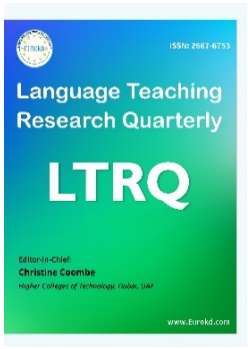

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Japanese EFL Speakers' Fluctuation of Willingness to Communicate: Its Interplay and Association with Feedback

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Abstract

The concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is essential for understanding Japanese learners' engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. WTC, a complex construct that varies throughout interactions, is influenced by several factors, including corrective feedback. This study examines the situational WTC of four Japanese EFL learners, focusing specifically on its relationship with corrective feedback, an essential tool for teachers to help students recognize and correct their errors. The research involved low-intermediate and advanced speakers who participated in interactive communicative tasks with the researcher. Data were collected through recorded and transcribed spoken interactions, supplemented by participants' self-evaluations and a stimulated recall interview conducted after each activity. The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative methods to reveal fluctuations in WTC influenced by feedback type, timing, and delivery method. Findings offer valuable insights into effective feedback strategies, emphasizing their potential to enhance students' WTC, engagement, and overall language proficiency in EFL contexts. This study underscores the dynamic nature of language learning and highlights the crucial role of well-timed, constructive feedback in fostering communicative competence and motivation among Japanese EFL learners.

Keywords: *English as a Foreign Language, Willingness to Communicate, Feedback, Interaction, English Proficiency*

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[1]Introduction

The acquisition of language skills necessitates adequate input, output, and interaction, as substantiated by seminal works in the field (Gass, 2003; Krashen, 1982; Long, 1996; Schmidt, 1992; Swain, 1985; Vygotsky, 1978). In the milieu of foreign and second language pedagogy, fostering a robust motivation among learners to engage in communication using the target language is imperative. This communicative engagement facilitates the critical opportunities for input, output, and interaction. Central to this communicative endeavor is learners' Willingness to Communicate (WTC), conceptualized as the predisposition to initiate discourse in a second language (L2) when one is free to do so (MacIntyre et al., 1998). While initial theorizations posited WTC as a static trait, subsequent research demonstrated its dynamic nature, fluctuating in response to immediate contextual variables (Dörnyei, 2014; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre, 2007; Sato, 2019). Therefore, it becomes paramount to investigate the determinants influencing these fluctuations to enhance pedagogical strategies aimed at augmenting WTC among learners.

Corrective Feedback (CF), the pedagogical response directed at learners' linguistic errors (Ellis, 2006), is instrumental in language acquisition and development. Its efficacy and preference can vary depending on the feedback type implemented (e.g., Brown, 2009; Lyster et al., 2013). Given its prevalence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings, understanding its relationship with the dynamic states of learners' WTC is crucial.

This exploratory observational case study investigates the fluctuations in Japanese EFL speakers' WTC, with a particular emphasis on the feedback provided by the interlocutor. While previous research has explored factors influencing WTC, there is limited understanding of how specific types of feedback, such as corrective feedback, affect WTC differently among learners of varying proficiency levels. By examining the variations in WTC among low-intermediate and advanced Japanese EFL speakers, this study seeks to address this gap, providing detailed insights into the communicative dynamics that can inform and enhance pedagogical strategies to promote sustained communicative engagement in EFL learning contexts[1].

Literature Review

Willingness to Communicate

Since enhancing communicative competence is a primary goal of language learning, learners are encouraged to use the target language actively in L2 classrooms (e.g., Long, 1996; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). Willingness to Communicate (WTC) describes a learner's inclination to initiate interaction, focusing on their readiness to engage in L2 discourse at a specific moment (e.g., MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre et al., 1998). WTC plays a key role in achieving language learning goals, as it supports communication initiation, input generation, and active participation in L2 conversations (MacIntyre, 2007). The concept also aligns with second language acquisition (SLA) theories, such as Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) and Swain and Lapkin's comprehensible output hypothesis (1995).While WTC was initially seen as a stable, individual trait, researchers have shifted focus to its dynamic qualities, particularly

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through the pyramid model, which explains the interplay of individual variables that form WTC in L2 contexts (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Empirical studies have identified situational factors influencing WTC variability. Kang (2005) explored three psychological conditions that affect WTC in L2: a sense of security (absence of anxiety), excitement (enjoyment in communication), and responsibility (the obligation to convey messages). Other studies highlight factors contributing to WTC shifts, including self-confidence (Cao & Philip, 2006; Yashima, 2002); familiarity and participation of the interlocutor (Cao & Philip, 2006); preparation time, affinity with the partner, opportunity for self-expression, lexical knowledge, and teacher presence (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015); as well as perceived communicative competence and reduced anxiety (Elahi et al., 2019). In the Japanese EFL environment, Sato (2019) investigated the variability of a Japanese EFL teacher's WTC throughout a single lesson. For this research, all the teacher's spoken L2 and L1 utterances during an EFL class were captured via audio and video recording. The analysis combined quantitative data from the teacher's self-assessed WTC for each utterance with qualitative insights gathered through a stimulated recall interview conducted after the lesson. The findings highlighted three main factors associated with heightened WTC in the teacher: opportunities to discuss personal viewpoints, a sense of responsibility, and the perception of the activity as challenging and rewarding. Conversely, the study revealed that doubts regarding the effectiveness of English explanations and a lack of confidence in English ability negatively impacted WTC. Sato (2023) observed that factors influencing WTC attrition varied significantly between speakers of low and advanced proficiency. While a perceived deficiency in English proficiency adversely affected the WTC of all speakers, the study found that for low-intermediate speakers, additional factors such as interest in the topic, the perceived safety in interactions with interlocutors, and their own confidence levels were significant determinants. Conversely, the WTC of advanced speakers was more prominently influenced by opportunities to express personal narratives and opinions. This differential impact underscores the complexity of WTC dynamics across varying levels of language proficiency.

Research indicates that learners' WTC in the classroom is influenced by both internal and external factors. MacIntyre (2012) described this fluctuation as resembling a wave, highlighting that WTC varies moment-to-moment based on the speaker's internal and external conditions, rather than remaining constant. Capturing and examining these rapid changes in learners' WTC is essential to support and enhance their language learning process.

Feedback

In the interaction between the teacher and the learner (speaker), responses and feedback from the former play an important role in learners' language learning and development (e.g., Gass, 2003; Long, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). The Interaction Hypothesis by Long (1996) suggested that through the negotiation of meaning, conversational interactions can facilitate language acquisition by providing learners with both positive and negative evidence in the form of CF. Lyster and Ranta (1997) examined different types of CF used by immersion teachers in Canada and their impacts on student responses or "learner uptake" (1997, p. 40). Subsequently, numerous studies have focused on CF and have found it beneficial for learning (Loewen, 2015).

Research has shown that learners prefer to receive CF rather than to have their errors ignored or left uncorrected (Jean & Simard, 2011; Roothooft & Breeze, 2016; Schulz, 1996). Studies have found that the degree of preference for CF may differ based on the types of feedback provided. For instance, Brown (2009) revealed that advanced learners preferred indirect (e.g., recasts) over direct feedback (e.g., explicit correction) because proficient learners were more willing to self-correct their errors (Lyster et al., 2013). Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) examined the degree of WTC and found that explicit CF increased Iranian EFL learners' WTC by enhancing their self-confidence. Zare et al. (2020) identified learners' marked preference for prompts, showing that both oral corrective feedback and proficiency level had a significant impact on WTC. Additionally, elicitative feedback types were identified as the most influential in enhancing learners' WTC in the L2. Zadkhast and Farahian (2017) focused on the timing of CF and WTC, and found that both immediate and delayed CF had significant effects on Iranian EFL students' WTC levels, and that the former outweighed the latter. In Sato (2011), low-intermediate learners reported that their motivation to continue talking decreased when they were given direct feedback, such as explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback, as it interrupted communication, which was not the case when recasts were provided. This break in communication induced anxiety among learners (Koga, 2010), which, in turn, had an adverse effect on WTC. Thus, learners' WTC may be higher when CF is provided, and different types of CF may have different effects on learners' WTC. However, the relationship between types of feedback and fluctuations in WTC has not been examined thus far, especially, in the Japanese EFL environment.

This study explored the WTC of low-intermediate and advanced speakers of English during their communication with a Japanese EFL teacher. It analyzed fluctuations in WTC for each utterance with a focus on feedback. The following research questions were formulated:

RQ$_1$: Does the WTC of Japanese low-intermediate and advanced EFL speakers fluctuate during interactive activities?

RQ$_2$: Which feedback types and their aspects are associated with high and low WTC?

The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, while paying attention to the possible difference in the results based on proficiency level, if any.

Method

Participants

This study involved four college students from a national university in western Japan: two low-intermediate and two advanced English speakers. Informed consent was obtained prior to the study, and pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities. At the time of data collection, Koki and Kana, both sophomores, were majoring in mathematics and music, respectively. Yuki, a fourth-year student, and Yuji, a graduate student, both majored in English. Yuji had passed the first grade and Yuki the pre-first grade of the Society for Testing English Proficiency (STEP) Test[2]. Koki and Kana held no English proficiency certifications. Based on their majors, English qualifications, and the researcher's in-depth observation of their performance across various language skills—speaking, listening, writing, and reading—Yuki and Yuji were classified as advanced speakers, while Koki and Kana were identified as low-intermediate speakers. The study assessed each participant's situational WTC using Yashima's (2009) questionnaire, an eight-item measure rated from 1 (absolutely unwilling) to 6

(absolutely willing). As displayed in Table 1, Yuki and Yuji demonstrated higher WTC, whereas Kana and Koki displayed lower WTC, suggesting that advanced speakers might have greater motivation for interactive communication than low-intermediate speakers. Their preference for CF was measured using the questionnaire from Sato (2015), which comprised six declarative statements that were rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (1=absolutely disagree, 5=absolutely agree). As Table 1 shows, Yuki had a high preference for CF, followed by Kana, Yuji, and Koki. This may imply that advanced speakers show high WTC when CF is provided.

Table 1

Participants Information

Participant	Gender	Age	Major	English Proficiency Level	Trait WTC	CF preference
Kana	Female	20	Music	Low-intermediate	3.1	3.8
Koki	Male	20	Mathematics	Low-intermediate	3.6	3.2
Yuki	Female	22	English	Advanced	4.4	4.8
Yuji	Male	24	English	Advanced	4.9	3.9

Procedure

In this study, participants engaged in two rounds of one-on-one interactions with the researcher in a laboratory setting, as outlined in Table 2. During the first session, they participated in a picture description activity adapted from the second grade STEP test (see Appendix 3). This task involved describing a story depicted in a horizontal sequence of four pictures. The material was chosen with care to ensure it didn't overtax participants from either a conceptual or linguistic perspective. Following this, a semi-structured interview was conducted in English, where the researcher asked questions related to the story from the initial task as well as about the participants' daily lives, such as hobbies, studies, family, and future aspirations. The picture description activity was classified as structured due to its requirements for accuracy, while the interview was more open, allowing participants to freely share their experiences and viewpoints. Both sessions were captured using a digital video camera and audio recorder, and all utterances from both the participants and the researcher were transcribed. In the second session, participants reviewed the video recording of the first session to rate their WTC fluctuations on a moment-to-moment basis, using a five-point Likert scale (1=greatly decreased WTC to 5=greatly increased WTC, with 3=stable). They self-rated their WTC each time they or the researcher spoke, resulting in a differing number of ratings across participants depending on the frequency of interaction. Participants were instructed to record only instances where fluctuations occurred, excluding stable points (3=stable). They marked these changes alongside the corresponding utterance on the transcript. Following this, a stimulated recall interview was conducted to investigate factors behind high or low WTC. Participants watched the video, pausing as needed to explain their WTC ratings, while the researcher refrained from leading questions, following protocols by Egi (2008) and Gass & Mackey (2000).

Table 2

Sequence of Procedures

	First session	Second session
Date	Kana, Koki: February 28, 2020 Yuki, Yuji: February 26, 2020	Kana, Koki: March 18, 2020 Yuki, Yuji: March 24, 2020
Activity	Oral Tasks: Picture Description, Interview	WTC Rating and Stimulated Recall
Time Length	Kana: 19 mins. Koki: 20 mins. Yuki: 17 mins. Yuji: 17 mins.	Kana: 41 mins. Koki: 44 mins. Yuki: 50 mins. Yuji: 48 mins.

Analysis

Six different types of feedback by the interlocutor were recorded, based on the classifications by Lyster et al. (2013): recast, explicit correction, metalinguistic feedback, clarification, elicitation, and repetition. Table 3 presents their definitions and examples.

Table 3

CF Types and Examples (Adapted from Lyster et al. 2013)

CF Type	Definition
Recast	Reformulation of all or part of the learner's utterances to resolve a breakdown in communication. S: I saw a bad dream this morning. T: Oh, you had a bad dream this morning!
Explicit Correction	Reformulation of a student's utterance plus a clear indication of the error. S: I study hard yesterday. T: You studied hard yesterday.
Metalinguistic Feedback	Brief metalinguistic statement aimed at eliciting a self-correction from the student. S: Yesterday, I watch a movie. T: Yesterday, it's past.
Clarification Request	Expressions like "Pardon?" and "I don't understand" to signal an error indirectly following a student's utterance. S: Why does he taking a picture? T: Pardon?
Elicitation	Directly elicit self-correction from the student. S: Yesterday, I watch a movie. T: Yesterday, you…
Repetition	A verbatim repetition of a student's utterance, often with adjusted intonation to highlight the error. S: Yesterday, I watch a movie. T: Yesterday, you watch a movie.

During the interaction, the researcher offered comments on, acknowledged, and summarized or paraphrased the participants' utterances. These responses may not be categorized as CF as they did not have any corrective intent. However, as they were often recorded in the interactions between the learners and the researcher, these three types of feedback were considered to have influenced the learners' speaking performances, and thus their WTC. Accordingly, comment, acknowledgment, and summary/paraphrase were included in the analysis. Examples for each category are as follows:

Comment:

Oh, you are very sad.

She must be very busy, but she is very happy working for those students.

Acknowledgment:
Okay.
I see.
I understand.

Summary/Paraphrase:
Oh, you mean, you should practice speaking English before going to an English-speaking country.
So, you want to go to Korea to enjoy Korean food.

In some cases, an utterance included more than one type of response. For example: *Okay, so you may have to teach English as well.* This included an acknowledgment and a comment, and in such situations, it was recorded as both.

Results and Discussion

RQ1: Does the WTC of Japanese low-intermediate and advanced EFL speakers fluctuate during interactive activities?

RQ1 examined the situational WTC of the four speakers. The number of utterances produced by each participant and the interlocutor were as follows: Kana (participant: 75, interlocutor: 137), Koki (participant: 102, interlocutor: 167), Yuki (participant: 130, interlocutor: 157), and Yuji (participant: 138, interlocutor: 153). The advanced speakers produced more utterances than did their low-intermediate counterparts, which is compatible with the advanced speakers' higher trait WTC (see Table 1). During the interaction, as Table 4 shows, the four speakers' WTC fluctuated often. Figure 1 shows how the WTC of one participant, Kana, fluctuated.

Table 4

Frequency of WTC Scores

	Kana		Koki		Yuki		Yuji	
WTC	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
5	33	15.6	126	46.8	0	0	0	0
4	72	34.0	61	22.7	54	18.8	8	2.7
3	75	35.4	50	18.6	111	38.7	262	90.0
2	21	9.9	32	11.9	89	31.0	21	7.2
1	11	5.2	0	0	33	11.5	0	0
WTC Average	3.5		4.0	0	2.6		3.0	

Figure 1

WTC Fluctuation for Kana

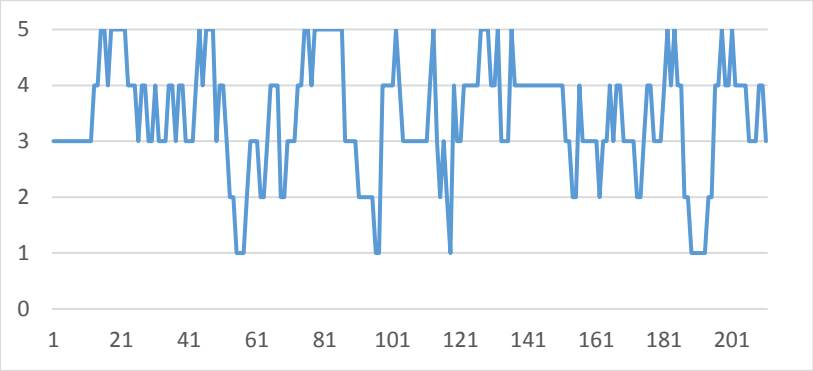

Figure 1. Alt Text: A line graph illustrating the fluctuations in WTC for an individual named Kana. The graph features sharp, vertical jumps between different levels on the y-axis (the score of WTC), which is labeled from 0 to 5, indicating distinct changes in willingness at various points. The x-axis (utterances) is labeled from 1 to 200, suggesting a timeline or sequence of events. The pattern is irregular, with rapid changes, showing a highly variable WTC over the observed period. Note. The x-axis represents the utterances.

The tables show that all the participants' WTC fluctuated during the interactive activity and that the low-intermediate speakers scored higher on situational (fluctuating) WTC than did the advanced learners. Two low-intermediate speakers scored the highest and second highest on WTC, and Yuji, the most proficient speaker in the study with the highest trait WTC, scored second lowest on state WTC, whereas Yuki scored lowest on WTC. While trait WTC examined before the activity indicated that the advanced speakers were more likely to show higher WTC (Yuji＞Yuki＞Koki＞Kana), this was not reflected in the situational WTC during the activity. This suggests that the advanced speakers had a higher baseline WTC level (stable = 3) compared to the low-intermediate speakers, resulting in fewer instances of high state WTC (ratings of 4 or 5) among the latter group.

RQ2: *Which feedback types and their aspects are associated with high and low WTC?*

Quantitative phase

RQ 2 explored the association between WTC and feedback from the interlocutor. Table 5 presents the frequencies of the types of feedback and the average WTC scores. Comments, acknowledgments, and paraphrases were analyzed. Table 6 summarizes the results.

Table 5

Types and Frequency of Feedback, and Average WTC Scores

	Kana		Koki		Yuki		Yuji	
Type of Feedback	Frequency	Average WTC	Frequency	Average WTC	Frequency	Average WTC	Frequency	Average WTC
Recast	12	3.9	10	4.8	8	2.5	4	3
Explicit correction	7	2.9	10	4	3	1.3	6	2.7
Metalinguistic feedback	1	2	3	2	0	-	6	2

Clarification requests	0	-	1	4	0	-	7	3
Elicitation	3	2.3	2	3	3	2	1	3
Repetition	3	4.3	2	3.5	1	2	2	2.5
Comment	6	3.4	2	5	0	-	3	3
Acknowledgment	14	3.7	14	4.4	18	2.9	10	3
Paraphrase/ Summary	4	3.3	6	4.7	5	2.2	7	3
	Total 50	Total Average	Total 50	Total Average WTC 4.2	Total 38	Total Average WTC 2.5	Total 46	Total Average WTC 2.8

Table 6

Types and Frequency of Feedback and Average WTC Scores

Type of Feedback	Frequency	Average WTC
Recast	34	3.7
Explicit correction	26	2.9
Metalinguistic feedback	10	2.0
Clarification requests	8	3.1
Elicitation	9	2.4
Repetition	8	3.4
Comment	11	3.7
Acknowledgment	56	3.5
Paraphrase/Summary	22	3.3
	Total 184	Average 3.3

The results show that when feedback was provided, Kana and Koki, who were low-intermediate speakers, scored above the midpoint (3), whereas Yuki and Yuji, who were advanced speakers, scored lower than the midpoint (3). In the pre-task survey, it was found that advanced speakers had higher trait WTC and CF preferences than did low-intermediate ones (refer to Table 1). However, the results were incompatible with the participants' trait WTC and CF preferences, implying that more advanced speakers were more likely to decrease their WTC when CF was provided. It may be understood that as learners with higher levels of proficiency tend to be stricter in judging their capabilities (Freiermuth & Huang, 2015), advanced speakers in the study may have discovered their lack of English proficiency when CF was provided, which may have resulted in a decrease in WTC. The analysis based on the types of feedback provided indicated that recast, comments, and acknowledgment had the most positive impact on the levels of WTC, whereas metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and explicit correction had the most detrimental impact (Table 6). To capture the factors and reasons for their high and low WTC, a qualitative analysis was conducted on these six feedback patterns.

Qualitative Phase

The qualitative data are shown as excerpts, including interactions between the participant and the researcher, comments from the participant during the stimulated recall interview, or a combination of both. The participants' interview responses were translated by the researcher.

On average, recasts were associated with the highest WTC, with three participants recording this as their highest scores. This finding aligns with literature that describes recasts as minimally intrusive feedback; as Long (2007) noted, "…their implicit and genuinely unobtrusive qualities allow teachers and learners to continue their joint focus on meaning while still addressing linguistic problems" (p. 103). This unobtrusiveness of recasts may have contributed to the high WTC observed in the excerpts.

Excerpt 14
Koki: They, they eat dinner.
R: Oh, they ate dinner. [recast]
Stimulated recall: I noticed I had made a mistake, but the teacher didn't point it out.
Excerpt 15
Koki: So, I... We can... we can do safety travel.
R: Okay, so we can enjoy travel safely. Okay. [recast]
Stimulated recall: The teacher recasted what I said, and I felt secure to know that the teacher understood my utterance.

Kang (2005) noted that sense of security was a factor causing high WTC. When recasts were provided implicitly without pointing out the mistake, participants felt secure knowing that the interlocutor understood their messages, while possibly also learning the correct forms. The recast was a sign that acknowledged the interlocutor's comprehension of learner utterances, and led to their high WTC. Comments and acknowledgment also enhanced the sense of security, which led to relatively high WTC, as demonstrated in excerpts 16 and 17

Excerpt 16 (Stimulated recall interview) – about the researcher's comment
Koki: The teacher gave me a comment, so I thought he was listening to me attentively. I felt happy.

Excerpt 17 (Stimulated recall interview) – about the researcher's acknowledgment
Kana: When he said "okay," with a nod, I thought he understood me, and I felt relieved.

Comments and acknowledgment indicated that the interlocutor was listening carefully and attentively, and this social support made the participants feel secure (Kang, 2005). The three factors that were associated with low WTC belonged to explicit types of feedback.

Excerpt 18
Koki: But... but the next day, he have, have a cold.
R: He, Shugo ha he dakara (the subject is he, so). [metalinguistic feedback]
Koki: … (pause) He has a cold.
Stimulated recall: The teacher pointed out my mistake in Japanese and I didn't know why he did it. Our talk stopped.

In excerpt 18, the interlocutor provided metalinguistic feedback on Koki's mistake, which broke the flow of communication, possibly causing his low WTC.

Excerpt 19

Yuki: Maybe, I haven't eat, ah, French.
R: Oh, you haven't? [elicitation]
Yuki: Yeah, ate.
Stimulated recall: I felt the teacher was checking my mistake. I should have been more careful about my English.

Excerpt 20

Yuji: Ah, when I was a two-year student of undergraduate.
R: Second-year student. [explicit correction]
Yuji: Ah, second-year student, yeah
Stimulated recall: I felt embarrassed and lost my motivation to speak a little bit when my error was corrected explicitly and directly. Now, I can appreciate the feedback because I was able to learn, but for some reason, I felt discouraged then.

Unlike recasts, explicit types of feedback such as metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and explicit correction were intrusive as they broke into the learners' utterances (e.g., Doughty, 2001; Long, 2007). It was understandable that learners' WTC decreased at the moment when feedback was given. This implied that facilitating communication flow maintained learners' motivation. Thus, exercising caution was necessary while providing explicit types of feedback. Despite this, Koki recorded high WTC even when he was given explicit correction, and Yuji mentioned that he appreciated the feedback. Tavakoli and Zarrinabadi (2018) reported that whereas explicit CF increased Iranian learners' WTC, implicit CF did not. They examined the degree of WTC after the lesson and not at the exact moment when feedback was given. Thus, they did not find fluctuations in WTC. Additional research is necessary to explore the complex relationship between WTC and the time of measurement and the learners' individual differences.

Conclusion

This study investigated the state WTC of Japanese low-intermediate and advanced speakers by analyzing fluctuations in their WTC during an interactive activity and exploring the relationship between WTC and feedback. All participants' WTC fluctuated and feedback was associated with low or high WTC differently according to type. The results show that implicit types of feedback (recast) had strong relations with higher WTC, whereas explicit factors (metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and explicit correction) may work the other way. This is in line with Sato (2011) in which after explicit corrective feedback was given, the flow of conversation between a teacher and a student was interrupted in 50% of cases, compared to 7% for recasts, showing that recasts tend to be less disruptive to the flow of conversation than explicit corrective feedback. It can be argued that implicit type of feedback is more motivating for learners than explicit one. However, these results are not compatible with research that showed that Iranian EFL learners expressed a preference for explicit types of feedback (Tavakoli & Zarrinabadi, 2018; Zare et al., 2020). Even among EFL learners, there can be different effects of feedback on the learner's affective aspects or emotional responses, such as confidence, anxiety, and motivation. To explore this, more controlled experiments with a

larger number of EFL learners with different backgrounds, motivations, and proficiency levels should ideally be conducted. Feedback that concerned speakers' affective aspects (acknowledgment, comment) also was related to higher WTC. This can be explained by the effect on the participants' psychological conditions, namely, a sense of security (Kang, 2005). It can be interpreted that while they were given acknowledgment or comments, participants were safe from anxiety or fear in L2 communication.

This study has pedagogical implications for EFL teachers. They can be encouraged to give learners supportive responses like comments and acknowledgments, instead of showing signs of disinterest or boredom, as it can help students feel a sense of security, thus increasing their WTC. In the case of teaching Japanese EFL learners, the use of recast, rather than other explicit types of CF, should be encouraged to keep the learners' WTC high, as they are less obstructive when given in the normal flow of communication. Three explicit types of feedback, namely, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and explicit correction should be avoided if the purpose of the lesson is to focus on communication, as they can decrease the students' WTC momentarily. Although this study offers valuable findings and implications, it has certain limitations. First, only four interactive activities involving four participants were recorded and analyzed, limiting the generalizability of the results. A larger dataset with participants from varied learning backgrounds, English proficiency levels, and personality traits would have strengthened the data's rigor. Though the results showed relationships between WTC and types of feedback, this study did not examine the directionality of the causal relationship. Given these limitations, this study should be regarded as an initial exploration or pilot project. It is anticipated that this research will inspire future studies to address these limitations and provide valuable insights for teachers and teacher educators by enhancing understanding of WTC fluctuations and its connection with feedback in EFL contexts.

Note

1. In Sato (2023), the same data from the same participants were analyzed with a focus on the relationship between the participants' English proficiencies and state WTC. However, this study focused on the relationship among feedback and state WTC.

2. The STEP test, administered by the non-profit organization Society for Testing English Proficiency, Inc. (STEP), is an English proficiency assessment supported by Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT). The test evaluates listening, writing, and speaking skills and is regarded as one of the most reliable and valid English proficiency exams in Japan. MEXT mandates that Japanese English teachers attain at least a pre-first grade level on the STEP test.

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Ethics Declarations

Competing Interests

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Appendix 1

Example of Items in the Questionnaire Measuring Willingness to Communicate (8 Items, a=.77).

- When you give a speech in front of many people.
- When you have a discussion with a small group of friends.
- When you meet an acquaintance standing before you in line.

Note. Questionnaires were written in Japanese and translated into English by the author.

Appendix 2

Example of Items in the Questionnaire Measuring Preference for CF (6 Items, a=.89).

- I want my teacher to correct all my errors when I speak in English.
- I think I learn more when my teacher corrects my mistakes.
- I want my teacher to correct errors that I make most often when I speak in English.

Note: Questionnaires were written in Japanese and translated into English by the author.

Appendix 3

Picture Description Activity (Adopted from the Second Grade STEP Test Conducted in 2018).

Your story should begin with this sentence: **One evening, Mr. and Mrs. Sato arrived at their hotel on their winter vacation.**