



Assumptions, Attitudes and Beliefs: Tracing the Development of Teacher Beliefs about Classroom L1/TL

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Research into the implementation of English-only pedagogies in South Korea has focused on teacher perceptions of English-only government policies (Kim, 2002), the different language functions of English and Korean in the classroom (Kang, 2008, 2013; Liu et al., 2004; Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014), the role of teacher commitment in language teaching (Moodie & Feryok, 2015), as well as the futility of trying to ban the L1 in South Korean English classrooms (Kelleher, 2013). Research on the beliefs behind teachers' classroom actions as well as the socio-historical elements that are responsible for the formation of these beliefs has been little more than an afterthought in most studies. This report comes from a larger study which explores why South Korean elementary school English teachers use the TL and the L1 the way they do. This report aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What influences the formation of assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs about L1/TL use in the classroom?
- RQ2: What beliefs do teachers have about the TL and L1 as languages of instruction in Korean elementary school English classrooms?

The Study

Research on teacher beliefs acknowledges that they are socially constructed through experiences with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators. Normative and lifelong learning experiences are built upon experiences as learners in classrooms, as participants in professional educational programs and in communities of practice while they work (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Grossman, 1990).

This study continues the social turn (Hall & Cook, 2012) taken within applied linguistics by assuming that language is a cognitive tool that mediates mental processing (Swain & Lapkin, 2000), where this mediating role is derived from the social context in which users find themselves (Brooks, Donato, & McGlone, 1997). This approach allowed for the co-construction of knowledge between the teachers and the researcher by acknowledging that the discourse created via the interviews was a representation of the experiences that the teachers had, which in turn allowed for an analysis of these experiences.

Three reoccurring words from the literature were taken and used to describe different stages of belief development (Barnard & Burns, 2012). The first, initial assumptions, are maxims which allow people to

make judgments about the world in which they interact. These change with experience into tentative attitudes, which are then 'refined, rejected or reformulated and then incorporated into a set of firmer beliefs'(Barnard & Burns, 2012, p. 3). This description allows for the isolation of the different influences acting on the teachers at different stages in their lives.

The Participants

Five South Korean English subject teachers were selected via the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling to participate in the study as it served 'the real purpose and objectives of the researcher of discovering, gaining insight and understanding into a particularly chosen phenomenon' (Burns, 2000, p. 465). The teachers were chosen in large part due to different conversations had on training programs about the role of English and Korean in their classrooms, as well as rapport that had developed during these exchanges. All teachers except one had at least five years English language teaching experience. One had only been teaching for 2 years but was selected due to a lack of other viable candidates. All teachers were women aged between 30-40 years old, and each was given a pseudonym. They were all from the city in which the study was conducted and had an excellent command of the English language.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were employed for this study as they provided both guiding structure and the necessary freedom to follow any digressions as they arose. The interviews were an adaptation of 'in-depth, phenomenologically based interviewing' (Siedman, 2006, p. 15). This two stage interview process combined life history interviewing with more focused and in-depth interviewing techniques (Siedman, 2006). In the first interview, the teachers discussed their experiences as learners of English; in the second interview they described current experiences and beliefs about the use of the TL and L1. The analysis of the data was based on an iterative, inductive approach, with the data analysis moving back and forth between the data collection, analysis, and interpretation stages. Interview data was analysed via the constant comparative method, as it 'enables the researcher to understand the individual perspectives' of teachers while also making generalizations among these perspectives (Johnson, 1994, p. 441). Single-case comparisons were made between the two interviews to ascertain links between prior experiences and current beliefs, and then cross-case comparisons were made between teachers to discover any similarities.

Results

RQ1: What influences the formation of assumptions, attitudes and beliefs about L1/TL use in the classroom?

Two sets of distinct influences were found to act upon the teachers at different stages of their lives. They have been termed primary influences and secondary influences. These terms indicate when they were experienced by the teachers: primary influences acted on the teachers in the formation of initial assumptions during their time before teaching, and secondary influences acted on these initial assumptions, forming first tentative attitudes (after some initial experience as a teacher) and then firmer beliefs after further experience as a teacher. Figure 1 summarizes these findings below.

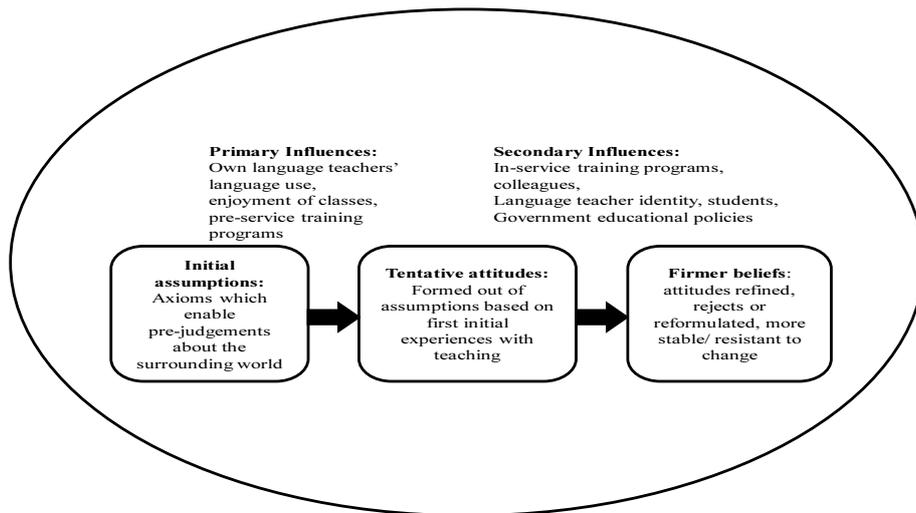


Figure 1. Influences acting in the formation of beliefs.

Initial Assumptions

Initial assumptions are defined as axioms which enable pre-judgements about the surrounding world. These axioms are generally formed after limited experience with a phenomenon. For the teachers, these were formed as students and before they became teachers. Influences that acted in the formation of initial assumptions about teaching and language use in the classroom were:

- Own language teachers' language use
- Enjoyment of classes
- Teacher training programs

Own teachers' language use

All teachers had Korean English language teachers who were reluctant to use English for anything more than reading texts aloud, as Sarah described,

My Korean English teachers? No they didn't use English ... At that time well, it was boring they just explaining grammar so ... Well I didn't expect that kind of thing I think because I had no other background or other theory to teach...It just felt the normal way...Everywhere it happened like that...We didn't think about it because at that time all teachers used Korean.

These experiences led to the assumption that the use of Korean was common place when teaching English unless they had experienced a Target Language Dominant (TLD) approach to language teaching. Teachers who did not experience TLD approaches formed initial assumptions about the L1 being commonplace in foreign language classes. Teachers who experienced TLD (in this case English, French or Japanese) approaches viewed the use of the L1 more negatively. Emma described her TLD experience by stating,

I liked it because...in that class I experienced various things ... sometimes it was hard to understand them ... I can remember I was afraid of going there because I couldn't understand all of what they were saying, but gradually I could understand what was going on, ... the atmosphere was totally different ... the atmosphere was really free and open.

These TLD learning experiences were important in forming assumptions about the role that the TL could play. This influence provided a contrast to the first language dominant (L1D) approach, and established an assumption about the need to embrace the TL in the classroom. Linked to the experiences with their own language, teachers' language use was the element of enjoyment. In general, L1D classes were portrayed very negatively, whereas the TLD classes were portrayed positively. The findings on the influences of teacher language use and enjoyment correlated with earlier findings (Borg, 2003; Hall & Cook, 2012) about the important role that early learner experiences play in the formation of teacher beliefs.

Pre-service teacher training programs

The teachers attended government sponsored teacher training programs at different times in their careers. For two of the teachers this was prior to teaching English as a subject, while the other three teachers attended these courses subsequent to becoming English teachers. The two teachers stated that the courses on English teaching methodology and English proficiency were useful in making them aware of general theories about second language acquisition. The pre-service training experiences exposed the teachers to English education which explicitly encouraged a TLD approach. For teachers with a lack of English language teaching experience, these programs influenced their approach when they first started teaching. These experiences helped form assumptions about the role of the TL which had yet to be tested with experience in the classroom. These teachers had formed negative assumptions about the L1 during their school years, and these programs provided more support for a TLD approach. The two influences - previous experiences with L1/TL and teacher training programs – worked in tandem to establish an initial assumption about language use.

Tentative Attitudes

Tentative attitudes evolved from assumptions, being further shaped by experiences with language teaching. Initial experiences with language teaching influenced the formation of tentative attitudes as these experiences acted on the teacher and their initial assumptions. The secondary set of influences were:

- In-service teacher training programs
- Colleagues
- Language teacher identity
- Students

In-service teacher training programs

The experiences teachers had during in-service programs differed to pre-service programs. They generally reinforced already established assumptions about the role of the TL or L1 in the classroom. Different reactions to the programs were related to previous assumptions about language use and teaching experience. Teachers that experienced TLD approaches as students had initial assumptions about how positive a TLD approach could be, and these assumptions were strengthened by programs that espoused the value of minimizing L1 use. This served to further shape their assumptions into tentative attitudes about the value of the TL in the classroom. Those teachers who did not have TLD experiences as students had assumptions about the importance of the L1 reinforced into tentative attitudes. This contrasting development can best be seen in teachers Emma and Sarah. Emma had previously experienced TLD approaches as an elementary and middle school student,

Actually after I go the ITT course I think I felt more confidence about my English and also teaching English...

Where Sarah, who did not have any experiences with TLD approaches while at school, said,

As you know when I was a student I didn't... you know my teacher didn't use English but it was the first time in WTT it was the first time only using English it was difficult.

Despite attending the same programs, teachers interpreted the experiences in accordance with their initial assumptions, further underlining the strength of their initial assumptions, and the significant role the primary set of influences played in belief formation.

Colleagues

The influence of colleagues depended on when certain experiences occurred. When experienced early in their career, the influence of colleagues proved important in the evolution of tentative attitudes from initial assumptions. The influence of more experienced colleagues strengthened initial assumptions into similar tentative attitudes about language use, as in the case of Sue,

At the beginning of class, it's the same that kind of things I think I learned from the other teachers in the ... subject teachers room, I didn't think that kind of thing before before I met her and I saw her doing like that and I think that's very good so I learned from her.

Alternatively, colleagues also challenged assumptions, creating attitudes that differed from the original assumptions, as in the case of Michelle,

I believed speaking English was the really best way for my students but ... I went to her open class, and even though she was kind of a top teacher, a designated teacher ... she sometimes used Korean for lower level students and even then in front of the whole class and I was a little bit surprised "why she speaks English very fluently like a native speaker but she sometimes tries to sometimes speak Korean" so I was a little kind of surprised about that.

This experience with a more experienced colleague reshaped her initial assumptions into a different tentative attitude.

Language teacher identity

Identity refers to how people understand their relationships to the world around them, how these relationships are constructed across both time and space, and how people understand their possibilities for the future (Norton, 1997). Teacher identity construction 'must be understood with respect to larger social processes' and is influenced by coercive or collaborative relations of power (Norton, 1997, p. 419). Teachers stated that they used more L1 when teaching English as a homeroom teacher than when teaching English as a subject teacher. For some of the teachers, being an English subject teacher who used a lot of the TL allowed them to distance themselves from the students' day to day problems. When the teachers became English subject teachers, some changed their attitudes slightly towards the TL, believing that there was a perception that they must speak more TL as that was their assigned role in the school. This perception change led the teachers to believe they needed to increase their use of the TL, but how much it increased depended on the teacher. For teachers who had assumptions that favored L1 use in class, these assumptions changed only slightly in favor of using the TL, whereas teachers who already favored using TL felt even more compelled to use it.

Students

All teachers used the L1 as a result of their students' inability to successfully operate in a TLD environment. When some teachers first started teaching they chose not to speak the L1, and ignored students who did not understand everything they said, instead relying on ideas learned during training programs that suggested increased exposure would eventually allow students to comprehend what was being said, as Sue stated,

... I didn't have enough experiences at that time and I tried to use English but students didn't understand me... at the very first year or second year when I was a brand new teacher I believed I had to use English all the time and when I made a plan I used the difficult terms or expressions students won't understand and I thought it's right I don't know because I was an English teacher so I have to show them a lot and I thought it was natural I didn't I think didn't need to make my English easier ... because I think whether they understand or not I have to say the correct expressions and the right English and I don't care about the level.

For teachers who favored the use of the L1, the TL proficiency of students was a source of justification for L1 use, and the ability of students was not as significant as other factors in determining how much TL or L1 was used. The decision to use more of one language than the other was determined by initial assumptions. For Sarah, who had experiences which led her to believe that there was an important role for L1 in the classroom, the L1 had always had a prominent place in class. For teachers who had experiences which led them to minimize the L1 in their classes, student level did not drastically alter assumptions about TLD approaches, as they spoke the L1 to ensure that they maintained control over the learning environment. The teachers stated that they did not feel their own language ability was a factor in determining how much TL they used. They felt the curriculum was simple enough and they did not fear not knowing something in the TL.

Secondary vs Primary Sets of Influences

Secondary influences occurred while the teachers were actively teaching English, which distinguished them from the primary influences. The secondary influences worked on the existing assumptions, both reinforcing them and hardening them into attitudes, as in the cases of the teacher training experiences, or changing them into new attitudes about language use, such as being influenced by a colleague. Each secondary influence acted differently according to the initial assumptions about language use, pointing to the strength of the initial assumptions as well as the importance of the primary sets of influences.

RQ2: What beliefs do teachers have about the TL and L1 as languages of instruction in Korean elementary school English classrooms?

Firmer beliefs are differentiated from tentative attitudes about language use in that they are less likely to change. They find their origins in the initial assumptions about language use formed when at school or prior to teaching English, then as the tentative attitudes about language use which developed in the early years of teaching. The secondary set of influences that refined tentative attitudes into firmer beliefs continued to influence the daily lives of the teachers, reinforcing these firmer beliefs. Firmer beliefs were unlikely to change unless a new influence was experienced by the teachers. The following table summarizes the firm beliefs for each of the teachers.

TABLE 1
Teachers' Beliefs about Using the TL and L1

Teacher	Beliefs about English	Beliefs about Korean
Emma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ English exposure important ▪ Should use as much as possible, even 100% ▪ Distinguishes her classes from other subjects/teachers ▪ Makes class atmosphere better, lowers student affect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows control of lower level students ▪ Makes her like other (non-English subject) teachers in school/ more authoritative ▪ Used with boring activities/ in effective teaching methods
Jody	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ English exposure important ▪ Do not need 100% though ▪ Can demotivate weaker students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Needed to ensure all participate ▪ Motivates weaker students ▪ Has important place in class as is L1
Sue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ English exposure important ▪ Distinguishes her classes from other subjects/teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows better control of class ▪ Needed to ensure all participate ▪ Motivates weaker students ▪ Can express herself better in Korean
Sarah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Difficult only using English ▪ Exposure is important for some students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows better control of class ▪ Needed to ensure all participate ▪ Motivates weaker students ▪ Can express herself better in Korean
Michelle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ English exposure important ▪ Amount depends on level of students ▪ Distinguishes her classes from other subjects/teachers ▪ Good role model for students <p>(these are treated as tentative attitudes more than firm beliefs due to her limited experience teaching)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A little is OK ▪ Allows better control of class ▪ Needed to ensure all participate

Discussion and Conclusion

Primary influences were significant factors in the establishment of beliefs about L1/TL use in the classroom. Secondary influences either reinforced or refined the initial assumptions into tentative attitudes, and then firmer beliefs, the longer they acted upon the teacher. Radical changes in ideas about L1/TL use appear to be rare, with only minor adjustments occurring. This study provides an approach on how to differentiate the stages of belief formation over a lifetime of experiencing a phenomenon. By accounting for the diverse influences that act upon teachers at various times of their development as an English teacher, a greater awareness of what beliefs are and where they come from can be made explicit to teachers, which in turn can facilitate the cognitive development of teachers when understanding their own teaching practices.

The exploration of teachers' beliefs and their development from initial assumptions into tentative attitudes and then firmer beliefs about language use in class is beneficial to any teacher training program

that encourages or prepares EFL teachers for a TLD approach. In order for teachers to be able to accept government initiated innovations in regards to language use in the classroom, they should better understand their own apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975). A raising of consciousness about how a teacher comes to make classroom decisions allows for a more critical interpretation of teaching practices. By articulating the primary and secondary influences that have shaped the assumptions, attitudes and beliefs of teachers, a more penetrating exploration can be undertaken as to why teachers use TL/L1 the ways they do. For teachers who may be resistant to TLD approaches, the process in this study can unearth reasons for this resistance and potentially assist both pre-service and in-service teacher trainers in developing strategies for encouraging teachers to embrace changes based on their previous experiences via the enactment of more collaborative teaching-learning relationships (Johnson, 2015). If teaching is to be seen as more than just the application of knowledge and of learned skill, as the call from research on teacher cognitions implies (Borg, 2006; Richards, 2008), then interviews of the type and focus discussed in this study could be utilized as they allow for a more in-depth exploration of personal experiences which shape the beliefs individuals have about a phenomenon. In addition to this, pre-service and in-service teacher training needs to be more than just the application of the accepted wisdom of language teaching methodology; it needs to build grounded alternatives that include the experiences of the teachers involved (Breen, 2001), so that teachers can better see the value in what they do as well as appreciate the value of attending training courses that seek to genuinely assist a teacher, rather than impose on them theories of teaching which contradict every experience they have had, especially in the case of TLD approaches.

The Author

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