The practice of policy: Teacher attitudes toward “English only”

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Abstract

For some language educators, communicative-style language teaching, by definition, entails viewing the use of the learners’ first language (L1) as counterproductive to the learning process or as an unfortunate but sometimes necessary recourse. However, recent research has shown that L1 use can serve important cognitive, communicative, and social functions in communicative foreign and second language (L2) classrooms (Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; see also Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009). The current article documents an attitudinal survey of 29 ‘native-English speaker’ teachers at a Japanese university where the exclusive use of the target language is promoted as a key feature of the optimal foreign language learning environment. Results indicated that, contrary to the official policy, 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. The authors argue that teachers and students themselves are best placed to determine, based on the immediate context of the classroom, what constitutes optimal use of the target language and the L1.

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1. Introduction

The monolingual approach has long been prescribed by official policies in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Macaro, 2001; Phillipson, 1992) as well as in other contexts (McMillan and Turnbull, 2009). However, current thinking, informed by pedagogical and sociolinguistic research, holds that judicious first language (L1) use can enhance second language (L2) learning and the learner’s developing identity as an aspiring bilingual (Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009; Turnbull and Daily-O’Cain, 2009). Yet despite the preponderance of evidence clearly favoring judicious L1 use, “English only” continues to enjoy hegemonic status in some teaching contexts, with students and teachers being prevented or dissuaded from using the students’ L1 in ways that are, in fact, pedagogically principled.

In Japan, overuse of the L1 is viewed as a barrier to effective instruction in many secondary level classrooms, and efforts to encourage teachers to move beyond traditional grammar-translation methods and adopt a more communicative
approach have met with limited success to date. This has been attributed to a number of factors, including Japanese English teachers’ own lack of communicative ability, lack of teacher training, and the emphasis placed on university entrance examinations (see Clark, 2009; Reesor, 2002; Sato, 2002; Stewart, 2009). Furthermore, Japanese learners of English tend to suffer from a “national inferiority complex” (Efron, 2000, p. 1; see also Reesor, 2002; McVeigh, 2004), which is often reinforced by reports of Japanese TOEIC and TOEFL scores being at or near the bottom of international rankings. Despite these rankings not necessarily being based on a fair interpretation of the test data, Reedy (2000, p.1) argues:

[These results are] frequently paraded about as proof of the dreadful nature of foreign language learning in Japan, evidence used to excoriate (…) Japanese learners, Japanese teachers, the Japanese test-taking system, the Japanese educational bureaucracy, even the Japanese language itself.

Discussions concerning the problems with English education appear almost daily in the national news media (e.g., Clark, 2009; The Japan Times, 2009). Against this backdrop, an English-only approach may appear to EFL educators, students, and other stakeholders to be a cure for all that ails the English education system. However, some teachers who recognize the paradigm shift which is occurring with regard to judicious L1 use are discovering, with their students, ways of using the L1 selectively to enhance the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (e.g., Rivers, 2011a, 2011b).

Following a review of the relevant literature, this paper examines teacher beliefs at a Japanese university where an English-only classroom policy is promoted as best practice.

2. Literature review

L1 avoidance is often considered to be a key feature of CLT, in keeping with the tradition of “direct” or “natural” teaching methods (Butzkamm, 2003; Cummins, 1998; Pennycook, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). The main theoretical argument which underlies the monolingual approach is the L1 = L2 hypothesis, which holds that L2 learning should be based on the way that children acquire their L1. Krashen’s (1982) theories, which had an important influence on the evolution of CLT, proposed that L2 acquisition takes place subconsciously through exposure to comprehensible input, with the learner focusing on meaning rather than form. However, the importance of conscious learning and attention to form is now also widely recognized (Long, 1990; Nation, 2005). In fact, the best natural model for L2 learning is the young developing bilingual, who uses her skills in one language to help her progress in the other (Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009; Cook, 2005).

2.1. The role of the L1 in L2 learning

Contrary to the L1 = L2 hypothesis, the learner’s L1 has in fact been shown to play important cognitive, communicative, and social functions in L2 learning. According to the cognitive perspective, learners consciously use a variety of mental strategies, and use their L1 to make predictions about what works in the target language (TL) (Gass and Selinker, 1994). Cook (2001) argues that teaching should take advantage of the many L1-L2 connections that learners naturally make in their minds, by highlighting the similarities and differences between the two languages (see also Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009; Harbord, 1992). Moreover, as Macaro (2005, p. 68) asserts, “the language of thought for all but the most advanced L2 learners is inevitably his/her L1.”

In many language-learning contexts, teachers are warned against using their students’ L1 on the grounds that it will lead to an increase in student L1 use. However, Macaro’s (2001) study with pre-service teachers found no correlation between teacher L1 use and L1 use by beginner and lower-intermediate learners, and no significant increase in student TL use when the teacher used the TL exclusively or almost exclusively. Macaro (2005, p. 72) concludes that “codeswitching by the teacher has no negative impact on the quantity of students’ L2 production and that ‘expert codeswitching’ may actually increase and improve it.” Indeed, numerous other studies have demonstrated that student comprehension and production of the TL can be enhanced through judicious L1 use (e.g., Butzkamm, 1998; McMillan and Turnbull, 2009; Rivers, 2011a, 2011b).

Negotiation of meaning in the TL can provide feedback and comprehensible input for acquisition, and “some of the most effective L2 experiences for learners will take place during such moments” (Chaudron, 1993, cited in Auerbach, 1994, p. 159). However, negotiation of meaning may occur relatively infrequently in the “real word” of the classroom...
Moreover, studies using sociocultural theory have shown that L1 use during learner—learner interaction is often “on-task” and can be highly beneficial, especially for intermediate and lower-proficiency learners dealing with cognitively challenging tasks and content (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Behan et al., 1997; Brooks and Donato, 1994; McMillan and Rivers, 2009; Swain and Lapkin, 2000). A strict English-only policy acts to silence this positive L1 use.

Cook (2005) suggests that because codeswitching is a natural feature of communication among bilinguals it should also be permitted in the L2 classroom. Similarly, Levine (2009) proposes strategies for increasing learner awareness of useful codeswitching, while Dailey-O’Cain and Liebscher (2009; see also Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain, 2004) have shown that learners can also develop naturalistic norms of codeswitching on their own. From a more sociolinguistic standpoint, and of particular relevance in contexts such as Japan, Fuller (2009) argues that codeswitching allows learners to associate themselves with their L1-based identity and peer group while at the same time developing a new social identity in the TL.

2.2. Teacher beliefs regarding L1 use in CLT

For some teachers, CLT entails viewing the use of the learner’s L1 as counterproductive to the learning process or as an unfortunate but sometimes necessary recourse (Macaro, 1997, 2001, 2009). Recommended general principles for CLT (e.g., Berns, 1990, cited in Savignon, 2007; Richards, 2006) have not clearly addressed the topic of L1 use, perhaps unwittingly contributing to the perception that L1 use is incompatible with a communicative approach. Nunan (1991) proposes five features of CLT, the first of which is “an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language” (p.279); however, “emphasis” does not equate to exclusivity, and indeed, principled L1 use should improve the quality and quantity of communication in the TL (Macaro, 2005). Thus pedagogically-principled L1 use should, insofar as it assists learners in developing their communicative competence, be deemed an acceptable form of instruction in courses and programs based on a communicative approach. Indeed, there have been recent calls for judicious L1 use to be recognized as holding the potential to enhance practice in immersion (McMillan and Turnbull, 2009) and in communicative second and foreign language programs (Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009; Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain, 2009).

Teachers’ beliefs can be shaped by many factors, including their own experiences as L2 learners, teacher training, teaching experiences, official policies, and through exposure to the perspectives of colleagues and superiors. Demonstrating how teachers’ beliefs can change over time, a number of language educators who practiced and advocated a TL-only approach earlier in their careers have documented how they later came to view the L1 as a valuable tool for L2 learning (e.g., Atkinson, 1993; Auerbach, 1994; Burden, 2000; Butzkamm, n. d.; Mattioli, 2004).

3. The present Study

3.1. Rationale and hypotheses

In 2003, Barker noted “a gradual move (…) away from the ‘English-only’ dogma that has long been a part of the British and American ELT movement” (para. 3). Moreover, it has been observed that “strong versions of methods have little chance of engaging the full support of all the teachers being told to use them” (Tomlinson, 2005, p. 143). The aim of the current study was to determine the degree to which a “move away” from an English-only approach is reflected in the beliefs of teachers at a Japanese university where an English-only classroom policy is promoted as best practice. Since most of the teachers had recently completed their master’s degree, it was hypothesized that their beliefs would tend to reflect the recent turn in the research literature in favor of judicious L1 use. However, it was also hypothesized that teachers with limited proficiency in the students’ L1 would be more likely to downplay its usefulness in the classroom (Barker, 2003; Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2005).

3.2. Context

The research was conducted at a private Japanese university specializing in foreign languages employing more than 60 native-speaker EFL teachers (all as language-lecturers on fixed-term contracts), almost all of whom were from the United States (20+), the United Kingdom (10+), Australia, Canada, or New Zealand. The majority of teachers possessed a language-related postgraduate diploma, a M.A., or a higher degree. Teachers were assigned to teach English proficiency classes within one of three departments (hereafter departments A, B, and C).
In terms of the student population, first-year students vary greatly in their level of English proficiency upon entry to the university, with some demonstrating highly advanced skills and others still operating at a basic beginner level. Furthermore, in departments A and B, classes are streamed and thus relatively homogeneous in terms of proficiency levels, whereas students in department C are placed in mixed-ability classes, each with an equal distribution of high-, mid-, and low-proficiency learners. Despite these differences, all teachers and students are expected to follow an English-only classroom policy, promoted by the university as a core component of their communicative approach toward language teaching. This policy, with slight variations, is explicitly stated in the first-year oral proficiency course syllabus in each of the departments (see Appendix A).

Teachers were generally not questioned regarding the use of Japanese in their day-to-day teaching. However, because there was little opportunity to discuss the issue openly, teachers did not have a clear idea as to how effective the policy was, nor how many of their colleagues actually believed that an English-only approach was appropriate for their students (see Rivers, 2011a, 2011b for further context specific research).

3.3. Procedure

A call for volunteers was put out to teachers during the spring semester of 2008. Participants completed an online survey which featured six open-ended questions related to various teaching issues within their work environment. Because the English-only policy was considered a highly sensitive issue at this institution, it was felt that the anonymity of an online survey would encourage teachers to answer honestly according to their personal beliefs. The researchers also felt that open-ended questions would produce the most personally relevant, self-driven answers. Teachers were also asked to indicate how many years of teaching experience they had in Japan, and to rate their level of Japanese proficiency on a four point scale (see Appendix B).

After four weeks, 29 questionnaires had been completed and the decision was made to begin the data analysis. For the purpose of this paper only three of the six questions, directly relating to language policy issues, will be focused upon:

1) Based on your experiences as a teacher, how do you feel about the use of the students’ first language (L1) when used by the teacher?
2) Based on your experiences as a teacher, how do you feel about the use of the students’ L1 when used by the students?
3) Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement and explain your answer based on your own knowledge and beliefs: “Within an EFL classroom, using a ‘communicative approach’ requires that the teacher and students use the target language only.”

3.4. Data analysis and results

In a preliminary analysis, responses to questions 1 and 2 were classified as either viewing L1 use positively or negatively through a process of keyword and sentence analysis. A number of teachers hedged their answers, and these were labeled mixed response. Similarly, for question three, responses that did not clearly agree or disagree with the statement were assigned to a third mixed-response category. Overall percentages are shown below, in Table 1; individual responses are reported in Appendix B.

The hypothesis that teachers with limited proficiency in Japanese would tend to oppose L1 use was not completely borne out by the data. While teachers who held distinctly negative views of teacher L1 use tended to be less proficient in Japanese (mean = 2.58) compared to those who viewed judicious L1 use by the teacher positively (mean = 3.00), several teachers who rated their proficiency as low or very low expressed positive attitudes toward judicious L1 use by the teacher (Teachers 23, 24 and 25), and several teachers whose level of proficiency would likely have been sufficient for helping students to understand content, express ideas, or make cross-linguistic comparisons were strongly against teacher L1 use (Teachers 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 and 7). Interestingly, teachers who held a positive view of student L1 use had a distinctly lower level of Japanese ability (mean = 2.45) than those who held negative views of student L1 use (mean rating = 3.09). No clear pattern of responses was found with respect to teachers’ years of experience in Japan and their attitudes toward L1 use.

Responses were also analyzed in terms of the specific reasons teachers provided to explain their beliefs. Comments were reread several times to allow categories to emerge. Responses often contained two or more reasons, and in some
cases part of the response was categorized as an argument in favor of L1 use, and another part against. For a small number of very brief responses, no supporting ideas were provided (e.g., “I prefer it not to be used.”).

3.4.1. Arguments in favor of teacher L1 use

Twenty different teachers provided 29 comments in favor of L1 use by the teacher. These comments were grouped into nine categories, as shown in Appendix C. Twelve teachers expressed the belief that the L1 could be used to facilitate and ensure successful communication between students and the teacher. For example, T28 responded: “The expediency of a simple Japanese translation can save extensive time and considerable frustration on the part of the student. I sometimes ask the students for the Japanese of a vocabulary item as a very simple and quick comprehension check.” T18, T19, and T22 suggested that the teacher could use the L1 for complex definitions or instructions; T22 commented further that teacher L1 use could be important “especially when the meaning is important or involves students’ personal lives, emotions, etc.”

Five teachers referred to the need to consider the learner’s level of proficiency. For example, T16 stated: “I taught English in a francophone African country and I used French about 50% of the time due to students’ low level of English.”

Five participants asserted that occasional L1 use could help the teacher to build rapport with students; however, three of these teachers felt that the role of the L1 should be limited to humor. For example, T3 believed that L1 use should be “strongly discouraged as a general rule,” but went on to say: “however, I believe that the L1 can be used as a humorous rapport-builder to prevent extreme levels of stress caused by severe communication breakdown.” On the other hand, T27 stressed the importance of demonstrating an appreciation for the learners’ linguistic and cultural identity: “In Canada, I often used [the students’ L1] because of the political situation. When they saw I could use their language, they seemed more willing to learn mine.”

Two teachers commented that L1 use could be helpful for learning vocabulary. For example, T21 responded: “Some research shows that initial vocab learning will be more efficient if the L1 is used as a study aid.”

Two other teachers referred to the benefits of translation and comparing the two languages. T17 responded: “Translation drills using the native language may be helpful for lower-level students”; while T29 asserted: “Teachers can use the L1 to show differences and similarities between the TL and L1.”

Three other comments were expressed by individual teachers. T23 commented: “Any language policy which forbids a language being spoken goes against the grain of bilingual education and the promotion of multilingualism.” T25 referred to the learners’ previous learning experiences: “I do not feel that [the policy] is appropriate considering the current methodology employed at the primary/high school levels in Japan …” Finally, T14 felt that teacher L1 use was “sometimes OK when used by bilingual teachers in a monolingual classroom.”

3.4.2. Arguments against teacher L1 use

Thirteen different teachers made 17 comments arguing against L1 use by the teacher, yielding eight different categories (see Appendix D). Five teachers felt that prohibiting L1 use would result in more negotiation in the TL. For example, T2 commented: “[L1 use] may speed up explanations, classroom management, etc. but the possible extra time and repetition needed for doing everything in the TL is time and effort well spent.” Similarly, T15 responded “The ‘English-only’ rule puts pressure on students and teachers to try to maintain an English environment, where speaking English is more than just ‘practice’, but amounts to meaningful and necessary communication.”

Three teachers made reference to the micro or macro linguistic environment. For example, T16 stressed the importance of trying to create an English-only classroom in a “monolingual country” in order to “get as much as
possible out of the limited time they have in a room with a native speaker, and +/- 30 motivated learners.” T17 referred to a different teaching context with students having multiple L1s:

>In Israel, my students demanded that I speak Hebrew in the class to translate difficult words or phrases (...) but I stopped because it was not fair for the native speakers of Arabic, Amharic, and Russian who were the majority in the class. I told them it was best for me to use English so they would have maximum exposure to the language.

Two teachers believed that students would prefer that their teacher use English only. T4 stated: “When [the L1 is] used to clarify or for other communicative ends, I feel that students would rather the teacher utilize English only.” T9 referred to his/her own preference as a learner: “When I am a student, anyone speaking English [my L1] at all puts me off altogether.”

Two other teachers believed teacher L1 use to be inappropriate given the supposed high level of TL proficiency possessed by students. For example, T13 commented: “I don’t think it’s appropriate at the university level, especially for English majors”.

T16 and T7 believed that teachers should simply go along with the policy as set by the university. T16 stated: “Since there is the policy at [the university], I guess the 80 min in the classroom should be used encouraging the struggle monolingually, and outside, teachers are free to use Japanese where appropriate.” T7 responded: “I don’t use any Japanese in Freshman English because the course is aimed at improving students’ speaking and listening in an immersion setting.”

Only one teacher stated that L1 use by the teacher would lead to more student L1 use: “I feel that [teacher L1 use] demonstrates to the students that it is then okay to use Japanese” (T11).

Finally, T6 commented that “L1 use should be limited to emergencies,” while T17, again referring to a different context, stated: “(...) my inability to use students’ L1 made them more motivated to use L2. They also seemed less embarrassed because their English was better than my Korean/Japanese.”

3.4.3. Arguments in favor of student L1 use

Thirty-six positive comments related to student L1 use, produced by 19 different teachers, were grouped into six categories (see Appendix E). Eleven teachers stressed that student L1 use could facilitate or ensure successful communication with the teacher or with the rest of the class in general. Typical responses included that of T26, who felt that L1 use was acceptable “if the student tries to use English and peppers in a bit of katakana English for difficult words, or some Japanese for complex ideas.” T10 responded: “I occasionally allow it if someone just plain doesn’t know a word in English, but only as a way of learning that word.”

Seven teachers believed that the L1 could facilitate learner–learner interaction and peer assistance. For example, T23 was in favor of “letting students check their understanding of grammar points with each other in their L1.” T24 commented: “If nobody understands the teacher, students can explain to each other.”

Seven teachers referred to student proficiency levels, with T12 commenting: “With low tier students, sometimes it’s a necessary evil.” T29 stated: “I would tend to allow more L1 use when working with beginner level students.”

Six teachers commented that students could benefit from using their L1 during certain stages of a lesson. T21 commented: “there is some research which shows for such things as rehearsal for activities the L1 can enable the student to provide a richer output.” T14 responded: “[Using the L1] might be more beneficial when looking at grammar for example, while for skills or practice classes it would of course not be ideal.”

Three teachers mentioned that L1 use could help to build rapport in the classroom. T3 stated: “Very rarely, the L1 can be used as a humorous rapport-builder,” while T29 responded: “Some L1 use may be social in nature, but some research indicates that L1 use may actually be ‘on-task’ more often than not.”

Two teachers stated that student L1 use could serve as a form of needs analysis, with T26 commenting, “I consider those instances as an opportunity for one-point lessons on what would be appropriate in English.”

3.4.4. Arguments against student L1 use

Participants expressed seven reasons for disallowing student L1 use, as shown in Appendix F. Five teachers attributed use of the L1 by students to laziness or off-task behavior. T1 commented: “In [department X], there is only a little use of students’ native language by weaker students who use it mainly because they are lazy.” T20 believed that...
some student L1 use was acceptable “as long as they speak English when required and do not use the L1 as a crutch to avoid trying (...).”

Five other teachers felt that students should use their L1 only in emergency situations. For example, T2 responded: “Any use of L1 should be initiated by the teacher in all but the most extreme circumstances.”

Five other reasons were given by individual teachers. T8 suggested that students should try to think in English: “I will accept a slip of the tongue in the [L1]; however; I encourage students to try to speak and think in English (...).” T9 again referred to his/her own experience as an L2 learner, saying that “anyone speaking [my L1] at all puts me off altogether.” T3 commented: “It should be avoided because it expands to everyone”, while T18 believed that “Overall, the classroom should be a physical and experiential space which students associate with use of the L2.” Finally, T13 believed that, “given the functional threshold of [English] possessed by the majority of students at [university X], students should always use, or make the effort to use English only.” However, T13 went on to say that s/he had also taught “in situations (at lower skill levels) where students benefitted from clarification from a peer in their L1.”

3.4.5. Arguments in support of L1 use in CLT

Twenty-two teachers made 33 comments in support of the idea that selective L1 use was compatible with CLT (see Appendix G). As with questions 1 and 2, the most common reason was that L1 use could help students to understand and express ideas (17 comments). T10 asserted: “Students may aid ‘communication’ at times by using their native language. CLT is not synonymous with English only.” T15 commented: “Students should attempt to use the TL first, except when it’s getting in the way of negotiating meaning and creating serious misunderstandings.” T24 stated: “For instructions and technical activities, like setting up computers for example, forcing students to stay in the TL can lead to more confusion and lag time that could have been used for the actual task at hand.”

Three teachers commented on the need to consider the learners’ level of proficiency: “It depends on the situation. With lower-level learners, some L1 communication may facilitate L2 learning” (T27).

Three teachers mentioned the importance of the timing of L1 use. For example, T25 stated: “Explaining some aspects of language in ‘input’ sessions is more effectively done in the L1. Of course during ‘practice’ phases, use of the TL would be preferred.”

With respect to comparing the TL and the L1, T29 stated: “The teacher can explain differences and similarities between the two languages while keeping the TL as the main language of communication.” T23 referred to comparing the TL and L1, as well as establishing rapport: “I have had some very ‘communicative’ interactions with students that involved English, their L1, and even other L2s, which served to raise awareness of linguistic, paralinguistic, and pragmatic characteristics of the different languages as well as encouraging rapport and comfort level development.”

Two teachers referred to the level of difficulty of course content. T29 stated: “Small amounts of L1 can allow students to tackle more cognitively challenging and age-appropriate content.”

Two teachers suggested that students will naturally use their L1 in concert with English as bilinguals in the “real world.” For example, T22 responded: “If the classroom reflects the real world, then the students should practice explaining terms and expressions from their own language.”

T16 wondered if the English-only rule also applied to dictionaries: “Are monolingual dictionaries to be prescribed? Who but the most advanced students, or people studying languages with close relationships to their L1 (...) can survive with such a dictionary?” And finally, T17 responded: “It’s a bit harsh and counterproductive to ignore a student’s utterances in the L1 if he/she is unable to produce them in the TL. It can become an off-hand needs assessment to see what they need to work on.”

3.4.6. Arguments against L1 use in CLT

Four teachers expressed four arguments in support of the idea that an English-only approach is an important feature of CLT (see Appendix H). T3 believed that students would develop better communication skills if not permitted recourse to their L1, and that if given an inch, student would take an L1 mile: “Using TL encourages use of communication strategies; use of L1 is often the thin edge of the wedge.” T20 commented: “I get the feeling that we are supposed to use English only as we are selling a product which the university has promoted and essentially sold to students—that being native-speaker English interaction.” Finally, T18 hedged his/her response: “Once students are adept enough in the TL to run the classroom in it (after, say, a semester of learning), then the class needs to be in the TL as much as possible. Certainly at the level of [university X], this should be a given. However, sometimes dipping into the L1 resource is beneficial, but it should be done infrequently.”
4. Discussion

As hypothesized, a significant number of teacher-participants believed that L1 use could play a positive role in L2 teaching and learning, in keeping with a communicative approach. Teachers in favor of judicious L1 use provided more reasons on average, and many of their beliefs are in fact supported by research. For example, teacher and student L1 use can act as a “conversational lubricant” (e.g., Butzkamm, 1998, p. 81; McMillan and Turnbull, 2009; Rivers, 2011a, 2011b); L1 use can play a number of important functions in learner—learner collaboration (e.g., McMillan and Rivers, 2009; Swain and Lapkin, 2000); and students can benefit from using the L1 in preparation or rehearsal stages of a lesson (Behan et al., 1997), and from comparing the TL and L1 (e.g., Butzkamm and Caldwell, 2009; Harbord, 1992).

On the other hand, many of the arguments expressed against L1 use are not substantiated in the literature. For example, when working collaboratively, learners may not negotiate meaning in the TL as often or as wholeheartedly as the teacher may assume (Eckerth, 2009; Storch, 2007). While a teacher’s own learning experiences can be important in shaping beliefs and practice (Lortie, 1975), different students have different preferences regarding TL and L1 use (Macaro, 2005). Students viewed as lazy or defiant for switching to their L1 may be trying to achieve intersubjectivity with their peers (Anton and DiCamilla, 1998; Swain and Lapkin, 2000), or may wish to speak off-record (Hancock, 1997). Teachers and students can use the L1 judiciously without it expanding to everyone, and in fact expert codeswitching can improve the quantity and quality of TL comprehension and production (Butzkamm, 1998; Macaro, 2005; McMillan and Turnbull, 2009). Nonetheless, it is important to note that all teachers who believed that L1 use could enhance L2 learning also strongly cautioned that the L1 should not be overused.

The finding that teachers who viewed student L1 use more positively tended to be less proficient speakers of Japanese was somewhat surprising. Of course, teachers may have learned other second or third languages, allowing them to better relate to their students’ learning needs, or perhaps teachers’ beliefs were shaped by the way the topic of L1 use was covered in their postgraduate degree program. Future research could take the form of a more detailed survey, or interviews and classroom observations, to determine how teachers’ beliefs are shaped and what teachers and students are actually doing in the classroom.

As mentioned by T20, an English-only policy may serve as a recruitment tool, designed to attract more—or more highly-motivated or highly-proficient—students (White, 2001). However, program policy should also aim to provide the best possible educational experience for all students actually enrolled. Teachers who believed that all students would learn most effectively in an English-only classroom may not have fully appreciated the wide range in ability that exists in other classes or departments. Moreover, promotion of the policy may be creating a gap between student and teacher expectations, with some students being “sold” on the idea that lessons should be English-only, while many teachers believe that their students can benefit from judicious L1 use.

Under a one-size-fits-all English-only policy, any amount of L1 use is viewed as bad practice on the part of the teacher, or laziness or defiant behavior on the part of students (Rivers, 2011a). Teacher beliefs and intended pedagogical practice may be strengthened or weakened by the expected reactions of important others, such as students, colleagues, and administrators (Kennedy and Kennedy, 1996), and thus teachers at the university in question who believe that the L1 can play a positive role in L2 learning may feel pressured to exclude the L1 from the classroom. Teachers have little say in management decisions, and those who speak out against the policy risk being regarded as deviants (O’Donnell, 2005; Rivers, 2011b). Furthermore, the native-speaker language-lecturers can only teach at the university for a maximum of four years (split into two 2-year contracts), which further weakens the potential for challenges to the policy (see Rivers, 2011b).

5. Conclusion

As was suggested by T17, language choice is best viewed as a continuum. Targets for TL use could be based on a language use scale (Crichtley, 2002), taking into account student proficiency levels and the difficulty of the task at hand (e.g., 85% English for lower-proficiency students or mixed-proficiency classes, 90% for intermediate, and 95% + for higher-proficiency students). Teachers could allow students to use the L1 selectively in some stages of the lesson, following an “English-mainly” rule (McMillan and Rivers, 2009; Rivers, 2011a, 2011b), while other lessons, or parts thereof, could be conducted entirely in the TL. Learners can be guided toward making effective language choices which benefit learning (Levine, 2009), even if teachers are unable or prefer not to use the students’ L1 themselves (Dailey-O’Cain and Liebscher, 2009; Mattioli, 2004).
While an English-only policy would have been considered “cutting edge” at a Japanese university 20 years ago, our understanding of L2 teaching and learning has progressed considerably over the last two decades. Policy should continue to evolve based on the best available research evidence, and as Tomlinson argues, “flexible weak versions of pedagogic approaches, which encourage teacher variation within a recommended framework, have a much better chance of helping teachers to help their learners to learn” (2005, p. 143). Teachers, as reflective practitioners and professional decision-makers (Borg, 2008), should be encouraged by program managers (see Dunne et al., 2000) to develop localized strategies for maximizing TL comprehension and production—strategies which are supported by research and in keeping with teachers’ personal beliefs.

An earlier version of this paper, containing a preliminary analysis of the research data, appeared in the JALT2008 Conference Proceedings, published by the Japan Association for Language Teaching.

Appendix A. Official English-only classroom policies for first-year students

Department A:
Do your best to speak only in English in class. I know that it can be very difficult and frustrating to use only English for 90 min, but because you are learning English in Japan you must take every opportunity to use your English! Please don’t waste your valuable class time!

Department B:
This course has a strict English-only policy. Please make sure that you do not speak Japanese during the class. Speaking Japanese will lower your final grade and make it difficult for the other students around you to speak English. I will help you to speak English and you should also help each other.

Department C:
English Only: This class follows a strict ENGLISH ONLY rule and speaking English is a part of your participation grade. It can be very challenging at first to use only English for 90 min, but it will get easier the more we speak. Speaking English will help you improve your English and you are encouraged to work with your classmates as much as you can. I am here to help you, too.

Appendix B
Summary of teachers’ responses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude toward teacher L1 use</th>
<th>Attitude toward student L1 use</th>
<th>CLT = EO?</th>
<th>Years teaching in Japan</th>
<th>Japanese language ability*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T1 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T3 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T4 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T5 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T6 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>T7 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T8 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T9 Negative</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>T10 Negative</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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<td>T11 Negative</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>T12 Negative</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T13 Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T14 Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T15 Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>T16 Mixed</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T17 Mixed</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T18 Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T19 Positive</td>
<td>Negative</td>
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<tr>
<td>T20 Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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</table>

(continued on next page)
Appendix B (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitude toward teacher L1 use</th>
<th>Attitude toward student L1 use</th>
<th>CLT = EO?</th>
<th>Years teaching in Japan</th>
<th>Japanese language ability*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T21 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T22 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T23 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T24 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>T25 Positive</td>
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</tr>
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<td>T26 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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<td>T27 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T28 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T29 Positive</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Teachers were asked to rate their own level of Japanese proficiency on a four point scale: 1 — “I only know only a few basic words and phrases”; 2 — “I am able to have limited conversation on everyday topics”; 3 — “I am able to discuss a variety of topics without too much trouble”; or 4 — “I have no problem communicating with native-speakers on a wide range of topics.”

Appendix C

Arguments in favor of judicious L1 use by the teacher.

Categories Number of comments

Facilitates and ensures successful teacher-student communication 12
(T13, T15, T16, T18, T19, T20, T21, T22, T23, T26, T28, T29)

Helpful when teaching lower-proficiency students (T16, T17, T26, T27, T29) 5

Helpful for building rapport with students (T1, T3, T4, T24, T27) 5

Helpful for learning vocabulary (T21, T28) 2

Translation and comparing the TL and L1 (T17, T29) 2

Natural for developing bilinguals to use L1 (T23) 1

“English-only” not appropriate given previous learning experiences (T25) 1

OK if the teacher is bilingual and students all share a common L1 (T14) 1

TOTAL 29

Appendix D

Arguments against L1 use by the teacher.

Categories Number of comments

More negotiation of meaning if students use English only (T1, T2, T5, T11, T15) 5

Factors relating to the micro or macro linguistic environment (T8, T16, T17) 3

Perceived student preferences; teacher preferences as an L2 learner (T4, T9) 2

L1 use not appropriate for university level English students (T6, T13) 2

The university’s English-only policy should be followed (T7, T16) 2

Teacher L1 use will lead to overuse by students (T11) 1

L1 for emergency situations only (T6) 1

Teacher’s inability to use students’ L1 encourages TL use (T17) 1

TOTAL 17

Appendix E

Arguments in favor of student L1 use.

Categories Number of comments

Facilitates and ensures successful communication with the teacher or the whole class 11
(T10, T13, T14, T15, T17, T20, T21, T24, T26, T28, T29)

Helpful when students provide peer-assistance (T11, T20, T21, T23, T24, T28, T29) 7

Helpful for lower-proficiency learners (T12, T13, T15, T22, T24, T27, T29) 7

Helpful during certain stages of the lesson (T14, T16, T20, T21, T22, T26) 6

Important for building rapport (T3, T25, T29) 3

L1 use can serve as an informal needs analysis (T23, T26) 2

TOTAL 36
Appendix F
Arguments against student L1 use.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Due to laziness or connected with off-task behavior (T1, T4, T5, T8, T20)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For emergency situations only (T2, T3, T7, T9, T19)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students should speak and think in English only (T8)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As an L2 learner, teacher was demotivated by L1 use (T9)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1 use spreads to everyone (T3)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should aim for an immersion-type experience (T18)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students at university ‘X’ are up to the challenge of using English only (T13)</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
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</table>

Appendix G
Arguments in support of L1 use in CLT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates and ensures successful communication</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(T4, T6, T7, T9, T10, T12, T14, T15, T16, T17, T19, T20, T21, T23, T24, T28, T29)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful for lower-proficiency learners (T11, T12, T27)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For beginning stages of the lesson/semester (T18, T22, T25)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing and contrasting TL and L1 (T21, T23, T29)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allows for more challenging content (T27, T29)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to “real world” communication (T22, T29)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helps to establish rapport (T23)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual dictionaries are effective learning tools (T16)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serves as an off-hand needs assessment (T17)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>33</td>
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</table>

Appendix H
Arguments against L1 use in CLT.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Number of comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TL exclusivity promotes negotiation and use of communication strategies (T1, T3)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any use of the L1 will lead to overuse (T3)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students have been “sold” on “English-only” (T20)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes should be “English-only” at the university level (T18)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

References


