Japanese University Students' Attitudes toward English Speaking Situations

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1. Introduction

In recent years, English education in Japan has given more attention to speaking by emphasizing the importance of communicative skills in English. Nevertheless, most students cannot speak English after studying it for six years at secondary schools. This is probably because the entrance examinations of high schools and universities mostly test passive skills, such as grammar and reading, so students tend to focus only on those skills. In addition, Japanese people have little opportunity to speak English in everyday situations. Therefore, it is difficult and sometimes even considered unnecessary for them to improve their speaking skills.

However, output plays a significant role in language acquisition. Although Krashen (1984) suggested the importance of comprehensible input for language acquisition, which is a spoken language that can be understood by a learner even though the learner may not know some grammar and vocabulary, Swain (1985, 1995) proposed an output hypothesis by claiming that Krashen's comprehensible input is not enough for second language acquisition. This is due to the results of Swain (1985) in which sixth-grade French immersion students could not achieve native-like performance in French after receiving comprehensible input for almost seven years. Therefore, Swain argued that comprehensible output is necessary for learners to improve their L2 a step further, moving from semantic to syntactic processing.

Nevertheless, Swain (1985) stated that "comprehensible output is,

unfortunately, generally missing in typical classroom settings" (p.252). Ito (2008) also pointed out that even though more attention is being given to communication in English classes at Japanese secondary schools nowadays, due to large class sizes, the amount of the output by the students is too little to improve their speaking skills. Isoda (2008) mentioned as well that although they are given the chance to speak English in English classes, many Japanese university students hesitate to talk because they have had little experience speaking English.

Even though educators in Japan have recently called for placing more importance on communicative approaches, the existing conditions show that not enough output is drawn from the students in English classes. In addition to some external causes, such as class size and entrance examinations, there are also internal causes that influence students' production of English output: Japanese students' affective factors such as anxiety, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate. In this study, I would like to focus on these psychological aspects and investigate Japanese university students' attitudes toward English speaking situations.

2. Literature Review

This study dealt with the following three affective variables that relate closely to L2 speaking: language anxiety, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate (WTC). These three variables were chosen because they are believed to be trait communication constructs that exert a substantial impact on communicative behavior (Baumeister, Campbell, Kruger, & Vohs, 2003; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987).

2.1. Language Anxiety

Language anxiety is one of the most important variables influencing learners' L2 learning and performance. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1991) defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning, arising

from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.31), and described the following three components of language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is "an attitude characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people," which includes oral communication anxiety, stage fright, and receiver anxiety (p.30). Test anxiety refers to "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure" (p.30). Fear of negative evaluation, which is not limited to test-taking situations, was defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend, 1966, p.449).

Language anxiety has often been investigated in the context of its relationship to L2 proficiency. Most studies have indicated that language anxiety has a negative correlation with L2 proficiency. For example, Aida (1994) examined the relationship between anxiety and Japanese language learning with 96 students. The correlation coefficient between anxiety and the course grade was $r = -.38$, $p < .01$, which indicated that higher anxiety was moderately associated with lower course grades. According to Horwitz (1991), the correlation between the anxiety and the final course grade was $r = -.49$, $p = .003$ for 35 students in Spanish classes, and $r = -.54$, $p = .001$ for 32 students in French classes. Both correlations indicated strong negative relationships between anxiety and L2 proficiency.

Woodrow (2006) considered language anxiety as "a two-dimensional construct reflecting communication within the classroom and outside the classroom in everyday communicative situations" (p.309). Therefore, Woodrow investigated both in-class and out-of-class anxieties of 275 ESL students in Australia using 12 items based on a five-point Likert scale (six in-class and six out-of-class items), which asked students to indicate how much anxiety they feel when speaking English in each situation. The mean scores of each English speaking situation were calculated. The anxiety-provoking situations were, "Giving an oral presentation" ($M = 2.93$) and "Role-playing in front of class" ($M = 2.73$), both of which are in-class anxiety items, and

"Answering lecturer's questions" (M = 2.65), which is the out-of-class item. On the other hand, the easy situations were from in-class items, "Speaking informally with teacher" (M = 1.81) and "Participating in group discussions" (M = 1.74).

2.2. Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is another important factor in L2 acquisition. It is believed that "a person has the ability to produce results, accomplish goals, or perform tasks completely" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.73). Clément and Kruidenier (1985) maintained that "self-confidence is the most important determinant of motivation to learn and use the second language" (p.24). The concept of self-confidence was first introduced into L2 literature by Clément, Gardner, and Smythe (1977), who examined 304 tenth- and eleventh-grade francophone students in Canada. The results of factor analysis revealed that English competence was related to the individual's prior experience with English and his/her ensuing self-confidence and greater motivation to learn English.

Based on the finding by Clément et al. (1977), Clément (1980) established Clément's model in which self-confidence is developed through the frequency and quality of interethnic contact, leading to motivation and eventually communicative competence. Clément and Kruidenier (1985) tested this model with 1,180 seventh-, ninth-, and eleventh-grade francophone students in Canada. The results confirmed the model by showing structural relationships: self-confidence was derived from intercultural contact (r = .70, p < .001), which in turn generated motivation (r = .51, p < .001). In Clément's (1987) investigation of 293 francophone university students in Canada, self-confidence was the best predictor of L2 oral proficiency (r = .63– .73, p < .01).

Although Clément's model emphasized the intercultural contact that generates self-confidence, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) extended the applicability of self-confidence into an EFL context where there is little direct contact with L2 members. Investigating 301 secondary school students in Hungary, Clément et al. found that students' self-confidence in L2 was significantly correlated with the teachers' ratings of students' L2 proficiency.

Communication proficiency, in particular, showed the strongest relationship (r = .49, p < .001). Therefore, the concept of L2 self-confidence was found to be important not only in an ESL context but also in an EFL context.

2.3. Willingness to Communicate

The concept of WTC, which was first developed in L1 communication by McCroskey and Richmond (1987), was defined as a "personality orientation which explains why one person will talk and another will not under identical, or virtually identical, situational constraints" (p.130). MacIntyre (1994) developed an L1 WTC model (Figure 1) in which WTC is most directly influenced by communication apprehension, or language anxiety (r = -.15) and perceived competence, or self-confidence (r = .58). MacIntyre explains his model as follows, "It would appear that people are willing to communicate to the extent that they are not apprehensive about it and perceive themselves to be capable (competent) of effective communication. The person least willing to speak up would be the apprehensive individual who feels incompetent as a communicator" (pp.137–138).

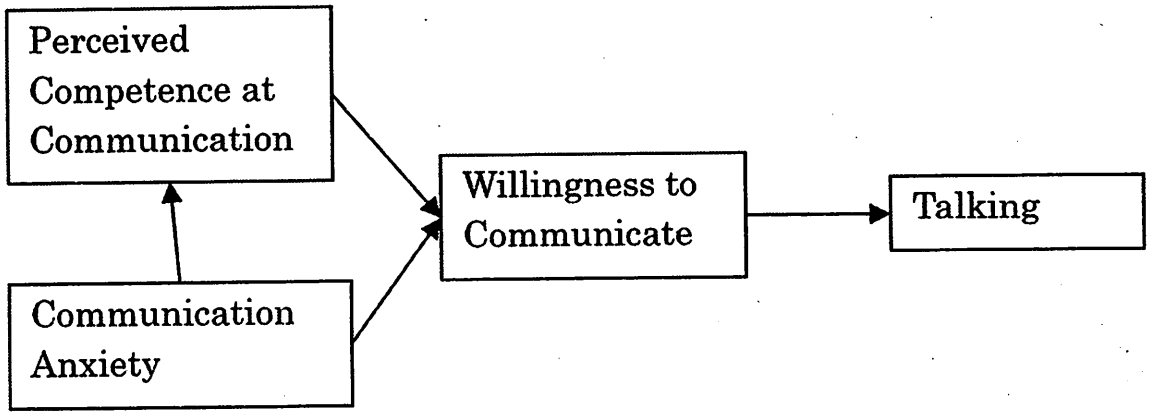

Figure 1. A portion of MacIntyre's (1994) Willingness to Communicate Model

MacIntyre and Charos (1996), who investigated 92 adult Anglophone students learning French in Canada, applied L1 WTC to L2 communication. The results revealed that students who were more willing to communicate

tended to communicate more often (r = .16). As perceived competence had the largest effect on L2 use (r = .60), it was suggested that "simply perceiving that one has the ability to communicate, regardless of one's actual proficiency, can affect the rate of participation in L2 conversation" (p.18).

With regard to L2 WTC of Japanese students, Yashima (2002) constructed an L2 communication model with a sample of 297 Japanese university students. In the model, L2 Communication Confidence, a combination of communication competence and perceived communication competence in English, had the largest effect on L2 WTC (r = .68). Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu (2004) also created an L2 communication model with a sample of 166 Japanese high school students in which Self-Confidence had the largest effect on L2 WTC (r = .59). Thus, it was found that low anxiety and high self-confidence were considered crucial for a person to be willing to communicate in English. The second part of this study examined the degree to which WTC predicts voluntary communication behavior in the L2 with 60 Japanese high school students who participated in a study-abroad program in the United States. Pearson correlations indicated that WTC was significantly correlated with the frequency of communication with a host family (r = .27), the frequency of communication in class (r = .28), and the amount of time that the students spent talking with the host family (r = .37). Therefore, the students with a higher WTC tended to engage in communication with Americans more frequently and over a longer period of time than those who recorded lower WTC.

3. Objective of the Study

As I mentioned in the Literature Review, Woodrow (2006) classified English speaking situations into two contexts: in-class and out-of-class. I will also look at these two contexts, but in this study, I will expand her study in two ways. First, Woodrow dealt with only anxiety, but I will add two more variables, self-confidence and WTC, in order to investigate students' attitudes in more detail. Second, although Woodrow compared each situation

by looking at mean scores, I will analyze the data using a Rasch model that has two major advantages in analyzing Likert-scale data over looking at only mean scores. First, Rasch analysis checks whether the items in the questionnaire measure the same traits as the rest of the items. Second, Rasch analysis indicates the relative difficulty level of each item in comparison to other items in the questionnaire (Bond & Fox, 2007; McNamara, 1996).

4. Research Questions

In the investigation of Japanese students' attitudes toward in-class and out-of-class English speaking situations, first, the differences in attitudes between the two contexts will be examined. Therefore, the first research question is, "Are there any differences in Japanese students' attitudes toward in-class and out-of-class contexts?" Next their attitudes toward each English speaking situation will be looked at. Thus, the second research question is, "What are Japanese students' attitudes toward each English speaking situation?"

5. Method

5.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 103 first- and second-year Japanese university students (66 males and 37 females) majoring in either business or engineering at two private universities in Japan. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22, and they had studied English for at least six years in Japanese secondary schools. Although the participants were non-English majors, the two universities are competitive, so the participants had a high proficiency in English, especially in reading and grammar skills.

5.2. Instruments

The instrument used in this study was the Willingness to Communicate scale designed by Sick and Nagasawa (2000). The scale consists of 27 items

describing specific situations in which one uses English. Among 27 items, 20 items were chosen because they represent situations that Japanese EFL students are likely to encounter: 10 in-class items and 10 out-of-class items (see Appendix). The participants rated their anxiety, confidence, and willingness in each situation. Using a six-point Likert scale, the participants indicated their position on a continuum (Anxiety: 1 = no anxiety, 2 = 20% anxiety, 3 = 40% anxiety, 4 = 60% anxiety, 5 = 80% anxiety, to 6 = 100% anxiety; Confidence: 1 = no confidence, 2 = 20% confidence, 3 = 40% confidence, 4 = 60% confidence, 5 = 80% confidence, to 6 = 100% confidence; Willingness: 1 = no willingness, 2 = 20% willingness, 3 = 40% willingness, 4 = 60% willingness, 5 = 80% willingness, to 6 = 100% willingness). The possible scores for each are from 27 to 162, respectively: low scores represent low anxiety, low self-confidence, or low WTC, while high scores represent high anxiety, high self-confidence, or high WTC.

5.3. Procedure

The students who voluntarily agreed to participate in the study filled in the questionnaire during a school break. The data were analyzed using SPSS for the first research question. The Alpha level for statistical significance was set at .01. As for the second question, the data were analyzed using Winsteps.

6. Results and Discussions

The questionnaire data were collected from 103 participants, but three participants were missing data due to noncooperation or unwillingness to answer. The data of the three participants were deleted consequently, and the data from 100 participants were analyzed.

To answer the first research question, "Are there any differences in Japanese students' attitudes toward in-class and out-of-class contexts?," correlation coefficients of each context were computed among the following three affective variables: anxiety, self-confidence, and WTC. The results are shown in Table 1 for in-class and Table 2 for out-of-class contexts,

respectively. All the correlations were statistically significant, indicating that if students have less anxiety, then they have higher self-confidence and are more willing to communicate in English in both in-class and out-of-class English speaking situations.

Table1. Correlations among three Variables in In-Class Context

	Anxiety	Self-Confidence
Self-confidence	− .64*	
WTC	− .40*	.59*

*$p < .01$

Table2. Correlations among three Variables in Out-of-Class Context

	Anxiety	Self-Confidence
Self-confidence	− .59*	
WTC	− .39*	.59*

*$p < .01$

Next, to look at the differences in students' attitudes between the two contexts in more detail, t-tests were conducted in order to evaluate whether students have different degrees of anxiety, self-confidence, or WTC toward in-class and out-of-class contexts. The results of t-tests indicated that students have significantly greater anxiety out of class than in class, and that they have greater confidence in English in the in-class than the out-of-class context. However, no significant differences were found in WTC between the two contexts. Accordingly, although students have less anxiety and more self-confidence in the classroom environment, their degree of willingness to speak English does not differ from natural (out-of-class) situations. This result may be due to the fact that English education in Japanese schools has focused on passive skills and has not drawn much English output from the students, and that many English classrooms have failed to provide students with a relaxed environment where students can feel free to express themselves in English.

Therefore, willingness to speak English did not much develop in Japanese students even in classroom environments.

Table 3. Comparison of In-Class and Out-of-Class Contexts

	In-Class		Out-of-Class		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*T* (99)
Anxiety	25.53	9.91	33.01	9.26	9.92*
Self-confidence	36.67	9.43	30.33	9.97	8.61*
WTC	30.63	9.12	30.08	9.90	0.70

*$p < .01$

With regard to the second research question, "What are Japanese students' attitudes toward each English speaking situation?," the data were analyzed using a Rasch model. First, unidimensionality of the language anxiety construct was examined. Bond and Fox (2005) suggested that for samples of less than 500, items are considered misfit when mean square infit or outfit values are larger than 1.3. By following their guideline, two anxiety items (In-Class Anxiety item 1, or IA1, and Out-of-Class Anxiety item 5, or OA 5) were found to be misfitting. These items were not measuring the same traits as the rest of the items in the questionnaire; therefore, they were deleted from the analysis. After deleting the items, the Winsteps reported that item reliability was .98, item separation 7.05, person reliability .90, and person separation 2.94, respectively.

Figure 2 is a Wright map for anxiety. In the Wright map, items are indicated by the item number, while each person's performance is represented by an "X." Persons and items are located on the map according to their ability and difficulty estimates, respectively; higher items represent the situations where students feel more anxiety, and higher persons are those who feel less anxiety speaking English. Therefore, the students feel the most anxiety when they participate in a speech contest (OA10, logit = 1.74). Other difficult situations are also from the out-of-class context: "Call a hotel to reserve a room" (OA1, .69), and "Talk to a foreigner sitting next to you on the train"

(OA3, .66). In the in-class context, students feel anxious in IA5 (.53), IA6 (.42), and IA7 (.58) where they have to speak English in front of the class. In contrast, students feel less anxiety in IA9, "Ask a Japanese teacher the meaning of a word using English" (-1.42), and IA8 (-.86), and IA 4 (-.74) where they engage in pair-work in the class. Overall, out-of-class situations are more likely to arouse anxiety in students than in-class situations; however, students tend to feel more anxiety by speaking English in front of the class than they do in half of the out-of-class situations.

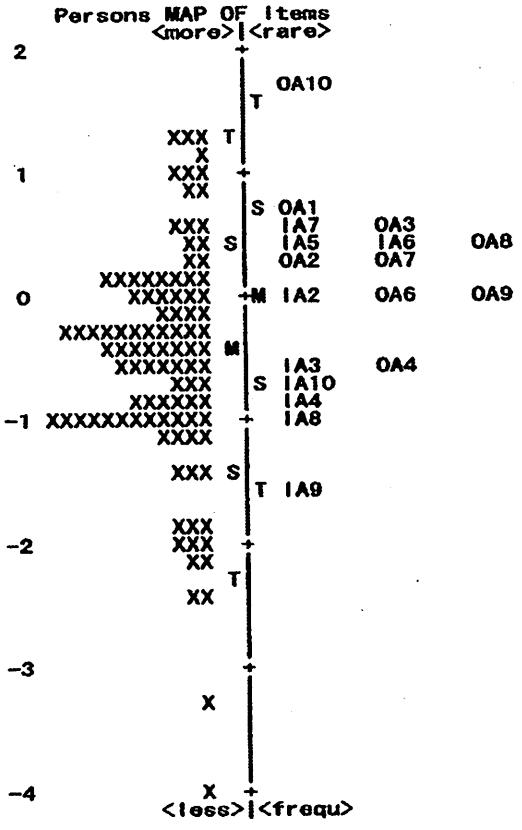

Figure 2. A Wright map for Anxiety

Second, self-confidence in each English speaking situation was examined. The Winsteps detected the following three items: Out-of-Class Confidence item 5, or OC5, In-Class Confidence item 9, or IC9, and IC1 were misfitting, and thus, they were deleted from the analysis. The item reliability was .96, item separation 5.01, person reliability .91, and person separation 3.13.

Figure 3 is the Wright map for self-confidence; higher items represent

situations in which students have more confidence in speaking English, and higher persons are those who have more self-confidence in speaking English. The logit values revealed that students have the least self-confidence in participating in a speech contest (OC10, 1.38), and that they have less confidence in talking to a foreigner on the train (OC3, .82) and guiding a small group of English speaking people in Tokyo (OC8, .65). With regard to the in-class context, IC5, IC6, and IC7 were difficult situations, where students have to speak English in front of the class. On the other hand, the situations in which the students have greater self-confidence are "Ask a native teacher the meaning of a word" (IC 3, -.66) and "Tell your partner how to get to a certain place using a map" (IC8, -.40).

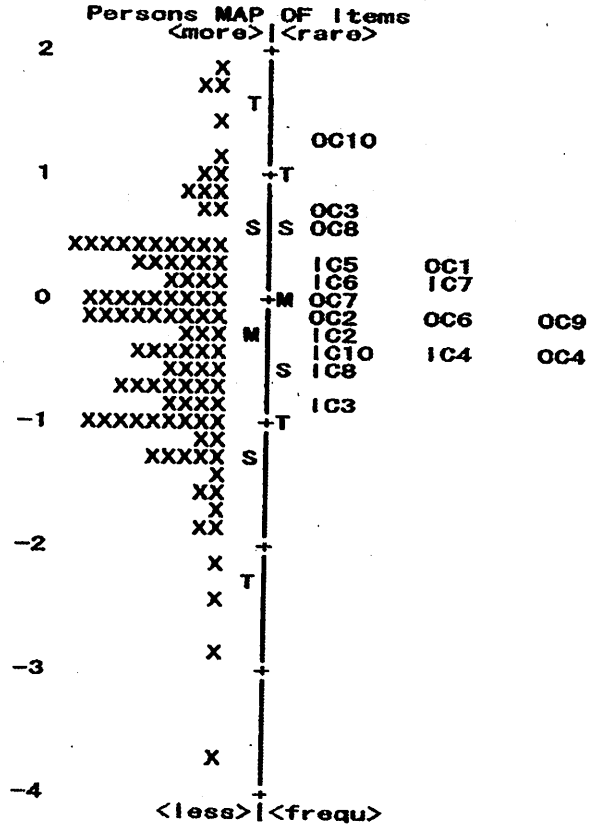

Figure 3. A Wright map for Self-Confidence

Finally, with regard to the WTC construct, Winsteps reported three missing items: Out-of-Class Willingness item 3, or OW3, OW7, and OW10. After deleting these items, item reliability was .92, item separation 3.38, person

reliability .89, and person separation 2.74, respectively. The Wright map for WTC is shown in Figure 4, where higher items represent the situations in which the students tend to have less WTC, and higher persons represent those who have greater WTC. Based on the map, the situations in which students are not willing to speak English are in-class context: In-Class Willingness item 5, or IW5 (.54), IW6 (.41), and IW7 (.45), where students have to speak English in front of the class. In contrast, the students are likely to feel greater WTC in situations such as "asking a native or Japanese teacher the meaning of a word" (IW3, -.44; IW9, -.53), and "calling a friend to invite him/her to a party" (OW4, -.44).

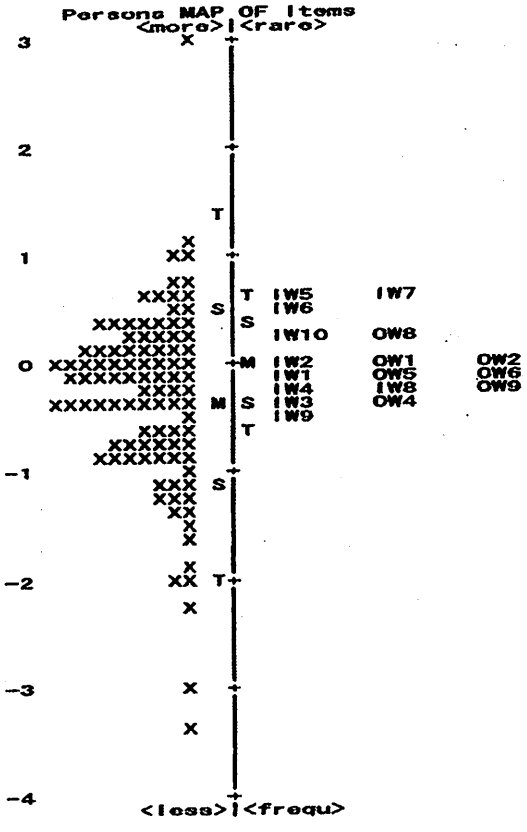

Figure 4. A Wright map for Willingness to Communicate

So far we have looked at each of the three affective constructs, and some situations were difficult or easy for more than two variables. For example, the situation of participating in a speech contest arouses the maximum anxiety and the least self-confidence among all the items. This situation in fact caused

the least WTC; however, Rasch detected the WTC item was misfitting, so it was deleted. This is because the feeling of willingness to speak English in a speech contest was considered to be different from the WTC in other English speaking situations. Other out-of-class situations in which students have greater anxiety and a lack confidence are "talking to a foreigner on the train," "making a reservation with a hotel by telephone," and "guiding a group of native speakers on a Tokyo tour." With regard to the in-class context, students feel anxiety, lack confidence, and have less WTC when they have to speak English in front of the class. Interestingly, students' unwillingess to speak English is greater in front of the class than in out-of-class situations. On the other hand, students have less anxiety and greater confidence and WTC for asking a teacher the meaning of a word and engaging in pair-work.

Moreover, when we look at the bottom part of the three Wright maps, we notice that some students are located below the items. This is because they have greater anxiety, less self-confidence, or less WTC than those items could measure. The number of those students is larger in anxiety than in self-confidence, and in self-confidence than in WTC. As we used the same situations for all three constructs, it can be said that students are more likely to feel less anxiety than more self-confidence, and more self-confidence than more WTC in those English speaking situations.

7. Conclusion

In this study, Japanese students' attitudes toward English speaking situations were investigated. The findings indicated that when students feel less anxiety, they have more self-confidence and willingness to communicate (WTC) in English in both in-class and out-of-class contexts. Moreover, students feel less anxiety and more self-confidence in class than out of class, but the degree of their WTC in English does not differ in either context. Additionally, students think participating in speech contests and speaking English in front of the class are difficult, and that asking a teacher the meaning of a word and engaging in pair-work are rather easy situations.

However, the participants in this study were 100 students majoring in business or engineering, so the results should be generalized with caution to other students, especially those majoring in English, because English major students are usually more motivated to learn and have more confidence in English than non-English major students. Moreover, as the English proficiency of the participants was at an intermediate level, the results may not be applicable to students who have much higher or much lower proficiency.

Despite these limitations, this study will provide valuable information to English teachers who would like to draw more output from Japanese students in speaking classes. As there were significant correlations among the three variables, teachers can start with decreasing anxiety and increasing self-confidence, which may lead to an increased WTC in English. As a first step, it seems better to encourage students' output through pair-work or their asking teachers questions than making them speak English in front of the class. Teaching spoken English while considering students' affective variables can provide students with a more relaxed and non-threatening environment in which to speak English.

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