

An Analysis of Instructors' Perspectives to First Language (L1) use in Monolingual Japanese University Contexts

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Abstract

A multi-method approach was used to understand the attitudes of English Language Teachers working in universities in Japan to first language use (L1) in the second language (L2) classroom. Findings indicate that instructors recognise the benefits of the L1 and have awareness of current empirical findings, though, their approach is highly dependent on contextual factors such as the maturity and motivation of learners, learner proficiency and the complexity of content. Prior teaching experience in the Japanese public school system also had a significant effect on their present state suggesting teachers' attitudes are in part driven by the realities of their present and past contexts. The study concludes by suggesting strategies for utilising the L1 in a more systematic manner to maintain engagement levels and scaffold content.

Keywords: L1 use, context driven, Japan, University

Introduction

According to some, acquisition of another language ought to be “based on the use of language in communicative situations without recourse to the native language” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 9). While few would refute the argument that it is vital to receive ample exposure to the second language (L2), in certain situations judicious first language (L1) use could play a more pivotal role in aiding learners' comprehension of and development in the target language (TL). Foreign language (FL) contexts are typically monolingual; so when faced with communication breakdowns or issues with comprehension the L1 is the learners' natural remedy and may prove a useful resource for the instructor to provide clarification as appropriate and maintain attention (Cook, 2001).

An assertion which has gained momentum in recent years and is reflected by the positive attitudes of teachers to the L1 (Copland & Neokleous, 2010; McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Yavuz, 2012) with the argument that prudent use can assist in the teaching and learning process (Tang, 2002). In particular, Vygotsky's (1980) sociocultural approach has been referred to in support of judicious L1 use as it may enable students to mediate “their understanding of task and content, which supports their co-construction of the TL” (Swain & Lapkin, 2013, p. 110). This is a claim supported by Bhooth, Azman, and

Ismail (2014) who found that the L1 serves as a scaffolding mechanism, a method to build on existing knowledge, which encourages learners to work collaboratively to facilitate learning. Consequently, the L1 might enable teachers and learners to clarify troublesome language features or concepts which would otherwise be beyond a learner's comprehension (Swain & Lapkin, 2002).

The Japanese context

Despite this apparent shift, it is unclear to what extent it has filtered into practice, particularly in Japan where perceptions of the L1 may be heavily influenced by a recent push to improve English proficiency and become more globalised. In a 2013 article in the Japan Times, it was reported that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the department responsible for education in Japan, were pushing for language classes to principally be conducted in English, intimating a diminished role for the L1. Furthermore, Japanese learners receive six years of English instruction, typically by a bilingual teacher, though, the focus is generally on passing university entrance exams not communicative use (Butler & Iino, 2005; Gorsuch, 2001; Kikuchi & Browne, 2009), hence, at university level there could be a greater desire to unlock this passive knowledge through extensive TL input and use without reference to the L1 (Ford, 2009).

Research Questions

Building on empirical data taken from university contexts in Japan (Ford, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011) this study aims to understand teachers' views to L1 use and establish whether context influences attitudes. The following research questions have been posed to address these objectives:

- 1) What is the attitude of instructors to learners' first language use in the second language classroom?
- 2) How do instructors perceive teachers' first language use in the second language classroom?
- 3) What factors influence decisions to use the first language?

In spite of a call for a more pragmatic approach to L1 use plentiful exposure to the TL is considered paramount in the learning process (Crawford, 2004). Thus, it is hoped this study will provide practical input from instructors on strategies for utilising the L1 sensibly alongside the TL and aid teaching pedagogy by offering guidance for professionals in other FL contexts.

Literature Review

Many studies have examined L1 use in the L2 classroom, though few have drawn comparisons between teachers' attitudes across different contexts which is a particularly pertinent research area, and a key motivator in the present study, as other literature has attributed context as a salient influence on L1 use. Moore's (2013) study investigated the influence of context on the quantity of L1 use during peer interactions preceding two oral presentation tasks in a Japanese university English as a foreign language (EFL) course and discovered that context had a significant bearing on students' L1 use. As well as influential factors such as learners' L2 proficiency, engagement with the task and/or interlocutor and the negotiation of task, it was found that dyads generally used less L1 over time possibly due to the shift away from procedural discussions associated with planning their presentations towards the actual production side itself. Contextual factors were also pertinent in Leeming's (2011) study of Japanese high school students' L1 use. Using observation and interviews it was found that learners' use tended to be positive but was dependent on learner proficiency and task. Though interestingly both of the aforementioned studies focused on the examination of L1 use within small groups and pair work situations which might be more controlled and reflect an entirely different dynamic to a larger classroom setting.

Considering L1 use within larger learner groups, Crawford (2004) analysed teachers' perspectives in mainstream education in Australia and found that educators relied significantly on the learners' L1, particularly with lower proficiency users. Based on survey data many participants claimed that the L1 was necessary as it aided the language learning process and provided a mechanism for making connections with the TL culture. However, teachers' experience within the TL culture and their proficiency in the TL had some bearing on attitudes which may suggest that some of these participants were unable to confidently use the TL themselves, thus remaining focused on L1 use. The influence of teachers' proficiency and experience may also become apparent in the present study as the sample consists of educators with differing levels of Japanese proficiency and length of stay in Japan.

Conversely, through an analysis of audio recorded interviews with 10 native English instructors teaching in Japanese universities, Ford (2009) discovered overwhelming support for an English only approach to instruction. In complete contrast to the Crawford study, reluctance to utilise the L1 was spawned from the belief that teachers' use may increase the frequency of learners' use, to the detriment of the TL. Furthermore, participants felt that in a FL context learners have fewer opportunities to receive comprehensible input so a L2 rich learning environment was considered desirable. However, despite an emphasis on maximising their own L2 use instructors appeared more accepting of learners' L1 use particularly when the topic, or language, was complex requiring clarification and discussion of the TL.

In a similar vein to Ford (2009), McMillan and Rivers (2011) analysed the views of 29 native English teachers to L1 use and its relevance to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Evidently, in spite of an English-only policy at the university, teachers generally had a positive attitude toward the L1 believing it may enhance learning. An abundance of reasons supporting its use were cited, such as to facilitate successful communication, aid understanding, build rapport and demonstrate appreciation of the learners' linguistic and cultural identity. On the whole, teachers had robust opinions with the suggestion that prohibiting the learners' L1 "goes against the grain of bilingual education and the promotion of multilingualism" (McMillan & Rivers, 2011, p. 255). Nevertheless, certain detractors argued that L1 use may restrict learners' ability to negotiate meaning, learners working collaboratively to consider and develop an understanding of the TL (Long, 2000), as they may go off-task which according to these participants was problematic. Similarly, more ardent supporters of the English only ideal proposed that banning the L1 altogether helps students to develop better communication skills in the TL.

Surprisingly, a correlation between attitudes in support of judicious L1 use and teachers' proficiency in Japanese was not supported by the data. In fact, some of the more proficient Japanese speakers had wholly negative views, whereas, teachers with very low Japanese ability expressed positivity indicating that personal language learning experiences influence teachers' decisions regarding L1 use to some extent.

Despite the contrasting views outlined in McMillan and Rivers (2011), the participants in De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) were entirely positive to L1 use. Collecting data over a 12 week semester using observations, interviews and stimulated recall sessions, it was found that the two participants consistently used the L1 in their teaching, including the delivery of instructions, as it was claimed that it facilitates the learning process. However, in their analysis of the quantity and use of the L1 by a group of French Immersion students, Swain and Lapkin (2000) found that students who used less L1 while planning to write a story in the L2 produced a higher quality piece of work leading to the conclusion that reliance on the TL may develop better communication skills, which was also a view expressed in McMillan and Rivers (2011).

In an attempt to understand whether teachers perceive the L1 in a similar light, Bruen and Kelly (2015) interviewed six university lecturers from a higher institution in Ireland and found significant support for the use of translation. While these participants put forth various benefits of the L1, such as learning vocabulary and checking comprehension, they argued that utilising translation outside of monolingual learner groups would not be appropriate so some teachers felt the context lent itself to this approach. The influence of context was further evident in that participants were teaching on degrees in Applied Language and Intercultural Studies or International Business where many of the students were training to become translators suggesting a strong

extrinsic motivation for study. Similarly, their learners were also intending to spend their third year in a country where the L2 was spoken so they had a genuine need to use the TL. Obviously, this is in stark contrast to compulsory L2 courses taking place in monolingual settings where learners have not chosen to study the TL and may not have a clear end goal connected to the L2.

As is evident from this review, literature around L1 use in the L2 classroom has produced contrasting findings which is largely the result of variants based on context in that teachers' and students' attitudes and L1 use reflects aspects of their learning environments. Hence the decision to conduct the present study, as it is expected that the participants' attitudes to the L1 will most likely depend on the challenges they face.

Methodology

The context

Nine instructors currently teaching in two universities in Tokyo, Japan, form the basis of the sample. For the purpose of anonymity each institution will be referred to as University One (U1) and University Two (U2) and participants as P1-P9 throughout. Both courses are compulsory. However, while the syllabus at U1 is discussion based and tailored towards the learners' faculty, the course at U2 is English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and uses a text designed for professional adults. Class sizes at U1 tend to consist of 10-15 learners and 25-30 learners at U2; and each class is 90 minutes in length (U1 once a week; U2 twice a week).

Significantly U1 is within the top three universities in Japan and has a reputation for a committed student body requiring strong grades to attend suggesting their proficiency in English is also high. In contrast, U2 requires less academic acumen, though, overseas study is mandatory in their second year, indicating that the students may have limited English proficiency but possibly a greater motivation to improve their English fluency.

Participants

The instructors are all native English speakers, qualified to either Trinity Diploma/Cambridge DELTA and/or Master's level with teaching experience ranging from 5-20 years (mean length 13.1 years) and length of time in Japan 3-20 years (mean length 10.7 years). Each instructor has a variable level of Japanese ability based on self-assessment using a five point scale (1=expert, 5 = novice).

Data collection

Data were collected using questionnaires and group interviews. The questionnaires consisted of 26 closed and open questions, and statements

using the Likert scale (e.g. strongly agree to strongly disagree). Following completion of anonymous questionnaires participants volunteered to take part in semi structured group interviews, involving a 60-minute discussion based around 10 questions; though, the format allowed for flexibility.

The questions for both data collection methods were generated following informal discussions with peers both face-to-face and via an online forum. Additionally, the questionnaire was piloted with a sample of teachers without involvement in the project.

Data analysis

The interview questions and questionnaire were divided into two sections: teachers' use and learners' use so responses were categorised under these two headings and further sub-divided into instructors' attitudes and factors influencing instructors' attitudes to the L1. Forum-based research conducted with a large pool of experienced teachers prior to developing the questionnaires, generated a variety of reasons for and against L1 use. These were cross referenced against other studies (e.g., Ford, 2009; McMillan & Rivers, 2011) to form possible categories which enabled the grouping of responses:

- Institutional policy
- Pedagogical beliefs
- Building/sustaining rapport
- Classroom management
- Learners' needs (e.g. learner proficiency, affective needs of learners)
- Context
- Personal language learning experience
- Complexity of content

Questionnaires were administered prior to interview and data were analysed to establish other probable categories and partially formed the questions for the group interviews. In addition, audio from the interviews was reviewed by myself and a colleague to consider whether any other categories had emerged.

Data from the questionnaires were quantified by determining the number of participants who: a) had a positive/negative stance to L1 use; b) and the factors influencing those attitudes. This was converted into a percentage to establish possible trends, correlations or contradictions. An analysis of the audio for the interviews was conducted to record any pertinent information, providing a qualitative analysis to expand on responses and elaborate on findings. The responses from the two collection methods (i.e. questionnaires and interviews) were later compared to check the credibility of data by identifying conflicting responses between the two.

Results

Based on questionnaires and interview data, instructors produced varied views (see Table 1) regarding L1 use. The data obtained from the questionnaires appear reflective of the interviews in that just under half of the participants (44%) exhibited a general negativity to the L1, 33% indicating positivity and 22% neutrality.

Table 1
Attitudes to teachers' L1 use

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Teachers should only use the TL		44% (4)	22% (2)	22% (2)	11% (1)
L1 Builds Rapport		44% (4)	33% (3)	22% (2)	
L1 use lazy		22% (2)	22% (2)	56% (5)	
L1 last resort	11% (1)	33% (3)	33% (3)	22% (2)	
Teachers' L1 use influences students		33% (3)	44% (4)	22% (2)	
Occasional L1 use saves time	33% (3)	67% (6)			
Useful for low levels	11% (1)	78% (7)			11% (1)

Note: "TL" refers to "Target language" and "L1" refers to "first language".

Attitudes to instructors' L1 use

Despite corroboration of the two data collection methods, a large percentage of the participants (78%) indicated varying degrees of L1 use, yet, during the interviews all of the participants acknowledged using it in their practice to different extents.

In spite of the high proportion of participants claiming to use the L1, there was a mixed response regarding "English only" with 44% agreeing and 33% disagreeing with this notion. During the interviews some of the instructors suggested that it may depend on the context or teacher with P8 stating that "teachers' L1 use reduces input but depending on the situation the benefits of using it might outweigh the negatives". This divergence of attitude was evident throughout the data with some (44%) questioning instructors' use as it "may indicate a skills deficit" (P4) and/or 'diminish an instructor's teaching ability" (P9). However, the remaining participants (56%) disagreed with the association between laziness and L1 use as at times it may be

unavoidable.

Nevertheless, the majority agreed in principal that classes ought to be conducted in the TL as it “provides learners with comprehensible input and maintains levels of interest in the class” (P5). Although at the same time, prudent L1 use was widely supported (56%) which was summed up by P1 who suggested that “teachers use the L2 99% of the time but reverting to the L1 occasionally is positive”.

Factors influencing attitudes to instructors’ L1 use

A range of factors (see Table 2) such as prior teaching experience, overuse of the L1 and the desire to provide comprehensible input and output seemed to influence the views of these instructors.

Prior teaching experience

Experience in the Japanese public school system appeared to significantly influence the stance of some instructors (44%) as it was claimed that translation is commonplace in Japan which has negatively transferred to learners’ language use in English class at university. Therefore, it was argued that the teacher’s role is to guide learners by illustrating that “using a second language is not a big deal” (P8) and reducing the role of the L1.

L1 as a crutch

Indeed, a significant amount of the sample (66%) felt that the overuse of translation, which Japanese learners have grown accustomed to, “gives learners a crutch so although they might be anxious we shouldn’t indulge them and instead push them to man up” (P6).

Comprehensible input and output

Although these contextual factors were significant, 56% of participants contended that too much L1 use may also be a negative from a pedagogical standpoint with the argument that “you learn a language through usage and input in the L2 which is why the methodology of the CELTA is so sound” (P6). However, while all of these participants recognised the relationship between TL use and acquisition, some believed that instead of eradicating the L1 it could actually be used to aid learning and sustain communication, asserting that “the methodology of English only is sound but the reality is somewhat different” (P7)

Attitudes to learners’ L1 use

As is apparent from Table 2 these participants appeared more accepting of

learners' L1 use as it was claimed that it aids their understanding of language and content (44%) enabling them to complete tasks more effectively. However, the general consensus indicated a preference for an English only classroom (56%) to maximise opportunities for input and output.

Table 2
Teachers' attitude to learners' L1 use

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
English only policy essential For input & output	33% (3)	22% (2)	11% (1)	22% (2)	11% (1)
Translation helps with learning and retaining lexis		33% (3)	44% (4)	11% (1)	11% (1)
L1 to ask & provide clarity helps students to complete activities more effectively		44% (4)	33% (3)	22% (2)	
Teachers' job to teach English so learners should use English at all times	11% (1)	11% (1)	11% (1)	56% (5)	11% (1)
L1 use gives fuller understanding of English helping learners to improve		44% (4)	33% (3)	22% (2)	
L2 to discuss & consider meaning helps learners to process the TL more deeply	22% (2)	44% (4)	33% (3)		
L1 gives learners autonomy		33% (3)	33% (3)	22% (2)	11% (1)
Too much L1 demotivates some learners		44% (4)	33% (3)	22% (2)	

Note. 'L1' refers to 'the first language' and 'L2' 'the second language'

Indeed, navigating linguistic gaps without reference to the L1 was supported by 66% of participants during the interviews who argued that “it’s unlikely in the real world that they’ll have the chance to check meaning in their L1” (P9). Interestingly, 66% disagreed with the idea that English ought to be used by students all of the time suggesting that, in fact, the L1 can make input and output more comprehensible (66%). However, although the sample appeared generally divisive over L1 use, an overwhelming majority (89%) claimed that its overuse may in fact impact on learner motivation which ought to be a consideration.

Factors influencing attitudes to learners’ L1 use

As is evident from the previous section participants produced a mixed response to L1 use which appears to be the result of factors attached to their contexts.

L1 as a crutch

Pointedly, almost all of the sample agreed (89%) that Japanese learners are too reliant on their L1 so its role ought to be reduced to show “learners that using another language is nothing to fear” (P6).

Motivation & maturity of learners

Overreliance on their L1 was claimed by these participants (56%) to be compounded by the fact that some learners are unable to manage their own L1 use resulting in frequent off-task discussions. This was emphasised by P5 who stated that “if you have motivated learners who are doing their best to communicate in English and occasionally revert to the L1 that’s fine” but “less motivated classes will just use Japanese to discuss something off task”.

Learner proficiency

Despite the perceived inability of learners to manage their own L1 use, over half of these participants (56%) claimed that learner proficiency was an important consideration, arguing that the L1 helps them “to recognise the gap between what they know and what they want to say’ as they are ‘still more reliant on concepts translated in their L1” (P9). Although, almost all (89%) emphasised the need to consider every learner as more advanced users have “a better conceptual understanding of English” (P6) and a wider linguistic repertoire.

Comprehensible input & output

However, although some (44%) felt that the influence of prior learning in Japanese schools, where “students rarely produce the TL’ and ‘L2 input is often preceded by translation” (P6), may prevent input and output, 66% contended that the L1 actually aids acquisition.

Prior teaching experience

In fact, prior teaching experience was frequently referenced by those at U2, suggesting that it has a considerable impact on their approach to L1 use. During the interviews numerous responses were attached to their experience in Japanese public schools with claims that prior learning of English is “*irrelevant because they haven’t had to use the language in JHS/HS*” (P5/P6) and “by the time they reach us they’re not familiar with a communicative classroom where they have to produce the TL” (P6). Indeed, instructors were also critical of the methodology associated with the approach in Japan to English study suggesting that “the Grammar translation method is prevalent” so the L1 is often overused (P6), thus, aspects of prior teaching have significantly impacted on their attitudes.

Discussion

Attitudes to the L1

A point widely conceded in the present study was that L1 use is an unavoidable consequence of language acquisition particularly in monolingual settings (Cook, 2001; Leeming, 2011) as it can provide clarification, reduce learner frustration (Bruen & Kelly, 2015) and possibly ensure closer attention is paid to the TL (Copland & Neokleous, 2010). However, despite an overall optimism to learners’ use, it was far from definitive and resulted in conflicting views with contextual factors, such as learners’ needs and course content, appearing to influence approach to the L1 which is reflective of other studies (De La Campa, 2009; Moore, 2013).

Indeed, consideration of the learning environment was important in the present study with the argument that too much L1 use may be demotivating for learners desiring maximum TL use (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). This was also the case in Moore’s (2013) study in that, according to instructors, the L1 and TL had to be balanced so not to affect the motivation of those wishing to have continuous exposure to the TL. Moreover, from a student’s perspective, Schweers’ (1999) examination of L1 use at a Puerto Rican university indicated that while teachers believed it should occasionally be used, some students disagreed, suggesting that consideration of individual preferences is essential (Macaro, 2005), which appears to be supported by the present study.

Nevertheless, despite claims that the L1 can alleviate the cognitive

burden associated with language acquisition (Scott & De la Fuente, 2008), some participants contended that avoidance is preferable. This was also the case in McMillan and Rivers (2011) as it was claimed that encouraging TL use for discussion of language develops better communication skills. A notion supported by Swain and Lapkin (2000) who found that although the L1 was successfully used to construct a story in the L2, those pairs using more L1 during collaborative dialogues (discussion of language/tasks with peers) produced weaker stories suggesting that maximising TL use may have been more beneficial. Though, as DiCamilla and Anton (2012) point out less able students doubtlessly have a greater need to use their L1 which may explain the relationship between the quantity of L1 use and the quality of work produced in the aforementioned study.

As with other research (Izumi, 2003; Leger & Storch, 2009, Long, 1996; Swain, 2000) these participants recognised that regular TL use supports acquisition, yet, some maintained that supplementing it with occasional L1 use is at times necessary. An argument reinforced by Bruen and Kelly (2015) who found that language lecturers in their study supported L1 use in limited instances, such as the explanation of complex grammar, where it could reduce cognitive overload and learner anxiety.

Furthermore, according to Eckerth (2009) and Storch (2007) while instructors would prefer learners to negotiate meaning and form through the TL, it may not be a realistic objective; instead when faced with complexity students instinctively reach for their L1 to form connections and reduce memory constraints (Macaro, 2005). An assertion held by almost half in the present study suggesting that although the ideal is to analyse and evaluate the TL without the L1, it might not be feasible or indeed practical especially with lower proficiency learners.

Despite participants appearing fairly pragmatic and adaptable to L1 use from a learner's perspective, views to teachers' use were far more uncompromising, particularly with those from U2, with the perception that immersing learners in the TL is the most effective way to learn it (Turnbull, 2001). However, complete avoidance by teachers was not considered viable given the demands in certain contexts. The influence of context was also prevalent in Moore (2013) who found that instructors' use was dependent on time constraints and content. Similar findings were identified in Sali's (2014) investigation of a group of Turkish EFL teachers, in that the L1 was used to achieve the lesson aims, "speed up learner comprehension" (p. 315) and increase communication.

Despite the suggestion that the L1 may save time and aid communication, the tendency in the present study was to avoid it themselves. This reluctance was in keeping with Ford (2009), yet, generally speaking empirical data has shown that a minor intervention by the teacher in the L1 can keep learners on task and encourage the continuity of communicative TL use (McMillan & Rivers, 2011). An assertion supported by Cook (2001) who argues that when the cost of the TL is too great the L1 ought to be employed,

though, participants in the present study generally disagreed, claiming that other strategies could be used.

The preference for alternatives to the L1 resulted from a concern that teachers' language could influence learners' linguistic choice, leading to greater L1 use, which was also mentioned in Ford (2009). Yet, according to Macaro's (2001) examination of six student teachers, the quantity of their L1 use did not significantly impact on learners indicating that this decision may be independent of the teacher. Nevertheless, teachers in Japan are afforded a comparatively high status (Hargreaves, 2009) and salaries remain competitive with other professions (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1995), intimating that teachers may be more respected and potentially have greater influence over learners. Thus, teachers' L1 use may be a more salient concern in Japanese contexts and could be a genuine issue for these participants.

Factors influencing attitudes to L1 use

While it was conceded that learners' L1 use is unavoidable in monolingual contexts, these participants asserted the importance of maximising opportunities for TL input and output. This attitude appears to be supported by empirical data, although, numerous caveats were provided which will be explored further in the following section.

Comprehensible input and output

Comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) and opportunities for output (Swain, 1985) are widely considered to be essential components of language acquisition, though, in FL contexts learners have limited opportunities for input so their instructor could be the only source available (Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). This was a concern in the present study as it was argued that a substantial element of a teacher's role is to provide comprehensible and meaningful input, which was also significant in Ford (2009) and McMillan and Rivers (2011).

However, some argued that occasional L1 use might in fact aid comprehension in that it can emphasise certain aspects of the TL resulting in a more thorough understanding of it (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Sali, 2014). A claim supported in the literature (Butzkamm, 1998; Long, 1996; Van Lier, 1995) with the argument that the quality of input is of greater importance than the quantity suggesting that teachers' L1 use may enable learners to engage more fully with the TL (Turnbull, 2001), leading to intake (Long, 1996) - internalising the language item. An argument reinforced by McMillan & Turnbull (2009) in their study of teachers' L1 use in a French immersion context in that code switching can improve the quantity and quality of learners' comprehension & production of the TL (Macaro, 2005).

Nevertheless, as in McMillan and Rivers (2011) division appeared as to whether the L1 encourages or disrupts communication, yet, the general

consensus in the literature is that judicious L1 use promotes rich communication and learning in the L2 (Levine, 2009). Hence, providing the L1 is on-task it may aid TL input and output (Long, 1996; Macaro, 2005; McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Sali, 2014).

L1 as a crutch

Despite this assertion, some in the present sample were reluctant to acknowledge its benefits reporting that Japanese learners tend to be over reliant on their L1. Conversely, while a number of studies (Bruen & Kelly, 2015; Klapper, 1998) have argued that the L1 may reduce anxiety and frustration, the overwhelming feeling with these participants was that L1 dependency should be discouraged and more anxious learners ought to be pushed to use the TL more. A point supported by Madylus (2001) who claimed that permitting the L1 for fear of raising anxiety levels potentially gives the TL a symbolic value making it appear unattainable and unyielding, which was a major concern in the present study.

Similar views were espoused by instructors in Ford (2009), Manara (2007) and McMillan and Rivers (2011) suggesting this concern is fairly widespread. Although, it could be a more salient issue in Japan as the shyness of learners, their reticence to speak out (Matsumoto, 1994) and the avoidance of communicative English during school are synonymous with this context which may result in a greater dependency on the L1.

Indeed, Hobbs, Matsuo and Payne (2010) referenced the impact schooling had on the Japanese tutors in their study as it was suggested that the traditional method (teacher-led and minimal TL use) dominates in Japan which influenced their participants' pedagogy. In the same way, the prior learning experience of Japanese University students may have skewed perceptions of how languages are learnt and their expectations of English class. Thus, some instructors in the present study appeared intent on realigning this ingrained attitude, which possibly explains their negative perceptions.

Prior teaching experience

As well as potentially distorting learners' attitudes to English class at university, it appears that some in the present study have formed negative associations to L1 use as a result of their own teaching experience in Japanese public schools. Contrary to the pedagogy of these participants the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) predominates in Japan (Leeming, 2011) and conceivably their first-hand experience of this may have impacted on their attitudes to L1 use. This also appeared to be an influence in Ford (2009) and McMillan and Turnbull (2009), as negativity to the L1 was regularly accompanied by the mention of learners' schooling prior to university and the unnecessary use of translation.

Plainly, context has directly impacted on their perceptions which was also significant in other studies. De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) found that the FL setting was a significant influence on perceptions and uses of the L1 leading them to conclude that decisions regarding its use are partly “context driven” (p. 753). McMillan and Turnbull (2009) identified a similar phenomenon, in that teachers’ attitudes were influenced by their backgrounds, life histories (Vygotsky, 1987) or prior learning experiences which Swain and Lapkin (2013) claim impact on teachers’ behaviour in class. In addition, evidence indicates that L1 use varies significantly across different contexts (see Macaro, 2001; Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002) suggesting that each teaching environment has its own unique characteristics. Thus, as in the present study it appears that teachers tend to form beliefs and practice around the considerations of their context.

Learner proficiency

One such factor was learner proficiency as it was conceded that those with a less developed L2 may utilise their more sophisticated L1 to support SLA. In contrast, usage by higher levels was viewed as unacceptable (McMillan & Rivers, 2011) as these learners are able to articulate themselves in the TL. This is supported by Carson and Kashihara (2012) who found that all but the highest proficiency learners in their study advocated the importance of the L1 to check comprehension. Likewise, Swain and Lapkin (2000) asserted that higher proficiency learners use less L1 than lower ability users suggesting that “as L2 proficiency increases, there is less and less need to use the L1 as a cognitive tool” (Swain & Lapkin, 2013, p. 110).

This is telling as it reveals that instructors in the present study are generally reactive to their context and understand that in certain instances the L1 may be an appropriate remedy. These findings are also supported by empirical data (Crawford, 2004; Ford, 2009; Manara, 2007; Moore, 2013; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) signifying that an adaptable approach to learners’ L1 use is beneficial which was widely acknowledged in the present study.

Nevertheless, a significant portion of this sample indicated that regardless of learners’ proficiency they would not use the L1, which appears contrary to empirical data. For instance, just 10% of language teachers in Crawford’s (2004) study reported using the TL in beginner classes, which gradually increased as their learners developed linguistically. The same phenomena was identified in Moore (2013) in that teachers varied their language depending on different factors, such as proficiency, demonstrating that instructors in other contexts alter their language based on learners’ needs. A finding reflective of other studies (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Sali, 2014; Song & Andrews, 2009) in that learner proficiency tends to influence teachers’ approach to L1 use, yet, irrespective of learners’ proficiency some participants remained reluctant to use it.

Maturity and motivation of learners

Indeed, the advantages of L1 use were widely agreed in principal, yet, those at U2 contended that its use is highly dependent on learner maturity and motivation as the majority of their learners rarely push themselves to use the TL and frequently revert to off-task L1 use. A point alluded to in Ford (2009) where it was claimed that first year university courses in Japan tend to be compulsory so learner motivation may be fairly low and thus off-task L1 use could be prominent. This was also a concern of Leeming (2011) who speculated that the observed differences in L1 use by dyads in his/her study may have been the result of motivation. This supports the apprehension expressed by some of these participants in that their learners' lack of engagement in English class may produce large quantities of off-task L1 use.

Inappropriate L1 use was a definite concern in the present study and has also been raised in other research (McMillan & Rivers, 2011), though, according to Anton and DiCamilla (1998) and Swain and Lapkin (2000) L1 use by learners, which is often viewed as lazy or off-task, may be an attempt to achieve intersubjectivity (*language as a tool to manage or understand a task*).

An argument supported by Leeming (2011) who, following a comparison of two dyads of female high school students in Japan, found that any deviations to learners' L1 generally served specific functions, mainly with the intention of comprehending the task and language. Indeed, Fotos (2001) identified similar findings in that the L1 was effectively used for conversational strategies and clarification which may suggest that although the participants in the present study were concerned about off-task L1 use, it may not be to the extent imagined.

However, both Leeming's (2011) and Fotos' (2001) studies observed small groups in controlled environments so these findings may not be representative of larger class sizes, similar to those taught by the present sample. Furthermore, students' L1 use in the aforementioned studies was closely monitored under experimental conditions, which Foster (1998) argues affects the behaviour of students, so this data may not accurately reflect actual usage and perceptions of the L1. Moreover, according to MacIntyre (2007) a variety of factors influence students' Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in the TL, including the situational context (e.g., language classroom). Therefore, learners' attitudes to the L1 might adapt depending on context and those around them so a classroom environment may increase the likelihood of off-task L1 use. Subsequently, the reported off-task usage in the present study maybe a salient concern despite suggestions to the contrary.

Clearly, students' inability or reluctance to manage their own L1 use, has an influence on the decisions of these participants. A point supported by Leeming who found that the L1 was far less effective in a mandatory course which combined low proficiency, unmotivated learners with more enthusiastic, higher ability students, similar to the U2 context. This was an

argument constructed in the present study as participants stressed that while the L1 might facilitate acquisition, its effectiveness relies on different contextual factors, including the attitude of learners.

De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) identified similar data as it was found that teachers' expectations in terms of the quantity of TL and L1 use differed significantly leading to claims that the demands of the context shape instructors' approach, which appears to be the case in the present study. Evidently, learner motivation seems to influence language use and although these participants may overestimate the quantity of off-task L1 usage it is a legitimate concern which may explain the cautious approach expressed by some.

Conclusion

Despite awareness of the benefits of the L1, a host of reasons connected to their context, such as learners' maturity and motivation and proficiency, appear to have influenced participants' attitudes and approach to L1 use. Significantly, prior teaching experience in Japanese schools seems to have resulted in a fairly rigid approach to the L1 by some of these participants. Therefore, as with other studies attitudes and approach appear to be context driven (Ford, 2009; Kurihara, 2013; Nishimuro & Borg, 2013; Saito, 2014) and instructors' decisions reflect these challenges (McMillan & Rivers, 2011)

However, instructors ought to consider explicitly discussing how both languages may effectively be used (Levine, 2009) during class to encourage learners to actively participate. Providing a forum for learners to contribute may reassert their role as adults, potentially altering attitudes to English class. Furthermore, planned, consistent and systematic use would clarify expectations and potentially realign perceptions regarding English class at University. An argument supported by Macaro (2001) who suggests that a framework is needed which "identifies when reference to the L1 can be a valuable tool and when it is simply used as an easy option" (p. 545).

Another pertinent factor discussed was learner anxiety, as there was a belief that Japanese learners tend to be fairly introvert and risk averse which, in addition to their prior English study, favouring the learning of grammar and writing, produces a general reluctance to produce the TL for fear of standing out (Leeming, 2011; Ohata, 2005). As a result, instructors seem determined to alter students' behaviour and attitude to learning English which may have led to a stricter approach to the L1 as there is a concern that even judicious L1 use may give learners an erroneous impression of expectations in English class.

While this is a valid concern, denying access to the L1 may lead to learner frustration (Bruen & Kelly, 2014; Klapper, 1998), resulting in a loss of attention and potentially greater off-task use. Indeed, Norman (2008) observed that minimal L1 use with "students (who were) often unresponsive, inattentive and unwilling to speak in class" (p. 692) led to better participation and TL use which suggests that the L1 could be utilised in this and other

contexts to prevent students losing interest (Norman, 2008).

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