



THE FACTORS AFFECTING WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN CHINESE LANGUAGE - A CASE STUDY OF NORTHEAST NORMAL UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Abstract:

In this era of globalization, people cross country borders for various purposes some for education, business, work, tourism, or for living. In meeting such purposes, people have to use language for communication; this has necessitated different countries to introduce foreign language studies in their education system at various levels. In China, Chinese language is a national language for the People's Republic of China. Currently students from different countries go to china to pursue various studies and they have to learn Chinese. The study examines the factors that affecting willingness to communicate in Chines Language among the International students. The study ought to explore the factors affecting willingness to communicate in Chinese based on gender, program taught, number of courses they have, years living in China, and number of Chinese friends they have. The study used Pearson correlation, Independent T-Test and One way ANOVA, to find out the correlation between these dependent factors and independent factors. Ultimately, the study found a significant relationship between willingness to communicate in Chinese and language programme taught number of Chinese courses, courses learnt, and the time of living in China.

Keywords: Chinese language, willingness to communicate, International students

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1. Introduction

In this era of globalization, people cross country borders for various purposes. Some for education, business, work, tourism, or for living. International students are an example of people moving from one country to another. Upon arriving in these foreign countries, these students have to learn the language of their hosts. As a result, many countries have introduced a study of foreign languages in their education system at various levels. China has no different with other countries. Currently many international students from different countries go to china to pursue various studies. Northeast Normal University is among the popular universities in china especially north part of China for international students. It had 724 international students from almost all over the world (www.jledu.gov.cn, 2016). As a consequence, the university has several Chinese courses for international students: some compulsory and some optional courses. The main goal of these Chinese language programmes for international students is to enable them to communicate freely with native and non-native speakers, teachers and any one in Chinese language (Baran-Lucarz, 2014). To meet this goal, there is systematic oral communication (speaking) practice in Chinese for international students. However Luo (2013) argues that, due to the tones and the non-alphabetical writing system of the, Chinese language, it becomes challenging language for most of international students to learn and use it in daily communication.

2. Research Objectives

This study examines the factors, that affecting the willingness to communicate in Chinese Language among the NENU international students.

The study specifically explores factors affecting willingness to communicate in Chinese based on gender, program taught, number of courses they have, years living in China, and number of Chinese friends they have.

3. Statement of the Problem

Language is a tool for human communication in all aspects of life. The use of language in any society is unavoidable thing in all levels. In this case learning a new language to new society is unavoidable thing. Chinese language is a very popular language in the world and is the national language for the *People's Republic of China* Zhou (2004). Due to the increase of Chinese economy throughout the world, it has attracted many learners to go to study in this country. The universities of China have different Chinese

language programs for all international students. Some programs are for communication purpose and some are for academic purpose. Due to this importance, the NENU has developed the Chinese courses for all international students to learn Chinese for their daily communication. Apart from these efforts done by the university and the country as a whole still the international students completed their studies and Chinese courses unwillingness to communicate in Chinese. The current study investigates if Willingness to communicate relates with learner variables like program taught, number of Chinese courses, and number of Chinese friends, duration of living in China and duration of learning Chinese.

4. Literature Review

4.1 The Concept of Communication

Rahman (2010) defines communication as a dynamic interactive process that involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values in which according to Alam and Uddin (2013) this kind of communication can be done orally or in writing. Byrne (1986) argues that, “oral communication is a two way process between the speaker and the listener and involves the productive skills of speaking and the receptive skills of understanding. It is the process of verbally transmitting information and ideas from one individual or group to another. However, Oral Communication skills include the mix of verbal, interpersonal and physical strategies needed to interact confidently and effectively with a range of audiences (Griffith Institute of Higher Education, 2004). According to Alam and Uddin, (2013) Oral Communicative Skills mean both speaking and listening to oral language that is integration of listening and speaking skills termed as Oral Communication Skills. Carter and Nunan (2001) argues that speaking is a linguistic activity which consists of pronunciation (sound); morphology and lexis (words and their parts; grammar and syntax (structure); semantic, discourse (conversation and utterances) pragmatics (use of language and associated rules); fluency (ease of speech, confidence, coherence and speed) On the other hand listening is an active process of constructing meaning where a listener need active mental involvement, Staab (1992). Then, in developing Oral communication Skills, listening starts then speaking comes later, Alam and Uddin. (2013).

Luo (2013) attribute lack of willingness to communicate among Chinese learners to complicated alphabetic system of the language. According to him, the system put the learners off. However, Stephen Krashen claims that humans have an innate ability that guides a language learning process. Infants learn their mother tongue simply by listening attentively to spoken language that is (made) meaningful to them. Foreign

languages are acquired in the same way. Krashen (1982) He believes that there is no fundamental difference between the way we acquire our first language and foreign languages.

4.2 The Concept of Willingness to Communicate

The term willingness to communicate has been discussed by several studies. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) refer to it as individuals' general personality orientation towards talking. People differ in the amount of talk in which they will choose to engage in. Situations variables may impact personal willingness to communicate within a given context. For instance, how a person feels for a given day, background of communication with other person, what that person looks like, what might be gained or lost in communicating may have a major temporary impact on willingness.

MacIntyre et al, (1998), developed a pyramid model to account for individual differences in the decision to initiate foreign language (L2) communication. At the top of the pyramid is an intention to communicate with specific purposes at specific time. This regards final step before starting to initiate communication with influence tied to a specific situation.

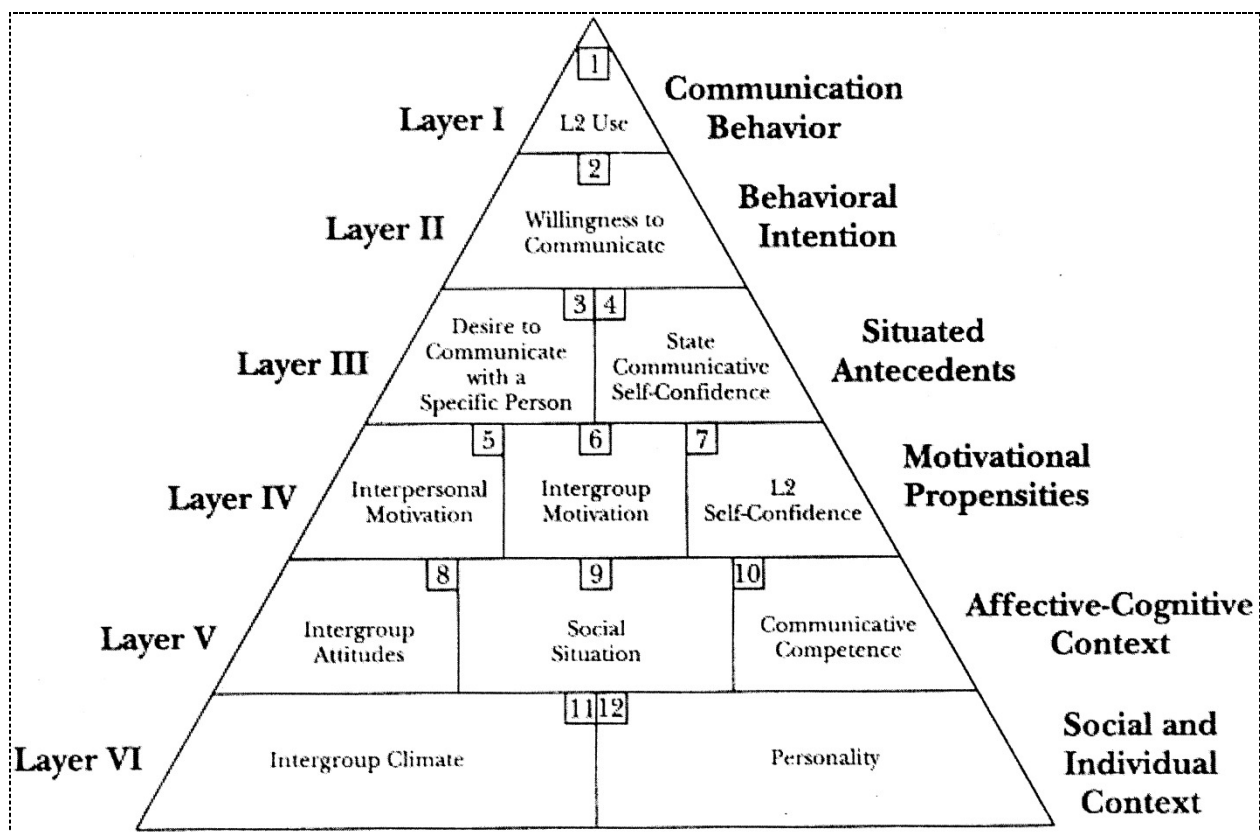


Figure 1: Heuristic model of variables influencing WTC (MacIntyre, et al 1998)

The model, refers to situations in which there is a specific person with whom to communicate, and both the desire and self-confidence to speak to him or her. This desire to communicate comes from affiliation or control motives, or both. Affiliation motives are directed towards persons who are attractive in some way or frequently encountered, such as one's friends. Control motives refer broadly to any situation in which people seek to influence each other's behaviour. The other major immediate influence, self-confidence, is composed of perceived competence and a lack of anxiety (MacIntyre et al 1998). In this conceptualization of WTC the influence of self-confidence is composed to competence and lack of anxiety (Clement, 1986).

4.3 Communication Skills Learning Process

Speaking is a linguistic activity which consists of pronunciation (sound); morphology and lexis (words and their parts; grammar and syntax (structure); semantic, discourse (conversation and utterances) pragmatics (use of language and associated rules); fluency (ease of speech, confidence, coherence and speed) Carter and Nunan (2001). Speaking is all about verbal responses. According to Kurniasih (2011), there are several activities for learning language speaking skills, these include; songs, chants and poems, games, peer work activity. Oral report, discussion on books in which learner has finished reading. Kurniasih (2011) says that for completion of learning any language usually one learns to listen first, and then speak, then to read and finally to write as demonstrated below:

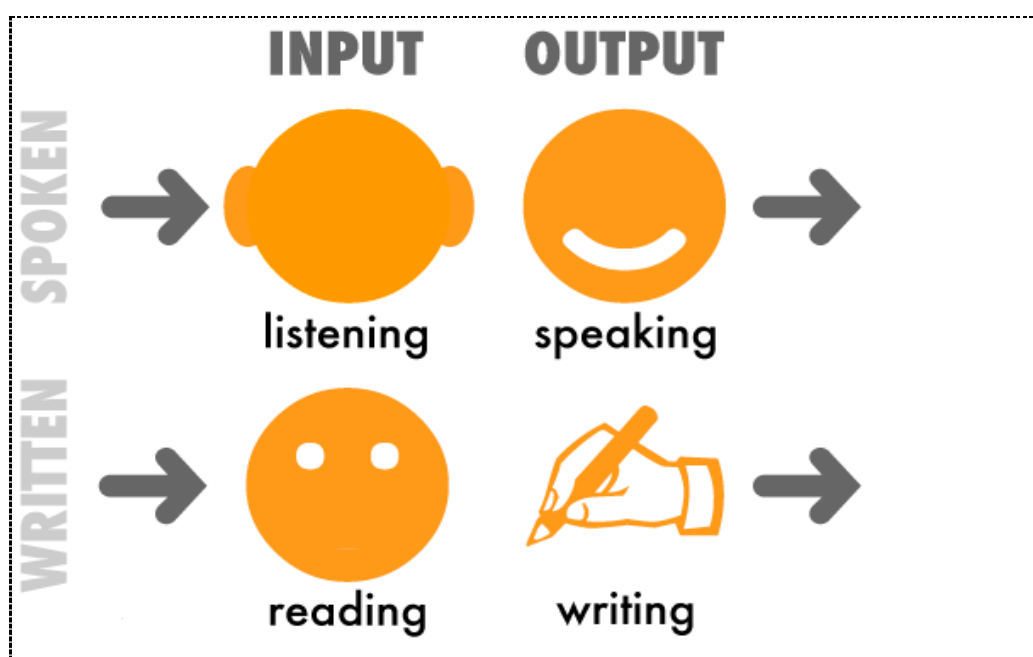


Figure 1: Adapted from Kurniasih (2011): Language Skills and Learning

As the above sketch shows, a successful language learning process, language input involves listening and reading and language output involves speaking skills and writing skills therefore the present study dealt with the speaking skills as language output in Chinese language.

5. The Methods of the Study

The research was done in Northeast Normal University in Jilin province in China. It used quantitative research design. The study further used random sampling to choose a sample of 119 respondents. These were 51 males and 68 females, and 65 were from Chinese programmes while 54 were from English taught programmes. The study adapted Willingness to Communicate in Foreign Language Scale (WTC-FLS), developed by Baghaei (2011). The data were analysed using Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation test, Independent T-Test, and One way ANOVA.

6. Findings Analysis and discussion

Table 1: Factors that influencing willingness to communicate in Chinese language

S/N	VARIABLE	RESULTS	P VALUE	TEST USED
1	Gender	No significant difference between male and female on willingness to communicate in Chinese	0.089	Independent T- test
2	Language Program taught	There is a significant difference in willingness to communicate in Chinese between students taught in Chinese language programme and those taught in English language programme	0.0	Independent T- test
3	Number of Chinese courses learnt	There is a significant difference in willingness to communicate in Chinese due to the number of Chinese courses the students they learnt	0.001	ANOVA
4	Number of Chinese friends	There is a significant difference in willingness to communicate due to the number of Chinese friends the student have	0.003	ANOVA
5	Time living in China	No significant difference in willingness to communicate due to the time living in china	0.077	ANOVA
6	Time of learning Chinese	There is a significant difference in willingness to communicate due to the time of learning Chinese	0.017	ANOVA

The study found that there is no gender difference in WTC in Chinese; this finding was not consistent with that of MacIntyre et. al (2002) in which women were more willing to communicate than men in the Canadian context. But it was similar with the result of

Alemi et al. (2013) and Moazzam (2014) that found no gender difference in willingness to communicate.

Further, the study found that, willingness to communicate in Chinese was influenced by program taught, number of Chinese courses, number of Chinese friends and the duration of learning Chinese. Generally, the more the students are anxious the less they are willing to communicate in Chinese. The results are coinciding with the study of MacIntyre et al. (1998) in which students who felt more anxious in second language (L2) demonstrated less willingness to communicate in L2.

However, students taught in Chinese programme had higher WTC in Chinese than those students who were in English program. Thus, students who had to use the Chinese language during their study tended to speak Chinese more, as their Chinese language competence was high.

This result indirectly supported the findings of Alemi et al. (2013) which found advanced students are more willing to initiate communication in second language than the intermediate ones. They said the result appeared because the less proficient learner's value their interpersonal interaction and speech communication less than the more proficient learners do.

Moreover the study found that the number of Chinese friends students had did not influence their willingness to speak Chinese. But, students who had more than 20 Chinese friends were more willing to communicate in Chinese than those students who had less than 10 Chinese friends. So, the number of Chinese friends the students influenced their willingness to speak Chinese. In the study Alemi et al. (2013), those learners who had communicated with foreigners manifested a higher degree of willingness to communicate than those who had never had the chance to communicate with English speaking people.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Willingness to communicate in Chinese was influenced by program taught, number of Chinese courses, number of Chinese friends and the duration of learning Chinese. But gender and duration of living in China had no effect on willingness to communicate in Chinese. The study faced problems of the small sample study area which cannot represent international students in whole China. Time constraints also forced the study to focus on only one language skills among four language skills.

8. Suggestions for Future Research

Further researches can investigate a relationship between personal traits, motivation and language proficiency and willingness to communicate. Further researchers need to use larger sample in other universities and in other areas of China.

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