Target Language Use in the Classroom in Japan and South Korea: Reflection, Confidence Building, and Beyond

日本と韓国の外国語教室における目標言語使用 －自省、自信づくり、そして未来の可能性

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キーワード：目標言語を通じた外国語教育、教師の授業についての自省、韓国の英語教育

1. Introduction: A Timely Issue

On April 4, 2000, the South Korean Ministry of Education announced a new policy regarding target language use in teaching English: From then on teachers were required to teach in English for one hour a week. The new policy reflected the activist stance of the Ministry of Education toward English education that began in the 1990s (Kwon, 2000). The plan was to affect the first two years of elementary and the first year of middle school from the 2001 academic year and expand to include the remaining years of post-elementary education by 2004. The announcement provoked short-lived controversy, but the issues soon faded from the public eye. It resurfaced in September 2000, however, when the results of a Ministry of Education survey of 21,562 English teachers throughout the country were released (Yi, 2000). The survey showed that only 15.2% of teachers were confident of teaching in English; in Seoul, the figure was only 4.9%. To many, this comes as no surprise, which perhaps explains why the Ministry of Education's announcement was greeted with tempered skepticism in the first place. The reality that most teachers are not confident of teaching in English may force the Ministry of Education to revise or abandon the plans.

The issue of teaching in the target language, English in the present discussion, is timely, but it is also one of the most under-researched topics in foreign language education and SLA (second language acquisition). For all the progress in SLA research in recent years, there is a paucity of literature on how the use of the target language in the classroom by non-native teachers affects acquisition (for example, Ellis, 1990, contained almost no discussion about teaching in the target language). We know relatively little, for example, about how the target-language proficiency of non-native teachers affects learners, or how teachers and learners interact when using the target language. One reason for this state of affairs is the dominance of research that is conducted in English-speaking, second-language contexts in North America and the UK. In these contexts, learners typically come from a number of different countries and are taught by native speakers of English who teach almost exclusively in English. The assumption is that most second-language teaching takes place in the target language. Reality is, however, that most English teaching in the world takes place primarily in the native language of the learners, as is common in Korea. Another reason, which affects many foreign-language contexts, such as Korea, is the lack of teachers who are capable of teaching consistently in English. If few teachers in a school teach in English, for example, it is impossible to arrange a study with a control group to compare learners who are taught in English with those who are taught mainly in their native language. As a

result, most scholars end up speculating rather than referring to empirical research on the advantages of teaching in English. In Japan, the issue has received relatively little attention compared with South Korea. The focus, instead, has been on the role of native-speaker Assistant Language Teachers (ALT) in the classroom.

To open the door to discussion on the issue of target language use in the classroom, I plan to discuss a number of questions in this paper: Is there a minimum level of target-language proficiency that teachers must reach in order to facilitate acquisition? How do learners feel about speaking the target language with teachers? Do learners perceive significant differences in targetlanguage use by native-speaker teachers and non-native-speaker teachers? Finally, how do teachers feel about teaching in the target language? To answer these questions, I will also discuss relevant literature on the topic, particularly *Reflections on the Target Language* (Neil, 1997), which is based on an introspective study of ten non-native teachers of German in Britain. I will also discuss reflective interviews on microteaching with students in a teacher-development program at Kagoshima University. I will relate the discussion to South Korea because of the Ministry-of-Education-induced controversy, and will organize it around three perspectives: linguistic, educational, and social.

2. Linguistic Perspectives on Target Language Use in the Classroom

The South Korean Ministry of Education's decision to push teaching in English reflects a linguistic approach to the issue. The argument is simple: Greater exposure to English, preferably in the form of natural input, promotes acquisition. Much of this argument comes from Krashen's (1985) hypothesis on comprehensible input, known as "i + 1," which states that learners need adequate exposure to input that is slightly beyond their current level of proficiency to facilitate acquisition. (It could be argued that the emphasis on using the target language only also reflects the audio-lingual method.) Krashen's theory is odd because it focuses almost exclusively on listening and assumes that development of listening skills will facilitate the development of speaking and other skills. Nevertheless, the input hypothesis remains influential in Korea, as the Ministry of Education's interest in the teacher as a source of linguistic input shows. Even if Krashen's theory is accepted in full, the issue of comprehensibility remains. If learners cannot comprehend teacher-provided input or if the teacher-provided input is not of a sufficient complexity, then the input hypothesis ceases to function as Krashen outlined it. Thus, for teacher-provided input to be beneficial, teachers must have enough English proficiency to be understood and to produce sufficiently complex and reasonably accurate utterances.

In his study, Neil (1997) noted that teachers used German mainly in the context of classroom management. This meant an increase in use of imperative forms and present tense forms. Teachers also simplified their speech by using few subordinate clauses, which may have helped them avoid the verb-final word order in German subordinate clauses that are difficult for native-speakers of English to master. Neil (1997) speculated that the level of input was too simple to benefit learners at their particular stage of learning. These findings suggest that, from a linguistic perspective, "classroom English," may not enhance acquisition to the degree that its proponents argue. It must be noted, however, that of the teachers in Neil's (1997) study, teachers used German on average 50% of the time, with a range of 67.5% to 27.5%. If the teachers used German almost 100%, learners would have been exposed to a wider range of target-language input.

3. Educational Perspectives on Target Language Use in the Classroom

Educational perspectives on target language use in the classroom have rarely surfaced in Korea. This is regrettable because educational perspectives cast the issue in a distinctly different light. Instead of being a source of linguistic input, the teacher is a learning facilitator who uses the target language to create an environment conducive to learning. Many teachers use the target language to instill confidence in learners and to motivate learners to develop an interest in learning the language (for a case study of one such teacher, see Moran, 1996). One common trait of master teachers everywhere is their enthusiasm for the subject that they teach. Teaching in English allows teachers to share their enthusiasm for the subject with learners. In a study of 18 Japanese students' reflections on their formal English education experience, Beebe (1998) reported that teachers of high proficiency learners used English almost twice as much as teachers of low-proficiency learners. She noted: "If the Highs [proficiency] found it easy to identify their Japanese teachers who spoke English, then those teachers may have helped the informants to imagine themselves as successful speakers of English, which could have inspired the student to actually try speaking" (1998, p. 97). In an important study on the use of English in Korean high schools, Park (1996) noted that learners in the experimental group whose teachers were instructed to use mainly English developed positive motivation and achieved higher levels of proficiency during one semester of instruction than those in the control group whose teachers were instructed to use mainly Korean. Together, these findings suggest that use of English and teacher enthusiasm helped turn the teacher into a positive role model.

To return to Neil (1997), results show that teachers had clear ideas about which types of classroom activities were best taught in the target and native language. Teachers used German almost 100% of the time in greetings, praising, and giving simple instructions. By contrast, they preferred to use English to explain grammar and vocabulary because doing so was difficult for teachers and students. This suggests what many experienced teachers already believe: Metalinguistic explanations are more efficient in the native language. Of the ten teachers, eight were instructed by school administrators to use German language "as much as possible." Despite this, the teachers' resistance to using German in explaining grammar and vocabulary reflects views of teachers in Korea who, aside from their proficiency in English, may not believe that teaching in English is beneficial pedagogically. In a study of French teachers at the university level in Scotland, Mitchell (1988) discovered that many teachers want to teach in French more often, but that they are negative toward to the idea of teaching in French only. Similarly, in a pioneering study on use of the target language in the classroom by 42 high school Spanish teachers in the United States, Wing (1980) found that teachers viewed grammar as an exception. "Teachers who say that they conduct their classes entirely in the target language often add the disclaimer: 'but not grammar, of course.' Grammar analysis is considered to be one area of weakness in the students' preparation in the native language and thus a potential problem area in the target language" (1980, p. 202). For Korea, the implications of these findings are obvious: As long as grammar and vocabulary are central to the syllabus, teachers are likely to prefer the native language over the target language no matter how fluent they are in the target language. In relation to this, a study of attitudes toward methodology of 881 Japanese high school English teachers, Gorsuch (1999) found that grammar-dominated university entrance examinations had paramount influence on classroom instruction. "The English language sections of university entrance examinations seem to be the single driving force behind English instruction in Japanese high schools today" (1999, p. 370).

4. Social Perspectives on Target Language Use in the Classroom

Whereas linguistic perspectives focus on input in the classroom and educational perspectives on the role of the teacher in facilitating learning, social perspectives focus on the classroom as a mini-community that has its own social life. Social perspectives of using English in the classroom have received mainly negative attention from academics and media personalities who define themselves as "nationalists." Typically, they argue that teaching in English is suspect because it could cause students to lose their national identity. They argue that Korean schools have a responsibility to maintain a classroom culture that reflects Korean cultural values, and that teaching in English risks bringing American cultural values into the classroom. By contrast, those in favor of teaching in English argue that doing so helps students develop an open mind to foreign cultures that is in keeping with globalization.

Though most of these discussions are media productions, they highlight an issue that many scholars in Korea ignore: The connection between classroom culture and local and national culture(s). One of the main justifications for French immersion programs in Canada is that teaching in French only creates a pseudo-French-speaking atmosphere in the classroom that is beneficial to promoting cross-cultural understanding. In Korea and Japan, however, English education is only part of the curriculum, so creating a classroom atmosphere that deviates from the classroom culture of most other academic subjects risks trivializing or marginalizing English education. Creating a hybrid classroom culture that uses English while reflecting Korean social values risks weakening the cross-cultural component, but it remains the better alternative. Extra-curricular activities, such as student exchanges, can pick up where the classroom left off in providing students with meaningful opportunities for cross-cultural understanding.

In addition to such macro-issues as national identity and cross-cultural understanding, teaching in the target language has a number of micro-effects on the social life of the classroom. According to Neil (1997), learners were generally satisfied with the amount of German their teachers used, but, if given a choice, more learners wished that their teachers would use less German. They were also aware of differences between non-native teachers and native-speaker assistants and were aware of the simplification strategies that teachers used. This suggests that learners make comparisons between non-native- and native-speaker teachers that some non-native teachers may find uncomfortable or stressful in the course of teaching, particularly in an educational environment such as Korea where teacher mastery of subject matter is expected (for an excellent collection of articles on non-native teachers of English, see Braine, 1999). Beebe described the dilemma that many Japanese high school teachers face as follows:

> If, as Peirce (1995) maintains, identity is a site of struggle between multiple, changing, and sometimes contradictory facets, then JTEs must struggle to claim their identities as English speakers in the social setting of schools. One hopes that more teachers can come to do that by allowing themselves to make mistakes in front of their students and by making the leap of seeing NS teachers and students who speak English well as allies rather than as intimidating competitors. (1998, p. 344)

It is also possible that students feel "cultural dissonance" when speaking with teachers in English in the classroom. If so, this would make it difficult for teachers to bond with their students emotionally. In Japan, Gorsuch (1999) found that teachers are interested in using communicative approaches in theory, but that they revert to traditional methods, such as drilling and grammar translation, in practice because of social factors, such as the demands of

managing large classes and relationships with colleagues. In Korea, where the act of teaching includes moral and social responsibilities that go beyond the mere transfer of knowledge, difficulties in bonding with students make teachers wary of trying of dramatic changes in teaching method. Park (1996) stressed the importance of bonding, or "love for students," in creating a positive atmosphere for using English in class. Much more research on the issue of learner perceptions of the target language is needed to produce substantive conclusions. The importance of empathy goes beyond the classroom. In reporting the results of a study on non-native English teachers in Hong Kong, Tang (1997, p 579) concluded, "NNESLTS [non-native English as second language teachers] not only play a pedagogical role in their classrooms, but they also serve as empathetic listeners for beginning and weak students, needs analysts, agents of change, and coaches for public examinations in the local context."

5. Reflecting with Teachers: Examples from Kagoshima University

In this section, I turn to three examples of student teachers at Kagoshima University. The student teachers were enrolled in "English Teaching Practicum II," which I taught in the spring semester of 2000. Though thirty students were enrolled in the course, the three examples reveal issues that affected other students in the class and, indeed, many teachers in the field. In developing the course, I drew on recent research on reflective teaching in foreign language teaching (Crandall, 2000; Stanley, 1998).

The structure of the course was as follows: After explaining a number of basic approaches to and methods of teaching English during the first half of the course, I asked students to prepare a mock lesson of a full class and present it to the class for 15 minutes. (Japanese university classes meet only once a week for 90 minutes, so time is limited.) The only requirement for the lesson was that students use a Ministry of Education approved textbook (except for elementary school) as the main teaching material. I did this to encourage students to develop interesting lessons with teaching material that was not necessarily their first choice. Students were free to choose the grade level of the lesson. I videotaped the lesson and then asked the student to visit my office for a follow-up conference. Before the conference, I asked students to complete a reflective questionnaire as soon as they could after the mock lesson had finished. I discussed the comments with the student as we looked at the video during the conference. One of the most common points for discussion was use of the target language in the classroom. Most students wanted to use more English, but could not because they were nervous or lacked confidence. Others tried to use English, but switched to Japanese in midstream. A few students used English consistently throughout the 15-minute mock lesson.

Example 1: High level of proficiency and high level of confidence → Effective code-switching. Before taking the course, the student had spent ten months in California studying English at a branch of the University of California. The student had a high level of proficiency in all areas of English. She was comfortable in speaking English for extended periods of time and was confident of her pronunciation and presentation skills.

Retrospective comments on the questionnaire indicate that the student had thought about the issue of which language to use in the mock lesson. In response to the question "What was your overall impression of your lesson?" she wrote, "I doubt if students can understand the lesson which is given only in English." In response to the question "What problems did you encounter as you taught?" she wrote, "I should have checked students' understanding by asking comprehension questions."

Example 2: Moderate level of proficiency and low level of confidence → Frustrated code-switching. Based on course work and talks with the student, I evaluate his spoken proficiency in English as being at the intermediate level, while is writing and reading proficiency at the high-intermediate level. In talks with me, I found that the student often worried about accuracy, and frequently paused in the middle of speech or corrected himself.

The student focused his lesson on teaching the passive voice, and his comments reflect his concern for teaching grammar clearly. In response to the question "What do you think of the materials and teaching aids that you used?" he wrote, "The cards written 'subject, verb, object, and complement' in Japanese were useful when I explained grammar." This indicates that, like teachers in the literature discussed in this paper, the student believed that grammar explanations were best done in the native language, or at least by referring to the native-language materials.

At the beginning of his lesson, however, the student attempted to use English, but ended up code-switching frequently, sometimes in the middle of a sentence. As the lesson progressed, he used more Japanese, but would switch back to English for classroom management issues. The student did not mention these code-switches in his retrospective comments, but they usually happened when he paused in the middle of an English sentence to find the right word or to think about the grammar. The concern for accuracy and frustration with using English to explain grammar indicate that self-confidence in English proficiency and the subject of the lesson influence teacher decisions about which language to teach in.

Example 3: High level of proficiency and high level of nervousness → Japanese only. The case of this student is a combination of the first two. Before taking the course, the student had spent a year studying English at a university in the United States and had developed a high level of proficiency in English on par with the student in the first example. Despite a high level of proficiency, however, the student taught almost exclusively in Japanese after greeting the class in English. Even simple issues of classroom management (i.e., "Open your books," etc.) were presented in Japanese instead of English.

Retrospective comments indicated that the student had given considerable thought to the issue of teaching in English. In response to the question "What would you have done differently?" she responded, "I should've taught them in English more. I taught them in Japanese almost for the whole class, so it wasn't good, I think." The interesting issue here is why a student who could easily have used English in the mock lesson did not do so. The student's response to the question "What problems did you encounter as you taught?" offers a clue. She wrote, "I was too nervous to organize the class as I planned." While looking at the video of her mock lesson, I discussed the issue further and found that nervousness was the sole reason why she spoke only Japanese. The student told me that she was so nervous that even teaching in Japanese was a struggle. Nervousness is not a problem for experienced teachers, but the case of this student shows that the level of comfort with the class influences decisions about which language to teach in. If a teacher feels some degree of discomfort with a class for whatever reason, it could become much more difficult to teach in the target language.

The three examples above are only a sampling of the possible combinations of language proficiency and affective variables, such as self-confidence, nerviousness, and "feelings," in teacher decisions about use of the target language in the classroom. They indicate, however, that such decisions and, perhaps equally important, teacher awareness of these decisions varies according to proficiency and self-confidence. Levels of proficiency and self-confidence need not be the

same, but the lack of one will cause a teacher to avoid using the target language in the classroom. Though interesting, more evidence is needed to confirm the tentative correlation in the above data between language proficiency and self-confidence, on the one hand, and use of the target language in the classroom, on the other.

6. Conclusion: An Expanded Dialogue on Target Language Use in the Classroom

The discussion now returns to the South Korean Ministry of Education policy mentioned at the beginning of this paper. Simply put, is the Ministry of Education's policy of requiring teachers to teach in English for one hour a week an effective way to improve English education in Korea? The answer to this question varies depending on perspective. From a linguistic perspective, the answer is clearly, "No." The quantity of the input is too small to enhance acquisition, and the quality of the input in most cases is not appropriate to learner needs. From a pedagogical perspective, however, the answer is, "Yes, but ...." In a monolingual and monocultural society such as Korea, teaching in English casts teachers as Korean role models that learners can follow, which helps learners develop self-confidence. It also allows teachers to share their enthusiasm for the subject with students, which is beneficial to improving learner motivation and the atmosphere of the classroom. The resilience of grammar-based teaching in Korea, however, forces teachers to use Korean and raises questions about the pedagogical validity of using English exclusively. From a social perspective, the answer is also, "Yes, but ...." Teaching in English for one hour a week is unlikely to cause learners to lose a sense of national identity, as some fear. Combined with confidence building, it has the potential to help learners develop an open mind, which is the basis for effective cross-cultural understanding. To work, however, teachers need to maintain a classroom culture that is not dramatically different from that of the other classrooms in the school. Together, these tentative conclusions suggest that the Ministry of Education's policy is useful in bringing the issue of teaching in the target language to the surface, but that it is unlikely to produce significant improvements in English proficiency from classroom instruction. Instead, the good intentions of the Ministry of Education should be channeled into helping teachers acquire and maintain higher levels of proficiency in English so that they can use the language with confidence and enthusiasm in the classroom. A good place to start would be to heed the advice of Choi (2000, p. 27): "For the development of Korean EFL instruction, teachers themselves should try to be more proficient in and confident about their English skills. At the same time, continuous pre-service and in-service teacher training and more opportunities to study abroad or travel to English speaking countries are recommended."

For Japan, meanwhile, the implications of the debate on teaching in English are many and raise a number of serious questions about the heavy reliance on ALTs who are placed in schools through the JET Program. If students have limited and irregular exposure to ALTs, as is the case in most schools, then how helpful is the native-speaker input in developing proficiency? If teaching in English helps turn teachers into positive role models, then what kind of role model can ALTs become for Japanese students? If the use of English should be integrated into the classroom culture, what are the effects of an ALT's presence on the classroom culture? Finally, does the presence of ALTs inhibit Japanese teachers from developing creative ways to integrate teaching in English into their teaching? As Japanese society places more emphasis on English education, defenders of the status quo will have to explain why relying on young and essentially temporary native-speaker teachers is more effective than improving the English proficiency of career Japanese teachers of English. There is much left to

discover.

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