



Chinese University Students' Willingness to Communicate, Motivation to Learn, and Performance in Japanese as a Foreign Language

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Abstract. The present study explored the relationships between Chinese university students' WTCJ (willingness to communicate in Japanese), motivation to learn, and their performance in Japanese. 103 students majoring in Japanese participated in the survey, and 4 of them accepted the interview. The quantitative and qualitative data analyses led to the following major findings that: (1) in this study, the participants were unwilling to talk in Japanese. Their WTCJ was equal or of slight difference in diverse contexts. The types of audiences, however, produced an effect on WTCJ. (2) The participants were strongly motivated to learn Japanese, with utility being the greatest motivation factor and cost being the least one. (3) The participants' WTCJ was irrelevant to their performance in this study. Most motivation beliefs were positively correlated with performance and also with WTCJs (subscores of WTCJ). (4) Expectancy can positively predict performance, with attainment being the more powerful one than expectancy, both of which positively predicted performance. This study adds to the body of work on second language acquisition centering on Japanese learners and provides some implications for Japanese teaching.

Keywords: Willingness to communicate · Expectancy-value motivation · Performance

1 Introduction

A number of studies on willingness to communicate (WTC) and motivation have centered on English learners. Despite the systematic and solid foundation that has been made for second language acquisition (SLA), various research contexts and languages are needed to further conduct the empirical studies. English is still of great importance in the globalizing process. Nevertheless, learners of other languages have been increasing in number in China, which deserves further investigation from all learning aspects. Japanese is a comparatively popular foreign language for Chinese students to learn other than English. Thus, the present research aimed to investigate their WTCJ (willingness to communicate in Japanese) and motivation to learn Japanese in relation to performance in Japanese.

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2 Literature Review

2.1 Expectancy-Value Motivation

It is of great importance that motivation has been researched in second language acquisition (SLA). In the earliest stage, the relevant research mainly focused on social-psychological factors theoretically and empirically [1–3]. Gardner et al. divided motivation into integrative orientation and instrumental orientation, respectively referring to communication with people speaking the target language for a better understanding of their culture or lifestyle and practical benefits such as promotion [1, 2]. Afterward, more factors from other fields, such as general and cognitive psychology, were adopted to develop L2 (second language) motivation theories [4–6]. Oxford et al. put forward several ways to extend L2 motivation theories, including enlarging Gardner’s model based on Atkinson’s expectancy-value theory [6]. Herein, expectancy was defined as a cognitive anticipation involving the probability of success [6, 7].

Further theoretical research was mainly contributed by Wigfield and his associates [8, 9]. Taking adolescents and children as participants, Wigfield & Eccles concluded that English learners’ expectancy and the subjective value predicted their performance, affecting such as goals, understanding of learning demands, etc. [8, 9]. Instead of focusing on SLA, recent research by Wigfield and his associates on expectancy-value theory was conducted in the field of educational psychology [10, 11]. Additionally, Loh proposed that despite the wide use of expectancy-value theory in SLA, very few studies had investigated the relationship between the two constructs, expectancy and value, and L2, or focused on the application to daily teaching for L2 learners’ improvement [12].

The empirical studies of the expectancy-value theory, compared with other branches of L2 motivation theories, though small in number, nevertheless did not center on learners of English as L2. Considering understanding the corresponding culture as one of the ultimate goals of L2 learning, an expectancy-value questionnaire concerning the foreign language was used by Altstaedter & Jones to examine the feasibility of a systematic inquiry-based method and the results were encouraging [13]. There were also some other studies focusing on English and relevant factors for achievement or proficiency [14–17]. For example, MacIntyre et al. adopted three motivational frameworks including the expectancy-value model to examine the ability of variables within this framework and the results showed that the variable ‘hesitation’ significantly predicted non-linguistic outcomes such as willingness to communicate [14]. According to Zhan et al., motivations and self-efficacy had a substantial interplay when it came to the influence on language learning management strategies and language usage strategies [15].

As aforementioned, studies of the expectancy-value theory began to enlarge the variety of participants by including students of different languages as L2.

2.2 Willingness to Communicate

McCroskey and Richmond initially established the idea of willingness to communicate (WTC), a personality attribute referring to one’s desire to speak [18]. It was in the field of L1 (one’s first language) that the following Willingness-To-Communicate Scale (WTCS) was initially used [19, 20]. In its application in L2 research, WTC was applied as the

willingness to engage in L2 conversation with a particular person or persons at a certain time [21]. For the first time, an attempt was conducted to apply WTC in the L2. They made an effort to look into potential relations among WTC variables like interpersonal motivation and self-confidence, and concluded that a key construct of L2 pedagogy is producing a WTC [21].

Apart from the theoretical development, empirical studies of WTC have also flourished in the field of L2 research, most of which centered on EFL (English as a foreign language) learners, especially in the Chinese or even Asian context [22–25]. For example, Peng & Woodrow investigated WTC in Chinese EFL classrooms, resulting in that the classroom environment predicted WTC and other factors such as communication confidence, learner beliefs, and motivation [26]. There were also studies focusing on other languages as L2, especially French [27]. For example, MacIntyre et al. conducted a survey among students of French as L2 in a junior high program and found that from grades 7 to 8, students' WTC in L2 (French, herein) grew, while it remained stable between grades 8 and 9 [28]. Although these studies were scarce, there have been studies focusing on learners of CFL (Chinese as a foreign language) [29, 30]. According to Liu's research, the majority of participants who were bilingual or multilingual were willing to speak Chinese and did not experience any anxiety when doing so [30].

As seen, the studies of the expectation-value motivation are small in number, whereas WTC has long been studied in L2 research. Most studies of WTC focused on learners of EFL and FFL, while hardly can one find literature on learners of other languages as L2. The studies in the same context are inadequate for further research. Also, it has to be taken into consideration that the empirical studies of expectancy-value motivation need to be further explored in the field of SLA, compared with other branches of motivation theories on which a significant deal of research has been done. Hence, based on the previous studies, the present study on expectancy-value motivation and WTC was conducted among Chinese university Japanese learners, to achieve more findings on the two issues in relation to Japanese learners' performance. The research questions were:

- (1) To what extent are Chinese university Japanese learners willing to communicate in Japanese?
- (2) What are Chinese university Japanese learners' motivations to learn Japanese?
- (3) How are the students' WTCJ and their motivation to learn Japanese related to each other and to their performance in Japanese?
- (4) Do WTCJ and motivation predict the learners' performance in Japanese?

3 Research Design

3.1 Participants

A total of 112 questionnaires were distributed to university Japanese learners, among which the valid were 103 (recovery rate of 91.96%) in the present study. Females were the majority of participants ($N = 103$, 71), as a typical characteristic of the population composition of language majors in China. All participants were from different grades, including freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students ($N = 103$, 9, 35, 40, 15, 4 respectively).

3.2 Interviewees

4 interviewees were selected from the 103 survey participants, after receiving their oral consent to agree to be interviewed. They were all females from different grades, including 1 sophomore (interviewee A), 2 juniors (interviewee B and C), and 1 graduate student (interviewee D).

3.3 Instruments

Background Information Questionnaire

The background questionnaire was used to gather participants' gender and grade, to limit potential variables as much as feasible.

Willingness-to-Communicate in Japanese Scale

The McCroskey's WTC scale, which had 20 items and covered four different communication contexts—public speaking (PS), meetings, group discussions (GD), and interpersonal conversations (IC)—as well as three different audiences—strangers, acquaintances, and friends—was used to develop the Willingness-To-Communicate in Japanese scale (WTCJS). In the present study, a Japanese context was set in the scale, where each item has added the word 'Japanese'. On a 5-point Likert scale, participants were required to freely choose the time they wanted to communicate at in Japanese for each item. The WTCJS, similar to the WTC scale, yielded a total score ($\alpha = 0.858$) and seven subscores, namely PS ($\alpha = 0.637$), meeting ($\alpha = 0.673$), group discussion ($\alpha = 0.612$), IC ($\alpha = 0.643$), stranger ($\alpha = 0.746$), acquaintance ($\alpha = 0.696$), and friend ($\alpha = 0.728$).

Expectancy-Value Motivation Scale

Trautwein et al. developed a 16-item Expectancy-Value beliefs scale for English and mathematics, including 4 items on expectancy beliefs and 12 items on value beliefs (3 on attainment beliefs, 5 on intrinsic beliefs, 2 on utility beliefs, and 2 on cost beliefs) [31]. Two dimensions (i.e., utility value and cost value) were composed of less than three items, for which two additional items each were added in the later study [32]. To better fit the present research, the 19-item Expectancy-Value motivation scale was adopted from all 16 items developed by Trautwein et al. and 3 additional items added by Yang & Mindrila (2 on utility value and 1 on cost value) [31][32], with the domain-specific words (i.e., English and human diversity) in each item replaced by the word 'Japanese'. The present scale now included 4 items on expectancy ($\alpha = 0.827$) and 15 items on value ($\alpha = 0.895$), the latter of which were composed of 3-item attainment value ($\alpha = 0.841$), 5-item intrinsic value ($\alpha = 0.891$), 4-item utility value ($\alpha = 0.790$) and 3-item cost value ($\alpha = 0.797$).

Performance

The Japanese learners' performance was measured by the most recent Japanese test score in class (mid-term test or final-term test), wherein their self-rated scores on a scale of 1–10 were used as the reference to remove outliers through calculating the Mahalanobis distance (MD). MD of test scores ranged from 0.159–6.413 (Table 1),

Table 1. Residuals Statistics^a

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>N</i>
Mahal. Distance	.159	6.413	.990	1.299	103

Note. ^aDependent Variable: the most recent Japanese test score in class (mid-term test or final-term test).

which did not exceed the critical value of 7.879, suggesting no abnormal data in all 103 questionnaires.

Semi-structured Interview

The interview questions, covering WTCJ, motivation, and performance, were created to complement the results of the quantitative survey. Meanwhile, the subjective ideas and feelings of WTCJ and the expectancy-value motivation for performance were also implied by the interview. Besides, the interview also contained personal statements from the perspective of students, e.g., opinions and suggestions of their current teaching contexts.

3.4 Procedure and Data Analyses

All questionnaires and scales were designed in Chinese to better fit the present context, with negative items reverse coded in statistical analyses to keep consistency. Eventually, all data of 103 eventual valid questionnaires were analyzed via SPSS 26.0. First, the means and standard deviations were calculated for both WTCJ levels and motivation patterns. Then, bivariate correlation analyses were employed to find the relationships between WTCJ, expectancy-value motivation, and performance. Next, the performance predictors were found using multiple regression analyses. Besides, all the interview data were transcribed for the complementation of the quantitative results and the investigation of causes and effects.

4 Results

4.1 WTCJ Levels and Motivation Patterns

The frequency test and descriptive analysis of WTCJ (with scales from 1 to 5) and motivation scores (with scales from 1 to 7) are presented in Table 2, either set of which is normally distributed.

As seen in Table 2, the total WTCJ score ($M = 2.7961$, $Mo = 2.17$) of participants is below midpoint 3, indicating that they were unwilling to communicate with various individuals in various situations in Japanese. Of the subscores, the participants scored the highest on talking to friends ($M = 3.6723$, $Mo = 4.00$) and the lowest on talking to strangers ($M = 2.0704$, $Mo = 1.25$), both of which are components of audiences, while the participants scored similarly low on talking in diverse contexts, namely PS ($M = 2.8932$, $Mo = 3.00$), meeting ($M = 2.6375$, $Mo = 2.33$), GD ($M = 2.7994$, $Mo = 3.00$)

Table 2. Means, Std. Deviations, medians, and modes for WTCJ scores, expectancy, and value beliefs

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode	Skewness	Kurtosis
Total WTCJ score	2.7961	0.64187	2.7500	2.17 ^a	0.215	-0.43
<i>Context subscores</i>						
PS	2.8932	0.871	3.0000	3.00	-0.018	-0.661
Meeting	2.6375	0.85445	2.6667	2.33	0.238	-0.466
GD	2.7994	0.65403	2.6667	3.00	0.211	-0.273
IC	2.8544	0.74194	2.6667	2.67	0.072	-0.214
<i>Audience subscores</i>						
Stranger	2.0704	0.75765	2.0000	1.25 ^a	0.421	-0.507
Acquaintances	2.6456	0.71015	2.5000	2.25	0.594	0.211
Friends	3.6723	0.80974	4.0000	4.00	-0.457	-0.517
Expectancy	4.7354	1.12885	4.7500	5.50	-0.419	-0.081
<i>Value</i>						
Attainment	5.323625	1.193169	5.333333	5.3333	-0.91	0.453
Intrinsic value	4.885	1.2759	5.200	5.8	-0.495	-0.448
Utility value	5.5243	1.01189	5.7500	4.50 ^a	-0.638	0.103
Cost	4.2751	1.39906	4.3333	4.67	-0.253	-0.454

Note. ^aMultiple modes exist. The smallest value is shown.

and IC ($M = 2.8544$, $Mo = 2.67$). The two results show that the participants' WTCJ was equal or of slight difference. The types of audiences, however, produced an effect on the participants' WTCJ. Under this circumstance, the participants were the greatest willing to talk to friends and the least willing to talk to strangers, regardless of the context.

Table 2 also presents that the participants scored well above the midpoint 4 (M ranged from 4.2751 to 5.5243, and Mo ranged from 4.50 to 5.8), suggesting a strong motivation in Japanese learning among the participants. Of all components, the participants scored the highest on utility value and the lowest on cost, implying that the participants were generally motivated to learn Japanese by its usefulness in life and other settings, while the cost was the least motivating factor for them to learn Japanese. Meanwhile, it should be noted that the highest mode is the intrinsic value ($Mo = 5.8$), suggesting that the participants were of great subjective interest in Japanese as well as enjoying the learning process.

Additionally, the independent samples test and one-way ANOVA were run, resulting in that all dimensions of the WTCJ scale and motivation scale are not significantly varied by gender and grade. Consequently, gender and grade will not be identified as variables in the subsequent analyses.

Table 3. Correlations between WTCJ, motivation, and performance in Japanese

	P	Expectancy	Attainment	Intrinsic value	Utility value	Cost
Expectancy	.307**					
Attainment	.354**					
Intrinsic	.237*					
Utility	.204*					
Cost	0.116					
PS	0.014	.298**	0.136	.211*	0.143	-0.01
Meeting	0.115	.311**	.208*	.197*	0.125	-0.019
GD	0.126	.274**	.211*	.205*	0.114	-0.019
IC	0.077	0.179	0.168	0.165	.197*	-0.006
Stranger	0.11	.230*	0.193	.235*	0.165	-0.135
Acquaintances	0.098	.257**	0.181	0.129	0.095	-0.009
Friends	0.042	.335**	0.178	.231*	0.181	0.095
Total WTCJ	0.097	.326**	.218*	.237*	0.176	-0.016

Note. P = performance, i.e., the most recent Japanese test score in class (mid-term test or final-term test). Coefficient of determination: small, $r \leq 0.1$; medium, $r = 0.3$; large, $r \geq 0.5$ [33].

4.2 Correlations Between WTCJ, Motivation, and Performance in Japanese

Correlation analyses were employed to find the relationships between WTCJ, motivation, and performance in Japanese, as reported in Table 3.

Table 3 presents no statistically significant relationships between all the WTCJ scores and performance, suggesting that the participants' WTCJ is irrelevant to their performance in the present study (ρ ranged from 0.885 to 0.205 > 0.05). Positively correlated relationships are found between all motivation beliefs and performance statistically, with the exception of those between cost and performance ($\rho = 0.245 > 0.05$). The effect size of all the coefficients of motivation beliefs other than cost was medium, ranging from 0.204 to 0.307.

Additionally, there are statistically positive correlated relationships between some of the motivation factors and WTCJ. Expectancy is significantly positively correlated with all WTCJ scores except IC. Intrinsic value is correlated with the same WTCJ scores (including subscores) as expectancy is, apart from the acquaintance. Moreover, there are positively correlated relationships between attainment and meeting, discussion, and total WTCJ score. It should be noted that three beliefs of motivation are positively correlated with meeting, group discussion, and total WTCJ respectively, with coefficients ranging from 0.197 to 0.326 being medium size. These results imply that the higher motivation (e.g., future success, personal importance, and subjective interest) to learn Japanese, the more willing to talk in Japanese to different types of audiences in diverse contexts, especially in a large group or a small meeting of friends.

Table 4. Multiple regression coefficients and significance of predictors for performance in Japanese

Model		R^2	B	β	t	ρ	F	Collinearity Statistics	
								Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.126			13.335	.000	14.495		
	Attainment		3.386	.354	3.807	.000		1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	.166			10.296	.000	9.976		
	Attainment		2.718	.284	2.944	.004		.893	1.120
	Expectancy		2.160	.214	2.213	.029		.893	1.120

4.3 Predictors for Performance in Japanese

There are no statistically significant correlations between WTCJ and performance, as shown in Table 3. Hence, only motivation factors were involved to identify the predictors for performance. The regression models were created using the stepwise method in order to find the significant performance predictors, as reported in Table 4.

Two models, namely model 1 (Attainment) and model 2 (Attainment, Expectancy), are presented in Table 4 with R^2 (0.126 and 0.166 respectively) being both significant for performance, implying that attainment and expectancy can both predict students' performance. Also, the validity of model 2 is proved with F being 9.976 and both VIFs being $1.120 < 5$. In model 2, the standardized coefficient of attainment ($\beta = 0.284$, $B = 2.718$) is bigger than that of expectancy ($\beta = 0.214$, $B = 2.160$). Statistically, it suggests that attainment is a more powerful positive predictor for performance in Japanese than expectancy.

4.4 Interview Result

Among the participants, 4 of them were interviewed for the inner exploration of WTCJ, motivation, and their performance in Japanese. All 4 interviewees agreed that their WTCJ was influenced by the types of audiences. For example, 'how familiar I am with the audience determines and restricts the content I can talk about. Because I would be worried about whether I am capable of continuously talking about a subject with him' (interviewee B). 'My defensive mechanisms automatically come up when seeing someone I do not know much of. To some degree, I am also afraid of being embarrassed in front of people or embarrassing them' (interview D). Similarly, all 4 interviewees believed that a strong motivation existed during the learning process, 3 of which specifically confirmed the usefulness of Japanese for them, especially 'the benefit for the future career' (interview C). The other interviewee was motivated by intrinsic value, reporting that 'I just love learning Japanese, whether I am in the class or life' (interviewee A).

As to the relationship between WTCJ and performance, 3 interviewees reported that personally speaking, their performance was irrelevant to their WTCJ. As one of them said, 'My performance is just a test score of textbooks. But my WTCJ is not generated

based on any kind of textbooks' (interviewee A). The other interviewee, different from the survey result, believed that the WTCJ and performance 'were mutually promoted because of the sense of satisfaction' (interview D).

Regarding the relationship between motivation and performance, all 4 interviewees scored well in their most recent test, which contributed to their relatively strong motivation, as reported. For example, 'although Japanese was not my first choice at the beginning, I have to study well for a good grade because if you do are doing something, why don't you do your best' (interview D). And 'I am a student for more than ten years. I think it is very normal for me to be excellent at what I am studying' (interview C).

Regarding the relationship between WTCJ and motivation, 3 interviewees agreed on the correlations between WTCJ and motivation, with 1 interviewee who was not sure about this issue. According to the 3 interviewees, WTCJ and motivation were interrelated in the learning process. For example, 'either Japanese or other languages that I have been learning were initially aimed for communication and the consequent interest came along afterward' (interviewee B).

Moreover, all the interviewees shared their opinions and suggestions about Japanese learning and teaching. 1 of them proposed that learning a language differs from studying a discipline. 'It is not like a simple answer from solving equations' (interview D). Based on this premise, 2 interviewees summarized their past learning experiences and concluded that their WTCJ, motivation, and performance in Japanese were all at a relatively high level when their class context was no longer 'a simple process of output and input' (interviewee A), but 'an environment of student-oriented guiding instruction' (interview D).

5 Discussion

5.1 WTCJ Levels and the Relationship Between WTCJ and the Performance in Japanese

As aforementioned, the participants were generally reluctant to communicate with various individuals in various situations in Japanese. Based on the previous studies, evident findings of WTC in the second language centered on English and resulted that the majority of the students were not willing to communicate in English during class, due to various reasons including poor self-rated proficiency and fear of making mistakes [22–24]. Supposing that the SL learning processes were alike, the earlier studies support this finding. Besides, the participants were the greatest willing to talk to friends and the least willing to talk to strangers, regardless of the context. This result also abides by WTC in any kind of communication, implying the potential preference for the participants of more familiar audiences.

The quantitative results show no statistical correlations between WTC and their performance in Japanese, which is consistent with interview results. Further, the latter gives the causes that students' performance in class was measured only by textbooks, from which WTCJ was divorced.

5.2 Motivation Patterns and Their Prediction for Performance in Japanese

Of the generally strong motivation, the survey result shows that the participants were generally motivated to learn Japanese by its usefulness in life and other settings, which confirmed the results of Hu & McGeown in the EFL context [16]. This result is consistent with the following interview result, such as scholarship, subjective interests and always being good at course learning. In detail, positively correlated relationships are found between all motivation beliefs and performance statistically, with attainment and expectancy being the positive predictors for performance. The interview data also confirms it with improving suggestions targeted at better performance and the changeability of motivation.

5.3 Correlation Between Motivation and WTCJ

There are statistically positive correlated relationships between some of the motivation beliefs and WTCJs. It is supported by Hoi's research wherein the context was set in class [17]. It is also consistent with the interview result that all the interviewees confirmed the positive prediction of motivation for WTCJ on them, with the inner interpretation of the personal changes in motivation in real life.

6 Conclusion

As aforementioned, the present study aimed to explore the relationships between Chinese university students' WTCJ, motivation to learn, and their performance in Japanese. The research yielded findings are as follows: (1) Generally, the participants were unwilling to talk in Japanese. WTCJ was equal or of slight difference in diverse contexts. The types of audiences, however, produced an effect on WTCJ; (2) The participants were generally strongly motivated to learn Japanese, with utility being the greatest motivation factor and cost, the least one; (3) The participants' WTCJ was irrelevant to their performance in this study. Most motivation beliefs were positively correlated with performance and also with WTCJs; (4) Expectancy can positively predict performance, with attainment being the more powerful one than expectancy, both of which positively predict performance.

These findings have some suggestions for JFL (Japanese as a foreign language) teaching. The student's performance in class is divorced from their actual willingness in life. It is of crucial importance to improve the current teaching guidance for providing a better index for students' performance. Besides, there has been proven strong learning motivation which is common for Chinese students in all disciplines. The JFL teaching process could further consider this strength for better performance and eventual learning outcomes.

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