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Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and L2 Achievement: The Case of Arabic Language Learners

Mohammad-Hadi Mahmoodi[a, *], Ismail Moazam[b]

[a, b]Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Postal Code: 651783695, Iran

Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and foreign language achievement of Arabic students. Participants were 44 undergraduate Arabic students studying at Bu-Ali Sina University-Hamedan, Iran. For data collection purposes, a Five-digit Likert-scale questionnaire of Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language Scale (WTC-FLS) containing 20 statements was administered. Additionally, for each student, Arabic language achievement was assessed in terms of his/her average. Using SPSS, the results of Pearson's correlation (2-tailed) indicated that, overall, Correlation was significant between WTC and Arabic language achievement. The implications of the study are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: Willingness to communicate (WTC), Arabic language achievement, Arabic language learners

1. Introduction

Willingness to communicate in a second language (L2WTC) which represents the psychological preparedness to use the second language (MacIntyre, 2007), is an important concept across disciplines of second language acquisition and communication. This importance of WTC arises from the role of interaction in language development (Molberg, 2010). Kang (2005) holds that more interaction causes more language development and learning.

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +98-912-288-3429.
 E-mail address: mhmahmoodi@yahoo.com

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is often regarded to be the main cause of the frequency of L2 use (Yu, Li & Gou, 2011). Moreover, McIntyre (2007) maintains that the choice to start communication in an L2 is one of the primary facilitators of language use, and as such, may be an important predictor of language survival. More importantly the willingness to take advantage of opportunities to use a second language reflects a level of success in language learning and language training. Further, "Being willing to communicate is part of becoming fluent in a second language, which often is the ultimate goal of L2 learners" (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010, p. 1).

WTC is of obvious interest to communicative language teaching (CLT), which puts an emphasis, on learning through communicating (Ellis, 2008, cited in Xie, 2011). Therefore, L2 learners with a strong willingness to communicate may be able to benefit from CLT while those who are not so willing may learn better from more traditional instructional approaches (Birjandi & Amiri, 2011). McIntyre, Clement, Dornyei and Noels (1998) believe that producing WTC (which influences not only speaking mode but also listening, writing and reading modes) is a crucial component of modern language instruction, and therefore, the goal of the learning process should be to increase language students' willingness to communicate.

2. Review of the related literature

McCroskey and his colleagues (1985) introduced the construct "Willingness to Communicate" in relation to communication in the native language. They mentioned introversion, self-esteem, communication competence, communication apprehension and cultural diversity as antecedents of WTC. Moreover, they suggested that any kind of generalization should be done with reference to culture.

MacIntyre (1994) hypothesized that communication apprehension and perceived competence would be the causes of WTC when introversion would be related to both communication apprehension and perceived competence, and self-esteem would be related to communication apprehension. Based on his model, people are willing to communicate when they are not apprehensive about communication and when they perceive themselves as capable of communicating effectively.

MacIntyre and Charos (1996) widen the structural model by adding motivation, personality, and context as predictors of not only WTC but also the frequency of communication. They hypothesized that WTC and integrative motivation would explain the frequency of communication in L2.

MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued the differences between L1 and L2 WTC. They integrated linguistic, communicative and social psychological variables to explain one's WTC in his/her second language. However, they treated WTC in L2 as a situational variable that has both transient and enduring influences. Moreover, they theorized that WTC influences not only speaking mode but also listening, writing and reading modes. They use a pyramid shaped figure to illustrate the WTC model, the pyramid model demonstrates the wide variety of factors that affect the psychological preparedness to speak. We can identify both individual factors (anxiety, motivation, attitudes, interpersonal attraction, etc.) and social contextual factors (ethno linguistic vitality, language contact, etc.) that either enhance or reduce WTC (MacIntyre, 2007).

With respect to affective variables as predictors of reported second language use, Hashimoto (2002) studied Japanese ESL students in classroom context. He showed that motivation and WTC affect reported L2 communication frequency in classroom. Perceived competence and L2 anxiety were found to be causes of WTC, which led to more L2 use, and L2 anxiety was found to negatively influence perceived competence. Although a path from WTC to motivation was not found to be significant in the original study, it was found to be significant in the present replication. In addition, a path from perceived competence was found to exert a strong and direct influence on motivation from a data-driven path.

Kang (2005) noted how situational willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2) can dynamically emerge and fluctuate during a conversation situation. He found that situational WTC in L2 emerged from the joint effect of three interacting psychological conditions of excitement, responsibility, and security, each of

which was co-constructed by interacting situational variables such as topic, interlocutors, and conversational context. Based on the findings, he proposed a multilayered construct of situational WTC and a new definition of WTC in L2, in which WTC is suggested as a dynamic situational concept that can change moment-to-moment, rather than a trait-like predisposition. He also presented pedagogical implications, suggesting ways in which situational variables can be controlled to create L2 learners' situational WTC.

Cetinkaya (2005) in an investigation of Turkish college students' willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language found that students' willingness to communicate was directly related to their attitude toward the international community and their perceived linguistic self-confidence. Furthermore, motivation and personality in terms of being an introvert or extrovert were found to be indirectly related to students' willingness to communicate through linguistic self-confidence. Finally, he found that students' attitude toward the international community was correlated with their personality.

Regarding research in the context of Iran, Zarrinabadi and Abdi (2011), in their investigation of the relationship between Iranian EFL Learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) inside and outside the classroom and their language learning orientations, found that language orientations are more correlated with willingness to communicate outside than inside the classroom.

Baghaei (2012) on the relationship between willingness to communicate and success in learning English as a foreign language, showed that two out of the three subscales of WTC (willingness to communicate in the school context and willingness to communicate with native speakers of English) were moderately correlated with success in learning English as a foreign language.

Barjesteh, Vaseghi and Neissi (2012) argue that Iranian EFL learners are not willing to start communication in unfamiliar situations. Because majority of Iranians communicate in English only in their language classrooms. That is they don't have access to a native speaker of English or possibility of travelling to an English speaking country. Finally, Birjandi and Tabataba'ian (2012) found a significant relationship between EQ, WTC, and Foreign Language Anxiety (FLCAS). Further, the findings indicated that FLCAS, EQ, and some of its subscales were predictors of WTC.

2.1. Research questions
The current study seeks answers to the following questions:
> RQ1: Is there any significant relationship between Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and L2 achievement of Arabic language learners?
> RQ2: What is the relationship between L2 achievement and WTC of Arabic learners with:
> - *Native speakers,*
> - *Nonnative speakers and*
> - *In class context?*

3. Method
3.1. Research design
In this study a correlational design was employed to find out the relationship between Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Arabic language achievement.

3.2. Participants
This study was carried out during the academic year of 2013 at the Faculty of Literature and Humanities at Bu Ali Sina University of Hamedan. The participants of the study were 44 Iranian undergraduate Arabic students (both male and female). The age range of the participants was 19-30. Table 1 presents characteristics of the participants in the study.

Table 1. Characteristics of the participants in the study

Gender		Total
Female	39	44
Male	5	

3.3. Materials and Instruments

Data related to the objective of the study were collected from the Willingness to Communicate in a Foreign Language Scale (WTC-FLS) questionnaire which was developed and validated by Baghaei (2012) (see Appendix A). The instrument is composed of three subscales measuring, a. Willingness to communicate with native speakers of Arabic (WTC-NS), b. willingness to communicate with foreigners who are not native speakers of Arabic (WTC-NN), and c. willingness to communicate in the school context (WTC-SC). Participants were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree=1 Disagree=2 Neutral =3 Agree =4 Strongly Agree=5) how willing they were to communicate. Additionally, for each student, Arabic language achievement was assessed in terms of his/her average.

3.4. Procedure

For the purposes of the study, participants were given the WTC questionnaire to complete during their class time. The questionnaires were collected after about 15 minutes of administration. Also, each learner's average was obtained from the course instructor as an indicator of his/her Arabic language achievement. Using factor analysis, the questionnaire was found to have an acceptable validity rate. And, using Chronbach's Alpha, the reliability of the questionnaire was estimated to be 0.87.

3.5. Data analysis

Using SPSS, Pearson's correlation (2-tailed) was run to see whether there is any relationship between WTC and its subscales with Arabic language achievement.

4. Results

This section aims to present the results and findings of the current research study. The first research question was whether there is any significant relationship between Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Arabic language achievement. Table 2 shows the coefficient of correlation between Arabic language achievement and overall WTC.

Table 2. Coefficient of correlation between Arabic language achievement and WTC- FLS

		Arabic language achievement	WTC
Arabic language achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.309[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.041
	N	44	44
WTC	Pearson Correlation	.309[*]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.041	
	N	44	44

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As Table 2 indicates, there is a significant positive correlation between WTC and Arabic language achievement (r=.309, n=44, p<.05). Regarding the second research question, Tables 3, 4 and 5, report the coefficients of correlation between Arabic language achievement and subscales of WTC-FLS respectively.

		Arabic language achievement	WTC-NNS
Arabic language achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	-.085
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.581
	N	44	44
WTC-NNS	Pearson Correlation	-.085	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.581	
	N	44	44

Table 3. Coefficient of correlation between Arabic language achievement and WTC- NS

As is evident from Table 3, there is no significant correlation between WTC-NS and Arabic language achievement (r=-.85, n=44, p<.05).

Table 4. Coefficient of correlation between Arabic language achievement and WTC-NNS

		Arabic language achievement	WTC-NS
Arabic language achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.213
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.164
	N	44	44
WTC-NS	Pearson Correlation	.213	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.164	
	N	44	44

As shown in Table 4, there is no significant correlation between WTC-NNS and Arabic language achievement (r=.213, n=44, p<.05).

Table 5. Coefficient of correlation between Arabic language achievement and WTC-SC

		Arabic language achievement	WTC-SC
Arabic language achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.413[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.005
	N	44	44
WTC-SC	Pearson Correlation	.413[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	
	N	44	44

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As Table 5 presents, there is a significant positive correlation between Arabic language achievement and WTC-SC (r=.413, n=44, p< .01).

5. Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and foreign language achievement of Arabic language students. The results of Pearson's correlation indicated that, overall, correlation was significant between WTC and Arabic language achievement. However, the coefficients of correlation between Arabic language achievement and subscales of WTC-FLS were variant. That is while willingness to communicate in the school context had the highest correlation with Arabic language achievement, the

lowest correlation was found between WTC-NNS and Arabic language achievement.

Overall, the findings indicate that students who are more willing to communicate are rather high at L2 achievement. And those who are high at L2 achievement are more willing to communicate in the classroom.

The findings of this study are in line with that of Baghaei (2012) who found that two out of the three subscales of WTC (willingness to communicate in the school context and willingness to communicate with native speakers of English) were moderately correlated with success in learning English as a foreign language. While willingness to communicate with non-native speakers of English was not correlated with success in foreign language learning. In this regard, Dörnyei (2003) maintains that WTC is a fairly stable personality trait, developed over the years, but the situation is more complex with regard to L2 use, because here the level of one's L2 proficiency, and particularly that of the individual's L2 communicative competence, is an additional powerful modifying variable.

In this study, while willingness to communicate in the school context had the highest correlation with Arabic language achievement, WTC-NNS had the lowest correlation with Arabic language achievement. There might be some reasons why the results have turned out to be so. One possible reason for current results is, in foreign language contexts students rarely have opportunity to be exposed to the target language outside of their classrooms. In other words, students in L2 classrooms frequently are faced with the opportunity to speak up and outside the classroom opportunities for L2 communication might present themselves from time to time (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010). Similarly, Barjesteh, Vaseghi and Neissi (2012) argue that Iranian EFL learners are not willing to communicate in unfamiliar situations. They mostly communicate in English only in their language classrooms because they don't have access to a native speaker of English out of their classrooms. Also, Moradi Khazaei, Moin Zadeh and Ketabi (2012) found Iranian students to be more willing to communicate in (small) classes where they had more opportunity to practice oral skills and communicate.

The second highest correlation was found between willingness to communicate with native speakers of Arabic and L2 achievement. And, almost there was no correlation between willingness to communicate with non-native speakers of Arabic and L2 achievement. Perhaps EFL learners believe that they can learn more from native speakers of Arabic than non-native speakers of Arabic. So, they may see no point to communicate with non- native speakers of Arabic.

6. Conclusion and implications of the study

This study set out to investigate the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and foreign language achievement of Arabic students at Bu-Ali Sina university of Hamedan, Iran. As the results of Pearson's correlation indicated, overall, correlation was significant between WTC and Arabic language achievement. That is, students who were more willing to communicate were rather high at L2 achievement.

However, the coefficients of correlation between Arabic language achievement and subscales of WTC-FLS showed that while willingness to communicate in the school context had the highest correlation with Arabic language achievement, the lowest correlation was found between WTC-NNS and Arabic language achievement. The findings of the study suggest that in foreign language learning context, taking advantage of classroom opportunities is the best chance to foster willingness to communicate. So, EFL teachers are advised to increase the level of students' WTC as one of the predictors of their participation in classroom activities and L2 use.

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Appendix A

Willingness To Communicate in a Foreign Language Scale (WTC-FLS)

1. If I encountered some native speakers of Arabic in the street, restaurant, hotel etc., I hope an opportunity would arise and they would talk to me.

2. If I encountered some native speakers of Arabic in the street, restaurant, hotel etc., I would find an excuse and would talk to them.

3. If I encountered some native speakers of Arabic who are facing problems in my country because of not knowing our language I take advantage of this opportunity and would talk to them.

4. I am willing to accompany some native speakers of Arabic and be their tour guide for a day free of charge.

5. I am willing to talk with native speakers of Arabic.

6. If someone introduced me to a native-speaker of Arabic I would like to try my abilities in communicating with him/her in Arabic.

7. If I encountered some nonnative speakers of Arabic in the street, restaurant, hotel etc., I hope an opportunity would arise and they would talk to me.

8. If I encountered some nonnative speakers of Arabic in the street, restaurant, hotel etc. I would find an excuse and would talk to them.

9. If I encountered some nonnative speakers of Arabic who are facing problems in my country because of not knowing our language I take advantage of this opportunity and would talk to them.

10. I am willing to accompany some nonnative speakers of Arabic and be their tour guide for a day free of charge.

11. I am willing to talk with nonnative speakers of Arabic.

12. Nonnative speakers of Arabic have interesting experiences that I would like to share.

13. In order to practice my Arabic I am willing to talk in Arabic with my classmates outside the class.

14. I am willing to ask questions in Arabic in the classes at the university.

15. I am willing to talk and express my opinions in Arabic in the class when all my classmates are listening to me.

16. I am willing to have pair and group activities in the class so that I can talk in Arabic with my classmates.

17. In order to practice my Arabic I am willing to talk in Arabic with my professors outside the class.

18. I am willing to give a presentation in Arabic in front of my classmates.

19. In group work activities in the class when the group is composed of my friends I am willing to speak in Arabic.

20. In group work activities in the class when the group is NOT composed of my friends I am willing to speak in Arabic.