

Researching the Role of L1 (Japanese) in the English (EFL) Classroom

外国語としての英語 (EFL) 教育の場における 第一言語 (日本語) の役割に関する研究

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Abstract

The use of students' first language (L1) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom has been a heavily debated topic. Whilst historically the English-only approach has been preferred by educators, recent research points to genuine benefits in including a proportionally small amount of the students' L1 in the EFL classroom, particularly at lower levels of proficiency (Tang, 2002; Schweers, 1999). Several articles have provided lists of ways to incorporate the L1 into classes, reasoning that judicious L1-use keeps students motivated, uses class time more efficiently and creates a more congenial atmosphere than a strictly English-only classroom (Critchley, 2002; Nation, 2003). However, there is very little empirical evidence of how teachers are actually using L1 in the EFL classroom. In this study the researchers explore the role of L1 in the classroom, focussing on the amount of time teachers speak L1, the frequency of functions of L1-use and whether teacher L1-usage relates to student L2 proficiency. Results indicate that teachers are judiciously using students' L1, and teachers consistently choose when and where to use the L1, depending on L2 proficiency levels. This study confirms the notion that L1-use is a valid and indeed positive aspect of the modern, student-centred EFL classroom.

[key word] L1, L2, EFL, judicious use, proficiency, classroom

要 旨

外国語としての英語教育の場での生徒の第一言語 (L1) である日本語使用については、これまで議論されてきた。英語のみを使用するアプローチが教育者に好まれてきたという歴史があるが、最近の研究は、特に、習熟度の低い生徒に対して、EFL 教育の場で L1 を多少使用することが有益だと示している (Tang, 2002; Schweers, 1999)。さまざまな文献が、適切な L1 の使用は、生徒のモチベーションを維持させ、授業時間をより効果的に使うことを可能にし、また、厳しく英語のみが使用される授業よりも打ち解けた雰囲気をつくると論じて、L1 の授業への組み込み方を提案している (Critchley, 2002; Nation, 2003)。しかしながら、どのように教師が L1 を EFL 教育の場で使用しているかは、ほとんど実証されていない。そこで、この研究では、教育の場における L1 の役割に関する調査を行った。特に、教師が L1 を使用する時間、機能としての L1 の使用頻度、教師の L1 使用と生徒の L2 (英語) 能力の関係に注目した。結果では、教師は生徒の L1 を適切に使用し、また、教師がいつどのようなタイミングで L1 を使用するかに関しては、L2 習熟度に応

じて一貫した選択がなされているということが分かった。この研究は、L1 使用は有効で、現代のかつ生徒主体の EFL 教育の肯定的側面であるという考えを裏付けたものである。

【キーワード】 L1, L2, EFL, 授業言語、英語能力

1. Introduction

Several authors have presented historical reasons that have led to English becoming the dominant world language. These reasons include colonialization, developments in industry and trade, travel, pop culture, and technology (Auerbach, 1993; Harmer, 2001; Crystal, 2003). However, language teaching pedagogy has also played a part in this process. In 1961, at a conference held in Makerere, Uganda, five basic tenets of English language instruction emerged which became an unofficial and yet unchallenged doctrine of much ELT work (Phillipson, 1992). One of these tenets is that English is best taught monolingually.

A monolingual (English-only) approach may have credibility in an English as a Second Language (ESL) environment, where the only language of communication is English. However, this approach has less relevance to EFL classrooms where the students already have a common language (Kreiger, 2005).

The English-only approach, however, is seemingly maintained in the EFL context for a variety of reasons.

- When native-English speaking teachers go overseas to teach English, they often come from an ESL teaching background.
- Most teaching methods omit any reference to L1-use (Cook, 2001).
- Many schools and universities are rooted in an English-only culture thus profoundly affecting teacher beliefs. Where a method has become ‘the norm’ it “might be taken for granted as the most effective” (Zacharias 2003, p. 14).
- The highly developed and lucrative EFL market sees many teachers arrive in countries without any knowledge of students’ L1.
- Textbook producers tend to maintain mainstream content for an international audience by avoiding any use of L1. “The anti L1-trend has more to do with economic rationalism than any ideal teaching pedagogy” (Weschler 1997, p. 7).

This last point is highlighted by one of the textbooks currently used at the location where this study was conducted, J. F. Oberlin University. L1 does not feature in the student book and there is no guidance on how to incorporate Japanese into a lesson in the teacher’s book. The author’s advice in an accompanying handbook under the heading “Only English” is:

When lost for words, students may need to ask us for help or use a dictionary, or we may need to interrupt the whole class and offer vocabulary help for everyone. Our own

explanations should be in English even if a quick translation may be easier – we have to observe the “Only English” rule too (Jones, 2007, p. 22).

In the literature on Communicative Language Teaching, a methodology that has become popular in language teaching today, a major characteristic is listed as, “judicious use of the native language is acceptable where feasible” (Hadley, 2001, p. 117). There is, however, no further explanation of how to implement this in the classroom.

In universities in Japan, English language study may differ from other EFL environments. Firstly, English is often compulsory as it is also in high school and junior high school. Students, therefore, come to class having already studied English for at least six years. Stephens (2006) indicates that students may therefore be less motivated. With very few exceptions, the classes are entirely made up of Japanese students. There is, therefore, a common L1 which the teacher can choose to use.

Research supports the use of the students’ L1 in the EFL classroom, particularly at low levels of L2 proficiency (Weschler, 1997; Burden, 2000; Cook, 2001; Nation, 2003). By including a small amount of L1, the EFL class can become more productive than an English-only classroom where the L2 is used in every situation, regardless of the needs or wants of the students (Dujmovic, 2007).

With ‘judicious use’ of the students’ L1 in the EFL classroom becoming acceptable, and even preferable (Cook, 2001), researchers have been investigating instances where the L1 can be effectively used. The instances are wide-ranging, but largely fall into three distinct, yet overlapping areas; Humanistic Use, Bottom Up Language Focussed Use, and Top Down ‘accessing prior knowledge’ Use (von Dietze & von Dietze, 2007).

1.1 Humanistic Use

1. L1 has several uses when considering the classroom environment, affective factors and the individual needs of the student. Auerbach (1993, p. 19) suggests that, “starting with the L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners’ lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves.” Atkinson (1993, p. 13) similarly believes that, especially for teenage and adult learners, “occasional use of L1 gives them the opportunity to show that they are intelligent, sophisticated people.” Once learners are comfortable in the L2 setting, they will be more willing to experiment and take risks with English (Auerbach, 1993).

2. Critchely (2002, p. 3) links the idea of immediacy and motivation suggesting that “an all-English exchange of complex ideas that can promote immediacy may not be possible with de-motivated or lower level learners. With these learners, teachers should use Japanese when appropriate to build positive and mutually supportive relationships that will promote student motivation”.

3. Examples of specific functions of L1 use for humanistic reasons are; providing feedback to individuals, talking with the student (individually), joking, giving encouragement, explaining course methodology and requirements, and giving instructions (so that those who may have 'missed out' are able to participate in the L2 activity).

1. 2 Bottom Up Language Focussed Use

1. The main argument for bottom up language focussed use of the student's L1 is that it is often more efficient to briefly explain something in L1 and then go on to use it in the L2, than to persist in the L1 at all costs (Cook, 2001).

2. The translation of vocabulary, and grammar explanations are often cited as useful functions of the L1. Weschler (1997) argues that the process of asking, "What does ___ mean?" and then decoding the answer in the first language, is a natural process of L2 learning, particularly at lower levels of proficiency. "Suppressing this tendency only adds ... counter-productive tension ... in the class and raises the affective filter of the student that much higher" (Weschler, 1997, p. 4).

3. Nation (2003, p. 3) discusses the effectiveness of making bilingual vocabulary cards for the initial learning of vocabulary. In opposition to the English-only approach, he states that "although there are frequent criticisms raised of learning L1-L2 word pairs, these criticisms are not supported by research".

4. Other examples of bottom up functions of L1-use are comparing L1 and L2, testing, using a bilingual dictionary and the explanation of errors.

1. 3 Top Down 'accessing prior knowledge' Use

1. 'Brainstorming' and 'mind-mapping' are frequently used tools in the EFL classroom. These techniques allow students to plan their thoughts and gather ideas before being asked to speak or write about the topic in the L2. For a cognitively challenging topic, research has shown that students benefit by being allowed to brainstorm in L1. Nation (2003, p. 3), recommends that where a "meaning based L2 task might be beyond the capabilities of the learners, a small amount of L1 discussion can help overcome some of the obstacles".

2. Teachers can aid student comprehension by providing L1 translations of key points or headings. This can provide a framework, or scaffold, which students can use to maintain understanding. Scaffolding (Bruner, 1975) creates supportive conditions in which the novice can participate, and extend his or her current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence (Yu, 2004).

1. 4 Recent Teacher Research of L1-use in the EFL classroom

With the above functions of L1-use in mind, researchers have begun surveying how and when teachers use the L1 in the L2 classroom. Schweers (1999) used a questionnaire and classroom observations in Puerto Rico (where English is an official second language). His findings were that the majority of teachers believed that Spanish should be used in the English class at university level. His questionnaire included yes/no questions as well as questions such as, “How often should Spanish be used in the classroom,” with a scale from ‘never’ to ‘fairly frequently’. He concluded that, “the pedagogical and affective benefits of L1-use justify its limited and judicious use in the second or foreign language classroom” (Schweers, 1999, p. 5).

In a tertiary institution in Indonesia, Zacharias (2003) conducted research on 100 English teaching professionals. Her questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations revealed that most teachers (mostly non-native English speaking teachers) agreed that L1 should be used in the classroom, while 20% maintained an English-only approach to the classroom.

In a Chinese university, Tang (2002) used classroom observations, interviews and questionnaires to ascertain 20 teachers’ attitudes to using L1 in the classroom. Based on Auerbach’s (1993) suggestions for L1-use, Tang’s questionnaire included 6 functions where the L1 (in this case Chinese) could be used. Her findings indicated that the L1 played a “supportive and facilitating role” and “does not reduce students’ exposure to English, but rather can assist in the teaching and learning process” (p. 41). Though beyond the scope of her study, Tang also indicated that the amount of L1 should be no more than 10% of class time, and that “this percentage decreases as student proficiency increases” (Tang 2002, p. 41).

Whilst the above studies have provided insight into the general attitudes of teachers in ESL and EFL contexts, the questionnaires conducted were limited to 6 to 10 functions of L1-use. In addition, there was no scale evident to indicate whether or not teachers change the amount of L1-use as students’ L2 proficiency increases. Also, studies have not yet compared L1-use in listening/speaking classes with reading/writing classes. Furthermore, no research has attempted to compare the frequency in which language functions are used in L1. Given the lack of knowledge in these areas and their implications for the EFL classroom, it was decided to undertake a study to address the following research questions:

1. For how much class time does the teacher speak in the student’s L1 (Japanese)?
2. How frequently are certain L1 functions employed?
3. Is teacher L1-usage related to the proficiency level or subject matter of the class?
4. Are the teacher’s L1 proficiency, teaching experiences, and willingness to use Japanese in classes at other proficiency levels related to their use of L1 in a given class?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A questionnaire on the use of L1 in English language classes was distributed to approximately 60 English language instructors at J. F. Oberlin University in Tokyo, Japan. 21 anonymous questionnaires were returned. In terms of language background, two of the respondents were Japanese, while the remainder came from countries in which English is the first language. The teachers variously self-assessed their proficiency in Japanese as being from the beginner to the native level. The teaching experience of the participants ranged from 1 to 28 years, and the vast majority of the teachers were qualified in English language teaching at Masters level or above.

2.2 Data Collection

After requesting information on the respondents' language skills and teaching experience, the questionnaire then focused on teacher use of Japanese in the classroom. For the purposes of this study, teacher use of Japanese refers to communication with both the whole class and individual students. The participants addressed two issues. Firstly, the teachers were asked to consider how much time they typically spend speaking in Japanese in their classes. This question was sub-divided by the proficiency level of the class and the lesson content. Therefore, data was collected on teacher L1-use in beginner, pre-intermediate, and intermediate level classes for both listening/speaking and reading/writing lessons. Secondly, respondents were asked to report both on the purpose and frequency of their L1 usage. In this case, the participants were presented with a list of functions and a six-point scale upon which to report how frequently the L1 was used to satisfy these functions. While the functions were primarily drawn from previous work in the field (Auerbach, 1993; Cook, 2001; Nation, 2003), the list also reflected any additional functions that the researchers considered important. Lastly, the respondents were also provided with space to record any additional comments they might have. Numerous comments were returned, providing rich feedback on various topics related to the research. It is estimated that the questionnaire took around 20 minutes to complete.

2.3 Data Processing

Once the questionnaires had been returned, the data was transferred into digital format. For the purposes of the statistical analyses, the frequency with which the teachers reported using Japanese was transferred from an ordinal scale into an interval scale. This was achieved by simply converting the six available frequency choices (see Appendix 2) into a percentage. For instance, when respondents reported using a function "About once or twice a semester", it was estimated that the function was used in 10% of classes. The data was compiled and prepared using Excel, and the statistical analyses were performed using SPSS for Windows, Version 10.

3. Results

3.1 Sample Size

The survey was completed by 21 participants. However, not all of the participants were found to have completed all of the questions. In particular, responses to questions regarding the proportion of class time that teachers speak Japanese were found to be missing. In hindsight, this was understandable given the difficulty in providing accurate answers to these questions. In order to ensure that the results were not misleading, it was determined that if an instructor had not provided a full data-set for either part of the survey, none of the data for that part of the study would be included in the later analyses. After the list-wise deletion of data from the two sections, the resulting sample sizes can be seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Sample Sizes

	Sample Size
Teacher use of Japanese (% of class)	12
Teacher use of Japanese (functions)	21

To ensure that the results consistently measured the target constructs, the data was subjected to reliability analysis. Test reliability simply refers to how consistently a scale measures a target construct. The most common means of measuring scale reliability is through Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach alpha values fall between 0 and 1. For the purposes of educational research, a coefficient in excess of .70 is commonly cited as acceptable (e.g. Nunnally, 1978; Kline, 1999). For the four sections of the survey that are contained in Table 1, the reliability coefficients were found to be between .93 and .94. Therefore, despite the reduced sample size, the data remained a firm foundation upon which to draw conclusions.

3.2 Teacher L1 Talk Time

The results of teacher L1 talk time, gathered from the questionnaire (see Appendix 1), are summarized in Table 2. Overall, the mean average time that teachers spoke Japanese was a mere 1.3%. As was mentioned, this included the time spent both talking to the whole class and to individual students. However, as suggested by the standard deviation (SD) value (2.1), there was a large degree of variability in L1 talk time between different teachers. While the teacher who most used Japanese devoted 8 percent of the class to using the L1, there were also teachers who reported not using any Japanese at all.

Table 2: L1 Teacher Talk Time (n=12)

		mean (%)	SD
All		1.3	2.1
Proficiency Level	Beginner	2.2	3.6
	Pre-Intermediate	1.4	2.3
	Intermediate	0.5	.07
Class Type	Listening/Speaking	1.3	1.6
	Reading/Writing	1.4	2.0

Furthermore, similar to Tang's (2002) findings, the results suggest that the teacher L1 talk time varied according to the students' proficiency level. For beginner classes, teacher L1-use comprised 2.2% (SD=3.6) of class time, while it was 1.4% for pre-intermediate groups (SD=2.3), and 0.5% (SD=.07) for intermediate level students. In contrast, the findings indicate that there was very little difference in how the teachers employed the L1 in listening/speaking (1.3%, SD=1.6) and in reading/writing classes (1.4%, SD=2.0).

3.3 Teacher use of L1 functions

As can be seen in Table 3, on average, the 13 functions were each used in 14.6% of classes. The most common use of L1 was to translate key words. On average, teachers reported that they used Japanese in 28.1% of classes for this purpose. On average, this function was used in 37.6% of beginner level classes, and in 18.6% of intermediate classes.

Table 3: The Purpose and Frequency of Teacher L1 Usage (n=21)

	All (%)	Beginner (%)	Intermediate (%)
1. Translate key words	28.1	37.6	18.6
2. Brief encouragements	26.1	32.8	19.4
3. Compare L1 and L2 (e.g. errors, pronunciation)	24.1	29.3	18.9
4. Joke	17.4	22.8	11.9
5. Teach grammar	14.0	17.6	10.4
6. Explain course requirements	12.1	17.5	6.8
7. Explain challenging concepts	11.7	14.7	8.8
8. Chat with individual students	11.6	15.9	7.2
9. Confirm instructions	11.4	15.8	7.0
10. Give instructions	11.0	18.1	3.8
11. Provide individual feedback	9.5	13.9	5.1
12. Review vocabulary	8.4	11.3	5.4
13. Whole class feedback	4.5	6.7	2.4
Mean Average	14.6	19.5	9.7

Following the translation of key words, the next most commonly used functions were 'brief encouragements' (26.1%) and 'comparisons between L1 and L2 (e.g. errors, pronunciation)' (24.1%). These functions were used in 32.8% and 29.3% of beginner classes, and 19.4% and 18.9% of intermediate level classes, respectively. To 'joke' was also reported to be a relatively highly used function, although the use of Japanese for this function dropped from 22.8% to 11.9%, between the beginner and intermediate level classes.

To 'teach grammar', 'explain course requirements', and 'explain challenging concepts', 'chat with individual students', 'confirm instructions' and to 'give instructions' had a close range of total use from 14% in beginner classes to 11% in intermediate classes. Of particular interest though, is that whilst the rest of the items roughly decreased by half, to 'give instructions' dropped dramatically from 18.1% in beginner classes to 3.8% in intermediate classes.

Lastly items 11, 12, and 13; 'provide individual feedback', 'review vocabulary' and 'whole class feedback' accounted for 9.5% to 4.5% of total use of Japanese. In line with the other results, compared to beginner level classes, the use of the functions also dropped by approximately half in intermediate level classes.

In summary, the most common use of Japanese was for short interjections such as to 'Translate key words', 'Brief encouragements' and to 'Compare L1 and L2 (e.g. errors and pronunciation)'. Also, consistent with the findings in Table 2, across the 13 functions of L1-use by the teacher, the percentage of L1-use generally decreased by approximately half when moving from beginner to intermediate classes.

3. 4 Factors influencing the classroom usage of the L1

There is little understanding of the characteristics of a class that affect the teacher's L1 usage. To shed light on this issue, the first factor to be investigated was the subject matter of lessons. As was mentioned in the Method section, data was collected on the proportion of Listening/Speaking and Reading/Writing classes in which the respondents used Japanese. As can be seen in Table 2, the descriptive results indicated that there was very little difference in how teachers employed the L1 in Listening/Speaking (1.3%, SD=1.6) and Reading/Writing classes (1.4%, SD=2.0). To explore more thoroughly whether the subject matter of the class influenced the teachers' use of the students' L1, the data was subjected to a paired samples t-test. No statistically significant difference was found between the time that teachers reported speaking L1 in Listening/Speaking classes compared to Reading/Writing sessions ($t(11)=-.56$, $p=.59$) (two-tailed).

The second factor to be examined was the proficiency level of the class. As was previously noted, the descriptive results from Table 2 suggest that the higher the proficiency level of the class, the less time the teacher speaks Japanese. However, when the time data was analysed through three separate paired t-tests, no statistically significant difference was found between

the teachers' behaviour in the beginner and pre-intermediate classes ($t(11)=1.90, p=.08$) (two-tailed), pre-intermediate and intermediate classes ($t(11)=1.65, p=.13$) (two-tailed), or the beginner and intermediate classes ($t(11)=1.78, p=.10$) (two-tailed). Nevertheless, despite the time data being drawn from a small dataset ($n=12$), the results erred towards statistical significance. Furthermore, when the frequency with which the teacher used the various L1 functions was explored using a larger sample size ($n=21$), a statistically significant difference was found between the beginner and intermediate level classes ($t(20)=4.88, p<.001$). Thus, on balance, it is posited that the proficiency level of a class makes a difference in how much Japanese is spoken by the teacher.

3.5 Factors influencing the teacher's use of Japanese

As explained in the Introduction, owing to the lack of knowledge on the subject, one of the main purposes of this study was to better understand the factors that contribute to an instructor's willingness to use the students' L1 in class. To assist in answering research question four, which pertains to whether teachers' L1 proficiency, teaching experience, and willingness to use Japanese in classes at other proficiency levels relate to their use of L1 in a given class, data was collected on the instructors' L1 proficiency level and teaching experience. Since there was a relatively large dataset available on the functions of teacher L1-use, it was determined that the information on teachers' Japanese proficiency level and teaching experience would be correlated against this variable. As can be seen in Table 4, while no statistically significant relationship was found between Japanese proficiency and the teachers' use of L1 functions with beginner level classes, a fairly large and statistically significant correlation was recorded between Japanese proficiency and the use of L1 functions with intermediate level classes ($r=.45, p<.05$). Thus, around 20% of the variability in the use of Japanese functions with intermediate level classes can be explained by the instructor's Japanese proficiency ($R^2=.20$). However, no such statistically significant relationship was found between teaching experience and the use of Japanese.

Table 4: Simple Bivariate Correlations ($n=21$)

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Japanese Level	-	.11	.33	.45*
2. Teaching Experience		-	.12	.16
3. Functions: Beginner			-	.83***
4. Functions: Intermediate				-

Note: *** $p<.001$, ** $p<.01$, * $p<.05$ (one-tailed)

It is also worth noting, that there was a high Pearson correlation between ‘Functions: Beginner’ and ‘Functions: Intermediate’ of .83 ($p < .001$). Therefore, a teacher’s relative willingness to use Japanese in lower level classes is a very good guide to their willingness to use L1 in higher level classes ($R^2 = .68$). Nevertheless, as earlier results indicate, there is a statistically significant difference in the way teachers approach high and low level classes.

4. Discussion

The topic of this research has led to much discussion amongst teachers at the university where the study was conducted, J. F. Oberlin University. Despite different backgrounds, different training and a variety of professional experiences, teachers are carefully assessing the value of L1 and are using this tool in many ways. Since there is little guidance on how to use L1 in the methodology, and different institutions have their own guidelines on teaching practices, teachers have been left to make their own decisions. Some maintain a sense of guilt as L1-use may be seen as ‘slipping up’. Others support the English-only approach. Mattioli (2004, p. 21) believes that, “most teachers tend to have opinions about native language use, depending largely on the way in which they have been trained and, in some cases, on their own language education”. Many questions, however, remain unanswered regarding L1-use. Thus one teacher commented:

I’ve been wondering what’s best for students in terms of using Japanese in class. 100% English doesn’t seem to be very effective to these lower level students. (Teacher 3)

From the data a pattern has emerged that L1 is indeed present in the majority of classrooms and that teachers are making professional decisions in the interests of their students as to when and how much to use.

4. 1 For how much class time does the teacher speak the student’s L1?

This study found that the amount of L1 spoken by teachers seems to be relatively low. Although there is a variation in how much teachers used L1, ranging from 0% to 8% but averaging at 1.3%, this research shows that teachers do not appear to be over-using Japanese and are indeed using it judiciously. Moreover, this amount of class time changes according to the proficiency level of the students. Teachers are allocating more time to beginner classes than to intermediate classes. The clear message that teachers are giving is that English is the focus of the class and that L1 should be used sparingly. This supports the findings of Zacharias (2003). A typical teacher response to highlight this is:

As my knowledge of Japanese increases, I find I ‘sprinkle’ it more into my lessons. However, I do insist (!) that the students use English as much as possible. (Teacher 6)

Establishing teacher-talk time, and then teacher-talk time in L1 was a difficult process for many teachers. However, it developed into an opportunity for self-review of classroom behaviour. Subsequent informal discussions challenged long-held beliefs of methodology and practice. Yet all teachers took the view that as much class time as possible should be dedicated to the L2. These results, which fall well below the estimates of L1 talk time in other research (Tang, 2002; Dujmovic, 2007), seem to indicate that this is exactly what is happening.

4.2 How frequently are certain L1 functions employed?

As mentioned previously, researchers such as Auerbach (1993) and Nation (2003) have suggested many approaches to L1-use in the L2 classroom. These approaches generally fall into the three areas of Humanistic Use, Bottom up Use and Top down Use. The results of this study indicate that the most highly used functions are in the Bottom up Language Focussed Use, and Humanistic Use areas. Whilst 'translating key vocabulary' (28.1%) and 'comparing L1 and L2' (24.1%) are obvious uses of L1, it is interesting to note the relatively high reported use of 'brief encouragements' (26.1%) and 'jokes' (17.4%).

In terms of time taken, the use of these four functions is very short, often requiring just a single word or two. Moreover, they are not particularly difficult and could be done by most teachers. It seems that teachers are choosing to include L1 in such instances, yet are choosing English explanations in more difficult and time consuming situations, such as 'teaching grammar' or 'explaining course requirements'.

What can be deduced from the results of this survey is that teachers are using brief encouragements and jokes to try to connect with their students. Several researchers have indicated the value of using L1 as a way of setting up an appropriate classroom atmosphere. Schweers (1999) refers to establishing rapport, whilst Burden's findings of a student survey indicate that the teacher should use the L1 to relax the students (Burden, 2000). Having a positive classroom environment is an important step in creating relationships with students and developing trust and shared goals.

I tend to use Japanese much more outside the class rather than in, especially with lower level students. Otherwise it is almost impossible to really get to know them well.
(Teacher 12)

It must be remembered that the teachers are all teaching first year university EFL classes. The students, having just completed the gruelling university entrance procedure, are probably more used to a rigid classroom structure than is the norm at university. Moreover, there may be students who have never experienced the type of class where English is the primary means of communication. Thus, it is quite understandable that teachers try to loosen the atmosphere with encouragements and a sense of humour. As one teacher indicated about using Japanese:

Especially lower level students feel more comfortable if I do speak Japanese. (Teacher 20)

4.3 Is teacher L1-usage related to the proficiency level or subject matter of the class?

Tang (2002) indicates that no more than 10% of class time should be devoted to L1. Dujmovic (2006, p. 99) in a repeat of Tang's study in Croatia indicates "that 10% to 20% of time is quite enough with the percentage decreasing as the students English proficiency increases". Yet neither of these studies focussed on the point of whether teachers actually change their L1-use according to the L2 proficiency of the students.

As previously mentioned, teachers' actual percentage of class time using L1 was very low at 2.2% in beginner classes, 1.4% in pre-intermediate classes and 0.5% in intermediate classes. These figures are all surprisingly low since it was assumed that more time would be spent in L1, particularly in beginner classes. 2.2% represents about two minutes of a 90-minute lesson, whilst 0.5% is less than one minute. Whilst the sample size is small (n=12), it does confirm that the proficiency level of a class does make a difference in how much Japanese is spoken by the teacher, and highlights that teachers are choosing carefully when to use L1.

In general, I use Japanese only as needed to facilitate communication and comprehension for lower proficiency students and to raise students' awareness of L1 interference in upper level writing classes. (Teacher 4)

This survey also asked teachers if they used the L1 differently in Speaking/Listening classes and Reading/Writing classes. This distinction was made to suit the way classes are organised at this particular university. In all classes it is recommended that teachers employ communicative strategies and include the four skill areas. Interestingly, this study indicated that there is no difference in L1-use between different class types, with the amount of time given to L1 in a Beginner Reading/Writing class being similar to the amount of time given to L1 in a Beginner Listening/Speaking class. Perhaps for this reason, there was very little difference in the way teachers used L1 in these two areas.

4.4 Are the teacher's L1 proficiency, teaching experience, and willingness to use Japanese in classes at other proficiency levels related to their use of L1 in a given class?

The teachers involved in this study mostly ranged between pre-intermediate and intermediate level Japanese proficiency, which equates to Level 3 and Level 2 of the Japanese Proficiency Examination. Despite these generally high levels of Japanese proficiency, they do not seem to reflect teacher willingness to use the students' L1.

I haven't taught a level 1 (beginner) class in a few years, but I don't think the amount of time I spend talking varies by level; what I say rather than how much I say differs in the different levels. (Teacher 2)

Teacher comments also showed how teacher beliefs and individual personalities play a role in whether a teacher chooses to use the L1. A comment from a teacher who seems to have skills in Japanese but who chooses not to use them states,

I feel that in any class, as much English as possible should be used. I will allow students to suggest the meaning of words in Japanese and gain consensus, but I don't like to say yes or no as this shows them I can speak Japanese and also ends up confirming English as a 'translation' of Japanese. (Teacher 5)

In contrast, comments from teachers with limited Japanese abilities,

Since I'm a foreigner who's insecure with his Japanese language abilities, I think they find it endearing. It makes me less intimidating to them. (Teacher 11)

Students can see the teacher struggling with a foreign language and might be less embarrassed to use imperfect English. (Teacher 17)

However, a significant correlation was recorded between a teacher's Japanese proficiency and the use of L1 functions in intermediate level classes. It could be that since most teachers have at least some grasp of Japanese, most can use Japanese functions with beginner classes. But when it comes to higher level classes, it only tends to be those with higher level Japanese proficiency that are able to provide the necessary L1 support for such students.

Beyond the functions already discussed, another interesting comment in the open-ended section of the survey was,

If a native English speaker tries to use Japanese, it can be seen as making an effort to communicate. If a Japanese tries to use Japanese, it can be seen as just being lazy or making things easy. (Teacher 8)

5. Conclusion

The debate that surrounds this topic seems now no longer centred on whether teachers should be using students' L1, but on how much should be used and when it should be used. The results of this research should provide teachers with a pedagogical basis to help them understand the role of L1 in the classroom, and to help them make decisions on their own use of student's L1.

Until now, limited data has been available on how teachers are actually using L1 in the EFL classroom. Whilst the term ‘judicious use’ of L1 has been quoted, no further explanation is available in current language teaching methodology. This has led teachers to make their own decisions, based on factors such as: the teacher’s own proficiency in the student’s L1, the teacher’s education and training, teacher beliefs, and the educational setting they are working in.

In the Japanese university context, the results of this study indicate that teachers are dedicating only a small proportion of a typical class to student L1. This reflects ‘judicious use’. Moreover, teachers are varying their L1 use depending on the proficiency of the learners and the teacher’s own language abilities.

In a recent study Norman (2008, p. 697) indicates that, “from the perspective of the students, it is obvious that teachers need to look more carefully at the EFL level of the students in their classes when contemplating what amount of Japanese (if any) to use”. The current study proves that teachers are doing just that.

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Appendix 1: Survey item to establish actual L1 speaking time for different proficiency levels.

Note: L/S refers to Listening/Speaking classes. R/W refers to Reading/Writing classes. FE Levels 1, 2, & 3 are the proficiency level course titles at J. F. Oberlin University for core English classes.

	Teacher talking time	% of this time in Japanese
In a beginner L/S class (e.g. FE Level 1)	mins	%
In a beginner R/W class (e.g. FE Level 1)	mins	%
In a pre-intermediate L/S class (e.g. FE Level 2)	mins	%
In a pre-intermediate R/W class (e.g. FE Level 2)	mins	%
In an intermediate L/S class (e.g. FE Level 3)	mins	%
In an intermediate R/W class (e.g. FE Level 3)	mins	%

Appendix 2: Survey item to establish frequency of use of functions in L1

Teacher Use of Japanese: Do you speak Japanese yourself in any of the following situations in lower level S/L and R/W classes? Check the frequency that is most true for you.

Note: L/S refers to Listening/Speaking classes. R/W refers to Reading/Writing classes. FE Level 1 is the course title at J. F. Oberlin University for core English classes, equivalent to a beginner level.

In Beginner English Language classes e.g. FE Level 1						
Situation	Frequency					
	Almost always / every class	Most, but not every class	Every two or three classes	About every fourth class	About once or twice a semester	Almost never / never
To translate key words						
To give instructions						
To confirm understanding of instructions						
To teach grammar						
To compare Japanese language with English (e.g. errors, pronunciation)						
To explain course requirements and assessment procedures						
To test language items						
To provide individual feedback about class work						
To provide whole class feedback about class work						
To explain a challenging concept (e.g. What a podcast is.)						
To talk with individual students about everyday things						
To make a joke						
In short expressions such as 'gambatte ne' or 'otsukaresama deshita'						