

Beyond L1/L2

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1. Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the non-native teacher's use of the learner's first language (L1) and the target language (L2) in the context of a foreign language (FL) classroom, an issue that is often debated both academically and anecdotally. Previous literature has argued that native as well as non-native speaking teachers of the L2 should be encouraged to speak the students' L1 to ensure the efficient use of time spent and to enhance affective expectations. The purpose of this paper is to look at the L1/L2 issue from another perspective, that of developing the learner's grammatical competence¹, so as to bring together the various methods of teaching vocabulary, phonology, and form and meaning, such methods as have, over the years, been proposed and practiced in the fields of foreign language teaching research and in the classroom, and, furthermore, to argue that the L1/L2 distinction is not as relevant to the learner's acquisition of grammatical competence as has in recent years been automatically assumed and that what is crucial in the acquisition of language is not to do with which language to teach it in, but how it should be taught.

2. Literature Review

In this introductory section, I offer an overview of the previous litera-

ture that has dealt with situations in which foreign language teachers may or may not speak L1 in class, while at the same time I shall look at what it is that teachers (and students) are actually doing in real classrooms. It has been proposed that teachers may use L1 in order to reduce the time for explaining that would be needed if L2 alone were ever used and to enable the development of good teacher-learner relationships, while a quantitative analysis has been conducted of teachers' and learners' L1/L2 use in English classrooms in a Japanese high school.

2.1. Efficient use of time

It has been argued that teachers of an L2 may use L1 in the interest of reducing the time spent on explanation since it would naturally be less time-consuming than if explanations were only ever given in the target language, the L2.

Atkinson (1987, p. 243), for instance, argues that the teacher's use of L1 can be less time-consuming in eliciting a certain phrase from the learners by asking 'How do you say X in English?' and that the elicitation can be done less ambiguously than by such other well-known methods as visuals, mime, and their associated techniques. Harbord (1992, p. 351) notes that time-saving is the reason that teachers are, most commonly, in favor of L1 use. Critchley (2002, p. 12) supports the teacher's use of L1, as well as that of L2, should the teaching point be too abstract and likely to take too long to explain in the L2. Critchley (2008, p. 12) suggests that written forms of Japanese in the teaching materials should help reduce the need for teacher explanation, from which it obviously follows that time will be saved.

2.2. Affective enhancement

Shimizu (2006) conducted a questionnaire to survey the attitude of

Japanese teachers and learners toward the use of the L1 in class, the results of which reveal that the use of the teacher's L1 serves as maintenance and enhancement of affective expectations. She argues that, since many Japanese learners wish to comprehend everything in the class, the teacher's unremitting use of L2 can provoke anxiety and discourage students from learning. She quotes as typical some of the comments made by participants in her survey (p. 79):

"I always feel lost when a class is taught completely in English. It is discouraging and, as a result, I lose interest in learning."

"I feel tense and become anxious in the classroom when the class is given all in English."

Consequently, Shimizu (2006, p. 82) concludes that the appropriate and judicious use of L1 in class can help Japanese learners to engage in learning English without their affective states being endangered.

2.3. Quantitative analysis

Shimura (2008) analyzes data he collected from 21 teachers about their use of L1 and L2 in English classrooms in a Japanese high school, with the goal of investigating quantitatively the amount of their L1 and L2 use in class and the functions they hoped that their utterance in those languages would fulfill. He reports that while some Japanese teachers of English tended to use L1 in giving instructions and conducting the class, others tended to use L2 when providing the learners with positive feedback, including praise.

Table 1². Shimura (2008, p. 3): The ratio of L1/L2 by 7 Japanese teachers of English when conducting the class

T	1		2		3						4		5		6	
	Translation		Explanation		Linguistic Form						Backg. Know.		How to Learn		Reading Aloud	
	L1	L2	L1	L2	a. Grammar		b. Vocab.		c. Pronun.		L1	L2	L1	L2	L1	L2
1	5.0%		4.1%	3.2%	4.7%	1.2%	6.4%	7.0%	0.6%	0.6%						20.5%
2	5.5%	0.4%	15.4%	6.4%	12.2%	1.1%	12.9%	5.9%			8.0%		3.0%			0.5%
3	1.0%	0.3%	1.7%	3.6%			0.7%	1.0%	7.6%	3.0%		0.7%				0.3%
4	8.3%	0.1%	7.3%	4.3%	0.5%	0.1%	3.2%	9.4%	0.1%		9.9%		0.1%			19.3%
5	8.7%		11.0%	3.5%	4.7%	0.2%	3.5%	4.0%								7.8%
6	2.6%	0.7%	13.1%	22.0%	8.6%	3.0%	2.2%	3.4%	0.7%	1.1%	2.2%	1.1%				3.7%
7	7.3%		7.3%	44.6%		1.2%	1.9%	5.8%			3.8%					
m	5.5%	0.2%	8.5%	12.5%	4.4%	1.0%	4.4%	5.2%	1.3%	0.7%	3.4%	0.7%	0.4%	0.0%	0.1%	7.4%

3. Problems: The Need for Another Perspective

In this section, I would like to point out three problems that appear to have been overlooked in the previous literature. The first problem concerns the motivation for the teacher's L1 use: time efficiency. While teachers must admittedly consider time management, it should not be the over-riding factor in their deciding to use the L1; it should be recommended for its effectiveness in language learning, not for its temporal convenience. If we were to suppose, tentatively, that the teacher's exclusive use of L2 would in the long run be the most educationally beneficial, then teachers ought to make use of it, however long it would be likely to take.

The second problem lies in the domain of affective variables such as anxiety; it is not clear to exactly what extent it would have a negative effect on language acquisition. Anxiety may not immediately mean unsuccessful learning of a foreign language; Brown (2000, p. 151), in fact, points out that psychologists classify anxiety as either debilitating or facilitative, the latter kind, unlike the former, being a positive factor. This being so,

the argument for the teacher's L1 use solely on the basis of affective enhancement would be seriously weakened.

The third problem has to do with the need for more, and more clearly focused, research into the effectiveness of the various teaching methods themselves; although the "scientific" quantitative analysis of large amounts of L1/L2 classroom interaction might have great potential as a methodological tool, its results would be pointless unless it were able as well to make clear what, in practice, the teacher should and should not do in actual teaching situations in order to help the learner to acquire specific aspects of L2 in the most effective and lasting way, a point of view the Shimura's (2008) argument lacks, only presenting the data of numbers without considering what it means and in what particular cases teachers' L1/L2 use may be positively beneficial.

4. Developing Learners' Grammatical Competence

As well as attending to the problems mentioned above, we need to look at the issue of the teacher's L1/L2 use from a broader perspective than that of the simple L1/L2 distinction in isolation; and I should like to show, by reviewing recent research on second language acquisition, how the teacher can develop the learner's grammatical competence, irrespective of the language that is to be used, or is being used.

4.1. Vocabulary

It has been suggested, for instance, that new vocabulary items to be learned can be effectively taught with the help of L2. Tono (ed.) (1997, pp. 63-66) notes a vocabulary teaching method that a number of research projects have demonstrated to be effective: this is the *Keyword Method*, an

approach that utilizes the phonological form and meaning of a word in both L1 and L2. Schmitt (2000, p. 121) takes as an example of this method an English native speaker's use of it to learn the Japanese word for 'sword,' *katana*. First of all, the learner attempts to find an English word that has a certain phonological similarity to the target item, which, in Schmitt's (2000) example, is 'cat.' Second, the learner is encouraged to conjure up a mental image that will combine the Japanese and English words, in this case, perhaps, of its samurai cat waving a sword. When the learner hears the word *katana*, s/he will be reminded of 'cat', which activates the mental image of the samurai cat, which leads in turn to the recall of its meaning 'sword.' In this way, the L1 can assist learners in learning new words in the L2. In other words, the complete eliminating of L1 in the classroom would deprive learners of an effective learning method while overloading them with the unnecessary expenditure of energy and time.

Suppose, conversely, that new vocabulary items are presented to the learners with such visual aids as pictures, quite a common practice in ESL and EFL settings. In this case, one might believe that the target item can be taught without the use of L1, and hence be preferable. Yet Nation (2001) argues that pictures alone are insufficient, and can, in fact, lead to permanent semantic and conceptual misinterpretation: they must therefore be combined with a verbal definition, so that the meaning of the target word is acquired linguistically as well as visually.

4.2. Phonology

An explanation and comparison of the phonological features of L1 and those of L2 is bound to be helpful, and, in an EFL context, the L1 can be used to help in raising the learner's awareness of similarities and differences between the languages.

Tanabe (1990, p. 119) proposes that, in addition to the conventional intuitive approach, the teacher should take the “Analytical Approach” to pronunciation teaching, in which s/he provides the learner with a detailed explanation of English sound patterns as these are related to information structure and semantic implication, while Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994, p. 72) argue that the explanation of phonological features will raise learners’ awareness of phonetic and phonological facts.

In her discussion of the English language as an international language, Jenkins (2000, p. 223) proposes that non-native English teachers apply their knowledge of articulatory phonetics to their classroom demonstration of where and how sounds are produced in the L2 as compared with the L1.

Bobda (2008, p. 27), who considers the methods used to teach English word stress, suggests that comparing stress placement in different languages is beneficial. Taking the example of teaching English to Cameroonian learners (whose mother tongue is French), he suggests teaching the stress placement contrastively in French and English:

French: as˘saut ta˘lent inter˘valle profes˘seur universi˘té

English: as˘sault ˘talent ˘interval pro˘fessor uni˘versity

4.3. Form and Meaning

Support for the argument that the use of L1 in class can help learners to acquire the form and meaning of target items has come from a number of researchers, especially those working within the framework of socio-cultural theory. In line with Donato (1994), Antón and DiCamilla (1999), for example, analyze discourse recordings of groups of learners in an FL classroom and conclude that the learners’ collaborative talk in an L1 is beneficial. Additional evidence supports the view that the teacher’s use of

L1 facilitates language learning.

Antón (1999) presents data of two FL teachers instructing grammatical forms at their respective universities. One of the teachers is a learner-center-oriented Francophone while the other is a teacher-center-oriented Italian. Antón's (pp. 309-310) data illustrates the teachers' use of L1 in ways that she judges to be both helpful and unhelpful. The following is the interaction between the French teacher and her class, during which a student has asked a question and the teacher responds (with her own subsequent questions):

1. T: Ah, OK, so, you are asking when is it *eu*?
2. S1: Yeah, I know it's the past, but I don't understand how to use it.
3. T: OK, good. Can anybody give us a sentence where we would want this past participle *eu* ? ... Can we think of a sentence? ... In this sentence [pointing at a sentence on the board] this is totally incorrect.
4. S2: because it's *did*.
5. T: right, so we have agreed that this is a different *have* but she wants to know just, totally apart from this example, how do we use *eu*?
6. S3: If you said *I had a pizza*.
7. T: OK, so how do you say it?
8. S3: *J'ai eu une pizza*.
9. T: Good [writing the sentence on the board], and the translation?
10. S3: I had a pizza.
11. T: *I had a pizza*, something that was in my possession, *I had a pizza*, so that's how you use it.

The following is the discussion between the Italian teacher and his students

that takes place when the learners are correcting a drill exercises that they had done at home:

1. T: *Compragliene.*

(Buy some for him)

2. S: Is that *gliene* attached to *compra*? *Compragliene?*

(Is that *some for him* attached to *buy*? Buy some for him?)

3. T: It has to because you attach the pronoun, an indirect pronoun to affirmative informal imperatives.

Antón (1999) considers that the interactions controlled by the French teacher and the Italian teacher are in sharp contrast. The former, unlike the latter, provides scaffolding³, which is to say that she invites the whole class to solve the problem, simplifies the task accordingly, and highlights crucial features of the target item under discussion. This, from socio-cultural perspectives, is more likely to assist learners in language learning, whereas the Italian teacher simply answers the learner's question, which is likely to be less helpful.

5. Discussion

In the previous section, I suggested that certain methods of teaching vocabulary, phonology, and form and meaning might be beneficial, since they share the following characteristic in common; irrespective of the teacher's use of L1 or L2, they are able to raise learner's awareness of and make much sense not only of the target item, and, but, more generally, of the language as a whole, a better means to help learners acquire L2. In order to effectively teach vocabulary with the *Keyword method* or the

visual/verbal presentation, the teacher may or may not use L1 or L2; what is necessary is for the teacher to help learner to attend to the target word and to come up with a phonologically and semantically similar word, while at the same time stimulating their visual perception and linguistic intelligence. The same argument holds true for teaching phonology; when, as Jenkins (2000) suggests, the teacher explains how to produce L2 sounds while demonstrating how they contrast with their L1 counterparts, s/he may offer the explanations in L1, a practice which is more likely than other methods to help the learners clearly understand the point of what they are being taught. The extract taken from the French teacher's lesson discussed by Antón (1999) is an example of the successful use of L1 when teaching L2. It follows from these considerations that it is more important to direct the learners' close attention to the target item than to give priority to the language to teach in, a choice that will depend on some other relevant factors such as the teacher's own beliefs, the level of the learner's competence in L2 their, preferences of learning styles, and so on.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have offered a quick survey of the literature that has previously considered the teacher's L1/L2 use in FL classrooms and have pointed out some of the problems that it may overlook. While reviewing the methods of teaching vocabulary, phonology, and form and meaning, I argued that how the teacher directs the learner's attention to the target item is more significant than the language in which s/he teaches it, a decision which should be determined not exclusively but comprehensively in terms of all other relevant variables.

In conclusion, I should like to mention some suggestions with regard to

the direction in which foreign language teaching research should advance. First, in order to develop learners' grammatical competence, we need to investigate the most effective methods of teaching the various aspects of L2, from morphology and phonology to levels of discourse, and how to evaluate them empirically. Second, with respect to the teacher's L1/L2 use, we need to make clear whether or not the use of L2 does indeed develop learners' grammatical competence, and, if it does, on what occasions it is appropriate for the teacher to speak the L2. Finally, we shall need to explore the relationship between the learners' belief concerning their use of L1/L2 and the actual outcome of their attempts to apply all this in practice.

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¹ Grammatical competence is a component of communicative competence and is defined as "knowledge of lexical items and rules of morphology, syntax, and sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology" (Canale and Swain, 1980, p. 29).

² This table was translated into English by the author.

³ Antón (1999, p. 305) lists six scaffolding functions observed in the help that the expert provides the novice:

1. Recruitment: enlisting the learner's interest in the task.
2. Reduction in degrees of freedom: simplifying the task.
3. Direction maintenance: keeping the learner motivated and in pursuit of the goal.
4. Marking critical features: highlighting certain relevant features and pointing out discrepancies between what has been produced and the ideal solution.
5. Frustration control: reducing stress and frustration during problem solving.
6. Demonstration: modeling an idealized form of the act to be performed by completing the act or by explicating the learner's partial solution.

As Antón points out, the French teacher provides the learners the scaffolding functions #1, #2, and #4.

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