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Balancing Language and Content: A Study of Negotiation Learning in Applied English Courses

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of subject content versus the English language on students whose first language is non-English. Focusing on Applied English juniors and above, the course in question required negotiation learning through English. Surprisingly, students often reverted to their native language (Mandarin Chinese) during scenario discussions and role-play, despite the assumption that English should be exclusively used. The semester-end survey, based on a 5-point Likert scale, revealed several key findings as follows. First, the course facilitated diverse problem-solving approaches. Secondly, negotiation skills were effectively put into practice. Thirdly, role-play activities played a critical role. Fourthly, teacher-delivered lectures enhanced content understanding. Interestingly, when asked about continuous English usage, approval significantly dropped when foreign students were present. These results suggest that prioritizing knowledge acquisition, skill internalization, and higher-order abilities is essential, even if the “whole English” pattern is not strictly enforced during class.

KEYWORDS: bilingual education, EFL, TESOL, scaffolding, CLIL, bargaining

Introduction

Negotiation like many other subjects that require skills and hands-on experiences is challenging to average undergraduates, let alone those who need or have to learn it via another language. The use of a foreign language by classroom participants could be psychological (Pysarchyk & Yamshynska, 2015; Ali et al., 2020), pedagogical (Ali, 2020; Cripps, et al., 2021), professional (Zumor, 2019; Ibrahim & Ali, 2021), and polyfunctional (Hakim, 2021; Eusafzai, 2022) impactful. This paper, intended to explore under such a circumstance how high the ratio of subject content expressed and discussed in L2 to those in L1 was more acceptable to college students, aims to help pedagogical practitioners rethink the L2-only mode when it is taken into account that EMI courses should not be conducted at the expense of knowledge acquisition.

The course entitled *English for Negotiation* offered by the Applied English department at a private university aims to equip students with the ability to apply English to negotiation. However, the subject content provided, like those in any other specialized field, would be already extremely hard to acquire for L2 students if it was taught in L1. In the class offered in the fall semester of 2021, for example, the classroom participants were primarily Mandarin-speaking students as Applied English majors, most of whom were in the business module of the department. English was L2, whether Mandarin Chinese was their L1, and all participants, including students and the teacher, were problematically supposed to use English *all the time* during class. There were two reasons why this class “must” be an EMI course. First, students signing up for it had to learn negotiation while practicing English; secondly, not all of them were Taiwanese locals with the fact that a couple of students could be foreigners whose L1 was not necessarily English. The assumption that ensued makes sense: English should be in use

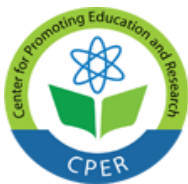
during class minimally enough to ensure effective knowledge impartation.

What seemed also challenging to this course included the size of the class (over 70 students, the number of which might be reduced after the midterm week), the English proficiency held by students in general near or below B2 level, and how often or how much English was supposed to be used to facilitate learning efficiency.

Literature Review

In negotiation pedagogy, communication competence including moderation, adaptation, and joint action decisively mattered to effective instruction for learners (Putnam & Powers, 2015). Being extremely challenging, negotiation instruction required interdisciplinary practices and a benign circle conducted by learners from input to output (Lewicki, 1986). Negotiation could be better taught when learners were engaged face to face in class, and its pedagogical approach had become more oriented toward interaction and problem solutions (Harvard Law School). Negotiation styles could be condensed to “labels” in expedient use for law majors in college as beginners in learning how to negotiate (Schneider, 2012).

For high school students, negotiation could be better learned when students expose themselves more often to everyday practice whether at school or anywhere else (Marlborough School, 2019). For learners below college, negotiation could be better taught by adding components that help entertain them and serve as positive incentives to class (Dodge, 2019). Giving participants chances to observe themselves and interact with teammates, collaborative simulations were found to be among the best ways to help learners apply skills to negotiation practices (Alavoine et al., 2013). For self-learners in negotiation, a comparative look at two or more scenarios where a tactic



might be put to appropriate use was highly recommended (Kellogg School of Management).

As to negotiation, more attention had been paid to how it worked in a classroom where learners were engaged in learning English as a foreign language (Rees, 1998; Morita, 2004; Tran, 2011; Hosni, 2014; Palma, 2014; Yufrizal, 2015; Jiang, 2016; Hartono, 2017; Koizumi, 2017; Saboonchi & Mahmoudi, 2017; Ali, 2021). However, the existing data do not take into account cases where English as a vehicular language appears to be a barrier to EFL learners, let alone how negotiation can be better taught in a situation where students are non-native English speakers.

Research Questions

This paper aims to tap the students who finished the course as aforementioned for an exploration of any clues regarding how negotiation could be better taught/learned now that English was neither their mother tongue nor official language. The questions as follows are believed to help EMI instructors develop an approach to ways that are favorable to EFL learners in a negotiation class.

How do pedagogical methods often adopted in negotiation classes such as knowledge impartation, group discussion, and role-play simulations affect EFL learners? Which of these methods proves effective despite the whole English environment? How often is English expected to be used in class if there is or there is no classroom participant whose mother tongue or official language is non-Mandarin? And what do both mean? How do any scaffoldings unintentionally allowed in class help EFL students learn negotiation? And what does this mean?

Methodology-Participants

72 Applied English majors as EFL learners took the negotiation class, where 71% (n=51) of them responded to the questionnaire although incentivized by a bonus. Among the questionnaire respondents, 76.5% (n=39) were females, while 23.5% (n=12) were males. Their names were known to no one but the teacher in charge. 88.2% (n=45) of the respondents were college juniors, and 9.8% (n=5) were seniors or above. None of them were English native speakers.

The teacher in charge of the class in question held the edge in his regular and close observation of classroom participants. His weakness was the limited ability to interpret numbers or percentages through statistics; his strength lay in being able to decipher key figures that seem hardly seen through by non-participants.

Methodology-Research Tool

The questionnaire was designed through Google Forms, giving 30 items.¹ The first 3 items asked about personal information. Item 4 to item 14 asked about students' general feedback on the course. The other 16 items were based on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1, 2, 3, 4, to 5 [from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"]). Items 15 to 18 asked about opinions on teacher-delivered lectures. The items from 19 to 24

asked about opinions on the scenario sessions. The last 6 items asked about how valuable the course was to the students in specific aspects. For each item, respondents should choose the best/most appropriate answer except for the items between 10 and 14, where more answers were allowed.

Methodology-Procedure

The questionnaire was conducted online by the end of the semester during class. The students were welcome to attend class or stay anywhere else for the survey before the end of class as long as with access to the Internet with an electronic device. The teacher in charge gave instructions at the beginning of the survey session, and the respondents were aware that he would be ready to help before the end of class if there were any questions or problems. After completion of the survey, the teacher was responsible for data collection and data interpretation based on the results.

Results and Data Analysis

82.4% (n=42) of the respondents preferred more time spent on knowledge acquisition, that is, unilateral input from teacher-delivered lectures to more time spent on knowledge output (referred to as scenario discussions and role plays). The data may indicate the majority of L2 participants were desperate for the teacher's help for a better understanding of key terms and basic ideas since the classroom situation emphasized EMI. On the contrary, 58.8% (n=30) of the respondents preferred more daily scores allocated to knowledge output sessions instead of those of knowledge input. This piece of information reflects how challenging and reliably assessable the output sessions appeared to L2 students.

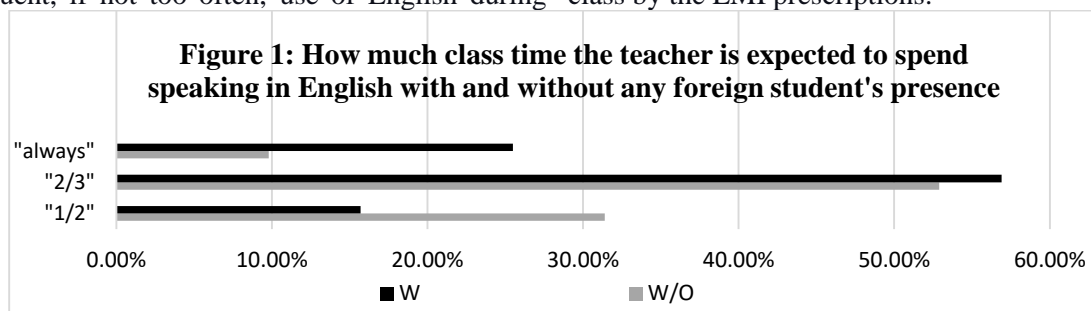
Regarding how often scenario discussion was expected to be held as compared with scenario role plays, the former received more responses from "equally held" (54.9%; n=28) and from "more often" (23.5%; n=12). 41.2% (n=21) of the respondents preferred more daily scores allocated to scenario discussion sessions instead of those of scenario role plays, while 37.3% (n=19) preferred daily scores equally allocated to both sessions. These pieces of information reflect even a quasi-preparation - scenario discussion - for the "real thing (negotiation simulation)" was more appreciated by L2 students than directly engaging them in the role plays.

Were there any students whose L1 was non-Chinese in class, the percentages of those who agreed to how often English was supposed to be spoken by the teacher were 25.5% (n=13) favoring "all the time", 56.9% (n=29) favoring "two-thirds of the class time", and 15.7% (n=8) favoring fifty-fifty. To follow up on this item, weren't there any students whose L1 was non-Chinese, the percentages separately changed to 9.8% (n=5), 52.9% (n=27), and 31.4% (n=16). (Figure 1) These data reflect, in the eyes of L2 students, the key reason why the "whole English" mode should be carried out was the presence of foreign classmates not being able to speak Chinese but use English as the communication platform; meanwhile, L2 students widely

¹ On request for academic review, the author of this paper is prepared to share the survey results. The address for accessing the survey results is provided below: <https://forms.gle/9PUEsk6E93nuGere7>.

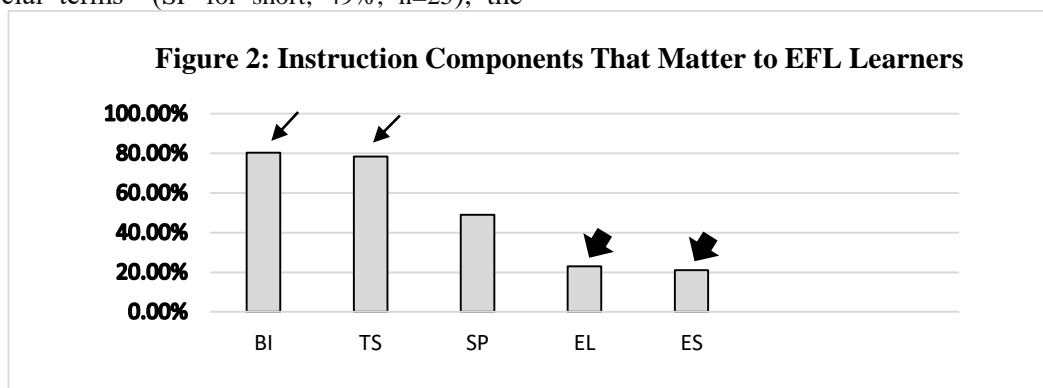


accepted the frequent, if not too often, use of English during class by the EMI prescriptions.



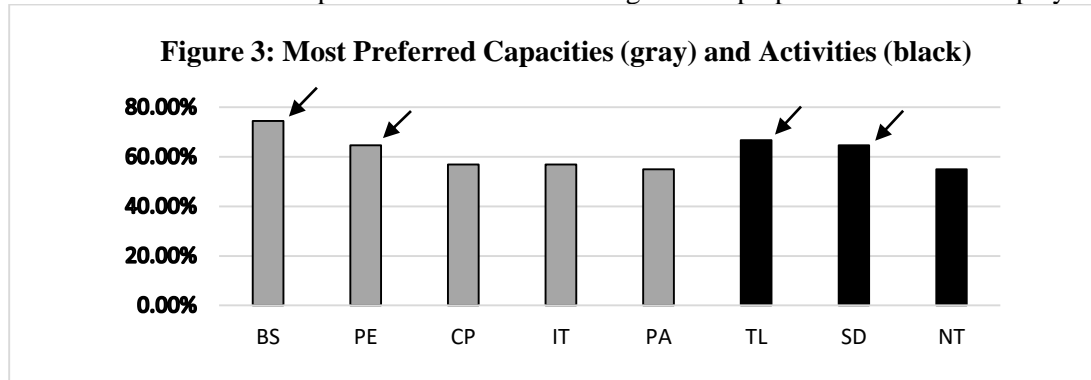
Regarding which components during class mattered to the respondents, who were free to choose as many answers already set as possible, the highest numbers were located at the acquisition of “basic ideas and notions” (BI for short; 80.4%; n=41) and of “tactics and skills” (TS for short; 78.4%; n=40), while the second highest numbers were located at the acquisition of “special terms” (SP for short; 49%; n=25), the

chances to get drilled in “English listening” (EL for short; 45.1%; n=23), and the chances to get drilled in “English speaking” (ES for short; 41.2%; n=21). These data correspond to the course objects already set for L2 Applied English majors and confirm equal, if not greater, importance of knowledge acquisition and skill enhancement. (Figure 2).



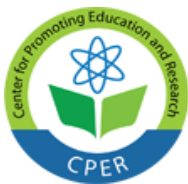
Regarding which capacities the respondents expected to develop in themselves, more responses were targeted at “better understanding” of the subject content (BS for short; 74.5%; n=38), “professional use of English” (PE for short; 64.7%; n=33), “self-confidence in the profession” and “independent thinking” (CP and IT for short; 56.9%; n=29), and “professional attitude” (PA for short; 54.9%; n=28). These data further explain L2 students’ care for higher-order abilities in a professional class

characterized by EMI. Regarding which activities in class proved helpful in learning, more responses were located at “teacher-delivered lectures” (TL for short; 66.7%; n=34), “scenario discussion” (SD for short; 64.7%; n=33), “note-taking based on teacher-delivered lectures” (NT for short; 54.9%; n=28), and “scenario role-play” (47.1%; n=24). Again, these statistics show that the input of basic ideas plays a crucial role in negotiation preparation before role-play activities. (Figure 3).



As to which activities in class appeared challenging, the most frequently chosen answers include “scenario role-play” (66.7%; n=34), “scenario discussion” (51%; n=26), and

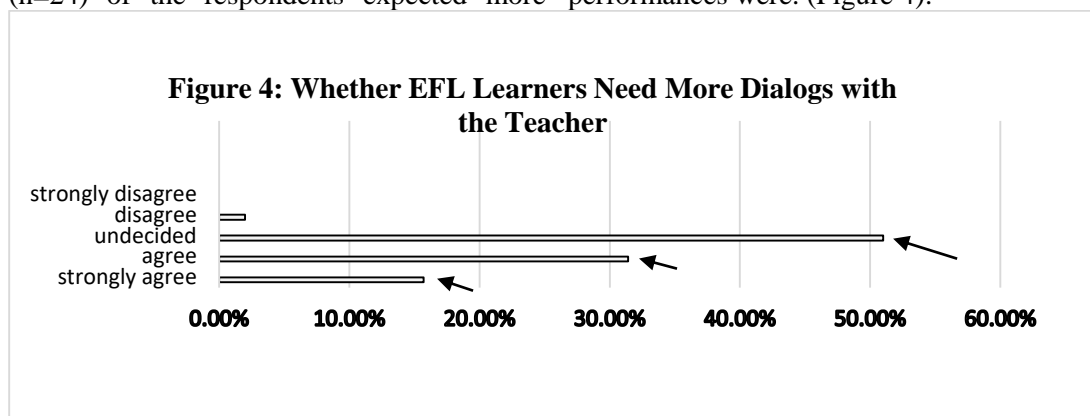
“listening to teacher-delivered lectures” (37.3%; n=19). The negative factors that affected learning significantly were “attention less paid to lectures” (52.9%; n=27), “lesson notes



less reviewed” (51%; n=26), and “lesson notes less reviewed before scenarios” (29.4%; n=15). These data indicate not only that the use of English is the de facto barrier to content internalization despite being built-in as a vehicular language for all participants, but also that external incentives which might help bring about learner autonomy should have been considered in the activity “game rule” and classroom management.

Most respondents believed teacher-delivered lectures served as a positive factor that helped them “better understand the content” (86.3%; n=44) and fostered “curiosity and interest” (56.9%; n=29 despite another 37.3% [n=19] showing no opinion). 47.1% (n=24) of the respondents expected more

dialogs with the teacher during the lecture sessions, but much more (51%; n=26) of the respondents showed no opinion on this. 35.3% (n=18) of the respondents expected more quizzes or questions raised by the teacher for the lecture sessions, but much more (45.1%; n=23) of the respondents remained undecided about this. The numbers shown above indicate now that EMI remained the principal, whatever pop-up requests made to unexpectedly cause more stress on L2 students were not very appreciated. However, this does not mean that the role played by the teacher as a guide was undermined; nevertheless, it depended on how digestible and intelligible the pedagogical performances were. (Figure 4).



Scenario discussion was believed to have helped most respondents “think deeper about basic ideas and concepts” (78.5%; n=40), “think deeper about tactics and skills” (72.6%; n=37), and “make clear of what” they learn (80.4%; n=41). Most respondents regarded scenario role play as a great chance to put “basic ideas and concepts” (82.3%; n=42) and “tactics and skills” (80.4%; n=41) into practice and “make clear of what” they learn (78.4%; n=40). Although challenging, the output sessions were regarded by L2 students as indispensable since a profession like negotiation requires being put into practice to assure quality learning outcomes.

Most respondents believed that the value of this class lay in negotiation put to practical use (66.6%; n=34 despite another 33.3% [n=17] showing no opinion), negotiation put to professional use (78.5%; n=40), negotiation conducted in English (62.7%; n=32), and English applied to negotiation (68.6%; n=35), while most respondents also believed that the value of this class lied in the provision of chances to sharpen the use of English in negotiation (74.5%; n=38 despite another 21.6% [n=11] showing no opinion) and provision of “insights into or approaches to” problem solution (84.3%; n=43). This negotiation class, through these data, proved to be one that was expected to help learn certain higher-order skills and the professional use of English, the importance of which was beyond negotiation in itself.

Discussion

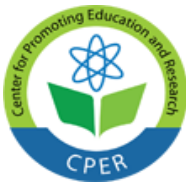
Regarding the case in question, more time expected to be spent on knowledge input than on knowledge output might

account for EFL learners’ demand for linguistic preparation and extended immersion in the EMI context. This is reflected by scenario discussion expected to be a little more often conducted than scenario role plays, also referred to as uncertainty or risk avoidance because scenario practices are nothing less than assessment tasks for students.

Further, more daily scores expected to be allocated to knowledge output might account for scenario sessions seen as a feasible and reliable assessment tool. A little more daily scores expected to be allocated to scenario role plays than to scenario discussions reflected an assumption commonly held by L2 students the more challenging an assessment task, the higher the scores it was supposed to promise.

The presence of international students became an incentive that made EFL learners more willing to accept challenges characterized by English as the medium of instruction in class. The classroom components that mattered to EFL learners accounted for students’ tendency to ensure their mastery of negotiation in English before prioritizing mastery of English in negotiation.

In addition, the teacher served as a guide through giving lectures and designing and facilitating scenario assessments, and both activities were regarded as equally important to learning negotiation. Knowledge output sessions were more challenging for EFL learners. However, such difficulty could be mitigated by paying more attention to teacher-delivered lectures, concentrating on note-taking accordingly and going over the notes for scenario practices. Knowledge input could



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turn out to be more effective if dialogs between students and the teacher were timely but moderately conducted. But this does not mean more challenges such as quizzes, although helpful, were expected to be imposed on L2 students. In addition, indispensable to EFL learners in negotiation, scenario assessments were like an arena where students through trials and errors could retrieve, internalize, and deepen what they had learned.

These EFL learners tended to see the negotiation class as valuable when it proved to be practical and professional, which means they would like to learn what seemed more applicable and skillful and to become more “professional” than ever no matter how much or well English was used during class. They also tended to compromise or be pragmatic despite their hope to practice English and wish to improve English in a class characterized by high practicality. Nevertheless, they enjoyed very much any insights or problem-solving approaches ever provided with peers’ teamwork and the teacher’s help during class.

What has been asserted is that the use of L1 in EMI contexts through codeswitching/translanguaging should be purposeful (Moncada-Comas, 2022) and strategically oriented toward knowledge acquisition and supportive of English practices (Zhang & Wei, 2021). Therefore, not only does this

paper correspond to such findings, but it to some extent justifies the use of L1 in EMI courses while reflecting what supposedly matters to L2 students including more time to be spent on output preparation and English-only immersion and more chances to practice English in a manner that encourages classroom learners to try instead of discouraging them or imposing unhelpful pressure on them.

Conclusion

When it comes to learning negotiation, to which concept comprehension served as the initial access, according to the case in this study, L2 learners in English were in higher demand for knowledge input than advanced or L1 learners in English before stepping into any skill-drilling sessions that required the internalization of the subject content.

This negotiation class for which L2 English learners signed up could have been better taught through contextual scaffoldings without having to stress linguistic refinement despite EMI implementation. This means non-English components such as body language, visual/pictorial elements, and even L1 (Mandarin Chinese for example) could have more often served as expedients intended to help. In short, for these EFL negotiation learners, the more progress they made, the less need for EMI scaffoldings they were in.

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