

Action Research Final Report  
April 2021-March 2022

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**Willingness to Communicate in One's L2 While Improving Communicative Competence**

**Theme**

My research aims to understand students' willingness to communicate in their L2 while relating it to students' communicative competence and researching how I can best facilitate it and improve my teaching pedagogy.

**Introduction/What I Learned/My Background**

First, let me shortly explain why I want to research this theme. Being in Japan, I have felt a slight uneasiness when speaking Japanese (my L2) to others. I am not shy, but I lack what I thought was a keen sense of confidence when communicating in my L2. I always wondered why I felt this way and the logical reason for this tendency. Before studying at NUFS, I did not know the correct terminology. The professors in my Action Research class helped me find what I thought was a confidence issue but more of a willingness to communicate with communicative competence.

What I have learned for teaching before being a non-degree seeking student in NUFS came from my bosses and fellow teachers who are stuck in their obsolete ways of teaching. Moreover, I was unaware of the teacher-centered versus student-centered classroom dynamic, the essential findings of influential researchers like Savignon (1972), and outdated knowledge of mechanical drills. She was one of the first researchers to find empirical data that showed that the behaviorist-based model of the Audio-lingual Method was not sufficient. She discovered that using communicative activities mixed with ALM lead to more communicative competence. (Lee & VanPatten, 2003 p.49-52) My approach to education now uses communicative language teaching with communicative activities, drastically improving my students' engagement and overall enjoyment.

My new approach to teaching started during my first semester at NUFS when I was in the Second Language Acquisition and Action Research classes. I learned much from each class. I

used to think I had a good understanding of teaching English, but I did not know how much the students learned or acquired the language. Throughout my experience as an English teacher, my teaching method has changed not because I thought it would make for better learning but more for my students' enjoyment. I used to teach structured-based classes because it is what my bosses wanted. I noticed my students were slightly bored, so I moved to a more conversational-based class. At first, I thought I was doing them a disservice but the second language acquisition class has taught me that communication with others is just as important if not more than explicit teaching, according to Lightbown & Spada (2013) (p. 209-210) Savignon (1997) defines communication as the "expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning." Also, communicative competence is always context-specific, integrating grammar competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence, which Canale and Swain (1980) say are sections that make up communicative competence. This book has made me realize how little my boss knows about language acquisition. I now focus more on implicit teaching. I want my students to talk as much as possible without restraint.

### **What I learned about my pedagogy**

In my Action research class, the video clips made me realize that I might be a little too dominant in the conversation. I cut students off a few times with my opinions and thoughts. However, students continued to say what they wanted, which showed a solid willingness to communicate. I must be more careful not to fill in the student's thoughts and be more patient. I tend to do that when the number of students in the class is low to keep the conversation moving. This tendency is related to my previous belief in having a more teacher-centered classroom which now I know a student-centered classroom is more beneficial for everyone.

In my second language teaching class, the class was concluded with a final message. I will quote Professor Yoshi's closing comment. "There is no single best method. Actually, CLT is not a method, but an approach, which is based on principles of LL and T. It means we have to modify and develop materials that suit our students. From this point of view, teaching is a creative job. Good teachers challenge students and continue to learn for their lives." This quote summarizes how I feel about teaching. It is also one of the reasons NUFS has helped me. Before taking these courses, I was winging it based on what my boss and students wanted. Now I have a baseline foundation for what it means to teach English as an L2.

## Short Literature Review

When I began my research for the 2021-2022 year, I was utterly at a loss of how to define a willingness to communicate. Fortunately, I was able to find others' previous research to understand the topic better. According to Yashima (2002), "Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is emerging as a concept to account for individuals' first language (L1) and second language (L2) communication." (p.54). It has also been related to an individual's anxiety (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). WTC may change based on the number of people, topic, environment, and energy levels. This idea is consistent with (Clement, Baker, and MacIntyre, 2003) research, which argues that the WTC in a wide range of topics is linked to communicative confidence. Two variables shape their research. One is how relaxed L2 learners are and how competent or incompetent they feel about their L2 ability. The other is previous interactions with L2 speakers directly influence one's WTC.

Most research on personality variables has been conducted using a quantitative method (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, many researchers argued that more qualitative data is needed to understand better how WTC works. However, Yashima (2002) evaluated 297 Japanese university students using AMOS version 4 (Analysis of Moment Structures) to find a latent variable, international posture, as she coined it. She hypothesized from structural equation modeling that international posture influences motivation causing a result of proficiency in English levels for Japanese students. She also mentions that "Motivation affected self-confidence in L2 communication which led to willingness to communicate in an L2." (p.56). Her data backed this up, which she says, "... (The model's fitness to the data was good) which indicates the potential for using the WTC and other constructs to account for L2 communication.

Matsuoka (2006) found that an essential variable in WTC is not English proficiency but language anxiety. She suggests lowering anxiety levels is paramount to enhancing WTC. She also mentioned a study by MacIntyre (1996) that "Anxiety/apprehension may not be directly related to WTC but via self-confidence" (p.3). Also, that self-confidence is closely related or may even overlap with anxiety.

In addition, according to Lee & VanPatten (2003), learner beliefs about how a class should be conducted are also related to a student's willingness to communicate. Some of the

antiquated beliefs they found contradictory findings. Beliefs, such as believing the way they learned is the correct way, are people's tendency to generalize their own experience can be applied to others. Another belief is that drills are effective tools for learning grammar. This belief is true to some extent, but it depends on the type of drills. Lee & VanPatten cited three types of drills: Mechanical, Meaning, and Communicative drills. Mechanical drills are just rote memorization. Meaning drills are using the target grammar or vocabulary in their own words. Communicative drills are using the language to express themselves without explicit instructions. Those who think Mechanical drills are most effective tend to believe they need to receive explicit feedback. Lee & VanPatten also said this is an outdated belief. Mechanical drills may give a focus or sub-goal, but they are not needed to develop abstract rules if the classroom has carefully constructed activities that use Communicative drills.

### **Teaching Context**

- Adults in their 20s to 40s. Classrooms hold up to eight students at a time.
- TOEIC level at 700 or higher.
- Free conversation topics. I encourage students to lead the discussion, usually with a worksheet.
- A 50-minute class once a week. (The students take additional classes with other teachers.)

Students can come as often as they please. Most of the students arrive on a regular basis, but sometimes a new student would join, or a student would stop coming for various reasons. It was primarily due to a job transfer to a different part of Japan for the regular students. Because of this dynamic, it is hard to build a curriculum or a continuation of a theme. At my office, each class has to be a singular unit so that students can join at any time without feeling left out.

### **Research Methodology**

My research questions have changed entirely from my initial questions throughout my Action Research class. My first questions were these:

1. Should I make a case study of my two focus students?

2. Should I focus on lower L2 speakers too?
3. What are some ways to better research with a small sample size?

As of now, I have these questions I plan to address in my future research.

1. What role does my teaching pedagogy play in a student's WTC?
2. How are learners' beliefs related to WTC?
3. What personality traits influence WTC?
4. How does WTC relate to communicative competence?

### **My Clear and Measurable Objectives**

1. Have students speak in complete sentences. This point is important because students should express themselves with more than one- or two-word responses.
2. Have students self-evaluate their progress and personality through questionnaires.
3. Guide students who are apprehensive by bringing them into the conversation. Hopefully, those kinds of students will start being more proactive as time passes.
4. Students talk with little prompting. I allow about 10 seconds of silence, then prompt them.

### **Classroom Development**

When I started my Action Research Report, I had a different focus group. I wanted to conduct research in one of my university classes. Unfortunately, my boss told me to stop conducting research during class time because the boss thought it took away time from learning and privacy issues. This is my first ARR classroom report.

### **Lesson Plan 1<sup>st</sup> class**

Time	Interaction T-Ss, S-S, S	Activity and Procedure
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5 15	T-Ss, T-Ss-S	Greeting Warm-up: Introductions – Students will introduce themselves, and after each introduction, another student and I will ask our follow-up questions.
1 1	T-Ss,  T-Ss	Pre-task 1. Model Question (input) I will ask the question, “Where have you traveled overseas?” I will give an example sentence. 2. Grammar Point (noticing) “I have been to-----”
5 15	S-S T-Ss-S	Task (output) 1. Conversation in pairs referring to Model question. 2. Interview the classmates with me, asking follow-up questions, plus another student.
5	S	Freewriting: Students will write 25 words about the topic which interests them.
5 15	S-S T-Ss-S	Sharing Report in pairs Report to the class with me and another student asking follow-up questions.
1	S	Cooldown – Students will relax for two minutes to catch their breath.
1 5	T-Ss  Ss-T	Pre-task 1. Model Question (input) What would you do with 100,000,000 yen? 2. Grammar Point (noticing) “I would---” I would give an example sentence. I would have students ask me a follow-up question.

4 10	S-S	Task (output) 1. Conversation in pairs referring to Model question. 2. Interview the classmates with me, asking a follow-up question, plus another student.
	T-Ss-S	
2	T-Ss	Homework- Have students write a one-day diary of 50 words before the next class to be read and handed in the next lesson.

Total time: 90 minutes

T-Ss: 10 minutes

S-S: 14 minutes

S: 6 minutes

Ss-T: 5 minutes

T-Ss-s: 55 minutes

I would have liked to focus on this group to get data from the start of the year and compare it with the end of the year to see if there was any progress. Anyway, I taught a more teacher-centered class at the beginning of the year. As I have stated, I did not know about the importance of a student-centered class.

### Most recent AR class.

Time	Interaction T-S, S-S	Content
5	T-S S-S	Greetings: Introductions and follow-up questions.
5	S	Questionnaire - Paper A section A
10	T-S	I quickly asked them about their opinions of the questionnaire with follow-up questions.

25	S-S T-S	The conversation led to a free talk with the students talking to each other about their learning experiences and beliefs. I only interjected when a student wanted help phrasing their sentences.
5	T-S	I asked them how they like to learn English and do not want to learn English.

S-S: 30 minutes

T-Ss: 20 minutes

I still tend to pull the focus back to myself, but I think I am getting used to teaching a more student-centered class. As I mentioned, I am confronted with some learners' beliefs that they still want explicit feedback from me. At first, I try to find someone who knows the answer or can explain the issue and have the student try to teach the other students in English. If no one understands, I tell them to use their dictionary or search on Google. Finally, if they are still at a loss, I try to explain the topic in more straightforward English. (For my beginner level classes, sometimes I have to use Japanese, but I try to avoid it.)

### **Data**

I handed out several surveys and questionnaires this year, but I cannot compare them because the students were different, and my focus students have moved on from the classroom. I can provide a snapshot of the students' answers at the given time. Most of my data is qualitative from the beginning of the year, and I conducted one quantitative questionnaire.

Early in the year, with the focus class, I gave out a sheet that looked like this:

### **Willingness to Speak Survey**

**What is your confidence level in speaking English in the classroom?**

**Please circle one number.**

- 1. Not confident**
- 2. A little confident**
- 3. Some confidence**
- 4. Confident**



## 5. Very confident

**What situation do you feel least willing to speak English?**

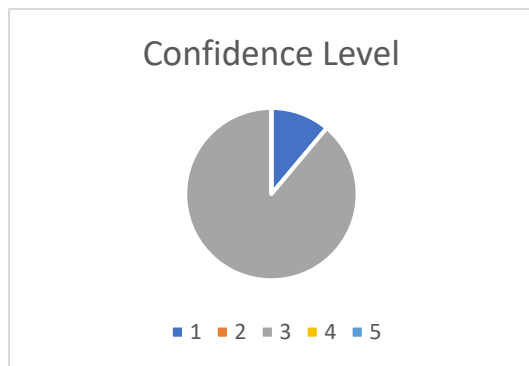
**Please write one or two sentences.**

**What situation do you feel most willing to speak English?**

**Please write one or two sentences.**

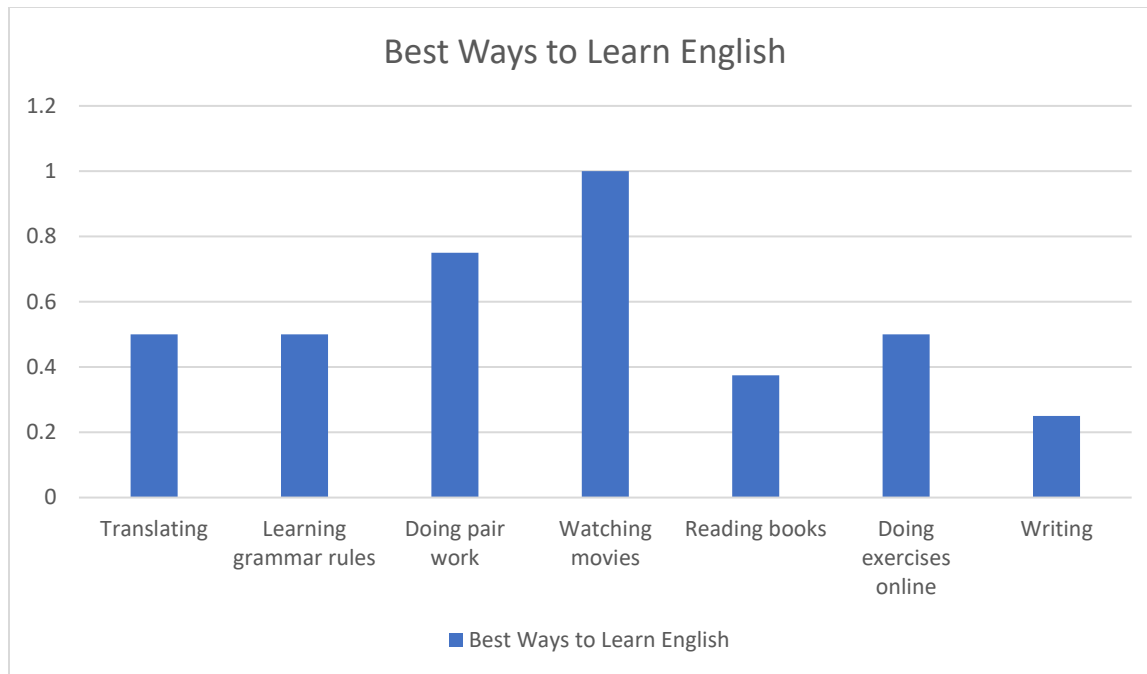
N=8. For the qualitative data, they generally feel least willing to speak English when others speak better than them. They also feel most willing to speak with the topic is fun or familiar to them with people they know.

For the quantitative question, the results are shown in the chart.



Most said they have some confidence (3), and only one said no confidence.

I conducted a more quantified questionnaire with a little qualitative data for my most recent survey. A check is a one, and an X is a 0. I averaged the questionnaires to get the mean.



Some of their ideas they like include **traveling, going to English classes, watching the news in Japanese, then watching it in English, having conversations in English, listening to music, remembering vocabulary, and making foreign friends.**

### Interview Questions with Focus Students

I chose two students who attended my classes throughout the year. I asked them if they could participate in a short interview. I asked them these questions:

1. When do you enjoy speaking English?
2. When is speaking English stressful for you?
3. When you speak English, are you able to say what you want to say?
4. When do you not feel like speaking English?

[0:00]

1. Andy: Yuusuke, when do you enjoy speaking English? (.) [0:04]
2. Yuusuke: So, (.)Especially I enjoy using English when talking with my American friend(..) and uhh, I like to watch the Disney movie in English. I think when I am watching these movies, I am enjoying the English [0:25]
3. Andy: Okay, that sounds good. When is speaking English stressful for you? [0:31]
4. Yuusuke: uhh (..) I (..) actually don't feel any stress when using English [0:41]
5. Andy: Uh [0:42]

6. Yuusuke: But (.) I actually don't want to use English at my work ha ha [0:48]
7. Andy: Ahh, yea yea. So sometimes at work you have to use English? [0:52]
8. Yuusuke: hmm, just sometimes [0:58]
9. Andy: When you speak English, are you able to say what you want to say? [1:02]
10. Yuusuke: (.) I (.) think 70 to 80 percent of what I want to say. [1:14]
11. Andy: Um, ok, and when do you not feel like speaking English? [1:18]
12. Yuusuke: Umm, maybe umm the answer is the same as number 2 [1:25]
13. Andy: Yep, at work [1:26]
14. Yuusuke: When I need to use English at work, I kinda have like a responsibility of that. I need to understand 100 percent of English. Especial my work, umm, almost workers cannot use English so I kinda have a big responsibility of that. [1:54]
15. Andy: That's a lot of stress. Alright, thank you very much. [1:57]

Yuusuke was able to speak more when it came to talking about his job. It seemed almost like he is venting some frustration he has at work. Yuusuke is a high-level student and his willingness to speak increases when the right topic is right in front of him. Even though he says he feels no stress besides work. He does pause to think of what to say.

[0:00]

1. Andy: When do you enjoy speaking English? [0:04]
2. Reika: Umm. I, I enjoy speaking English when the umm people from other countries are gathered. Yeah, and at that situation I want to communicate with many people so I enjoy speaking English. [0:24]
3. Andy: Sounds good. When is speaking stressful for you? [0:29]
4. Reika: ummm, at, at the meeting, web meeting, I, I am okay doing the presentation but the questions and comment section makes me feel really nervous [0:54]
5. Andy: Ah, yeah yeah yeah. When you speak English are you able to say what you want to say? [0:54]

6. Reika: ummm, I think I can say what I want to say about 60 to 70 percent usually I try my best to tell my opinion, but I sometimes take a long time to explain. [1:26]
7. Andy: Ah, and when do you not feel like speaking English? [1:40]
8. Reika: Umm. (.) I (.) I not feel like speaking English when I am exhausted and my brains feel like it's burning ha ha then at that situation I cannot pick out the proper words. [1:56]
9. Andy: Thank you Reika. [1:57]

Reika is also a high-level speaker and tends to speak freely in the classroom. However, I think the pressure of being interviewed made her at a lost of words. Taking that into consideration I think it relates to her response

### **Moving Forward**

I have learned a lot over the course of this year. I tried many different methods, and some were successful and others not so much. Due to the nature of trying to conduct research in an English conversation school, I could not get reliable data to show progress throughout the year. Luckily, I found a new focus group at a high school which will lead to more precise data and the ability to build upon lessons and see their growth in English. I will still focus on Willingness to Communicate in One's L2 While Improving Communicative Competence. Next year, I will be able to conduct better Action Research and improve my teaching pedagogy.

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