Willingness to Communicate of Foreign Language Learners in Turkish Context

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Abstract

Willingness to communicate and its antecedents were investigated through a structural model with the participation of 251 freshmen studying at a state university in Turkey. Quantitative data were analyzed via Partial Least Square - Structural Equation Modeling. According to the results, all hypotheses were accepted which means participants’ attitude toward international community, their motivation to learn English, and their confidence in English communication have direct significant positive effect on their WTC in English. Additionally, participants’ attitude toward international community positively influences their motivation to use and learn English as well. Finally, participants’ personality influences their confidence in English communication.

1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the latest trend in language teaching and learning (Yu, 2009). This fact requires language teachers to shift their attention from the necessity of perfect grammatical and linguistic competence to communicative use of that language. According to this fact, being proficient in one language means to communicate in that language fluently rather than to master the structures of it as it used to be previously.

The gist of CLT is to let the learners communicate in target language to improve their communication competence (Savignon, 2005). However, the expectation that learners will have a high level of communicative
competence and eventually they will use target language willingly and effectively may turn out to be an unexpected result due to nature of human. Although the main objective of CLT is to improve the learners’ communicative ability in target language, a counter argument is put forward by Dörnyei (2005). He claims that it is common among people to avoid communicating in L2 though they are communicatively competent. This idea shows that other factors play role between having competence to communicate and putting this competence into practice, and thereby underpins importance of willingness to communicate (WTC). WTC is a complex one of those factors, which is globally known 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).

Though this construct was first used by McCroskey and his colleagues in first language investigations (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1989) and it was accepted as a personality trait (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990), it started gaining importance in the field of foreign language learning (FLL) among researchers. The reason was that because by contrast with generally accepted view that students need to practice in speaking in order to learn (MacIntyre et al., 2003), learners generally tend to be silent when they have the chance. Considering the importance of it in terms of FLL, Dörnyei (2005, p. 210) also suggests that “developing WTC is the ultimate goal of instruction”.

However, in spite of the crucial role of WTC in FLL, there are few studies concerning the case in foreign language settings (Yu, 2009) and especially in Turkish context. Therefore, in order to throw some light on WTC and its potential antecedents, the present study tests a model by investigating variables, such as WTC, motivation, attitude, confidence in communication and personality among Turkish learners of English as a foreign language.

It is clear that WTC is a complex construct and it can be provoked by a number of linguistic, psychological, social and cultural factors. Due to its complex nature and significance in FLL and teaching, it is important to investigate this construct and possible antecedents of it in order to gain insight about how learners become willing to communicate in English and what affects them in this process.

For this reason, the aim of this study was to investigate Turkish university students’ WTC in English and potential interrelations among individual difference factors. Bearing this purpose in mind, the present study examined whether the proposed WTC theoretical framework developed by McIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) accurately described the interrelationships among Turkish university students’ WTC, attitude toward international community, motivation to learn English, linguistic self-confidence and personality. Thus, the following research question informs this study:

Does the proposed WTC model accurately describe the interrelationships among Turkish university students’ WTC, attitude toward international community, motivation to learn English, linguistic self-confidence and personality?

2. Literature Review

WTC started to appear in the research arena within the first language communication. MacIntyre (1994) by using the data collected by McCroskey and his colleagues (1990) in the USA, Sweden, Australia, Micronesia, and Puerto Rico developed a structural model to explain the variance in L1 WTC. He 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. In order to examine the antecedents and consequences of WTC at both trait and state levels, MacIntyre, Babin, and Clement (1999) conducted another study which yielded in similar results with MacIntyre’s (1994) previous study except this time in the structural model the path from communication apprehension to WTC was not significant.

Instead, Çetinkaya (2007), depending on the theoretical framework of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998), investigated students’ attitude toward international community, their motivation to learn English, their linguistic self-confidence, their WTC and personality in a model through SEM. The results revealed that the path from communication anxiety to linguistic self-confidence was not statistically significant, which showed that anxiety did not contribute to the construction of linguistic self-confidence. According to the statistical results, the final model indicated that Turkish students’ WTC in English was directly related to their attitudes towards international community and linguistic self-confidence. The attitude toward international community was correlated with personality. Students’ motivation and personality were also indirectly related to their WTC through their linguistic self-confidence.
Kim (2004) researched WTC, confidence, motivation and attitudes in Korean context by applying MacIntyre et al.’s heuristic model. The results showed that except for the relationships between attitude and WTC in L2, there were significant relationships among all abovementioned constructs. It could be understood that Korean university students’ WTC was directly related to their confidence in English communication and indirectly related to their attitudes and motivation through confidence in English communication.

Jung (2011) investigated WTC, personality, attitude toward English, confidence in communicating in English and motivation both qualitatively and quantitatively with the participation of 226 Korean students. He employed structural equation modeling to analyze the relationships among these constructs. According to the results, communication confidence and motivation affected WTC directly. A direct path was also found from motivation to communication confidence. Students’ attitudes and their personality were found to be correlated with one another. Overall, the paths found were from confidence to WTC; motivation to confidence; attitudes to motivation; motivation to WTC.

Ghonsooly et al. (2012) investigated the construct of WTC and variables related to it in an EFL setting in Iran in which they used WTC model and socio-educational model. A communication model was also proposed and tested via structural equation modeling. According to the results, L2 self-confidence and attitudes toward international community were the predictors of L2 WTC. The paths from motivation to L2WTC; and openness to experience to L2 self-confidence were not significant which yielded the elimination of these paths in the model. L2 self-confidence was found to be the most significant predictor of L2 WTC.

In another study, Nasser (2014) examined relationships among WTC in English, shyness, motivation, communication self-confidence and teacher immediacy through SEM. The results brought out significant positive paths from motivation and communication self-confidence to L2WTC; from immediacy to motivation; and from motivation to self-confidence; and negative paths from shyness to self-confidence and motivation; and from teacher immediacy to shyness. Additionally, an indirect effect was found from teacher immediacy to L2WTC through the mediation of self-confidence and motivation.

Yousef et al. (2013) researched Malaysians’ WTC in English as a second language by proposing a hypothesized model integrating WTC in English, communication apprehension and competence, motivation and communication strategies by using SEM. The results indicated that communication strategies directly affected motivation, self-perceived communication competence and WTC in English. According to the results, motivation was found to be affecting communication confidence and WTC indirectly through self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension.

WTC has recently been researched in Turkish context by Şener (2014). She presented the levels of WTC in English of Turkish ELT department students together with their linguistic self-confidence, motivation, attitudes toward international community, and personality employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. It was found out that there were significant correlations between self-confidence, attitude toward international community, and WTC in English. Self-confidence was found to be the most significant predictor of students’ WTC. In addition, students’ motivation partly affected their WTC.

Yu (2009) investigated WTC and related variables such as teacher immediacy, communication apprehension, motivation, attitude toward learning situation, integrativeness, instrumental orientation and self-perceived communication competence in a Chinese setting. The results showed that only attitudes toward the learning situation and motivation were found to be the significant predictors of WTC. Communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence were the only two direct effects on WTC in English. Motivation had direct effect on communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Setting

The participants of the present study were 251 freshmen studying in different departments of at a state university in Turkey, such as, tourism, agriculture, natural gas installation, air conditioning, computer programming, business administration, and accountancy. The age range of the participants was between 18 and 36. The number of male
students outnumbered that of female students. The participants study for two years and they do not receive any English preparatory class.

3.2. Instruments

The data were gathered by means of questionnaires in the present study. The questionnaires were translated into Turkish in order to increase the return rate. All the questionnaires were back translated to English in order to establish accuracy of translation.

The structural model of the current study included five latent variables: WTC in English, Attitude (International Posture), Personality, English learning motivation, Confidence in English communication. Attitude (International Posture), English learning motivation, confidence in English communication were measured by four, three, and two indicator variables respectively. WTC in English and participants’ personality were measured by one indicator variable each. Participants’ personal information, such as age, gender, and department they are enrolled were also questioned. The latent variables together with their indicator variables, their reliability scores and their sample items are provided below.

Table 1: The latent variables, their indicator variables, reliability measures, sample items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent Variable</th>
<th>Indicator Variable</th>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>C. Alpha</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Sample item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>McCroskey, 1992</td>
<td>Present a talk in English to a group of strangers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in English Communication</td>
<td>Communication anxiety</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Yashima, 2002, MacIntyre &amp; Clément, 1996</td>
<td>Talking in small groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Learning Motivation</td>
<td>Perceived communication competence</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>Yashima, 2002, MacIntyre &amp; Charos, 1996</td>
<td>Give a presentation in English to a group of strangers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to learn English</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>Yashima, 2002, Gardner &amp; Lambert, 1972</td>
<td>I believe absolutely that English should be taught at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivational intensity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>Gardner &amp; Lambert, 1972</td>
<td>Compared to my classmates, I think I study English relatively hard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes toward learning English</td>
<td>Intercultural friendship orientation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>Yashima, 2002</td>
<td>It will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude (International Posture)</td>
<td>Interest in international vocation/activities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>Yashima, 2002</td>
<td>I'd rather avoid the kind of work that sends me overseas frequently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intergroup approach-avoidance tendency</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>Yashima, 2002</td>
<td>I would share an apartment with international students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>McCroskey, 1997</td>
<td>I often read and watch news about foreign countries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I inclined to keep in the background on social occasions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. The Model and Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998) and previous studies mentioned in the literature section, the research model proposed in the current study is provided below in figure 1. Each arrow in research model represents a hypothesis.
Several studies indicated a direct relation between attitude toward international posture and WTC (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004). For this reason, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**H1** = Participants’ attitude toward international community positively influences their WTC in English.

Yashima (2002) and Kim (2004) also provided the result showing a relationship between international posture and motivation. Therefore, **H2** is proposed in this study.

**H2** = Participants’ attitude toward international community positively influences their motivation to use and learn English.

WTC research has included motivation to learn a foreign language as one of its significant components (MacIntyre et al., 1998). **H3** was proposed in relation with this fact.

**H3** = Participants’ motivation to use and learn English positively influences their WTC in English.

The fact that personality has an indirect influence on one’s WTC through confidence in English communication was found in some studies (MacIntyre et al., 1998; MacIntyre et al., 1999) which resulted in the proposal of the following hypothesis.

**H4** = Participants’ personality influences their confidence in English communication.

Kim (2004), Yashima et al. (2004), and Yashima (2002) found out a direct relationship between one’s WTC and confidence in English communication. Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed in this study.

**H5** = Participants’ confidence in English communication positively influences their WTC in English.

### 3.3. Analysis

The data were analyzed using PLS-SEM (Partial Least Square- Structural Equation Modeling) (Smart-PLS 2.0 M3). SEM provides not only a simultaneous assessment of the structural component (path model) but also the measurement component (factor model) in one model (Halawi & McCarthy, 2008). PLS is one of the most useful algorithms in researches especially in the case of limited participants (Wong, 2011). As in other SEM approaches, PLS also presents the benefit of testing of complete research model just once. In this study, before proceeding the
analysis, the data were screened and 48 missing data were estimated using ‘expectation maximization algorithm (EM)’. In addition, total scores of the constructs were used in the analysis.

4. Findings

PLS algorithm, which makes use of non-parametric methods, such as bootstrapping and jackknifing, was used to determine the statistical significance of the hypotheses. First, factor loadings of the constructs (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) were investigated. All the t-values and coefficients are provided in table below:

Table 2: The latent variables and their indicator variables, reliability measures, sample items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Latent variables</th>
<th>Indicator variables</th>
<th>Coefficient</th>
<th>t Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward international community</td>
<td>Interest in foreign affairs</td>
<td>0.274</td>
<td>2.752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercultural friendship orientation</td>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>26.392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interest in international vocation-activities</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>13.889</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intergroup approach-avoidance tendency</td>
<td>0.797</td>
<td>31.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in English communication</td>
<td>Communication anxiety</td>
<td>-0.051</td>
<td>0.371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perceived communication competence</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>150.906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Desire to learn English</td>
<td>0.898</td>
<td>70.791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Motivational intensity</td>
<td>0.830</td>
<td>44.758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attitudes toward learning English</td>
<td>0.884</td>
<td>64.042</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the coefficients shown in table 2 are significant at .05 (t>1.96) except for ‘communication anxiety’. As seen, the path from ‘communication anxiety’ to ‘confidence in English communication’ is not statistically significant at .05 level. In this context, ‘communication anxiety’ does not contribute to the construction of ‘confidence in English communication’. Therefore, it is possible to test the structural model relationships with the omission of ‘communication anxiety’ from the construct of ‘confidence in English communication’.

Second, the results of the hypotheses put forward in this study are provided in figure 2 below:

![Figure 2: Hypotheses' results](image)

* Hypothesis number, coefficient, (t-score)
The investigation of the structural model starts with the significance of the hypothesized paths. The t-values need to be significant to support the hypothesized paths (above 1.96 or 2.56 for alpha levels of .05 and .01 respectively) (Halawi & McCarthy, 2008). As seen in figure 2, as a result of the structural model, all hypotheses are accepted. Therefore, participants’ attitude toward international community (H1), their motivation to learn English (H3), and their confidence in English communication (H5) have direct significant positive effects on their WTC in English. Additionally, participants’ attitude toward international community positively influences their motivation to use and learn English as well (H2). Finally, participants’ personality influences their confidence in English communication (H4).

Chin (1998) suggests that path coefficients range between .20 and .30 along with measures that explain %50 or more of the variance in the latent variable or the model. In this model, the explained variance of WTC is not strong (.544), which may be attributed to the fact that other factors are not included in the model. However, according to beta coefficients, the strongest predictor of WTC is ‘confidence in English communication’ (.480). Although the variance explained in motivation to learn English is not strong (.446), the influence of attitude toward international community on motivation to learn English is not weak (.668).

5. Conclusions and Discussion

Students’ confidence in English communication, their attitudes toward international community, and their motivation to learn English were found to be directly related to their WTC in English. Therefore, in the context of this study, the ones who were confident in communication in English and who had positive attitudes toward international community and who had strong motivation to learn English were the ones who were more willing to communicate in English. Students’ personality, which evaluated learners as being introvert or extravert, was found to be indirectly affecting L2 WTC through confidence in English communication.

In the present study, students’ L2 WTC was found to be directly related to their attitude toward international community, their confidence in English communication and their motivation to learn English. However, no significant path was found from motivation to WTC in some studies (Çetinkaya, 2007; Öz et al., 2015) though it was a significant predictor of WTC in this study. In these studies, the influence of motivation on WTC was indirect. On the other hand, the paths from attitude and confidence in speaking English to WTC in Çetinkaya’s study (2007) were similar in the present study as well. Also, communication anxiety was not a significant contributor of confidence in English communication in the present study which was in line with the results of Çetinkaya’s study (2007).

Moreover, the results of this study were congruent with many studies in the L2 WTC literature. One of the findings of this study which showed the influence of confidence in English communication on L2 WTC was supported by the researchers using SEM to investigate predictors of L2 WTC in the literature (Kim, 2004; Jung, 2011; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Nasser, 2014). The path from motivation to learn English to L2 WTC was also in accordance with the findings of Jung (2011) and Nasser (2014). In Jung’s (2011) model, path from attitude from international community to motivation was also consistent with the findings in the present study.

Given that L2 WTC is one of the most important constructs of CLT, the results of this study will be helpful for English teachers focusing on the development of students’ communicative ability, English language program developers by revealing the possible factors affecting one’s WTC in English. As communication is considered as the primary goal of language education (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996) and the significance of WTC in CLT, the results of this study have implications for field of FLL. It is obvious that program developers should value the factors affecting WTC such as students’ motivation, attitude toward international culture, and confidence in English communication in the design of new programs. Additionally, learners with higher levels of L2 WTC would benefit more from language instruction than those with lower levels of L2 WTC (Öz et al., 2015). Therefore, English teachers should make more efforts to improve students’ WTC by taking its affecting factors into consideration.

Although this study contributed to the literature on WTC, it has some limitations as well. First, PLS model does not provide fit indexes such as GFI, CFI or TLI, which inhibits the researcher to find the exact suitability of the model. Second, as the findings suggest, L2 WTC is a complex construct influenced by a vast variety of factors underlying it (Öz et al., 2015). Therefore, due to the complex and context-specific nature of the L2 WTC and small
sample size of the present study, it may not be possible to generalize the results to other contexts. Finally, this study is limited with the constructs included in the model. Therefore, future researchers might design more complex and inclusive L2 WTC models including other constructs. Researchers might also have larger samples from different ages or different cultures as well.

References