Examining the Effects of All English Class on Learners’ Affective Aspects:
Variations of Willingness to Communicate, Communication Anxiety and
Perceived Communication Competence

1. Introduction
The Course of Study (MEXT, 2009) requires high school teachers to conduct English lessons mainly in English. There is a theoretical rationale in providing more input through all (or almost all) English lessons. Krashen (1981, 1985) claims that language acquisition is input-driven, meaning that acquisition is based primarily on what we hear and understand. His overall sketch of acquisition in the Input Hypothesis is one of the most influential theories claiming that input is essential to language acquisition. Input may not be sufficient for language learning (e.g., Swain, 1985, 1998), but we should regard input as a precondition for learning (e.g., Carroll, 2000; MacWhinney, 1987; Schmidt, 1990, VanPatten, 1996). Since a new education policy (i.e., conducting lessons in English) is currently introduced, and thus the number of studies investigating this policy especially in relation to the development of learners’ communication variables is limited, this paper reports findings on how almost all English lessons influence the evolution of university students’ willingness to communicate (WTC), communication anxiety, and perceived communication competence.

2. Backgrounds and Purposes of the Study
One of the most important factors contributing to successful language learning can be said motivation, which has indeed been thoroughly examined by many researchers in various contexts. Traditionally, Gardner and his colleagues, paying primary attention to socio-cultural contexts, have claimed that learners who are integratively oriented tend to be more successful in language learning than those who are instrumentally oriented (e.g., Gardner, 1985, 2001). More recently, researchers basing their focuses on the self-determination theory have also reported intrinsic regulations would be superior to extrinsic regulations (e.g., Noels, 2001; Noels, Clément, & Pelletier, 1999). Regardless of the types of orientations or regulations, it is evidenced by the meta-analysis (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003) that motivation is significantly associated with language achievement.

Deeply related to motivation are communication variables that must be also carefully examined because the ultimate goal of language learning is to actually use the target language in real communication contexts. Among such variables, WTC has become a main target of
investigations by various researchers (e.g., MacIntyre, 2007; Yashima, 2002). WTC was first argued in first language communication contexts by McCroskey (e.g., McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, 1990) and later elaborated in the second/foreign language learning situations by MacIntyre (e.g., MacIntyre; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). WTC, defined as the likelihood of initiating communication, is a crucial factor to consider the moment of taking action of actually using the target language. MacIntyre’s claim is intriguing in that he stated that traditional motivation research largely emphasized learners’ pasts (e.g., attained proficiency and personality) and learners’ futures (e.g., possible self and learning orientations), but overlooked the moment of taking actions (i.e., immediate volition to use the target language in communication). WTC is directly influenced by communication competence and apprehension; the more competent and the less anxious learners become in employing the language, the more willing they are to communicate with others.

These motivational and communication variables are originally regarded as trait variables; they are rather stable and enduring. However, recent studies have shown that such variables can be undermined or can develop over an extended period of time. Tachibana, Matsukawa, and Zhong (1996) and Koizumi and Matsuo (1993), for instance, reported a declining tendency of motivation of Japanese junior and high school students. Koga (2010a), on the other hand, suggested that learners with low motivation were more likely to develop their motivation levels than those with high motivation in cooperative and communicative language classrooms. Focusing on specific pedagogical interventions (e.g., writing, speaking, and listening activities), Hiromori (2006) and Tanaka (2010) also showed increases in more intrinsic regulatory types. The number of studies arguing a dynamic aspect of communication variables is still limited, but Koga (2010b) made a suggestion that as learners accumulated communication confidence in cooperative and communicative activities, the level of their WTC would successfully develop.

Although these studies have proposed possible changes on learners’ motivational and communication variables, we need to pay more attention to various learning and classroom contexts. As indicated earlier, the current education policy is that English classes must be conducted in English, and in this specific learning context, we are still unknown how learners’ affective, especially communication, variables vary. Hence, the main purposes of our study are to investigate how Japanese EFL learners’ WTC, communication anxiety, and perceived communication competence would change in four-month-running classrooms conducted almost all in English.

3. Method
3.1 Participants
The class was composed of 27 second-year university students. Among them, 12 were male and 15 female who were between 19 and 21 years old. All of them belonged to the department of teacher training and school education, and their majors were mathematics, science, or pedagogy. Although they were not majoring in English, they could be regarded as at least low-intermediate level students as they were required to pass the entrance examinations of the national university by attaining relatively high scores on the English portion of the test. None of them had received English lessons conducted in all or almost all English in high school and in the previous year at the university.

3.2 Materials
Three sets of questionnaires were prepared to examine communication variables. The first one
measuring learners’ WTC was directly borrowed from the study by Yashima (2009). It asks learners about how willing they are to communicate with different groups of people (e.g., friends and strangers) in various contexts (e.g., in a small group or a large group of friends or strangers). This questionnaire consists of eight items in total, ranging from one (i.e., absolutely unwilling) to six (i.e., absolutely willing). Based on this questionnaire, the rest of two was created to measure communication anxiety and perceived communication competence in the same format; eight items each with a six point scale ranging from one (i.e., absolutely not anxious or not competent) to six (i.e., absolutely anxious or competent).

3.3 Descriptions of Lessons, Research Procedures and Data Analysis

An English class titled “Foreign Language Communication” was conducted in almost all English. Each lesson was 90 minutes long, and in the four months of the term period (from October, 2010 to February, 2011), lessons were conducted 15 times by the Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) teacher, who is one of the researchers of the study. The lessons were based on the principle of the presentation-practice-production (PPP) model in which learners learn target structures explicitly in the first presentation stage, and then move on to a practice stage, focusing mainly on accuracy, followed by the next stage, production, at which point they are provided with opportunities to produce the target form, sometimes through communicative activities. Muranoi (2006) introduced a revised PPP based approach, presentation-comprehension-practice-production (PCPP), and argues that this more content oriented approach would improve Japanese EFL students’ communicative abilities effectively. In the lessons for the study, as it was considered effective in the Japanese EFL learning environment (Sato, 2010, 2011), PCPP approach was adopted.

In the presentation stage of the lessons, as they already had explicit knowledge of grammatical structures, target structures were introduced in the form of small talk by the teacher followed by a brief explanation of them in English or sometimes in Japanese. In this presentation stage, there also was a lot of interaction between the teacher and the students in English. The comprehension stage was aimed at comprehending the short essays in the textbook, in which students were engaged in various types of reading and listening activities followed by comprehension check questions from the teacher. In the practice stage, students performed not only mechanical activities such as imitation and repetition, but also practiced with the context. For example, they were required to write their own sentences by using the target structures in a given context and memorized them. In the last production stage, students performed communicative activities in pairs or groups focusing on meaning and forms. In the lessons for the study, the Japanese language was used in some limited cases. In giving feedback to improve students’ grammar, pronunciation, or linguistic aspects of English, sometimes instructions in Japanese were provided. In explaining complicated grammar rules that are difficult to explain in English and abstract Japanese words or expressions that have no exact translational equivalents in English, Japanese was used for time-efficiency. However, it should be noted that the lessons were conducted almost all in English. Appendix 1 shows the sequence of each of the lesson.

As for the research procedures, the questionnaires were administered on two different occasions. On the first day and the last day, students were asked to answer the questionnaires to examine to what extent their WTC, communication anxiety, and perceived communication competence changed. They were told that the results of the questionnaires would not influence their final grades. Appendix 2 shows the example of the questionnaires.

As for the data analysis, in order to analyze variations on the three communication variables,
paired t-tests were performed. In addition, effect sizes (i.e., a point-biserial correlation coefficient, \( r \)) were calculated due mainly to providing as accurate and informative information as possible.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of t-tests indicated that (a) WTC increased significantly with a large effect size \( p < .05, r = .50 \), (b) communication anxiety did not change significantly, but a small effect size would suggest it slightly decreased \( p > .05, r = .25 \), and (c) perceived communication competence also showed a stabilizing tendency, but again considering a moderate effect size, it was implied that it developed for about four months \( p > .05, r = .35 \). Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variations of WTC, communication anxiety (CA), and perceived communication competence (PCC). Note here that the high scores of WTC and PCC mean that learners feel more willing and competent to communicate, while the low score of CA means that they feel less anxious about English communication.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before the lessons</th>
<th>After the lessons</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>Mdiff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23.42</td>
<td>6.61</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>7.13</td>
<td>-2.795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>34.88</td>
<td>7.10</td>
<td>33.42</td>
<td>6.90</td>
<td>1.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCC</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22.50</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>24.83</td>
<td>6.94</td>
<td>-1.761</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * \( p < .05, r = .10 \) refers to a small effect, \( r = .30 \) to a medium effect, and \( r = .50 \) to a large effect (Field, 2005, p. 32)

The results revealed that almost all English class can improve students’ WTC, and implied that it is effective to increase students’ perceived communication competence and to decrease communicative anxiety. I, who is one of the researchers of the study and the teacher of the class, actually felt that students were trying hard to speak English as much as possible not only in pair and group activities, but in every opportunity they were given. This is because they assumed English was the official language in the class and/or it was natural for them to speak English not Japanese.

The notion of possible selves gives us some clues to construe the increases in WTC. Markus and Nurius (1986) defined the possible self as follows: “Possible selves are the ideal selves that we would very much like to become” (p. 954). Learners in this research saw the teacher successfully using English and might have thought that they would like to become a person who was able to speak English well. This is not simply a desk plan if we consider our experiences. For example, if we play baseball or play the piano, we would like to become a good baseball player or pianist. Similarly, students learning English would like to become a good speaker of English just like the teacher. Yashima (2009), indeed, reported that learners with positive international posture are more likely to imagine themselves as those who are capable of speaking English. It is implied that in all-English-classroom contexts, teachers may be able to work as a good model who has a positive influence on learners’ WTC.

Although the increase of WTC was statistically significant with a large effect seize, this was not the case for the increase of perceived communication competence or the decrease of communication anxiety. The results can be interpreted as incompatible with MacIntyre (1994) who explained perceived communication competence and communication apprehension are the
antecedents of WTC. However, it can be interpreted that Japanese EFL learners, who are generally regarded as low-level learners if we refer to, for example, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines-Speaking, 1999), would have felt anxiety due to their limited English proficiencies even when they were willing to communicate in English. As for the results of perceived communication competence, when they were willing to communicate or actually did communicate, some of them would have found a hole or a gap (Swain, 1985, 1998) causing the feeling of incompetence. In the Japanese EFL environment, learners’ high WTC may not be the direct results of decreased communication anxiety or increased perceived communication competence, but may be independent in itself. Further studies are needed to confirm this suggestion.

After the end of the last class, students also filled out the evaluation paper, which was required by the university. It was revealed that (a) 84% of the students studied actively and enthusiastically in the lessons, (b) 95% of them were satisfied with the lessons, (c) 79% of them were impressed by the lessons, and (d) 100% of students felt that the teacher responded well (mainly in English) to students. The results may not be a direct reflection of the almost all English class, but it can be assumed that the English-medium class was favorably accepted by the students.

5. Limitations and Conclusion

Before concluding our arguments, three main limitations need to be pointed out. The first and primary one is a small number of participants involved in the research (N = 27). Because of this, it is difficult to generalize the findings of this study, but we are well determined to show that the results suggested something important not only for the current study, but also for the future insights on changes on learners’ communication variables for an extended period of time in all-English-classroom contexts. The second one is related to learners’ language performance. That is, this study did not measure the criteria of the frequency of learners’ actual communication and developments of English proficiency in general. Finally, there was no control group in which the teacher conducts the lesson mainly in Japanese. Further studies should compare the effects of all English lessons and almost Japanese lessons on learners’ communication variables.

Despite these limitations, this study cultivated a new research area that is meaningful and important in research and educational contexts, especially in this current education policy in Japan. This study suggested that all English class can stimulate the level of WTC and also has a high probability of positively affecting communication anxiety and perceived communication competence. Many problems remain still unsolved such as the effects of all English class on the future development of motivational variables, language proficiency, and communication skills. Furthermore, still restricted is the number of longitudinal classroom studies that investigate various factors directly influencing learners’ communication variables in all-English-classroom contexts. Therefore, we strongly hope future research will clarify questions, for instance, raised above in order for learners to succeed in language learning.

(佐藤聡太郎 : 奈良教育大学) (古賀功 : 名城大学)

References


### Appendix 1
Examples of Daily Classroom Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small talk seeded with the target structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction between the teacher and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brief explanation of the structure (sometimes in Japanese)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comprehension</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening and reading activities, Comprehension check</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanical practice, Practice in the context (feedback is sometimes given in Japanese)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicative activities focusing both on meaning and forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Each lesson has target structures, such as, a relative pronoun, the progressive form, a participial construction, an infinitive, the comparative and the superlative degree, and so on.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2
Example of the Questionnaire

以下8つの状況下で、自分がどれだけ英語で話す意欲があるかを選んでください

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>常に話す</td>
<td>たいてい話す</td>
<td>ときどき話す</td>
<td>あまり話さない</td>
<td>めったに話さない</td>
<td>決して話さない</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. 大勢の前でスピーチをする機会があるとき
2. 列に並んでいて知り合いで前にいたとき
3. 英語の授業中のグループディスカッションのとき
4. 初めて会う人のグループで話す機会があったとき
5. 英語の授業中に自由に発言する機会があるとき
6. 列にならんでいて友達が前にいたとき
7. 英語のクラスで前に出て話す機会があるとき
8. 友人のグループで議論するとき

(英語で)

1 2 3 4 5 6

(Yashima, 2009)