Willingness to Communicate Research in Second-Language Learning : From Seed to Development

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journal or publication title	Journal of Inquiry and Research
volume	116
page range	1-16
year	2022-09
URL	http://doi.org/10.18956/00008043

関西外国語大学 研究論集 第116号（2022年 9 月）
Journal of Inquiry and Research, No.116 (September 2022)

Willingness to Communicate Research in Second-Language Learning: From Seed to Development

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Abstract

Over the past three decades, applying L1 WTC studies, second language acquisition (SLA) research has attempted to probe into why some L2 learners are willing to speak L2 while others are not, and established the L2 WTC arena. Previous influential L2 WTC research has viewed WTC as personality-based and enduring, situational, or dynamic, and explored the reasons behind the willingness or unwillingness to communicate in an L2 in a wide variety of language learning contexts. In this paper, reviewing such a historical overview of WTC research from the early sprouting stage to development, I attempt to discuss the current trends toward L2 WTC research and some research gaps that need to be filled by future research that will contribute practical pedagogical implications to L2 instruction.

Keywords: L2 WTC (Willingness to Communicate), situational WTC

1. Introduction

Some language learners seek second language (L2) communication while others avoid it (MacIntyre et al., 1998). "It is not uncommon to find people who tend to avoid entering L2 communication situations even if they possess a high level of communicative competence" (Dörnyei, 2014, p. 207). This is true in any L2 use situations including language classrooms. To address this enigma, considerable amounts of research has assimilated through the concept called Willingness to Communicate in an L2 (L2 WTC). In this paper, reviewing a historical overview of L2 WTC research from the early sprouting stage to development, I attempt to identify the current trends toward L2 WTC research and some research gaps that need to be filled by future research.

2. Historical Overview of Research on Willingness to Communicate in an L2

2.1 Emergence of L1 WTC research

WTC research emerged from first language (L1) communication studies conducted in Canada. McCroskey (1970, 1977) first attempted to explore why individuals initiate or avoid communication in an L1. Around the same time, Burgoon (1976) attempted to explain why some people avoid communication and described the construct "unwillingness to communicate" as an individual predisposition to naturally avoid L1 communication. Using quantitative methods, researchers (i.e., McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1982) explored the variables that relate to L1 WTC, namely communication apprehension, perceived communicative competence, introversion versus extroversion, and self-esteem. In these studies, WTC was viewed as an individual personality trait unique to each person, with McCroskey and Baer (1985) defining it as the intention to initiate communication given the opportunity when free to choose to do so.

2.2 Emergence of L2 WTC Research

To explore why some learners are more willing to talk in an L2 than others, researchers in the second language acquisition (SLA) field have attempted to apply the L1 WTC concept and research methods to L2 contexts. In the early days, following previous L1 WTC research approaches (McCroskey, 1970, 1977, 1992), most L2 WTC studies regarded L2 WTC as a person's stable personality trait demonstrated across a variety of situations and thus focused on various factors affecting trait-like L2 WTC (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2001; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre & Clément, 1996; Yashima, 2002).

During this early period, research found that several individual differences in communication dispositions (e.g., anxiety in relation to the L2) significantly influence learners' choice to initiate communication in the L2, thus placing L2 WTC as part of L2 learning outcomes. In particular, MacIntyre and associates found that perceived communicative competence and anxiety influence the choice to initiate (or resist) communication in the L2 (MacIntyre & Clément, 1996; Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2001). For example, Baker and MacIntyre (2000) and MacIntyre et al. (2001) studied Canadian youth living in the unilingual Anglophone community and learning L2 in French immersion programs. They found that perceived communicative competence and anxiety had the greatest impact on their L2 WTC. Perceived communicative competence refers to how learners perceive

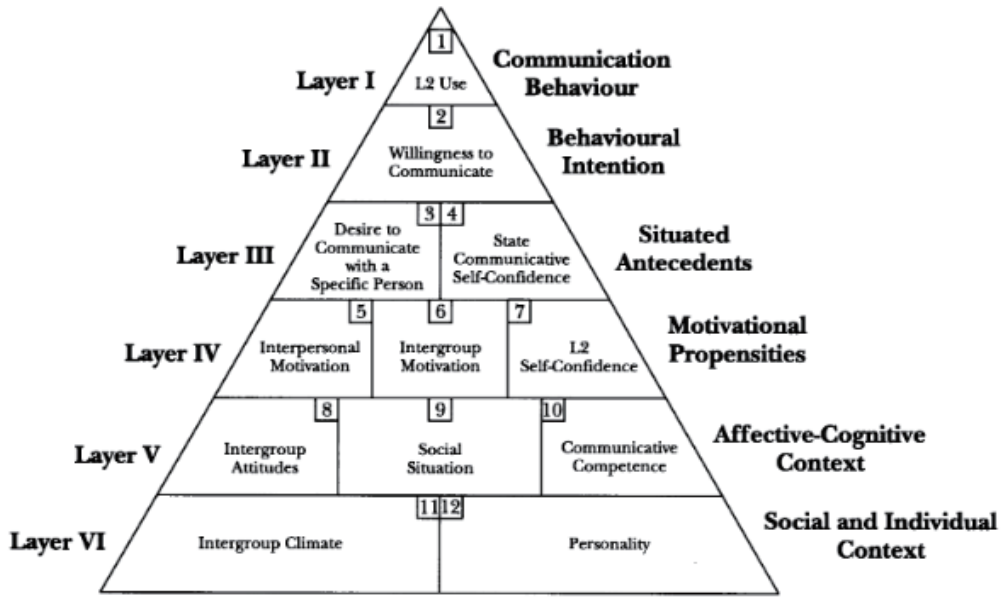
their own ability to communicate effectively in the L2 in a given situation, which is likely to determine L2 WTC, as opposed to learners' actual communicative competence (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). For example, one learner who is not measurably competent may feel fully competent while another with high proficiency in the L2 may avoid using the L2 altogether. Thus, it has been argued (e.g., Baker & MacIntyre., 2000; Dörnyei, 2009) that it is not the learner's actual competence but rather how they perceive their own communicative ability that determines L2 WTC. Moreover, it was found that other individual-level variables, such as personal agreeableness and extroversion (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), also significantly predict L2 WTC.

2.3 WTC Model

MacIntyre et al. (1998) defined L2 WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a specific time with a specific person or persons using an L2" (p. 547) when free to do so. Applying the results of previous empirical studies and the L1 WTC model to English as a second language (ESL) context, they proposed a schematic, multilayered pyramid model of WTC (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC



Note. Adopted from "Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in an L2: A situated model of confidence and affiliation," by P. D., MacIntyre et al., (1998), *The Modern Language Journal, 82*(4), 545–562. doi:10.2307/330224.

This model suggests that L2 WTC needs to be conceptualized as a combination of both situational and enduring influences, each of which represents distinct properties. Enduring influences (e.g., intergroup relations, learner personality) are seen as stable, long-term qualities of the environment or learner that would apply to almost any situation. In contrast, situational influences (e.g., on-the-spot desire to talk with a specific person, knowledge of the topic) are viewed as more transient and dependent on the specific communication context at a given time.

In the model representing both enduring and situational influences that lead to communication behavior in the L2 (MacIntyre et al., 1998), enduring factors (e.g., personality) are shown in Layers Ⅳ, Ⅴ, and Ⅵ at the base while Layer Ⅲ presents more immediate and situational factors (e.g., desire to communicate with a specific person) that may change at each moment.

The lower layers (i.e., Layers Ⅳ, Ⅴ, Ⅵ) include both social factors (i.e., intergroup climate and attitudes, social situation, and interpersonal and intergroup motivation) and individual factors (e.g., personality, perceived communicative competence, and L2 self-confidence). Regarding social factors, L2 learning settings present in North America are reflected since the model's representation was targeted at L2 users living and learning an L2 in that context. Intergroup climate is the political, economic, and diplomatic relationship between the L2 user's own culture and the culture of the target language community member the person communicates with in the L2. Intergroup attitude consists of the L2 user's stance toward the target language community. Intergroup motivation is the intensity of motivation to communicate with the target language community, while interpersonal motivation is the intensity of desire to communicate with specific persons in the L2. Finally, social situation refers to different social circumstances (e.g., a formal dinner party, chatting with a friend) where registers are determined by context, purpose, and audience.

With regard to individual factors, L2 self-confidence, together with two social factors (interpersonal motivation and intergroup motivation), leads to two immediate precursors of L2 WTC: the desire to communicate with a specific person, and state communicative confidence, both of which are hypothesized to immediately and directly influence L2 WTC. For example, if a person has a high desire to communicate with a friend and high situational communicative confidence created by stable L2 self-confidence, this is likely to lead to high willingness to communicate with this friend (i.e., Layer Ⅱ) and result in L2 use (i.e., Layer Ⅰ).

In short, MacIntyre et al. (1998) showed that based on enduring individual variables

shown in the bottom layers, L2 users undergo immediate situational influences that determine L2 WTC, the final step before initiating speaking to someone in an L2.

2.4 Spread of L2 WTC Research across Different Contexts

More recently, L2 WTC research has expanded beyond North America into other regions of the world, including Japan (Yashima, 2002; Yashima, et al., 2004) and China (e.g., Peng & Woodrow, 2010), especially in settings where people place great importance on L2 education. The aforementioned WTC model thus led to three important developments in subsequent studies. One was research validating some of the variables shown in the WTC model. Another consisted of exploring other variables in a variety of cultural contexts. A third was a new trend in L2 WTC studies that explored the situational WTC shown in the top layer of the WTC model. In this section, the first two are presented in turn. Following this, the development of situational WTC research is presented in the next section.

First, research validating some of the variables shown in the WTC model is introduced. Stimulated by the WTC model, quantitative (i.e., large-scale questionnaire-based) L2 WTC studies conducted in various cultural contexts, including Japan, have focused on more enduring variables that might determine L2 learners' WTC (Baker & MacIntyre., 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2001; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004; Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008).

Consistent with previous studies (e.g., MacIntyre & Clément, 1996), research (e.g., Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 2001) confirmed two key variables—perceived communication competence in the L2, and L2 anxiety—as primary determinants of L2 learners' WTC. For example, Baker and MacIntyre (2000) examined differences between immersion and non-immersion learners of L2 French in Canada, with the former showing lower L2 anxiety, greater perceived competence, higher L2 WTC, and more frequent communication in the L2. They also found that L2 anxiety was the strongest predictor of L2 WTC in immersion students, while perceived communicative competence was strongest in non-immersion students, whose L2 use opportunities were limited to the classroom. Meanwhile, studies conducted in the Japanese EFL context by Yashima (2002) and Yashima et al. (2004) found that perceived communicative competence was a stronger predictor than L2 anxiety. Taken together, these studies suggest that two variables have the strongest influence on L2 WTC: perceived communicative competence, and L2 anxiety; however, degrees of such influences may differ depending on the learning context.

Secondly, some studies have explored new variables other than those shown in the

WTC pyramid model (see Figure 1). For example, Yashima (2002) and Yashima et al. (2004) conducted cutting-edge L2 WTC research in the EFL context in Japan. They examined what L2 communication variables affect L2 WTC in that context and confirmed several such variables revealed by past studies. In addition, in place of Gardner's notion of integrative motivation (i.e., the desire to assimilate into the target language social community: Gardner, 1985; Gardner & Lambert, 1972), Yashima (2002) proposed a new construct, namely international posture, which was hypothesized to capture learners' general attitude toward the international community and toward L2 learning in relation to it, and found that this construct affects L2 WTC in EFL learners who aim to use the L2 in diverse global contexts for a variety of reasons rather than in the target language community itself.

In addition, a number of other variables have been found to affect L2 WTC. These factors include the motivation to learn an L2 and attitudes toward L2 learning generally (MacIntyre et al., 2001). Further, classroom-related factors, including student cohesiveness (i.e., how united learners feel their group members are), task orientation (i.e., task-based course design and aims) (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), and attitudes toward group activities (Fushino, 2010) were also found to influence L2 WTC.

More recently, through a comprehensive meta-analysis concerning the effect sizes of the previous L2 WTC studies, Shirvan et al. (2019) revealed that three key variables—perceived communicative competence, L2 anxiety, and L2 motivation—were found to be correlated with L2 WTC. These studies suggest that improving L2 WTC in the EFL classroom may depend on fostering perceived communicative competence and motivation in the classroom itself.

In sum, the previous WTC studies suggest that what influences WTC varies across learning contexts and that WTC might change depending on the learning environment (e.g., groups and tasks).

2.5 Research on Situational WTC

In recent years, L2 WTC research has expanded its scope of investigation and become more directly linked to language learning in the classroom. One such trend is the move toward conducting research in situational WTC. MacIntyre et al. (1998) define situational WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a specific time with a specific person or persons using an L2" (p. 547) when free to do so. While L2 WTC was viewed as a stable personality disposition in previous research, new research desired to investigate not a stable but more dynamic condition of L2 WTC. Thus, situational WTC was seen as a psychological

condition allowing us to make a free choice to initiate communication in an L2 that might change moment-to-moment depending on the type of occasions, with whom, and with how many interlocutors we use the L2.

Recent L2 WTC research (e.g., Cao 2014; Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Yashima et al., 2018) has increasingly investigated how situational WTC fluctuates and what factors affect change in L2 learners' situational WTC in ESL/EFL learning contexts. Thus, these studies took a step toward what MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) intended to demonstrate in their WTC model.

2.5.1 Previous Research on Situational WTC

Table 1 summarizes major studies on situational WTC showing research methods, contexts, and findings. As shown in Table 1, researchers (e.g., Cao, 2014; Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Pawlak et al., 2016; Peng, 2012; Yashima et al., 2018) have attempted to capture factors that influence situational WTC in the language classroom as well as in other contexts such as a laboratory. Situational WTC is commonly operationalized as either observed frequency of communication (e.g., keeping track of WTC behaviors, Cao, 2014; counting the amount of self-initiated turns, Yashima et al., 2018) or self-reported assessment of moment-to-moment situational WTC level during speech (e.g., Pawlak et al., 2016) or after speech by watching the video-taped performance (e.g., MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). The studies in Table 1 investigated situational WTC by combining qualitative data that include interviews, stimulated recalls, open-ended questionnaires, and observations to capture some of the individual, contextual, and sociocultural factors that affect fluctuation patterns in situational WTC during a conversation in pairs or groups as well as in monologues (e.g., presentation tasks) in the language classroom.

For example, in her interview study with Korean ESL learners, Kang (2005) found that in conversations with native speakers of English, learners experienced three psychological conditions: security, excitement, and responsibility. Security is a feeling of being free of fear in L2 communication; excitement is "a feeling of elation about the act of talking" (p. 284), while responsibility is how learners themselves choose to engage in conversation (e.g., introducing a topic). These feelings rise or wane depending on surrounding situational variables such as topic (e.g., interesting or not), interlocutor(s) (e.g., familiar or not), and conversational context (e.g., composition of participant group), eventually leading to changes in situational WTC.

Table 1

Past Major Studies on Situational WTC

Researchers	Major method	WTC operationalization	Study contexts & participants	Major findings
Kang (2005)	Qualitative analyses of results of stimulated recalls	Self-assessment during interviews	Four adult Korean ESL students in conversation with native speakers	Three psychological conditions (responsibility, security and excitement) influenced by changes in surroundings influenced situational WTC
Cao & Philp (2006)	Qualitative analyses of results of stimulated recall interview and journals	Observed frequency of communication through WTC behavior categorization scheme	Adult Asian and European learners in ESL classrooms	Situational WTC resulted from interdependence of individual factors (e.g., self-confidence), linguistic factors (i.e., proficiency), and environmental factors (e.g., topic)
de Saint Legér & Storch (2009)	Quantitative analyses of questionnaires and qualitative analyses of open-ended questions	Self-assessment on questionnaire type-scale	32 French learners in EFL classroom	Improvement in perceived communicative confidence led to higher situational WTC
MacIntyre & Legatto (2011)	Qualitative analyses of results of stimulated recall interviews	Self-rating on a scale shown on computer while watching learners' own speech performance	Six college L2 French students tested in laboratory	Less familiar topics lowered situational WTC due to difficulty finding appropriate lexis
Peng (2012)	Qualitative analyses of results of semi-structured interviews, students' journals, and observations	Assessing WTC level from students' interview results	Four Chinese university students in EFL classroom	Situational WTC was influenced by a range of individual, environmental, and linguistic factors
Zhong (2013)	Qualitative analyses of results of semi-structured interviews, logs, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews	Observed frequency of communication	Five Chinese college students in ESL classroom	Situational WTC heightened in student-centered dyad communication rather than teacher-led discussion due to joint effect of sociocultural and individual factors
Cao (2014)	Qualitative analyses of results of stimulated recall interviews, observations, and reflective journals	Observed frequency of communication through WTC behavior categorization scheme	Six Chinese ESL students in bridge program to undergraduate program	Situational WTC level was influenced by interdependence of individual, environmental, and linguistic factors
Eddy-U (2015)	Qualitative analyses of results of semi-structured interviews to focus groups	Categorizing motivating and demotivating reasons for task participation	25 Chinese university students in EFL group tasks	Situational WTC was influenced by combination of social, task-related, and individual factors
Pawlak et al. (2016)	Qualitative analyses of results of closed and open-ended questionnaires	Self-rating on grid-like scales every five minutes during conversation	60 Polish English major students in EFL classroom	Situational WTC fluctuated due to a range of contextual and individual factors. In particular, dyad/small group conversations with familiar interlocutors on personal topics facilitated WTC.
Yashima et al. (2018)	Qualitative analyses of stimulated recall interviews	Observed frequency of communication (self-selected turns)	Mainly three Japanese university students in EFL classrooms	Situational WTC fluctuated depending on how learners saw their own L2 performance relative to group-level communication behaviors

As shown in Table 1, Cao and Philp (2006) developed a behavior categorization scheme that indicates several typical WTC behaviors (e.g., a student volunteers a comment.) in three different interactional contexts in classrooms (i.e., pair-work, group work, and whole class) and assessed situational WTC in Asian and European adult learners in ESL classrooms. Cao and Philp then attempted to explore reasons behind low or high situational WTC through qualitative analyses of results of stimulated recall interview and journals. The results show that situational WTC in the ESL learners varies across conversational contextual factors such as the number of participants (e.g., pair work, group work, or whole class), familiarity with interlocutors, and interlocutors' contribution to the conversation. In addition, they found that situational WTC was affected by learners' affective factors (e.g., perceived communicative competence, or how learners perceive their oral abilities).

Subsequent studies (e.g., de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Eddy-U, 2015) also found that perceived communicative competence affects fluctuations in situational WTC. For example, de Saint Léger & Storch (2009) found that over time, students were able to assess improvement in their own language use in terms of fluency and vocabulary and perceived communicative competence, which resulted in higher willingness to contribute to speaking activities.

Through a new research trend called Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST), MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) attempted to capture moment-to-moment WTC fluctuation during an interview task by using the "ideodynamic method," in which participants self-rated their WTC while watching their own speech performance on-screen and commented in retrospect on how and why their WTC went up or down. It was found among others that if learners could not think of vocabulary related to unfamiliar topics, this reduced their situational WTC. This suggests that cognitive demands or situational constraints beyond the learner's language ability reduce situational WTC even during a short oral activity.

In addition to individual psychological and contextual factors, Zhong (2013) suggests that the joint effect of classroom sociocultural and individual factors affects changes in situational WTC. Zhong investigated the situational WTC of Chinese college-level ESL students using various instruments for triangulation (semi-structured in-depth interviews, learning logs, classroom observations, and stimulated recall interviews). The study revealed that learners showed higher L2 WTC in student-centered dyad communication than in larger groups or teacher-led class discussions. The research related these results to sociocultural factors, including fear of losing face and avoidance of being thought of as flaunting their skills as well

as individual learner factors such as concern for accuracy and perceived self-efficacy.

More recently, Yashima et al. (2018) attempted to capture both trait-like L2 WTC and situational WTC in 21 university students in an L2 English classroom for the purpose of fully understanding why L2 learners choose (or avoid) communication at given moments. Qualitative data based on observations, student self-reflections, and interviews and quantitative data reflecting trait-like L2 anxiety and trait-like and situational WTC were collected. Situational WTC was operationalized as the number of self-selected turns in class discussions while trait-like L2 WTC was measured using a traditional questionnaire. The study focused on only three distinct participants for in-depth analyses. The results revealed that the interplay of individual characteristics (e.g., personality and proficiency) and contextual influences such as other students' reactions to learner's talk and group-level talk-silence patterns tended to determine whether learners chose or avoided communication.

To sum up, as shown in Table 1, qualitative and mixed-methods research increasingly illuminates the dynamics of L2 WTC in classrooms as being influenced by individual (learner-internal) and contextual (learner-external) factors as well as sociocultural factors. In particular, contextual factors such as group size (Kang, 2005; Cao & Philp, 2006; Zhong, 2013), conversational topic (Kang, 2005; Cao & Philp, 2006; Zarrinabadi et al., 2014), task familiarity (Eddy-U, 2015), interlocutors' proficiency level and familiarity (Kang, 2005; de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Zarrinabadi et al., 2014), and classroom sociocultural factors either reinforce or restrain two situational factors: the desire to communicate with a specific person, and communicative self-confidence, both of which, the WTC model hypothesizes, immediately affect L2 WTC.

2.5.2 Pedagogical Interventions Reinforcing Situational WTC

Recently, a handful of pedagogical intervention studies have been undertaken with the purpose of enhancing learners' situational WTC in pedagogical contexts (e.g., Munezane, 2015; Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). For example, Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide (2008) conducted a longitudinal study in a high school context and compared TOEFL scores, international posture, L2 WTC, and frequency of communication in three groups: a study-abroad group, a group with content-based instruction (CBI) delivered at home, and a control group (i.e., regular high school English classes with some CBI instruction). The CBI-focused instruction group learned about global issues in English while aiming to present their own opinions in a model United Nations. The results revealed that students who experienced more L2 use

opportunities (through study-abroad and CBI-focused instruction aiming at an imagined international community of practice) compared to the control group showed greater gains in frequency of communication in the L2, which reflects L2 WTC.

Dörnyei (2009) proposed a new model, namely the Motivational Self System, to explain how L2 learners' motivation is generated in diverse global contexts through two types of future self-visions. One is the Ideal L2 self, or the possible future self-image one desires to be as an L2 communicator. If one has a strong vision of one's Ideal L2 self, one is likely to try hard to reduce any discrepancy between current self and ideal L2 self, which will result in powerful motivation to learn. The other is Ought-to L2 self, which is more like the instrumental motivation one feels toward various duties, obligations, or responsibilities so as to avoid negative outcomes (e.g., low test scores).

Based on the L2 Motivational Self System, Munezane (2015) attempted to encourage L2 motivation and L2 WTC by triggering the learners' ideal L2 selves. She compared three university-level EFL learner groups—one with visualization treatment (i.e., instructing students to visualize themselves in a future career as specialists who need to solve global problems using the L2), another with visualization plus goal-setting treatment (i.e., instructing students to articulate their speaking goals in each class), and a control group. It was found that the visualization plus goal-setting condition led to significantly greater improvement in L2 WTC compared to the other two conditions. As Dörnyei (2009) proposes, this study suggests that fostering ideal L2 self-images through visualizing learners' attributes (e.g., learning goals) may be a powerful motive for using the L2.

2.6 Previous Research on L2 WTC in Japan

In this section, a brief summary of previous studies on L2 WTC in Japan is introduced. As shown in previous pages, Yashima (2002), Yashima et al. (2004), and Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, (2008) conducted pioneering L2 WTC studies in EFL contexts in Japan including high school and university. They not only reaffirmed the factors affecting L2 WTC already validated in the previous studies but also established a new construct—international posture. International posture refers to a broad attitude towards the international community specific to Japanese EFL learners mainly learning L2 in their own countries. They found that international posture affects L2 WTC while interacting with L2 motivation and perceived communicative competence.

Also in Japan, Fushino (2010) examined L2 WTC of college EFL students, especially

in the context of group discussions. She found that the students' L2 WTC was largely influenced by perceived communicative competence in the L2 whose level shifted depending on their group attitudes. Favorable group attitudes helped students increase their perceived communicative competence, leading to higher L2 WTC. In an L2 group interaction, a harmonious sociocultural environment in which learners open up to interlocutors may be key to fostering learners' perceived communicative competence, leading to higher L2 WTC.

Further, Freiermuth and Huang (2012) investigated the effect of synchronous online chat task between Taiwanese and Japanese EFL college students on L2 WTC and task-related motivation. They revealed that participation in the online chat with learners of a different culture facilitated Japanese learners' joy of using English, namely higher L2 WTC, while reducing the pressure they often feel in face-to-face L2 interactions. This study suggests that enjoyment of language use for real intercultural contact combined with lower L2 anxiety in the interactional environment encourages L2 WTC.

2.7 Research Gaps and Future Research Directions

As shown previously, L2 researchers have attempted to explain reasons behind learners' willingness and unwillingness to communicate in an L2 across different cultural contexts. However, considering previous L2 WTC research coupled with language education settings in Japan led me to the following research gaps to be filled.

Firstly, pedagogical intervention studies remain limited in number. Instead, most research aims at either testing the validity of the WTC model or at identifying factors influencing L2 WTC in a specific context. Thus, additional interventional studies, which have the pedagogical aim of enhancing L2 WTC, are therefore needed. To do so, it is necessary to investigate whether the level of learners' situational WTC improves or not in L2 learning context, making a comparison between a treatment group and a control group in L2 instruction.

Secondly, regarding the operationalization of situational WTC, there is room for improvement. As shown previously, most L2 WTC research in the past operationalized situational WTC as either observed frequency of communication or self-assessment of frequency of communication. However, these methods might not reliably measure the moment-to-moment dynamic WTC. Future research should devise a more promising objective measurement method. One possible future course for situational WTC research is to capture dynamic moment-to-moment state WTC through real-time assessment such

as computer-based idiodynamic methods (see MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). In this approach, while watching their own L2 performance on computer, participants self-rate their WTC level at a rate of approximately one per second using specially designed software. This will provide a continuous graph of precise changes in situational WTC.

Finally, there has been a high concentration of L2 WTC-related research on university contexts or adult language programs and a corresponding lack of research on other educational stages, especially early language learning such as junior high school, even though Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) has promoted L2 instructions at all educational stages from early to tertiary. Previous research (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004; Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008; Yashima et al., 2018) validated previously observed individual and contextual variables affecting L2 WTC in high school and college contexts. Thus research needs to explore whether these variables also apply to younger learners and whether any other variables affect these learners' L2 WTC. An extended study targeting a wide variety of EFL learners in different contexts will allow for deeper insights into the WTC agenda in Japan. For example, elementary school EFL context or another junior high school context in different regions will need to be investigated.

3. Conclusion

In a relatively short history, applying L1 WTC studies, L2 WTC research, probing into L2 learners' speaking psychology, has developed and widely spread around the world. L2 researchers have attempted to explain the reasons behind L2 learners' willingness or unwillingness to communicate in an L2 in a wide variety of L2 learning contexts including ESL/EFL around the globe and Japanese EFL contexts. Previous L2 WTC research has explored aspects of WTC viewed as personality-based and enduring, situational, or dynamic. Yet, further research remains to be done. One vital future research should address how silent or less willing L2 learners can develop their L2 WTC in the language classroom through classroom-based interventional studies.

Furthermore, while a tremendous amount of L2 WTC research has now assimilated, given the relatively higher concentration of L2 WTC research specifically in tertiary level ESL/EFL contexts, the research focus needs to be directed to wider age groups, particularly children or early teenagers who have just started learning L2. Given that language education is one sequence in several learning stages in one's life from elementary to tertiary level,

and, as Baker and MacIntyre (2000) argue, L2 communication experience at the early stages of language learning is likely to shape subsequent future L2 WTC, how the early stages of language learning shape L2 WTC needs to be investigated. Such research will certainly contribute practical pedagogical implications to language instruction.

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