A dynamism of willingness to communicate
in English by Japanese learners

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the language classroom all over the world, teachers struggle to get learners to talk in a target language. Those who avoid communication are a concern for teachers, curriculum designers, and language planners. This issue has been central to research on willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2). According to MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998), WTC is defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a specific time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (p. 547). As the growing necessity of L2 (especially English) acquisition has been observed in school education, promoting learners’ communicative competence accounts for the primary objective of English education in Japan. Moreover, MacIntyre et al mentioned that “a proper objective for L2 education is to create WTC” (p. 547). Considering these situations, it is vital to advance deeper research on WTC for people who are engaged in English education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies of WTC are one of the popular research areas in L2 learning. WTC has originally grown out of the concept of communication apprehension (CA) within native language (L1) communication studies, and is closely related to the concept of anxiety. I will introduce several studies investigating both WTC and anxiety.

According to McCroskey, Gudykunst, and Nishida (1985), CA is a broadly based anxiety related to oral communication. They established a Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) scale in order to assess an individual’s level of CA. The scale includes four perspectives of CA: trait-like, generalized context, person-group, and situational CA. On the basis of the measurement of McCroskey et al., McIntyre and Charos (1996) reconstructed a standard for measuring L2 CA which has been widely used in anxiety research of applied linguistics.

The 1998 article published by MacIntyre et al. proposed the pyramid model of variables influencing L2 WTC. The model is composed of six layers—(1) social and individual context, (2) affective-cognitive context, (3) motivational proponents, (4) situated antecedents, (5) behavioural intention, and (6) communication behavior. The first three layers represent stable, enduring influences on the process whereas the second three situation-specific influences on WTC at a given moment in time. Despite the fact that WTC has been regarded as a fairly stable personality trait, the fact is not always the case. MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) conceptualize WTC as changing from moment to moment, as opportunities for L2 communication arise. They developed the research methodology to capture the fluctuations of WTC and investigated six Canadian female university students by giving eight oral L2 tasks (e.g., “Describe what you are wearing”
Discuss the education system of your home province in some details. Examples of the research results are that one of the participants who have relatively low WTC-Trait and CA in some oral tasks showed high WTC to the clothing topic whereas she showed low WTC to the education one. She afterward stated that she had had good vocabulary on the topic of clothing, but had not known the proper terminology to respond to the education topic. The results indicate that the association between anxiety and WTC is complex, with the two variables relating each other at times positively, while at other times negatively or not at all.

From these studies, the WTC theory has been soundly established and well researched with the CA concept. Besides, while CA and WTC are related on occasion, sometimes there are no relation found positively, for WTC is intricate enough to change dynamically by given situations. My research, therefore, will focus on how L2 CA in learners affect their L2 WTC, and in what situation they have high or low L2 WTC will be revealed.

3. METHOD

Approximately 4-6 Japanese learners of English will be recruited. Similar to the MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) study, the present study will not include many samples and try to capture an individual learner’s dynamism in WTC in detail. My study will employ three data collection methods—questionnaire, monitoring and interview. First, I will develop a questionnaire based on previous studies (e.g., McIntyre & Charos, 1996). Then pairs of two participants will talk about certain topics and this conversation will be recorded with a video camera. In addition, I will play back the video of the tasks a second time, stopping it at each point where they will have showed a noticeable change in dynamic WTC. Then participants will be asked to describe why the change will have occurred. The interview also will be videotaped so that it can be reviewed and examined carefully.

4. REFERENCES


