Motivating Japanese Students to Speak English in a Monolingual Setting
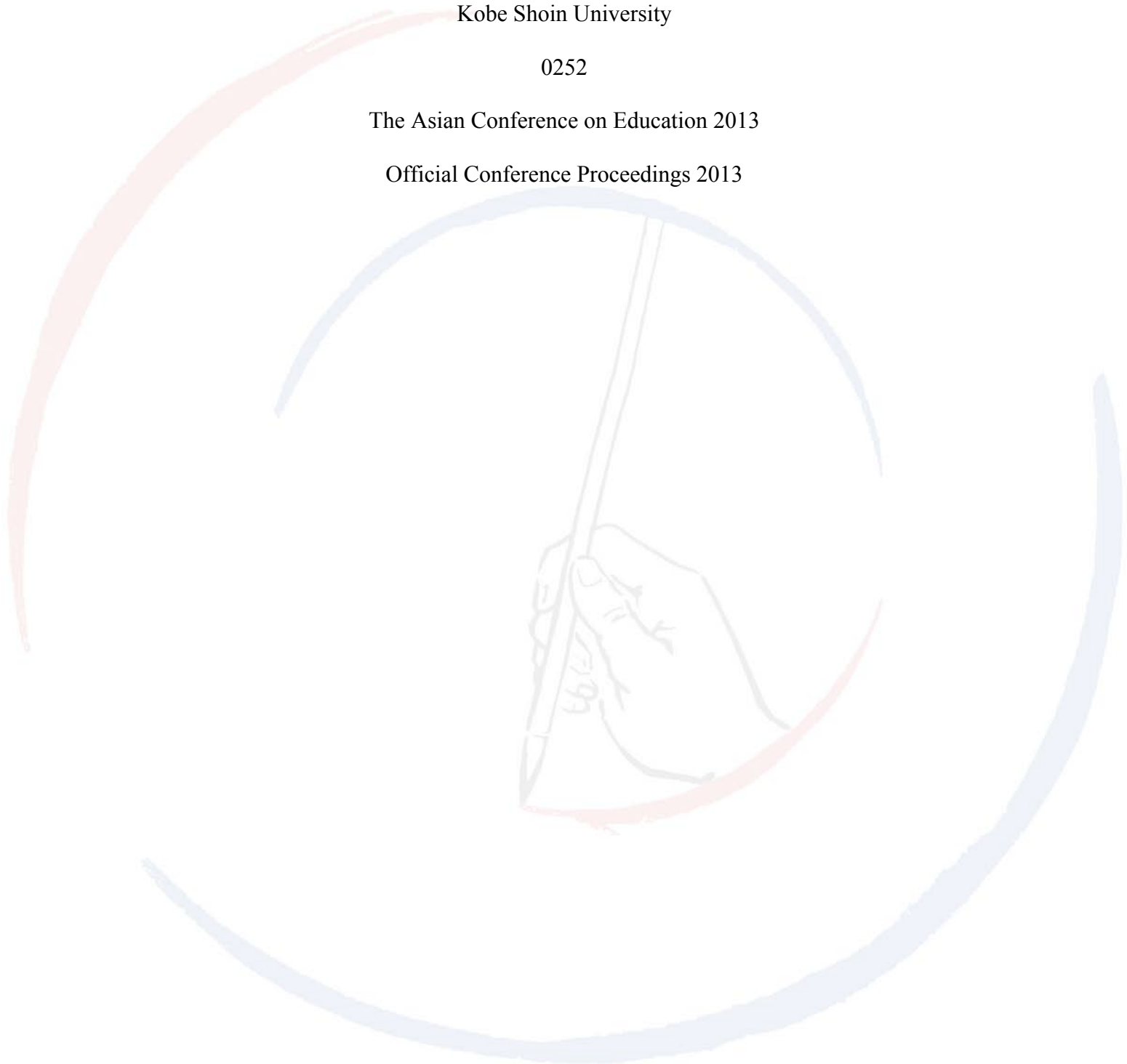
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One of the biggest problems for English teachers in monolingual language classrooms is encouraging students to speak to each other in English during the class. This can be especially problematic when students have low levels of English ability, but it is not always related to English language ability. In my experience some students try to speak English as much as possible, but others try to avoid using English in the English class. I feel that this is a motivational problem. Everyone starts out as a beginner, but only some students go on to develop communicative competence in a foreign language. For example, in my class when I call the register I ask students to call out "Yes" or "Here". This must be the easiest act of communication, yet some students will continue to say the Japanese "*hai*" even after constant reminders.

To achieve proficiency in a foreign language you must practice speaking the target language. Why do some students continually revert to their native language in the English class, but others struggle to use English even when their English ability is very low? Having tried for many years with different styles of teaching and classroom management in order to encourage my students to practice speaking English in the classroom, I decided to try to find out why the students thought that they were using their native language rather than English. Although a lot of research has been done on motivation in general, there is very little focusing on the spoken component of the language classroom. In this paper I have tried to discover when students feel the need to speak their native language, rather than English, and consequently how English teachers can set up their classes to encourage students to speak English as much as possible. A likert scale questionnaire was used with ten questions. The questionnaire was given to approximately 200 first and second year students of two Japanese Universities.

In Lambert and Gardner's (1978) study, they found that strong integrative motivation was a better indicator of language success than instrumental motivation. The initial studies were done with Canadians and focused on their attitudes to French speakers. However, in a later study carried out in the Philippines they found that instrumental motivation was the stronger motivational force. The situation in the Philippines is far more similar to Japan, with groups of monolingual speakers needing English only for work. This evidence would indicate that if Japanese students can be made to realize the instrumental value of being able to speak English, they might become motivated to speak more. Dornyei (1990) also suggests that instrumental motivation might be more important than integrative motivation for foreign language learners, such as the students taught in universities across Japan.

In Dornyei's process model (2001), motivation is divided into three stages; generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation, and positive self-reflection. The generation of initial motivation can be very difficult in compulsory foreign language classrooms. I often encounter classes where very few students had even been abroad, let alone wish to live abroad for study or any other purpose. Thus integrative motivation is largely lacking. Instrumental motivation in the form of getting a good job is there to some degree, but students in the first and second years at Japanese universities don't even seem to realize that they will need English for work. Students see that speaking is not necessary to get a good score on standardized tests such as TOEIC and TOEFL. Because of these factors it is very difficult to generate initial motivation to speak English.

Noels, et al (2000) defined 'amotivation' as the situation in which students see no relationship between their actions and the consequences. In the framework of this study that would correspond to students who did not realize that they needed to practice English in order to improve their English speaking skills. However in this study the response to the questions

'I did not realize that it was important to speak in English in class.'

'I know that it is very important to practice speaking English as much as possible.'

were inconclusive with a large percentage of neither agree nor disagree responses to the statements. However, when asked explicitly by the teacher the majority of students said that they know that they need to speak in English, to improve their English skills. The majority of students also said that they want to be able to speak English fluently, either for their future job, or to be able to speak with foreigners. I wanted to discover why they did not connect speaking English in class with these goals. Bankier and Wright (2012) state that, 'It is vital that students view high levels of language proficiency as a result of effort rather than an innate ability.' Sadly I often heard students say that the higher English proficiency students were "good at learning English," as if they could never achieve that level because they were not good language learners. Without the belief that they can become good at English, students will not have strong motivation in English classes.

Research Methodology

I based my research on five hypotheses as to why students might speak in their native language (in this case Japanese) instead of the target language;

    a.   Subject material is too difficult and students cannot do the task in English.

    b.   There is no need or incentive for students to speak in English. (They can accomplish the task in Japanese) and there is no grade component in speaking English.

    c.   Students do not understand the need to speak in English.

    d.   Peer pressure. All their friends speak Japanese so they do not want to stand out.

    e.   In the past all their English classes were conducted in Japanese so they are accustomed to using Japanese in the English class.

These were based on my experience as a teacher as well as informal interviews with students. Although some colleagues have pointed out other factors such as embarrassment of their low ability, and the inherent unnaturalness of speaking English to another native speaker of Japanese, I felt that these five hypotheses offered some opportunities to change the language classroom if found to be true.

Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed on a likert scale of 1 to 5 from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The five hypotheses were made into pair questions one asking when students chose to speak English the other asking when students chose to speak Japanese. In this way I hoped to investigate what motivated their decision to

choose English or Japanese for an activity. The questions were all translated into Japanese so that all students could understand fully whatever their English ability.

Participants

The participants were about two hundred first and second year students in compulsory English classes at two private Japanese universities. Some classes were mixed ability, but some classes were divided by ability into high and low level. It is a very common situation in Japan for students to take on average four English classes in their first and second year, whatever their major. Because of the compulsory nature of the course, students tend to have low motivation to study English. Another problem is that classes are often mixed ability, so that some students find the material too easy, whereas others find it too difficult. The students who find it too easy sometimes intimidate the lower English ability students, raising their affective filter and discouraging them from speaking in English. On the other hand the higher English ability students sometimes think the class is too easy, and just can't be bothered to speak English, creating an atmosphere where no one in the class wants to speak English. I observed all of these behaviors in these classes on occasions.

Results

The results were divided into four sections. First, affective factors including feelings about speaking to their peers and feelings about how an English class should be conducted based on past experience. Second, language learning difficulties based on the task difficulty from the point of view of lexical difficulty and lack of schema. Third, instrumental factors, in this case wanting to get a good grade. Finally, students' knowledge of language learning and specifically if they know that they need to speak English in order to improve their English skills.
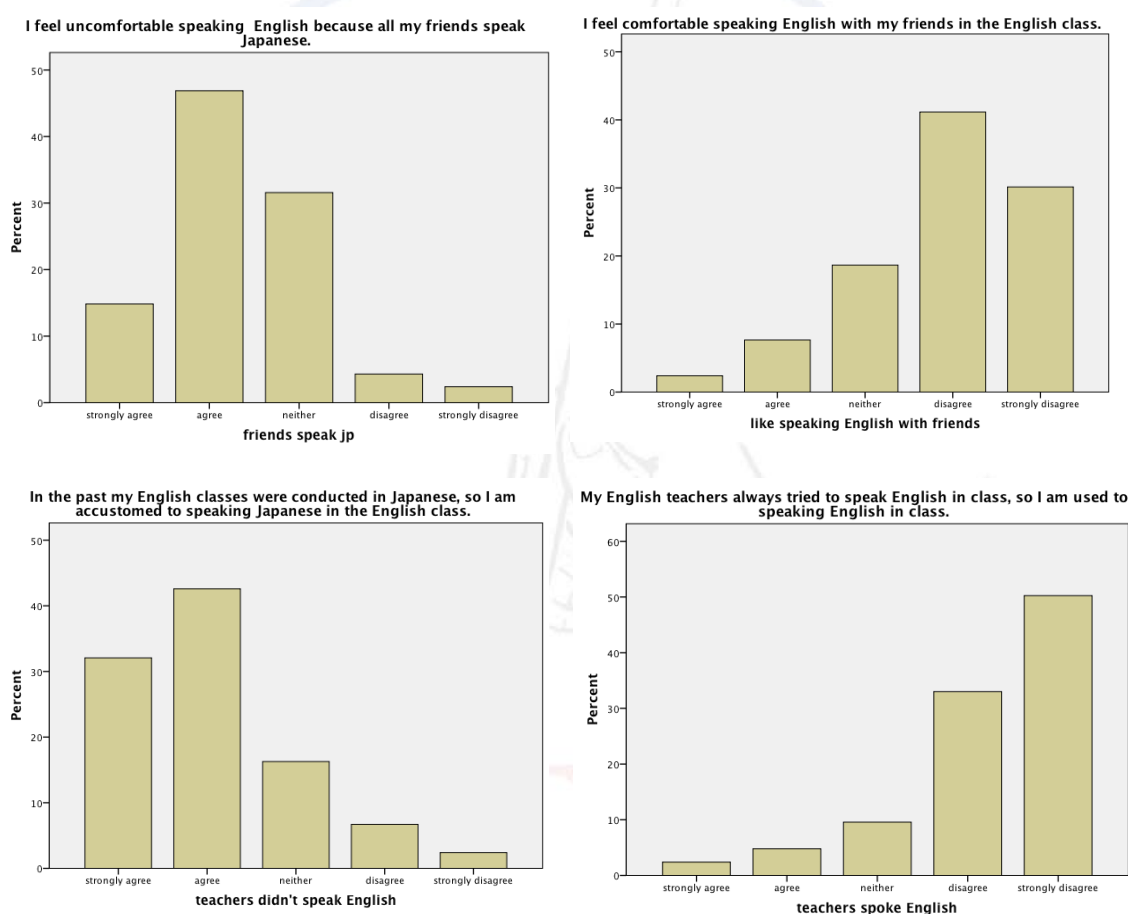
Affective Factors

The strongest result from this research was that their English teachers in the past had spoken in Japanese in the English class. 75% of students stated that they either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they are accustomed to teachers speaking Japanese in English classes, while 83% 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' that their English teachers have always tried to speak in English. Although we cannot say that this would make the students more likely to choose Japanese as their classroom language, it would certainly not create an atmosphere in which all students felt that it were natural and they were comfortable speaking English with other Japanese students. The second strongest result is that they feel uncomfortable speaking English with their native Japanese speaking friends. 62% chose 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the first statement:

I feel uncomfortable speaking English because all my friends speak Japanese.
71% of students chose 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to the second statement:
I feel comfortable speaking English with my friends in the English class.

Both of these are affective aspects of the classroom. It suggests strongly that teachers need to create an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable and natural speaking in English. One way to do this is to make it clear that this class is very different from their previous English classes. When the teacher acts as a model students will follow. However sometimes in large classes groups will have their own dynamics. Tuckman (1965) established that groups went through four stages. The first stage is one where people form the group, they are testing the group and dependent on a leader. In an English class, if the leader spoke in English this would become the norm for the whole class. In the case of small classes the leader might be the teacher, but in large classes each small group in the class will have its own leader. As the groups move through the different stages to the final cohesive group the language choice of the group will have been set. It is very difficult to force students to choose English, but if you could have a leader in each group with strong English skills it could set the tone for the class and entire course.

I feel uncomfortable speaking English because all my friends speak Japanese.

I feel comfortable speaking English with my friends in the English class.

In the past my English classes were conducted in Japanese, so I am accustomed to speaking Japanese in the English class.

My English teachers always tried to speak English in class, so I am used to speaking English in class.

Solution

It is vital that the teacher should be a role model from the beginning. Starting a course by speaking in Japanese and trying to switch to English after the students get used to you is not a good idea. The teacher needs to be a leader in English usage from the beginning when the group is forming. Dornyei and Csizer (1998) agree stating that teachers setting an example with their own behavior will be very influential on student motivation. Furthermore, student attitudes towards language learning are mostly modelled after their teachers. In Gardner's and Lambert's model (1978) they

found that integrative motivation was the most powerful indicator that students would improve in their language learning. As the teacher is the only example of the target culture in the monolingual classroom it is essential that they have enthusiasm for the target culture. Dornyei and Csizer (1998) also state that a tense classroom is one of the strongest factors to reduce student motivation in an L2 classroom, so the teacher needs to create a good atmosphere. I would also recommend making small groups by mixing the class up. It has been my experience that students are more likely to follow the teacher as a leader when they are not sitting with their friends. When they are in groups of friends the students become leaders and can form a Japanese speaking norm for the group. If possible putting one strong personality with good English skills in each group encourages all group members to speak in English. Unfortunately this is very difficult to do in the first lesson as the teacher usually doesn't know the students' English ability or personality yet.

Language Limitations

The third strongest result was that task difficulty plays a large part in language choice. 65% chose 'agree' or 'strongly agree' for the statement: *I often speak Japanese when the lesson is too difficult and I cannot do the task in English.* 50% chose 'agree' or 'strongly agree' for the statement: *When the task is not difficult I try to speak English.* In this case students are using Japanese as a survival technique when they feel that they cannot accomplish the task in English. It is all very well to challenge students to achieve their i +1(Krashen, 1981), but if you misjudge what is slightly beyond their current ability and give them a task to accomplish, which they think is far too difficult, they will use Japanese defeating the object of the activity. Difficulty of the task can take two forms; vocabulary and grammatical complexity, and lack of schema or knowledge of the topic.
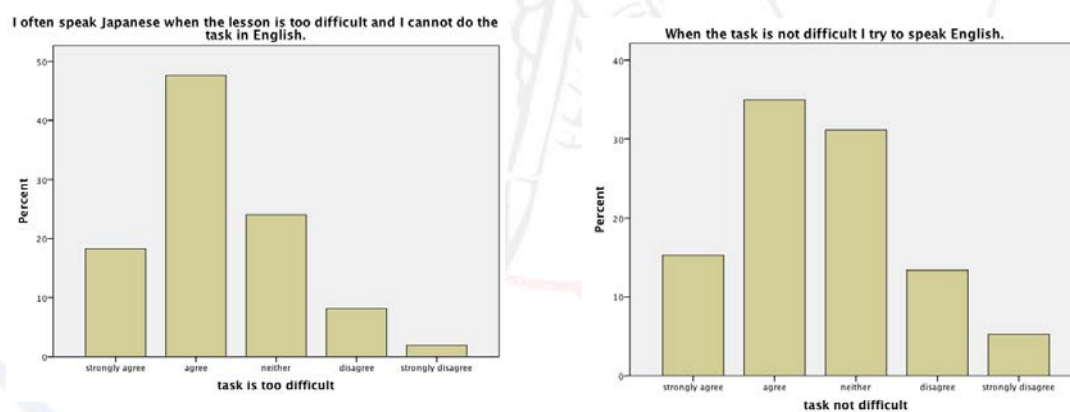
Vocabulary and Grammatical Complexity

Controlling the vocabulary and grammatical complexity are tied to the task. In speaking activities the teacher should pre-teach some of the vocabulary and have sample sentences that students can use. It can be very difficult to judge which level to aim for in a mixed ability class. If you want all students to speak then you must aim at the lowest level student in the class. It is also possible to offer extra scaffolding for lower level students. For example offering model sentences that the students can just read off the paper. This enables very low English ability learners to participate in the class, but it does not need to prevent higher English ability students from creating their own sentences. Teaching students how to ask for help and support from their

teacher and peers through formulaic sentences for example, "How do you say '*shizuka*' in English?" can help to keep the classroom language in English.

Lack of Schema or Knowledge of the Topic

Textbook writers, frequently have topics which appeal to the teachers, who will choose the textbooks rather than the students. Recently I was teaching a class, and the topic of the textbook was the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington D.C. My students said they had never heard of the Vietnam War, they had never been to America, and they had never visited a war memorial. In this situation students could not talk about the topic in Japanese let alone English. Some teachers feel that they want to teach students about the world in general, which I fully agree with. However, if we are language teachers, our first goal should be to enable the students to use the language. Having topics completely outside the students' world knowledge is self-defeating, they will not learn language or content. Too often textbooks are based on teachers' interests rather than students' interests.

Students' Knowledge of Language Learning

49% of students stated that they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement: *I did not realize that it was important to speak in English in class.* However the result was very evenly balanced for the statement: *I know that it is very important to practice speaking English as much as possible.* Most students answered that they neither 'agree' nor 'disagree' and an equal number agreeing and disagreeing. A large percentage of students did not know that they needed to practice speaking in order to improve their speaking skills.
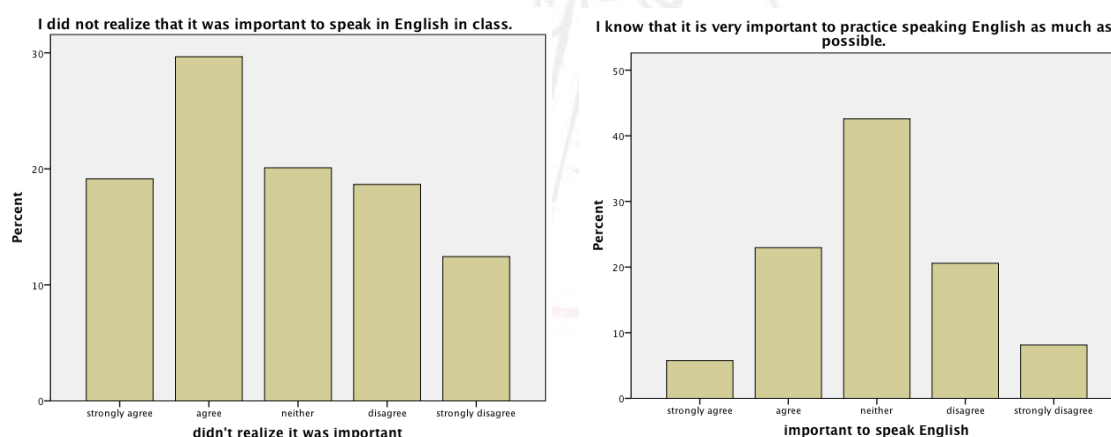
Solution

It would be valuable for teachers to explain explicitly to students at the beginning of the course why students need to practice speaking in English. It seems that some students did not realize that their speaking skills would not improve without speaking.

Including Speaking in the Course Evaluation

46% of students stated that they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they spoke Japanese when they did not need to speak English to get a good grade. On the other hand 41%

stated that they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that they try to speak English if their grade depends on it. Although this does not seem like a strong result, in both cases a large percentage stated that they neither 'agree' nor 'disagree'. This indicated to me that the students were somewhat instrumentally motivated, but not strongly. This would make sense to me in Japan, where it is difficult to enter university, but relatively easy to graduate. Students want to pass their courses, but are not so focused on getting a high grade. Including some sort of clear evaluation of spoken effort and ability might increase their motivation to speak in English during the class. This might be in the form of rewards for speaking English or punishments for not speaking English. I have always favored the carrot over the stick. I think students genuinely want to improve their spoken English skills, punishing them for using Japanese, especially when this study has indicated that affective factors and language ability may be the reasons that students use Japanese, would not be productive. Classes with speaking tests and graded presentations encourage students to speak in English.
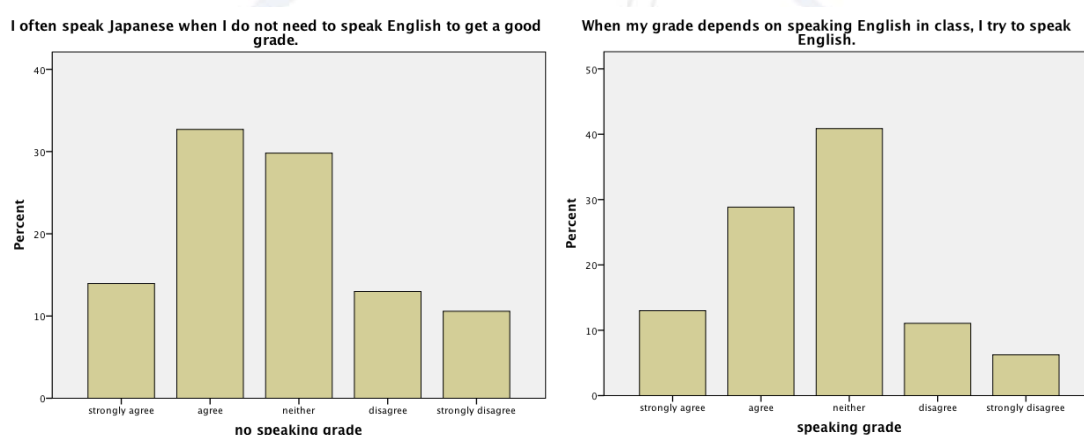
In Conclusion

I started this research with the aim to discover why students speak their native language during the English classes. As the results show a strong affective cause for native language use, this is very difficult to change. However I think that the questionnaire might have acted as a consciousness raising tool, encouraging students to check themselves for native language use. I never thought that the students made an active decision to use their native language, but by questioning students they might monitor themselves for native language use.

As the strongest reason that students use their native language in the class is probably affective, classroom atmosphere and management are crucial to encourage English usage in the language classroom. A variety of techniques could help, the most important being to create an English-speaking atmosphere from the start of the course. Making students feel that they are in a different environment can change their attitudes. If specialized 'English only' rooms are available this can be very effective. Task level and design are also crucial in encouraging students to speak in English. In terms of spoken activities aiming at a slightly lower level might aid oral communication. Finally encouraging students to speak English by including it in the course evaluation might also have an effect. The lack of oral English on university entrance tests and internationally recognized tests, such as TOEIC and TOEFL gives the impression that speaking English is not as important as some of the other skills. In

recent years there has been an effort to include more oral aspects, but it is time consuming and difficult with large numbers of students.

The purpose of this study was to move the 'blame' for speaking in their native language away from the students, and to give teachers ideas on class management and task design that would encourage oral communication. I hope that it offers teachers some insight into what they can do, rather than either giving up and accepting mostly native language use, or becoming frustrated with the students. In the future I would like ot implement some of the solutions presented in this paper to see if the percentage of native language in the English classroom could be changed.

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Appendix A

Speaking Japanese in an English Class Questionnaire

Please answer this honestly about your feelings and reasons for using Japanese in the English class.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I often speak Japanese when the lesson is too difficult, and I cannot do the task in English. 学習内容が難しすぎて、なかなか英語では対応できないから授業中日本語で話す。	1	2	3	4	5
2. I often speak Japanese when I do not need to speak English to get a good grade. 授業で英語を話さなくても、最終的には良い点がとれるから授業中日本語で話す。	1	2	3	4	5
3. I did not realize that it was important to speak in English in class. 英語で話す必要がないと思うから授業中日本語で話す。	1	2	3	4	5
4. I feel uncomfortable speaking English because all my friends speak Japanese. 友達が皆授業中、日本語で話しているから自分も日本語で話す。	1	2	3	4	5
5. In the past all my English classes were conducted in Japanese, so I am accustomed to speaking Japanese in English classes. 過去の英語の授業では皆日本語で話していたから、それに慣れてしまった。	1	2	3	4	5
6. When the task is not too difficult I try to speak English. 学習内容があまり難しくなければ、授業中英語で話す。	1	2	3	4	5
7. When my grade depends on speaking English in class, I try to speak English. 授業中英語で話さないと良い点がとれなければ、授業中英語で話す。	1	2	3	4	5
8. I know that it is very important to practice speaking English as much as possible. 英語で話す必要性がしっかり理解できているから、授業中英語で話す。	1	2	3	4	5
9. I feel comfortable speaking English with my friends in the English class. 友達と気楽に英語で話せる。	1	2	3	4	5
10. My English teachers have always tried to speak English in class so I am used to speaking English in class. 過去の英語の授業では、皆英語を話していたからそれに慣れた。	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B

In the past all my English classes were conducted in Japanese, so I am accustomed to speaking Japanese in English classes.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	67	32.1	32.1	32.1
	agree	89	42.6	42.6	74.6
	neither	34	16.3	16.3	90.9
	disagree	14	6.7	6.7	97.6
	strongly disagree	5	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	209	100.0	100.0	

My English teachers have always tried to speak English in class so I am used to speaking English in class.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	5	2.4	2.4	2.4
	agree	10	4.8	4.8	7.2
	neither	20	9.6	9.6	16.7
	disagree	69	33.0	33.0	49.8
	strongly disagree	105	50.2	50.2	100.0
	Total	209	100.0	100.0	

I feel uncomfortable speaking English because all my friends speak Japanese.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	31	14.8	14.8	14.8
	agree	98	46.9	46.9	61.7
	neither	66	31.6	31.6	93.3
	disagree	9	4.3	4.3	97.6
	strongly disagree	5	2.4	2.4	100.0
	Total	209	100.0	100.0	

I feel comfortable speaking English with my friends in the English class.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	5	2.4	2.4	2.4
	agree	16	7.7	7.7	10.0
	neither	39	18.7	18.7	28.7

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
disagree	86	41.1	41.1	69.9
strongly disagree	63	30.1	30.1	100.0
Total	209	100.0	100.0	

I often speak Japanese when the lesson is too difficult, and I cannot do the task in English.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	38	18.2	18.3	18.3
	agree	99	47.4	47.6	65.9
	neither	50	23.9	24.0	89.9
	disagree	17	8.1	8.2	98.1
	strongly disagree	4	1.9	1.9	100.0
	Total	208	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		209	100.0		

When the task is not too difficult I try to speak English.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
strongly agree	32	15.3	15.3	15.3
agree	73	34.9	34.9	50.2
neither	65	31.1	31.1	81.3
disagree	28	13.4	13.4	94.7
strongly disagree	11	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	209	100.0	100.0	

I know that it is very important to practice speaking English as much as possible.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	12	5.7	5.7	5.7
	agree	48	23.0	23.0	28.7
	neither	89	42.6	42.6	71.3
	disagree	43	20.6	20.6	91.9
	strongly disagree	17	8.1	8.1	100.0
	Total	209	100.0	100.0	

I did not realize that it was important to speak in English in class.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	40	19.1	19.1	19.1
	agree	62	29.7	29.7	48.8
	neither	42	20.1	20.1	68.9
	disagree	39	18.7	18.7	87.6
	strongly disagree	26	12.4	12.4	100.0
	Total	209	100.0	100.0	

I often speak Japanese when I do not need to speak English to get a good grade.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	29	13.9	13.9	13.9
	agree	68	32.5	32.7	46.6
	neither	62	29.7	29.8	76.4
	disagree	27	12.9	13.0	89.4
	strongly disagree	22	10.5	10.6	100.0
	Total	208	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		209	100.0		

When my grade depends on speaking English in class, I try to speak English.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	strongly agree	27	12.9	13.0	13.0
	agree	60	28.7	28.8	41.8
	neither	85	40.7	40.9	82.7
	disagree	23	11.0	11.1	93.8
	strongly disagree	13	6.2	6.3	100.0
	Total	208	99.5	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.5		
Total		209	100.0		