The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Individual Differences

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Willingness to Communicate

Publication details
Jian-E Peng
Published online on: 31 May 2022

How to cite :- Jian-E Peng. 31 May 2022, Willingness to Communicate from: The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition and Individual Differences Routledge
Accessed on: 15 Dec 2023

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WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

Jian-E Peng

Background

Second language (L2) learning is commonly seen as building not only on input but also on output, wherein learners experiment with new forms and structures and then automatize what they learn. However, as MacIntyre (2007) pointed out, years of L2 learning does not necessarily produce fluent L2 speakers. One possible reason is that L2 learners often lack the willingness to communicate (WTC), which limits their productive L2 use. L2 learners’ WTC has been a key issue that researchers and educators alike have endeavored to solve in order to promote learners’ communicative competence. In this chapter, I will provide a historical account of research on L2 WTC, review major findings and data elicitation approaches in this area, discuss practical applications, and finally identify future directions.

The concept of WTC originated from earlier notions of “unwillingness to communicate” (Burgoon, 1976), “predisposition toward verbal behavior” (Mortensen et al., 1977), and “shyness” (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982) in first language (L1) communication research. These notions capture individuals’ inclination to approach or withdraw from verbal communication. L1 WTC is seen as a stable propensity for communication, conceptualized as individuals’ tendencies to engage in communication when given free choice (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). L1 WTC is associated with factors such as introversion, anomie and alienation, self-esteem, communication competence, communication apprehension, and cultural divergence (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). Classroom factors such as unsupportive teachers or disliked subject matters also inhibit students’ L1 WTC (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2002).

Given its pedagogical relevance, WTC was soon introduced into the field of second language acquisition (SLA). L2 WTC was conceptualized as “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). This definition highlights that L2 WTC, in contrast to L1 WTC that manifests regular communicative tendencies, has both trait and state characteristics, exhibiting not only a degree of constancy but also variation across situations.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a heuristic pyramid-shaped model (Figure 10.1) in which factors commonly examined in SLA are theorized to exert enduring and transient influences on L2 WTC (henceforth WTC, in contrast to L1 WTC) and L2 use (the top of the pyramid). From the bottom to the top, variables on a distal–proximal continuum are layered, with variables in each
Figure 10.1 Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing L2 WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547, reproduced by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

layer constituting the basis or foundation of the variables above them. The bottom three layers include enduring variables, with intergroup climate and personality in Layer VI exerting distal influences on L2 use. Layer V comprises learners’ intergroup attitudes (e.g., integrativeness), social situations (e.g., participants and setting), and communicative competence. At Layer IV, interpersonal and intergroup motivation concerns individuals’ interactional purposes of control and/or affiliation at interpersonal and intergroup levels. Self-confidence (a.k.a. linguistic self-confidence) has a cognitive component, referring to individuals’ self-appraisal of their L2 skills, and an affective component, namely anxiety, about L2 use. Self-confidence derives from L2 contact and thus is a socially defined construct, a feature different from the cognitive nature of self-efficacy (Dörnyei, 2005). Layer III contains two situated antecedents of WTC: desire to communicate with a specific person and state self-confidence, the latter being a transient feeling of confidence at a particular moment as opposed to its counterpart of enduring self-confidence in Layer IV. WTC represents a convergence of its distal and proximal antecedents, and directly predicts L2 use. WTC is the final step before overt communication (MacIntyre et al., 2001).

In educational contexts, WTC has been explored from situated and dynamic perspectives. A situated approach to WTC aims to unearth what transpires in the conversation setting by examining the interplay of individual and situational factors. Wen and Clément (2003) articulated situated restraints on Chinese students’ WTC in class, such as group cohesiveness, teacher support, and positive expectation of evaluation, which could be traced to Chinese cultural influences. The situational nature of WTC was subsequently explored in studies that adopted a micro-perspective on classroom settings (Cao, 2011; Cao & Philp, 2006; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Peng, 2014).

The dynamic perspective on WTC (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011) was informed by complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). According to CDST, a dynamic system contains a large number of interconnected components that interact to form a unity at a particular point in time. The system develops in a non-linear manner and constantly self-organizes into preferred states (attractor states) or non-preferred states (repeller states); it is always in a state of flux such that each state forms the conditions for the next one (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) conceived of WTC as a dynamic system and revealed its interconnectedness with cognitive and affective systems at a momentary timescale. Studies informed by this view (Pawlak et al., 2016; Yashima et al., 2018) have jointly initiated a “dynamic turn” in WTC research.
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Research

Evidence

Individual Attributes Related to WTC

A large body of research has focused on exploring the relationships between WTC and its antecedents. Integrativeness and motivation, respectively in Box 6 and Box 5 in MacIntyre et al.’s (1998) model, are two important antecedents. Integrativeness refers to learners’ inclination to interact or even identify with the L2 community, which is a complex of attitude that influences motivation (Gardner, 2001). Significant correlations between motivation, integrativeness, and WTC were reported among English L1 students who learned French as an L2 in Canada (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2002, 2003). This indicates that the Anglophone students who were more committed to integrating into the Francophone community tended to have stronger motivation to learn and communicate in French.

International posture is another attitudinal construct that directly, positively predicts WTC and motivation to learn the L2 (Yashima, 2002). International posture refers to learners’ interest in or “favorable attitudes toward what English symbolizes” (Yashima, 2002, p. 57). This construct captures English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) students’ perception of English as linked to an international community, rather than any specific L2 community against the backdrop of globalization. A significant direct influence of international posture on WTC and motivation was identified among university students in Japan (Yashima, 2012), Iran (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Khajavy et al., 2016), and South Korea (Lee & Lee, 2020a).

However, the impact of motivation on WTC is either indirect or direct as indicated by statistical analyses. Findings with non-English major students showed that motivation indirectly influenced WTC via its effect on L2 self-confidence (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Yashima, 2002). According to Yashima (2002), this was because motivation needs to be coupled with confidence for generating WTC. However, a direct influence of motivation on WTC was reported in Fallah’s (2014) study of Iranian English-major students. The different participants may lead to this discrepancy, since English majors would naturally show stronger motivation. It may also be due to how motivation was operationalized. Fallah (2014) measured three aspects of motivation (desire to learn English, motivational intensity, and attitudes toward learning) with 30 items, whereas the same three aspects were measured with only one item each in Ghonsooly et al. (2012), and only the first two aspects were considered in Yashima (2012).

When viewed as a continuum with differing degrees of internal to external regulation (intrinsic and extrinsic motivation) from the perspective of self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985), motivation was found to have positive, indirect effects on WTC (Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). In Joe et al.’s (2017) study, intrinsic motivation did not influence WTC, whereas identified regulation, which is a form of externally regulated motivation, was a significant predictor of WTC. When motivation was reconceptualized as the L2 motivational self system that foregrounds future self-guides as motivational forces (Dörnyei, 2005) (see Chapter 7, this volume), it was found that ideal L2 self was a significant predictor of L2 WTC (Lee & Lee, 2020b; Teimouri, 2017), or ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self both indirectly predicted WTC, respectively, with positive and negative correlations (Peng, 2015). Nevertheless, taken together, this evidence sufficiently demonstrates the significant role of motivation in providing a psychological base for the generation of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

WTC is also positively linked to state self-confidence (Box 4 in Figure 10.1) (Cao, 2011; Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; Yashima et al., 2018) and trait self-confidence (Box 7 in Figure 10.1) (Fushino, 2010; Gallagher, 2013; Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004). Confidence is often conceptualized as encompassing self-perceived competence and a lack of L2 anxiety, although L2 anxiety is an emotional factor also examined in WTC.
research (presented below). Specifically, self-perceived competence had a stronger positive impact on non-immersion students, whereas anxiety was a stronger, negative predictor of immersion students’ WTC (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2003). This implies that students with frequent L2 contact may face high expectations and thus high anxiety, while those with limited L2 contact may be willing to speak in the L2 as long as they perceive themselves to be competent.

Other individual characteristics, including negative and positive emotions, also contribute to the psychological spectrum of WTC. WTC has been found to be negatively related to L2 anxiety (Dewaele, 2019; Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996) or specifically, learners’ pronunciation anxiety (PA), which refers to “pronunciation self-perception, fear of negative evaluation, and beliefs concerning the pronunciation of the target language” (Baran–Lucarz, 2014, p. 445). High-PA students were significantly less willing to talk than their low-PA peers (Baran–Lucarz, 2014). However, recent evidence has suggested that in digital settings, such as Facebook or online games, L2 anxiety does not affect WTC (Lee & Hsieh, 2019; Lee & Lee, 2020a). Moreover, digital games were found to reduce learners’ anxiety and enhance their self-confidence and WTC (Reinders & Wattana, 2014, 2015). These findings can be attributed to the social support and psychological benefits (e.g., feeling “safe” and “open”) gained from digital communication. In addition, a range of emotions including satisfaction, enjoyment, anxiety, boredom, disappointment, frustration, embarrassment, and anger were addressed by Cao (2014). Mystkowski–Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017) presented detailed accounts of student-related factors associated with WTC, such as lack of interest, boredom, fatigue, and excessive concern with accuracy. Quantitative evidence has shown that enjoyment positively predicts WTC (Dewaele, 2019). Enjoyment is a positive state where challenge and perceived ability to meet them parallel (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Learner beliefs are inherently related to L2 WTC (Dörnyei, 2005). According to Ajzen’s (1991) planned behavior theory, behavioral intentions, such as WTC, are determined by learners’ beliefs about the consequences of the particular behavior and how significant others evaluate the consequences. Fushino (2010) found that the beliefs held by Japanese learners about the value and usefulness of group work in an L2 class exerted a significant indirect effect on WTC via communication confidence. Learner beliefs about English learning and classroom communication were also reported to indirectly impact WTC among Chinese students via motivation and communication confidence (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). In brief, while learner beliefs may not create WTC, they exert distal influences on WTC via their effects on other factors.

WTC is also associated with more stable individual traits including personality (Box 12 in Figure 10.1), age, and gender. Of the five personality traits in the big five model (Goldberg, 1992), agreeableness directly influences WTC, while extraversion and intellect (i.e., openness to experience) exert indirect effects on WTC (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Openness to experience was found to indirectly predict WTC in Ghonsooly et al.’s (2012) study. A recent attempt has been testing the relationship between L2 WTC and grit, the latter referring to “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth et al., 2007, p. 1087). It was found that grit significantly positively predicted Taiwanese undergraduates’ WTC in in-class, out-of-class, and digital contexts (Lee & Hsieh, 2019) and Korean undergraduate and graduate students’ in-class WTC (Lee & Lee, 2020a). Regarding age and gender, MacIntyre et al. (2002) reported that students in Grades 8 and 9 had significantly higher WTC than those in Grade 7, which could be explained by increased experience with the L2 over their years of L2 learning. While gender had no significant effect on WTC in Baker and MacIntyre’s (2000) study, a general trend that girls were more willing to communicate than boys was observed among junior high school students (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004; MacIntyre et al., 2002). However, females in senior high school and university showed lower WTC than males, which was attributed to their higher communication apprehension and lower
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self-perceived competence (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004). These findings suggest the distal influences of personality and demographic factors on WTC (see MacIntyre et al., 1998).

**Situational Factors Related to WTC**

Situational factors related to WTC abound in educational contexts. Kang’s (2005) study with four Korean students in a conversation-partner program in the US found that WTC emerged from the interaction of three situational variables (topic, interlocutors, and conversational context) and three psychological conditions (excitement, responsibility, and security). Later studies described multiple situational factors (for a recent review, see Zhang et al., 2018). First, the interlocutor is an important factor: learners are more willing to talk to familiar, cooperative, and engaged interlocutors (Cao, 2014; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017), but their WTC tends to drop when conversing with interlocutors with advanced proficiency or greater content knowledge (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). In Gallagher and Robins’ (2015) study with 43 international students in a university in Britain, the participants’ WTC showed various situational tendencies. For instance, students who were from the same cultural background (i.e., co-ethnics) and had high WTC in small-group settings tended to form a social network, and their WTC was likely to be stimulated in small-group configurations that comprised students from different ethnolinguistic backgrounds.

Topics and tasks are also crucial factors (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Peng, 2014). Interesting and familiar topics related to real-life experiences are likely to increase students’ confidence and readiness to speak (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). Group projects and game-like activities tend to be favored (Cao, 2011; Pawlak et al., 2016). Tasks that are highly planned and structured with lengthy pre-task and post-task stages may hamper WTC, whereas tasks giving more leeway for creativity and spontaneity can boost it. Receptive activities (e.g., reading and listening) may prompt lower levels of WTC than productive activities (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017).

WTC also varies according to classroom-organization modes which result in different interaction patterns. Student–student interaction generally contributes to higher levels of WTC, and it tends to be heightened in pair work (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017) or group work with three or four members (Cao, 2011; Cao & Philp, 2006), since these modes trigger less anxiety and present more opportunities to talk with peers. The effect of teacher-led whole-class interaction on WTC has not been unambiguously identified. One positive effect was that some students believed that they learned more in this mode (see Zhang et al., 2018), while negative effects may also be caused by intensified anxiety related to public performance (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017).

Multiple teacher-related factors, ranging from teacher characteristics to teaching methods, have an impact on WTC. Teacher support, manifested in the teacher’s help, friendship, trust, and interest shown to students, is beneficial to students’ WTC (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; see also Wen & Clément, 2003). Teacher immediacy, referring to a teacher’s verbal and nonverbal behaviors that enhance relationships with students, was found to indirectly predict WTC via motivation and confidence (Fallah, 2014). In addition, the ways a teacher manages the teaching, such as the teacher’s wait time, error correction, use of multimodal clues (e.g., gesture and spatial position), or even frequency of L2 use, highly influence students’ WTC (Dewaele, 2019; MacIntyre et al., 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Peng, 2019; Peng et al., 2017; Zarrinabadi, 2014). This is intuitively plausible because the teacher represents a linguistic and organizational authority in class who designs and determines how classroom communication unfolds.

Another important factor is the classroom environment, atmosphere, or social climate, which is co-created by the class group and the teacher. The classroom environment or climate has been quantitatively verified to significantly predict WTC among students in China (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), Iran (Khajavy et al., 2016; Khajavy et al., 2018), Korea (Joe et al., 2017), and Poland.
(Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017), and this was corroborated qualitatively among students learning French in Australia (de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009). These findings collectively accentuate the importance of a positive, relaxed, and encouraging atmosphere in enabling students to “cross the Rubicon”, a metaphor for choosing to speak up in the L2 (MacIntyre, 2007).

It is inspiring that WTC has been found to be receptive to instructional interventions. In Mesgarshahr and Abdollahzadeh’s (2014) intervention study, students who received communication strategy training reported significantly higher WTC than their control-group counterparts who received regular language instruction. Munezane (2015) assigned two groups of Japanese university students to two experimental conditions, one guided to visualize themselves as future English-speaking specialists and another undertaking both visualization and goal-setting activities, with a control group engaged in regular content-based lessons. The students receiving both the visualization and goal-setting interventions showed a significantly larger increase in WTC than did the other two groups. This effect was replicated in Al-Murtadha’s (2019) intervention study with Yemeni high school students. These results suggest that when learners develop vivid and elaborate future self-guides that are augmented by procedural strategies, their WTC increases.

It is noteworthy that the individual and contextual precursors of WTC do not operate in isolation, but instead interact in a complex way to influence WTC (Cao, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). This is shown in studies adopting an ecological perspective (Cao, 2011), particularly Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) nested ecosystems model (Peng, 2014). This model places a developing person within nested systems ranging from innermost to outermost: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Peng (2014) suggested that Chinese EFL learners’ WTC in the classroom microsystem, which is directly influenced by both individual and contextual factors, is also susceptible to factors in the mesosystem (e.g., past experience and extracurricular activities), exosystem (e.g., course evaluation criteria), and macrosystem (e.g., the culture of learning and communication in China). Suffice it to say that the ecological perspective presents broad theoretical explanations and is also compatible with CDST approaches to WTC.

Compared with abundant research on the antecedents of WTC, studies of its prediction of linguistic or nonlinguistic outcomes are scarce. In Joe et al.’s (2017) study of Korean secondary school students, WTC did not predict L2 achievement in the final exam; according to the researchers, this was because WTC did not automatically create actual opportunities for using the L2, and the lack of such opportunities did not promote language development. As for nonlinguistic outcomes, WTC significantly predicts L2 communication frequency (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Yashima et al., 2004). In Gallagher’s (2013) study with Chinese L1 students at a British university, WTC negatively predicted cross-cultural daily hassles, defined as transactional difficulties in cross-cultural adaptation such as loneliness and financial constraints.

Dynamic Fluctuations of WTC

As mentioned previously, WTC has also been approached from a dynamic perspective. In a study that collected six female learners’ self-ratings of momentary WTC when performing communication tasks and their later reflections in interviews, MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) observed remarkable non-linear ups and downs in WTC, noting that a “WTC score at any particular time was partially a function of WTC at the preceding moment” (p. 165). This study also illustrated interconnectedness between WTC and cognitive systems (e.g., task familiarity and vocabulary retrieval) and affective systems (e.g., anxiety and confidence). In brief, WTC was found to show features characteristic of a dynamic system.

While MacIntyre and Legatto’s (2011) study took place in a laboratory-style environment, dynamic fluctuations of WTC in regular classroom settings have also been investigated. In Pawlak et al.’s (2016) study, the self-ratings of WTC by Polish English-majors in natural conversation classes also showed great changes at both individual and group levels, which were attributed to the
influence of many of the contextual and individual factors discussed above. Ascribing to the CDST, Yashima et al. (2018) tracked the WTC of 21 Japanese students during classroom discussion sessions over one semester. The students’ frequency of self-initiated turns, an indicator of state WTC, was found to vary greatly. In addition, group-level communicative tendencies formed the context (e.g., topics, interlocutors’ reactions, and group-level talk–silence patterns) facilitating or restraining individual participation, which in turn created new group-level patterns. The findings indicate that the dynamicity of WTC is related to “dynamically changing intra- and inter-personal, and many other contextual factors” (Yashima et al., 2018, p. 132).

**Data Elicitation**

Research into WTC, similar to other fields, has adopted quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches to elicit data. Surveys are typically used to obtain data for quantitative analyses. WTC has been measured in diverse ways, with three major instruments commonly adopted. In many studies, WTC was assessed with an adapted instrument originally developed for measuring L1 WTC (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). High reliability coefficients were reported, with Cronbach’s alpha (α) between 0.91 and 0.97 (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; MacIntyre et al., 2002, 2003; Yashima, 2002). A second instrument was designed by MacIntyre et al. (2001) specifically to measure WTC inside and outside the classroom in four skill areas (speaking, writing, reading, and comprehension; α ranging between 0.83 and 0.96). The third main instrument was Weaver’s (2005) scale of WTC in speaking and writing in class. Its items for WTC in speaking were adapted in Peng and Woodrow’s (2010) study, which validated ten items to measure WTC (α = 0.88) through exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Seven of Weaver’s (2005) scale items were adapted by Khajavy et al. (2016; α = 0.85) and Khajavy et al. (2018; α = 0.81). Weaver’s (2005) study reflects researchers’ concerns that the prototypical items in the L1 WTC scale describe communication situations unlikely to be encountered in EFL classrooms, and WTC in EFL classrooms should be assessed with a more context-relevant instrument.

The dominant design in WTC research has been a correlational one using techniques such as multiple regression analysis, path analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM). For instance, Lee and Lee (2020a) performed multiple regression analysis to test the roles of motivation, self-confidence, L2 speaking anxiety, grit, and risk-taking in predicting WTC. Path analysis, which is an extension of regression analysis, was employed in MacIntyre and Charos (1996) to test hypothesized relationships between personality traits, WTC, perceived competence, L2 anxiety, and communication frequency. However, path analysis only provides separate estimates for each correlational relationship. In contrast, SEM enables the computation of all hypothesized relationships simultaneously while accounting for error variance (see Chapter 32, this volume), and has been widely employed to test interrelationships between WTC and other variables (Gallagher, 2013; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Joe et al., 2017; Khajavy et al., 2016; Peng, 2019; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002). Taking this method a step further, Khajavy et al. (2018) used a doubly latent multilevel analysis to explore the nested structure of data, i.e., a measure at one level being embedded in another measure at a higher level. In Khajavy et al.’s (2018) study, an individual’s anxiety, enjoyment, and WTC (individual level) were assumed to be nested within the average anxiety, enjoyment, and WTC of the whole class (class level).

Network statistical models, which have so far been rarely utilized in SLA, have been applied to WTC research (Gallagher & Robins, 2015). A social network refers to “a web of dyadic (one-to-one) connections or ties that exist among a collection of social actors” (Gallagher & Robins, 2015, p. 934). In Gallagher and Robins’ (2015) study, L2 WTC was measured with the L1 WTC scale (McCroskey & Baer, 1985), and the participants were asked to nominate people with whom they discussed important things. The participants’ WTC scores and lists of nominated interlocutors were analyzed with an exponential random graph model (ERGM); this is similar to a logistic regres-
sion, with the dependent variable being the presence or absence of a tie, but ERGM also considers interdependence between dependent variables.

Experimental or quasi-experimental approaches were used in intervention studies that examined the effects of instructional treatment on students’ WTC. Munezane’s (2015) quasi-experimental study compared two experimental groups and one control group, while Al-Murtadhah’s (2019) experimental design involved one experimental group and one control group. In these studies, the data was analyzed using a one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), wherein the pre-test of WTC was treated as the covariate, the post-test of WTC as the dependent variable, and the treatment conditions as a grouping (independent) variable. In Mesgarshahr and Abdollahazadeh’s (2014) quasi-experimental study, independent samples t-tests were used for between-group comparisons, and paired samples t-tests for within-group comparisons.

Qualitative approaches were frequently used in studies that took situated and dynamic approaches to WTC. Interviews, often involving stimulated recalls, were commonly conducted (Cao, 2014; Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; Peng et al., 2017; Reinders & Wattana, 2015). Stimulated recalls were typically implemented by playing video or audio recordings of participants’ oral conversations to prompt their retrospection on factors related to WTC at specific moments (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; Yashima et al., 2018).

In addition, learner journals (Cao, 2011; Peng, 2014) and focused essays (MacIntyre et al., 2011; Zarrinabadi, 2014) are also used to elicit retrospections from learners. For instance, MacIntyre et al. (2011) asked 100 junior high school students to record at least six situations where they were most and least willing to communicate in French. Using the same technique, Zarrinabadi (2014) collected 97 entries from 50 Iranian students describing situations associated with their highest WTC, and 84 entries associated with their lowest WTC.

Observations were sometimes conducted to supplement other sources of data (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Peng, 2014) or to accrue data for capturing learners’ state WTC (Cao, 2014; Cao & Philp, 2006; Yashima et al., 2018). For instance, state WTC was indicated by observable voluntary behaviors in Cao and Philp (2006) and by the frequency of student self-selected turns in Yashima et al. (2018). This may circumvent possible difficulties in obtaining participants’ online self-reports of WTC without interrupting the teacher’s instruction or distracting the participants (cf. Pawlak et al., 2016). However, it should be noted that because they are in different layers in the L2 WTC model, operationalizing WTC with communication behavior may risk obscuring the conceptual underpinnings of L2 WTC as a final step before speaking in the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 2001).

The dynamic nature of WTC has also been explored using what MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) called an idiodynamic method. This involved novel procedures to measure momentary changes in learners’ WTC. First, participants were asked to perform eight communicative tasks, which were videotaped. In follow-up stimulated recall interviews, they watched the recordings of their performance and simultaneously rated their WTC (from −5 to +5) on a moment-to-moment basis using specifically designed software, which eventually produced a bitmap graph of the WTC ratings. The participants received a printed version of the graph and watched the videos again, during which they described the reasons for the changes in their WTC. In a classroom setting, Pawlak et al. (2016) invited 60 students to self-rate their WTC (ranging between −10 and +10) on a grid at five-minute intervals prompted by a prerecorded beep. The students also completed a questionnaire towards the end of each class to elaborate on factors that impacted their communication tendencies. This method enabled the participants to provide online ratings of their momentary WTC and their retrospections about the factors underlying those changes.

It should be noted that the above methods are often variously combined to form what is generally known as a mixed-methods approach (Al-Murtadhah, 2019; Cao & Philp, 2006; Lee & Lee, 2020b; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Munezane, 2015; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Peng, 2014; Yashima et al., 2018). For instance, quantitative measurement of WTC and semi-structured interviews were combined in Al-Murtadhah’s (2019) experimental study, while in Mystkowska-
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Wiertelak and Pawlak’s (2017) project, closed- and open-ended questionnaires, a self-rated WTC grid, and instructors’ lesson plans were the instruments for data collection. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has allowed researchers to combine macro- and micro-perspectives so that one type of findings can inform, triangulate, or explain another.

In sum, research in this field has shown a broadened scope of conceptualizations of WTC and novel methodological attempts. There is a clear trend towards opting for more situated and dynamic perspectives sensitive to contextual factors that synergistically act on learners’ momentary WTC in situ.

Practical Applications

Research into WTC has many implications for language practitioners. One immediate insight is that WTC, like a node in a large net, is linked to many other psychological, linguistic, and educational “nodes”, meaning that any change anywhere in the net can cause fluctuations in WTC. Weaving positive emotions such as enjoyment and confidence into class and mitigating negative contextual influences on WTC should be priorities for teachers. Since teachers have a greater impact on students’ enjoyment than on their anxiety (Khajavy et al., 2018), they can adopt pedagogical discourses characterized by immediacy behaviors, or skillful deployment of multimodality such as smiles, head nods, vocal expressiveness, and gestures (Peng, 2019; Peng et al., 2017), alongside being humorous and showing respect and praise to students (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). Meanwhile, teachers need to handle error correction appropriately, since although no conclusive inference has been made about the effect of error correction (MacIntyre et al., 2011), correction immediately following an error may cause embarrassment and insecure feelings among students (Zarrinabadi, 2014), which suppress their willingness to talk (Kang, 2005). Teachers are advised to take heed of the live atmosphere, and wind up lengthy whole-class discussion if the class is becoming bored or fatigued (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). In addition, teachers may take advantage of productive tasks (e.g., information-gap or decision-making tasks) to maximize student involvement and alleviate the boredom possibly caused by receptive tasks (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). Lesson plans incorporating visualizing and goal-setting activities, as detailed in Munezane (2015) and Al-Murtadha (2019), may be helpful in stimulating students’ L2 WTC.

Given the close relation between WTC and emotions, students’ negative emotions such as anxiety need to be monitored especially carefully. Teachers can encourage students to share their concerns about L2 communication and provide them with guidance. Such concerns may be about being negatively evaluated or perceived as showing off (Peng, 2014), dominating whole-class discussions (Yashima et al., 2018), or non-standard pronunciation (Baran-Łucarz, 2014). In addition, teachers can design activities such as group discussions or end-of-class reflections to guide students to trace the sources of these concerns and discuss possible solutions. These activities can help students become cognizant of or reshape their attitudes and beliefs about L2 learning and communication.

Pedagogical approaches can integrate computer-mediated communication (CMC) into curricula by means of networking technology such as email and social media (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, and WeChat). Teachers can require students to collaborate on specific communication tasks or projects on a social media platform or other CMC software before or after class, and this can be embedded in a task-based language teaching framework. The characteristics of written communication, more time for rehearsal, and possibilities for delayed response in digital settings can provide students with social and emotional support, and free them from the anxiety arousal often encountered in face-to-face communication (Lee & Hsieh, 2019).

Policy makers can also derive insights from WTC theories and research findings. As Yashima (2012) rightly pointed out, MacIntyre et al.’s (1998) L2 WTC model posits that L2 proficiency is
not “the goal of learning the L2 per se” but rather “a means to achieve interpersonal/intercultural goals” (p. 122). In this increasingly globalized age, English plays a dominant role and competent English users are needed in all walks of life. Decision makers need to reconsider relevant policies guiding curriculum goals tailored not just to enhance learners’ L2 proficiency but also enable learners to act on their L2 proficiency in real-life or simulated communicative situations.

**Future Directions**

As indicated in the above review, L2 WTC research has great theoretical and practical significance. Future directions should center on pursuing under-explored issues or emerging trends. First, additional compelling evidence on the relationship between WTC and L2 competence is clearly needed, because WTC is generally presumed to be beneficial to L2 learning. The existing limited evidence does not pin down whether the effect of WTC on L2 competence is direct or (more likely) mediated by other factors. Learners’ actual communicative behavior; degrees of behavioral, cognitive, affective, and social engagement (see Hiver et al., 2021) in L2 communication when opportunities arise; and contextual affordances may well be the intervening factors that warrant future research.

More situated studies examining the dynamics of WTC in classroom settings are also particularly needed. Future research may adopt experimental or quasi-experimental designs to ascertain which instructional interventions (e.g., explicit teaching of communication strategies) have the greatest impact on students’ WTC. The context-dependent dynamics of WTC may be further explored by means of mixed methods or longitudinal studies that focus on certain student cases or combinations of cases, so that nuanced changes in WTC can be tracked at individual and group levels. Narrative findings from these inquiries will significantly inform instructional practices.

Future efforts may also be directed towards exploring how and to what extent L2 learners’ WTC is boosted in CMC settings. With the greater use of digital technologies, such as cloud-based conferencing and social media, online or virtual learning is increasingly making inroads into secondary and higher education. Researchers may extend the extant findings to investigate specific digital situational factors that are conducive or inhibitory to learners’ L2 communication intentions. This remains a largely under-researched but worthwhile avenue given the ubiquity of technology and its escalating role in facilitating learning and teaching in many educational settings (Hiver et al., 2021).

**References**


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