Research Article

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Interpreting unwillingness to speak L2 English by Japanese EFL learners

Abstract: This article reports on an empirical study investigating what makes Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) unwilling to speak English, regardless of their learning period, proficiency level, and location of the communication. The current study focuses on the self-perception of second language (L2) English abilities, anxiety, and interlocutors as possible causes of their unwillingness to speak L2 English, compared with first language (L1) Japanese. An online questionnaire was administered to 27 Japanese undergraduate students (age: 19–22) with non-English majors at a national university in Tokyo, Japan. The results show that the elements depressing the self-perception and willingness to speak are fundamental to managing human relationships in speaking situations, which have more impact on L2 English than L1 Japanese contexts. This is attributable to other-directedness, which has been discussed as being characteristic of Japanese and Chinese EFL learners. Furthermore, it appears plausible to assume that the other-directedness derives more from "considerations for others" than "face-saving." Future work will further investigate what constitutes Japanese other-directedness, compared with Chinese EFL learners'.

Keywords: willingness to speak, Japanese university students, self-perception, language anxiety, interlocutors

1 Introduction

It has been noticed that Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners have failed to improve their speaking ability, despite spending several years in oral communication classes. For example, it was found that high school students were unable to improve their English abilities, although they had communication classes with a native English teacher for 3 years (Watanabe 2013). Japanese learners' silence in English classrooms has been explored (e.g., Humphries et al. 2020, King 2012). In addition, Japan's low ranking in the Test of English as Foreign Language Institutional Testing Program Test (TOEFL IBT) scores reflected the failure. In 2011, English communication classes became compulsory in public primary schools. Nevertheless, in 2019, Japan ranked the third lowest out of 29 Asian countries, according to Test and Score Data Summary published by Educational Testing Service.

Interestingly, some previous studies on Japanese EFL learners found no link between English communication abilities and English proficiency (Matsuoka 2009, Poole 2005) and between willingness to communicate (WTC) in English and extensive learning period (Fushino 2011). The author has personally observed Japanese participants' hesitance to speak English in oral production tasks in earlier second language (L2) research, despite their Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores and learning experiences.

Much research has focused on the factors affecting learners' oral English communication in the classroom. As influential components of L2 WTC, the self-perception of communication competence (e.g.,

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Yashima 2002, Zhong 2013) and communication apprehension (e.g., Matsuoka and Rahimi 2011, McCroskey 1997) have been well-attested. It was suggested that both self-perception and language anxiety are the factors that strongly affect L2 WTC (e.g., Hashimoto 2002, MacIntyre 1994, MacIntyre and Charos 1996).

Many researchers have suggested self-perceived communication competence as one of the critical determinants of L2 WTC in classroom activities (e.g., De Saint Léger and Storch 2009, McCroskey and Richmond 1990). McCroskey and McCroskey (1986a, b) suggest that L2 learners are more influenced by self-perceived communication competence than actual communication skills in deciding whether to communicate. They also argue that self-perceived communication competence correlates more with WTC than actual communication competence.

Language anxiety and communication apprehension have been similarly denoted as anxiety about communication (Daly 1991, Horwitz et al. 1986). Many studies found that language anxiety negatively affects learners' WTC (e.g., Horwitz et al. 1986, Schlenker and Leary 1982). It was found that Japanese EFL learners, in particular, are prone to be anxious about communication in L2 (Klopf 1984) and both first language (L1) and L2 (McCroskey et al. 1985). Notably, some previous studies have pointed out negative evaluations in classrooms as a cause of anxiety (Gregersen and Horwitz 2002, Zhong 2013). Others have found that Japanese and Chinese EFL learners showed a tendency to put a high value on evaluation from others (Liu and Jackson 2008, Matsuoka et al. 2014).

This study[1] aims to explore possible underlying causes of Japanese EFL learners' unwillingness to speak English, not limited to classroom communications. Specifically, the current study concentrates on the self-perception of L2 English abilities, anxiety, and interlocutors, comparing L2 English with L1 Japanese.

2 Possible factors of Japanese EFL learners' unwillingness to speak

2.1 Self-perception

McCroskey and Richmond (1990) proposed self-perceived communication competence as one of the most direct and facilitative individual factors of L2 WTC. Many studies have examined whether self-perceived communication competence enhances L2 WTC through some class communication activities. For example, in De Saint Léger and Storch's research (2009), L1 English learners of L2 French showed that discussion activities in the classroom improved their self-perception of speaking ability, which positively affected L2 WTC. Matsuoka et al. (2014) also found that oral presentations helped Japanese EFL learners enhance self-perceived communication competence, which heightened L2 WTC.

Focusing on L2 English abilities, the current study aims to examine how Japanese EFL learners perceive their accuracy (vocabulary, pronunciation, word order, listening comprehension, and contextual appropriateness), spontaneity, and fluency. This study further investigates (1) how the self-perception shows a difference between L1 and L2; (2) whether the self-perceptions are correlated with the willingness to speak the respective languages under the two types of anxiety (see Section 2.2).

2.2 Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety may be considered "the main restraining force" as an individual factor of L2 WTC (Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak 2017, 62). Horwitz et al. (1986) proposed communication apprehension,

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1 This article deals only with three factors that could make Japanese EFL learners unwilling to speak English. A further article (using the same dataset and materials) includes bidirectional data and discusses the group comparisons (Muroya 2022).

test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as a measurement of classroom anxiety (the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: FLCAS). Gardner (2001) suggested language class anxiety and language use anxiety to deal with anxiety about classroom communication in the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Notably, some previous studies pointed out Japanese EFL learners' tendency to anxiety about communication. Klopf (1984) found that the Japanese learners' group was more anxious about communication than the other L1 groups: American, Australian, Chinese, Filipino, Korean, and Micronesian. McCroskey, Gudykunst, and Nishida's (1985) study revealed that Japanese students feel apprehensive about communicating, even in L1 Japanese.

Specifically, negative evaluation has been examined as a prime source of language anxiety in the classroom (Gregersen and Horwitz 2002, Zhong 2013). Matsuoka et al. (2014) found that anxiety about external evaluation is a possible cause of Japanese learners' unwillingness to communicate in English. Similarly, Liu and Jackson (2008) found that Chinese EFL learners feared negative evaluations from others.

The current study investigates which source of anxiety exacerbates Japanese EFL learners' willingness to speak English more, internal fear about their English abilities, or external fear of evaluation from others in both L1 and L2 contexts. In addition, this research aims to identify which elements promote their unwillingness to speak in the respective types of anxiety.

2.3 Interlocutors

Many studies have examined interlocutors as one of the situational factors affecting WTC in a foreign language classroom. One focus has been the number of interlocutors and the relationships (familiar or unfamiliar). Cao and Philp (2006) found that a smaller number of interlocutors and more familiar classmates positively affected L2 WTC. Gallagher and Robins (2015) also found persistent effects of personal relationships with interlocutors on L2 WTC. Furthermore, it was noted that Japanese and Chinese EFL learners are sensitive to the opinion of others: "other-directedness" (Matsuoka et al. 2014, 198) or "other-directed self" (Peng 2014, 31). More specifically, the other-oriented sensitivity, deriving from the concept of face-saving/face-losing, could be a root cause of internal fear about their English abilities and external fear of negative evaluation. For example, as Zhong (2013, 744/746) suggests, using accurate English contributes to gaining face, while making mistakes leads to losing face for Chinese learners.

This study examines which interlocutors' attributes affect the learners' unwillingness most, based on the sensitivity to others commonly found in Japanese EFL learners. Specifically, the current research investigates the following attributes: gender (i.e., the same or different gender), L1 backgrounds (Japanese, English, other L1s), trust (whether Japanese participants think the interlocutors are trustworthy), preference (whether Japanese participants like/have good impressions of interlocutors), and familiarity (whether interlocutors are familiar to Japanese participants).

3 The study

3.1 Research questions

The present study explores which elements make Japanese EFL learners unwilling to speak L2 English, focusing on the self-perception of L2 abilities, anxiety (individual factors), and interlocutors (a situational factor). By comparing L1 and L2 contexts, the following three research questions (RQ) are addressed.

RQ 1. Which elements matter most for Japanese EFL learners to perceive their English abilities?
    i. Is that different from that of their L1 Japanese abilities?
    ii. Are these self-perceptions correlated with their willingness to speak in the respective languages?

RQ 2. Which source of anxiety affects their unwillingness to speak English more, anxiety about their English abilities, or evaluation from others?
   i. Which elements of the anxiety contribute to their unwillingness to speak English?
   ii. Are these contributors similar to those of L1 Japanese contexts?

RQ3. Which attributes of interlocutors affect their unwillingness to speak English most?
   i. Are these features found in L1 Japanese contexts?

3.2 Participants

The participants were 27 Japanese EFL learners, aged 19–22, in a national university in Tokyo, Japan. The undergraduate students with non-English majors had received formal EFL classroom instruction. The participants' full linguistic background is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Japanese EFL learners' linguistic background

n = 27	Mean (SD)	Range
Age at testing (years)	20.2 (0.9)	19–22
Accuracy rate of National Centre Test (%)	89.9 (6.2)	75–99
TOEFL ITP scores (310–677) (n = 20)	483.5 (48.3)	393–601
Age of first L2 exposure (years)	10.6 (1.8)	6–12
Total number of English classes	1213.8 (363)	676–2497
Proportion of speaking classes (%)	20.6 (17.4)	0–76.1

This study uses the National Centre Test scores for university admission in Japan to assess English proficiency. The mean accuracy rate (89.9%) was higher than the national average rate (59.6%) from 2016 to 2019, during which all participants took the test (National Centre for Entrance Examinations). TOEFL ITP scores are provided as supplementary information because not all participants had the same official scores. Specifically, only three participants had the TOEIC scores, which were converted to the TOEFL scores to allow a direct comparison of proficiency levels (see Appendix).

The total number of classes covers from primary school to university. The learning period varies due to age and school (e.g., private or public school and geographical location). In Japan, private primary to high schools have unique curricula for learning English. Additionally, in public primary schools, English classes were introduced in 2008 and became compulsory from the fifth grade in 2011, during which each local education board decided when and how children would be taught English. All Japanese participants fall into that period when they could have English-speaking classes in public primary schools. However, the starting grade and the number of classes per week varied, depending on the area: for example, in some cities, English teaching started from the third grade in 2005, a few years before the trial introduction; in other cities or wards, in 2008 from the first grade or in 2011 from the fifth grade. In addition, six participants (Nos 5, 14, 16, 18, 24, 27 in Appendix) received additional English teaching for a year to retake an entrance exam.

3.3 Materials

The current study employed an online questionnaire to quantify (1) the self-perception of L2 English; (2) the willingness to speak L2 English under two types of anxiety and five attributes of interlocutors, compared

with an L1 Japanese context. Each is shown with different five-point Likert scales specifically targeted to the objective and a full list of all actual questions/statements in Examples 1 and 2.

1. To measure the self-perception of English/Japanese abilities:
   Please click the box which you feel best describes your "English/Japanese" skills.
   5: Strongly agree, 4: Agree, 3: Slightly agree, 2: Disagree, 1: Strongly disagree

   a) Accuracy
     [vocabulary]
       I know enough vocabulary so that I can say what I want to.
     [pronunciation]
       I can pronounce English correctly and clearly so that everyone can understand it.
     [word order]
       I have enough knowledge about the word order of English sentences to express what I want to say.
     [listening comprehension]
       I have no difficulty understanding when English is spoken to me.
     [contextual appropriateness]
       I can choose the most appropriate expression for the situation, both in respect of who I am speaking to and the context.
   b) Spontaneity
       I can speak English spontaneously: it takes little time to think about what I am going to say.
   c) Fluency
       I never make revisions, hesitate, or pause when I am speaking English.

2. To measure the willingness to speak English when encountering individual (anxiety) and situational (interlocutors) factors:
   Please click the box which best describes your willingness to speak "English/Japanese" in each of the situations described.
   5: Definitely willing to speak, 4: Willing to speak, 3: Moderately willing to speak,
   2: Not willing to speak, 1: Definitely not willing to speak

   a) Anxiety about:
     i. English/Japanese abilities
       [accuracy of vocabulary]
         You might choose the wrong words and/or expressions.
       [accuracy of pronunciation]
         You might mispronounce the words: wrong stresses and/or intonations.
       [accuracy of word order]
         You might make the sentences in the wrong order.
       [accuracy of listening comprehension]
         You might mishear or misunderstand what was said to you.
       [accuracy of contextual appropriateness]
         You might choose the inappropriate expressions for a specific person and/or context.
       [spontaneity]
         You might spend a lot of time to think about what you are going to say.
       [fluency]
         You might revise, hesitate, and pause frequently when you are speaking English/Japanese.
     ii. Evaluation from others
       Your English/Japanese will cause reactions from and judgements to be made by:
       [familiarity] unknown people, your acquaintances, your close friends,
                 your teachers, your classmates.

[trust] the people you trust, the people you do not trust
[preference] the people you like, the people you do not like
b) Interlocutors (five attributes)
Please click the box which best describes your willingness to speak English
<u>when you speak to each kind of person described.</u>
The people you are speaking with are also expected to speak English/Japanese.
i. gender: the same gender (male if you are male),
a different gender (female if you are male)
ii. L1 backgrounds: native Japanese speakers, native English speakers,
foreign nationals whose native languages are not English
iii. familiarity: unknown people, your acquaintances, your close friends,
your teachers, your classmates
iv. trust: the people you trust, the people you do not trust
v. preference: the people you like, the people you do not like

4 Results

4.1.1 Self-perceptions of English and Japanese abilities

To address the first RQ, the questionnaire measured the self-perceptions of L2 English and L1 Japanese abilities (see Section 3.3, Example 1 for full details). Japanese EFL learners demonstrated a marked difference between English and Japanese, where their self-perception of L2 English abilities was almost half that of L1 Japanese abilities (Figure 1; Table 2 for details).
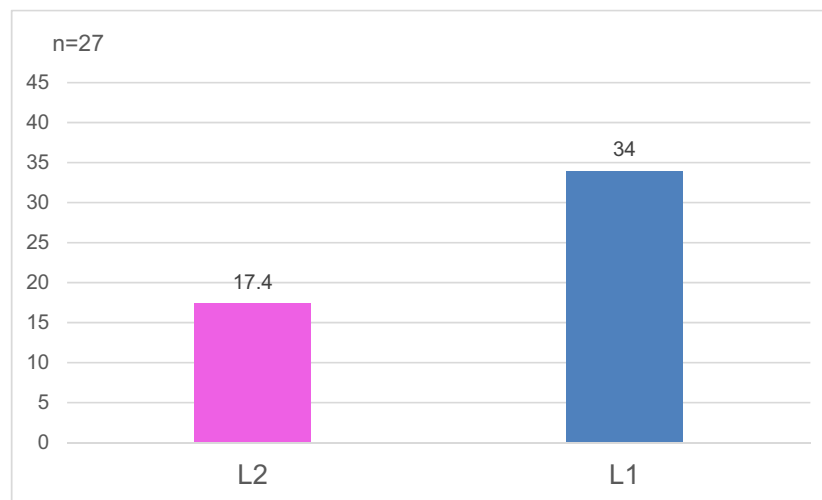
Figure 1: Self-perceptions of L2 English and L1 Japanese abilities (Likert points).

Table 2: Self-perception of L2 and L1 abilities (Likert points)

Language	Mean (SD)	Range
L2 English	17.4 (5.0)	9–28
L1 Japanese	34.0 (6.3)	22–45

Specifically, in L2 English, disagreement rates were high in all abilities, including both "disagree" and "strongly disagree" (Figure 2). This indicates that Japanese EFL learners have a negative perception of their accuracy (vocabulary, pronunciation, word order, listening comprehension, and contextual appropriateness), spontaneity, and fluency in L2 English.

By contrast, in L1 Japanese, disagreement rates that include no "strongly disagree" were much lower than in L2 English except in "fluency" (Figure 3).

Noticeably, "fluency" showed the highest disagreement rates in both L2 English and L1 Japanese. In other words, Japanese EFL learners thought that they tended to make revisions, hesitate, or pause while speaking, regardless of the language used.
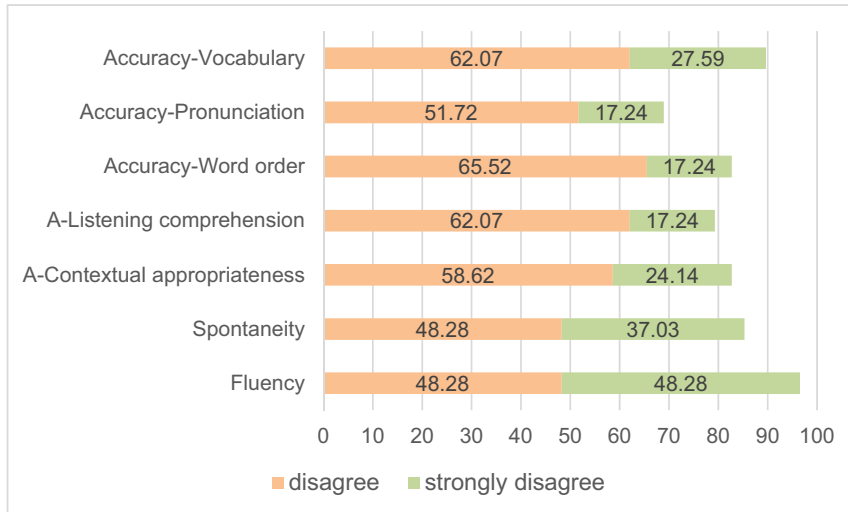
Figure 2: Disagreement rates in self-perception of L2 English abilities (%).
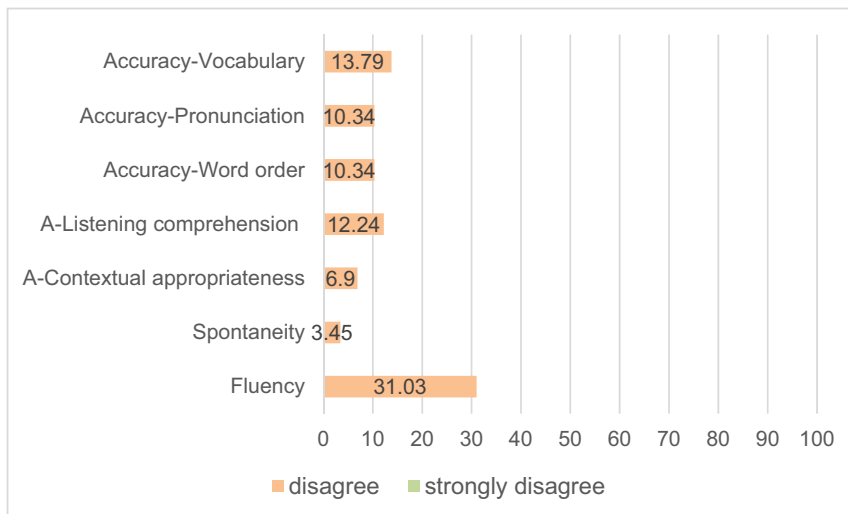
Figure 3: Disagreement rates in self-perception of L1 Japanese abilities (%).

4.1.2 An Interpretation of the possible relation between self-perception and willingness to speak

The current research examined whether Japanese EFL learners' ($n = 27$) willingness to speak under anxiety is correlated with the self-perceptions of L2 and L1 abilities. In the L2 English context, a positive correlation

was observed between willingness under both types of anxiety and self-perception (1) willingness under anxiety about English abilities ($r = 0.55$, Figure 4); (2) willingness under anxiety about evaluation from others ($r = 0.52$, Figure 5).
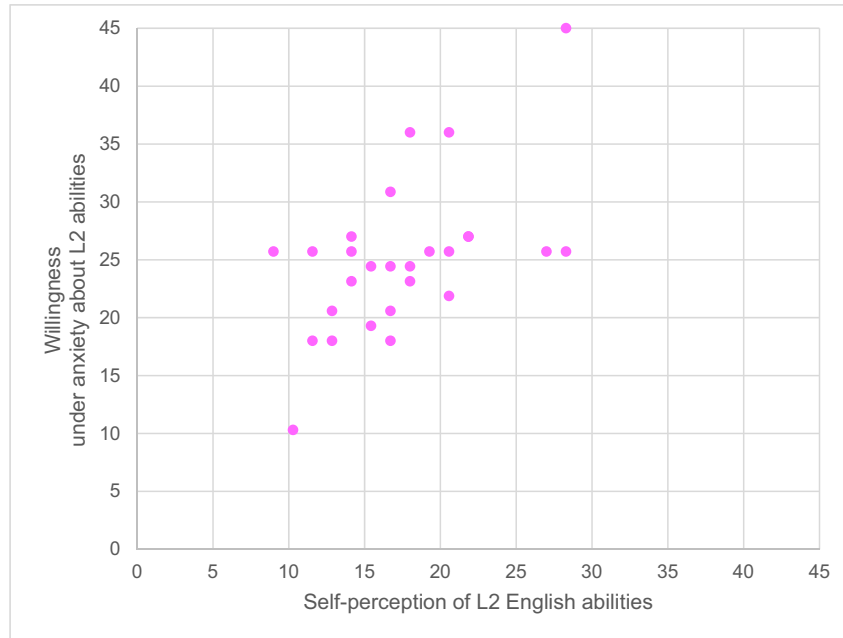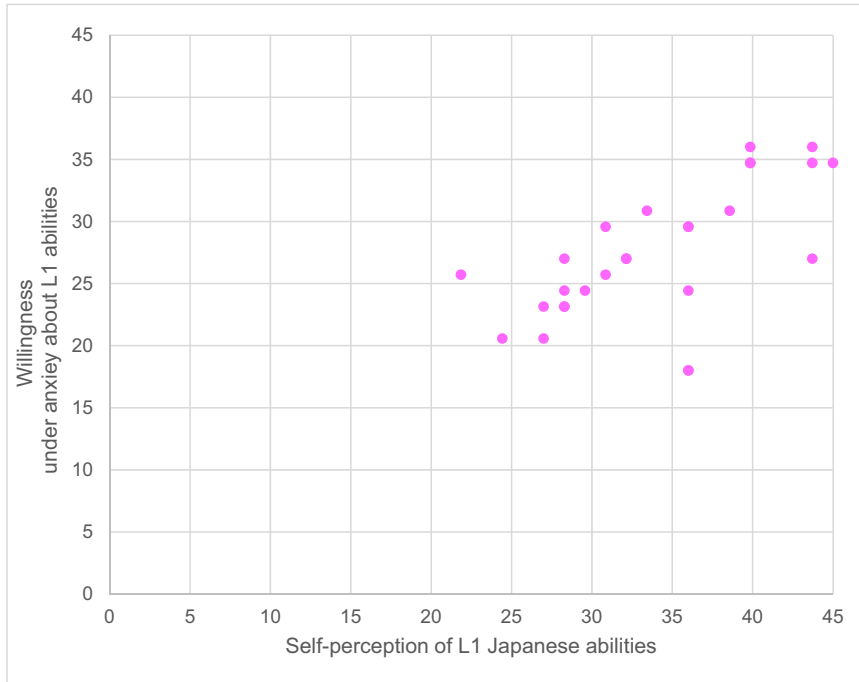

Figure 4: Correlation between willingness under anxiety about L2 abilities and self-perception of L2 abilities (Likert points).
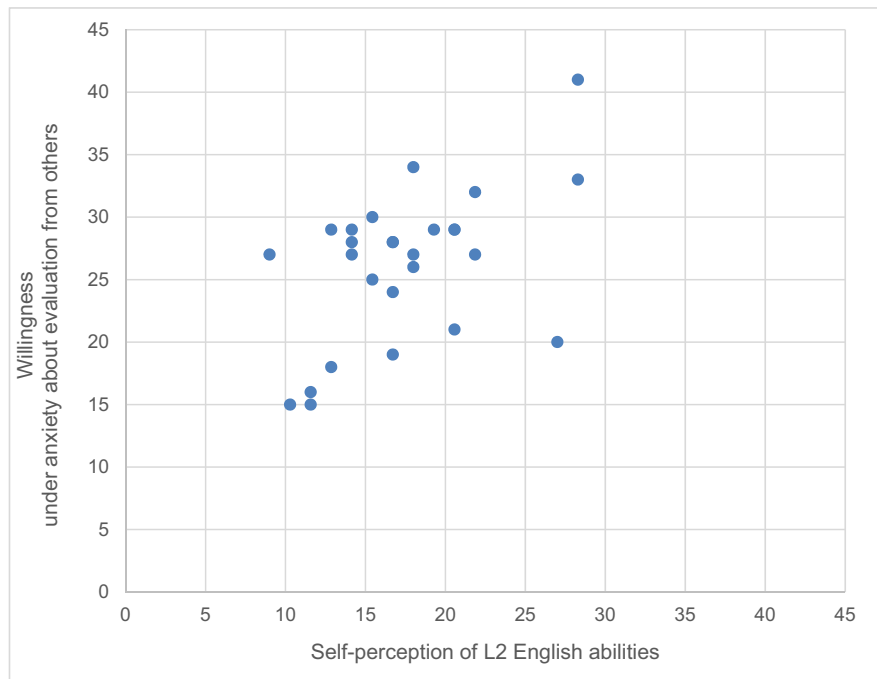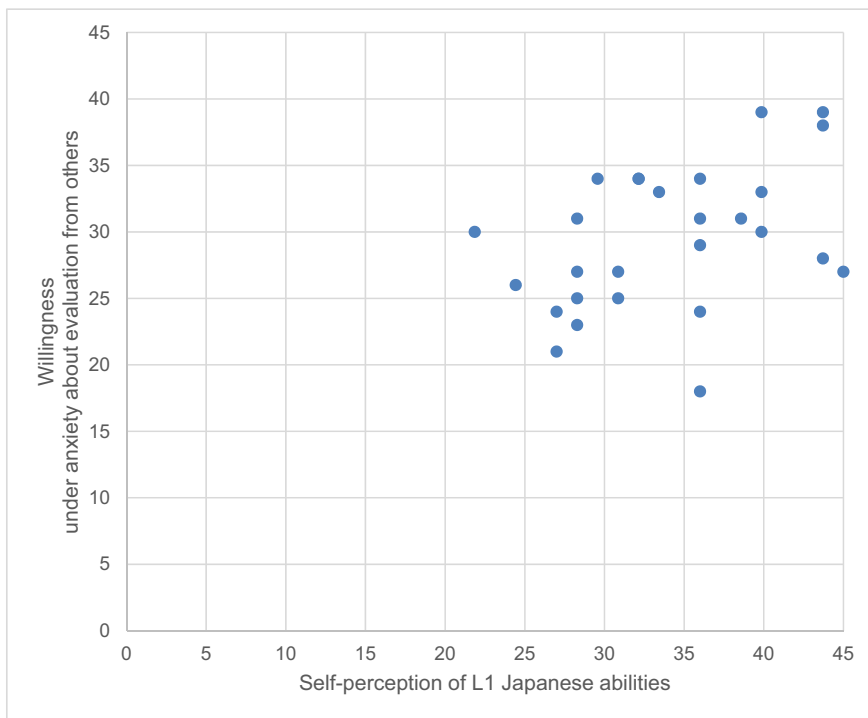

Figure 5: Correlation between willingness under anxiety about evaluation from others and self-perception of L2 abilities (Likert points).

The L1 Japanese context also showed a positive correlation between willingness under both types of anxiety and self-perception (1) willingness under anxiety about English abilities ($r = 0.66$, Figure 6); (2) willingness under anxiety about evaluation from others ($r = 0.42$, Figure 7).

Figure 6: Correlation between willingness under anxiety about L1 abilities and self-perception of L1 abilities (Likert points).

Figure 7: Correlation between willingness under anxiety about evaluation from others and self-perception of L1 abilities (Likert points).

4.2 Two types of anxiety and unwillingness to speak English

Aiming to answer the second RQ, this study focused on two contrasting sources of anxiety that Japanese EFL learners could face while speaking English: anxiety about their English abilities and evaluation from others (see Section 3.3, Example 2 for full details). Japanese EFL learners exhibited low willingness to speak when feeling both types of anxiety (Figure 8; Table 3 for details).
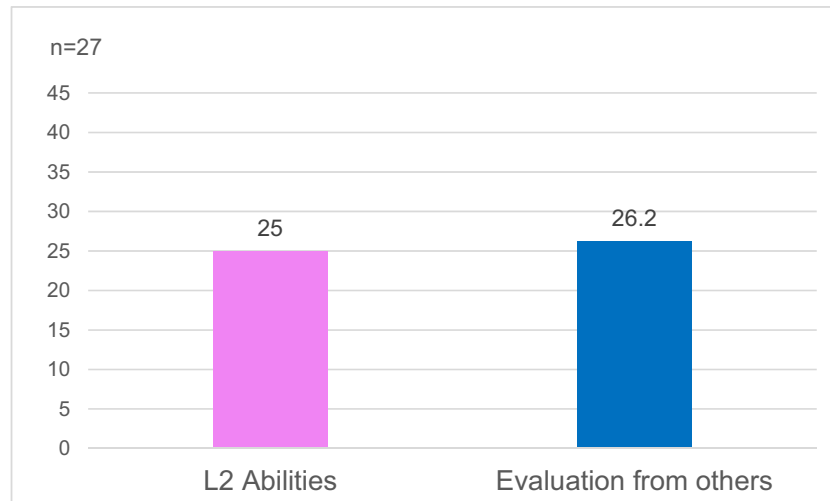
Figure 8: Willingness to speak L2 English under two types of anxiety (Likert points).

Table 3: Willingness to speak L2 English under two types of anxiety (Likert points)

Anxiety about	Mean (SD)	Range
L2 Abilities	25.0 (6.5)	10−45
Evaluation from others	26.2 (6.0)	15−41

Looking at the unwillingness rates in the anxiety about the individual English abilities, "contextual appropriateness" exhibited the highest unwillingness rates that include both "definitely not willing to speak" and "not willing to speak" (Figure 9). Japanese EFL learners are unwilling to speak English when they are anxious that they might choose inappropriate expressions for a specific person and context.

Similarly, in L1 Japanese, the highest unwillingness rates, including both "definitely not willing" and "not willing", were shown only in the "contextual appropriateness." The other areas did not show similar results to L2 English, except for "fluency" (Figure 10).

In the other area of anxiety about evaluation from others, the questionnaire measured which type of evaluation causes anxiety to lower their willingness to speak English. The "trust" and "preference" options showed more noticeable unwillingness rates than "familiarity" options. Specifically, the reactions and judgments from "the people they do not trust" and "the people they do not like" were more influential than that from "unknown people" and even "teachers." In addition, "the people they trust," not "close friends," showed the lowest unwillingness rates (Figure 11).

Similarly, in L1 Japanese, "the people they do not trust" and "the people they do not like" showed higher unwillingness rates than the other options, while "the people they trust" showed the lowest. Noticeably, L1 results showed no apparent difference among familiarity options, unlike L2 English (Figure 12).
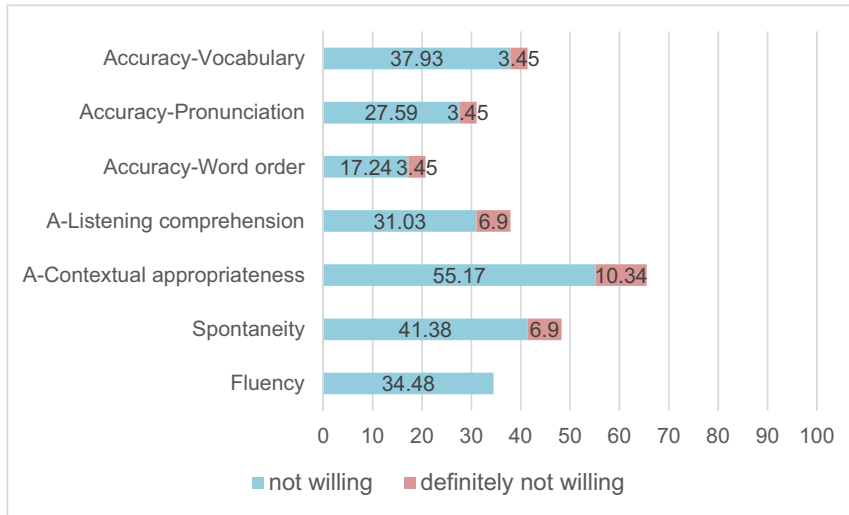
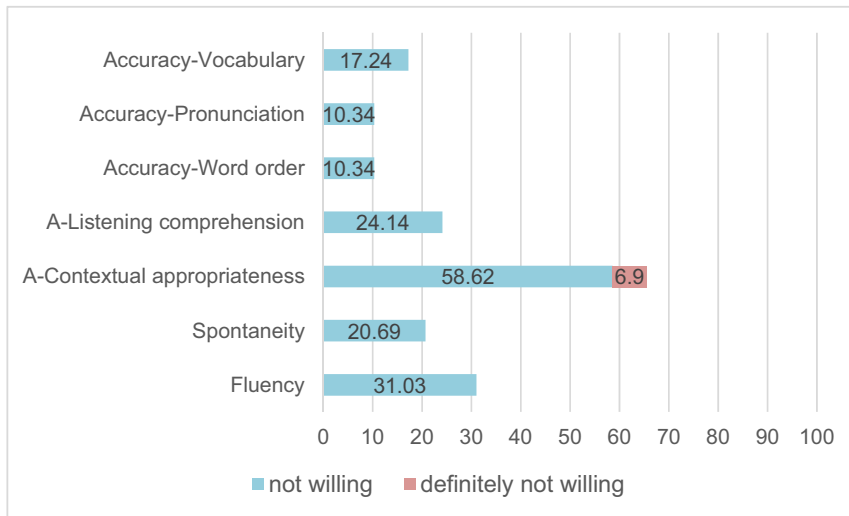**Figure 9:** Unwillingness rates under anxiety about L2 English abilities (%).

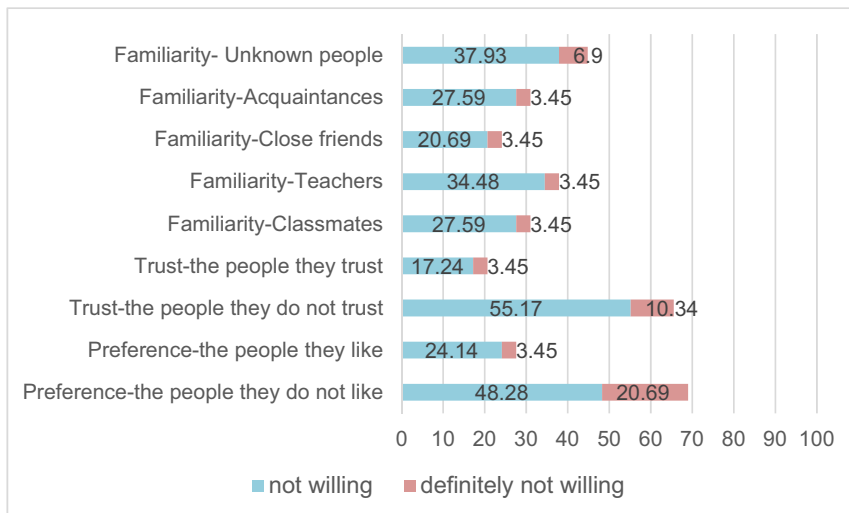**Figure 10:** Unwillingness rates under anxiety about L1 Japanese abilities (%).

Figure 11: Unwillingness rates under anxiety about evaluation from others in L2 English (%).
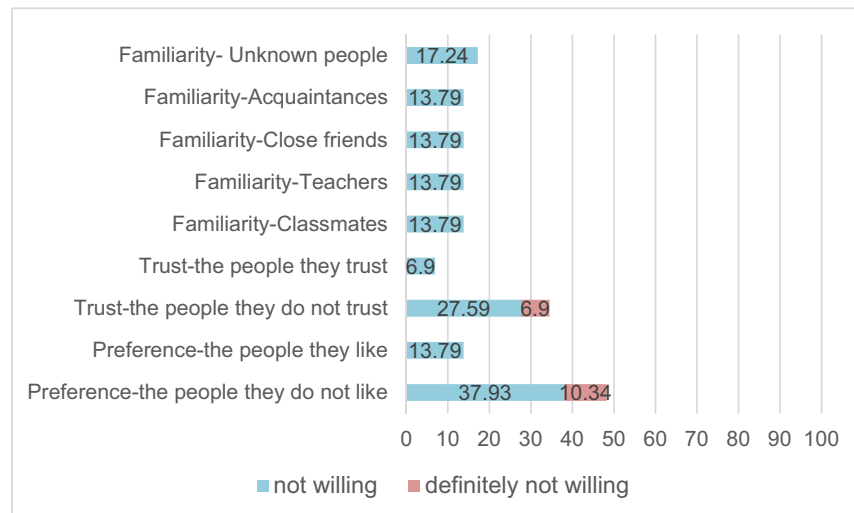
Figure 12: Unwillingness rates under anxiety about evaluation from others in L1 Japanese (%).

4.3 Five attributes of interlocutors and unwillingness to speak English

Regarding the third RQ, the online questionnaire investigated which of the five attributes (gender, L1 background, familiarity, trust, and preference) influences Japanese EFL learners' willingness to speak English. First, Figures 13 and 14 show the unwillingness rates of gender and L1 background in L2 and L1 contexts, respectively. In the L1 background, the participants were instructed that "native English speakers" and "foreign nationals" (whose native language is neither English nor Japanese) are expected to speak English and Japanese in the respective language contexts. Nevertheless, the two types of non-Japanese interlocutors showed unwillingness rates in both contexts, whilst the other options showed no unwillingness rates in the L1 context.

Second, Figures 15 and 16 show the unwillingness rates of familiarity, trust, and preference in the respective contexts. "The people they do not trust," "the people they do not like," and "unknown people" showed high unwillingness rates, including both "definitely not willing" and "not willing," in L2 English and L1 Japanese. The other options showed zero unwillingness rate in L1 Japanese (Figure 16).
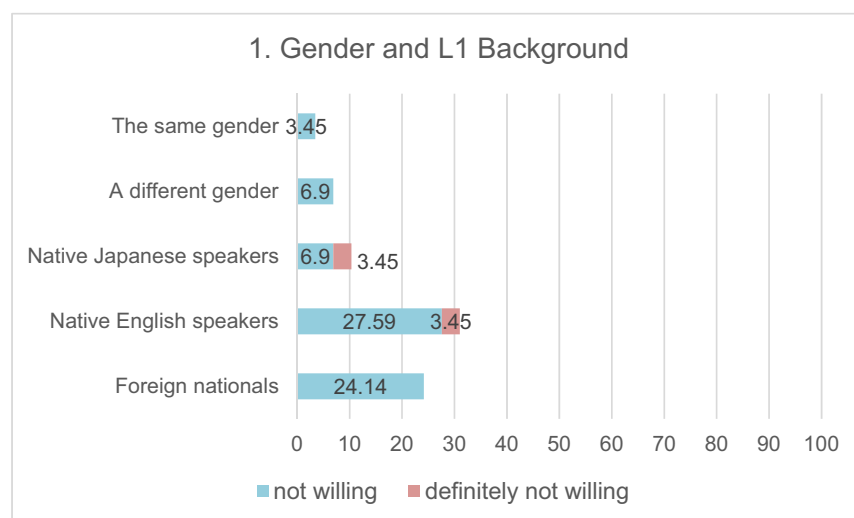

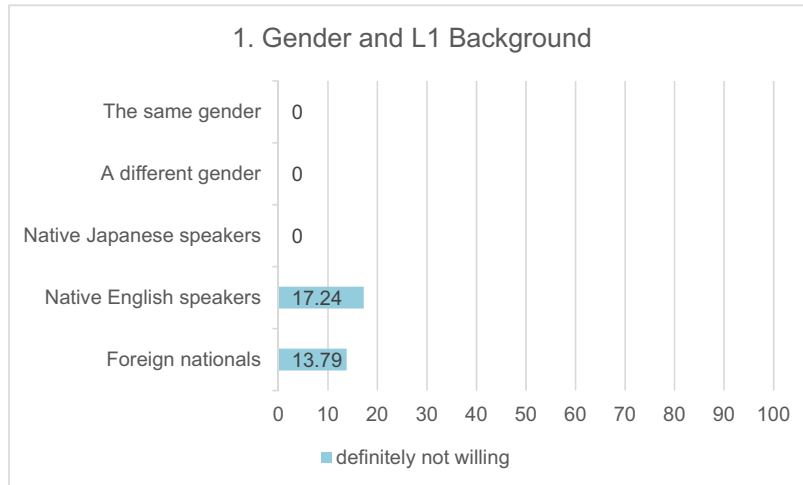**Figure 13:** Unwillingness rates under different Interlocutors in L2 (%).

1. Gender and L1 Background

Category	Value
The same gender	0
A different gender	0
Native Japanese speakers	0
Native English speakers	17.24
Foreign nationals	13.79

■ definitely not willing

Figure 14: Unwillingness rates under different Interlocutors in L1 (%).

2. Familiarity, Trust, and Preference

Category	not willing	definitely not willing
Familiarity- Unknown people	34.48	3.45
Familiarity-Acquaintances	10.34	3.45
Familiarity-Close friends	13.79	
Familiarity-Teachers	20.69	
Familiarity-Classmates	10.34	
Trust-the people they trust	10.34	
Trust-the people they do not trust	55.17	6.9
Preference-the people they like	13.79	
Preference-the people they do not like	72.41	10.34

■ not willing   ■ definitely not willing

Figure 15: Unwillingness rates under different interlocutors in L2 (%).

2. Familiarity, Trust, and Preference

Category	not willing	definitely not willing
Familiarity- Unknown people	6.9	3.45
Familiarity-Acquaintances	0	
Familiarity-Close friends	0	
Familiarity-Teachers	0	
Familiarity-Classmates	0	
Trust-the people they trust	0	
Trust-the people they do not trust	34.48	3.45
Preference-the people they like	0	
Preference-the people they do not like	51.72	13.79

■ not willing   ■ definitely not willing

Figure 16: Unwillingness rates under different interlocutors in L1 (%).

5 Discussion and conclusions

5.1 Discussion of findings

The primary goal of this study is to explore what makes Japanese EFL learners unwilling to speak English, regardless of their learning period and proficiency level. The three RQs were addressed by comparing the results between L2 and L1.

The first RQ examines how self-perception of L2 English abilities is shaped and whether self-perception correlates with their willingness to speak L2 English. The results reveal that Japanese EFL learners' self-perception of English abilities is approximately half that of Japanese abilities (Figure 1 and Table 2). The contrast reflects a difference in disagreement rates between the two (Figures 2 and 3). Japanese EFL learners show much higher disagreement rates, including "disagree" and "definitely disagree" with all aspects of abilities in L2 English than in L1 Japanese.

In particular, "fluency" shows higher disagreement rates than "accuracy" options and "spontaneity" in L2 English (96.56%) and L1 Japanese (31.03%). The results contradict the prediction that some of the "accuracy" options (e.g., vocabulary, pronunciation, and listening comprehension) will exhibit the highest disagreement rate. This is based on Japanese EFL learners' obsessiveness with correctness even under time constraints observed in the author's 2010 pilot study: 23 second-year university students exhibited a strong tendency to either think through or revise their sentences repeatedly, seeking only the correct answer. However, the Japanese EFL learners in this study regarded "fluency" as being the most severe weakness in both L2 and L1: they appear afraid that they are unable to avoid revising, hesitating, or pausing while speaking with others, regardless of the language they are speaking.

In addition, the data indicate that self-perception positively correlates with the willingness to speak under two types of anxiety in L2 English (Figures 4 and 5) and L1 Japanese (Figures 6 and 7). This suggests that Japanese EFL learners' unwillingness is attributable to their negative self-perception of L2 abilities. The results could support the findings that higher self-perception leads to higher willingness, found in previous studies (e.g., De Saint Léger and Storch 2009, Matsuoka et al. 2014, McCroskey and Richmond 1990), although it should be noted that the focus of these studies was on communication in an L2 context.

The second RQ focuses on which types of anxiety and which elements in the respective types contribute to their unwillingness to speak English. The results demonstrate no considerable difference in willingness to speak between the two sources of anxiety (Figure 8 and Table 3). The willingness to speak is slightly higher under anxiety about evaluation from others (26.2 points) than L2 abilities (25 points). This study predicted that the anxiety about evaluation from others would discourage willingness to speak more, driven by face concern, than that about L2/L1 abilities, based on the finding that the anxiety about evaluation from others would influence L2 WTC (Matsuoka et al. 2014). In addition, Peng (2014) argues that "face" is highly valued in Chinese society due to "other-directed self-construal," which is shared by Japanese society historically influenced by Chinese sociocultural aspects (e.g., Confucianism). However, this study found no clear difference in willingness to speak between the two types of anxiety.

Looking at the unwillingness rates ("not willing" and "definitely not willing") under anxiety about their abilities, "contextual appropriateness" was the highest in both L2 English (65.51.%, Figure 9) and L1 Japanese (65.52%, Figure 10). This is against the prediction that some major "accuracy" options will demonstrate much higher unwillingness rates than the other options, given Zhong's (2013) finding that face protection is closely connected with "accuracy" for Chinese EFL learners. Additionally, in the unwillingness rates under anxiety about evaluation from others, "preference" and "trust"-related options were higher than "familiarity" options in L2 (Figure 11) and L1 (Figure 12). The results are inconsistent with the prediction that the evaluation from "the least familiar" option will show the highest unwillingness rate, based on the finding of the more familiar – the higher WTC (Cao and Philp 2006).

The findings reveal that the options affecting Japanese EFL learners' willingness to speak are not unique to L2 English but are common to both L1 and L2, as in "fluency" found in the self-perception.

This appears similar to McCroskey, Gudykunst, and Nishida's (1985) finding that Japanese students feel apprehensive about communication in L1 as well as L2. Noticeably, the "contextual appropriateness" and "preference"/"trust" are underlying factors of interpersonal relationships, regardless of which language is spoken. This suggests that Japanese EFL learners could be susceptible to the elements that affect their connections with other people in speaking situations.

The third RQ investigates which attributes of interlocutors matter most for their willingness to speak English. The results indicate that only the options shared by L1 and L2 exhibit high unwillingness rates. First, in the context of the L1 background, "native English speakers" and "foreign nationals" show much higher unwillingness rates than "native Japanese speakers" in both L2 and L1 contexts (Figures 13 and 14), although both types of interlocutors are expected to speak L2 and L1 in the respective contexts. The results are incompatible with the prediction that "native Japanese speakers" will show a higher unwillingness rate than these non-native Japanese interlocutors. This is based on the assumption that Japanese EFL learners would be more nervous about being evaluated by the interlocutors sharing the same L1 background, who could be more aware of their mistakes and attitudes in speaking situations. Second, as shown in Figures 15 and 16, the "preference" and "trust"-related options (the people they do not like or trust) demonstrate higher unwillingness rates than the "familiarity" option (the unknown people) in both L2 and L1. Furthermore, the other "familiarity" options (acquaintances, close friends, teachers, and classmates) show no clear difference among them, with low unwillingness rates in L2 and zero unwillingness rates in L1. The results do not seem to support Cao and Philp's (2006) finding that more familiar interlocutors facilitate a higher WTC, as discussed in the second RQ. The findings suggest that Japanese EFL learners value the attributes of interlocutors that underpin personal relationships, which appears consistent with Gallagher and Robins (2015)'s WTC study on the interactional network in the L2 classroom.

All the options with high disagreement/unwillingness rates are not unique to L2 English but are also shared by L1 Japanese, although they are more evident in L2 than in L1. In addition, "fluency", "contextual appropriateness," and "preference and trust" are essential to establish and maintain good human relationships in society. This could be partly attributed to the focus of this study on a more general speaking environment and not L2 classroom communication. Nevertheless, the results reveal that the factors damaging self-perception and willingness to speak are fundamental values deeply rooted in Japanese society. In other words, the overall results appear to reflect other-directedness, deriving more from "consideration for others" than face-saving (Peng 2014, Zhong 2013) or self-binding-the-other (Lebra 2004). This appears consistent with Briggs and colleagues' (1980) notion that other-directedness, characterized by shyness, public self-consciousness, neuroticism, and low self-esteem, is associated with anxiety about the appropriate social behavior and low resilience to unexpected situations.

In Japanese society, "not causing trouble for anyone" is regarded as one of the most crucial tacit agreements. In addition, the Japanese have multiple layers of speech registers (e.g., in the hyper polite register, *watakushi* (I), *senjitu* (the other day), *sasiageru* (give)) and honorifics (respect honorifics and humble honorifics) to denote interpersonal relationships (Iwasaki 2013). Japanese people choose the most appropriate register and honorific expressions, depending on their relationships with interlocutors. In other words, Japanese people are constantly required to speculate how appropriately they must behave in any speaking situation. They feel obliged to avoid annoying others, by reading signs from others' behavior to identify the most appropriate verbal and non-verbal behavior.

Specifically, Japanese EFL learners would prefer not to bother their interlocutors, so they try to avoid revising, hesitating, or pausing and speculate on, choose, and use the appropriate expressions for each speaking situation. They could feel apprehensive about the factors to establish good personal relationships. In addition, they could find it difficult to speculate upon the appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviors while speaking with non-Japanese interlocutors. They might be vulnerable to speaking situations where they cannot speculate on the appropriateness of harmonious relationships with interlocutors. It appears plausible to assume Japanese EFL learners share a common focus on the "considerations for others" while speaking L2 English and L1 Japanese.

6 Conclusions

Japanese EFL learners showed much lower self-perception of L2 English abilities than L1 Japanese but no clear difference in willingness to speak under two types of anxiety. Noticeably, the elements driving down their self-perceptions and willingness to speak were fundamental to human relationships in society. They were common to L1 and L2 but clearly influenced their L2 English more than their L1 Japanese. The results suggest that Japanese EFL learners are highly conscious of the elements essential to fostering good personal relationships, regardless of their language. It is assumed that all the options with high negative rates could represent other-directedness, stemming from "considerations for others," characteristic of Japanese society. In other words, Japanese EFL learners' unwillingness to speak English could be attributed to "considerations for others", as a possible source of other-directedness in Japanese society.

Several limitations are present in this study. The number of participants was small, and some did not have the same measurement of L2 proficiency scores (e.g., TOEFL or TOEIC). These issues gave the data low statistical power. Additionally, the questionnaire could have engaged more with social and cultural perspectives of Japanese EFL learners, allowing the intricacies of the learners' unwillingness to speak English to be teased out.

Future research will examine Japanese EFL learners' unwillingness to speak more closely, concentrating on other-directedness and other elements which are typical of the characteristics of Japanese ELF learners. Specifically, noting that Japanese society shares the same sociocultural values with Chinese society against the historical backdrop, future research will address such questions as (1) is other-directedness different between Chinese and Japanese EFL learners?; (2) which feature does other-directedness mirror for the respective EFL learners? Furthermore, numerous research design weaknesses must be overcome and improved in future studies. For example, it is necessary to increase the number of participants, their age groups (e.g., junior high school students; mature students), L1 social background (e.g., Chinese EFL learners; French EFL learners), and add an interview for qualitative analysis. Assuming that other-directedness has been fostered with various factors intertwining, future work needs to design questionnaires and interviews, taking social and cultural perspectives into account.

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Appendix

Japanese EFL learners' linguistic background information

I.D. No.	Year	Total number of English classes *retake 1 year	Total number of speaking classes	Percentage of speaking classes (%)	Accuracy rate of Center Test (%)	TOEFL ITP (/677) *from TOEIC
1	4	2,497	1,900	76.1	90	601*
2	2	1,674	492	29.4	85	477
3	3	1,615	984	60.9	93	532
4	3	1,572	251	16.0	91.5	523
5	2	1,488*	306	20.6	80	450
6	4	1,408	360	25.6	95.5	503
7	3	1,360	256	18.8	97.5	470
8	3	1,292	112	8.7	94.5	401
9	2	1,272	214	16.8	81	514
10	2	1,272	234	18.4	84	393
11	2	1,265	0	0	97	—
12	3	1,248	260	20.8	75	—
13	4	1,245	35	2.8	80	497
14	2	1,206*	195	16.1	91.5	—
15	2	1,191	204	17.1	90	—
16	3	1,150*	234	20.3	93	—
17	4	1,133	35	3.1	90	470
18	2	1,120*	144	12.9	95	401
19	2	1,072	373	34.8	91	489
20	4	986	122	12.4	95	481
21	4	921	443	48.1	90	503
22	2	914	146	16.0	99	—
23	4	887	17	1.9	95	445
24	4	829*	0	0.0	80	525*
25	4	747	176	23.6	90	493*
26	4	733	64	8.7	95	501
24	3	676*	180	26.6	90	—