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## Student Use of Japanese in the EFL Classroom

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### Introduction

In his article *Using the First Language in the Classroom*, Cook (2001) points out that since the “Great Reform” at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a tendency for language pedagogy to be based primarily on communicative approaches which exclude the mother tongue from the foreign language classroom. However, over the past thirty years, some scholars have come to question this propensity to favor L2 exclusively and have begun an inquiry into the roles that the mother tongue may play in the foreign or second language classroom. Despite this newer wave of research (Burden, 2000; Prodromou, 2001; Roberts-Auerbach, 1993; Schweers, 1999) many institutions and the teachers who work in them automatically adopt target language-only policies. It may be safe to assume that some institutions advocate English-only education as a marketing tool. However, teachers often adopt these policies not only because of institutional pressure but also because they believe without question that exclusive use of the target language will help students reach their goals more quickly than allowing the use of their mother tongue.

My own experience teaching in both ESL and EFL contexts seems to reinforce the notion that English-only policies are in place in many regions of the world. In fact, every institution that has employed me over the past 15 years has eschewed the use of the mother tongue in the classroom. Although my colleagues and I often had trouble enforcing English-only policies, we did not question their validity and instead focused our attention on schemes which would prevent our students from using their first language which included distributing yellow and red cards and making students pay a fine for infractions. Despite our efforts, most teachers admitted that it was next to impossible to maintain an English-only classroom. I attributed my own failure to enforce exclusive use of English to the fact that I did not completely agree with the policy on an ideological level and because attempts to ban the use



of the students' first language often took away from the task at hand due to the constant reminders and interruptions that were required.

I had always assumed that my students were reverting to using their mother tongue due to a lack of proficiency in English and that trying to force them to make the effort to express themselves in L2 was good practice for the "real life" situations they may face outside the classroom when use of their own language may be impossible.

It was not until 2007 that I began to question the reasons why my students may be using their mother tongue in the classroom and if their use of L1 was somehow mediating and facilitating their acquisition of L2. This inquiry began as a result of being placed in a unique teaching situation. While working at an international school in Tokyo, I was assigned to teach a group of twelve students who did not fit into any of the four established English departments. In the class were native English speakers who spoke Japanese well, advanced students whose mother tongue was Japanese, and advanced students whose mother tongue was not Japanese but who were proficient in the language. At the beginning of the academic year, we established class rules together and the students chose to adopt an English-only policy. Despite the students' own wishes to see such a policy enforced, it proved once again to be impossible. However, in this case, limited proficiency could not be squarely blamed for the use of Japanese and I decided to investigate the matter further in hopes of discovering the reasons motivating my students' language choices, their attitudes towards that usage, and, based on that information, establishing a more pedagogically appropriate language policy for the class. In order to do so, I planned an action research project which aimed at answering the following questions:

- a. What are teachers' evidence-based views of student use of Japanese in the classroom, and are there any patterns to be found in that usage?
- b. What are students' views about their own use of Japanese in the classroom, their attitudes towards that usage, and are there any commonalities apparent in their comments?
- c. How do the teachers' and students' views in this study compare with published classroom-based research in this area?

### **Review of the Literature**

In the following section, I will briefly survey the literature which leans in favor of L2-only policies and that which advocates allowing some use of L1 in the classroom. Then, specific



attention will be focused on the situation in Japan and how the increasing complexity of this context is pushing the simple argument of “for or against L1 use” out of the limelight. This complexity is demanding a new paradigm for English language education that encompasses a student body which is gradually becoming more and more diverse.

*Scholars and Teachers in Favor of L2-Only Policies*

In his book, *A History of English Language Teaching*, Howatt (1984) traces the shift in trend from the Grammar Translation Method to more communicative approaches that began with The Direct Method at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He states that the backlash against Grammar Translation produced a pedagogical approach which almost utterly rejected use of L1 in the language classroom and to demonstrate this, he explains the rationale behind The Direct Method and then reviews some of the most influential studies carried out on the issue by Wilkins (1970), Swain (1980), Krashen (1985). This research bolstered the notion that L1 should be banned from the foreign language classroom so that students’ learning of the new language could be fast-tracked through maximum exposure to input and maximum opportunity for output of the target language.

Cook (2001) further supports Howatt’s view that 20<sup>th</sup> century pedagogical approaches were centered around direct or communicative methods and he outlines the typical justifications which have been used to keep English-only policies in place. Cook (2001) argues that the ban of L1 has been common in English language pedagogy based on three theories of how foreign language learning occurs: first, that L2 can be acquired in the same way as L1; second, that compartmentalization of the two languages in the brain is both possible and necessary; and third, that maximum exposure to L2 will produce faster results than allowing the use of the first language.

Although neither Howatt (1984) nor Cook (2001) advocate the ban of L1 from the classroom, their work provides us with a background for understanding the reasons why many scholars and teachers favor L2-only policies. In addition to this historical grounding, it is important to look at work which directly advocates a near complete ban on the use of the students’ language.

In her response to Roberts-Auerbach’s (1993) article on allowing students to use L1 in the language classroom, Polio (1994) argues to the contrary. She begins by pointing out that the terms “allow” and “use” need to be clearly defined before any legitimate language policy can be put into place. She also puts into question the rationale behind the amount of



L1 that Roberts-Auerbach (1993) advocates and states that it cannot be proven that the use of the mother tongue empowers students or that L1 actually aids them in their learning of L2. Finally, Polio (1994) takes issue with Roberts-Auerbach's (1993) argument that banning L1 is primarily an ideological move which reinforces post-colonial power structures and ends her work by stating that any pedagogical decisions about language use need to be made based on SLA theory rather than political opinion.

Prodromou (2001) argues that there is a place for the students' language in ESL/EFL situations and that the majority of his students want the option of being able to use their first language when studying English. Prodromou (2001) states that using the students' language or allowing them to do so helps to increase grammatical awareness, is useful for contrastive analysis, and can help students better prepare themselves for activities to be carried out in L2. In contrast, Gabrielatos (2001) argues that grammar explanations can be delivered with equal efficiency in L2 and that contrastive analysis and language preparation can also be accomplished through the exclusive use of the target language.

While the studies mentioned above are primarily theoretical arguments against allowing the use of L1, there has also been a considerable amount of action research carried out in the field which appears to indicate that the majority of teachers feel the use of L1 is unhelpful and that an attempt to restrict its use is the goal that educators should be striving towards (Lin, 1990). One example of such a study was conducted by Bawcom (2002) in Spain, the aim of which was examining the reasons why her students were using L1, followed by a post study which attempted to limit this usage. Although Bawcom herself determined that the students were using Spanish in the EFL classroom to lower the affective filter, transfer learning strategies, and for expedient translation of unknown vocabulary, she does not appear to find these reasons to be legitimate because in her post study she attempts to show that these purposes for using L1 can be accomplished just as efficiently in L2.

While some may argue that Bawcom's (2002) study is an isolated one that does not accurately reflect the complexity of teachers' attitudes towards the use of L1, the work of Chavez (2003) and Belz (2003) appears to confirm that the majority of teachers working in both ESL and EFL situations favor L2-only policies and are concerned about how they can be enforced. Chavez (2003) points out that most of the research on this issue emphasizes the ways in which teachers can reduce the use of L1 in the classroom. Gathering information from a less academic setting, Belz (2003) uses comments posted on an internet website with more than 10,000 members and which is dedicated to addressing the issue of English-only



policies to demonstrate that the vast majority of teachers link the use of L1 to laziness and deficiency and prefer to devise ways of preventing students from using their language rather than examine the reasons why this may be happening.

*Scholars and Teachers in Favor of Allowing Use of L1*

While the force of pedagogical tradition lies in favor of L2-only education, and it appears that researchers who challenge L2-only policies open up debate, and it also seems as if the bulk of action research done by teachers tends to focus on methods of reducing L1 usage, there is a body of literature that has been growing over the past thirty years which advocates the use of the first language in the foreign language classroom. Studies that endorse the use of the mother tongue can be grouped into four different categories: ideological arguments, student attitudes towards L1 use, teacher attitudes towards L1 use, and recent research in SLA theory.

As briefly outlined in the previous section, Roberts-Auerbach's (1993) argument for the use of L1 in the foreign language classroom is based primarily on the theory that English-only policies are rooted in a particular ideological perspective. She argues that requiring students to use English-only mirrors policies which attempt to do the same on the national level. She bolsters her argument by citing the work of Tollefson (1991), Skutnabb-Kangas (1990), and Phillipson (1990). Unfortunately, Roberts-Auerbach's (1993) work does not address specifically how English-only policies in the classroom (as opposed to on the national level) are based on this ideology and she does not mention the counter argument that students who become proficient in English may be allowed access to greater economic and social power. Also, as Polio (1994) points out, Auerbach's arguments cannot be generalized to fit into EFL situations and one of their major weaknesses is the absence of SLA research to support them. However, her main point is to prompt teachers to weigh their own ideological perspective and examine how that comes into play when shaping their pedagogical practice.

In addition to ideological considerations, some scholars and teachers believe that the students' attitude towards the use of L1 in the classroom is an important factor to take into account when determining a formal language policy. The work of Schweers (1999), Prodromou (2001), and Burden (2000) appears to confirm that students would prefer to be allowed to use their mother tongue in the foreign language classroom in order to achieve specific purposes. Schweers' (1999) study conducted at the University of Puerto Rico indicates that students want Spanish to be used to facilitate comprehension of unknown words or instructions and to build rapport between students and with the teacher.



Prodromou's (2001) work shows that the lower their level, the more the students want to have the option of using L1 to help them comprehend the material covered in class. It also indicates that despite increased proficiency, 50% of higher level students want to use L1 primarily to support the learning of new vocabulary. Finally, Burden's (2000) survey of Japanese university students illustrates that the majority of them want to use Japanese and have the teacher use Japanese in order to help them relax.

Not only do students appear to want the option of resorting to L1 in the classroom but so do some teachers. Although the previous section indicates that most teachers feel English-only is the best policy, they report often using students' L1 amidst feelings of guilt that they are robbing their students of various opportunities to be exposed to input in the target language (Buckmaster, 1999; Lin 1990). Despite this, some teachers believe that some use of L1 serves an important function in the classroom.

Roberts-Auerbach (1993) cites Piasecka and Collingham (1988) who advocate the use of L1 for functions such as negotiation of the syllabus, record keeping, classroom management, language analysis, discussion of cross-cultural issues, error explanation and correction, idea development, and to lower the affective filter. In addition, Prodromou (2001) cites Atkinson (1987) who suggests using L1 in order to set up activities, clarify instructions, and check student comprehension. Also, Nation (2003) puts forth some instances in which L1 may be used which include word for word translation of vocabulary and to help students lower the affective filter.

While the above work illustrates how some teachers are using L1 in the classroom, the following studies indicate that teacher attitudes are gradually changing towards using the mother tongue based on their experiences in the classroom. Rolin Lanziti's (2003) study which includes a section on correcting learners by using their L1 demonstrates that the teachers who participated in her research were willing to experiment with using L1 in the classroom and changed their classroom language policy based on the results of her data collection which showed that use of L1 in error correction is often more effective than use of the L2. In addition, Foto's (1995) work indicates that more and more teachers are beginning to believe that code-switching is a natural phenomenon which occurs amongst bilinguals and developing bilinguals and, as a result, are not opposed to using or hearing L1 in their classrooms. Finally, Cohen and Swain (1976) report that several teachers they surveyed indicated that they use the L1 for discipline because it is oftentimes more effective than the L2.



Although it is important to bear in mind the ideological implications of an English-only policy as well as student and teacher attitudes towards the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, the research which examines these factors does not provide any solid evidence that the use of L1 necessarily facilitates the learning of L2. However, several SLA-based studies tend to confirm that the use of L1 can be an effective tool in learning to read, write, and speak in L2. For example, Seng and Hashim's (2006) study on using L1 to "think aloud" when reading a text in L2 indicates to the researchers that students using their mother tongue were able to solve "word related and idea related" problems in L2 more quickly than students who did not. Also, students using L1 "think aloud" while reading transferred reading strategies from L1 to L2 more efficiently and more often than students who did not use L1 "think aloud" while reading.

Anton and DiCamillas's (1998) study on using L1 while writing shows that students who switched to their mother tongue in order to mediate the task before beginning and to negotiate meta-linguistic problems they encountered while writing performed better than those who did not. A second study on using L1 while writing in L2 was conducted by Stapa and Majid (2006). Their work indicates that students who were allowed the opportunity of brainstorming ideas in L1 prior to writing a composition in L2 received better scores from independent markers in the areas of content, organization, vocabulary, and mechanics than students who did their brainstorming in L2.

Other studies which focus on speaking also confirm that the use of L1 appears to facilitate L2 learning. For example, Brooks and Donato (1994) conducted research on students learning Spanish in North America. Between two groups, one of which was permitted to use English (L1) and one that was not, the group that used English completed the task more quickly and more successfully than the group that did not use their mother tongue. As a result, Brooks and Donato concluded that the "meta-talk" that revolves around the task is best done in L1 and serves as a mediator between students and the new language.

Hancock (1997) also did research on the use of L1 during speaking tasks. In his work he recorded two English classes in Spain: one at the beginning of term and one at the end. In both cases, students were permitted to use their L1 and their conversations were recorded and transcribed. According to the data collected, students used L1 as a "task negotiation tool" and as a means of helping themselves and others "comprehend the material" (p. 218). Hancock concluded that students select L1 for the above mentioned "particular purposes" and that they either consciously or unconsciously know that using L1 will help them negotiate



meaning and work through a task. As a result, Hancock (1997) concluded that attempts to prevent students from using the L1 tool that they have at their disposal will likely be unsuccessful.

*Focus on the Issue in the Japanese Context*

When it comes to the issue of using the mother tongue in Japan, Critchley (1999) points out that relatively few studies have been conducted on the topic, probably because most institutions market courses based on the exclusive use of English during class time. Weschler (1997) and Klevberg (2000) also both note the intense institutional pressure that teachers in Japan face to implement English-only policies. Based on interviews with representatives from the three largest language schools in Japan, Klevberg reports that the rationale behind the L2-only policies which are so common is that there is parental pressure for such education and that many parents and school managers believe that students who speak Japanese “for six days and 23 hours a week...should have an intensive English lesson...and hear a native English speaker” (p. 1). Other arguments for L2-only policies include the idea that when preparing students for home-stay programs abroad, they should not be able to use any Japanese in the class because they will not be able to depend on their mother tongue once they are living with their host families (Klevberg, 2000).

Interestingly, despite these arguments for exclusive use of L2, 50% of teachers working in the institutions where Klevberg conducted her study admit to using Japanese some of the time. They report doing so in order to help out lower level students, to translate vocabulary, and to provide grammar explanations. An additional study carried out by Schmidt (1995) yielded similar findings to those of Klevberg and indicates that some teachers use L1 for simple word-to-word translations and to establish positive rapport with the class. Also, some teachers permit students to use L1 when they brainstorm ideas or prepare for tasks to be done in L2. Despite his apparently open stance on the use of the mother tongue, Schmidt (1995) warns that many teachers who use L1 in the classroom report that they feel guilty for doing so and he concludes his paper by cautioning teachers not to allow L1 to dominate, to slowly wean students from using Japanese, and to use various methods of teaching vocabulary in order to avoid an over-reliance on translation.





*A New Language Teaching Paradigm for Japan?*

The research of Weschler (1997), Klevberg (2000), and Schmidt (1995) demonstrates that although there is pressure to submit to the L2-only policies established by institutions for various reasons, many teachers are in fact using some L1 in the classroom. However, the work of these teachers appears to portray the situation in Japan as a monolithic one in the sense that all students are native speakers of Japanese and use Japanese exclusively in their daily lives. While this may be true for the majority of students, the situation in Japan, particularly in Tokyo, is changing rapidly and is becoming more complex. As a result, the issue of allowing the use of L1 to a certain extent or attempting to ban it completely is also becoming more difficult to address.

Several scholars in Japan are beginning to explore this new phenomenon of diversity from within their own context. In their book, *Studies in Japanese Bilingualism*, Noguchi and Fotos (2001) focus on the emerging multilingual, multicultural situation in the country and stress that the creation of a new English language education paradigm is required in post-modern Japan which includes native English speakers, near-native English speakers, returnees, heritage learners, language minority students, and EFL learners. Although Japan is a country which is known for its one nation, one language, one culture construct and bilingual and multilingual identities are often seen as threats, some scholars believe that within a new paradigm, it will be possible to re-imagine “foreign” language education as a boon rather than a danger by focusing on how cross-cultural, multicultural and socio-cultural education are beneficial to Japan both economically and socially (Train, 2005; Yamamoto, 2001).

Despite the apparent enthusiasm of Noguchi and Fotos (2001), Yamamoto (2001), and Train (2005), the goal of creating a new paradigm to fit the varied profiles of students in Japan is a daunting one. As Seibert Vaipae (2001) notes, the majority of teachers who work with “language minority” students (defined as students whose mother tongue is not Japanese) often lack special training to help them cope with this new population and there are no solid programs set in place by the Ministry of Education for these students. Furthermore, as Katz (2003) points out, while native or near native speakers who are in EFL classes have valuable linguistic and cultural insight, they often have no clearly defined role in the classroom. Another contentious issue is that traditional EFL students are often intimidated by “returnees” who are proficient in English and, as a result, students with a high level of English and a native-like accent may become the target of bullying. In addition, numerous returnee



students feel self-conscious in the English language classroom and do not want to be singled out by the teacher or set apart from the rest of their classmates (Noguchi, 2001).

### **Summary**

At present, there is a debate in the fields of ESL and EFL on whether or not to allow the use of L1 in the classroom and, if so, how much and for what purposes. Although most scholars, regardless of where they stand on the issue, do not advocate any completely fixed policies and recommend that each teaching context be considered before concluding what the official class rules are regarding the usage of the mother tongue, the majority of teachers are of the opinion that L2 exclusivity is the best policy and face pressure from the institutions they work in to enforce English-only rules. Despite this ongoing debate, the time may soon come when the argument is moot because of rapidly increasing diversity amongst populations.

The ESL context is almost always more diverse than the EFL one, and teachers are normally faced with students who do not share the same mother tongue. As a result, those working in ESL have often insisted on L2 exclusivity in the classroom. Perhaps this is because it is impossible for the teacher to know and use all of the students' first languages and also because they may believe the fairest, most practical way to address the students and for them to address each other is in the target language. Despite this, the ESL situation is slowly changing as some teachers are beginning to realize some of the benefits of allowing the students to use their own language, maybe not with other students, but by themselves or in small groups when they are preparing to write or speak in L2.

Unlike the ESL context, EFL situations have almost always lacked diversity and, as a result, the issue of L2-only policies and how to enforce them may be a greater "bone of contention" in Gabrielatos' (2001) words, since most students share the same mother tongue. However, even in countries such as Japan, this is changing. As a result, the debate of allowing or banning L1 will likely move gradually from L2 exclusivity towards a new paradigm, however problematic its establishment may be, which allows for bilingualism and multilingualism to manifest itself in tangible ways in the language classroom.

The following study seeks not only to contribute to the debate of whether or not the students' first language may facilitate learning of another language but also to examine student attitudes towards the use of L1 in the English language classroom. As mentioned earlier, Critchley (1999) highlights the fact that studies of this nature are not often carried out in the Japanese context. Also, Noguchi and Fotos (2001) have called for the creation of a



new paradigm for teaching in Japan which addresses the diversity which is rapidly becoming commonplace. This study is an attempt to begin to fill the gap in research in this area and to endeavor to shape a new paradigm for teaching which may be used at the grassroots level, in this author's own teaching situation.

## **Methodology**

### *Setting and Participants*

The following study took place at Kanto International School in Central Tokyo. The school has approximately 2000 students enrolled in five different English departments: Regular English, which is a program that covers the normal EFL curriculum based on guidelines set up by the Japanese Ministry of Education; General English, which includes more hours and has a stronger academic focus than the Regular Program; Super English, which is a program recognized by the Ministry of Education and includes more contact hours than either the Regular or General English Programs and only admits students who achieve a high academic level in both their English classes as well as their other classes; the "Returnee" Program which is dedicated to serving the needs of Japanese students whose mother tongue is Japanese but who have spent a portion of their lives studying abroad in either in Japanese or English medium schools; and the Study Abroad Program, a department which was established for Japanese EFL students of any level who share the goal of post secondary education in an English speaking country.

The students who took part in this study were enrolled in The Study Abroad Program and were in their first year of high school. All participants were either 15 or 16 years of age at the time the research was conducted. At the beginning of the school year, these twelve students were separated from the Study Abroad homeroom class and put into a special class because their high level of English proficiency did not make them suitable candidates for the lower level curriculum normally used in the first year of the program. They were selected to be members of this group based on their entrance examination scores and on the results of personal interviews about their backgrounds. Although some of the students would have been suitable candidates for the Returnee Program, they chose to enroll in The Study Abroad Department because of the program's intense academic focus and their goal to pursue a degree from an English medium university upon graduation.

Despite the fact that all of the students have a high level of English, their proficiency can be grouped into three categories: native English speakers, native Japanese speaking



students with an advanced level of English, and advanced level students whose mother tongue is neither Japanese nor English. Of the four native speakers that make up the first category, one was born to an American mother and a Japanese father, raised in Texas and moved to Japan at age 14, one was born to an American mother and a Japanese father, raised in Colorado and moved to Japan at age 12, another was born in Japan but spent all her life abroad in English medium schools in South Africa and Jordan and used English at home with her Japanese parents, and one who was born in Japan but completed the majority of his schooling in New York. Of the six students that form the second category, one was born and raised in Japan and speaks Japanese at home but studied in bilingual English-Japanese schools in Malaysia and the US for five years, three others are of mixed Chinese and Japanese heritage and have never lived abroad before but speak both Japanese and Chinese at home and acquired a good level of English through study in both EFL settings in Japanese schools as well as private night schools, one student is of mixed Japanese and Iranian heritage and uses Japanese and Farsi at home, and one student is Japanese, has lived in Japan all his life, uses Japanese exclusively at home but has an upper-intermediate level of English due to self-study. Two students form the final category have Korean ethnic backgrounds. Both were born in Korea and speak Korean exclusively at home. One moved to Japan at age 9 and the other at age 12. Both report that they can speak and write Japanese well because they studied it in Korea and, since coming to Japan, they studied in schools which provided instruction in Japanese, Korean, and English.

### *Study Design and Data Collection*

This study was conducted over the period of a week during which time students had two reading classes, two speaking classes, and two writing classes. All the classes were 50 minutes in length and were designed so that a maximum of interaction could occur amongst students. Prior to beginning the classes for the week, I explained to students that we would have a different language policy during each two lesson block. In the reading classes, students were requested to try to maintain an English-only policy when discussing and composing group answers. In the speaking classes, I told native English speakers that they could use some Japanese and non-native English speakers that they could have limited use of Japanese but I did not specify for what purposes. Instead, I asked the students to use Japanese when they felt it was necessary, either to help others or to help themselves. In the



writing classes, I told the students that they could have unlimited use of Japanese to accomplish a series of task-based activities which prepared them to write an expository essay.

In order to collect data for this study, I employed three methods. First, I set the tasks to be accomplished at the beginning of each class and then sat as an observer, keeping notes in a logbook on what I noticed about the students' use of Japanese. Second, I invited six different colleagues to observe one class each and write down what they noticed about the students' use of Japanese. I asked teachers to write down instances of Japanese usage and to identify the purpose of that use if possible (vocabulary translation, task clarification, etc.) All of the teachers who took part in collecting data for this research have MA degrees in TESOL or are in the process of pursuing an MA in this field. All had been teaching in Japan for over two years and all except for one identified themselves as intermediate or advanced speakers of Japanese. Finally, I asked the students for their written feedback on their views about how they used Japanese, why they think they used Japanese this way, and how they felt about their Japanese use at the end of each two class block (see Appendix 1). In response to the above three prompts, students were asked to free write for a period of 15 minutes. Students were also requested to fill out a questionnaire which aimed at gauging their attitudes on the use of Japanese in the classroom (see Appendix 2). Unfortunately, due to strict privacy laws in place at the school, it is not possible to make either audiotapes or videotapes of students and therefore impossible to expound on the data by replaying or transcribing the lessons. However, I will attempt to add validity and reliability to this qualitative inquiry through categorization of data and specific examples taken from student interaction observed by teachers as well as quotes from student comments.

## **Findings**

Upon examination of the data collected from the logbook, colleagues who observed the classes, and the feedback from the student participants, a number of similarities can be found in the comments on the use of Japanese in the classroom. In addition, the findings of this action research project appear to substantiate some of the findings of previous studies conducted on the same topic and outlined in the literature review.

In this section, I will summarize the main points of the findings of this study by combining data collected in my logbook with the data submitted to me by my colleagues who observed the classes. The data collected from student feedback forms will be reported on separately. Finally, I will draw parallels between the findings of this study and those of other



research carried out previously. In doing so, I will attempt to address the research questions (*a*, *b* and *c* below).

*Findings Based on Teacher and Observer Data*

a. What are teachers' evidence-based views of student use of Japanese in the classroom, and are there any patterns to be found in that usage?

According to the data collected by the teachers, students used Japanese to achieve several goals. First, students used Japanese to define unknown words. Seven out of seven teachers noticed that students used sentences like, "I forgot how to say ----- in English." or "I don't know how to say ----- in English." Some words that students translated from Japanese were "discrimination," "expose," "theory" and "rural." Interestingly, while native English speakers knew the Japanese for these words and were able to provide English equivalents, they did not know the Kanji (Chinese characters) for these words and the Japanese students were able to teach them. Second, seven out of seven teachers noticed that Japanese was used for task clarification. When unsure of how to proceed, students said, "What should we do now?" or "What are we supposed to do?" in Japanese. Native English speaking students tended to provide explanations in English while others provided task clarification in Japanese. Third, four out of seven teachers noticed that class members used Japanese to explain to fellow students about language appropriacy or to do contrastive analysis. One example of this is when a native English speaking student told a native Japanese speaker that the word "bitch" is not appropriate to use in the classroom and is derogatory. In Japanese, the borrowed word "bitch", made popular in ads for a line of clothing, simply means a girl who is streetwise. Another example is when a native English speaker explained to students in her group that the word "stalker" cannot be used flippantly in English as it may cause offense, unlike the glib usage that is permissible in Japanese-English. Forth, all teachers noted that all students, including native English speakers, used Japanese fillers. Examples are the Japanese words for "let me see," "really?," "great," "got it," and "I see." Finally, four teachers out of seven noticed some of the native Japanese speakers using their own language to voice their discomfort during the English-Only class block. One student said, "I feel nervous" and another said, "This is embarrassing, isn't it." Two other students apologized in Japanese to others in their group for their "weaker English ability" when they struggled to find a word. Teachers noticed that native speakers responded to these comments in Japanese, trying to encourage their fellow students and reassure them by saying things like "take it easy," "don't



worry about it,” and the Japanese word *gambatte*, loosely translated as “go for it,” thus perhaps using L1 to lower the affective filter.

*Findings based on Student Data*

b. What are students’ views about their own use of Japanese in the classroom, their attitudes towards that usage, and are there any commonalities apparent in their comments?

In their feedback, student remarks appear to confirm what teachers noticed about use of Japanese in the classroom. First, all students reported that using Japanese improved the atmosphere in the class. The phrase “more comfortable” appeared 17 times in the free-write feedback gathered after the limited Japanese use classes (see Appendix 1). Other phrases used to describe this block of classes were, “much less tense,” “so much easier,” “under less stress,” “not so much pressure,” “I felt more relaxed,” “I felt relieved,” and “I didn’t feel pushed.” Second, all students reported using Japanese to provide translation for unknown words in English and all students except for one stated that they felt being able to use Japanese for quick translation was preferable to trying to use circumlocution or the dictionary. The one student who did not want to be able to use Japanese for translation was a native English speaker. He commented that:

I choose to try not to use Japanese to help other students with vocabulary. The reason for this is simple. If you don’t know how to say a word, you can just use the dictionary. Asking for words will be a distraction for people trying to focus on their own work. Also, if you ask the person next to you, you are only able to listen but if you look words up in the dictionary, you are able to read and memorize too.

Third, students reported that they used Japanese for what can be identified as social and cultural purposes. For example, one native English speaking student said that they used English exclusively to talk about academic subjects but that she wanted to use some Japanese in her group. She reported, “I’ve noticed that when I talk about things that do not have to do with what we are studying, I talk in Japanese because I want to fit in with the two guys in our group who usually speak Japanese. Also, English is my first language and I want to use Japanese when I can, even in English class because I worked so hard to learn it.” Another native English speaking student reported that she likes to use Japanese when she wants to get her group members to do something. She said that Japanese sounds “softer” and that it is “less direct” than English.



In addition to the data collected from students' free-writing, class members were also requested to respond to a questionnaire that attempted to gauge student attitudes about the use of Japanese in the class (see Appendix 2). The data collected from the questionnaire indicate that attitudes towards using Japanese in the classroom differ depending on whether the student is a native English speaker or a native speaker of another language and there are several important points to note. First, questionnaire data appear to show that although the native Japanese speakers express a desire to use some Japanese in the class, they think that this use does not help them to learn English, but rather only serves to make them feel more "comfortable," as they put it, in the free-write feedback. In contrast, the native English speakers seemed to think that using Japanese helped other students in the class learn English. This is shown in student responses to statement one, *I like to use some Japanese because I had problems expressing myself in English*. All six native Japanese speakers responded that they agreed or strongly agreed. It is also shown in student responses to statement five, *I think that using Japanese helps me / others to learn English*, with which all the native speakers and the Korean girls either agreed or strongly agreed while all the native Japanese speakers disagreed or strongly disagreed. Second, the data appear to show that despite the fact that the native English speakers and the Korean girls thought using some Japanese would help fellow students, they did not always want to provide this help. In response to statement two, *I felt I wanted to help other students by using Japanese because I thought they were having difficulty with English* two native speakers agreed while the other two and both Korean girls responded that they felt neutral. Third, responses to statement three, *I felt pressure to use Japanese because it is the language we use in our social lives outside the classroom* seemed to indicate that although the native English speakers do not necessarily want to use Japanese to help other students, they do use Japanese to try to fit in because all the native English speakers responded that they agreed with the statement while the Korean girls and the native Japanese speakers either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Finally, all the native Japanese speaking students responded "agree" or "strongly agree" to statement four, *I sometimes feel embarrassed using English because my ability is weaker than that of other students* while the Korean girls disagreed. This seems to indicate that there is some kind of affective filter influencing the oral performance of the Japanese native speaker students.

In summary, although the Japanese students admit to feeling embarrassed at times because their speaking is not on par with other students in the class and they would like to use Japanese to alleviate the stress this causes, they also believe that using Japanese will not be





helpful to their learning of English. Also, native English speakers are not uniformly willing to use Japanese to help fellow students. Rather, they indicate that they use Japanese in class because they feel pressure to do so since it is the language of social life normally used among students.

*Comparison of Findings with Other Studies*

c. How do the teachers' and students' views in this study compare with published classroom-based research in this area?

In addition to teacher, observer, and student data containing common points about how Japanese is used in the classroom, the findings of this study also share similarities with the results of other research which has been published on the topic. Perhaps the most salient commonality can be found when comparing portions of the work of Roberts-Auerbach (1993) to this study. In her article on the use of the first language in the "foreign" language classroom, Roberts-Auerbach's (1993) only argument in favor of allowing L1 that is based on SLA research is the notion of the "affective filter". She states that permitting students to speak some of their native language during lessons will reduce the affective filter and help them feel more at ease and less embarrassed. Although Polio (1994) disagrees that the affective filter theory has been proven, there seems to be some evidence of it in this study based on both what the teachers observed in the classes and what the students reported they felt. As previously mentioned, teachers noticed that some students voiced their discomfort in the "English-Only" classes by using words in Japanese like "nervous" and "embarrassing" and students wrote on their feedback forms that they experienced "stress" and were "uncomfortable" enough that they stated their speaking performance was affected by the fact that they felt they were "under pressure".

Another similarity between this study and the results of other research can be found in the complexity of student attitudes towards the use of Japanese. As both Weschler (1997) and Klevberg (2000) address in their work, there is a strong bias in favor of English-only policies in Japan. This bias is also manifest in the comments of the student participants of this study. As mentioned above, while native Japanese speakers consistently reported that they were "uncomfortable" during the "English-Only" classes, they always added that despite this feeling of discomfort, they believed that using English would only be more affective in helping them learn English. One student also stated that one of the reasons his parents had



chosen to put him in the Study Abroad Program was because of the English-only classroom policy.

Despite the fact that the majority of students feel L2-only is best, their comments also indicate that they benefited from the “Controlled Use of Language” classes in that they were more relaxed and they were able to translate vocabulary and clarify tasks in Japanese. This leads to another similar point: students need flexible options for language use inside the classroom rather than a fixed, target-language-only rule. According to Prodromou (2001), Schweers (1999), and Burden (2000), the majority of students in both higher and lower level classes in various regions of the world want the option of using their L1 when studying another language. Although the lower level students of this study tend to believe use of Japanese would hold them back, their comments indicate that they would like the option of using some Japanese in order to accomplish certain tasks, particularly translation of vocabulary. Also, despite the fact that most students in this study are native or near native speakers of the target language, they too wanted (or felt neutral about) using Japanese in order to translate vocabulary, clarify tasks, and provide pragmatic instruction or contrastive analysis.

A further similarity between the findings of this study and those of previous studies can be seen in student use of language for quick translation of unknown words or phrases. As Nation (2003) points out, direct translation from L1 to L2 is often the most expedient way to convey meaning. While one native English speaker felt that learning to use the dictionary is more constructive than depending on others to provide translation, the majority were comfortable providing word to word translation, probably because they thought it to be most expedient in the classroom when working on group tasks and, as previously noted, the translation can go both ways. Not only do native English speakers help Japanese students but so do native Japanese speakers help English speakers with their Japanese.

Finally, despite benefiting from being able to use some Japanese in the classroom, all students reported that the “Free Use of Language” lessons were the least helpful for them. Students said that if Japanese is to be permitted during English class, it would be most constructive to lay down ground rules about the circumstances under which it can be used. These comments appear to validate Polio’s (1994) argument that the terms “allow” and “use” need to be defined and limits set so that students are clear on when they are permitted to use another language as well as the pedagogical rationale behind this usage.



## Discussion

Regardless of whether they lean in favor of L2-only policies or if they advocate the use of L1 for a variety of purposes, the majority of researchers and teachers studying this topic agree that rules on language usage in the classroom cannot be completely fixed and depend on specific variables of the teaching context including institutional constraints, instructor beliefs, and student attitudes. Although it is valuable to read as widely as possible in order to gain an understanding of why English-only policies are currently favored by the majority of institutions and the teachers working in them, and to map the groundwork of scholars who are currently challenging L2-only policies, it may be most helpful for individual teachers to do action research in order to determine the language usage rules most appropriate for a given group of students. This has been the impetus behind this project and, by combining the results of previous research conducted on this subject with the findings of this study, it is possible to formulate a classroom language policy which is context appropriate as well as pedagogically sound. However, if the language policy of this class is to deviate from the usual English-only one put in place by the administration, one primary goal must be accomplished prior to introducing a new set of rules: students must become aware of the concept that an English-only policy may not be the best option pedagogically, despite the fact the majority of institutions in Japan as well as the students' parents tend to believe that such policies are most beneficial. One way of accomplishing this task could be to present the students with the results of the research in which they participated and discuss it.

If students agree that they believe some limited use of L1 may provide them with the optimum learning environment, the next step is to outline a policy. In order to provide students with some ground rules about language use in the classroom, their language choices and the reasons behind them need to be re-examined. Five significant points can be made about how the students of this class use language and, based on this data and similar findings of other studies, it is possible to begin to formulate language rules that can be put into place in order to more suitably address the needs of the students and facilitate their learning. First, according to the results of this and other studies, there seems to be some evidence of Krashen's (1981) "affective filter" hypothesis. Because the "affective filter" is raised when speakers feel anxiety, students' comprehension of input and their ability to produce quality output are put into jeopardy during classes when an English-only policy is being strictly enforced. Similar to what Schweers (1999) reported in his study on Puerto Rican students, the students of this class tended to use their common language (Spanish) to create a more



relaxed atmosphere and to build rapport. In order to lower the affective filter which seems to be quite apparent amongst these students, limited use of Japanese should be permitted to satisfy this need. It may also be used for social purposes by the native speakers of English.

Second, similar to the findings of Nation (1993), students in this class use Japanese in order to provide quick translations for unknown words. Although not all students thought this technique was better than looking the words up in the dictionary, the majority did. As a result, the use of Japanese or other L1s may be permitted for translation of vocabulary during group work. Third, in keeping with Atkinson's (1987) findings, students selected to provide clarification of task instructions in the L1. This may also be due to the fact that those doing the clarifying thought that it would be quickest and easiest in the native language of the person asking for clarification. As a result, some teachers may conclude that L1 could be permitted in order to accomplish this purpose. Lastly, just as Prodromou (2000) found in his study, the students of this class used Japanese to address questions about English pragmatics and to provide less proficient students with some contrastive analysis. Since students themselves chose to use Japanese to accomplish these tasks, perhaps the common language of all the students could be permitted for these purposes.

Enforcing a strict English-only policy may possibly hinder the accomplishment of the above goals. However, it is important to bear in mind that without clear understanding of these ground rules and their consistent enforcement, students may overuse Japanese.

## **Conclusion**

In his book, *Teacher Cognition in Language Learning*, Woods (1993) argues that a foreign language teacher's classroom practices are shaped by three overriding factors: values, goals, and assumptions. As stated in the introduction, I do not necessarily agree with English-only language policies as I do not feel that they reflect either my core values or my ideological stance. However, one of my goals as a teacher is to try to provide students with what I think is the best learning environment. For most of my career, my attempt to achieve this goal was based on the assumption that English-only policies were important to have in place because I thought that using the target language exclusively would be most beneficial to students. This assumption was based on two factors: first, my own experience as a language learner and second, my understanding of the importance of English-only policies in the Japanese context. My assumptions about how a language is best acquired were based largely on my own experience as a learner and were left unchallenged partly because I did not test them myself



and partly because the institutions I worked for and my colleagues seemed to fully support my assumptions. However, one of the problems with English-only policies is that they tend to prompt teachers to hypothesize monolinguals in the making (Chavez, 1995). As Cook (2001) argues, many language instructors still assume that a foreign language can be learned in the same way as the mother tongue and that bilingual people can and need to compartmentalize languages in the brain.

Although I did not make these assumptions, I did believe that using the target language exclusively would help students achieve their common goal of being able to use L2 as if it were their L1. However, my experience with the students who participated in this research indicated that code switching was indeed a normal part of language use amongst bilinguals and that oftentimes, even amongst high proficiency bilinguals, the knowledge of one language was deeper than that of the other. The language that is more familiar to the student can be used to support that language that is less familiar.

The question now remains how one can best encourage students to use the stronger language to facilitate the learning of the second, particularly when students in the class have different mother tongues and when some students are in fact native speakers of the target language. As Noguchi and Fotos (2001) advocate, a new model is needed to accommodate this kind of unique teaching and learning situation. One of the greatest challenges to teachers wanting to contribute to the creation of this new paradigm is to develop a sense of belonging and community in the classroom which will in turn help students overcome the issues that arise because of their varying backgrounds and levels of proficiency (Blythe, 1995). Perhaps the first step one can take in the creation of this new teaching model, which is broader and more inclusive, is to endeavor to construct a context in which the rich personal, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students are respected rather than ignored (Bialystock and Hakuta, 1994). One possible way to begin to accomplish this goal may be to allow some use of other languages inside the English language classroom and to encourage all students to supply both comprehensible input in the target language, as well as support in the languages more familiar to them.



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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Feedback Forms for the Kaede 1 Class

On the following sheets of paper, please write down what you noticed about:

1. Your use of language.
2. Why you think you used language this way.
3. How you felt about your use of language.

You will have 15 minutes to write after each two-class block. Thank you very much for your help and your honest answers ☺ !!



Appendix 2

Student Attitudes Questionnaire

Please respond to the following statements about your experiences in class this week.

5=Strongly Agree 4=Agree 3=Neutral 2=Disagree 1=Strongly Disagree

1. I like to use some Japanese because I had problems expressing myself in English.

5            4            3            2            1

2. I felt that I wanted to help other students by using Japanese because I thought they were having difficulty with English.

5            4            3            2            1

3. I felt pressure to use Japanese because it is the language we use in our social lives outside the classroom.

5            4            3            2            1

4. I sometimes feel embarrassed because my English ability is weaker than that of other students.

5            4            3            2            1

5. I think that sometimes using Japanese helps me / others to learn English.

5            4            3            2            1

