

Action Research on Collaborating Mother Tongue and Foreign Languages in EFL Materials Development

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Abstract: *This paper aims to highlight the necessity and significance of collaborating mother tongue and foreign languages in English as a Foreign (EFL) classrooms, as this can enrich learners' metalinguistic awareness and awaken their language awareness, yielding an effective use of both mother tongue and foreign languages reciprocally. The purpose is to illustrate a new approach for EFL education by elaborating upon recent action research initiatives. In East Asian EFL countries, there is a growing tendency to reinforce the distinction between English as a Second Language (ESL) and EFL teaching and learning, and thus the applicability of formerly preferred ESL teaching methods is being reconsidered. As an imperative rule, the "English-only" policy has come under question, while the essential role that mother tongue plays in developing language awareness tends to be underestimated. Therefore, this paper proposes a valid approach to collaborating mother tongue and foreign languages in EFL education by introducing metalinguistic awareness activities and activities that lead towards an "awakening to language". The goal is to provide learners with different viewpoints on language structure and function, so as to be aware of the richness and power of language. A case study is conducted as action research with 7th graders in a Japanese junior high school. Lesson flow and learners' reflective writings are used to verify the applicability of collaborating mother tongue and foreign languages in EFL classrooms.*

Keywords: *EFL education, metalinguistic awareness, language awareness, materials development, pluralistic language approach*

1. Introduction: Role of Mother Tongue in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning

The distinctions between EFL and ESL started to be realized in the 1960s (Okihara, 2011). Different terms were used to make such distinctions, in accordance with the prevalence of English teaching in a worldwide context. Kachru (1982, 1992) classified 'world Englishes' into three concentric circles to demonstrate different socio-cultural environments where English is used and taught. Similarly, Holliday (1994a, b) used the two terms BANA and TESEP to make a distinction between two types of educational contexts in various countries: BANA refers to Britain, Australia and North America, where English language teaching is mostly of a private nature much like a daily commodity product, which is similar to Kachru's concept of "inner circle" within his established concentric circles of English. TESEP refers to state education, either in tertiary institutions, or secondary and elementary schools in countries where English teaching is associated with national public education, which relates to Kachru's definitions of "outer circle" and "expanding circle".

In East Asian EFL countries, there is a growing tendency to reinforce the distinction between ESL and EFL teaching and learning, so the applicability of formerly preferred ESL teaching methods is being reconsidered. As an imperative rule, the "English-only" policy has come under question, while the essential role that mother tongue plays in developing language awareness tends to be underestimated. Relating target language to learners' mother tongue, Cook (2010) pointed out the value of translation for most language learners by reviewing best practices from the last 100 years of language teaching. Given the results of comparative studies of various methods, he argued that translation provided learners with an academic metalanguage and a deeper understanding of the nature of language and language use. Wang (2012, 2018) examined how mother tongues were dealt with in EFL textbooks in South Korea, Japan and China, and showed that mother tongue is not fully used as a language learning resource other than in instruction and explanation.

The significance, however, of incorporating mother tongue and foreign language has been acknowledged in national language policy. The Japanese EFL curriculum guidelines for 2020 assert the importance of "knowing the differences between English and Japanese, and noticing the fun and richness of language", and "noticing the differences in word order between Japanese and English" (MEXT, 2018). This resonates with mother tongue language curriculum, which suggests that "from the viewpoint of improving linguistic competence, learners should actively engage in relationships with other subjects, such as foreign language activities and foreign language departments, and so on, so as to increase the effectiveness of guidance". This aspect of collaborating mother tongue with foreign language makes for a compelling case for this current action research.

2. Literature Review

Effect of Foreign Language Learning on Mother Tongue Proficiency

In contexts where English is taught as a second language, especially in the case of immigrants living in English-speaking countries, more exposure to English means less exposure to one's mother tongue. High proficiency in ESL is necessarily attained by sacrificing exposure to mother tongue, which is called the *balance effect* (Macnamara,

1966). However, this is not the case in the context of individuals that learn English as a foreign language within monolingual speaking countries. Vygotsky (1962) claimed learning a foreign language facilitated mastering the higher forms of the mother tongue, which leads to awareness of linguistic operations. Cummins' (1978, 1979) interdependence hypothesis inferred transfer existed in a two-way direction linking mother tongue with target language in a bilingual context.

The *deep structure hypothesis* (Hill, 1970) states that learning a foreign language can have positive effects on mother tongue skills, since learning can occur at a more abstract and deeper level beyond that of superficial linguistic similarities. For example, if we compare Japanese and English, they are said to be drastically different languages. Apart from clear differences in word order and phonemes, Japanese language is agglutinative, whereas English is relatively independent. In the same way, Chinese, Japanese Kanji characters are ideograms, whereas the English alphabet letters represent phonograms. Although on the surface there are no immediate similarities between Japanese and English, Chomsky's (1981) *generative grammar* theories claim that common syntax structures exist in all natural languages. Hence it is possible that EFL learning has positive effects on the learning and understanding of Japanese as mother tongue, especially at the more abstract and deeper levels of the mind.

According to an international survey targeting 120,000 learners in 18 countries, it was found that the more people speak their mother tongue together with their target language, the better their academic abilities at school were (Agirdag & Vanlaar, 2016). Also, when mastering a foreign language, Ortega (2018) found out that we should place more importance on the value of the mother tongue. Ojima, Nagai, Taya & Otsu (2011) designed an experiment based on the *event-related potential* (ERP) technique to study the effect of EFL on mother tongue usage. This technique involves measuring electrical activity in the brains of learners. The researchers compared Japanese adults who had either high or low proficiency in English by monitoring their brain reactions to linguistic stimuli. These stimuli consisted of spoken sentences in Japanese which contained syntactic violations. The results showed that Japanese individuals with high English proficiency had a stronger response to syntactic violations in Japanese than those who had low proficiency in English. This study provided empirical evidence of positive correlation between foreign language and mother tongue proficiency.

Metalinguistic Awareness in EFL Teaching and Learning

The positive transfers existing between foreign language and mother tongue involve metalinguistic awareness which is considered a fundamental linguistic competence in learning all languages. The learning language awareness movement in European countries from the 1980s is one of the defining moments that placed emphasis on the intellectual value of learning a foreign language. To solve the problems of the unpopularity of ESL, decline of English ability, and discrimination against minority languages in the U.K., a new holistic language program titled "language awareness education" was introduced to connect mother tongue and foreign language education as a "new language" subject (Hawkins, 1984). This is an educational program that focuses on raising language awareness of linguistic topics for the sake of understanding linguistic universality and variability in multi-ethnic and multicultural contexts. Tunmer, Herriman and Nesdale (1988) defined metalinguistic awareness as an awareness of the underlying linguistic

nature of language use by objectifying and reflecting on features of the language system. Tunmer and Bowey (1984) divided metalinguistic awareness into four categories: phonological awareness, word awareness, form awareness and pragmatic awareness. Cook (2001) states that promoting language awareness helps to enhance one's language sense. In addition, it is argued that the plural lingual and multiculturalist education that is being increasingly cultivated in Europe can be applied to foreign language activities (Oyama, 2016). This involves "activities promoting language awareness" that encourage learners to observe, analyze and infer about their mother tongue and other languages.

In EFL context, Otsu and Torikai (2002) state that cultivation of English communication ability should not be the true purpose of English education in school. Instead, cultivation of authentic communication ability through enriching cross-cultural understanding and developing metalinguistic ability is argued as the real purpose. Moreover, Otsu (1989) proposes the first priority of EFL education is to enable students to notice that language is interesting, rich and fearful in reference with mother tongue education. In doing so, language is learned in an objective manner with metalinguistic awareness. Since English is viewed in relationship to the mother tongue, all languages are treated as having equal status. Linguistic and cultural relativity lead to a common acknowledgment of the diversity and richness of language as both mother tongue and foreign languages can be cultivated synergistically and effectively by encouraging learners to become aware of linguistic commonalities and the unique characteristics and mechanisms of each language.

Action Research Initiatives for Metalinguistic Development

The early seeds of this case study came from action research studies that were carried out through a collaboration between teachers from Japanese language departments and English departments in an innovative curriculum design project (Saito et al., 2013; Akita et al., 2013; Saito et al., 2014; Akita et al., 2014; Akita et al., 2015; Akita, Saito, Fujie, 2019). Together, they designed metalinguistic lessons focusing on language structures for senior-high school students, which were aimed at nurturing metalinguistic ability in English, Ancient Japanese and Modern Japanese language classes. Besides engaging with the process of classroom teaching and learning, they analyzed multiple factors such as students' pre- and post-task tests, students' work written during classes, and worksheet comments, while also engaging with the lesson study meetings in order to verify the possibilities and effectiveness of these metalinguistic awareness activities. As a result, it was proved that students' metalinguistic awareness of focused language forms had increased through designed collaborated lessons.

3. Collaborating Mother Tongue and Foreign Language to Enhance Metalinguistic Awareness

The Lessons: Analysing a Poem in Chinese and Japanese Language in EFL Classrooms

A case study consisting of analyzing a poem in Chinese and Japanese in EFL classrooms was carried out by collaborating with three Grade 7 English teachers in a Japanese junior high school. The lesson was conducted in two classes on 18th, January, 2019, and in three classes, in which two classes joined together for one lesson, on 16th,

December, 2019. In total, this case study consists of four lessons taught in total. I was asked to be a guest teacher to introduce Chinese culture in a unit called “Let’s go to Chinatown” from the current EFL textbook. However, a Chinese Kanji quiz (Figure 1) in the textbook inspired me to design a metalinguistic-oriented lesson drawing on the fascination around Kanji. I decided to design a lesson that would help students think deeply about the characteristics of Japanese language by exploring similarities and differences between Japanese and Chinese in an English class. While searching through Japanese language textbooks, I found a poem titled “Chunxiao” (spring dawn), firstly introduced in the 5th grade Japanese textbook then in the 8th grade Japanese textbook for detailed learning, which is also included in the Chinese language textbook for elementary schools (Figure 2). This poem was selected because it is common and familiar to Japanese learners.

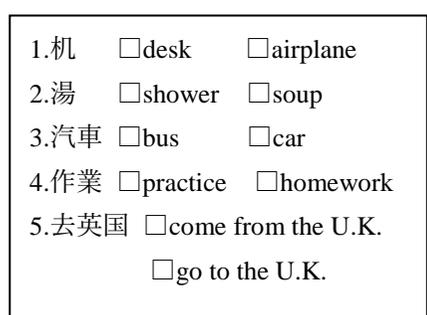


Figure 1: Chinese-English quiz



Figure 2: Materials used in the worksheet (Wang, 2019)

Lesson Process

School starts in April in Japan, so lessons conducted in December of 2020 were partially revised due to reflections on lessons in January of 2020. Four lessons were recorded, transcribed and categorized in terms of the four-stage-structured lesson analysis (Sarkar Arani, 2014). The flow of the lessons can be seen in Table 1. Regardless of revisions, there are four activities in common among these four classes. The first activity is to present the selected poem in Japanese from Japanese textbook, then present the Chinese version. Students are encouraged to read it in Chinese with the guest teacher, followed by a discussion in groups of four identifying the similarities and differences through comparing Japanese and Chinese poems. Given the fact that students have already learned this poem in the Japanese language, they are likely to focus on the language itself. The second activity is a Chinese Kanji quiz. Different quizzes rather than textbook examples are prepared, so students are engaged in a warm-up activity that builds a sense of achievement as they see they actually know some Chinese without having learned it specifically previously. The purpose of the Chinese Kanji-English quiz is to provide students comparative perspective to link three languages. The Karuta game is the third common activity in this case study. Students play *karuta* card games with Chinese words selected with the same Kanji, same meaning and similar pronunciation with Japanese words. This activity aims to stimulate students’ sense of distinguishing *onyomi* in Japanese and *pinyin* in Chinese. The last activity is to ask students what Chinese words they know and interact with their answers. This activity introduces a language in a familiar way, as

well as builds the relationship between guest teacher and the students.

Table 1: Lesson scripts in the case study

Category	Lesson Segments in January Class 7A(32 Ss), Class 7C(35 Ss)	Lesson Segments in December Class 7A'(34 Ss)+7C'(31 Ss)*, Class 7B(27 Ss)
Introduction	Several Ss are invited to write and pronounce their names in Chinese after guest teacher's self-introduction. Ss are asked to point out cities, where guest teacher has lived, from a Chinese map at hand as they hear cities in Chinese. Ss are asked to shout out what Chinese words they know. (15 minutes)	Ss shout out what Chinese words they know as warming up activity after the guest teacher is introduced. Ss are asked to answer Chinese-English quizzes by guessing the meanings. Ss sit if their answers are wrong until three students left standing up, whose names are taught in Chinese pronunciation. (15 minutes)
Development	The poem is presented and read in Japanese first, followed by its Chinese version. Ss are asked to write down similarities and disparities in groups with individual worksheets where they draw underlines and write notes. (10 minutes)	Karuta game is played in group of 4. Chinese cards are given to each group. Ss are asked to choose the correct Chinese word cards when they hear Chinese. The poem in Japanese is shown to Ss. It is read and interpreted by Ss' discussions. Then, the poem in Chinese is presented and read together with Ss guided by guest teacher. Worksheets were handed out, as Ss are asked to write down similarities and disparities they have noticed individually and in groups. (25 minutes)
Turn	Several Ss are called to speak out their opinions in the whole class. Ss are asked to choose the correct Chinese word cards when they hear Chinese in groups during a Karuta game. Ss answered Chinese quiz as a whole to choose correct pictures as they see Chinese Kanji words. Self-introduction in sentence pattern of S+V+O are shown in Chinese, English and Japanese. Several Ss are invited to do self-introduction in Chinese. (15 minutes)	Ss are free to share their opinions in groups; while two teachers walk around to facilitate. (5 minutes)
Conclusion	Ss are asked to write their notices, discoveries, questions or comments on the worksheet as reflections. (5 minutes)	There is no time during the lesson, so students are asked to write their notices, discoveries, questions or comments on the worksheet as reflections after the lesson.

(*Note that class 7A', 7C' are different from 7A,7C which were Grade 8 at the time.)

Analysis of Worksheet Answers and Reflective Writings

67 worksheets were collected from the two classes in January, and 92 worksheets gathered from the three classes in December. Students' answers to the similarities and differences of the poem in Chinese and Japanese, and reflective writings about what they had learned about Chinese, Japanese, and English from this lesson are analyzed in comparison to four categories proposed by Tunmer and Bowey's (1984): phonological awareness, word awareness, form awareness and pragmatic awareness. Phonological

awareness refers to phoneme segmentation, appreciation of rhyming and acoustic signals. Word awareness refers to word segmentation, word-referent differentiation, and appreciation of words and their meanings. Form awareness refers to structural representation of parser, linguistic or literal meaning. Pragmatic awareness refers to awareness to pragmatic and inferential rules, inconsistent communication failures, macrostructure, and intended meaning. In addition, one extra category, emotional awareness, emerged from analyzing students' reflections. In particular, emotional awareness refers to personal emotions toward language or language learning in general beyond specific linguistic items, involving interests and motivation. These categories provided the basis for classifying the various manifestations of metalinguistic awareness. Each entry was coded with a single main category, even when there was more than one category mentioned. Therefore, the frequencies equals the students' numbers in total. A blank category was created to show worksheets where either answers or reflections were absent. There were no totally blank worksheets collected. The main reason for blank worksheets was either that the teacher instructed students to write only either part or due to time limit.

4. Results& Discussion

As can be seen from Table 2, students' answers to the similarities and differences in the Chinese and Japanese versions of the poem were primarily in the category of word awareness (44%) and 16% of the reflective writings were in the same category. In total, one third of the answers and reflective writings were in the word awareness category and were attributed to the fact that Kanji as a common factor in both languages. Students identified Kanji meanings, Kanji writing, and poetic style and language components. The majority of the students noticed differences between simplified Chinese characters and traditional ones, between horizontal writing and vertical writing, and between Kanji numbers and space segmentation. They also discovered that the Japanese language includes Kanji from Chinese, katagana words from English and other foreign languages, as well as original hiragana. Some students commented that Japanese was more receptive and enriched, in contrast with alphabet-only English and kanji-only Chinese.

The phonological awareness category was identified in 23% of student answers and 27% in reflections. Similarities between Japanese *onyomi* and Chinese *pinyin* were noticed as well as differences in the phonics system which were addressed in specific symbols. It can be assumed that students are able to notice and analyze sound with phonemes in details when they are given appropriate materials. Given their prior knowledge about Kanji, some students listed different pronunciations of the same Kanji in Japanese while it seemed to have a single pronunciation in Chinese. Students' assumptions revealed that they applied what they learned from the Japanese language and other subjects to question the phonetic rules of a different language.

Answers and reflections categorized as pragmatic awareness were more inclusive as they included a mix of descriptions of each category with a focus on macrostructure. Linguistic distance among Chinese, Japanese and English and the relationship of language and culture were mentioned showing the unique characteristics of each language. Most of the comments stated that their images of Chinese and Japanese were revised through the lesson. This showed that getting opportunities to know and notice features of a different language engaged students to reconsider their understandings of languages including

mother tongue and foreign languages. Some students were able to deduce several unique characteristics of the Japanese language from their comparisons. Some of them wondered how katakana developed as a part of the Japanese language writing after Kanji was introduced in Japan. With English and Chinese being provided as reference languages to examine Japanese in an objective manner, not only did students pay attention to the unique features of Japanese language, but also felt inspired to inquire and deduce certain language rules based on the stimulus provided by the materials.

Form awareness had showed up the least in both answers (4%) and reflections (6%), which could be attributed to no specific instruction nor guidance about structures in the lesson. It could be said that students activated their form awareness by thinking and inferring by themselves when they were given the two poems. Sentence patterns, verb position and negative form were mainly discussed in this category among these three languages. Besides, some students noted that there were connecting words in Japanese, like “は”, “が”, “を”, “の”, “く”, but none of them was used in English (purely alphabet) nor Chinese (purely Kanji). This pointed out a unique characteristic of Japanese as an agglutinative language.

Emotion awareness (18%) was identified only in reflections because students were asked to write anything they felt or noticed in general. Most of the comments in this category expressed their interests and motivations to learn other languages, their respect for and questions about different languages and cultures, and their views to look at history and the relationship between Japan and China. It can be said that this lesson opened a door for students’ potential thinking and learning, not merely limited to linguistic features. Regarding the role of emotional motivation, emotion awareness is more likely to lead to students’ further learning in the future.

Table 2: Frequency of categories and examples

Category	Answers	Reflection
Phonological awareness	37(23%)	43(27%)
e.g.- Chinese has many sounds like [sha],[sho], [h]and [o]. There are also similar sounds like [yelai]. - [春] sounds [shun] in Japanese, but [chun] in Chinese. Pronunciations of [g] and [z] are different. - Chinese has more vowels and sounds rhythmical; Japanese sounds clear. - Each word has different tones in Chinese. There are symbols like musical notes [-] and [ˊ]. Japanese Kanji has more than one sound, like [(あかとき、あかつき、きょう) 晓=xiǎo;(お、こ、しょう) 小=xiǎo;(ふう、かぜ、かぎ) 風= fēng”, (ほう、ほこ、ほこさき) 鋒= fēng]. - Unlike Japanese, Chinese use English alphabets on top of it to show pronunciation.		
Word awareness	70(44%)	26(16%)
e.g. - Some Kanji are the same, but some are different in writing. Numbers of Kanji and space are different. - Chinese poem has 5 kanji only with comma and period in horizontal writing; Japanese poem has kanji, hiragana, and okurigana in vertical writing. Segmentations in a sentence are different. - There are same Kanji with same meaning in Chinese and Japanese, but same Kanji with different meanings also exist. - Different Kanji: [晓—晓、晓を覚えず—不觉晓、処—处、聞—闻、鳥—鸟、風—风]; Same Kanji:[春眠、雨、知、帝、声、多少、夜来、花落、孟浩然] - Some Kanji repeats in pair[処処=chu chu]. There are both English and Chinese words in Japanese.		
Form awareness	7(4%)	9(6%)

e.g.- Chinese put [不] in front of verb to express negative form; Japanese add ず behind the verb instead.		
- Verb comes first in Chinese and English, like [晓を覚えず→不觉 (おぼえず) 晓 (あかつき)].		
- Japanese is like S+~+V; Chinese and English are like S+V+~.		
- How to structure a sentence is different. The sequence of words is different.		
- There are no connecting words in Chinese nor English, like [の], and [を].		
Pragmatic awareness	25(16%)	35(22%)
e.g.- We have different languages in East Asia, but we could communicate with Kanji and gestures.		
- I found connections between Japanese and Chinese. We have similar Kanji, but different sentence structures, writing style and intonation. It may not be a problem to go to China.		
- I've noticed characteristics of Chinese and Japanese languages.		
- I've learnt meanings of Kanji are different due to cultural differences in social study lesson, but now I felt so different by comparing cultures from the view of Kanji in opposite.		
- Japanese sounds soft and use both Kanji and Hiragana; Chinese sounds angular and use only Kanji.		
Emotional awareness	0	29(18%)
e.g.- I'd like to learn more English as to look at other languages from the perspective of "English".		
-Japanese is originated from Chinese, but I am surprised how they turn out to be totally different now.		
-I'd like to research how to say my name in Chinese, and more Chinese words' meaning and sound.		
- It's important to respect other cultures and differences. I want to learn another country's culture and differences more.		
-It's a lesson for me to see a long time relationship between China and Japan.		
N/A:	20(13%)	17(11%)
Total	159(100%)	159(100%)

5. Conclusion

This case study examined the impact of newly designed lessons collaborating Japanese and Chinese in four English classes. These lessons were designed to provide students with opportunities to compare, analyze, categorize, and discover the similarities and differences between different languages for the purpose of developing metalinguistic awareness. The lessons, designed to incorporate a poem in Chinese and Japanese, were carried out in Grade 7 English classes in a Japanese junior high school. Students' worksheet answers and reflective writings during the lessons were collected and analyzed to clarify their metalinguistic awareness.

Through the analysis of students' answers and reflections written on worksheets, along with the processes of the classroom discourse, the effects of the designed lessons and students' metalinguistic awareness were manifested. It could be inferred from answers and reflections that students felt attracted to the richness of language, felt engaged in the exploration of language systems, and were able to recognize the importance of various languages for participating in global communication. The results also showed that the designed lessons awakened students' metalinguistic awareness in various potential aspects, not only on focused linguistic features but also on cultural and educational factors. Metalinguistic awareness activities collaborating mother tongue and foreign languages can be meaningful and applicable in developing metalinguistic awareness. More case studies are needed to practice these collaborations among mother tongue and foreign languages in different age groups from the perspective of materials development. However, it is recommended that further research exploring the process of how boosted metalinguistic awareness transfers to linguistic competency in both mother tongue and foreign language be done. This will be considered for future research.

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