Linguistic Multi-Competence and Its Implications for English Education in Japan

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is twofold: to elucidate theoretical and empirical underpinnings of the notion of linguistic multi-competence (LMC) of the second language (L2) user and to discuss its implications for English education in Japan. In the center of the LMC notion is the term ‘user,’ which was first used to avoid a negative connotation inherent in the term ‘learner’ as a deficient language speaker who is never able to attain a native-like proficiency in a L2. With a great impact of the LMC idea on applied linguistics and L2 learning and teaching, the term has been widely spreading, though slowly, among applied linguists and language teachers particularly in Europe and North America. As for the situation in Japan, however, the LMC idea itself or the L2 user concept has not yet attracted much attention. We begin by examining theoretical backgrounds of LMC. Next, we review some distinctive features of L2 users’ language and mind such as reverse transfer, hyper linguistic susceptibility, and cognitive restructuring to show how unique L2 users are. Finally, we discuss some pedagogical implications of LMC for English education with the solutions to current issues in Japanese English education in mind such as the role model for Japanese, L1 use and translation work in the classroom, the goals of English learning and teaching, and Japanese perception of themselves as English users.

1. Introduction

The aims of this paper are to examine the linguistic multi-competence (LMC) idea and to discuss its implications for English education in Japan in the midst of its expanding movement after Cook (1991). It first reviews what LMC is and then presents some empirically found distinctive features of the second language (L2) user’s language and mind which are, if not so dramatically but evidently, different from those of monolingual speakers of either first language (L1) or L2. The term the L2 ‘user’ constitutes important part of the concept of LMC because the L2 ‘learner’ connotes a negative implication as a ‘deficient language speaker’ who is never able to attain a native-like proficiency in a L2. The L2 ‘user’ has been commonly used, diffusing slowly
but steadily just like a piece of iceberg melting in the ocean, among applied linguists and language teachers particularly in Europe and North America (Ortega, forthcoming).

However, as for the case in Japan, to the best of our knowledge there has been very little formal discussion on the theoretical and pedagogical significance of the LMC concept to date (G. Murahata & Y. Murahata, forthcoming). As a result, the LMC idea or the L2 user concept has not attracted much attention among applied linguists and English teachers in Japan. The analysis of the terms used in the online program descriptions of the 41st Annual Conference of JASELE 2015 held in Kumamoto, for example, shows that either ‘gakushusha (learner)’ or ‘learner’ is used 348 times out of a total of 352 tokens, and either ‘yu-za’ [user] or ‘shiyosha’ (the Japanese translation equivalent to ‘user’) is used in only three cases, two of which are ours.

In this paper, we will begin by reviewing theoretical underpinnings of the LMC concept with special focus on its origin, the course of definition development and theoretical premises. Then we will discuss some empirical findings to support the LMC concept to show the distinctiveness and uniqueness of language and mind of L2 users. Finally, we will discuss implications of the LMC idea for English education in Japan.

2. What is LMC?

2.1 Background

There are two presumptive conditions in the origin of LMC. The first one is related to lingua-state-of-affairs in the world. Not a few people on the globe now speak more than one language (Li, 2007). The person who knows only one language might be the one who is in a sense isolated in a special place without having a chance to be exposed to any other language than his or her L1. In other words, we human beings are entitled to acquire more than one language wherever we are born. In London, for example, more than 300 languages are spoken and 32% of children there use English at school, but they use languages other than English at home (Baker & Eversley, 2000). In Switzerland four languages, Swiss German, French, Italian, and Romansh, are spoken, and also in Singapore four, Chinese, Malay, Tamil, and English (Grosjean, 1982). Furthermore, in Europe as a whole 53% of people can speak at least one European language other than their L1, and 23% two additional languages (European Commission, 2001). If this is the case, then we should fundamentally revise the view of how we describe our linguistic competence. It is an ideal monolingual speaker-listener that has been presupposed as the descriptive target of our linguistic competence (Chomsky, 1965). This monolingual orientation to linguistic competence contrasts sharply with the present global situation.

The second condition which made LMC emerge is one of the issues inherent in the term ‘interlanguage’ (IL) after Selinker (1972). The term has been used to describe L2 users’ language which can be defined as “in-between system used in the L2 acquisition process that certainly contains aspects of the L1 and L2, but is an inherently variable system with rules of its own”
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This definition was further redefined, though in a minor way by adding the phrase ‘or the same community’ after ‘the same mind’ as “the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind or the same community” (Cook, 2012). This addition is to widen the concept of LMC in order to incorporate the situation where LMC is concerned with not just a linguistic system at the personal level, but at the community level as well. This is parallel, in a sociolinguistic term, to the difference between an ‘idiolect,’ the way in which a particular person uses language, and a ‘dialect,’ the way in which a certain number of people in one community use language. LMC is now defined as “the overall system of a mind or a community that uses more than one language” (Cook & Singleton, 2014, p. 147). The background of this definition lies in the idea that the use of language is closely related to a variety of mental activities such as perception, attention, classification, inference, or memory. Such cognitive activities could not function independent from language, but are definitely influenced by our linguistic system in a certain way.

2.2 Developmental course of LMC’s definition

Cook first introduced the term LMC to describe the compound state of a mind with two grammars in the so-called poverty-of-the-stimulus argument of language acquisition. He argues that the normal human environment includes input in more than one language and that monolinguals are rather suffering from a form of language deprivation. Therefore, the poverty-of-the-stimulus argument should be “not how the mind manages to acquire a single grammar, but how it manages to acquire one or more grammars” (emphasis in original, Cook, 1991, p. 114). The LMC idea emerged in such a way “out of fairly technical questions within UG (Universal Grammar) theory” (Cook, 1992, p. 558). However, to make it clear that LMC is not restricted to syntax, but is concerned with all the other linguistic domains and it is not confined to two linguistic systems but more than one linguistic system such as three or four in the same mind. LMC is then redefined as “the knowledge of more than one language in the same mind” (Cook, 1996, p. 65). The word ‘state’ was replaced with ‘knowledge’ to indicate that LMC is not static but rather dynamic in nature.

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2.3 Premises of LMC

The successive revision of LMC’s definition seen above is the inevitable outcome of the development of the LMC idea itself supported by a large number of theoretical and empirical studies. The findings and considerations in those studies can be converged into three premises on which LMC is now based (Murahata, Murahata & Cook, forthcoming). Firstly, LMC concerns the total system for all languages in a single mind or community and their inter-relationships. Therefore, all the languages in the mind should be accounted for. Only looking at the L2 in isolation, which has been the main focus in second language acquisition (SLA) research, provides only part of the picture. Looking at the L2 in isolation from the L1 ignores the very factor that makes L2 acquisition different, the possession of a L1. The relationships between the languages in L2 users’ LMC, whether transfer (from L1 to L2), reverse transfer (from L2 to L1), hyper linguistic susceptibility (from L2 to hyper L1), which will be discussed in a later section, are its unique dispositions.

The second premise on which LMC works is independency on the monolingual native speaker. We should take the language systems of L2 users in their own right. We should not see any part of these L2 user systems as an imperfect copy of monolingual native speakers. In other words, the norm for L2 learning and teaching is the L2 user himself or herself, not the native speaker. It does not allow any comparison that treats one as a defective version of the other. The native-speaker-biased perspective misses the unique qualities of L2 users’ linguistic systems and how they develop. The LMC perspective takes the ‘descriptive’ approach central to all modern linguistics and tries to describe how L2 users are, rather than the prescriptive approach, how L2 users should be.

The third premise is that LMC affects the whole mind, that is, all language and cognitive systems, rather than language alone. We should see language as one of the complex systems in the mind, interacting with many other cognitive systems. We can thus expect potentiality of close relationships between language and other cognitive systems such as memory systems, conceptual structures or whatever. LMC does not necessarily stop with the language area involved but has implications for other areas of the complex bilingual mind. In the next section which follows, we will see how unique and permeable L2 users’ language and mind are with special focus on such phenomena as reverse transfer and hyper linguistic susceptibility, and cognitive restructuring, which had been little questioned in SLA research before the emergence of the LMC concept.

3. Some Distinctive Features of the L2 User’s Language and Mind

3.1 The L2 user’s language

There has been cumulative evidence in SLA-related research to show uniqueness of L2 users’ linguistic systems and mind that are different, if not so dramatically but evidently, from
those of monolinguals of either the L1 or L2. In particular, cross-linguistic influences between languages in mind such as reverse or backward transfer and hyper linguistic susceptibility are distinctive features of L2 users. Linguistic influence has almost solely been considered as transfer from the L1 to the L2 in hitherto conducted SLA research. However, based on the premise that LMC concerns the total system of a mind and deals with all the languages in mind, there can be also influence the other way around, that is, effects of the L2 on the L1. This section introduces some pieces of evidence of reverse transfer and hyper linguistic susceptibility, a newly recognized phenomenon beyond transfer, to show how unique L2 users are, which eventually reveal how L2 users’ L1 is different from that of monolinguals.

Firstly, reverse transfer or effect of the L2 on the L1 has been investigated at various levels of language such as phonology, vocabulary, syntax, or pragmatics. Flege (1987) examined Voice Onset Time (VOT) values of /t/ among English-French (hereafter, the language before the hyphen denotes a L1 and after it a L2) and French-English bilinguals. He found the effects were bidirectional. The former produced French-like English /t/ with significantly shorter VOT values than English monolinguals, as well as English like French /t/ with slightly longer VOT values than French monolinguals. The latter also produced French /t/ with longer English-like VOT values as well as English /t/ with shorter French-like VOT values. Harada (2007) reported that Japanese VOT values of voiceless stops such as /p, t, k/ produced by Japanese-English bilinguals found to be affected by English sounds.

Tokumaru (2002) examined reverse transfer in vocabulary among Japanese users of English. They displayed semantic transfer from L2 English to L1 Japanese in a word association task. Shown Japanese loan words from English, the Japanese participants with higher proficiency in English tended to associate them with words which were more English oriented. For example, they thought of office or work when seeing bosu ‘boss’, while Japanese monolinguals tended to think of gangsters or the leader in a group. Laufer (2003) reported that Russian-Hebrew bilinguals gradually declined to point out and correct unacceptable Russian verb phrase collocations, which were literal translations from Hebrew, as they stayed longer in the Hebrew speaking context. Pavlenko (2003) also revealed unique ways of using Russian among Russian-English bilinguals. Having acquired English, they use their L1 Russian in different ways from Russian monolinguals by means of strategies analyzed as lexical borrowing, loan translation, and semantic extensions.

Some studies showed evidence for reverse transfer at the syntactic level. For example, Dussias and Sagarra (2007) investigated Spanish-English bilinguals and found advanced bilinguals with extended exposure to English needed more time in understanding a particular type of sentence incorporating a relative clause, such as El policía arrestó a la hermana del criado que estaba enferma desde hacia tiempo [The police arrested the sister of the (male) servant who had been ill (feminine) for a while] than monolingual Spanish speakers. Y. Murahata (2012) explored L2 English effects on the L1 Japanese and reported advanced Japanese-English bilinguals were
more likely to give responses like English monolingual speakers in interpreting generic nouns, such as in Raion wa doumou da [Lions are ferocious] than novice bilinguals. These two studies both attributed the behavioral shift found among L2 users to English learning.

The L2 effect on the L1 at the pragmatic level has also been reported. Japanese is a high backchannel language, German a low backchannel language, and English between the two. According to Heinz (2003), German-English bilinguals used much more backchannels than monolingual German speakers, which he argued was L2 English effect on L1 German. Based on this research, Krause-Ono (2004) investigated bidirectional transfer between German and Japanese. A German-Japanese bilingual gave more backchannel cues when talking to her German friend in German, which is clearly shows L2 Japanese effect on L1 German. As for the total frequency of backchannel use, the Japanese-German bilingual did not show a clear effect of the L2 on the L1, but she used less overlapping backchannels. In other words, on the surface it seemed that the L2 didn’t affect the bilingual’s L1 backchannel behavior as a whole, but the L2 affected the L1 in the way of when to use this pragmatic cue.

While all of the studies reviewed so far evidenced the L2 effect on the L1, some studies on L2 users’ LMC have shown more intriguing aspects. They originate not from a transfer process but from another psychological one, which we may call ‘hyper linguistic susceptibility.’ This unique facet of LMC depicts the process through which L2 users become hyper L1-like or hyper L2-like by the enhancement of metalinguistic awareness as a result of learning a L2. Cook, Iarossi, Stellakis, and Tokumaru (2003) examined L2 English effect on Spanish, Greek and Japanese as a L1. The bilingual participants, including monolinguals of each language, were asked to choose one word as the sentence subject out of three words in their respective L1, for example, watches/the monkey/the pen. All L2 users performed differently from monolinguals. Especially Japanese users of English behaved unexpectedly in L1 Japanese showing significantly more preferences for animacy cues and subjective ones marked with ga or wa for subjects than Japanese monolinguals. This result showed that Japanese-English bilinguals behaved like ‘hyper-Japanese’ speakers as a consequence of acquiring English. Furthermore they showed strong preference for plural nouns as subjects in their L1 Japanese. As far as plurals are concerned, they adopt in a sense a peculiar disposition on plural nouns to their L1 as they learn English.

Obler (1982) reported another interesting case of hyper linguistic susceptibility in Hebrew–English balanced bilinguals over VOT. It was found that /t/ and /k/ produced by the bilinguals surely shifted in the direction of English monolinguals with longer VOTs than Hebrew monolinguals when they spoke Hebrew (backward transfer). On the other hand, those sounds were produced with even longer VOTs than English monolinguals when the Hebrew-English bilinguals spoke English, which may fall under hyper linguistic susceptibility. That is, in the latter case, the Hebrew-English bilinguals went beyond English speakers, becoming hyper-L2 speakers.

3.2 The L2 user’s mind
This section looks at how language affects cognitive behavior, i.e., cognitive restructuring, of L2 users. The issues of the relation between language and cognition can be found in the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Sapir, 1929; Whorf, 1956) or the Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis, which claims that language affects its speaker’s cognitive processes. The hypothesis first attracted much attention but declined later mainly because of methodological problems to verify the hypothesis (for further discussion see Y. Murahata (2012)). LMC appeared at a favorable time when a remarkable development in empirical research over the hypothesis was attained. A number of studies started to verify language effects on cognition in the 1990s (Gumpurz & Levinson, 1996; Lucy, 1992). Some experiments used in cross-linguistic studies among monolinguals were applied to investigate LMC among L2 users.

Observing differences in grammatical number markings between English and Yucatec (a Mayan language spoken in the Yucatan Peninsula), Lucy (1992) investigated whether the speakers of the two languages showed different responses on the number of objects and the amount of substance. Yucatec does not pluralize inanimate nouns, while English obligatorily does. As predicted, he found that Yucatec speakers showed less attention to inanimate objects than English speakers. Replicating the study on Japanese-English bilinguals, since Yucatec and Japanese have similar noun forms in grammatical number marking, Athanasopoulos (2006) found Japanese speakers restructured their cognitive disposition toward inanimate countable objects as they acquired higher proficiency in English. They became more sensitive to the number of inanimate objects as a consequence of learning English.

Research on color recognition is an established area of cross-linguistic studies over linguistic relativity, and various research methodologies have been developed. Using a method of asking focal colors, Athanasopoulos (2009) found Greek speakers tended to shift their prototypes for ble ‘dark blue’ and ghalazio ‘light blue’ after acquiring English, which does not distinguish the two blues in Greek. Two blues ao ‘blue’ and mizuiro ‘light blue’ and two greens midori ‘green’ and kimidori ‘yellowish green’ in Japanese also attracted attention as a good research area. Athanasopoulos, Sasaki and Cook (2004) investigated how Japanese-English bilinguals perceive those colors, and the results showed that L2 English affected their perception. That is, as they grew in English, which does not have distinguished names for the colors, they tended to perceive less difference between the two blues and two greens.

Other areas of studies on bilingual cognition often investigated are object categorization and motion. There is an argument that Westerners are more likely to have an analytic view paying attention to salient objects and their properties and East Asians are more likely to have a holistic view paying attention to relationships among objects (Nisbett, 2003). Y. Murahata (2012) explored whether Japanese speakers would show any behavioral shift in categorization as a consequence of learning English. She found that Japanese-English bilinguals tended to relate categorically-related objects more strongly as they acquired higher proficiency in English. This experiment using triads such as camel-horse-desert was also conducted on younger Japanese
children at the age of ten to twelve, and the L2 learning effect was found even among those children, who studied English at school only twice a week for two years (G. Murahata, 2010).

As for studies on motion events, one study concerned how an action was perceived by speakers of different languages (Boroditsky, Ham & Ramscar, 2002). Indonesian does not have tense, therefore, does not distinguish whether an action is completed, undergoing, or going to happen, while English does. It was found that Indonesian monolinguals paid less attention to the differences in actions than English speakers. Indonesian-English bilinguals, however, showed different responses from monolinguals: bilinguals were more sensitive to completeness of actions than Indonesian monolinguals when tested in Indonesian, and slightly more sensitive to it than English monolinguals when tested in English. Another study on conceptualization of motion events showed complicated behavioral shifts among Polish-English bilinguals (Czechowska & Ewert, 2011). Languages are categorized into satellite-framed languages and verb-framed languages (Talmy, 2000). Both English and Polish belong to the satellite-framed language group, but they are still different in expressing path and manner. Experiments used photographs of a person showing path and manner. Advanced bilingual groups showed different responses from the Polish monolingual group, but they were not always toward L2 English. It was concluded that Polish speakers tend to shift their conceptual behavior toward L2 English speakers and then restructure their conceptual domain as they further acquire English.

This section reviewed some major studies on language effects on cognition among L2 users, which show L2 users are unique individuals different from monolingual speakers and thus support LMC. The studies introduced here demonstrated that different ways of lexicalization and grammaticalization among languages lead the speakers’ attention to specific aspects of realities, thus different and unique behaviors are revealed not only among monolinguals of different languages but also among L2 users. In the next section, we will see, given uniqueness and permeability of L2 users’ language and mind, what the LMC concept implies for English education in Japan, which has been in a state of agitation due to extremely low achievement of Japanese students (Sugiyama, 2013; Tamaki, 2015).

4. Implications of LMC for English Education in Japan

4.1 Who is the role model for the L2 user?

To a great extent those who really work hard learning a L2 to become a highly proficient speaker would think that the best role model for them is the native speaker. However, the LMC perspective of L2 learning challenges this idea. It has been often indicated that even highly proficient near-native L2 users lack in grammatical accuracy (Coppetiers, 1987), that very few L2 users seem to be fully successful in the way that native speakers are (Towell & Hawkins, 1994), and that only a mere 5% of L2 users achieve native-like fluency in a L2 and therefore 95% fail to do so (Selinker, 1972). It has been also claimed that gaining native-like proficiency is not always
an adequate goal for all L2 users and L2 learning programs (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Then, is there any logical reason why the role model for the L2 user should be the native speaker of the target L2? The answer is ‘No.’ It is meaningless for any group of people, for any purposes, in any circumstances, to set a goal that will never be able to be achieved by the majority of them.

Particularly for those who learn a L2 in a foreign language environment like us for future potential use, the native speaker is an unrealistic role model. The logical outcome of this discussion goes something like the proposition that the role model for L2 users be ‘successful L2 users’ who can use the L2, though not approximate to native-like competency, to satisfy certain social functions in a multilingual society building and maintaining good human relationships with others. From the LMC perspective, the level of L2 users’ proficiency doesn’t matter and L2 users are neither an incomplete person, nor a linguistically deficient person. What matters is whether we can use the L2, or the L1, or both, with confidence of being a unique multi-competent speaker, in communicating with either native or non-native speakers for fulfilling functional and social purposes in a multilingual society. Non-native English teachers at school, for example, who can be regarded as successful L2 users, might be good role models for their students.

4.2 Should L1 use in the classroom be abandoned?

As discussed in the previous section, the LMC idea assumes L2 users’ linguistic competence to be the overall system of a mind or a community. Then the answer to the question of whether L1 use should be totally avoided or not ought to be subject to reconsideration. The proponent of L1 avoidance in the classroom argues that because of the identical nature of the L1 and L2 acquisition processes all the input L2 users needs is the L2 itself, not their L1. Also in the framework of communicative approach to L2 learning and teaching, L1 use in the classroom is considered to impede L2 development and the learning of a L2 can only be maximized when L2 users use the target language for communicative purposes (Richards & Rogers, 1986).

However, L1 and L2 acquisition processes are not identical, but fundamentally different (Bley-Vroman, 1990). L2 users are different individuals from monolingual speakers of either the L1 or L2. Furthermore, LMC functions in the L2 user’s mind as a total cognitive system with more than one language and other cognitive systems. Therefore, the L1 of L2 users should not be separated from other systems, and the classroom should be the place where L2 users can fully make use of their languages and cognitive systems.

As the quotations below show, an increasing number of researchers have coincidentally argued for the use of L1 or code-switching, which is a solely unique skill to L2 users, in the classroom for various reasons:

[M]other tongue (MT), [sic] is indeed the mother of the second, third and fourth languages. It is from this womb that the new languages are born in the student’s mind, so to exclude
MT from the English classroom is like trying to wean a baby on day one of their life. (Deller & Rinvolucri, 2002, p. 10)

Allowing for an increase in L1 use between students when working with old or new material or in groups could help promote production of the L2. ... The use of L1 should not be punished, and the use of L2 encouraged. (Carson & Kashihara, 2012, p. 47)

Though how effective, or hindering if at all, L1 use in L2 learning and teaching is remains open to further empirical research, there has been a growing positive discussion to show that the use of L2 users’ own L1 in L2 learning and teaching has a positive influence on affective support of low proficient L2 users in particular. L1 use makes L2 users more actively participate in L2 learning in the classroom, feel less stress, threat and anxiety, focus their attention more on practice and communicative activities, understand more in vocabulary and grammar learning, take less time understanding classroom managements, utilize more cognitive information in learning, and employ more peer collaboration with others (Timor, 2012; Matsumoto, 2014). Needless to say, this does not say that we should exclusively use the L1 in the classroom, but that L1 use does not have to be completely banned in the classroom. Rather the teacher should know when is the best time for them or for students to use their L1 to make the most of their learning and teaching in the classroom.

4.3 Is translation work useless in English learning and teaching?

The LMC idea also questions complete abandonment of translation work in L2 learning and teaching. The relative unsuccessfulness of the L2 learning is attributed to grammar translation work which is often considered to hold critical pitfalls. Translation work 1) is not itself a genuine communication activity; 2) is away from real life activities; 3) makes L2 users have a wrong belief of a one-to-one relation between the L1 and L2; 4) deprives L2 users opportunities to be exposed to the L2; 5) makes a negative influence of the L1 on the L2; 6) is nothing but learning of the L1; 7) is not always suitable to all L2 users. In recent SLA studies, however, there has been a discussion to argue that translation work is neither useless, nor unproductive, but is a very useful activity for learning the L2 (G. Cook, 2010; Fernández-Guerra, 2014). Some researchers even observe that the competency of putting the L2 into the L1 lies in the core of bilinguals’ communicative competence (G. Cook, 2010). This trend of supportive discussion on translation work is well compatible with the LMC perspective of L2 learning and teaching.

This does not mean, of course, as in the case of the L1 use in the L2 classroom, the exclusiveness of translation work in the classroom, nor unnecessity of directly understanding meanings through the L2. What is important here is the idea that incorporating translation work in the classroom allows the L2 user to have more chance to be able to understand meanings more clearly and to increase lexico-grammatical and pragmatic rules and principles of the L2 to a
greater extent, which eventually makes L2 users’ communicative competence more functional and substantial. Translation work also enables to grow L2 users’ L1 vocabulary, expressiveness and logical thinking skills either explicitly or implicitly as a byproduct of L2 learning.

Moreover, from a L2 user’s point of view, translation work gives them chances to know more about linguistic and cultural background of the L2, the relationship between forms and meanings, conventional uses of languages and to raise awareness of differences and similarities between the L1 and L2 (Fernández-Guerra, 2014). Thus translation work plays an important role in enriching the total linguistic system of L2 users, i.e., L2 users’ LMC. Considering a serious concern about the low achievement of an ever increasing number of Japanese high school and university students, who haven’t even acquired grammatical items they should have acquired as junior high students (Sugiyama, 2013; Tamaki, 2015), we think it urgent to empirically explore how and when translation work should be incorporated in classroom L2 learning and teaching.

4.4 What are the goals of English learning and teaching?

It has become a common idea in recent English education world-wide that too much emphasis has been put on the ‘external’ goal for L2 learning, i.e., to be able to communicate in the L2 outside of the classroom and less on the ‘internal’ goal, i.e., socio-cognitive enrichment of the L2 user (Bassetti & Cook, 2011). The English language education in Japan is not an exception as is clearly shown in the goals described in Course of Study by MEXT. In reality very few students in Japan have chances on a daily basis to use English for real communicative purposes outside of the classroom. Therefore, more emphasis should be put on the linguistic and cognitive advantage of learning a L2, the ‘internal’ goal.

The exclusiveness of the external goal for language teaching can be dated back to the emergence of communicative language teaching in the 1980s (Stern, 1983). It can be legitimately claimed, on the one hand, that when people learn a L2 in the classroom, they naturally expect themselves to be able to use the L2 for communicative purposes outside of the classroom. But it is also true, on the other hand, that learning a L2 has an impact on L2 users’ linguistic systems and cognitive dispositions as discussed in the previous section. In other words, learning a L2 makes human beings a unique person with LMC and ‘multi-cognition’ (G. Murahata, 2010). In particular for those who learn English as a L2 in a foreign language environment like us, it might be desirable to set the external goal at a realistic level, not too far to an unachievable level, and to place the internal goal to raise both mentally and linguistically unique L2 users, whatever level of their L2 grammatical accuracy and use appropriacy.

4.5 How should Japanese see themselves as English users?

It is not difficult to find studies which show Japanese lack of confidence in English (British Counsel, 2011; Edwards, 2012; Haverson, 2013). For instance, British Counsel (2011) conducted a questionnaire survey, with a 5-point Likert scale of ‘very confident’ (5) to ‘very unconfident’ (1),
to find out how confident in English Japanese business persons are. The results of the survey showed that only 18% of the participants had confidence in English to a certain extent and more than 60% of them showed lack of confidence in English. As often shown in other studies, these results are not surprising, but what is interesting in this study is the fact that almost 90% of them answered ‘Yes’ to the question of whether they ever had a chance to use English for either a private or business reason. Having chances to use English even in a Japanese context, they can be actually regarded as a real English user, not an English learner or a deficient English speaker.

There could be potentially various factors behind lack of confidence in English among Japanese. If it is deeply rooted in the unjustified comparison with the native speaker, however, those who are involved in English education in Japan should make every effort to take that negative attitude away from Japanese L2 users. It is meaningless to evaluate how good pears apples are. Apples are apples, not deficient pears. They are a unique kind of fruit in their own right. In much the same way, the L2 user is a unique person, not a deficient native speaker of the L2. They should see themselves as a person, not a failed native speaker, who is equipped with LMC which makes L2 users what they are with unique linguistic skills such as code-switching or translation and different cognitive dispositions monolingual speakers don’t and will never have.

5. Conclusion

We have closely explored how LMC emerged and developed and argued that because of the uniqueness of L2 users’ language and mind the ideal role model for us Japanese L2 users is not a native speaker of English, but a successful L2 user who has unique linguistic and cognitive dispositions different from monolinguals. Neither L1 use nor translation work has to be completely banned in the English classroom and what English teachers should do is to seek optimal ways of when and how to incorporate those useful learning and teaching devices to develop L2 users’ LMC. It is ideal to set the external goal at a realistic level and to put more emphasis on the internal one to foster students’ ways of linguistic and cognitive processing.

Lastly, but not least, we have argued that English teachers should have our students see themselves with much confidence as independent L2 users, not deficient or subsidiary language users. To conclude, it is our hope that more and more English teachers in Japan come to understand the both theoretical and pedagogical significance of the LMC idea for English education as we have discussed in this paper, and to recognize their students, and themselves as well, as not just ‘learners’ of English but multi-competent language ‘users.’

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