

Willingness to Communicate in Japanese-Brazilian Communities: A Case Study of a Japanese-Brazilian School

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日系ブラジル人のコミュニケーションを取ろうとする意思： ブラジル人学校でのケーススタディ

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This study aimed to compare willingness to communicate in English between elementary and high school students at a Brazilian school in Japan because English is considered the “lingua franca” globally. Willingness to communicate helps to understand why learners do or do not engage in target language communication. Considering the historical background of Japanese-Brazilian students living in Japan, but studying in a Brazilian school, a Likert scale questionnaire was used for collecting data, and a two-sample *t* test to calculate differences between means was performed to explore whether willingness to communicate changed between elementary and high school students. Of the 37 questionnaire items, nine showed significant differences, showing that changes occurred as the students aged.

本研究の目的は、日本にあるブラジル人学校の小学生と高校生に対する、英語へのWillingness to Communicate (WTC) を比較することである。日本のブラジル人学校に通う学生たちは、主にL1がポルトガル語、L2として日本語を学習し、L3として英語を学習している。日本在住の日系ブラジル人の児童生徒に対して、ブラジルの学校で勉強している歴史的背景を考慮して、リッカート尺度でのWTCについての37問のアンケートを行った。その後、データが収集された後、平均値の差を調べたところ、アンケートの37の質問のうち、9つの質問において小学生と高校生の間に差が見られた。そのため、Willingness to Communicateの一側面が小学生から高校生になるにつれて変化することがわかった。

キーワード：Willingness to Communicate (コミュニケーションを取ろうとする意思),
Japanese-Brazilian (日系ブラジル人), Motivation (モチベーション), immigrants (移民),
English Learning (英語学習)

1. Introduction

Japan and Brazil share a long history of migration and immigration. Both countries have huge communities of each other's citizens of workers, families, children, and teenagers. This is because in the 1900s, there was an incentive for Japanese people to pursue their dreams in a foreign land (in this case, Brazil).

As years passed by, Japanese immigrants established families in Brazil, and the social, political, and economic aspect of both countries experienced changes, leading to the Japanese-Brazilian people to migrate to Japan. To help this demand, Brazilian schools in Japan follow the Brazilian curriculum, but the students are surrounded by a lifestyle unique to Japanese-Bra-

zilian communities.

Brazil and Japan have English as a foreign language in their curricula. In a world where English is considered the lingua franca (a global language for means of intercommunity communication that can be used from speakers of different native languages to communicate), it is important to understand what variables can affect students' learning process and willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among these unique communities. Therefore, this study aimed to compare the WTC in English between elementary and high school students from a Brazilian school in Japan.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of WTC in the Classroom

Several factors affect second language learning, in-

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cluding WTC. Originally proposed for first language learning by McCroskey and Baer (1985), WTC is a theoretical concept affected by several factors that observes how prone a person is to communicate.

In L2 context, MacIntyre et al. (1998) described WTC as the “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2” (p. 547). That is, each person can have a different degree of WTC considering their environment, background, living experiences, language abilities, personality, and context in which communication occurs. Also, according to Dörnyei (1990), in a context where learners have little contact with the target foreign language, it is difficult to have a clear affective reaction for the target language. This can affect WTC because when there is less exposure, students can become more anxious.

The class environment can also impact WTC; it provides more variables, affecting how students come in contact with language learning depending on their engagement in class, teachers’ support, atmosphere between classmates, and interactional patterns in the classroom (e.g., Khajavy et al., 2018; Peng, 2012; Zhang et al., 2018).

A person’s worldview is another variable that affects WTC. The way a person perceives the world and becomes interested in other cultures, seeks information from other countries, and tries to communicate with people of different backgrounds can increase or decrease their WTC.

Considering worldviews and how English is now seen as the lingua franca, the Brazilian curriculum has offered a different way for teachers and students to approach English since 2017, as shown in the excerpt below from the Brazil’s National Common Curricular Base:

In this proposal, the English language is no longer that of the “foreigner,” hailing from hegemonic countries, whose speakers act as role models; nor is it a variant of the English language. In this perspective, the ways in which speakers of this language use it across the globe are acknowledged and legitimized, with varied cultural and linguistic repertoires, which allows us to question the world view that the only version of English that is correct-and correct to teach-is that spoken by the Americans or the British. (p. 241)

Considering all variables that can affect WTC and the way that the Brazilian curriculum for English education presents an approach for the language, this study aimed to understand how WTC of Japanese-Brazilian students from a school in Ibaraki, in a context where they belonged to a different cultural environ-

ment than Brazilian and Japanese, is affected. Each person is expected to react differently to WTC, therefore, making it interesting to observe how culture plays a part as a variable, especially among immigrant communities.

2.2 Brazilian Schools in Japan

As several Japanese-Brazilians live in Japan, the Brazilian Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) recognizes many Brazilian schools located in Japan because they are homologated; however, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology does not officially recognize it (Sera, 2019). As stated in the “General Orientation About Education for Brazilians in Japan,” published by the Brazilian MEC in 2018, to be homologated means:

The school petitioned for enrollment in the Chamber of Basic Education of the National Council of Education, and was received positively; thus, fulfilling the requirements to be able to emit valid school documents for all appropriate ends. (p. 10).

In Brazilian schools in Japan, classes are usually held in Portuguese as per the Brazilian curriculum for education. In addition to the regular Brazilian curriculum subjects, the students also have Japanese language classes.

These schools are an alternative for children whose parents plan on returning to Brazil after a short while so they can continue their education according to the Brazilian curriculum, for those that did not adapt to the Japanese school system, for those that came to Japan at an older age and have insufficient knowledge of Japanese, and for other personal reasons.

As Sera (2019) stated, Japan is the country with most Brazilian schools outside Japan, and it is the second country with the highest number of Brazilians outside of Brazil. Other than regular schools for children, there are also school programs for adults who did not complete their education when younger, allowing them to achieve their elementary or high school diplomas while living in Japan.

According to Bugarin (2017, as cited by Costa, 2022), there are 39 Brazilian schools registered in the Brazilian Consulate in Tokyo, Japan, of which 35 are approved by the Brazilian MEC, and four are in the process of being approved. In all, the number of Brazilian schools is even greater when NPOs (Non Profit Organization) are taken into account, although those are not always recognized (Sera, 2019 p. 10). From these schools, only 15 are considered by the Japanese government as “miscellaneous schools”; the rest are private schools, which do not receive any aid from the Japanese or Brazilian governments, and which require tuition fees which may not

be affordable in some scenarios (Kojima, 2013 p. 95). Therefore, NPOs are important for Japanese-Brazilian children's education.

Counting the number of Japanese-Brazilian children studying in the abovementioned Brazilian schools is difficult; however, in a document published by the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022), only 2% of the total of Brazilian students in Japan are enrolled in these schools (considering only the homologated ones). Several Brazilian schools in Japan follow the Brazilian curriculum, but the context in which those schools exist is unique to a Japanese scenario, where Japanese-Brazilians live in closed communities. Students attending Brazilian schools in Japan study Portuguese as L1, Japanese as L2, and English as L3. As studying English like public school students in Japan, is not their first priority, WTC might be different for Japanese-Brazilian students. Therefore, this study aimed to compare WTC between elementary and high school students from a Brazilian school in Japan. Although WTC is a common concept in Brazil, it only exists in recent research, none of which have compared the changes between elementary and high school students.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

In this study, to observe how students' perceptions toward a second language in different grade levels affected their WTC, 28 elementary and 15 high school students responded to our WTC questionnaire. The groups were divided according to the grade levels of the Brazilian Federal Law n. 11.274/2006, in which elementary school grade levels cover nine years and high school grade levels cover three.

The participants were from a Brazilian school in Joso, Ibaraki. This school is a non-profitable organization, and follows the Brazilian curriculum according to the Ministry of Education in Brazil. Classes are held in Portuguese; therefore, the questionnaire was also in Portuguese.

The number of students in each grade level was as follows:

Elementary school: second grade ($n = 4$), fourth grade ($n = 8$), sixth grade ($n = 5$), seventh grade ($n = 3$), eighth grade ($n = 4$), and ninth grade ($n = 4$). The questionnaire was not distributed to third and fifth grade students because no students from these grades were present on the day that the questionnaire was distributed.

High School: first year ($n = 9$), second year ($n = 4$), and third year ($n = 2$).

3.2 Materials

A 37-item questionnaire are used to collect data. The

questionnaire was adapted from Monoi (2020) to better fit the aim of this study and the participants' background. The questionnaire explored seven WTC concepts: second language approach, interest in foreign affairs, motivation, extroversion, perception of L2 communication ability, anxiety in second language communication, and WTC in the second language.

The questionnaire items were the same for both elementary and high school students; however, they differed in terms of the Likert scale used for rating. For elementary school students, a four-point Likert scale was used, and a six-point Likert scale for high school students, based on their developmental stages. Additionally, to avoid neutral responses, we used Likert scales with even numbers as they do not have a midpoint. As the midpoint can sometimes be misunderstood as neutral or undecided (which are different opinions), the questionnaire used in this study did not offer a midpoint option (Hair et al., 2019, p. 493).

3.3 Questionnaire Implementation

Before distributing the questionnaire, we explained the research to the school's principal, and understood the routine and background of the school. Both the principal and researcher provided consent, and no student was identified, to ensure anonymity.

Students from all grades responded to the questionnaire on the same day (November 25, 2022) during their regular classes. The researcher read all the questions aloud in Portuguese so the elementary students could easily understand the contents of the questions.

3.4 Analysis

Data gathered from the questionnaires were organized in excel tables for the elementary school and the high school. Because the range of the Likert scales were different for each group, the data were interpolated for comparison. After interpolation, we calculated the mean and the standard deviation of both elementary and high school students. Then, we used a two-sample *t*-test to determine whether WTC changed between the elementary and the high school students.

4. Results and Discussion

Of the 37 questionnaire items, nine presented a significant difference ($p \leq .05$). This means that some aspects of WTC changed from elementary to high school.

The questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 24 and 37 showed significant differences, as shown in Table 1. By checking the seven WTC concepts (Monoi, 2020), we could see that five questions belonged to language approach, one question belonged to interest in foreign affairs, one question belonged to motivation, one question to perception of L2 communicative ability concept, and one

Table 1. Questions showing significant differences between elementary and high school students

Concept	Question No.	Question	sig
App	1	I want to study English to meet and talk to people from different countries around the world.	0.0494
App	2	I want to study English and learn about different cultures.	0.03
App	3	If I see someone asking for help in English, I try to communicate.	0.04
App	5	I wish I had friendships that I could communicate in English.	0.04
App	6	I always try to help foreigners who do not speak Portuguese.	0.01
IFA	7	I often check foreign news in the media.	0.001
MOT	13	When I do not understand something in English class, I ask the teacher.	0.02
PC	24	I can create short sentences in English.	0.03
WTC	37	If I have a Brazilian friend who knows English, I will try to speak to them in English.	0.003

Note. APP: approach; IFA: interest in foreign affairs; MOT: motivation; PC, perception of L2 communicative ability; WTC, willingness to communicate

question to the WTC concepts.

Correa (2000) mentioned that it is possible to observe identity crisis that originates from the loss of cultural and affective references. Koltai (2013) added that a person's first language is considered their second skin, as each language has a different way to read and interpret the world, creating a unique identity to those who share the same language. For these reasons, the questions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 from the language approach concept may have been affected. This study was conducted to observe WTC in English as a foreign language, and although both Brazil and Japan provide English as a second language in their curricula, for the Japanese-Brazilian community, being able to use Japanese as a second language might be perceived as something more meaningful. These children speak Portuguese as a first language in Japan, and in a country where the main language is Japanese and only a few people speak English, the language approach to English might be different from the language approach to Japanese.

When observing question 7, it is important to note that there was a similar question which mentioned news specifically about Brazil and not about the world. One of the assumptions that may explain that the Japanese society has different characteristics than the Brazilian one (Okamoto, 2007) is that Japanese-Brazilians realize that although they are of Japanese ascendancy, by being foreigners, society has a different role in the social structure for them. Therefore, Brazil becomes their homeland, a country in which the culture is somewhat closer to what they experience in their communities in Japan, and is a more welcoming place. Therefore, news from countries other than Brazil might not be that interesting for the high school students.

A study by Harter (1981; as cited in Lepper et al., 2005) noted that a progressive and significant decline in motivation as children grew up, especially when going from elementary to middle school. This statement can support the change seen in question 13, that represents the concept of motivation. Although Brazilian schools divide school years somewhat different than the study proposed by Harter did, the students experienced a decrease in motivation to participate in class by asking questions to the teacher in the study performed in the Brazilian school.

The reason behind the decrease in question 24, that related to perception of L2 communication ability concept, could be explained by the fact that in high school, the English language curriculum covers more complex patterns of grammar which can demotivate students. The difference in language pronunciation (as phonemes are not always the same in English and Portuguese) can make it difficult for students to realize their communication ability. Communicating in a language does not necessarily need to comprise of a perfect accent or pronunciation. As speakers of other languages, it is important to communicate, but this fact might not be considered by high school students.

For question 37, that considered WTC, students in high school might not feel motivated to speak English with a Brazilian friend because they can communicate perfectly in their first language (Portuguese). If they struggle speaking English, communication might be difficult, thereby reducing their interest in speaking English.

5. Conclusion

This study observed that although living in an environment in which English is not spoken often, students

from Japanese-Brazilian backgrounds who lived in Japan understood that being able to speak English could bring opportunities in life. However, their motivation decreases as they age, and is also affected by their contexts (being neither Brazilian nor Japanese), an identity that is somehow difficult to understand (Nakagawa, 2005) in younger developmental stages. Future studies should observe and compare WTC in English and in Japanese as neither of these languages are the students' first language. This could help us better understand the scenario of language approach and perception of L2 communication ability.

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