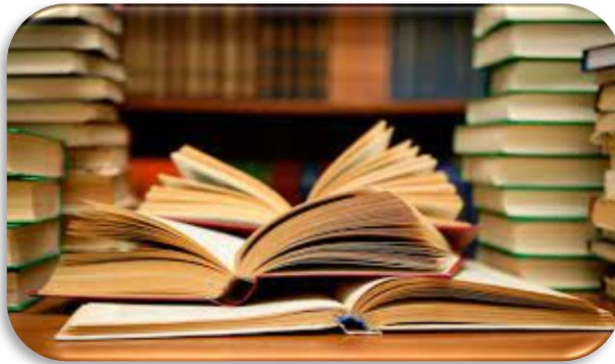**Research Paper**

# Iranian Bilingual EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate across Gender

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## ABSTRACT

Interactive versatility in the global community is a vital skill that must be catered for particularly in EFL contexts where learners strive to achieve native like competence in order to enter the international market and compete with the numerous rivals who are flooding the job market. This competence, however, grows gradually during years of attending language classes and through participation in communicative activities for which willingness to community (WTC) is essential and may be impacted by individual differences like gender and linguistic background. The main question addressed in the present study is the extent to which Iranian EFL learners may differ significantly in their WTC with respect to gender. To serve the purpose of the study, a random sample of 250 male and female bilingual Turkish-speaking EFL learners were recruited from three language institutes in Tabriz, Iran. They were asked to complete the WTC questionnaire to find out the level of their WTC. The independent samples t-test analysis of the findings revealed low levels of WTC for both groups with males reporting significantly higher WTC. The findings support sociocultural, psychological, and sociolinguistic variations that can lead to gender differences and will be discussed.

**Keywords:** *Bilingualism. EFL Learners. Gender. Willingness to Communicate*

تطبیق پذیری تعاملی درجامعه جهانی مهارتی ضروری است که باید پرورش یابد به ویژه در زبان آموزان بافتهای زبان خارجی که تلاش وافری مبذول می دارند تا توانش زبانی همانند بومی زبانان کسب کنند تا بتوانند وارد بازارهای بین المملی کار شده و با رقیبان بی شماررقابت کنند. توانش زبانی رشدی تدریجی دارد و در طول سالهای حضور در کلاسهای زبان و با شرکت در فعالیتهای ارتباطی تکامل می یابد که مستلزم تمایل زبان آموزان به ارتباط است که خود تحت تاثیرتفاوتهای فردی نظیر جنسیت و پیشینه زبانی است. سئوال اصلی تحقیق حاضر نیز بررسی میزان تفاوت تمایل ارتباطی زبان آموزان ایرانی دو زبانه با توجه به جنسیت آنهاست. برای پاسخ به این سئوال نمونه تصادفی از ۲۵۰ زبان آموز دو زبانه مونث و مذکر ترک زبان از سه آموزشگاه زبان انگلیسی در شهر تبریز، ایران، انتخاب شدند. آزمودنی ها با تکمیل پرسشنامه تمایل ارتباطی میزان تمایل خویش به ایجاد ارتباط را بیان نمودند. تحلیل داده های تحقیق با استفاده از آزمون تی نمونه های مستقل نشانگر سطح متوسط این تمایل در بین دو گروه بود و برتری زبان آموزان مذکر را نشان می داد. نتایج مبین عوامل اجتماعی-فرهنکی، روانشناختی، و جامعه-زبانشناختی است که با مداخله جنسیت بر تمایل ارتباطی تاثیر گذارند و مورد بحث قرار می گیرند.

**کلید واژه ها**: تمایل ارتباطی، دوزبانگی، زبان آموزان بافتهای زبان خارجی، جنسیت

# INTRODUCTION

The all-pervasive need for learning to interact in English seems to provide the impetus for plethora of EFL learners to enhance their interactive language skills as a prerequisite for mutual understanding in a global village. However, complaints can still be heard here and there about EFL learners' preference to remain taciturn and reluctant to partake in communicative activities during the process of learning. A logical consequence of this reticence, as stated by MacIntyre (2007), is the learners' failure to approximate native-like fluency not only in speaking but also in skills like reading comprehension even after years of receiving formal instruction which is observable even among postgraduate EFL learners (Seifoori, 2004). The dangers of unwillingness to communicate, which might be owing to negative affective variables like communication apprehension (Babapoor et al., 2018), are not limited to instructional EFL contexts and can also be observed among immigrants whose integration into the sociocultural context of the host community and acculturation can be postponed or even hindered through the same tendency to avoid communication (Henry & MacIntyre, 2023). By way of contrast, those who enjoy higher levels of willingness to communicate (WTC) are more likely to succeed and attain communicative proficiency (Baghaei, Dourakhshan, & Salavati, 2012) and accelerate the acculturation process in multilingual community contexts.

WTC, as defined by Henry and MacIntyre (2023), is the state of readiness to interact intentionally in a foreign language without any fear. This personal trait, however, is multifaceted and dynamic in nature, and like many other individual differences, might be impacted by various factors (Henry et al., 2021). One of the most important factors that can make learners in instructional EFL contexts more eager to talk is teachers' behavior and strategies that he uses to teach. As Nazari (2012) mentioned: the quality and quantity of teachers' behavior can cause a great change and motivate students to be active in classroom communication. Teachers function as moderators who not only transfer information to students (Hans et al., 2013), but engage them in various classroom activities so that they can interactively achieve learning outcomes. Nonetheless, to participate entails verbal contribution to the process of classroom discourse which is in turn reliant on a tendency to take part. This involvement is strongly impacted by the type of classroom atmosphere that is created and the degree of support one receives from the teacher. Among numerous teacher characteristics that can facilitate the development of rapport with their students and relieve the burden on the learners is learners' perceptions of their teachers' verbal and nonverbal immediacy which is directly influenced by their teachers' classroom management skills and emotional intelligence (EI) which has been defined as capabilities that enable individuals to monitor and discriminate feelings and emotions to guide the way they think and act to overcome various problems (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). A common experience all learners and teachers share is their encounter with talented and well-informed teachers who would fail to establish rapport with their students and colleagues in the work place. Such problems, as suggested by Woolfolk et al., 2003, can arise from low levels of teachers' EI.

Learners' level of WTC in classroom contexts may vary owing to plethora of individual differences they bring to the task of language learning. These include characteristics like learning anxiety, communication apprehension, proficiency level, gender, and language background. Research has shown that, taking proficiency constant, the fact that learners are learning English as a second or third language seems to impact the degree of their eagerness to interact (Khudobina et al., 2019). This can be the result

of multiple mental processing entailed in the production of a third language particularly in some context where linguistic dominance is a major factor (Ellis, 2015). Such a multilingual context exists in many parts of Iran including the northwest of country where learners' first language is Azari Turkish and they have to learn English as a third language. Drastic cross-linguistic differences, on the one hand, mingled with issues of language dominance and sociocultural gender variations, on the other hand, might be observed in the degree to which the learners tend to engage in interaction. Hence, investigation of gender variations in bilingual EFL learners' WTC can shed more light on such individual differences and provide insightful information about the needs of such learners to inform learner-centered curriculum design.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The large-scale research on WTC in different contexts has unraveled the significance of this affective variable that is quite ubiquitous in both EFL and ESL contexts and various factors that may be correlated with it (Cao, 2011; Ghelichli, 2022; Gol, et al., 2014; Hamasaid et al., 2020; Hashimoto, 2002; Kang, 2005; Peng, 2006). Although WTC was once envisaged as an individual's inflexible propensity to interact with others (MacIntyre et al., 1998), it was further defined as a dynamic tendency to behave, communicate and think in various contexts (Davis & Palladino, 2004; Lee & Lu, 2021). In other words, WTC is now assumed to be a trait that is both an inherent trait and a situational tendency which has its root in the human temperament but is subject to change under various contextual variables (MacIntyre, 2020). The former dimension of WTC can pertain to sociocultural characteristics of the community in which learners are born and grow whereas the latter can be ascribed to the overall atmosphere in which communication takes place. It is the second dimension of WTC that makes it a legitimate subject of pedagogical scrutiny particularly in EFL contexts.

Extensive research has explored WTC in relation to personality traits like openness to communicate and extraversion (Khany & Mansouri Nejad, 2017), anxiety and proficiency levels of the learners (Ghelichli, 2021), learner variables (Alemi, et al., 2013), classroom participation (Hamasaie et al., 2020), learner, teacher and classroom factors impacting it (Ramli et al., 2021), learners' emotional intelligence (EI) (Tabatabaei & Jamshidfar, 2013). The findings from these studies revealed that the participants' WTC could be positively correlated with their EI, personality, self-confidence, and proficiency level. Also, EFL learners' perception of TI were found to be correlated positively with WTC predicting learners' participation in the classroom activities. WTC has also been found positively correlated with second language learning motivation (Elahi Shirvan et al. 2019), the frequency of using the target language (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak 2015) and participation in classroom interactions (Yashima, MacIntyre, &Ikeda 2018).

Additionally, negative correlates of WTC has been identified as low self-confidence and feeling of cultural alienation that might be linked to communication anxiety (MacIntyre and Ayres-Glassey 2020). The investigation of the communication context has also revealed rapid shifts from WTC to unwillingness (MacIntyre, Burns, and Jessome (2011). Research on WTC in multicultural natural ESL settings is scarce, the findings have highlighted that the shift from willingness to unwillingness to communicate might be triggered by the intergroup contact patterns (Clément, Baker, and MacIntyre 2003; Henry et al., 2021), feedback from language users (Marton and MacIntyre 2020). The

findings accentuate the dynamicity in WTC with patterns of stability and change over time and owing to contextual features.

In EFL contexts, gender can be considered as one of the most prominent aspects of individual differences that has been investigated with respect to cognitive features like strategic awareness (Seifoori, 2003) and affective factors like WTC (Lee & Chiu, 2023). A large body of research addressed WTC in relation to variables which might affect the learning process. McCroskey (1990), for example, investigated the relationship between WTC and cultural perspective and found that for people are more eager to talk with the one who has a close relationship with them than to a group of people who are stranger or not close friends. More recently, Lee and Chiu (2023) explored WTC in relation to in-class and out-of-class contexts as well as levels of self-perceived English proficiency. They found that higher self-perceived proficiency associated with lower face-to-face anxiety and higher WTC in both contexts.

In the context of Iranian ELT, Tabatabaei and Jamshidfar (2013), examined the relationship between EFL learners' EI and WTC among EFL learners and found out a significant relationship. Another study in Iranian context investigated the relationship between WTC and EI across gender and reported gender as a significant factor impacting the participants' EQ and WTC (Gholami, 2015). Some other researchers investigated WTC and EI in relation to each other or to other variables (Shipley et al., 2010; Downey et al., 2011; Tabatabaei, Jamshidfar, 2013; Janfeshan & Nazeri, 2014; Ketabdar et al., 2014).

However, investigation of bilingual EFL learners with a focus on gender is still a fertile research soil that can shed light on how willing the large group of Iranian bilingual EFL learners are in making communication in English, and thereby, promoting their learning outcomes. Common experience of many English teachers in EFL contents as well as the Iranian context is the learners' reluctance to take part in speaking activities. Even under obligatory conditions like pair and group work activities, many students either restrain from openly expressing their ideas or keep their participation to a minimum or code-switch to their L1 altogether. This problem is not restricted to elementary levels and prevails at intermediate and advanced levels as well. Owing to such practical problems, on the one hand, and the paramount role that WTC plays in the process of learning (Peng, 2006), it seems quite logical to endeavor to identify probable factors that might correlate with it. A number of viable correlates have already been verified (Janfeshan & Nazeri, 2014; Ketabdar et al., 2014; Gholami, 2015). Yet, whether gender can impact the WTC of the bilingual EFL learners is still open to question. Thus, the current study was undertaken to bridge this gap and two research questions were formulated to serve the purpose:

*Do Iranian male and female bilingual EFL learners' differ significantly in various components of receiver WTC?*

*At what level of receiver-type WTC are male and female Iranian EFL learners?*

## METHOD

### Participants

A randomly selected sample of 250 upper intermediate bilingual Iranian EFL learners, 213 males and 237 females, participated in the current ex-post-facto study. They were within the age range of 18-28 and had been randomly selected from 40 classes available at three well-known English institutes in Tabriz, a metropolitan city in East Azerbaijan, Iran. The participants were bilingual speakers whose first and second languages were Azari Turkish and Persian, respectively. They were learning English as a third
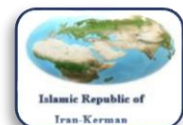
language. They were selected from a pool of approximately 500 upper intermediate bilingual learners based on their teachers' readiness to cooperate in the data collection procedure and the institutes' permission to conduct the study by taking 15 minutes of the class time. The participants were all informed about the purpose of the study by their teachers who had already been briefed by the researcher about the research objectives. The data were collected voluntarily and the participants were ensured that their personal information would be kept confidential.

**Instruments**

The data collection instruments employed in the study was the WTC questionnaire (McCroskey & Richmond, 2013) which had been developed as a direct measure of the extent to which the respondents would predispose to initiate or avoid communication. The WTC scale comprised 20 items related to context-type and receiver-type factors. The former measures the individual's propensity to take part in group discussion, meetings, interpersonal interactions and public speaking whereas the latter taps one's willingness to interact with strangers, acquaintances, and friends. The reliability of the WTC scale has been estimated to be from .85 to above .90 (McCroskey & Richmond, 2013).

Since the participants in the current study were not usually expected to take part in the contexts specified, the receiver-type items were the focus of the study. These involved 12 items representing the crossing of three types of receivers including WTC with strangers, acquaintances, and friends, with four types of communication context of group discussion, meetings, interpersonal and public speaking that were excluded. Items 3, 8, 12, and 17 measured WTC with strangers, items 4, 11, 15, and 20 tapped WTC with acquittances, and items 6, 9, 14, and 19 quantified WTC with friends. To compute the participants' WTC for each of these subcomponents, as suggested by McCroskey and Richmond (2013), the responses were added up and divided by 4 that was the number of items in each part. Moreover, to compute the total WTC score for the receiver-type WTC, the sub-scores for stranger, acquaintance, and friends had to be added and divided by 3, the number of factors. The interpretation of the WTC scores was done based on the following norms suggested by McCroskey and Richmond (2013).

**Table 1**
*Interpretation of the participants' Receipeint-Type WTC Scores*

|  | Low | High |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Stranger** | Lower than 18 | Higher than 63 |
| **Acquaintance** | Lower than 57 | Higher than 92 |
| **Friends** | Lower than 71 | Higher than 99 |
| **Total WTC** | Lower than 52 | Higher than 82 |

**Procedure**

At the outset of the research, the modified version of the WTC questionnaire was validated in a pilot study with a norm group of 60 respondents who shared the characteristics of the target group. The procedure of piloting the WTC questionnaire was the same as its actual administration in the main study. The internal consistency of the questionnaires calculated through Cronbach alpha was found to be.72 for the modified WTC scale.



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Permission for data collection was officially granted from the managerial boards of the Institutes and the data were collected in the Fall of 2022. First, an online meeting was set with the teachers of the selected classes, and they were informed about the purpose of this study and the details of the data collection instruments. They kindly accepted to distribute the WTC questionnaire during the last 15 minutes of their class time after the participant learners were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and would not affect their achievement and grades. It was also announced to the participants that the data collection was carried out anonymously and the data would be kept confidential. To avoid any probable misconception, the instructions about how to fill out the questionnaire and answering questions was delivered in Persian.

Having collected the research data, the male and female participants' data were segregated, and distinct scores were computed for various factors comprising the questionnaires as well as total scores for both groups. The research data were initially tabulated and then analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Prior to any analyses, the normality of the quantitative data was verified. Further, to answer the first and second research questions, which dealt with gender variations in EFL learners' level of receiver-type WTC, the data sets were compared through independent samples t-test.

## RESULTS

Prior to any analyses the normality of the data sets was checked, as revealed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for EFL Learners' WTC*

|                          |                | Sum Strangers | Sum Acquaintances | Sum Friends |
|--------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------|
| N                        |                | 450           | 450               | 450         |
| Normal Parameters[a,b]   | Mean           | 48.16         | 71.60             | 72.96       |
|                          | Std. Deviation | 18.59         | 14.16             | 14.50       |
| Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z     |                | 1.187         | .846              | .855        |
| Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)   |                | .119          | .471              | .458        |

a. Test distribution is Normal.
b. Calculated from data.

As Table 1 shows, the significant values of all data sets were higher than .05 revealing the normality of the score distributions. Thus, the data were compared using parametric tests.

**Male and Female Students' Willingness to Communicate**

The first research question concerned any significant difference between the Iranian male and female students' components of receiver WTC. Since the data had been found to be normally distributed, the descriptive statistics of the data were first computed and were followed by parametric analysis of the score sets. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics.

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Male and Female EFL Learners' WTC Scores*

|  | Gender | N | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sum Strangers | Female students | 240 | 46.16 | 18.74 |
|  | Male students | 210 | 50.70 | 18.15 |
| Sum Acquaintances | Female students | 240 | 69.48 | 13.67 |
|  | Male students | 210 | 74.31 | 14.37 |
| Sum Friends | Female students | 240 | 70.11 | 12.67 |
|  | Male students | 210 | 76.58 | 15.89 |
| Total WTC | Female students | 240 | 185.75 | 23.72 |
|  | Male students | 210 | 201.59 | 25.31 |

With regard to the results depicted in Table 4, the females WTC descriptive statistics were (M=46.16, SD=18.74) for Stranger, (M=69.48, SD=13.67) for Acquaintance WTC, and (M=70.11, SD=12.67) for Friends. Corresponding WTC descriptive statistics for males were (M=50.70, SD=18.15), for strangers, (M=74.31, SD= 14.37) for acquaintance, and (M=76.58, SD=15.89) for friends. The total WTC scores mean scores for males were higher (M = 201.59, SD = 25.31) than those of females (M = 185.75, SD = 23.72).

The sum of these 3 values divided by 3 indicated a moderate overall 61.91 for females which is slightly above the low level (> 52) and well below the high level (<82). The value for males, calculated in the same procedure, was found to be 67.19 which was higher than that of the females but still at a moderate level. The significance of the observed difference in the male and female participants' overall WTC was checked via independent samples t-test, as indicated in Table 5.

**Table 4**

*Independent Samples T-test for the Male and Female Students' Willingness to Communicate Scores*

|  |  | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  |  | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | Lower | Upper |
| Strangers | EVA | 1.38 | .24 | -1.93 | 448 | .040 | -4.55 | 2.36 | -9.19 | .-09 |
|  | EVNA |  |  | -1.93 | 437.44 | .042 | -4.55 | 2.35 | -9.17 | -.08 |
| Acquaintances | EVA | .703 | .40 | -2.70 | 448 | .007 | -4.83 | 1.78 | -8.34 | -1.32 |
|  | EVNA |  |  | -2.69 | 428.49 | .008 | -4.83 | 1.79 | -8.36 | -1.29 |
| Friends | EVA | 6.39 | .01 | -3.58 | 448 | .000 | -6.47 | 1.81 | -10.02 | -2.91 |
|  | EVNA |  |  | -3.48 | 404.96 | .001 | -6.47 | 1.85 | -10.12 | -2.81 |

As Table 5 demonstrates, difference between males and females reached significance level for WTC with stranger ($t_{(448)}$ = -1.93, p = .04 < .05), acquaintance ($t_{(448)}$ = -2.70, p = .007 < .05), and friends ($t_{(448)}$ = -3.48, p = .001 > .05). Therefore, the first research question is answered positively, there is significant difference between male and female bilingual EFL learners' WTC with different groups of recipients and the corresponding null hypothesis is rejected. Male participants were found to report significantly higher levels of WTC in each case.

The second research question delved into the level of Iranian EFL learners' receiver-type WTC. This question was answered based on the information in Table 4 depicting the descriptive statistics. As shown in this table, females' average WTC was 62 much lower than the high level of 82 while male participants' mean score was 97.2. Hence, it can be suggested that both male and female EFL learners are at moderate levels of WTC with females showing less willingness to communicate.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the research data revealed noticeable findings. The results indicated significant difference between bilingual male and female Iranian EFL leaners' WTC. The findings from the current study run counter to those reported by Afghari and Sadeghi (2012) and Alemi et al., (2013) who reported no significant different between male and female participants' WTC. The findings also run counter to those of Bukhari et al. (2015) who reported relatively high WTC among Pakistani undergraduate college students with no significant gender differences. However, the findings lend support to those of Gholami (2015) indicating significant difference between male and female participants' WTC with males reporting higher levels of WTC compared to females.

The relationship between WTC and bilingualism is a subject of interest in the field of applied linguistics particularly in EFL contexts. WTC refers to an individual's inclination or readiness to initiate communication in a particular language or across languages. Bilingualism, on the other hand, refers to the ability to speak and understand two languages proficiently. Research suggests that bilingual individuals may exhibit different levels of willingness to communicate depending on various factors such as language proficiency, language context, social environment, and personal attitudes towards language use.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between bilingualism and WTC. For example, MacIntyre et al., (1998) found that bilinguals might display different levels of WTC in their two languages, with factors such as language dominance and context influencing their WTC in each language. Additionally, Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) explored the impact of personality traits on WTC in multilingual individuals and found that factors like extraversion and anxiety could influence the willingness of bilinguals to engage in communication in different languages. Moreover, Cao (2011) highlighted the role of language attitudes and identity in shaping WTC among bilingual individuals. Such findings emphasize that positive attitudes towards both languages and a strong sense of bicultural identity could enhance WTC in bilingual contexts. The findings underscore the complex and multifaceted nature of the relationship between bilingualism and WTC and the fact that it might be influenced by linguistic, psychological, and sociocultural factors. Bilingual individuals may navigate different levels of comfort and confidence in using their languages depending on various internal and external factors, ultimately shaping their tendency to engage in communication in different linguistic contexts.

The moderate level of the participants' WTC in the current study might be explicated with regard to the high level of comfort in their first language and the fact that when communicating in English most of them might feel obliged to rely on translation as a common technique to express their ideas in a different language. This is the normal way for most of them to communicate in Persian which might emanate from their being coordinate bilinguals with two distinct knowledge bases and the need to switch languages while communicating. It seems that Persian plays the role of mediator between Turkish and English for most of Azari speaking bilingual EFL learners. That is, the need to first translate their ideas from Turkish to Persian, and thereby, into English poses a formidable challenge dwindling their WTC.

Moreover, the participants' low propensity might be linked to their identity styles. This link seems justifiable with regard to the close association between language learning and identity formation that, according to Zarrinabadi and Haidary (2017), might impact one's tendency towards communication. Investigating 186 Iranian EFL learners' WTC and communication apprehension in relation to identity styles, they found WTC positively correlated with informative and normative identity styles. Individuals with informative identity style have been described as conscientious, reflective, curious, and extraverted people who spend time on gathering accurate information prior to making any decisions and are open to new ideas (Berzonsky & Kuh, 2005; Soenens et al., 2005). Normative identity people abide by generally accepted social values and norms and remain resistant toward whatever may jeopardize their belief system (Duriez & Soenens, 2006). Although the participants' identity styles were not assessed, it might be suggested that inclination towards diffuse-avoidant orientation in identity, which is the third identity style, could be the reason for moderate levels of WTC among the participants. Learners with this identity style tend to avoid decisional situations and have been associated with high levels of procrastination and communication apprehension (Zarrinabadi & Haidary, 2017).

Male participants in the present study reported significantly higher levels of WTC compared to females. Theoretically, gender differences in WTC can be understood through the interaction of sociocultural, sociopsychological, and sociolinguistic factors. Cultural norms, individual psychological characteristics, and language use patterns associated with gender roles all contribute to variations in WTC between men and women across different contexts and cultural settings. Socioculturally, gender differences in WTC can be explained in terms of cultural norms, values, and social expectations on individual behavior. Gender roles and societal expectations regarding communication behaviors may differ across cultures, shaping individuals' WTC. For instance, Gudykunst and Nishida (1994) proposed that in some cultures, women may be socialized, more relationship-oriented and communicative, leading to higher levels of WTC compared to men. Conversely, in cultures where assertiveness and dominance are valued traits for men, women may exhibit lower WTC in certain contexts. The latter seems to be the case in the patriarchal research context.

Also, findings from the advocates of sociopsychological theory draw attention to individual psychological factors such as self-esteem, self-confidence, and anxiety which can influence communication behavior. Gender differences in WTC may be attributed to differences in these psychological variables. Evidence for this is offered by the findings reported by MacIntyre et al., (1998) who found that women tend to have higher levels of communication apprehension or anxiety compared to men, which may impact their WTC in certain situations. Additionally, gender stereotypes and

expectations can affect individuals' perceptions of their own communication abilities, leading to differences in WTC between genders.

Gender variation in WTC might also be approached from a sociolinguistic perspective by considering gender as a social factor that can influence language use. Research on gender differences in language use and communication styles, e.g., Tannen (1990) has explored gender differences in conversational styles and reported women as being more cooperative and using more rapport-building communication strategies. These differences in communication styles may also extend to WTC, with women more inclined to engage in communicative acts that foster relationships and social cohesion. The findings, thus, might allude to males as being more cooperative and rapport-building communication strategy users viably owing to the more dominant social roles awarded to them in the male-dominated Iranian culture.

Although the present study was limited to quantitative research data from the WTC questionnaire administered to upper intermediate bilingual Azari speaking EFL learners in a single city, the findings underscored moderate and low levels of WTC should be taken seriously since low WTC, as suggested by Hamasaid et al., (2021) can be positively correlated with low levels of participation in classroom activities in both male and female learners. That is to say, WTC has been found to be predictive of the learners' participation in learning activities that take place in classrooms (Chichon, 2019; Goldoust & Ranjbar, 2017; Lee, et al., 2019; Ningsih, et al., 2018; Ro & Burch, 2020). This is particularly true of EFL learners in Asian contexts who are living in multilingual communities and in some cases, like Iranian Azari speaking EFL learners, learn English as a third language. Such learners tend to be reticent and passive in language classrooms and avoid engaging in speaking in the target language. The findings accentuate the need for finding suitable ways to improve bilingual EFL learners' WTC which is both necessary and difficult since each individual has his/her own unique characteristics. One viable solution might be raising EFL learners metacognitive awareness so that they can manage the process of learning through planning and consistent practice (Seifoori, 2016). It is assumed that raising teachers' awareness of such variations can stimulate further endeavor to primarily raise their students' awareness of the key role of WTC and to humanize their classroom atmosphere to reduce aversive factors like communication apprehension and language anxiety that can reduce WTC.

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