

# Translanguaging in the Japanese Tertiary Context: Student Perceptions and Pedagogical Implications

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## Abstract

Although much research has been conducted into how languages interact in social practice in multilingual contexts, little understanding exists how this interaction affects learning particularly in the Japanese tertiary context. This study offers insights into the benefits of translanguaging as a tool to increase learner interest in Language led Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) or Soft CLIL classes. Sample classroom activities will be presented to illustrate strategic L1 usage and within instruction. This will be followed by qualitative results in the form of student comments from an open-ended questionnaire administered to small sample of Japanese first year university students demonstrated that strategic L1 usage appeared to increase learner interest in topics covered in Soft CLIL classes. As results were preliminary future studies increasing sample size or adding a quantitative research may offer more definitive information with regard to the benefits of translanguaging in this specific CLIL context.

Key words: translanguaging, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), active learning, learner autonomy

## 1. Introduction

The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology recommendations have strongly supported the goal of active learning as a methodology for successful language learning (MEXT 2011,2014). Indisputably, successful active learning is achieved when students have an interest in the subject matter they are studying, unfortunately this has not been seen as the case in Japanese tertiary contexts as most students surveyed still find English classes uninteresting and difficult (Ohmori, 2014). One issue that has been marginalized but may prove to be powerful tool in this dilemma is the usage of Japanese (L1) in learning English (L2).

In recent years there has been a great amount of research conducted with regard to how languages interact in social practice in multilingual contexts. (Adamson and Coulson, 2014 ) but yet little understanding exists how this interaction affects learning particularly in the unique Japanese tertiary context. The most often cited reason for this is generally English language programs have traditionally separated languages, viewing bilinguals as “two monolinguals in

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one” (Gallagher, and Collohan, 2014). In the last decade this philosophy has been challenged, opening up space for *translanguaging* - the use of languages to achieve communicative goals in educational and social contexts to scaffold negotiation of meaning.

Instrumental in understanding this innovative concept is literature indicating the “shuttling” between languages to improve comprehension of language as well as content for the promotion of active learning (Canagarajah, 2011).

The current study discusses the preliminary results from an intrinsic, small-scale case study focusing on the benefits of translanguaging as a tool to increase learner interest in a first year soft-CLIL cohort at a Japanese University (n=63) The literature review will provide an overview of CLIL methodology, and translanguaging highlighting the connection between content and language in the Japanese tertiary context. Utilizing an originally designed open-ended questionnaire as a methodology to target impressions of L1 usage during classes. preliminary results of the benefits of translanguaging will be presented. Additionally instructor observations will also be offered to further explain and triangulate the data collected. A discussion of the practical interventions within the current syllabus will be proposed as a means of improving learner, promoting learner autonomy as well as encourage student engagement in class. To conclude the limitations of this study and implications for further research will be suggested.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Forms of instruction that include both content teaching and language teaching are not a novel concept. Various methodologies such as Content-based instruction (CBI) English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and immersion education, which have been widely adopted in North American contexts may be viewed as precursors to CLIL (Brinton, Snow, & Wesche 1989; Lyster, 2007).

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has many similarities to CBI in that a second language is taught through content subjects. The main differences between the two models are the instructional goals and the learners. In CBI, the goal is to prepare English learners for successful participation in the English-medium curriculum; or English speaking environments such as the case when the learners are from immigrant families speaking a variety of first languages or in homogenous populations such as Japan (See figure 1). CLIL instruction strives to prepare students by developing their skills and talents in using the target language in an academic setting as well as to equip students with the linguistic skills needed to participate in the global economy (Dalton-Puffer, 2011).

## Language of Learning

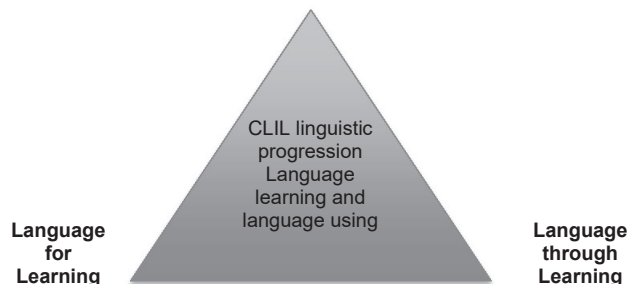


Figure 1. The Language Triptych (Coyle et al. 2010)

## 2.2 CLIL's 4 C's

The aims of CLIL are to improve both the learners' knowledge and skills in a subject, and their language skills in the language the subject is taught through. Language is used as the medium for learning subject content, and subject content is used as a resource for learning the language. The specific intrinsic aims for CLIL are summarized in terms of Coyle's (2007) 'four Cs'. They may be determined as follows: communication viewed as improving overall target language competence; content while learning the knowledge and skills of the subject; culture which builds intercultural knowledge and understanding and finally cognition and the development of thinking skills (see figure 2).

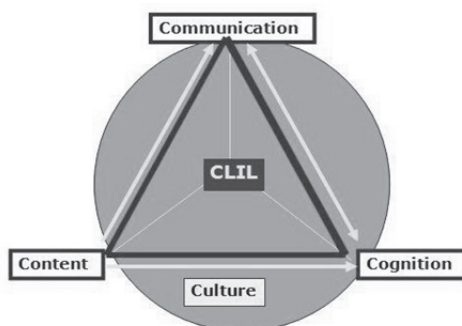


Figure 2 'four Cs of CLIL (Coyle 2007)

## 2.3 CLIL and Japanese Context

Although arguably contextually both CBI and CLIL may appear similar and be difficult to distinguish, as both approaches effectively increase students' linguistic competence and confidence, motivation, and awareness about cultures and global citizenship (Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, 2008, Coyle, 2007). CLIL appears to offer more flexibility in its methodology allowing for a hybridity of practice (Ikeda, 2013). These features have been found to match the learning needs of Japanese students as well as the needs of stakeholders mandating the production of successful global citizens (MEXT, 2014).

## 2.4 Soft CLIL

The term Soft CLIL is often used interchangeably Language-driven approaches (see figure 2) as both are concerned with teaching and learning that is focused *primarily* on language (Ikeda, 2013) Generally these courses are placed on the language curriculum in university programs desiring greater use of subject-based content. The Soft CLIL approach has *language learning* as its basic objective and is most often taught by language professionals and quite often the assessment is found to be weighing more on language acquisition as opposed to content knowledge as seems to be the trend with appearing in Japanese tertiary context (Ohmori 2014).

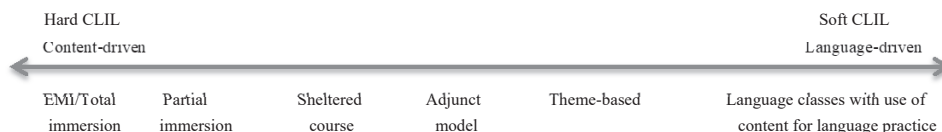


Figure 2 Met's (2009) continuum

## 2.5 L1 as a tool in Soft CLIL Instruction

The use of Japanese (L1) in English (L2) instruction is quite often found with opinions divided. Early methodologies such as the Direct Method are viewed as having had a great impact on the Education Policy in Japan to the point that monolingual instruction has been mandated by MEXT(2011) in order to increase students' exposure to English, through the use of English to strongly encourage students with incomprehensible input. Unfortunately, quite often stakeholders decision to employ monolingual English instruction for pedagogical reasons that are generally, based on unsound assumptions encourage an unbalanced teacher-student relationship, which as Yonesaka (2008) notes leads to the indication of linguistic imperialism as the classroom where students are unwilling to participate actively in classes or will not speak out of fear of embarrassment. Research conducted in settings similar to the Japanese context where L1 is found dominant sheds light on the fact that monolingual instruction is unnecessary and potentially detrimental and perhaps the strategic use of L1 in instruction facilitate learning (Adamson.et.al, 2014). The utilization of L1 in the classroom specifically in soft CLIL contexts and has been found to be very effective in bilingual training and may be a successful tool lower proficiency learners (Lasagabaster, 2013). The ability to use L1 in these contexts may ease the discomfort teachers feel when teaching more than language while dealing with unfamiliar content in language lessons (Ball, Kelly, & Clegg, 2015). In fact researchers report that forbidding L1 in CLIL classrooms may cause hostility among students and be detrimental to learning (Gallagher & Colohan , 2014).

## 2.6 Translanguaging

In recent years Translanguaging has become a popular concept to describe and analyze language practices that occur in varied learning environments (García and Menken 2010). The

Welsh word *Trawsieithu* translated into the English term *translanguaging* where it was a term used to describe an instructional practice observed in Welsh classrooms (Williams, 1996). Specifically, in the Welsh context the teacher would attempt to teach in English, the students would respond in English and *visa versa* with the language choice being reversed while the teacher offers explanations in English.

Although these techniques or behaviors are by no means considered unusual and often used routinely in language learning contexts albeit quite often perceived unfavorably, Williams argued these processes aided in maximizing the students as well as the teachers linguistic knowledge while at the same time augmenting problem solving skills. This practice may have the propensity to empower students and dissipate the negative stereotypes previously associated with the use of L1 in classroom instruction thus improving the learning experience that surpasses language learning for all stakeholders (Crease and Blackledge 2015). Through strategic classroom language planning that combines two or more languages in a systematic way within the same learning activity, *translanguaging* seeks to assist multilingual speakers in making meaning, shaping experiences, and gaining deeper understandings and knowledge of the languages in use and even of the content that is being taught ( Blackledge & Takhi, 2014).

## 2.7 *Translanguaging versus Code switching*

*Translanguaging* has been compared to *code switching* in that it refers to multilingual speakers' "shuttling between languages" naturally (Canagarajah, 2011). Although the term *translanguaging* often appears alongside *code switching* within the literature the difference becomes apparent in the ideology of the two theories (Crease et.al, 2015). *Code-switching* assumes that the two languages of bilinguals are two separate monolingual codes that have the propensity of usage without reference to each other. Alternatively, *translanguaging* suggests that bilinguals have *one linguistic repertoire* from which they deliberately choose features to communicate effectively. That is, *translanguaging* takes as its starting point the ways in which *language is used by bilingual people as the norm*, and not the abstract language of monolinguals, as described by traditional usage books and grammars as suggested by *code-switching*.

In this respect, *translanguaging* differs radically from the concept of *code-switching*, as it implies a compartmentalization of languages an viewpoint that the languages of a bilingual speaker are divided into two isolated systems that have the ability to be separated and regulated in time and space (Canagarajah, 2011). It is important to note that alongside *translanguaging* and *code-switching* other similar concepts such as, *heteroglossia*, *metrolingualism* and *translingual practice* (Canagarajah, 2011) represent a shift in the ideology of language, acting as precursors to the concept of languages seen as social constructs, and not merely separate systems(García & Flores, 2013). When considering language practices from this perspective the main emphasis turns to the language user and on how languages are negotiated in interaction rather than the language systems (Canagarajah, 2011).

## 2.8 Active Learning in the Japanese Context

Japanese research into active learning originates from the 1990s American Engineering and other science-related programs where students in these programs voiced frustration over instructional methodology relying mostly on lectures as the delivery method and as such lacked hands on learning opportunities (Imoto, 2013). The term active learning has recently become a buzz word in Japanese Educational context as stakeholders are seeing the benefits of moving instruction away from a high reliance on lecturing, and toward a new mode of educational dissemination which involves a greater degree of engagement of students (Tickle, 2014). Active learning is observed students are actively engaged with the content of the course and with each other in ways that promote long-term understanding and utilize critical thinking skills. Additionally active learning is witnessed in contexts where the goals and outcomes of the course are known to students and assessment is formative designed to inform both students, instructors and stakeholders with reflective practices. As students are viewed as active participants heavily engaged in the learning process, assessment within active learning framework equips learners with metacognitive skills that will in turn inform teachers in order to make timely changes to facilitate learning This methodology is viewed as in sync with CLIL methodology but contrasts with the traditional Japanese educational model of students as passive participants memorizing items in order to pass the next high-stakes test (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson, & Johnson, 2005).

## 3. Research Question

The purpose of the current research is to ascertain the presence of benefits or deterrents in applying translanguaging activities in Soft CLIL classes with the following research question:

Does the incorporation of translanguaging activities in Soft CLIL classes increase student interest in the Japanese Tertiary context?

## 4. Method

### 4.1 Research Context

The purpose of the current research is to investigate translanguaging in Soft CLIL for the promotion of active learning. The current study draws on data obtained from conducted in a small private university in Northern Japan. The participants (n=63) consisted of Information Science students enrolled in a second year compulsory soft CLIL course placed on the language curriculum. The sample is considered to be at the same lower English Language level based on a placement test taken upon entrance to the university.

The instructor is native English speaker with advanced Japanese ability and a very good knowledge of the content covered in the course. The sample for this study was chosen based on the fact that the researcher taught all of the students in this cohort offering the most convenient access. All participants consented in writing prior to start of this study and

completed questionnaires voluntarily.

## 4.2 Instrument and Procedures

A questionnaire designed in English with a Japanese translation was provided and the students were encouraged to answer the open-ended questions in either language as hopefully this would allow for more freedom of expression in answers and less overall stress for the students. All students responded in Japanese. The questionnaire consisted of five closed-ended questions with five predetermined responses followed by an open ended question in order to gain insight into the reasoning behind the closed ended answer (see appendix 1 for an example question). The questionnaires were distributed at the end of class and were administered a total of 10 times during a 15 week period. A general explanation of the questionnaire was provided as well as a reminder that the students' answers would be completely anonymous in an effort to prevent anxiety or stress as well as to promote candid responses (Armstrong, 2009). There was no time limit for completion of the questionnaire but all questionnaires were completed within 10 minutes.

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Student Impressions

Table 1 presents the students opinions with regard to the benefit of L1 usage by the instructor or student during class time. Preliminary results indicate that students found the use of L1 during class beneficial in every class evaluated and based on these results no students perceived the use of L1 detrimental in this study . Further investigation of specific L1 would be useful and may be further explained in student's comments to open ended questions (see in Appendix 2). Overall student comments portrayed a positive opinion of L1 usage with comments about ease of activity completion. Comments such as the usefulness of being permitting to use Japanese resources may indicate a potential for an increase in content knowledge. Furthermore comments that students researched topics outside of class time indicates the possibility of the development of learner autonomy. Certainly comments from students signaling there enjoyment of enjoy the classes were encouraging as this is an entry point to active learning (Smith et.al, 2005).

It is of interest to note that some students may have been moved out of their comfort zone with comments such as: "At first it felt strange to be able to speak Japanese in English class but with the time limit we could get more information easily and finish the assignment on time." and "I usually cannot be happy in groups because my English is poor but I enjoyed class today" which may indicate a change in students learning views and a movement toward active learning as result of L1 and translanguaging. Although comments such as "Japanese time was too short" or "Japanese time should be longer" were recorded, these would be expected as the instructor was hesitant about the time that should be allotted for solely L1 usage. Although this is a common dilemma among instructors when employing translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2011) based on student's comments perhaps more L1 time may

be permitted in the future as this may further aid in scaffolding necessary content (Mehisto, 2008).

## 5.2 Translanguaging in Group Work

Researchers have commented that learners often feel it is much easier to talk to their peers in their L1 when working in groups and Japanese students are no exception (Gorsuch, 2000). Historically the use of L1 in this context has been viewed as a barrier to learning but the reality may be the use of the L1 by the students when confronting problems posed by the L2 actually creates favorable conditions for language acquisition and linguistic reflection. With the awareness that the strategic use of L1 as a resource for academic learning not as previously thought, an interference or an obstacle, will enable both parties as well as stakeholders to recognize the benefits of translanguaging and L1 usage (Canagarajah, 2011).

Cooperative-learning (CL) has been suggested as an effective teaching strategy in lessons targeted at more difficult content matter particularly as within the group structure there may be many opportunities afforded to use strategic L1 in order to. In CL, students work together in small groups on a structured activity. The group members are individually accountable for their work, and the work of the group as a whole is also assessed (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). Cooperative learning permits opportunities for language development by allowing students to use groups a natural environment to learn English therefore increasing independence from the teacher as well as promoting learner autonomy. (Yamauchi, 2015).

The most utilized teaching approach within CL is the Jigsaw approach (Jacobs, Power and Loh, 2002). In the jigsaw approach to instruction, the target material is divided, usually into four parts, and distributed to small groups to learn. The students are permitted to use Japanese in gaining understanding about the content but must in the end must present their findings in English. As there is a time limit the students are aware that L1 usage must be limited (Yamauchi, 2015). In this activity a reading passage is divided into four sections, labeled A-D. The students with the same lettered passage make a group for a designated period of time. When the time is up the homogeneous groups having mastered their material, regroup into heterogeneous groups to present material and complete a task, during this part of the activity L1 may also be employed. the then put 4 sections of the passage into order. This activity concentrates heavily on peer teaching and group problem solving therefore the added tool of L1 during cooperative learning activities proved beneficial for all students but in particular lower level students.



Table 1 Student's Opinion Evaluation of the benefits of L1 (Japanese) usage during Class

Week	Attendance N=	Evaluation (%)				
		Strong agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strong disagree
1	63	96.8	3.2	0	0	0
2	63	95.2	4.8	0	0	0
3	62	96.8	3.2	0	0	0
4	63	98.4	1.6	0	0	0
5	63	96.8	3.2	0	0	0
6	61	98.4	1.6	0	0	0
7	62	96.8	3.2	0	0	0
8	58	96.6	3.4	0	0	0
9	62	98.4	1.6	0	0	0
10	63	95.2	4.8	0	0	0

## 6. Conclusions and Future Implications

The current study discussed the preliminary results from an intrinsic, small-scale case study focusing on the benefits of translanguaging as a tool to increase learner interest in a first year soft-CLIL cohort at a Japanese University. The use of translanguaging highlighted the connection between content and language in the Japanese tertiary context. An originally designed open-ended questionnaire as a methodology was administered 10 times in order to target student impressions of L1 usage during CLIL classes. Preliminary results reported that all students felt that L1 was beneficial for learning in this context. With increased language practice aided by L1 usage students reported more interest in the subject matter, less stress in L2 usage, and to a certain degree learner autonomy with unassigned English learning activities completed by students outside of class. Although results are preliminary this study as an acceptable tool for language learning in As results were preliminary future studies increasing sample size or adding a quantitative research may offer more definitive information with regard to the benefits of translanguaging in this specific CLIL context.

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#### Appendix 1 Example question from Student Translanguaging Questionnaire

Check the statement that most describes your opinion. Then explain your response in more detail.

1. Being permitted to use Japanese was helpful in the completion of today's activity.

\_\_\_\_ Strongly agree

\_\_\_\_ Agree

\_\_\_\_ Undecided

\_\_\_\_ Disagree

\_\_\_\_ Strongly disagree

Please explain your response in more detail.

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#### Appendix 2 Sample Comments from students

- We were able to complete the work faster.
- My English is low so Japanese helps me.
- My English ability is low so I was happy to use Japanese.
- The class was fun.
- I didn't look at the clock.
- Working together was easier than I thought.
- I felt comfortable.
- I could understand well because Yamauchi Sensei gave us information in Japanese too.
- This subject is new to me so I was happy to have help from my friends but Japanese time was too short.
- Japanese time should be longer.
- Using Japanese homepage was good.
- I checked out the website after class.
- I want to learn more about fish farming problem.
- At first it felt strange to be able to speak Japanese in English class but with the time

limit we could get more information easily and finish the assignment on time.

- I usually cannot be happy in groups because my English is poor but I enjoyed class today.