

# Some Learning Outcomes and Contextual Factors of History as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in a Japanese Context

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## Abstract

This article investigated learners' self-perceived foreign language learning outcomes and some contextual factors of a university level content and language integrated learning (CLIL) course in Japan; *The International History of Japan*. Interpretation of learner voice through a grounded theory study of reflective accounts (N=124) established that CLIL was welcomed by learners and that they generally self-perceived themselves to have improved L2 and associated skills such as presenting, summarizing, reflection and discussion. Motivation of varying types seems also to have been in evidence. It found however that there may be complex and fluctuating issues of identity threat for some learners and feelings of 'shame' occasioned by a non-national educator teaching National history. Further research is needed into ways to critically engage with and mitigate this phenomenon.

## Keywords

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); History in English as a Foreign Language (EFL); Critical Thinking; Intercultural Understanding; Japanese EFL Learners; Educational Contexts.

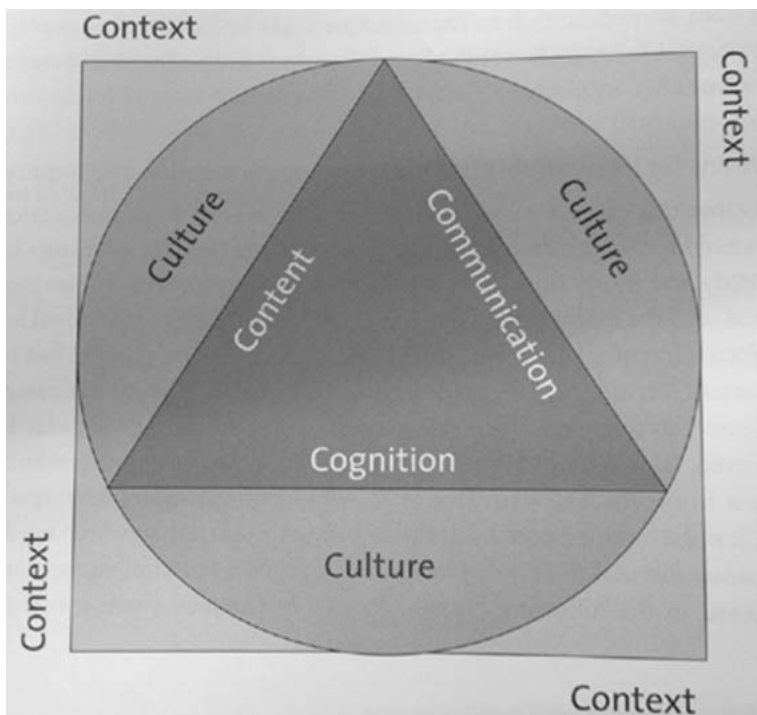
## Introduction and Literature Review

This article will investigate learning outcomes and contextual characteristics of a university level language-embedded content and language integrated learning (CLIL) course in Japan; *The International History of Japan*. As yet there

are seemingly no empirical studies on the foreign language learning (FLL) outcomes of CLIL history at the university level in Japan, nor many on CLIL in Japan in general; therefore this study attempts to explore new ground and pave the way for future research. In doing so it gives prominence to learner voice, how the learners themselves perceived CLIL history to have benefitted them and contributed to FLL and wider cognition.

CLIL is an educational method combining cognition, content and communication with FLL (Coyle et al., 2010) to create a form of pedagogy which is increasingly being treated as a distinct subject area in its own right (Breidbach & Viebrock, 2012). Communication is fostered through group work, cooperative learning and dialogic interaction to facilitate a marriage of FLL and content, leading to improved cognition through critical thinking (Coyle et al., 2010; Moore, 2011). Curricula involve not only skills and knowledge but also cognitive engagement, L2 usage opportunities and conceptualization beyond the classroom (Coyle et al., 2010).

In Coyle et al.'s (2010, p. 41) 4Cs framework for CLIL (Figure 1), Content (subject matter), Communication (language learning and usage), and Cognition (learning and thinking processes) are, recognizing the complex but intangible link between language and cultures, enveloped within a circle of Culture (global citizenship and intercultural understanding). Symbiosis is necessarily sensitive to context which surrounds the whole.



**Figure 1. The Four C's Framework**

Coyle et al. (2010, p. 41) suggest that the 4Cs lead to effective CLIL through:

- Progression in knowledge, skills and understanding of the content;
- Engagement in associated cognitive processing;
- Interaction in the communicative context;
- Development of appropriate language knowledge skills;
- The acquisition of a deepening intercultural awareness, which is in turn brought about by the positioning of self and 'otherness'

Studies seem to show CLIL producing significant FLL outcomes compared with traditional intensive language teaching (Várkuti, 2011); even leading to concurrent L1 improvements (Coyle et al., 2010; Kong & Hoare, 2011). Learners seem to apply lexical knowledge better and in broader contexts (Grum, 2012) and use a significantly higher level of cognitively demanding vocabulary more effectively (Várkuti, 2011); reading comprehension and elaborate strategy use benefit most (Breidbach & Viebrock, 2012). Várkuti (2011) suggested that CLIL might be particularly effective for FLL in largely monolingual societies with limited L2 usage opportunities.

CLIL students seem also to be better motivated and possess a more positive attitude to L2 (Fehling, 2008). Cyclical planning, requiring learners to process new ideas in increasingly more challenging ways (Kong & Hoare, 2011), using small groups to allow close cooperative co-construction of knowledge and language (Moore, 2011; Nikula, 2012) is effective in maintaining motivation and attitude. As long as group work is targeted and meaningful with adequately scaffolded L2, the temptation for learners to switch to L1 is reduced (Nikula, 2012).

Central to CLIL pedagogy are global citizenship and intercultural understanding, indeed as demonstrated in the 4Cs framework they might be considered as the enveloping principle. Sudhoff (2010, p. 32) goes as far as saying that the very fact of 'experiencing and understanding a foreign language in a content-based way opens the doors to intercultural learning processes'. CLIL history, as it lends itself to dialogic methods, critical thinking and reflection on diverse cultures, seems particularly suitable for critical understandings of intercultural issues. Analysis of underlying assumptions, attitudes, feelings and interpretations can lead to critical cognition of the world, intercultural understanding and connectivity (Mehisto et

al., 2008; Sudhoff, 2010). However, the data below will also show the need for careful planning to avoid infringing on feelings of national and cultural identity (Coyle et al., 2010).

There seem as yet to be no studies on CLIL history at the university level, but one article on history's role in FLL does exist (Brooks-Lewis, 2010); the literature review commences 'this literature review will be brief because there has been so little published about the role of history in foreign language education' (p. 138), a problem which has necessitated a focus on CLIL theory in this review also. Brooks-Lewis (2010) found learners overwhelmingly positive towards history in FLL classes; cultural awareness, motivation and understanding of why English was worth studying improved. Perhaps the most striking learner comment was, 'to date no other professor has bothered to explain to me where this language came from and why it is so important' (p. 146), showing that learners need not only to learn languages, but learn about them as well. Brooks-Lewis (p. 148) concluded 'history helps provide this panoramic vision, which creates a foundation for the constructing of learning, [language and history] is a learner need' (p. 148).

To date, most CLIL research has taken place in Europe (Coyle et al., 2010). The context of this study is Japan, and although there is increasing interest in CLIL, few studies have been published. Pinner's (2013) study emphasized the crucial link between authenticity of materials and language experience in CLIL and showed the motivation that arose from them. He showed that authentic materials are suitable for all levels of learners when appropriately chosen and scaffolded by educators. Godfrey (2013) wrote that both learners and educators had been motivated through the implementation of a university level CLIL curriculum. In line with other research, CLIL seemed to promote better communication,

critical-thinking and broaden the cultural scope of lessons.

CLIL's sensitivity to context requires this lack of literature to be attended to if CLIL in Japan is to be effective. This study will therefore seek to answer the following questions:

- 1) *What were learners' self-perceived language learning outcomes in this Japanese context?*
- 2) *Did this CLIL curriculum provide learners with foreign language learning motivation? If so how?*
- 3) *What contextual characteristics do educators need to be aware of when considering CLIL in Japan?*

## **This study**

### ***Context***

This study investigates a one-semester elective English language-embedded CLIL course for third and fourth year (20-22 years old) international communication students in a university near Tokyo; most were Japanese, a minority were Chinese and South Korean. TOEIC levels were between 600-800; CEFR 'Independent User'. While CLIL was new to them, most students were used to L2 discussion and content. Many were not motivated to begin with however:

I took this course not because I was interested in Japanese history. Reason that I took this class was the day and time of this class. I really didn't want to come to school early in the morning. After I took this class, I realized that this is a history class which subject I hate the most. So, at the first day in this class, I

thought this class would be very boring to me yet it wasn't and I started to like history. (#63)

*A brief overview of content <sup>1</sup>*

Throughout the course pains were taken to be as balanced and neutral as possible and to avoid promoting the idea of culture as a static and 'national' entity (Breidbach & Viebrock, 2012) but as a fluid and international hybrid. Content included ancient migrations of commoners, craftsmen and courtiers from the mainland and the embassies that travelled the other way in search of technology and culture from China, Korea and India. Middle age international cooperation to deal with piracy lead to widespread cultural and economic exchange, Japanese mined silver facilitating advanced economies in the region. Japan towns spread in Asia and Asian towns in Japan.

The arrival of Europeans and early modern travels to Europe facilitated technology and cultural transfers both ways but perceived and real political, religious and economic threats lead to sweeping overseas travel bans, reduced European links and expanded Asian ones. Most non-Japanese were restricted to Nagasaki and most Japanese abroad, mainly Christian refugees, merchants and mercenaries, were forbidden to return. Technological transfer via China was slowly superseded in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by study of the new European sciences from books brought by Dutch traders. Culturally however, Japan still remained firmly Confucian.

Encroaching Europeans and Americans and the Opium Wars led to expanded language education, stricter border controls, nascent manufacturing industry and

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<sup>1</sup> History is essentially interpretation. This summary takes the path of least resistance, but I recognize some people may disagree with aspects of it.

increased colonization of the northern and southern islands. When gunboat diplomacy imposed semi-colonial status, Japan reacted with an increasing internationalism; emigrant farmer, worker and courtesans spread around Asia and the Americas and sojourning students and aristocrats as well as immigrant ‘experts’ and merchants facilitated technology transfer and development in the home islands. Porcelain and silk filled American and European homes and Japanese art was widely copied.

An increasingly self-confident nation with an internationally respected culture, significant foreign communities and a strong military, firstly fostered and then, while embracing European style colonialism, rejected Pan-Asianism; a multicultural Japanese Empire imposed assimilation on the colonized. The new leading role in international affairs was resented by many who saw Japan as an upstart; the slow progress to WWII started with the exclusion of a racial equality clause in the Versailles treaty of 1919.

Post WWII, with most non-ethnic Japanese ‘sent home’ and deprived of citizenship, Japan instead embraced corporate internationalism with business and cultural exports and infrastructures expanding globally. At the same time, although little recognized, Japan’s society has become increasingly internationalized as sojourning and settling immigrants have spread food and other cultures and the Japanese have embraced global cultural exports, particularly from South Korea in recent years.

### *Curriculum*

While engaging with content, learners engage lower order skills such as understanding, explaining and summarizing and higher order ones such as



critical thinking, analysing, evaluating and reflecting (Coyle et al., 2010). Where possible multimodal resources such as artifacts, pictures, photographs, newsreel and films are utilized. Assessment comprises vocabulary research homework, 20%; class reflection, 20%; two self-researched learner group presentations, 20%; participation, 20%; final reflection essay, 20% (furnishing the data for this study). Table 1 describes a typical 90-minute class. For a fuller explanation of the course and its conceptual foundations see Lockley (2013).

**Table 1: A typical lesson from An International History of Japan**

Activity	L2 Skills	Aim
1) Homework 10-15 new words, example sentences	Vocabulary, writing	Aid content cognition and understanding
2) Mini-lecture	Listening, reading, writing	Background information
3) Teacher questioned	Speaking, listening	Clarify issues, deepen understanding; dialogic questioning
4) Three readings in groups of three.	Reading, writing	Focused information on specific topics; learners analyze and summarize texts and create discussion questions
5) Explain summaries and discuss questions	Speaking, listening	Analyze knowledge; co-constructing interpretations and conclusions
6) Learner reflection	Writing	Ground new knowledge in existing knowledge

### ***Method***

The research employed a grounded theory study of reflective learner essays, around 75000 words, (N=124, 101 female; 23 male) from six cohorts during 2011/2012. Grounded theory is a qualitative method by which categories are

allowed to emerge from the data rather than having pre-conceived categories foisted upon it. Dey (2007, p. 173) described the grounded theory process as allowing ‘comparison and contrast, links and connections’ to emerge to form a coherent narrative and discussion. Dörnyei (2007) advocates a three-stage approach to grounded theory. Firstly, open coding; the data as a whole was analyzed line by line for data pertinent to this research. Where data was relevant it was assigned an abstract category heading and when another piece of data fell under the same heading it was added to that category. When it didn’t it founded a new category.

Secondly, Dörnyei (2007) recommends axial coding; axial coding extends the coding process from ‘first-order concepts to higher-order concepts’ (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 261), finding connections and attempting to integrate them into wider, more encompassing conceptual categories. This stage is sometimes called theoretical coding (Glaser, 1992) and is the beginning of identifying the themes most central to the research.

Finally Dörnyei (2007) recommends selective coding to establish a core category, in this case categories, which appear in the narrative section below. It is these which enable the study to be written and conclusions to be drawn.

This article only seeks answers to the research questions above, all other data, was excluded for the purposes of this study.

## **Narrative**

This section outlines and discusses the narrative derived from the coding processes, using representative quotes, to construct a picture of self-perceived

learning outcomes and establish significant contextual characteristics. As these are learners' self-perceived outcomes they cannot be established quantitatively. This should not denigrate their worth however as self-perceptions are linked to self-concept and may contribute towards motivation, long-term effort, L2 achievement and other individualized factors (Mercer, 2011). In some places learner voice proves so powerful that it speaks for itself, in others it requires more discussion and interpretation.

#### *Learners' self-perceived language learning outcomes*

Almost all learners seemed to self-perceive L2 improvements, tending to be enthusiastic about CLIL methods and learning outcomes:

This lesson is ideal for English learners because we have to use all skills. The beginning of the class, we have [teacher] presentation, and after that we have to discuss about it and make a question to check that we understood the contents. At this time, we use listening and speaking skill. After that, we make a group of three and read the article, and after finished reading, we summarize it and discuss about it. At this time, we use reading, writing and speaking skill. We can use all skills that we want to practice. (#124)

Overall, I was able to improve well-balanced integrated four skills in English. (#37)

We didn't learn English, we learned in English. I thought that it was necessary to learn useful English. (#80)

One learner reported L1 improvements (Coyle et al., 2010):

Through the history, I could learn many vocabularies. It's not only English also I got some new Japanese words. (#107)

Learners particularly appreciated discussion opportunities:

I could get English communication skill, almost every class we had opportunities to discuss in group... I could also get [interactional skills], every student had to participate actively and if we did not participate we may not succeed in the class. (#14)

Actually I wasn't good at speaking up at class before, but I think I could speak up positively at class than before. I could get use to speaking English while enjoying the class with my friends. (#55)

And co-constructing authentic, meaningful, creative, intelligent and spontaneous ideas:

Exchanging our ideas was very interesting because they answered what I didn't expect. I could know many thoughts. (#83)

I could have many NEW ideas from classmates. (#22)

So many creative and interesting discussion points came out. (#9)

Learners however had individual opinions and expectations:

I want everyone to be more active to speak their opinions even they have different opinions to others because different opinions and perceptions can give others new thoughts. I believe that class will be more fun and meaningful when everybody starts having own ideas and saying it so that we could improve ourselves together. (#70)

Improvements in reading, writing, reflection and summarizing were frequently mentioned:

I could improve my reading and summarize skills. In fact I read texts faster than ever. I'm sure of it.... If I had practiced in a big group, I would have been reserved and haven't told my opinion. (#18)

Reflection helped my understanding. Not only just learning, also I could express my feelings from learning. At the beginning of the course, I couldn't write quickly my impressions, but gradually I could get the hang. (#89)

Learners also felt presentation techniques had improved:

For the presentation I had to explain clearly with easy English. By giving explanation in my own words, not only audience but also myself can understood it well. Furthermore I could also practice pronunciation and presentation skills such as eye contact, gesture and using proper tone of voice. (#1)

And peer teaching, effective among other things at changing learner beliefs and improving motivation (Dörnyei, 2005), through presentations seems to have inspired learners to improve their techniques and deepened content interest:

To give a presentation easy for audience to understand and with passion, I needed to research and collect much information together [...] to know our own topic very deeply. In the presentation, I also could learn interesting things from my classmates, and those were easy to understand. (#39)

I saw many other student's presentations and questions and opinions. Their presentations were excellent. I'm always moved by their speaking. In addition, I always thought I have to study more and more. (#107)

Furthermore, learners realized the import of CLIL acquired skills:

Experience can be very good teacher, so if we do presentation as many as possible, we can communication very smoother. I believe when I got job, communication skills are very important. (#96)

Even little self-perceived improvement seemed formative for one learner:

My English skill has not improved so much. But I could find my weak point and what I should do. I realized my reading speed is too slow. It means my vocabulary is very poor [...] I need to read many books as a practice as well. I have to improve speaking skill [too]. I should make more time to speak

English. (#64)

A majority of learners specifically praised CLIL as educationally effective, emotionally and academically motivating and cognitively stimulating (Kong & Hoare, 2011); they overwhelmingly self-perceived L2 and associated skills progression with L1 improvements also reported (Coyle et al., 2010).

### *Foreign language learning motivation*

CLIL seems to have motivated in various ways, primarily through connection with the past and inspiration from historical figures' actions:

Before this lesson begins, actually I gave up my English skills. Because I felt sure that I cannot speak English very well. Moreover I am a shy person. If I had a question during the class, I could not ask the question. I asked myself 'why I cannot be positively speaking in English?' I was disappointed of me [...] My wrong impression has changed since when I watched *The Choshu Five* [film about five young samurai who studied in Britain in the 1860s]. In this time, they could not get enough the reference books. However they made a desperate effort to study English. I felt that if I can make an earnest effort like them, I can do it too. Since then, I tried to improve my English skills. This class was really essential for me. (#113)

Otokichi went overseas at the age of 14 and he worked well and got many successes [...] This story gave me courage to go overseas because he was just castaway [...] but he succeeded there. (#47)

In this class I made presentation about Tsuda Umeko. I lived in the USA with my family when I was an elementary school student [...] I felt lonely because of living in different culture and language country. Umeko went abroad without her parents when she was five [...] She is now known as the pioneer of women's education [...] she made big influence on Japanese conservative society. (#63)

[In the 19<sup>th</sup> century] Japanese people tried to change their life and had to learn from foreign countries [...] They weren't afraid of change and severe punishment [because leaving Japan was illegal] and they did their best to develop Japan. I was shocked by it and then they changed my motivation to learn. I felt I have to have strong heart like them. I deeply appreciated them. (#68)

CLIL also prompted critical comparison with the present (Sudhoff, 2010):

I thought recently there are not fervid young people such as the Choshu 5 in Japan. These days young people are not interested in own country's government, society any problems and so on. So I have to reflect on our situation I found out we can learn a lot of things from ancient people. (#15)

I think that the intention of Choshu 5 [to learn] foreign technology is lacking to the present day young man including me. (#25)

One South Korean learner noted historical inspiration in action:

There was a discussion question that if you were live in that era, will you go to



abroad or stay in Japan? Students answered that they will go abroad to make revolution. I felt that young people have [more] passion and positive drive than I have thought. Japanese typical characteristic is humble and passive attitude. However they have ambition of becoming a citizen of the world. And I thought that these surroundings were made by historical heroes. (#62)

Stories of sociocultural conditions motivated too:

When we were talking about prostitutes [in 18th century Nagasaki], we were curious why prostitutes [preferred Chinese to Europeans]. The answer was ‘smell’. I had never imagined about them until that time, but European people didn’t have bath culture those days [...] if it’s a high school class, we couldn’t learn about it. Teachers might judge this information is not important [...] interesting information like this make me feel motivated. (#78)

As did imagined future L2 selves (Mercer, 2011):

If I have a chance to go to Europe in the future I want to talk about [the international influence of Japanese art] with European. I’m proud of that and I would like foreigners to know that. It would be a good topic and we can exchange our culture and history between nations. (#68)

For still more learners, ‘entering another language mean[t] entering another world’ (Sudhoff, 2010, p. 31), indicating that while the L2 medium may facilitate new perspectives, it may also require sensitivity:

The [lesson] contents are all Japanese history but the language was English. So I sometimes thought that we learned Japanese history as if many incidents happened in foreign country. (#10)

For others talking about national history in an international language, English, was empowering as well as motivating:

My most important progress in this class is I became to be able to introduce Japanese culture [...] so I feel I could get proof of Japanese by being able to talk about Japanese culture through this class. I think I should know Japan more as Japanese [...] Therefore I want to know enough to teach foreigner in English. (#50)

It didn't matter to be taught Japanese history by a British teacher. This is good time to be able to be a person who can teach history in English. I think Japanese should be able to tell about own country's history in English. (#101)

As the comment above shows, the educator's identity was significant for many learners, again showing the necessity of contextual sensitivity:

Learning Japanese history from a British teacher is strange thing. Usually we must be the position of teaching Japanese history. But this situation gave me motivation because I wanted to be [more] familiar about my country than foreigner. (#27)

I noticed that Japanese don't have knowledge of [Japanese] history [...] it is woeful to be taught Japanese history by a British teacher. We have to teach and tell history of own country [to] the world [...] I noticed importance of having pride and interest in own country by taking this class. (#52)

I felt very strange at first because foreign teacher know Japan better than me. I felt shame. However, it was very fresh for me. (#34)

A knowledgeable non-Japanese educator provoked discomfort and self-critical reflection in many learners; 'shame' was a word used in a narrow majority of the essays. Sentiments of reflected appraisal, pleasure at others showing interest in you and your's (Mercer, 2011), were concurrently apparent however. This motivated some to 'better the foreigner', clearly not manifest of the intended intercultural understanding aims of the course; however others were motivated through a fresh perspective. If CLIL is to become widespread in Japan, then it is likely that native Japanese educators will undertake most teaching; identity issues may or may not be significant with such contextual changes.

Japan and other Asian countries have had complicated relationships with independence, self-determination, nationalism and European and American nations and their languages over recent centuries. Coupled with deep national feeling, historical dialogue, the language of that dialogue and sensitivity to how that dialogue is expressed and controlled are important matters to be considered in CLIL as it relates to learner motivations, identities and sensitivities.

Some contexts render this debate null-and-void, The People's Republic of China for example forbids history from being taught in anything other than the national

language (Kong & Hoare, 2011) and closely controls its interpretation of the historical narrative for political and social reasons. Japan has no such laws, but there is a common (admittedly partly justified) assumption that non-Japanese have limited knowledge of things Japanese. This is coupled with a deep national pride, shown by the above-evidenced widespread expression of shame that ‘as Japanese people’ learners were taught ‘their history’ by a non-Japanese educator. Sentiments such as these, along with the widespread, but increasingly questioned, beliefs in the ethnic homogeneity of the Japanese nation (contested academically (Denoon, Hudson, McCormack & Morris-Suzuki, 2001), by foreign resident figures, (MOJ, 2012a) naturalization statistics (MOJ, 2012b), by the increased prevalence of mixed marriages and the approximately 20000 new mixed heritage citizens per year (MHLW, 2006)) and the ‘uniqueness’ of national culture mean many Japanese see intercultural understanding largely as a one-way ship; explaining Japaneseness to an unknowing world. CLIL disrupted these national self-conceptual beliefs for many learners; for some this was revelatory and liberating, for others, an affront to deeply held beliefs.

Deeply engrained beliefs such as these are not unique to Japan are but perhaps less prevalent where national histories are generally shorter, more fluid and less currently politicized, such as Europe, the source of most CLIL research. As such they present a contextual challenge that needs more research but might be mitigated perhaps by scaffolded and explicit critical engagement at the beginning of CLIL curricula. As Japan and other countries in the region such as South Korea and Taiwan grapple with increased or better-recognized multiculturalism, intercultural understanding will become both a far more pressing and a more subtly nuanced concern. CLIL history may provide one of the means to smooth these

social processes.

## **Conclusion**

This qualitative study researches a small number of participants in one learning context and uses only one source of data, however large that body of data was; it may not be widely generalizable even within Japan. Furthermore, the learning outcomes reported are all self-perceived, not quantitatively verifiable. However, self-perceptions are important contributors to learner proficiency and the more positive they are the more likely they are to lead to motivationally based proficiency improvements (Mercer, 2011). Despite these limitations, the author feels that the study does offer something to the reader and the wider research community as there appears to be no similar study on CLIL as history in the East Asian context published to date. It is hoped that this study will provide the impetus for larger and more in-depth mixed methods studies in the future.

History as CLIL in this context proved to be popular and the self-perceived learning outcomes seemed to be considerable. Linguistically, the overwhelming majority of learners reported improved L2 and associated skills such as presentation, reflection and summarizing; peer teaching and dialogic co-construction of knowledge and conceptual understandings seem to have particularly resonated with learners. FLL and content motivation flowed from these self-perceived progressions.

The main contextual characteristic for educators to note was the necessity of sensitivity to cultural and national identity. Learners overwhelmingly commented on the fact that they were being taught national history by a non-national educator. While for some this engendered positive feelings of reflected appraisal and

provided positive language learning motivation, for many this was ‘shameful’ and for some it provoked feelings of identity threat, paradoxically these may also have lead to motivation of a different kind. L2 medium may also have been an issue that was however overshadowed by educator identity in this instance. It would be interesting to see how learner reactions to a Japanese educator teaching similar L2 content would differ. It is hoped that in the future a body of literature concerning CLIL in the Japanese context will grow and lead to its further implementation.

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