for EFL courses in Japanese universities should implement judicious use of L1 and recognize that different levels of L2 proficiency will affect preferences for L1 usage in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: L1 usage, L2, student views, EFL, teacher L1 fluency, purpose of L1

Introduction

Robust debate surrounds the use of the first language (L1) in the foreign language classroom. It is an emotive issue that can call into question the teaching skills of foreign language instructors (Burden, 2000a); teachers can be made to feel guilty or inadequate for using an L1 in the L2 (second language) classroom (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). There is no consensus for L1 usage in the foreign language classroom and there is variation in L1 use between countries and teaching institutions (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008). There has, however, been a general shift in the debate in the past few decades from a strict emphasis on exclusive L2 usage towards a more balanced view recognizing the benefits of appropriate usage of an L1 (McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2006).

In Japan, many educational institutions have individual policies for the use of an L2 exclusively (Tsukamoto, 2011); however, the prohibition of L1 use in English classes is often advocated beginning in elementary school through to tertiary education. For example, some researchers argue that a monolingual approach is the most effective as it emulates the method in which a child acquires their L1 (Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins, 1998; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). L1 use is often regarded as a barrier to effective teaching in many secondary school classrooms (Tsukamoto, 2011). The overuse of L1 in Japanese high schools has been attributed to factors including "Japanese English teachers' own lack of communicative ability," a "lack of teacher training," and "the emphasis placed on university entrance examinations" (McMillan & Rivers, 2011, pp. 251-252). An English-only approach has recently been hailed as the solution to Japan's low international English rankings (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) announced in 2008 that English classes in high schools should be conducted in L2 (Tsukamoto, 2011).

* Email: gccquarterly@gmail.com. Tel.: +613 9479 1111 Address: Plenty Rd & Kingsbury Dr, Bundoora VIC 3086

Despite the Japanese government's push for greater L2 exclusivity in English classes, there has been an increase in counterarguments against the monolingual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom and a strengthening of support for L1 usage. In recent years, there have been arguments made for the judicious and theoretically principled use of the L1 in the EFL classroom (Cook, 2001; Levine, 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004; Turnbull, 2001).

In contrast with the vast majority of EFL literature concerning L1 usage in the foreign language classroom that focuses on the analysis of pedagogical methods and theories, this study examines the opinions of students who are the recipients of tertiary English language education. University students receiving L2 (English) education from a foreign EFL teacher were asked about their preferences for the foreign EFL teacher being fluent in the L1 (Japanese), using L1 when appropriate, the purpose of L1 usage, and whether a foreign EFL teacher should pretend to lack L1 proficiency. Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data found that Japanese university students largely favored L1 usage to aid learning in EFL classes, but there were also significant differences in preferences across the various levels of student L2 proficiencies.

Literature Review

The Advantages of a Monolingual Approach in EFL Classes

The monolingual approach to English teaching is often revered for emulating the method in which a child acquires their L1 (Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins, 1998; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). L2 exclusivity enhances subconscious learning, and there is a direct relationship between comprehensible L2 input and proficiency (Krashen, 1982). The key attraction to a monolingual approach is student exposure to the target language—the greater the exposure to L2, the faster students will learn (Ellis R., 2005). Macaro (1997) argues that L1 has no pedagogical value for students and in fact is a barrier to L2 learning. L1 use in the EFL class may also decrease the motivation of students by dismissing the importance of L2 as a communicative tool (Littlewood, 1992). Ellis (1985), on the other hand, while promoting the monolingual approach, recognizes that an L1 may be necessary to explain and organize tasks and manage the behavior of students to facilitate the functioning of the EFL class, although they lament that this may be detrimental to language acquisition through the reduction of L2 input. There is also the risk that allowing L1 in the foreign language classroom will lead to excessive use (Turnbull, 2001). Turnbull (2001) argues that the main issue with L1 is formulating the appropriate parameters for “an optimal or acceptable amount of [L2] and L1 use” (p. 531).

The Advantages of a Bilingual Approach in EFL Classes

More recently, there has been growing support for the bilingual approach to foreign language classrooms, with greater recognition of judicious and theoretically principled L1 use (Cook, 2001; Levine, 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004; Turnbull, 2001). Swain and Lapkin (2000) argue that judicious use of the L1 can indeed support L2 learning and use. To insist that no use be made of the L1 in carrying out tasks that are both linguistically and cognitively complex is to deny the use of an important cognitive tool. (p. 268)

The bilingual learner is now often presented as the best model for L2 acquisition, one who can use skills learned in one language to facilitate advancement in another (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Cook 2001). For example, bilingual learners consciously use mental strategies and use their L1 to forecast what works for L2 (Gass & Mackey, 2000). Cook (2001) argues that L1 use in the foreign language classroom may help develop “genuine L2 users” (p. 412) that are “mediators” (p. 407) between the L1 and L2 rather than “imitators” (p. 407) of native speakers.

There are three prevalent theories that provide evidence for L1 having a facilitating effect in the foreign language classroom. Firstly, the cognitive processing theory (Ellis N., 2005) demonstrates that L1 and L2 are not held in separate conceptual stores, and the mental lexicon is best explained as a series of connections, which are not language specific until activated (Ellis N., 2005; Kroll, 1993; Libben, 2000). Connections with L1 will be

much stronger; hence abandoning these connections will disregard an important tool for L2 learners (Ellis N., 2005; Kroll, 1993; Libben, 2000). The second, a socio-cultural theory promoting the use of L1 in foreign language learning proposes that inner voice and private speech, which are crucial devices in the way we think and act, are almost always carried out in L1 (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Brooks, Donato, & McGlone, 1997). Codeswitching in naturalistic environments makes up the third theory advocating the benefits of L1 in foreign language teaching, which compares switching from L2 to L1 in the classroom with naturalistic codeswitching outside the classroom (Håkansson & Lindberg, 1988). This theory identifies the advantages of using L1 for conveying message-oriented information in enhancing the process of foreign language lessons (Håkansson & Lindberg, 1988). Although the benefits of codeswitching are not conclusive, there is no evidence that teacher codeswitching is detrimental to lexical acquisition (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009) or that codeswitching by the teacher has a “negative impact on the quantity of students’ L2 production” (Macaro, 2005, p. 72).

Raschka, Sercombe, and Chi-Ling (2009) list four common functions of L1 in the EFL classroom: socialization (i.e., “when teachers turn to the students’ first language to signal friendship and solidarity”), topic switch (i.e., “when the teacher switches code according to which topic is under discussion”), classroom management (i.e., “where teachers negotiated progression of classroom activities in the students’ mother tongue”), and metalinguistic functioning (i.e., “where tasks were performed in the target language but comment, evaluation and talk about the task could take place in the first language”). However, the function of codeswitching between the L1 and L2 often fluctuates depending on the discourse in the classroom at a specific time (Raschka, Sercombe, & Chi-Ling, 2009). Eldridge (1996) argues that the functions of codeswitching interrelate in highly complex means making it difficult to identify the exact function of specific cases of L1 usage in the EFL classroom.

Tsukamoto (2011) breaks down the advantages of L1 in EFL learning into three categories: maintaining a comfortable class atmosphere, facilitating greater student comprehension, and class-time efficiency. The use of L1 can act as a tool to stimulate greater student participation by creating a relaxing atmosphere (Polio & Duff, 1994). Burden (2000b) found that an English-only approach isolates students and that the L1 is effective in providing a sense of security for learners in taking risks with the L2. Castellotti and Moore (1997) argue that L1 usage can create a low-anxiety classroom environment conducive to learning. Student comprehension may also be enhanced through L1 use. Krashen (1981) argues that bilingual learning provides knowledge and literacy in a student’s native language and indirectly enhances L2 proficiency. Students will often naturally equate the L2 with their native language; therefore, blocking this process may have negative effects (Harbord, 1992). Finally, L1 use can benefit L2 learners by increasing class-time efficiency and substituting time wasted on misunderstandings for more productive activities (Atkinson, 1987).

Teacher Views of L2 Usage

Researchers have also examined teacher and student views of L2 use in the foreign language classroom; however, in the past two decades, the bulk of studies have largely focused on teacher opinions (Macaro, 2001; Polio & Duff, 1994). Studies have found that teachers use L1 to explain new vocabulary and grammar, for instructions, and for student discipline (Kaneko, 1992; Macaro, 2001; Polio & Duff, 1994) and for creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere and teacher/student affinity (Kaneko, 1992; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). The shift towards the recognition of the advantages of L1 in foreign language education has been reflected in studies on the opinions of EFL teachers. Makulloluwa’s (2013) study of EFL teacher opinions in Sri Lanka found that “a majority of the teachers demonstrated a positive attitude towards the use of L1 in the classroom” (p. 592). Similarly, Timor (2012) concluded in a study of EFL teaching in Israel that teachers demonstrated a “positive pedagogical stance” with “regard to Hebrew as the [L1] in EFL classes” (p. 13). McMillan and Rivers (2011) conducted an attitudinal study of 29 native-English speaker teachers at a Japanese university and found, contrary to the official university policy promoting exclusive L2 use, “many teachers believed that selective use of the students’ L1, by the teacher or by students, could enhance L2 learning in various ways within a communicative framework” (p. 251).

Student Views on L2 Usage

On the other hand, there has been limited research published on student views of L2 use in the foreign language classroom (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008). Levine (2003) found through a study of 600 foreign language students and 163 foreign language instructors that, despite the prevailing “monolingual principle” in the US, the L1 reduces student anxiety and serves meaningful pedagogical functions. Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney published two studies in 2006 and 2008 exploring Australian university student views on L1 use in French, German, Japanese, and Spanish language classes (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2006; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008). They found that students recognized the value of L1 use in the foreign language class; however, this indicated “necessity of a delicate balance between the L1 and the [L2] within the language classroom” (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2006, p. 78). L1 use was seen as a “double-edged sword” (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2006, p. 78). For example, “while students see grammatical items as easier to grasp in L1 due to their complexity, they also see the necessity for learning structures from language in use, in a natural context” (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2006, p. 78). Although there was no consensus, the majority of students viewed the role of L1 use as a facilitator of medium-oriented interactions, i.e., focusing on form rather than content, such as vocabulary and grammar explanations (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008).

There has also been little research published on student views of L1 use in EFL classrooms in Japan. Burden conducted two studies examining Japanese university student views across varying levels of English proficiency, on student and teacher L1 use in English classes (Burden, 2000a) and another on changes in Japanese student views of L1 use in an English conversation class throughout a single university semester (Burden, 2004). Burden (2000a) found that the majority of students believed the teacher should have knowledge of the L1, and that the teacher and students themselves should use the L1 during class. This trend decreased as English proficiency levels increased, although postgraduate students bucked this trend and had similar views to the “pre-intermediate” level students (Burden, 2000a). Students were split into proficiency categories (Pre-intermediate, Intermediate, Advanced, and Postgraduate) based on their year level (Burden, 2000a). The most common reasons given for appropriate L1 use by the teacher was “relaxing the students,” “explaining the differences between [L1] and English grammar,” “explaining new words,” and “talking about tests” (Burden, 2000a, p. 144). Burden (2000a) concluded that students “recognize that communicative lessons with native speakers should be conducted in the [L2], while reserving the right to ask about usage through the [L1], thus creating a more relaxed, humanistic classroom where they can freely express themselves” (p. 139). Similarly, Tsukamoto (2011) conducted a “small study” on Japanese university students’ perceptions of L1 use in English classes. Tsukamoto surveyed 42 English major students asking, “Did you feel the instructor needed to use Japanese in class?” The majority of students (83%) believed the English instructor did not “need” to use L1 in the class (Tsukamoto, 2011, p. 150).

Research Questions

This study will contribute to current research (Burden, 2000a; Tsukamoto, 2011) by further exploring Japanese university student opinions (across varying levels of English proficiency) of the importance of a foreign English teacher’s L1 fluency, the need for L1 usage in English classes, and the specific purposes of L1 in English classes. This study will also present unique research regarding Japanese university students’ opinions of whether foreign English teachers should pretend to lack L1 proficiency in the EFL classroom. The research questions addressed by this study are: Do students prefer foreign EFL teachers to be fluent in the L1? When do students think it is appropriate to use the L1 during an EFL class? What purpose do students think the L1 serves, if any, in the EFL classroom? Do students think a foreign EFL teacher should pretend to lack L1 proficiency?

Methodology

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods of research to explore Japanese university

student views of L1 use in the EFL classroom. Questionnaires were administered to 175 first- and second-year undergraduate students from three universities in the Kanto region by the author and three other EFL instructors. The students undertook English classes taught by foreign native English teachers and were of varying English proficiencies. The questionnaire contained seven questions eliciting both quantitative and qualitative data on student views of the importance of a foreign English teacher's L1 fluency, the necessity for L1 use in EFL classes, the specific purposes of L1 in EFL classes, and whether a foreign English teacher should pretend to lack L1 proficiency. Students' L2 (English) proficiency levels were categorized through their Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Listening and Reading test scores—an exam that is designed to test students' everyday English skills working in an international environment.

Student respondents were asked if they preferred a foreign teacher that was fluent in the L1 (Japanese) or a foreign teacher that could not communicate in the L1. The students were also asked if they preferred the foreign teacher to speak no L1 or to speak L1 in certain situations. The questionnaire also contained a question asking students for what purpose, if any, did they want the foreign teacher to use L1. The options included “new vocabulary,” “grammar,” “instructions” (e.g., class instructions, homework, assignments), “administration matters,” “facilitating rapport/humour,” and “creating a comfortable atmosphere/enhancing communication.” Finally, students were asked if they preferred the foreign teacher to pretend to lack proficiency in the L1.

The data gathered from these questions were analyzed quantitatively both amongst the total number of students surveyed (175) and comparatively across each TOEIC proficiency level. Qualitative analysis was carried out through examining answers given to open questions regarding the respondents' reasoning for their preferences for a foreign teacher being fluent, or not, in the L1 and for a foreign teacher pretending to be fluent, or not, in the L1.

Results

This study explores four areas related to Japanese university students' opinions of L1 use in the EFL classroom across various levels of English proficiency. First, students were asked about the importance of foreign English teachers being fluent in L1 (Japanese); second, students were asked about whether the foreign English teacher should speak L1 (Japanese) at appropriate times during the EFL class; and third, students were asked about the specific purposes of L1 in EFL classes. Finally, students were questioned about whether the foreign English teacher should pretend to lack proficiency in the L1 (Japanese).

Desired Teacher Fluency

Overall, the majority of participants (66.29%) preferred that the foreign English teacher be fluent in L1 rather than having no knowledge of L1 (see Figure 1).

Unsurprisingly, there was a trend of decreased preference for teacher L1 fluency for participants with higher levels of English proficiency (see Figure 2).

Seventy-five percent of students with TOEIC scores ranging from zero to 300 preferred a teacher that was fluent in L1; sixty-seven percent of students with TOEIC scores ranging from 301 to 450 preferred a teacher that was fluent in L1; and seventy-three percent of students with TOEIC scores ranging from 451 to 600 preferred a teacher that was fluent in L1. On the other hand, only forty-seven and fifty percent of students with TOEIC scores ranging from 601 to 750 and 751 to 900, respectively, preferred a teacher that was fluent in L1. Common themes for preferring a foreign English teacher fluent in L1 across all levels included were that it is easier to learn, understand, and communicate during class. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 528 wrote:

If the teacher speaks all English then often I won't understand so I would like the teacher to occasionally explain in Japanese.

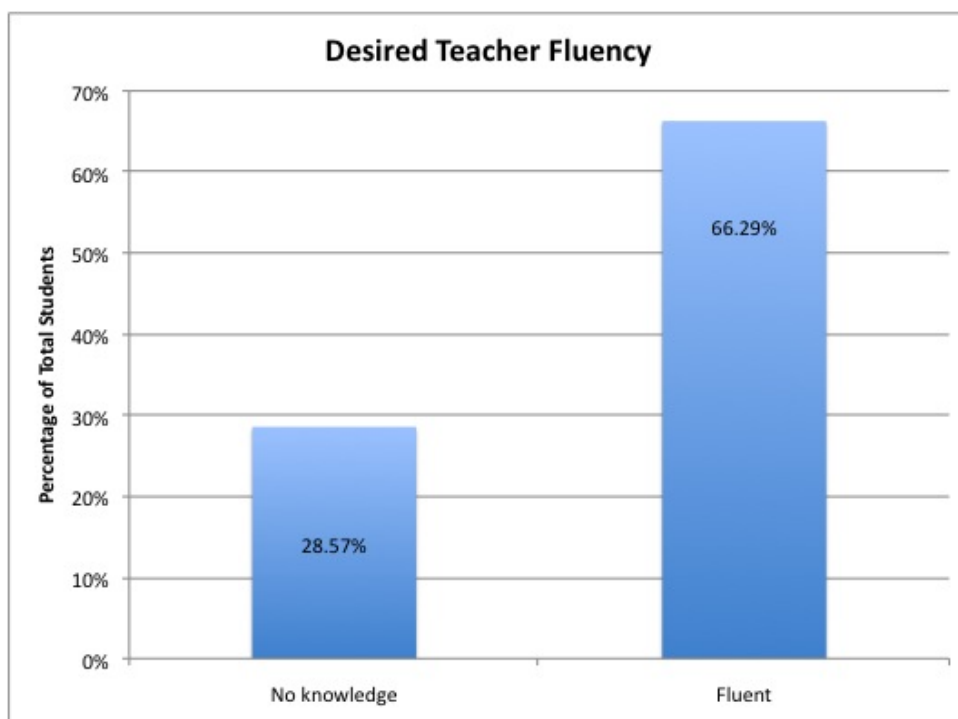


Figure 1. Students' preference of teacher L1 fluency (total students)

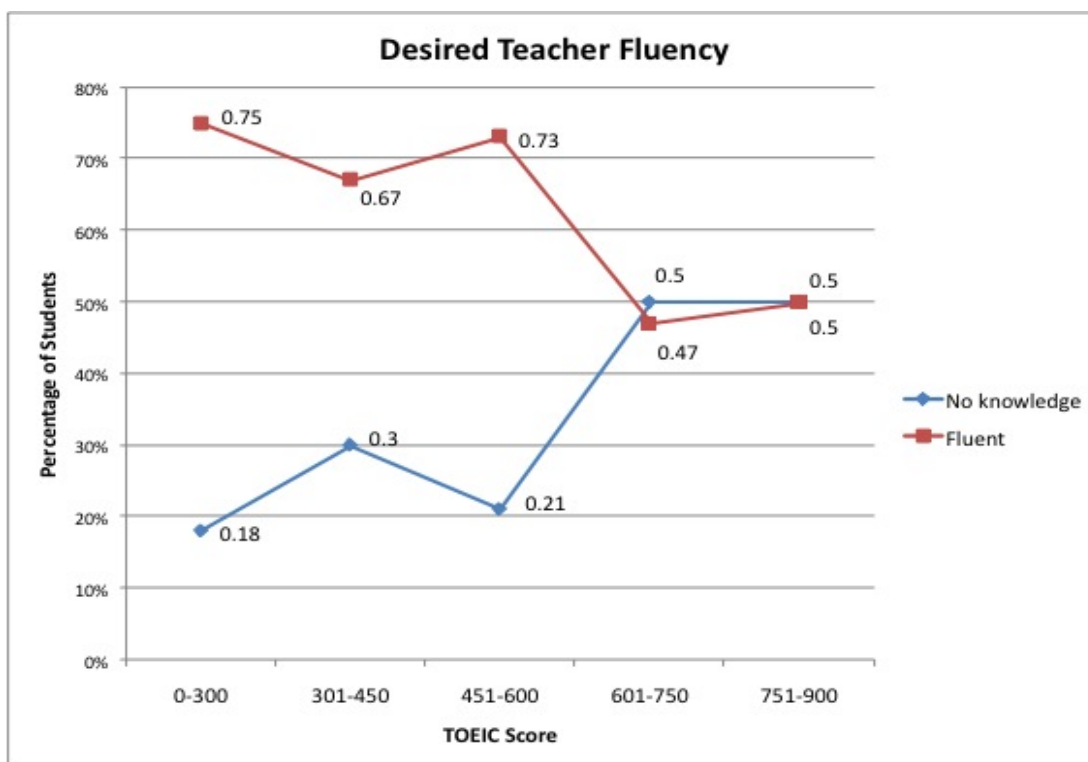


Figure 2. Students' preference of teacher fluency (per proficiency level).

Another student with a TOEIC score of 710, wrote:

If there is no way to communicate in English the teacher can understand. Also, the teacher can correct our English.

Other common reasons given for preferring a foreign English teacher fluent in the L1 were that the teacher could avoid “misunderstandings,” that it was useful “to communicate as a last resort” when L2 usage failed, and that students could “relate to the teacher.” For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 575, wrote:

It's better to relate to the teacher and easier to understand. If the teacher has gone through the same hardships learning a foreign language they will understand the student's position.

Common reasons given amongst lower level students were that a fluent foreign teacher enabled the class to “function smoothly” and encouraged student motivation. For example, a student with a TOEIC score of 155, wrote:

I can't understand what is being said from the beginning so I lose motivation.

Conversely, common themes amongst students that preferred the foreign English teacher had no knowledge of the L1 include not depending on the L1 and therefore being forced to try harder to use English. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 450, wrote:

If there is no other way than to speak in English then the student will try their best.

Another student with a TOEIC score of 775, wrote:

If we know the teacher speaks Japanese we might depend on it.

Other common reasons given for preferring the foreign English teacher had no knowledge of the L1 was to become familiar with the L2 and increase the quantity of English practice during class. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 160, wrote:

The class is a chance to speak English so we can get used to English conversation.

Another student with a TOEIC score of 603, wrote:

To make an English only environment and quickly get used to it.

Using L1 When Appropriate

The majority of all students (85.71%) preferred that the foreign English teacher use L1 when appropriate during class (see Figure 3).

Unsurprisingly, there was a negative correlation between English proficiency and preferring the teacher use L1 when appropriate (see Figure 4).

There was a gradual downward trend of desired L1 usage when appropriate with increasing English proficiency. Ninety-one percent of the students with the lowest-level English proficiency (TOEIC scores ranging from zero to 300) preferred that foreign English teachers use L1 when appropriate compared to just 67% of the students with the highest-level English proficiency (TOEIC scores ranging from 751 to 900).

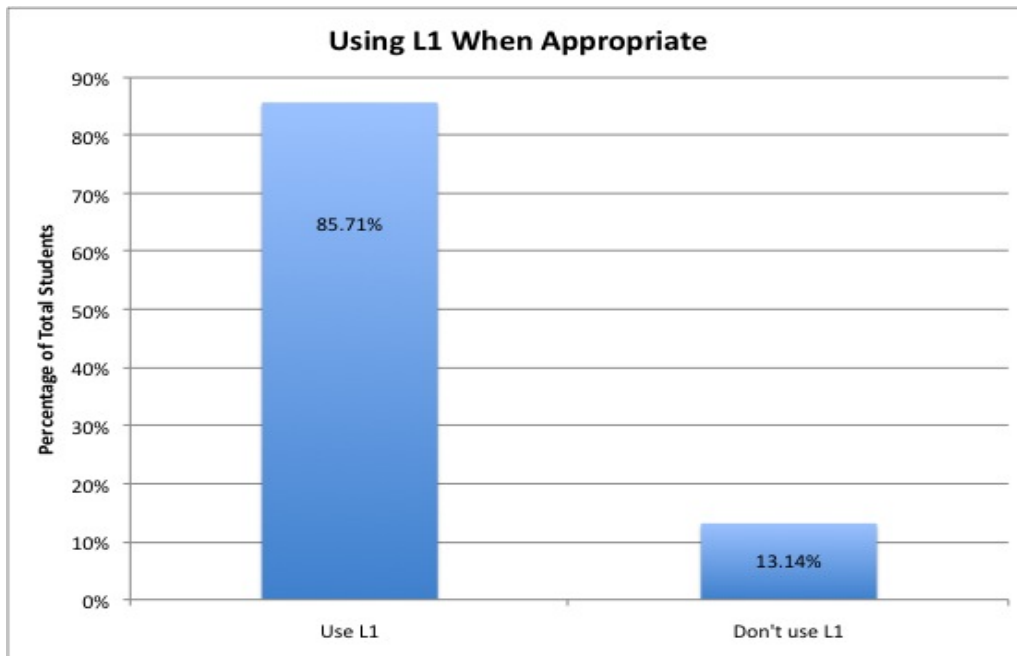


Figure 3. Students' preference for teacher using L1 when appropriate (total students).

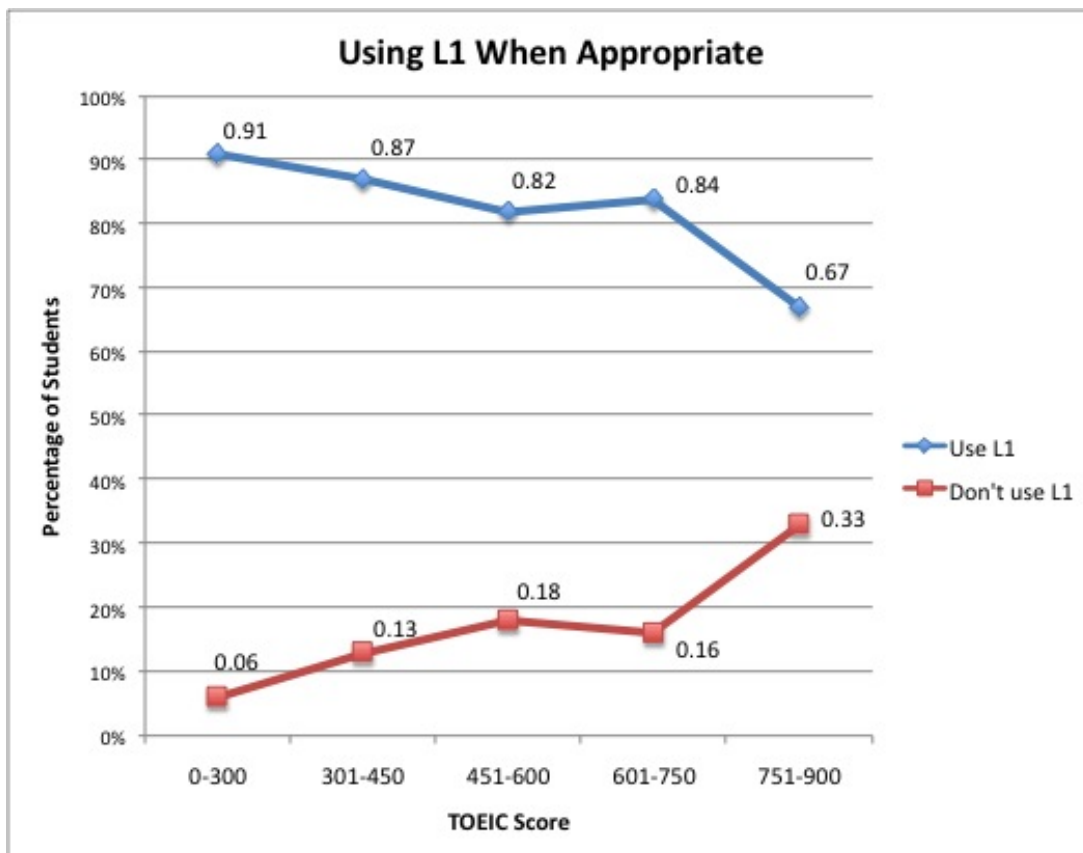


Figure 4. Students' preference for teacher using L1 when appropriate (per proficiency level).

Purpose of L1

New vocabulary was considered the most important area for the EFL teacher to use L1 (42% of all students identified new vocabulary) (see Figure 5). However, facilitating teacher/student rapport and humor (39% of all students), class instructions (35% of all students), class atmosphere/aiding communication (35% of all students), and grammar (34% of all students) were similarly highly regarded. Surprisingly, L1 for administrative purposes was only deemed necessary by 11% of all participants. Only 5% answered that L1 served “no purpose.”

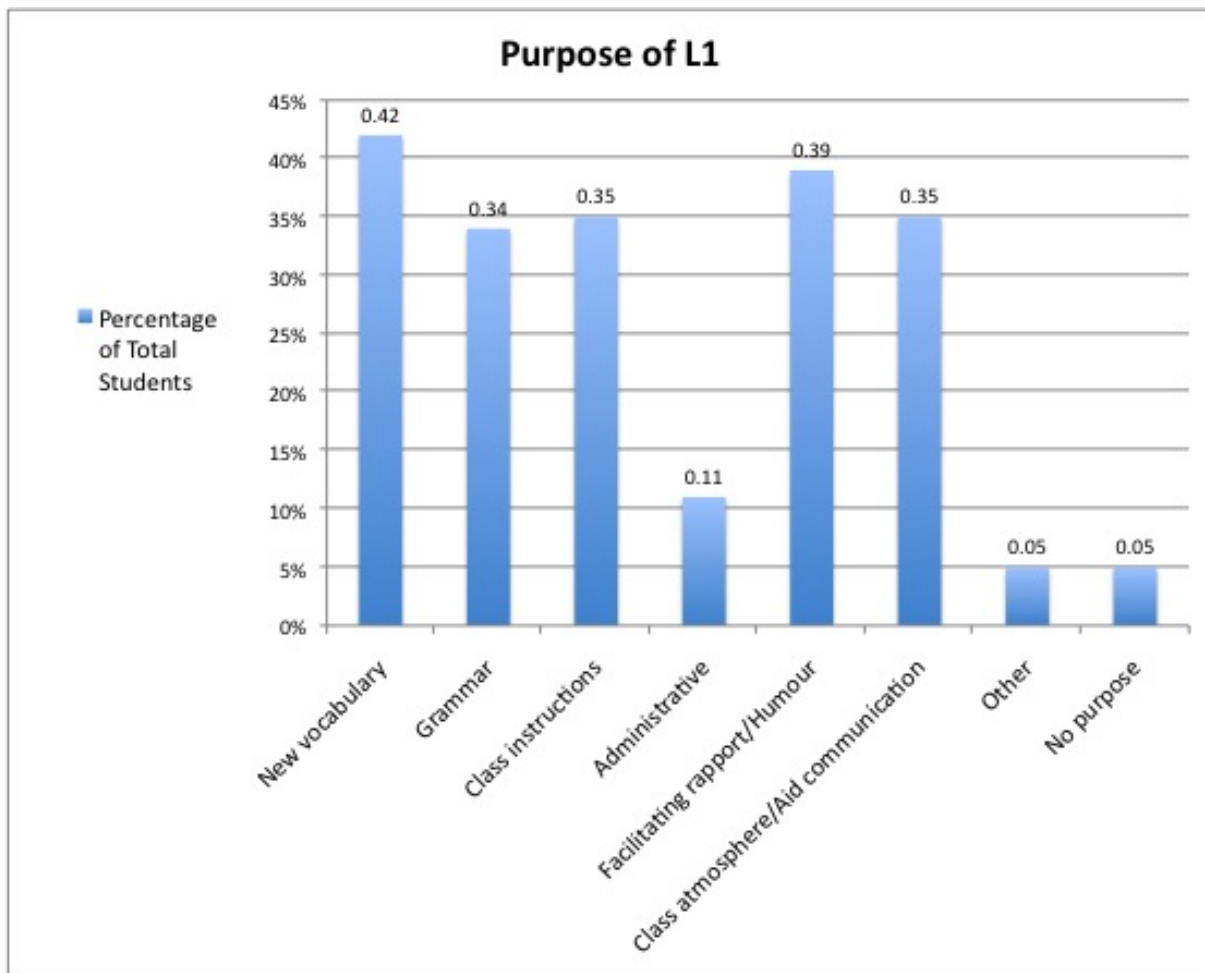


Figure 5. Desired purpose of L1 (total students).

The students with the highest TOEIC scores (751-900) identified new vocabulary (50% of the highest-level students) and class atmosphere (42% of the highest-level students) as the most desired areas for the EFL teacher using L1 (see Figure 6). Total percentages add to more than 100% due to students answering one or more desired purposes for L1 usage.

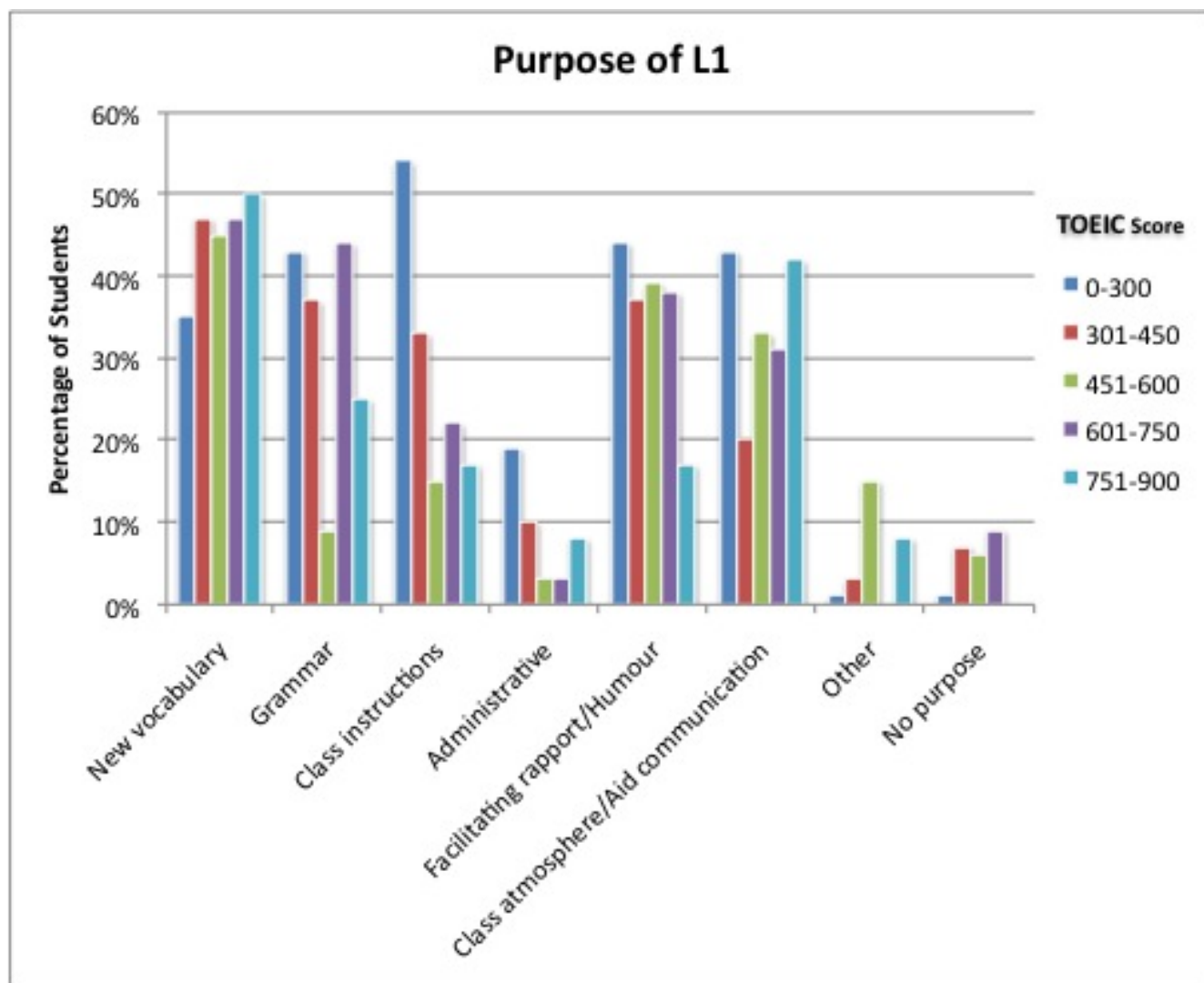


Figure 6. Desired purpose of L1 (per proficiency level)

New vocabulary had a slight trend of being more favourable the higher the TOEIC level of the students (see Figure 6). On the other hand, the three areas of facilitating teacher/student rapport and humor, class instructions, and administration all had a decreasing trend the higher the TOEIC level of the students.

The most desired purpose for L1 by students with the lowest TOEIC scores (0-300) was class instructions, with 54% of the lowest-level students (see Figure 6). Facilitating teacher/student rapport and humor (44%), class atmosphere (43%), and new vocabulary (35%) were also highly valued purposes for L1 use in the EFL classroom by the lowest-level students.

Pretending to Lack L1 Proficiency

Overall, only a small minority of students (16.57%) believed that foreign English teachers should pretend to lack proficiency in the L1 (Japanese) (see Figure 7).

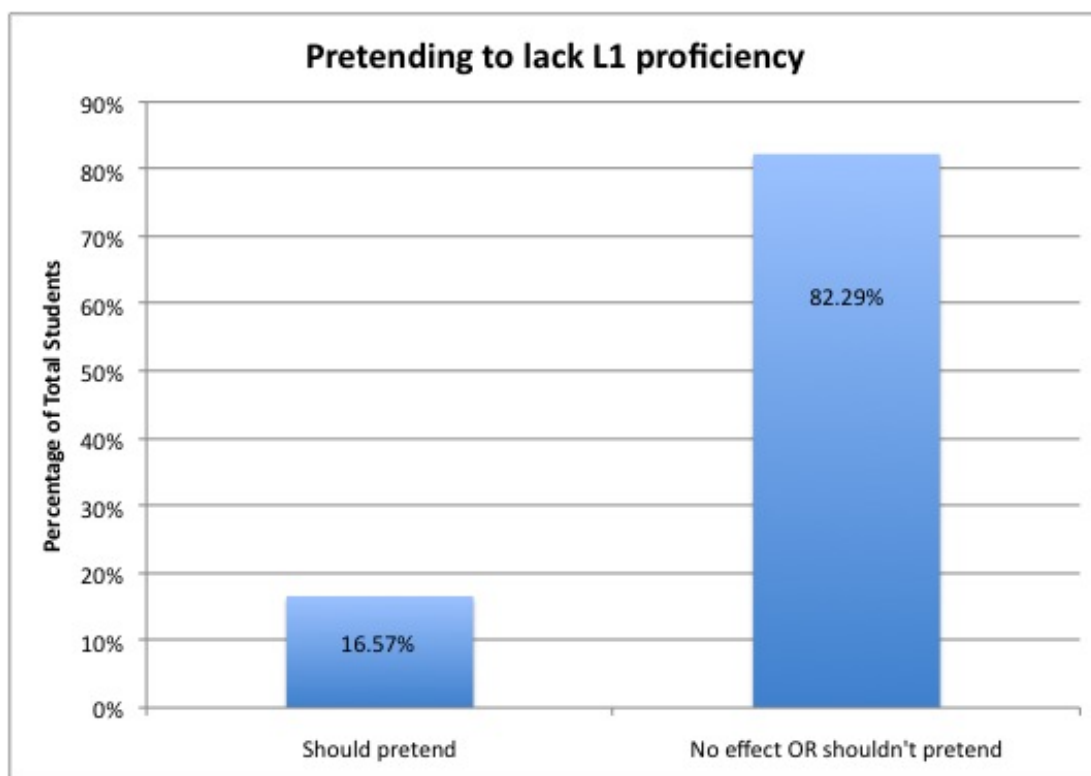


Figure 7. Students' preference of teacher pretending to lack L1 proficiency (total students)

As levels of English proficiency increased, more students believed the teacher should pretend to lack L1 proficiency (see Figure 8). However, surprisingly, the views of students with the highest TOEIC scores (751-900) bucked this trend and were almost identical to the students with the lowest TOEIC scores (0-300), with only eight and seven percent, respectively, indicating they preferred the foreign English teacher didn't pretend to lack L1 proficiency.

There were similar reasons given for rejecting the need for the foreign English teacher to pretend to lack L1 proficiency throughout all English levels of proficiency. One common reason given was to enable another means of communication with the teacher. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 821, wrote:

Japanese (the L1) may be used as one method of communication.

Another intermediate level student with a TOEIC score of 515, supported this opinion, commenting:

It's easier to communicate if the teacher speaks Japanese.

Similarly, another student with a TOEIC score of 180 wrote:

It's better for class atmosphere and communicating more easily.

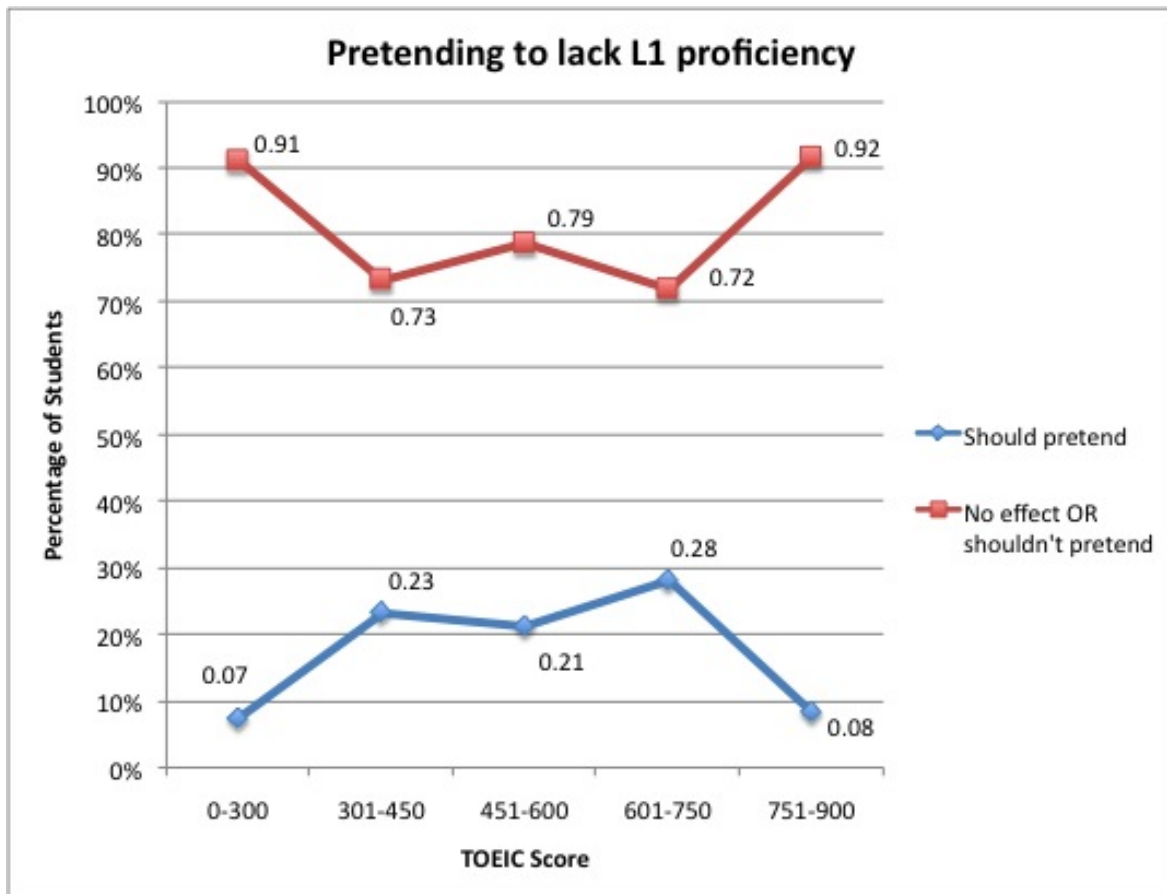


Figure 8. Students' preference of teacher pretending to lack L1 proficiency (per proficiency level)

Another common reason given for rejecting the need for the foreign English teacher to pretend to lack L1 proficiency was to facilitate a more effective lesson where misunderstandings could be explained in the L1. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 825 wrote:

There are times when I want things explained in Japanese.

Similarly, another lower level student with a TOEIC score of 290 wrote:

I want things explained in Japanese if possible.

Another common reason given across most proficiency levels (excluding the highest-level students with TOEIC scores of 751-900) for rejecting the need for the foreign English teacher to pretend to lack L1 proficiency was to relate to the teacher. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 405 wrote:

If the teacher speaks Japanese there is a greater sense of affinity and I will try harder to understand English.

Another student with a TOEIC score of 575, also commented on the importance of developing a relationship with the teacher:

I think it's better to understand the teacher and build a trusting relationship rather than pretending not to speak Japanese to increase English usage.

Similarly, another student with a TOEIC score of 600 wrote that knowing the teacher is learning the L1 can be stimulating for the class:

We can feel like we are learning a language together.

Comments by students that believed it was constructive for the teacher to pretend to lack L1 proficiency revealed common themes such as being encouraged to use L2 (English), L1 (Japanese) usage obstructing English practice, and an L2 exclusive class improving language acquisition. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 210 wrote:

If Japanese is used our English won't improve.

Another student with a TOEIC score of 360 wrote:

If Japanese is spoken it will obstruct English practice.

One student with a TOEIC score of 703 was concerned about becoming too reliant on the L1 during the EFL class:

Because the students will tend to depend on communicating in Japanese.

Discussion

The opinions gathered from Japanese university students in this study provide insight into the views of L1 use in the EFL classroom by those receiving an English language education. The results of the student surveys largely mirror other studies examining student and teacher views on L1 usage in EFL classes (Kaneko, 1992; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney 2008). A significant percentage of student views advocating for the use of L1 by a foreign EFL teacher supports the shift in recent years of publications highlighting the advantages of L1 usage (Cook, 2001; Levine, 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004; Turnbull, 2001).

Teacher L1 Fluency

Overall, a minority of students surveyed (28.57%) responded that the foreign EFL teacher should have no knowledge of the L1. Students that preferred that their foreign EFL teacher was not fluent in the L1—the majority of these having higher levels of English (L2) proficiency—believed this forced them to try harder because they could not rely on the L1, it assisted them in getting used to using L2, and also increased the quantity of L2 practice in the classroom.

These responses support R. Ellis' (2005) thesis that the main benefit of a monolingual approach in the EFL class is student exposure to the target language, thereby enhancing L2 acquisition. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 810 wrote, "We can't talk a lot of English in Japan, so it's better not to speak Japanese in class." Another student with a TOEIC score of 450 wrote, "If there is no other way than to speak in English then the student will try their best." Moreover, Turnbull (2001) argues that allowing L1 usage in the EFL classroom may result in excessive use and asserts that the main problem with L1 is creating appropriate boundaries for "an optimal or acceptable amount of [L2] and L1 use" (p. 531).

Nevertheless, a majority (66.29%) of the students surveyed preferred their foreign EFL teacher to be fluent in their native language (Japanese). This point of view had a negative correlation with the English proficiency of the students, i.e., the lower the level of English proficiency, the more likely a student is to prefer that their foreign EFL teacher is fluent in their native language. Conversely, the higher a student's English proficiency, the less likely they are to prefer their foreign EFL teacher to be fluent in their native language. This is a significant finding that is rarely addressed in EFL literature. This study highlights that L2 proficiency plays a significant role in determining learners' desire for L1 usage in the EFL classroom.

Students who preferred an L1-fluent foreign EFL teacher—the majority having a lower English proficiency—believed it allowed some usage of L1 and benefitted learning when they “didn't understand.” For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 200 wrote, “Because the teacher can explain in more depth.” Another student with a TOEIC score of 300 wrote, “I want to ask the teacher not to skip something if I don't understand.” This illustrates that many students—especially those with a lower English proficiency—recognized L1 as an important tool to develop their foreign language skills. Cook (2005) supports this position, arguing that the bilingual learner is now often acknowledged as the best model for L2 learning, whereby a student can use their skills already learned in the L1 to facilitate advancement in the L2. The survey results also support Burden's (2000a) findings that the majority of Japanese university students learning English as a foreign language believe that the teacher should have knowledge of the L1.

Using L1 When Appropriate

The majority of all students surveyed (85.71%) believed that L1 should be used in the EFL class when appropriate. This outcome supports recent studies recognizing the advantages of the judicious and theoretically principled use of L1 in the EFL classroom (Cook, 2001; Levine, 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O'Cain, 2004; Turnbull, 2001). This study also found a negative correlation between preferring L1 usage when appropriate and the L2 proficiency of the students, i.e., there is a decreasing trend of desired L1 usage when appropriate with increasing levels of L2 proficiency. These results demonstrate the importance of the L2 proficiency of the students in determining the parameters of L1 usage in the EFL class.

The overwhelming majority (91%) of students with the lowest-level L2 proficiency (TOEIC scores ranging from zero to 300) believed L1 usage should be allowed when appropriate, while only 67% of the students with the highest-level L2 proficiency believed that the L1 should be used when appropriate. Consequently, according to the recipients of tertiary English language education in Japan, the application of L1 when appropriate in the EFL class is more important for students with lower levels of English proficiency.

Purpose of L1

The survey produced a relatively complex mix of answers regarding the preferred purpose of L1 usage in the EFL classroom. Overall, new vocabulary (42% of all students) was considered the most significant area of importance for L1 usage, closely followed by the facilitation of teacher/student rapport and humor (39% of all students), class instructions (35% of all students), class atmosphere/aiding communication (35% of all students), and grammar (34% of all students). Significantly, only 5% of all students answered that L1 served no purpose in the EFL classroom, further highlighting student beliefs of the advantages of L2 usage in EFL lessons.

These results illustrate the similar findings of previous studies carried out on the application of L1 by teachers in EFL classrooms. Researchers found that teachers use L1 to explain new vocabulary and grammar (Polio & Duff, 1994) to give instructions (Kaneko, 1992; Macaro, 2001; Polio & Duff, 1994), and to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere and teacher/student affinity (Kaneko, 1992; Polio & Duff, 1994; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002). The results of this study also support the few published studies examining student views of L1 use in the EFL classroom. For example, Rolin-Ianziti and Varshney (2008) argue that the majority of Australian university students they surveyed viewed the role of L1 as a facilitator of medium-orientated interactions. In other words, L1 is an important tool for teaching aspects of language focusing on form rather than content such as new vocabulary or grammar. Similarly, this study found that students believed that L1

usage was most important for learning new vocabulary.

The students with the highest TOEIC scores (751-900) also identified new vocabulary (50% of the highest-level students) and class atmosphere (42% of the highest-level students) as the most desired areas for L1 usage. On the other hand, students with the lowest TOEIC scores (0-300) identified class instructions (54% of the lowest-level students), the facilitation of teacher/student rapport and humor (44% of the lowest-level students), class atmosphere (43% of the lowest-level students), and new vocabulary (35% of the lowest-level students) as the most important areas for L1 usage.

Respondents who believed that L1 usage was important for class atmosphere were relatively evenly spread amongst all levels of L2 proficiency; previous research supports this widely-held view amongst respondents. For example, Tsukamoto (2011) argues that maintaining a comfortable class atmosphere is one of the key advantages of using L1 in the EFL classroom. Polio and Duff (1994) found that the L1 is important for providing a sense of security for learners and can act as a tool to stimulate greater student participation. Moreover, Castellotti and Moore (1997) argue that the L1 can create a low-anxiety environment and enhance L2 learning. The results of this study suggest that the students surveyed were aware of these benefits, borne out of L1 usage, for creating a class atmosphere more conducive to learning.

These results also support Burden's (2000a) study in which students were split into proficiency categories. One of the most common reasons given for appropriate L1 use was "relaxing students." Burden argues that allowing students to ask about L2 usage through the L1 creates a more "relaxed, humanistic classroom where they can freely express themselves" (p. 139).

In contrast, the desire to use the L1 for class instructions was most prevalent amongst students with lower English proficiency levels. This again indicates that there is a discrepancy in the views of the role of L2 for differing levels of L2 proficiency. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 300 wrote:

There are times when I can't understand anything or when I can't understand instructions so I want the teacher to be able to speak some Japanese even if the teacher isn't fluent.

The results illustrate that students who are less proficient in the L2 believe that the L1 is most effectively used as a tool for increasing class efficiency.

The data also revealed an overall trend of a negative correlation between the preference for L1 usage for class instructions and the level of L2 proficiency. In other words, the more proficient the students, the less likely they were to prefer class instructions communicated in the L2. This pattern is the same for student views of L2 usage for the facilitation of teacher/student rapport and humor and administrative tasks, once again illustrating the different preferences for L2 usage across differing levels of L2 proficiency. These results demonstrate that students with lower L2 proficiency levels feel they need the L1 to create a comfortable environment for learning and to aid in the functioning of the class. The findings in this study illustrate that the arguments presented by Tsukamoto (2011), Polio and Duff (1994), and Castellotti and Moore (1997), i.e., the use of L1 to create a comfortable atmosphere in the EFL classroom to initiate more effective learning, are perhaps even more relevant to students with lower levels of L2 proficiency.

Foreign EFL Teachers Pretending to Lack L1 Proficiency

Finally, students were questioned about whether foreign EFL teachers should pretend to lack L1 proficiency. The overwhelming majority of students wrote that the foreign EFL teacher should not pretend to lack L1 proficiency. Only 16.57% of students wrote the teacher should pretend, which is slightly higher than the ratio of students advocating for the L1 not to be used in the EFL classroom even when appropriate. These results illustrate that almost all students who prefer the foreign EFL teacher not to use the L1 believe that the teacher should pretend to lack proficiency in the L1. The most common reasons given were that a monolingual EFL classroom encourages L2 usage and improves learning. For example, one student with a TOEIC score of 210 wrote, "If Japanese is used our English won't improve." Another student with a TOEIC score of 703 was

concerned with becoming too reliant on the L1 during the EFL class saying, “Because the students will tend to depend on communicating in Japanese.”

The results also showed an increase in student preference for teachers pretending to lack proficiency in L1 as L2 proficiency amongst the students increased. However, the students with the highest-level L2 proficiency (TOEIC scores ranging from 751-900) bucked this trend and have a similar ratio of preference for teachers pretending to lack L1 proficiency as the lowest level L2 proficiency students (TOEIC scores ranging from zero to 300). This perhaps suggests that the highest-level L2 proficiency students are at a stage in their English language development where they are confident enough that L2 usage will not impinge on their learning.

The overwhelming majority of all students surveyed (and the majority of students from each language proficiency level) believe the foreign EFL teacher should not pretend to lack L1 proficiency. Ultimately, many students believe the foreign EFL teacher can use the L1 to enable communication when there is a misunderstanding and to enhance the class atmosphere. Moreover, it may be difficult for teachers and program coordinators to satisfy the minority of students that prefer monolingual lessons through the implementation of L2 usage parameters given the diversity of students in one EFL class. In practical terms, it is extremely difficult for a foreign EFL teacher to pretend to have a lack of understanding of the L1 for one student and not another. This decision will affect all students in the class.

The majority of student opinions with regards to foreign EFL teachers pretending to have a lack of L1 proficiency support recent arguments for a greater acceptance of L1 usage in the EFL class in creating a comfortable atmosphere conducive to learning (Castellotti & Moore, 1997) and its use as an important cognitive tool (Swain & Lapkin, 2000).

Conclusion

Approaches taken towards L1 usage in EFL classes in Japanese universities can vary from a strict monolingual system to flexible bilingual methods. Until recently there have been strong arguments made for the advantages of monolingual EFL lessons. For example, some researchers argue that a monolingual approach is the most effective as it emulates the method in which a child acquires their L1 (Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins, 1998; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). However, in recent years, there have been arguments made for the judicious and theoretically principled use of the L1 in the EFL classroom (Cook, 2001; Levine, 2003; Liebscher & Dailey-O’Cain, 2004; Turnbull, 2001).

This study examined the views of university students receiving L2 (English) education from a foreign EFL teacher regarding L1 usage in the EFL classroom. The students in this study were asked about their preferences for the foreign EFL teacher being fluent in the L1 (Japanese), using L1 when appropriate, the purpose of L1 usage, and whether a foreign EFL teacher should pretend to lack L1 proficiency.

There are several limitations to this study: first, the students surveyed carried out the TOEIC English proficiency tests at different times, which creates a degree of inconsistency in the comparison of L2 proficiency levels between students; second, the practical implementations of the results will be restricted by the diversity of the language proficiencies and learning preferences of each student within an EFL tertiary class; and third, there may be some debate concerning the significance of student views when it comes to the methodology of English language teaching in Japanese universities. Finally, students with lower levels of L2 (English) proficiency may also have lower levels of motivation given their lack of progression in the language since secondary school.

Most of the 175 university students surveyed (66.29%) preferred that the foreign EFL teacher was fluent in the L1 (Japanese). A common theme throughout the responses was that the L1 was a useful tool when students could not understand the L2 and it helped to facilitate more effective class communication. These results strengthen the theses supporting L1 usage in the EFL classroom. This study also found that a negative correlation exists between student preference for teacher L1 fluency and the L2 (English) proficiency of these students. The determination of a monolingual or bilingual approach to tertiary EFL courses in Japan would subsequently benefit from the recognition of the influences of English proficiency levels on the desired levels of

teacher L1 usage.

Students were also surveyed on their preferences of the usage of L1 when appropriate. The overwhelming majority (85.71%) believed that the L1 should be used in the EFL classroom when appropriate, further adding weight to arguments supporting bilingual approaches. Moreover, there is a negative correlation between the preference for L1 usage when appropriate and student L2 proficiency, highlighting the fact that the L2 proficiency of students should be taken into account when devising an approach to L1 application in the EFL classroom. According to these findings, lower-level L2 proficiency classes should accept a greater quantity of prudent L2 application.

Students were also questioned on their views on the specific purpose of L1 in the EFL classroom. This study revealed discrepancies in themes from students in different levels of L2 proficiency. Students with the highest level of L2 proficiency mostly identified new vocabulary as the most important area for L1 application while students with the lowest level of L2 proficiency mostly identified class instructions as the most important area for L1 application. These findings also suggest that the L2 proficiency of students in the EFL class should be considered when determining the objective of L1 usage.

Finally, students were asked about their opinions towards foreign EFL teachers pretending to lack L1 proficiency. The overwhelming majority of students (82.29%) believed that the foreign EFL teacher should not pretend or that pretending will have no effect on learning. These results are significant for English courses with policies prohibiting foreign EFL teachers from using L1 (Japanese) in classrooms. According to the overwhelming majority of the recipients of tertiary English (L2) education, a foreign EFL teacher should not pretend to lack L1 proficiency.

This study found that students of English (L2) education in Japanese universities overwhelmingly preferred the application of the L1 to aid in the facilitation of learning in EFL classes. Moreover, there were notable trends in attitudes between differing L2 proficiencies, with results revealing a negative correlation between desired L1 application in EFL classes and student L2 proficiencies. The findings also showed a discrepancy in the desired objective for L1 application for different student levels of L2 proficiency. The opinions analyzed in this study suggest that the approach adopted for EFL courses in universities (in Japan) should implement the judicious and theoretically principled application of L1 and recognize that different levels of L2 proficiency will affect preferences for L1 usage in the EFL classroom.

This paper recommends further research on how student preferences of L1 usage in EFL classes across different levels of English language proficiency vary for different English subjects; for example, subjects focused on English listening, reading, writing, or speaking. Further research into Japanese university student preferences for L1 usage in English classes using a larger sample size of students is also recommended to complement the findings of this study. The addition of more specific research regarding student preferences of L1 usage in EFL classes will provide important data in challenging the commonly held position within Japanese educational institutions of a strong emphasis on L2 exclusivity.

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