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Willingness to Communicate in L2: Theoretical Roots and Pedagogical Implications

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Abstract. This literature review paper provides the readers with the presentation of the theoretical and empirical issues pertinent to willingness to communicate in L2. In this paper, first the roots of this variable are presented, then different conceptualizations of the variable are discussed in brief. It also provides the readers with the review of the most prominent studies conducted on willingness to communicate. The last section of this paper deals with the pedagogical implications related to willingness to communicate.

Keywords: Willingness to communicate, trait WTC, situational WTC, pedagogical implications.

1. Background

1.1. Willingness to communicate in L1

The term Willingness to communicate (WTC) was firstly employed by McCroskey and Baer (1985) in relation to interaction in first language. It was an extension of lack of inclination to communicate by Burgoon

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(1976), and by Mortensen, Arnston, and Lustig (1977) about tendency to oral performance (as cited in McCroskey & Baer, 1985).

McCroskey and Baer (1985) defined L1 WTC as a steady inclination toward communication when a person feels free to communicate.

Xie (2011, p. 19) treats "WTC in L1 as a personality-based, trait-like predisposition which was relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers". To put differently, while other variables such as context may influence people's inclination to speak, individuals show steady WTC propensity across various circumstances. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990) there are different variables that influence willingness to communicate in first language acquisition which are communication competence, self-efficacy, introversion, communication anxiety, and cultural diversities.

In the early 1990s, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) worked on WTC in the native language speakers of various first languages in Micronesia, Sweden, Puerto Rico, and Australia. They were looking for the relationship among WTC, communication anxiety, speaking anxiety, and introversion in these four nations. The results showed that the level of speaking anxiety, WTC, introversion, and communication competence was different among the people in these countries. Moreover, it was found that the relationship among these variables in different countries was different. While US learners were more willing to express themselves, Micronesian learners were very unwilling to communicate. The learners from Sweden were found to have the most level of language skill, whilst Micronesian learners had the least level of language competence. Based on the results of this study, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) proposed that no generalization can be made without referring to the culture of the people.

Macintyre (1994) proposes a model to forecast L1 WTC. This model assumes that self-perceived communication competence and speaking anxiety perceived by learners have straight effect on individuals' willingness to communicate. It means a mixture of high level of communicative competence and a relative shortage of speaking anxiety lead to high level of WTC. Personality trait was another influencing variable in his model. Xie (2011, p. 68) states that "the personality trait of

introversion contributes to both communication apprehension and the perception of communicative competence, and self-esteem plays a role in reducing communication apprehension".

1.2. Willingness to communicate in second language

A couple of years later, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) conducted their leading research in order to put into practice MacIntyre's (1994) model to L2 interactions amongst 92 English speaking learners in an immersion context in Canada. They employed the questionnaire, and explored the possible relationships among different affective factors, like attitudes, anxiety, and perceived competence, and the effect of these factors on the rate of recurrence of interaction in L2. The function of personality traits in Willingness to communicate was also inspected. They found that the inclination to talk model appeared to adjust best to the second language situation and may show a lucrative addition to the background of willingness to communicate.

MacIntyre, et al. (1998) claimed that in the second language situation, the context is more complicated because language proficiency level and one's second language communication ability are extra modifying variables. Therefore, they came to the conclusion that "it is highly unlikely that WTC in the second language (L2) is a simple manifestation of WTC in the L1" (MacIntyre et al., 1998 p. 546). Hence, willingness to communicate in L2 was described by MacIntyre et al. (1998) as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" (p. 547).

The result of some recent studies indicate that second language willingness to communicate is regarded as a function of situation-bound contextual variables, namely, topic, interactants, the magnitude of the communicative group, and cultural setting (Kang, 2005). Kang (2005) maintains that a person's psychological states and situational factors have an influence on willingness in the second language. She questioned the earlier definitions of second language willingness to communicate and claimed that it cannot be treated as a theoretical framework for studying inclination to communicate in active situations, where it can alter continuously. According to the findings of her study, Kang (2005)

puts forth a new definition of willingness to communicate as a situational factor:

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is an individual's volitional inclination toward actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables (p. 291).

Reviewing the description of willingness to communicate, it is clear that willingness to communicate can be considered as a variable that is affected by both situational as well as enduring characteristics. This point will be elaborated on more in subsequent part.

2. Different Conceptualizations of WTC in L2

2.1. Trait versus situational WTC in L2

Inclination to communicate in mother tongue has been defined as a feature which is specific to each person and that is constant across situations and interactants (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). However, MacIntyre et al. (1998) have stated that in the second language situation, willingness to communicate should be dealt with as a situational factor, which may be changing across different contexts. MacIntyre et al. (1998) stated that second language willingness to communicate is a contextual factor which can have both long-term and short-term effects. They differentiate and identify temporary and long-term effects as follows: The enduring influences (e.g., intergroup relations, learner personality, etc.) represent stable, long-term properties of the environment or the person that would apply to almost any situation. The situational influences (e.g. desire to speak to a specific person, knowledge of the topic, etc.) are seen as transient which are dependent on the specific context in which a person functions at a given time (p. 546).

The two-layeredness of willingness to communicate (trait-like and situation-specific) were studied by MacIntyre et al. (1999) in an experimental study among 226 learners in Canada. These learners were registered in 3 courses: English, interpersonal communication, and psychology. Their trait-level of willingness to communicate was tested by

employing a questionnaire containing perceived competence, communication anxiety, self-esteem, and emotional stability. The findings indicated that the trait, enduring and situational state levels functioned as complementary variables. Thus, MacIntyre et al. (1999) argued that trait-level WTC gives the learners a sort of predisposition to be included in or excluded from a communication context voluntarily. The second level, which is the state-level, has to do with the inclination of a person to initiate communication within the prepared context. MacIntyre et al. (2002) further called for a verification of self-report data by behavioural, qualitative studies in the classroom. Kang (2005) also argues that a quantitative method using questionnaires is not informative enough to reveal the contextual features of WTC in an actual situation. It can be concluded that both quantitative and qualitative studies are required to delve into the issue of WTC with regard to the trait and state levels, respectively.

In a qualitative study, Kang (2005) gleaned data by video-taping the interactions, interviews, and stimulated recall interviews. Four ESL learners who were studying in an American university were investigated for 32 weeks. The results of her study indicated that WTC in second language could alter according to the influence of situational variables, such as interactant(s), topic, and conversational context. These situational variables interacted with the psychological, enduring conditions of security, excitement, and responsibility to determine the degree of WTC in second language. She, then, provided a multilayered construct of situational willingness to communicate, in which WTC is treated as a dynamic situational notion that can vary moment-to-moment, rather than a trait-like tendency (Kang, 2005). All in all, the reviewed studies indicated that trait and state levels and the interaction between these two determine one's willingness to communicate level.

While the previous studies have mainly employed quantitative measures such as questionnaires to collect data on WTC, more flexible research tools which are compatible with the dynamic nature of willingness to communicate in second language. The employment of qualitative measures can lead to a better understanding of the WTC construct. One of the studies that has led to a well-established model of WTC is conducted

by MacIntyre et al. (1998) which has stimulated much research into L2 WTC.

2.2. MacIntyre, et al. (1998) heuristic model of WTC in L2

Trying to elucidate the interrelationships of affective factors affecting second language interaction behaviors, MacIntyre, et al. (1998) put forth a pyramid-shape model for inclination to talk in second language, which included an array of potential linguistic, communicative, and social psychological variables that could affect one's WTC in L2 (See Figure 1). They placed WTC in the second layer and claimed that WTC strongly implies a behavioral intention which leads to the communication behavior when the individual has the control over his behaviors.

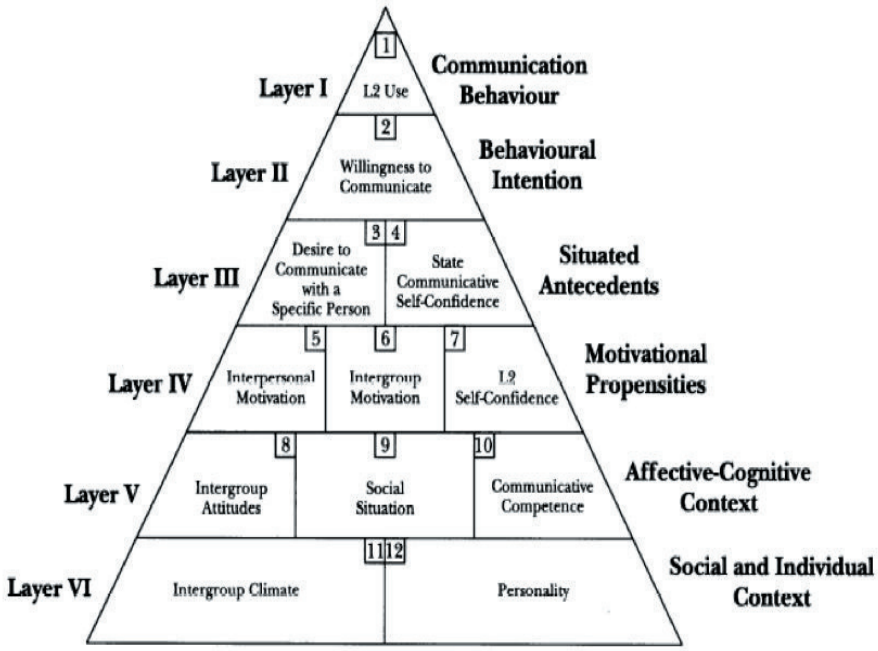

Figure 1. Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (Source: MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547)

At the lowest level of the model are the societal and individual contexts of communication. This layer has to do with the interaction between society and the individual. The societal context provides the situations for both acquiring and employing a second language (Clment, 1980, 1988). As Gardner and Clment (1990) state amicable intergroup relations boost the acquisition of a second language and its following employment; however, poor intergroup relations may reduce the willingness to learn and communicate in another language.

The individual's personality is another variable that assists explain how individuals react to, and communicate with, the members of their own cultural group as well as out-group members. Personality traits such as being extrovert or introvert, agreeable or unwilling, being conscientious, emotional stability, and predisposition to try new experiences will effect L2 acquisition and the inclination to talk in that L2 (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996).

Affective and cognitive contexts of second language communication are also influential. These factors are situation-free individualized factors which are not related to any specific context (MacIntyre et al., 1998). These factors include communicative experience, communicative competence, and intergroup attitudes. Intergroup attitudes entail the notion of integrativeness. The aspiration to recognize with the parts of an L2 group might be a deciding drive for a person to acquire that second language (Gardner, 1985); however, a fear of assimilation and losing one's identity may be a drive to evade acquiring or employing the target language (Clment & Kruidenier, 1985). Attitudes towards the second language itself are also included in intergroup attitudes. If a person has a positive attitude toward learning the second language, they may be more willing to use the L2 in the future. As mentioned before, communicative experience is another effective factor. One's familiarity with a situation affects the level of willingness to communicate. This experience is not transferable to other situations (MacDonald, et al., 2003). Furthermore, being exposed to a language community in different contexts, and its frequency, can affect the learners' willingness to interact in various contexts (Gardner, 1985).

Communicative competence, either real or perceived, also leads to

transform in the level of willingness to communicate. Sometime ago, it had been assumed that communicative competence in an L2 led to the use of that second language, but it is a simplistic view. There are different components of communicative competence that contribute to the process of learning and using the L2, namely linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, actional competence, and discourse competence (MacDonald, et al., 2003).

The subsequent layer in the model can be referred to as motivational propensities which can be conceptualized as enduring individual traits that apply in different contexts (MacIntyre et al., 1998). It involves interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and second language self-confidence (Zarrinabadi & Abedi, 2011). Interpersonal motivation refers to the learners' connection to the target language and the native speaker of that language (MacDonald, et al., 2003). Intergroup motivation refers to the attitudes and relations among people who are using the language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Communicative competence, in company with powerful past experience, supplies more self-assurance. The more percieved communicative ability directs to greater levels of self-confidence, and possibly a more L2 WTC (MacDonald, et al., 2003).

State communicative self-confidence is effected by two variables which are perceived competence and low level of anxiousness (Clment, 1986). Language users experience different levels of self-perceived competence and anxiety at various occasions. These contextual factors lead to different levels of WTC. Being encountered with situation specific context influences both perceived competence and the level of anxiety. New contexts are believed to lead to a less inclination to interaction, while experienced contexts are believed to yield more inclination to talk, because there might be a lower level of anxiety and a higher level of perceived competence.

The two terminating layers in the model are inclination to talk and real communication. WTC can be considered as the influence of different factors reviewed before and can be considered as a willingness to express themselves orally in the L2 at a specific point of time (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). Willingness to communicate (WTC) tends to provide more chance for learners to use the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998). According to

MacDonald, et al (2003), when it comes to actual communication, people decide to say something or not according to the interface between the above-mentioned variables.

3. Review of Some Recent Studies Pertinent to WTC

In this section, ten major studies on WTC conducted by major figures in the third millennium are reviewed. One of the most significant studies on WTC which was discussed earlier is conducted by MacIntyre et al., (1998). This study can be regarded as the first systematic study which moved away from the global trait-like conceptualization of WTC which was proposed by McCroskey. With regard to empirical studies, MacIntyre et al., (2001) developed a Likert scale questionnaire and investigated the grade 9 francophone students who were residence of an Anglophone community. They found that five variables which were school achievement, personal knowledge, travel, job related and friendship with francophones orientations were positively correlated with the participants' out of class WTC. They found that social support led to higher levels of out of class WTC but not in-class WTC.

A couple of years later, Clement, Baker, and MacIntyre (2003) conducted a study on Anglophone and francophone participants to discover possible underlying variables of willingness to communicate. Three hundred and seventy eight Canadian residents participated in this study. The questionnaire that they employed included items related to willingness to communicate, situated ethnic identity, frequency and quality of contact with the second language group, subjective L2 norms, frequency of L2 communication, and L2 confidence. The results of their study indicated that willingness to communicate is a context-based variable which varies across contexts, individuals, and social factors.

As time went by, more researchers investigated willingness to communicate in a dynamic manner. For example, Kang (2005) studied the way second language learners' willingness to communicate fluctuated in different situations and contexts. Kang states that one's willingness to communicate changes from time to time. For example, she found that as the security increased, the learners were of higher levels of WTC. The number of participants, the topic of the discussion, and the conversa-

tional contexts affected the learners' sense of security. She also found that when the excitement raised, the learners' WTC increased too. The extent to which interactants feel responsibility to take part in conversations is also influential.

Another study which delved into the contextual factors that might affect a second language learner's willingness to communicate was conducted by Cao and Philp (2006). They used observation, interviews and questionnaires to collect their required data. The result of their study indicated that different contextual factors such as the group size, familiarity with the interlocutor, the extent of an interlocutor participation, familiarity with the topic of the discussion, self-confidence and the background knowledge affect the learners' willingness to communicate.

Some studies like the one which has been conducted by Freiermuth and Jarrell (2006) investigated the affordances of the online medium for increasing second language learners' willingness to communicate level. Tasks were solved by the second language learners' experience in two different conditions of face-to-face and online. To check the differences of these two conditions, questionnaires and discourse analysis were employed. The results of their study revealed that the online condition led to the higher levels of willingness to communicate and a more comfortable environment.

In 2009, de Saint Leger and Storch conducted a study to uncover the relationship between second language learners' perceptions of speaking ability and their contribution to oral class activities and their willingness to communicate in second language. In their study, 32 students of French took the questionnaires. Their study revealed that the learners' perceptions of their oral ability and the activities affect their willingness to communicate level. By increasing in the learners' linguistic self-confidence, their willingness to communicate level increase.

Cao (2011) investigated different contextual factors that might affect second language learners' willingness to communicate. Eighteen students participated in this two-phase study. In order to collect data, journals, stimulated recall interviews and classroom observations were employed. The result of his study emphasized the complex nature of the willingness to communicate variable. The findings indicated that indi-

vidual factors, classroom environment conditions, and linguistic factors were at work to determine one's willingness to communicate at a certain moment in a task. The individual factors like self-confidence, personality, emotion and perceived opportunity to communicate, classroom features like topic, task, interlocutor, teacher and group size along with the learners' linguistic ability affect one's willingness to communicate.

Zarrinabadi (2014) investigated the ways in which teachers could affect second language learners' willingness to communicate. He enjoyed focused essay as the main research tool of the study. In his qualitative studies 97 situations of willingness to communicate and 84 situations of uwillingness to communicate created by their teachers were recorded. The findings indicated that teachers' wait time, the manner of error correction, the topic selection procedure and affective, linguistic and discoursal support affect the second language learners' willingness to communicate.

Subtirelu (2014) studied second language learners' willingness to communicative through an ideological lens. Interview was the main research means of this researcher. He interviewed three participates from Saudi Arabia and China four times. The result of his study indicated that although communicative experience and self-perceived L2 variables are mediated by another variable which is language ideology. In the author's words, "Ideological assumptions lead participants working with a deficit ideology to interpret certain communicative events as evidence of their own linguistic deficiency suggesting negative effects for their WTC" (p. 120). The learners' communicative experiences and their WTC can be mediated by their ideological assumptions, so the generalization of the results of a study to other contexts seems illogical and useless.

Piechurska-Kuciel (2014) conducted an in-depth study to uncover the attitudes of those who are willing and unwilling to communicate in second language classes. In her study, 609 students from six schools participated in the study. All participants took the questionnaire but a few of them were selected based on the purposive sampling to participate in interviews. The results indicated that the willingness to communicate stems from the volitional processes, thus the previous negative feeling associated with the task, context, or the language can decrease one's

willingness to communicate. The results also indicated that those with higher levels of willingness to communicate loved the language more than others.

This section dealt with the review of some studies on ESL/EFL learners' willingness to communicate in second language. As is obvious, the issues related to willingness to communicate are not limited. This brief review indicates that the investigation of individuals' WTC can be conducted by different qualitative and quantitative research instruments. Questionnaires, interviews, observation, stimulated recall, and journal writing are some examples of these instruments which should be selected based on their affordances to answer different research questions. Furthermore, the effects of different traits on the learners' predisposition to enter a communicative situation were traced in the studies. More studies are required to replicate the investigated variables, and study other personal and social constructs which are touched yet. Another point which can be induced from these studies is the possibility of the effects of computer-mediated-communication on the learners' WTC. Other studies can be conducted to check the effect of different CMC tools such as websites, weblogs, wikis, mobile, chat services, etc. on the second language users' WTC. Some studies tackled the issue of WTC from the ideological perspective; they called for the research on the ideological factors that affect speakers' WTC in L2.

In sum, there is plethora of lines of research pertinent to WTC which are not studied yet, and can be investigated by other researchers. By the popularization of the qualitative research methods, the previously asked questions can be re-examined by the use of in-depth methods to reach a vivid understanding of the WTC-related issues. Since the studies on WTC is highly context-dependent, previous studies can be conducted in the form of replications to find if there are some factors common in different contexts, and pinpoint the differences, and search for the reasons of these discrepancies.

4. Pedagogical Implications

Reviewing different theoretical and empirical papers, the researchers found a set of pedagogical implications which are outlined here:

• Teachers should engage learners in the process of topic selection to give the learners the chance to talk about the topics which are of interest to them (Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005; Zarrinabadi, 2013).

• Online conditions, especially the asynchronous ones, let the learners participate in conversations more willingly since the risk of losing face is minimized (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006).

• By increasing the learners' interest in learning the second language for its sake; in other words, by increasing one's intrinsic motivation, his level of willingness to communicate will increase too, so teachers should work on the learners' intrinsic motivation to have willing to communicate students (Azmand, 2014; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2014). Here are some guidelines for increasing second language learners' intrinsic motivation (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998).

- ◦ Set a personal example with your own behavior.
- ◦ Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom.
- ◦ Present the tasks properly.
- ◦ Develop a good relationship with the learners.
- ◦ Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.
- ◦ Make the language classes interesting.
- ◦ Promote learner autonomy.
- ◦ Personalize the learning process.
- ◦ Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
- ◦ Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

• Second language learners' self-esteem is another variable which affects their willingness to communicate (Azmand, 2014; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Thus, the measures which increase the learners' self-esteem can boost their willingness to communicate in the long-run. Canfield's (1990) provides a set of guidelines for teachers to follow to help their learners increase their self-esteem:

- ◦ Tell the students to accept their responsibilities fully.
- ◦ Focus on the students' positive aspects.
- ◦ Teach students to control their self-talk.

◦ Use support groups to discuss different issues to have a better atmosphere.

◦ Teach your students to identify the strength and resources.

◦ Help learners to clarify their vision.

◦ Help learners to set logical goals and objectives.

◦ Teach learners to visualize their future possible achievements.

◦ Motivate them to take actions.

◦ Teach them to be sensitive to feedback and preserve to achieve their goals.

• The teacher should provide the learners with linguistic, affective and discoursal and linguistic support to reduce their anxiety and increase their contextual self-confidence (Zarrinabadi, 2013).

• Help the learners become more autonomous; let them decide what skills and strategies to use while performing a task. Here, the teachers' responsibility is to provide them with strategic-based courses which enable them for a long-life educational career (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2014).

• Cooperative activities can reduce the anxiety and increase the situational self-efficacy of second language learners. Teachers can benefit from cooperative activities to provide the learners with a condition which is prone to yield higher levels of willingness to communicate (Razmjoo & Hoomanfard, 2011).

5. Concluding Words

The present study attempted to provide the learners with a brief view of the willingness to communicate variable and the pertinent research trends that are in vogue in the third millennium. The first part of the article reviewed the historical journey of this variable in L1 and L2. In the next section, the differences between trait and situational conceptualizations of WTC and the MacIntyre et al., (1998) model were reviewed. To give a vivid view of different research methodologies and topics about willingness to communicate, some studies published in the last decade in major journals were reported. At the end of the paper, a set of pedagogical guidelines which can increase the second language learners' willingness to communicate or its underlying variables was provided.

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