Learners' Use of First Language in Small Group Discussions in a Japanese EFL Class: A Sociocultural Perspective

Yuko SAKAI
Tokai University

This study investigated how Japanese high school students learning English used their first language (L1) during collaborative dialogue, while engaging in small group discussions. To determine the functions of the learners' L1 in their second language (L2) learning, a sociocultural framework was used. An analysis of the learners' spoken data and interviews with them revealed that learners used L1 to talk about language and tasks, as well as in their interpersonal relations. Additionally, L1 private speech, which was found in some participants' speech, showed its potential role in directing their thinking to regulate their learning processes. Learners use of L1 as a mediator of L2 learning on inter- and intra-psychological planes affirmed the sociocultural perspectives of language learning and suggested that learners' L1 is a beneficial resource to maximize communicative potential, whereby learners could maintain verbal interaction in group contexts.

本研究では，日本の高校生英語学習者のグループディスカッションにおける協働的対話に見られる日本語使用を調査した。社会文化理論の視点から英語学習における学習者の日本語の機能を分析した。学習者の音声データと再生刺激法を用いたインタビューをもとにデータを分析した結果，学習者の日本語は，言語・内容学習やタスク管理，そして人間関係の調整機能の他，思考を整理するプライベートスピーチの機能を果たしていた。学習者の日本語は，グループ活動におけることばのやりとりにおいて，認知的サポートを与え，コミュニケーションを促進するなど，英語学習において貴重なリソースであることがわかった。

This article examines English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' use of their first language (L1) observed in collaborative dialogue, while engaging in group discussions. Collaborative dialogue is "dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem-solving and knowledge-building" (Swain, 2000, p. 102). The study focuses on peer-peer dialogue while the learners are involving in speaking activities in small groups and investigates the learners' speech data in order to understand what learners are actually doing through

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collaborative dialogue in EFL classrooms. Much research has reported peer-peer collaborative dialogue to be an important aspect of second language (L2) learning, claiming that the social interaction occurring during interactive language learning tasks produces social and cognitive gains (Ohta, 1995, 2001; Storch, 2001; Swain et al., 2002). It has been shown that communicative activities in small groups not only provide learners with more opportunities than teacher-centered whole-class teaching methods to use L2 but that their language development also proceeds through social interaction when learners encounter linguistic problems and attempt to solve them together (Donato, 1994; Long, 1985, 1996; Ohta, 1995; Swain, 2000, 2005).

One of the concerns regarding small group work is that learners might use their L1 excessively, to such an extent as to deprive them of the opportunity to use the L2. However, researchers who take a sociocultural theory (SCT) of mind perspective claim that L2 development progresses through a process of social interaction, where language, whether L1, L2 or both, mediates the learning; thus, the learners' L1 should be viewed as a resource in second language acquisition (SLA) (Antón & DiCamilla, 1999; Ohta, 1995; Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Moreover, through the theoretical lens of translanguaging, learners' flexible use of linguistic resources in classrooms has recently been reported to have positive consequences for learning in multilingual contexts (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Wei, 2014; Stern, 1992). Translanguaging emphasizes the importance of investigating not "language" itself as a fixed and complete system, but the "language practices" that users create during their own meaning making processes (García, 2009). In this view, learners' use of L1 along with L2 can be regarded as "the full range of linguistic performances of multilingual language users" (Wei, 2010, p. 1223) as they create language by utilizing their available linguistic resources.

The present study takes the stance that learners' flexible use of L1 in L2 classrooms demonstrates their entire linguistic repertoire (García & Wei, 2014), and investigates the functions of the learners' L1 in their L2 learning. A sociocultural perspective was adopted to explore how the learners scaffold one another using L1, as they engage in peer group discussions or an opinion exchange task (Pica et al., 1999, p. 19). Based on the learners' speech data and stimulus recall interviews with each participant, the study illustrates that learners' language choice is flexible and dynamic during collaborative interaction. It first reviews studies on learners' use of L1 in group or pair work, followed by studies conducted from a sociocultural perspective that are particularly relevant to this study. Thereafter, the study reports different L1 functions found in the sample's collaborative activities and concludes with a discussion of L1 as a resource for L2 learning within a sociocultural framework.

Background

Learners' Use of L1 in Group/Pair Work in EFL Classrooms

In the past, the dominant view on the use of L1 in L2 learning was that it should be discouraged as it was considered to be "language transfer" (e.g., Gass & Selinker, 1983; Kellerman, 1995; Odlin, 1989). Teachers have sometimes been reluctant to incorporate group work into their teaching repertoire as students use L1 or frequently code-switch in group situations (Guk & Kellogg, 2007). However, in a context where learners share the same L1, the learners' use of L1 or code-switching behavior is a natural phenomenon in EFL classrooms (cf. Hall & Cook, 2012).

Previous studies report that group work activities, such as opinion exchange tasks (Chen & Hird, 2006; Hird, 1996), a pair role-play task (Hancock, 1997), or jigsaw and information gap tasks (Yokoyama, 2014), tend to create a context where learners produce informal and interpersonal forms of communication, which often results in more use of L1 for procedural-asides, than L2 for task-essentials.

Among the few studies which dealt with opinion exchange tasks performed by EFL learners, Hird (1996) examined Chinese EFL learners in a middle school in Hong Kong engaging in small group (four person) discussion tasks and reported that the learners' use of L1 (Chinese) had distinct function for opinion-exchange tasks (e.g., direct quotation, addressee specifications, reiteration, and asides) during the negotiation and management of discussions. However, Hird (1996) reported that the more learners became involved in the discussion's negotiation and the more they approached personal ownership of their learning, the less English was used.

Chen and Hird (2006) also observed Chinese EFL university learners engaging in opinion- exchange tasks and examined the learners' use of L1 in group discussions. They found that learners' switch from English to Chinese signaled a shift from a non-literal or performing frame to a literal or non-performing frame. In other words, L1 functioned to define "the boundary between 'on task' and 'off-task' behavior" (p. 215). They further state that, when learners are using L1 (such as when appealing to their peers for assistance), they momentarily abandon their role as participants in the English group discussion (non-literal role) and adopt their normal, authentic presence (literal).

As Ellis and Shintani (2014) state, in task-based language teaching classrooms where pair or group work is frequently incorporated, students often become so focused on achieving a task's goal that they frequently resort to L1 to resolve communication problems. In contrast to focused tasks, such as jigsaw or information gap tasks, which are frequently designed to accustom learners to the use of a specific linguistic feature, opinion-exchange tasks are meaning-focused and permit a number of possible outcomes related to a topic (Ellis, 2003). During group discussions, learners may rely more on

linguistic resources, such as L1, for comprehension and production to meet communicative needs. In summary, the abovementioned studies show that more authentic communicative situations, such as group discussions or the opinion exchange task examined in the present study tend to discourage the use of English for informal purposes (e.g., off-task talk) in EFL contexts.

Learners' Use of L1 in Translanguaging

The literature has acknowledged learners' use of L1 in L2 learning, which is typically observed under the notion of code-switching, as beneficial, and argued that L1 can be a cognitive and social tool that aids L2 learning (cf. Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012; Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). Code-switching, which is defined as "the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterances or conversation" (Grosjean, 1982, p. 145), is a characteristic feature of bilinguals' utterances and typically used as a communication strategy (Wei, 2000). However, in the traditional models of bilingualism, bilingual speakers were observed to utilize two separate language systems based on "the monolingual or fractional view" (Grosjean, 1989, p. 3). Grosjean questions the measurement of bilinguals' linguistic proficiency against monolingual standards and argues for a holistic view of the bilingual person as an "integrated whole" (1989, p. 6). As Ortega (2009) states, the monolingual bias based on traditional models of bilingualism persists in the field of second language acquisition.

The concept of translanguaging, which views language systems as fluid or lacking rigid boundaries, differs from that of code-switching in the sense that a bilingual linguistic repertoire is considered to consist of one entity that is unique to the speaker (García & Wei, 2014). According to García (2011), translanguaging is "the process by which bilingual students perform bilingually in the myriad multimodal ways of classrooms – reading, writing, taking notes, discussing, signing, etc." (p. 147), thus enabling bilinguals to perceive language choice as a part of the entire language repertoire. In addition, Wei (2018) explicitly states that translanguaging is a practice and "a process of knowledge construction that goes beyond language(s)" (p. 15). In contrast to code-switching, which is "rarely institutionally endorsed or pedagogically underpinned" (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 105), translanguaging is rooted in pedagogy and, through its practices, learners can unify their entire linguistic repertoire to negotiate and create meaning through interaction (García & Lin, 2016). In this view, learners' L1, as part of their full linguistic repertoire, is a valuable linguistic asset in the process of meaning-making and shaping knowledge and experience through language (cf. Swain, 2006).

Despite its frequent application in English as a second language settings, the pedagogical possibilities of translanguaging remain to be explored (cf. Aoyama, 2020;

Sano, 2018; Turnbull, 2018). As discussed by García and Kleyn (2016), a speaker's full linguistic repertoire is "constantly evolving in social interaction with others" in a translanguaging pedagogy, which is "always collaborative and student-centered" (p. 22). The authors then state that the "translanguaging design of the classroom must capitalize on collaboration among speakers" (p. 22) and recommend grouping students according to their home language backgrounds to maximize discussion and collaboration during tasks. This concept of translanguaging provides relevance to the perspective of SCT of the mind because both translanguaging and SCT value collaborative dialogue in social interaction during communicative language activities.

Learners' Use of L1 from a Sociocultural Perspective

Research on the function of L1 in peer interaction has been examined from the perspective of Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) SCT. It views cognition and knowledge as inherently social and dialogically constructed (Lantolf, 2012). From the perspective of SCT, "knowledge is not owned solely by the learner, but is also a property of social settings and the interface between person and social context" (Foster & Ohta, 2005, p. 403). Therefore, in a language classroom, learners need more social interaction with others, who may be experts or more capable peers, to attain their potential level of learning in the zone of proximal development (ZPD). In the ZPD, the learner, a novice, is provided assistance, known as "scaffolding" (Wood et al., 1976) by the expert so that the novice can perform beyond their actual level of development. Studies on peer interaction in L2 classrooms (e.g., Donato, 1994; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Ohta, 1995) have shown that scaffolding can also occur in peer interactions and reported that the expert's role in pair work can be fluid, with both learners taking turns to act as the expert. Hence, studies on group or pair work have shown that scaffolding can be collective (Donato, 1994) and that both the expert and novice can benefit from the interaction (Ohta, 1995).

Regarding the studies which focus on the functions of L1 in collaborative dialogue from the perspective of SCT, many have been conducted in the context of teaching writing (Antón & DiCamilla, 1999; DiCamilla & Antón, 2012; Storch & Wiggleworth, 2003), and some with speaking activities, such as information gap or jigsaw tasks (Brooks & Donato, 1994; Brooks et al., 1997). In general, the results of these studies suggest that using L1 provides learners with additional cognitive support to accomplish tasks through collaboration with others.

Antón and DiCamilla (1999), for example, examined functions of L1 use in the collaborative dialogue of five pairs of English L1 learners of Spanish engaged in a writing task. The study demonstrates how L1 was a powerful tool of semiotic mediation on an interpsychological plane and an intrapsychological plane (cf. Wertsch, 1985). On the

interpsychological plane, the L1 functioned as a cognitive tool for solving lexical or grammatical problems by providing scaffolding. The L1 also created a social space for the learners to develop a shared perspective on tasks (e.g., setting goals to achieve a task). On the intrapsychological plane, the L1 functioned as a private speech vehicle for externalizing or vocalizing their thoughts when encountering a difficult cognitive task. Among the various definitions of private speech, Lantolf (2000) says "private speech is not directed at any interlocutor but is intended for the speaker himself or herself" (p. 18). By function, it is a self-addressed form, or "speaking to understand" (Appel & Lantolf, 1994, p. 437). Ohta (2001) discusses the role of private speech as a component of the internalization process (cf. Saville-Troike, 1988), and for adult L2 learners, studies by Ohta (2001) and Centeno-Cortés and Jimenéz-Jimenéz (2004) reported that adult L2 learners' private speech in both L1 and L2 is a regulatory tool as learners develop increasing cognitive control of their learning.

A similar study by DiCamilla and Antón (2012) investigated the talk of English L1 learners of Spanish during collaborative writing tasks and identified four main functions of L1 (i.e., content, language, task management, and interpersonal relations) used by the learners to mediate their performance of the assigned task. The function of private speech, however, was not discussed in this study.

Though the majority of studies of the functions of L1 focused on adult language learners, Yaghobian et al.'s (2017) study is among the few studies that observed collaborative dialogue by relatively young learners (9th graders). Their study, based on functional categories used in DiCamilla and Antón (2012), investigated learners' L1 (Persian) use in an Iranian EFL school by observing learners' peer talk in pair or group work or whole-class interaction in a normal reading class, where students had to read sentences and answer questions in their group and finally to make their own sentences using the new words presented in the textbook. To manage this relatively complicated task, all learners were found to use L1 to reach an agreement on how to do the task in groups. It was also found that more proficient peers used L1 to provide support to their less proficient peers. In addition, the learners produced L1 intrapersonal speech to deal with more difficult tasks, serving both cognitive and affective functions. The results reveal that the L1 creates a context that allows more participation and collaboration, in which L1 and L2 mediate learners' mental processes and facilitate language learning.

To summarize, within a sociocultural framework, studies of learners' L1 use in small groups or pairs have generally found that it seems to serve social and metacognitive functions in the SLA process. However, until now, research into L1 use in learner-learner interaction has largely been conducted with adult English learners engaged in problem-solving tasks (e.g., jigsaw picture tasks) or in writing tasks, where the target

language forms are often predetermined. Little research has been conducted on collaborative dialogue by Japanese high school learners of English as they engaged in small group discussions, where the focus is more on expressing feelings or ideas than solving problems with L2. By examining learners' informal and less-constrained language use in group contexts, this study investigates how and in what contexts Japanese high school students use the L1, based on L1 functions observed during opinion exchange tasks. The following research question guided the present study:

RQ. What functions are served by Japanese EFL learners' use of L1 in inter- and intrapsychological speech during collaborative interactions in language classrooms?

Method

Participants

The participants were eight 12th grade high school learners of English enrolled in the English curriculum at a public high school in Japan. The English curriculum offers classes to develop students' practical language skills through various communicative activities, where using L2 is strongly encouraged in pair or group work. The course that was the setting for this research is an elective, *English Studies II,* a school-designed subject, which enrolled 23 learners with mixed abilities. Films or videos were often used as teaching materials to raise the students' awareness of cultural diversity, and opinion exchange tasks in pairs or groups were frequently adopted throughout the semester.

Two randomly chosen groups of four students participated in the study. Students in Group 1 will be referred to by the pseudonyms Kana, Yuta, Aki, and Shiho, and those in Group 2 as Noriko, Taka, Riko, and Aya. All participants were female, except for Yuta in Group 1 and Taka in Group 2. The students had a reasonable knowledge of vocabulary and grammar; however, oral communicative proficiency ranged from the upper-intermediate (i.e., B2 on the CEFR for Kana, Yuta, Noriko, and Taka) to intermediate (i.e., B1 on the CEFR for Aki, Shiho, Riko, and Aya) levels based on their recent EIKEN grades (cf. MEXT, 2018)[1]

Procedure

The study involved video recordings of spoken data, followed by stimulated recall interviews with each participant. Two sets of learners' speech samples (i.e., 45 minutes for each discussion) were collected as part of regular lessons; the total amount of data was 90 minutes. Participants discussed predetermined film-related topics in relation to

[1] Based on (MEXT, 2018), EIKEN Pre-1 corresponds to CEFR B2, while EIKEN 2 corresponds to CEFR.

films dealing with cultural diversity or cross-cultural issues. They were simply instructed to discuss the topics on the list without being required to discuss all the topics provided (see topic examples in Appendix 1). Students were encouraged to use English but were not challenged when they used their L1, even during the discussions.

Subsequently, stimulated recall interviews were conducted with individual participants to explore the reasons for their use of L1 and thus discover potential factors that influence their language choice (cf. Gass & Mackey, 2000). Interviews were conducted individually, in Japanese, within a week after the discussion. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Recorded videos were used as a prompt to help retrieve learners' memories so they could explain how they were performing a given task within a group.

Prior to the activity, the students were asked for permission for their discussion conversation and stimulated recall interviews to be recorded. They were informed that their performance and responses would not affect their grades and that their privacy would be respected. All participants signed consent forms to have their conversation and interviews recorded and for the data obtained from the recording to be used for research.

Data Coding and Analysis

The data used in this study were recorded and transcribed group conversations. The learners' spoken data were first transcribed, with AS-Unit as the unit of analysis. An AS-Unit is "a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause, or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause(s) associated with either" (Foster et al., 2000, p. 365). After identifying, for each unit, the learners' utterances containing Japanese, all the L1 utterances were coded for the function they seemed to have, although quantitative analysis of the learners' use of L1 was not the focus of this paper. Based on the functional categories of L1 discussed in previous research informed by SCT (e.g., DiCamilla & Antón, 2012; Yaghobian et al., 2017), we started with a working list of possible functions the L1 may serve. As well as the author, another researcher in the same field, a fluent speaker of Japanese and English, coded the transcripts, and there was an 85% agreement between the raters. When multiple functions were perceived, the functions were determined by referring to the participants' intent, which was extracted from the interviews. Based on the discussion between the two coders, primary function perceived was coded. The next section outlines the functions that seemed to reflect the principle reasons for the learners' L1 use, with examples extracted from the participants' speech data.

Results

Through a close and repeated examination of data, we finally arrived at a list of four main functions, including nine sub-functions that could most precisely capture language behaviors during opinion exchange tasks (Table 1).

In Table 1, the functions adopted to analyze the learners' use of L1 are shown in four main categories, namely, three L1 interpersonal functions, i.e., metatalk about language, metatalk about task, and interpersonal relations: and one L1 intrapersonal function, that of private speech. In the first main category, L1 in metatalk about language, we viewed language (form) and content as a single function. In contrast to the work of DiCamilla and Antón (2012), which examined learners' speech about the production of a writing task, an opinion exchange task focuses more on the delivery of meaning. Since there were many cases where a unit of utterance had both language and content mixed in learners' L1 speech, it was difficult to differentiate the learners' discussion data into form and meaning. Therefore, sub-functions of L1 in metatalk about language are the utterances in L1 related to either language or content, or both.

Table 1

Language functions

1.	L1 in metatalk about language	
	1a	Requesting information (assistance)
	1b	Providing information (assistance)
	1c	Arguing, agreeing, disagreeing
	1d	Initiating utterances
	1e	Expressing understanding
	1f	Responding to peers' utterances
	1g	Checking peers' understanding
	1h	Expressing opinions and ideas
	1i	Evaluating language forms and expressions
2.	L1 in metatalk about task	
3.	L1 in interpersonal relations	
4.	L1 in private speech	

The following excerpts from students' discourse data are intended to illustrate some of the salient L1 functions, listed in Table 1, identified in the learners' collaborative interactions. Transcription symbols used are presented in Appendix 2.

Interpersonal Use of L1 in Metatalk about Language

The interpersonal use of L1 in metatalk about language included requesting or providing information or assistance, communicating understanding, and arguing about film-related topics, regarding both language form and content. Participants used Japanese to ask for and provide help in finding appropriate English vocabulary or to discuss linguistic items. This metalanguage, or talk about language, was evident as seen in Excerpts 1 and 2, illustrating the L1's role in accessing L2 forms. In Excerpt 1, when Group 2 was discussing the differences between Greek culture and white American culture shown in the film, Aya wanted to say that white Americans have fewer relatives than Greeks. In response to a request for an L2 word, an upper-intermediate learner, Taka promptly provided the word *relative* and helped support Aya's endeavor to speak L2 (lines 2-3). In line 4, Taka used Japanese *sou da ne* (that is right) to agree with the idea Aya had expressed in English.

Excerpt 1

1 Aya: *Shinseki -tte nan da -kke* (1a)
relatives about what COP-Q
(what was "*shinseki*" in English?)

2 Taka: relative. ((turning to Aya))

3 Aya: *ah ah* (oh), relative (2.0) few relatives.
oh

4 Taka: *Un*, maybe *so da -ne* (1c)
yes so COP - PAR
(that is right)

Note. The numbers/letters in parentheses on the right refer to the language functions in Table 1.

Excerpt 2 illustrates a similar example of collaborative dialogue observed in Group 2. When Group 2 was discussing the topic, "What do you think of people who start going to school at the age of 30 or older?" Riko related her problem with accessing linguistic terms to express her idea (line 2). Then, as shown in lines 4 and 5, Riko and Aya asked for the words to be translated. Noriko, an upper-intermediate learner, then translated the intended meaning for Riko, which not only helped her participate in the discussion by expressing her opinions (1h), but offered Riko and Aya an opportunity to recall the phrase *up to* in cooperative conversation. Thus, the L1 use helped to maintain the group discussion.

Excerpt 2

1 Noriko : what do you (think)? ((turning to student Riko))

2 Riko : *u: n to nihonngo demo ii ka-na* (1a)
well Japanese though good Q - PAR
(well, can I say it in Japanese?)

3 Noriko : *un* (1b)
(yes)

4 Riko : *yakushi-te* (translate it) (1a)
(translate it)

5 Aya : *yakushi-te* (translate it) (1a)
(translate it)

6 Riko : *benkyoo shitai tte omou toki wa sono hito jishin da kara* (1h)
study want think time is that person self COP -PAR
(it is up to you when you want to study)

7 Noriko : Ah (2.0) so.

8 Riko : [*dakara sono taiming de* (1h)
(therefore at that timing)

9 Noriko : [It's up to (.) it's up to the person when they want to study.

10 Taka : Um. ((nodding))

11 Aya : *Ah*、up to. ((turning to Riko)) (1f)
(Oh)

12 Riko : up to.

13 Noriko : right? ((looking at Riko))

14 Riko : yes.

In Excerpt 3, the L1's potential use as a mediating device in constructing collective scaffolding is shown (Donato, 1994). In Group 2, during a discussion about the different characters of the mothers in the two films, Noriko shared, by partly using L1, her idea that Maria, a Greek mother, did not force Greek cultural values on her daughter (line 1). However, this signaled her lack of linguistic knowledge to the group: in this particular case, by using the English equivalent of *oshitsukeru* (to impose or force). Noriko continued to express her ideas with difficulty; this is indicated by a pause (line 3). Subsequently, Aya, a less proficient student, provided Noriko with the word *force* (line 4), which helped Noriko to recall *force* and construct an L2 sentence with the word (line 5). However, Noriko still failed to express her intended meaning because she had not yet organized her thoughts. Thereafter, Taka offered a different word, *obey* (line 6), while Noriko, instead of trying, expressed the difficulty of conveying her ideas with a laugh

(line 7). Although Noriko did not produce the intended utterance, this example indicates that in their groups, the learners can provide scaffolding for each other and that even the more advanced learners could benefit from the group interaction. It also illustrates that the role of the expert in group can be fluid when the learners pool their strengths, and this process seems to be facilitated by using L1.

Excerpt 3

1 Noriko : But Maria doesn't *oshitsuke-ru* (1h)
(impose / force)

2 Taka : *un un* ((nodding in agreement)) (1c)
(yes yes)

3 Noriko : tries to (.)

4 Aya : force?

5 Noriko : force. ah, force! (2.0) ((recalling the word, *force*)) force to (.) force her daughter to respect (.) not respect because Toula already respects her culture.

6 Taka : obey?

7 Noriko : obey? It's difficult to say. These kinds of things that I wanted to say ((laughing))

The excerpts presented above demonstrate that the learners, though limited in their linguistic knowledge, used L1 to ask for or provide help in their social interactions.

Interpersonal Use of L1 in Metatalk about Task

This function involves the use of L1 as a tool to control tasks such as creating a shared understanding of a particular task's requirements and goals. There were only a few instances of L1 use for this function. This is probably because the goal of the task, which was to discuss the film-related topics on the list until the bell rang, did not need much clarification. L1 used to advance to the next step of the task, specifically signaling to move on to another discussion topic, was evident in Group 1. Excerpt 4 is a discussion of a cultural difference where Americans tend to value individualism, whereas Mexicans hold more respect for family or a group of relatives. Aki expressed the importance of maintaining a balance of respect between the individual and family life (line 1). In this regard, Kana expressed understanding (line 2), whereas Shiho experienced difficulty in framing her idea (line 3). Kana stated that the topic was difficult to discuss (line 4). Shiho then suggested changing the topic (lines 4 and 8), to which Kana agreed (line 9).

Excerpt 4

1 Aki : Balance is very important, I think.
2 Kana : okay. okay.
3 Shiho: hum:
4 Kana : It's really difficult to talk.
5 Aki : ah. ((laughing))
6 Shiho : *tsugi*? ((after the group finished discussing one topic, turning to Kana)) (2) (next)
7 Kana : Um? ((unable to hear "tsugi"))
8 Shiho :*tsugi? ((turning to Kana))* (2)
9 Kana : Yes, good.

In her interview, Shiho stated that the use of the Japanese word *tsugi* (next) was not conscious. However, she believed it was acceptable to use Japanese between topics, since it was not an essential part of the discussion. Shiho further stated that she needed to make sure whether Kana, the most fluent L2 speaker in the group, would agree to change the topic. DiCamilla and Antón (2012) noted, "To collaborate successfully, students need not only to resolve the linguistic problems that the task confronts them with, but also to reach an agreement concerning how they are going to work together" (p. 175). Having finished one topic, Shiho's desire to share her view with Kana appeared necessary for the group to work collaboratively. Instances of L1 use on task processing found in the data involved clarifying the topic among group members.

Use of L1 in Interpersonal Relations

This function involves any learner's speech not directly related to linguistic aspects or tasks, but to their social conversations, which served to create a friendly social environment. Several instances of this L1 function were found in Group 2, where learners used L1 in off-task speech to tell jokes and pass humorous comments when praising or teasing peers. In Excerpt 5, Taka teased Noriko about a potential partner while discussing marriage. Noriko, who was becoming rather relaxed toward the end of the discussion, used L1 to emphasize that she did not want to marry a man from her hometown. After Noriko's emphatic expression in Japanese (line 5), Taka continued to joke by making a gesture of a cow, which evoked laughter and created a fun atmosphere. Thus, Noriko's limited use of Japanese may have served to ease the anxiety and tension involved in speaking L2 in the language classroom.

Excerpt 5

1 Taka : How about you? ((turning to Noriko))

2 Noriko : Of course. Japanese people. ((nodding))

3 Riko : Oh (.).

4 Taka : (the name of her hometown) people?

5 Noriko : no no no no no no no thank you, no thank you. *ZETTAI YADA !, ZETTAI YADA !* (3)

(no way! no way!)

6 Taka : why?

7 Noriko : because because you know, if I get marry with people [in (her hometown)

8 Taka : [you have to take care of cows? ((making a gesture of a cow))

Another example of L1 employed for social purposes can be found in Excerpt 6. When talking about racial discrimination, Noriko states that people tend to hold a discriminatory mentality toward another race (line 1). Taka responds by saying that older people have strong opinions or prejudices (line 2). Noriko then summarizes people's discriminatory mentality as racism and concludes the topic by saying "that's all" (line 3). Taka applauds because the group has finished the discussion task. Now, Taka, using Japanese, rather exaggeratedly praised the group's performance (line 4). In his interview, he reflected: "I complimented our active involvement in discussions, not our language performance, since we used a lot of Japanese." In English, Taka could have said, "(we all) four did a good job." However, communicating emotions in their shared native language seemed natural and effective for praising the group's performance. Taka's positive L1 comment may have helped create a positive affect within a group, which would not have been the case if he had said it in the L2.

Excerpt 6

1 Noriko: They have to do that they don't like it.

2 Taka : especially, especially old people have strong opinion.

3 Noriko: It's racism. Okay, that's all. ((Taka, clapping hands))

4 Taka : *kono yonin sugoi-ne, shabbete-ne.* (3)

these four great speak - PAR

(these four are great. (they) speak (a lot)) ((after discussing all given topics, looking at members))

Intrapersonal Use of L1 in Private Speech

Based on Smolucha's (1992) definition, Ohta (2001) identifies learners' self-directed private speech by its "(a) reduced volume, (b) because it was not in response to a question/comment directed specifically to the individual by the teacher or another student, and (c) because it did not receive a response by the teacher or classmate" (Ohta, 2001, p. 38). This present study followed Ohta (2001) and found that the participants used L1 private speech as a thinking tool when faced with a difficult task, specifically to reflect on the content and the form of linguistic items during the discussion. In Excerpt 7, from Group 2, Noriko first read the question of the topic to the group. However, being unable to understand the question herself, Noriko lowered her voice and spoke Japanese, *chotto matte, wakannai* (wait a minute, I don't get it) to regulate her thinking. Subsequently, Noriko re-read the topic question aloud in English. This time, she understood the topic correctly, as indicated by her saying "AH" out loud while nodding. As Noriko reflected, Japanese phrases spoken unconsciously were not intended to be addressed to any interlocutor but probably to help her understand the question.

Excerpt 7

1 Noriko : OK, next, do you think it was okay for Toula to hide her relationship with Ian from her family

°°*chooto matte, wakan-nai*°° (wait a minute, I don't get it.), do you think it was OKAY for Toula to hide her relationship with Ian from her family? ((raising her voice)) (2.0) AH: ((nodding)) (4)

As another example of private speech, in Excerpt 8, discussing differences between American and Mexican culture, an intermediate student, Aki, in Group 1, wanted to say that American culture values individualism more than Mexican culture. Aki, unable to locate the words *individual* or *individualism*, suddenly lowered her voice and, partly using Japanese, spoke to herself, *personal tte nan te iuno* (how do you say "personal"?). Then, in line 2, she was quick to recall "individual," and was able to express her opinion to the group.

Excerpt 8

1 Aki : I don't think that °°personal *tte- nan-te iu-no*°° (how do you say "personal"?) (1a) (2.0) Individual one is

I think most.

2 Kana: Uhm. ((nodding))

In her interview, Aki confirmed that her Japanese in line 1 was not intended for anyone in the group but for herself. Therefore, instead of seeking a response from the group, she proceeded to try to locate the necessary word herself. Aki also asked herself why she had used Japanese to recall English words. These unconscious uses of Japanese can be interpreted as private speech. They helped the learners to maintain communication in relation to task completion when they had trouble in understanding the concept (e.g., Excerpt 7) or creating language (e.g., Excerpt 8).

This function of L1 was found in some of the participants' utterances. L1 private speech identified in the data suggested that L1 regulates cognitive processes in learners as they manage their own thoughts or search for vocabulary themselves.

Discussion

By exploring Japanese EFL learners' use of L1 during collaborative dialogue through a sociocultural lens, this study revealed that L1 served several vital functions when learners engaged in small group discussions.

Regarding the research question about what functions the learners' use of L1 serves during opinion exchange tasks, the findings were consistent with previous studies (cf. Antón & DiCamilla, 1999), which revealed that the L1 played the primary role in the students' interactions on both inter- and intrapsychological planes. On an interpsychological plane, the L1 functioned as a cognitive tool, not only for solving lexical and grammatical problems but also for creating content by providing scaffolding to each other. As for the scaffolding function of L1 in collaborative dialogue, in both groups it appeared that the more proficient learners often provided scaffolding to the less proficient learners by intentionally adjusting their level of speech to that of the less proficient learners. There were also instances where even the more proficient learners benefited from collective scaffolding (cf. Excerpt 3), the same tendency as found in the talk by young learners in Yaghobian et al. (2017).

Additionally, the L1 worked effectively to create a shared understanding of how to proceed with the task in the group. As shown in Excerpt 4, Shiho unconsciously used the L1 to confirm quickly whether Kana would agree with her. It is often possible that, in a group task, one fluent speaker can have a voice in managing a task. By using the L1, Shiho quickly elicited an agreement from Kana, which helped the group to proceed to the next task. Although analysis of the frequency of L1 use for each function is beyond the scope of the present study, a small amount of L1 occurrences were used for this metatask function by one particular learner in each group. In contrast to Yaghobian et al. (2017), where all learners used L1 to engage in a relatively complex task, the present study utilized a simple opinion exchange task and found this function of L1 usage to be limited

mainly to one learner in each group. It may be that resorting to the L1 is not necessary to enable a shared perspective among the participants for working on this type of task.

L1 use for interpersonal relations, such as jokes, and an informal tone of voice served the social purpose of creating a positive and friendly atmosphere, as demonstrated in previous studies (DiCamilla & Antón, 2012; Yaghobian et al., 2017). The function of L1 for interpersonal relations is of importance because it affects social interaction positively when working collaboratively in groups in an affective climate of the classroom.

Additionally, on an intrapsychological plane, L1 private speech, which was found in some of the participants' speech, as in the case of the younger learners in Yaghobian et al. (2017), seemed to benefit their cognitive processes as a tool to direct their own thinking. Learners' self-directed private speech in the L1 was used to focus on problems and to search for vocabulary, serving as a cognitive mediator to help understand abstract concepts (cf. Excerpt 7) and language (cf. Excerpt 8) in the face of a cognitively challenging task.

L1 functions identified in the authentic discourse data from the learners' interaction have shown that the L1 in collaborative dialogues played a significant role "as a means to create a social and cognitive space" (Antón & DiCamilla, 1999, p. 245) where learners can provide each other and themselves with help as they work on a task. The L1 as a cognitive mediator also served to regulate language and thought, thus enabling the learners to maintain communication as they worked on the task.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings evidenced learners' L1 as an interactional, affective, and cognitive mediator of L2 learning on inter- and intrapsychological planes and affirmed the sociocultural perspective of language learning in Japanese EFL classrooms. Cook (1999) states that the L1 is in the mind of L2 learners and "every activity the student carries out visibly in the L2 also involves the invisible L1" (p. 202). Thus, it would be presumptuous to assume that when the learners use L1, they momentarily withdraw from tasks and abandon their roles as participants. Rather, it may be assumed that L2 learners work on tasks translingually (cf. García & Wei, 2014), using the shared L1 cognitively, socially, and affectively in peer interaction. According to Ferguson (2003), the "classroom is not only a place of formal learning but also a social and affective environment in its own right" (p. 6). The collaborative dialogue observed among the participants indicates that the learners aim to co-construct knowledge (cf. Hardin & Higgins, 1996), create meaning, and negotiate relationships with the shared L1, which played a critical role in the interaction. In this light, the learners' use of the L1 along with the L2 in collaborative

dialogue could represent their flexible and dynamic "translingual competence" (Anderson, 2018), which would demonstrate their entire linguistic repertoire, making full use of available resources collaboratively while working with a group.

The present study provides evidence that the learners' use of L1 for social and private speech during peer interaction affirmed the sociocultural perspective of language learning for Japanese EFL learners. However, the study has several limitations with the small sample size being the biggest issue. Similar studies on a larger scale, using different types of tasks, participants with varied levels of English proficiency, and diverse age groups should be considered. Although not considered the focus in this study, there seemed to be more utterances in the L1 with a wide range of functions observed in Group 2 than in Group 1. Quantitative analysis of the use of the L1 would be necessary to understand what factors (e.g., participants' beliefs about L1 use) would impact the use or usefulness of the L1 in real practice. Furthermore, this study has not demonstrated that the L1 was more useful than the L2. Further research is required to understand the multifaceted nature of L1 use in collaborative dialogue since the use of the L1 may be a normal psychological process that allows learners to maintain verbal interaction in communicative group work.

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Appendix 1
Film-Related Topics Used for Opinion Exchange Tasks

Example:

- What kinds of American and Mexican culture do you see in the movie?
- What are the strengths (good) and weaknesses (bad) of both cultures?
- Sometimes people start going to school (university) at the age of 30 or more. What do you think of this?
- Describe the Greek culture and white American culture shown in the movie. In what ways are they different?
- Do you know anyone in your life who has married a foreigner? Do you think they had trouble getting permission from their families?
- Imagine that you wanted to marry someone from a different background. What do you think would happen? Which do you think would be easier, for you to live in your spouse's country or here in Japan?

Appendix 2
Transcription Symbols

[	overlapping utterances	=	contiguous utterances
( )	translated into English	*italics*	utterances in Japanese
:	extension of sound or syllable	(( ))	contextual intonation
?	high rising intonation	(.)	brief pause
°° °°	reduced volume - whispered	.	falling intonation
CAPS	emphasis or stress	(0.0)	intervals in terms of second