Japanese High School Students' Beliefs About Translation Into Japanese and Into English: A Survey Result

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要　　旨

　外国語教育における学習者の母語（L1）使用に関する研究の中で、訳の有用性についての生徒の信念（ビリーフ）を調査している研究は数少ない。本研究の目的は、日本語を母語とし、外国語として英語（EFL）を学ぶ高校生の訳（日本語訳および英訳）に対するビリーフを明らかにすることである。生徒に配布されたアンケートでは、（1）英語学習における訳と（2）将来の英語力における訳ついてのビリーフを自由記述式で回答することを求めた。グラウンデッド・セオリー・アプローチ（GTA）を参考にデータを分析した結果、（1）と（2）で得られた生徒の回答から、訳の5つの役割と、2つのタイプのビリーフを抽出できた。生徒のビリーフは本人の学習経験に大きく左右されるため結果の一般化は難しいが、本研究が今まで議論されなかった訳の有用性における実証的研究の第一歩となることを期待したい。

Keywords: Students' Beliefs, Translation Into L1, Translation Into L2

1.　Introduction

　　　When hearing or being asked about translation in language classrooms, people would express their various positive and negative opinions about it, reflecting their own experiences as a learner. Even though language teachers have used students' first languages (L1's) in their classrooms, there are some people having critical views on the role of the L1. In fact, there have been controversies over its role in foreign language (L2) classrooms (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009). Numerous studies investigated what kinds of positive effects would be obtained when the L1 is used (Atkinson, 1987; Butzkamm, 2003; Cook 2008; Hall & Cook, 2013; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Liu, Ahn, Baek, & Han, 2004; Macaro, 2000, 2001). Ellis and Shintani (2014) indicated both positive and negative L1 influences. Furthermore, there are a few studies on teachers' beliefs (Omote, 2012; Sasajima & Borg, 2009; Tanabe, 2011) and learners' beliefs (Azami & Yamaguchi, 2015; Veiga, 2013) about using the L1 in the L2 classroom. Overviewing plentiful studies on the L1 use and

discussing when to use the L1, Hall and Cook (2012) claim that translation can be one of the ways to use the L1 and that it begins to come under the spotlight. Cook (2010) proposes "Translation in Language Teaching," a teaching method which incorporates translation in an effective way, making his own position toward translation clear: "Being able to translate is a major component of bilingual communicative competence. …translation should be a part of language teaching because all students will need to translate" (p. 20). There are three concepts supporting the use of translation as in the following.

1.1 Three Concepts

The first concept supporting the use of translation is bilingualization (Widdowson, 2003). In his opinion, when a teacher teaches an L2 as a foreign language, the students have at least one language in their minds. The goal of teaching the L2 as a school subject, therefore, is builingualism, and he focuses on its learning process – bilingualization – where students' L1 contacts with the L2. The language contact includes recourse to L1 and translation. This concept focuses more on language learning in L2 classrooms, but the next one discusses language learning for its actual use outside the classroom.

The second concept is linguistic multi-competence (LMC) (Cook, 2008). He defines it as "the knowledge of two languages in the same mind" (p. 15). In LMC, one of the goals of language learning is to become an L2 user, who "uses more than one language, at whatever level (p. 171)" outside the classroom as distinguished from an L2 learner who learns an L2 inside the classroom. The L2 user also has a distinct language system in the mind, unlike that of a native speaker of L2. Cook includes translation as a skill that L2 users uniquely possess (p. 172). Murahata and Murahata (2016) acknowledge that this concept does include not only codeswitching but also translation. This idea corresponds to that of Widdowson's bilingualization in that both talk about learners' cognitive aspects of L2 learning.

The third concept is mediation described in *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (*CEFR*) (Council of Europe, 2001). In *CEFR*, mediation enables communication between persons who do not share the same language through translation or interpretation, a paraphrase, summary, or record. It is one of the language activities that L2 learners or users perform along with production, reception, and interaction to activate their communicative competence. Thus, it plays an important role in "the normal linguistic functioning" (p. 14). This concept explains practical use of translation outside the classroom.

1.2　Students' Beliefs on Translation

Translation has been considered as one that impedes learning in the field of Second Language Acquisition (Hall & Cook, 2012). Yet, there has been growing interest in the use of translation as an asset, and an increasing number of studies on students' beliefs about translation have been making an appearance to prove whether or not it does hamper their learning.

Liao's (2006) study is one example that explored students' beliefs. In his study, 351 students in their fourth and fifth year of a five-year junior college in Taiwan answered a questionnaire about how they felt about translation and whether they used it as a learning strategy. 10 participants out of 351 had an interview with the researcher after answering the questionnaire. The result was that a large number of students held positive beliefs about translation. Particularly, they believed that translation helped learn L2 vocabulary, idioms, phrases, reading, and writing. However, some of the more proficient students considered it having a negative influence on their learning; thus, they used less translation. Those who thought translation positively tended to use translation as a learning strategy.

Fernandez Guerra (2014) investigated 155 university students' attitudes toward translation tasks through quantitative analysis in Spain. The research revealed students' positive attitudes toward translation. Many viewed it as a motivating and useful activity to learn the cultural and linguistic aspects of L2 and to enhance their meta-linguistic ability. Unlike Liao's study, the more advanced students chose the translation task as one of the most preferable ones.

Veiga (2013) explored students' perception about using L1 and translation exercises in foreign language classrooms, targeting 12 to 19 year old Portuguese students – high school students in the Portuguese school system – who were taking either English or French as a foreign language at that time. The study showed that the majority of the students preferred translation activities. Also, most of the students felt the necessity of translation exercises in their learning process. Many also felt a sense of security when their L1 was used. Responding to the students' positive perception on translation revealed in her study, Veiga concluded, "As a mediation activity, translation should be reassessed in foreign language teaching practices" (Findings section, para. 5).

1.3　Background to the Current Research

All the three studies overviewed above (i.e., Liao (2006), Fernandez Guerra (2014), and Veiga (2013)) were conducted outside of Japan. There has been no research published on Japanese students' beliefs about

translation.

In Japan, there have been criticisms over translation items appearing in university English entrance examinations. The translation items include Translation into Japanese (L1) items, Translation into English (L2) items, and Explanation in L1 items. It is said that the exams have a negative washback on L2-only teaching and assessment in high school, where teachers try to teach the L2 to work towards the goals described in the current Course of Study (Mizohata, 2015a, 2015b; Shizuka, 2006). In response to the criticisms, counter criticisms are made, claiming that the L2-only teaching approach could result in an increasing number of students who do not like L2 (Erikawa & Kubota, 2015; Science Council of Japan, 2016). Language awareness activities, such as translation and contrasting L2 with L1, help raise the students' motivation toward the L2 (Science Council of Japan, 2016). Further, Sugiyama (2013) criticizes the recent trend of communication-oriented classes. She also asserts the importance of *Bunpo-yakudoku*, a grammar-translation teaching method unique to the English education in Japan, in order to enhance Japanese students' overall communicative competence. Erikawa, Saito, Torikai, and Otsu (2014) question the goals of English education in the Japanese school system, criticizing the L2-only approach for favoring only a small percentage of students in school. The current Course of Study for high schools (MEXT, 2009) seems to try to promote the L2-only teaching approach with a little use of the students' L1. Moreover, there has been no reference to the role of translation in the various language policies announced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) (2003; 2013; 2014a; 2014b; 2015), nor in the next Course of Study (MEXT, 2016). A recent study revealed that Japanese high school English teachers who have to follow the Course of Study held positive, negative, and ambivalent beliefs about the translation items on the national university English entrance examinations (Masuda, 2016).

The aim of the present study is, thus, to investigate Japanese high school students' beliefs about translation into Japanese (L1) and into English (L2). As the three studies on students' beliefs about translation reviewed above, this research tries to explore whether positive attitudes toward translation used in language classrooms are identified and, when identified, classify the roles of translation in language learning. Moreover, it investigates students' beliefs about translation in terms of future L2 abilities.

2.　Method

2.1　Participants

　　The participants of the present study are first graders at a public high school in Prefecture A in Japan. The number of the students who graduated from this school in the last academic year and entered a national, prefectural or other public university was approximately 100 out of 280 (35.7%). Thus, the school curriculum is organized for the entrance examinations and their mock tests. The first grade students are required to take two different English classes, called "English Communication I" (four lessons a week), and "English Expressions I" (two lessons a week). They started learning English as a part of foreign language activity at the 5th grade of elementary school; they have been exposed to the language for seven years, except for those who started learning it at an earlier age. Most of the students are at the beginning level of L2, and only a few students are at a slightly higher L2 level.

　　At this school, the present author teaches "English Expressions I" in two classes – 39 students in one class and 40 in the other. In November 2016, she distributed a questionnaire to each of the 79 students at the end of a class and asked them to complete it at home and to bring it to the following class. She asked two open-ended questions in order to extract various beliefs from them: (1) You translate into Japanese and into English in your English classes. Do you think translation in class is useful for your English learning? Why do you think so?, and (2) Please imagine "a Japanese adult who has English abilities." Think of the skills (speaking etc.) he or she possesses. Do you think translation into Japanese and into English would be included in the skills? Why do you think so? The questions were asked and answered in Japanese.

2.2　Data Analysis

　　70 responses (89%) were collected and used for data analysis. The responses to the two questions were analyzed separately, and students' beliefs obtained from each of the questions were categorized based on Grounded Theory Approach (GTA) respectively. Though there are various ways of data analyses by GTA, the present research referred to the steps explained in a book about the qualitative research methods (Takeuchi & Mizumoto, 2014). The steps are to (1) group similar beliefs together, (2) label the categories as each represents a particular group, and (3) make categories again, when needed, to abstract those in (2). Unlike the formal steps of GTA, a core category was not extracted because the purpose of the current study was not to explain a particular phenomenon, but identify the roles of translation. However, those three steps were

conducted repeatedly so that the students' beliefs would be more accurately reflected on the roles. Furthermore, the grouping and labeling were checked by the author's supervisor several times. Disagreement that occurred was discussed before extracting the following five roles of translation in L2 learning and two groups of students reflecting the roles of translation in future L2 abilities.

3.   Findings

3.1   Beliefs About Usefulness of Translation

As for the first question on the questionnaire, 68 students think that both translation into L1 and into L2 are useful in their L2 learning. The rest of the students think that both are useful in some degree. In other words, all the students responded to the questionnaire have positive beliefs toward translation used in their L2 classrooms. This result is consistent with those of Liao's (2006), Fernandez Guerra's (2014), and Veiga's (2013) study in that more positive beliefs are identified than negative ones. None of the students in this study has made negative comments on translation.

Figure 1 below indicates five roles of translation identified in the students' beliefs about the usefulness of translation in their foreign language classrooms. The roles are "Translation Into L1 for Understanding L2 Meanings," "Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Understanding L2 Structures," "Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Self-study," "Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Affective Support," and "Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Examination Preparation." There were some comments that could not be classified, so not all of the students' comments are reflected in the roles.
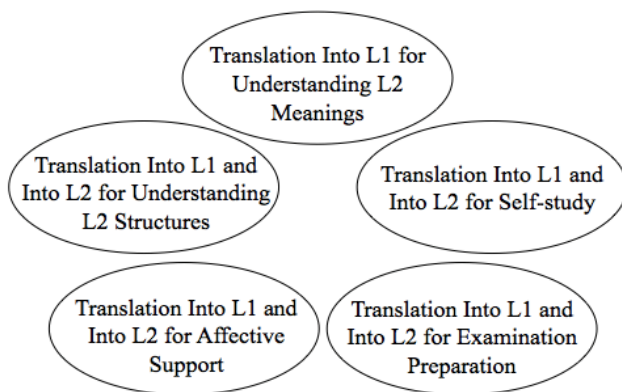

Figure 1. Five roles of translation in L2 learning. (made by the author)

3.1.1　Translation Into L1 for Understanding L2 Meanings

30 students believe that translation into L1 is useful for understanding the meanings of L2 vocabulary, sentences, and texts as a whole. Some of the responses that express this role are shown below. The students' responses were translated into English by the present author.

> Students 7 and 26: I can understand the meanings of English words.
>
> Student 20: Some sentences can be translated into L1 and L2 directly, but there are others that cannot be translated directly. When the teachers do translation for us, I think myself, "I get it!"
>
> Student 43: It is difficult to understand overall meanings and nuances of English texts without translation.

3.1.2　Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Understanding L2 Structures

9 students hold a belief that translation into L1 and into L2 are useful for understanding L2 grammar and sentence patterns.

> Students 63 and 65: I can understand how to use English grammar.
>
> Student 42: As for translation into Japanese, I can understand English sentence patterns well, thinking, "This is how this kind of a sentence can be translated."
>
> Student 53: I can learn the word order of the English language through questions where I need to put certain English words in the correct order.

3.1.3　Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Self-study

5 students conceive of translation into L1 and into L2 positively in terms of their self-study.

> Student 70: Translating into Japanese and into English in class helps me translate more smoothly, save time, for example, for looking up words, and learn English more effectively during my self-study.
>
> Student 13: During my study, I can answer questions without taking time if the questions are about clauses, etc. that I learned through translation in class.

3.1.4 Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Affective Support

6 students have expressed their beliefs in terms of the affective aspect of their L2 learning. Their motivation toward learning the L2 gets higher by translating into L1 and into L2.

> Student 1: I think translation into English in class helps me build up proactive attitudes toward learning English.
>
> Student 9: I feel a sense of achievement by knowing the meanings of all the sentences given and find them interesting.
>
> Student 48: I won't understand the flow of a story if I read it in English, but it's easy to understand when the story is translated into Japanese. When the translated story is interesting for me, my motivation toward reading in English gets higher.

3.1.5 Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Examination Preparation

13 students believe that translation into L1 and into L2 are useful for preparations for upcoming examinations. Examinations include term tests and mock tests that the students are required to take in high school and university entrance examinations that they will take at the end of the third grade.

> Student 30: Translation into Japanese and into English that I do in class will help me answer questions appearing in university entrance examinations.
>
> Student 44: I think translation done in both of my English classes will be helpful for reading sections in mock tests and rapid reading.
>
> Student 66: There are many questions that I need to answer in English on term tests and mock tests so I first need to understand their contents by translating them into Japanese.

3.2 Beliefs About Translation in Future L2 Abilities

As for the second question on the questionnaire, the students responded to it while imagining a Japanese adult who has L2 abilities. Two kinds of beliefs are identified based on their responses as shown in Figure 2: "Bilingual Group" and "Monolingual Group." Each group is explained as follows.
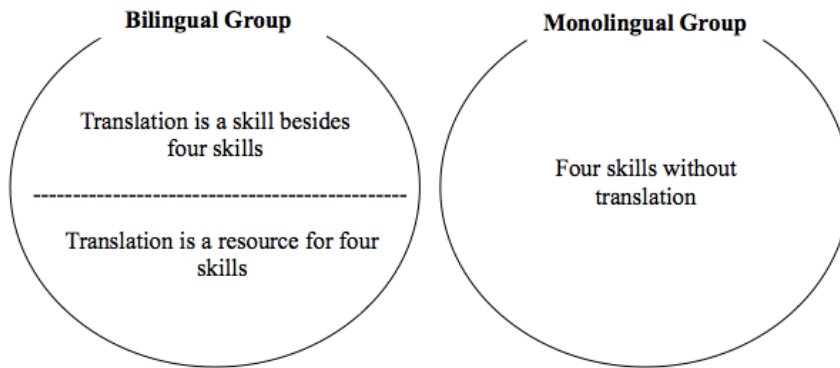
Figure 2. Two types of beliefs about translation in future L2 abilities. (made by the author)

3.2.1　Bilingual Group

65 out of 70 students believe that both translation into L1 and into L2 are included in the L2 abilities that a Japanese adult possesses. As shown in Figure 2, this Bilingual Group is further divided into two subgroups: One with those who consider translation as a skill, and the other with those who consider it as a resource to support the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).

In the first subgroup, translation can be seen as a mediation skill that a Japanese adult with L2 abilities needs to have in modern society. Shown below are some of the responses that express this belief.

Student 43: When thinking about a scene where there is a Japanese child, for example, and that child cannot understand any other language other than Japanese, translation is necessary to get messages across. This does not limit to children because not all Japanese people can understand English.

Student 2: If a Japanese person can translate into Japanese and English, s/he can help other Japanese people who do not understand English and foreigners who do not understand Japanese.

Student 21: If a Japanese adult can translate into Japanese and English, s/he can get conversations going as an interpreter for those who do not know English.

The other students in the first subgroup believe that translation is a skill that a Japanese adult would use whenever necessary.

Student 4: A Japanese person having English abilities means possessing speaking skills. I think a person possessing speaking skills can naturally do translation into Japanese and English.

Student 50: The more exposed a Japanese adult is to English, the more naturally s/he can do translation into Japanese and English.

Student 14: I think a Japanese adult translating into Japanese and into English can be seen as one who has English abilities.

Student 49: If translation into Japanese and into English are not included as English abilities, it cannot say that one is a bilingual speaker.

Those in the second subgroup believe that a Japanese adult with L2 abilities would use translation as a resource to support his or her four skills for successful communication in L2. Many of the students in this subgroup imagine a Japanese adult speaking with an interlocutor in L2. The following parentheses ([ ]) show the skill(s) supported by translation into L1 and into L2.

Student 15: I think a Japanese adult who cannot translate into English and into Japanese does not understand (English) sentence structures and can not converse with people in an understandable way. [Speaking]

Student 22: When one translates what the other has said in English into Japanese, understands it really well, and then translates what s/he wants to say in Japanese into English, it would be easier to communicate with other people, I think. [Listening and Speaking]

Student 53: I would feel hopeless when I actually go to an English-speaking country and cannot read words on maps even though I could speak the language. [Reading]

Student 19: Because the person is Japanese, if s/he cannot translate into Japanese and into English, s/he cannot express his/her opinion. [Speaking and Writing]

3.2.2 Monolingual Group

4 students have been categorized in the second group, Monolingual Group. They include neither translation into L1 nor into L2 in the L2 abilities that a Japanese adult has and seem to imagine him/her making full use of the four skills to communicate with others like a native or near-native speaker of L2. Each of their responses is shown as in the following.

Student 28: I am kind of thinking that translation into English is more needed. Because I think it is best to speak English naturally, translation into Japanese is not necessary as much as translation into English.

Student 66: In conversation, it is important to rapidly understand what the others said and respond to it in order to communicate with other people. So, when a Japanese adult talks to a foreigner, s/he should understand and respond without translating into Japanese.

Student 12: Even if s/he cannot translate into Japanese and English, a Japanese adult who keeps conversation going in English does have English abilities.

Student 60: Just because a Japanese adult can do an English conversation doesn't mean s/he can do translation into Japanese and English. The longer an English text becomes, the more difficult it is to translate into Japanese and into English.

4. Discussion

4.1 Translation in L2 Learning

The first three roles of translation in Figure 1, "Translation Into L1 for Understanding L2 Meanings," "Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Understanding L2 Structures," and "Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Self-study," help the students' language learning cognitively. The roles, thus, support Widdowson's bilingualization (2003) in that the students contact their L1 with L2 in their learning process using translation. He perfectly phrases this situation as, in a foreign language classroom, "learners are busy on their own agenda of bringing the two languages together" (p. 154). Butzkamm (2003) also claims that to turn off learners' L1 in their minds is impossible because connecting L1 and L2 is natural for the learners of L2 as a foreign language. He adds, "For beginners, becoming aware of meanings automatically involves connecting them with the MT [mother tongue]" (p. 31). Most of the students in this study, therefore, connect L1 and L2 in their minds to understand L2 meanings and structures in class and during their self-study. Cook (2010) uses the term, a bridge, to show that translation links the familiar to the unfamiliar, the known to the unknown. He also claims that language learners "need that bridge to maintain the links between their languages and identity" (p. 155). If MEXT wants to promote establishing identity as a Japanese individual in the next Course of Study (2016), effective use of translation in language classrooms should lead to achieving the goal because language

reflects who we are.

While Veiga (2013) revealed that the use of L1 in the foreign language classroom leads to the students' sense of security, this current research revealed that the use of translation does affect students' emotional aspects of language learning. Fuzzy or ambiguous translation does not at all help the students understand L2 meanings and structures, answer examination items, or support their self-study. Hence, their motivation toward language learning would be lowered. Higher motivation is one of the keys to the students' successful language learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In other words, translation can be a key to learning a foreign language successfully.

As opposed to the above roles of translation, the students' beliefs about the role, "Translation Into L1 and Into L2 for Examination Preparation," have been formed by outside influences. The students' experiences in high school appear to largely influence their positive beliefs about translation for examination preparation. In the school term tests that they have taken at the school of this study, they were required to translate into L1 and into L2 for the "English Communication I" tests and translate into L2 for the "English Expressions I" tests. In mock tests for university entrance examinations, which they have taken three times since they entered the high school, there were translation into L2 items. Even though no translation into L1 items have appeared in the mock tests, there are times when they have to translate into L1 in their minds in order to concretely explain an underlined word or phrase in an L2 text with a limited number of L1 words. Since they know what kinds of questions appear in those tests, they seemed to believe that translation into L1 and into L2 in class are useful. Some students (e.g., Student 30) believed that translation into L1 and into L2 in class are useful for university entrance examinations they will take in the near future, where 36.43% of translation items were on the examinations administered in 2015 (Fukazawa, 2016).

4.2 Translation in Future L2 Abilities

For future L2 abilities, the two groups in Figure 2 can be discussed based on the language activities described in *CEFR* (Council of Europe, 2001). As it tells that the language activities of production, reception, and interaction, or mediation help achieve one's communicative competence, the students in this study seem to think about future L2 abilities in terms of those activities. Some of the students in the Bilingual Group viewed translation into L1 and into L2 as mediation activities: Translation itself is a goal to be accomplished. The others saw both types of translation as a means to make production, reception, and interaction activities successful: Translation is a means for facilitating those language activities. The students in this group seem to

consider translation as what Japanese people uniquely have. This idea connects well with the concept of the L2 user (Cook, 2008), who can translate and code-switch whenever needed using their multi-competence.

The difference between the two groups is that whether or not translation is a means to keep communication going. The students in the Monolingual Group did not believe that translation is needed when they converse with interlocutors in L2. They seem to have imagined a Japanese adult with L2 abilities like a native or near-native speaker of L2. However, all of them believed that translation is useful in L2 learning. What this means is that they may differentiate between language learning and language use. In addition, those in this group appear to put an emphasis on automaticity in language use. Brown (2007) puts automaticity as "a timely movement of the control of a few language forms into the automatic, fluent processing of a relatively unlimited number of language forms" (p. 64). This definition reflects the students' beliefs.

Another interesting point to be noted is that most of the students in both groups imagined a Japanese adult with a proficient speaking ability. Only a few students referred to L2 reading and writing skills. This tendency is consistent with the result of a survey administered for 6,294 Japanese junior high and high school students (Benesse Educational Research and Development Institute, 2014). According to the survey, approximately 90% of the respondents felt that it is cool to be able to speak English. Over the half of the respondents chose the item, "conversing in English a lot," as what they think is the most important in studying English among many other choices, such as remembering English vocabulary, and getting a high score on a test.

5.　Conclusion

The present study revealed students' beliefs about translation. Based on their beliefs about the usefulness of translation for L2 learning, five roles of translation were identified. Further, their beliefs about whether translation should be included in future L2 abilities were grouped together.

However, there are two research limitations in the present study. First, since students' beliefs are largely influenced by individual learning experiences and the number of participants was too small, the classification made in this study cannot be generalized. It is suggested that beliefs of much more students across various high schools be collected for generalization. Second, unlike other studies on students' beliefs about translation, this study did not divide students into different English proficiency levels. This was because there was no significant difference in their levels, and the number of the students was too small to group proficient students. Thus, a future study needs to address these limitations and generalize the roles of translation in language

learning and in future L2 abilities from the learner perspective. Despite the limitations, the present study has hopefully moved one step forward to deal with the issue that has not been discussed openly – the roles of translation in foreign language classrooms and how the roles can be connected with future foreign language abilities outside the classrooms.

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