

**Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in L2: A review on the Fundamental Role of WTC as an Affective Construct and Its Interrelationship with Diverse Antecedents in L2 Learning Process\***

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**Abstract**

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Willingness to communicate (WTC) has recently gained considerable attention in second language acquisition (SLA). Given that in all L2 acquisition theories it is essential for learners to learn and use the target language more efficiently, it is a notable matter why some learners have less developed oral or communicative skills than the others, even seemingly in equal learning conditions. The same applies to learners' L2 WTC levels, which vary from time to time and in different situations while learning a L2. As MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) suggest, a considerable majority of L2 learners have relatively varying levels of WTC from each other in an EFL classroom setting. Considering this, it is highly significant to search into diverse factors or antecedents underlying learners' WTC in order to better understand the nature of WTC and its relationship with these factors in L2 communication process. Therefore, our aim in this paper is to provide an inclusive review of previous studies conducted in various EFL contexts by further examining a number of potential affective, contextual or situational, and individual difference factors that can influence L2 learners' WTC as well as the relationship of these factors with and effects of them on WTC.

**Keywords:** Willingness to communicate, trait versus state WTC, predictors of WTC

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## **Introduction**

In recent years, English has become the primary language of the world (Selvi, 2021). Accordingly, there has been a considerable increase in understanding the significant role that communication and interaction play in almost all areas of social life including academic and educational settings. As a consequence of this, there has been an ever-increasing concern in communicative language teaching (CLT) and its prominent role in second language teaching and learning. Since the emergence of CLT in 1970s, one of the primary tenets of which is to highlight the importance of interaction as both a means and ultimate goal of learning a language, an intensive use of communication has culminated in another congruent concept ‘interaction’, which is defined by Hall (2010) as “mutual or reciprocal action or influence” (p. 5). Canale and Swain (1980) argue that since interaction is an indispensable tenet in second language learning, we need to build a communicatively-sensitive classroom environment in which language learners can interact with each other and so develop their communicative skills efficiently. They further highlight the significance of meaningful interaction to be promoted through in-class or out-of-class activities and tasks to maintain successful communication, which is indeed the ultimate goal for all stakeholders in second language learning process. However, it is an indisputable fact that there are also some minor or major factors that can influence the effective use of the target language as well as learners’ willingness to communicate (WTC) in the whole process. Given the considerable number of studies previously conducted in different contexts, there has been an ongoing debate among researchers with respect to the latent nature of L2 WTC and its relationship with diverse factors or underlying predictors. In this sense, the focus of such discussions has often been twofold. On one hand, with special reference to communication in L1, a majority of researchers have argued that WTC in L2 needs to be considered as a fixed personality trait that is mostly assumed to be stable across various situations or settings, as in L1 communication. On the other hand, a considerable majority of researchers have clearly opposed this assumption by suggesting that it does not make any sense to consider WTC only as a trait-like variable in L2 communication. That is particularly because, as further suggested by them, it has a state-like nature and the use of a L2 introduces a potential for significant contextual as well as individual differences regarding numerous unpredictable variations in learners’

communication behaviors, competence, and intergroup relations (MacIntyre et al., 1998). To this end, the purpose of this paper is to provide a review of L2 WTC, its latent nature, and its relationship with some other contextual, affective, and linguistic factors in order to expand the framework for a more widespread use in research studies considering the ongoing lack of studies in this research area (Peker, Eren & Torlak, 2020).

### **Willingness to Communicate in Second and Foreign Language**

In the early 1990s, the development of research in L1 WTC-related studies drew researchers' attention to L2 WTC studies, with a particular focus on the variables that influence L2 WTC and the distinction between L1 and L2 WTC. It is suggested by McIntyre et al. (1998) that one of the most significant differences that distinguish L1 from L2 is that of discourse language. Due to this variation, it is quite likely that communication in L2 tends to differ a lot from communication in L1 in a communication setting. Another thing that differentiates L2 WTC from L1 WTC lies in the fact that L2 WTC might have more antecedents than L1 WTC. For instance, L2 communicative competence in most of people might vary from 0% to 100%, while this is usually above a standard level in L1 communication, which is generally more than 0% (Uyanık, 2018). Since there are some other social, cultural, and political factors included in the context of L2 use, WTC in L1 may not principally lead to the WTC in L2 (MacIntyre, 1996).

Based on this major argument, McCroskey and Richmond (1991) indicated that increased frequency and amount of communication predict high willingness by generating a variety of positive outcomes in return, while decreased frequency and amount of communication predict low willingness in communication with various negative outcomes in turn. MacIntyre et al. (1998) investigated willingness to communicate (WTC) in second language by briefly defining it as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" (p. 543). From this point of view, they argued that WTC should not be necessarily limited to a trait-like variable as the use of an L2 calls for contextual or situational differences as well as a wide range of changes considering individuals' competence and inter-group relations (Şener, 2014). MacIntyre et al. (2003) described L2 WTC as "an underlying continuum representing the predisposition toward or away from communicating given the choice" (p. 540). They laid

emphasis on the situational or unstable feature of L2 WTC. They further conceptualized L2 WTC by developing a theoretical model which subsumes the notion that a number of influential factors such as motivational dispositions, social and individual contexts, behavioral propensities, and affective-cognitive contexts are correlated in affecting L2 communication and L2 WTC.

The first attempt to adapt the WTC model to L2 could be made with MacIntyre and Charos' (1996) research. The two sources which they adapted their structural model from were primarily MacIntyre's (1994) model of L1 WTC and Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model of second language learning. With this path model, what they aimed was to investigate how efficient this model would be in explaining the relations between language learning and communication models, and also to find out to what extent individuals use the second language in communication. They further integrated both personality traits and sociolinguistic context into this new model in order to examine how they influence individuals' L2 WTC (See Figure 1).

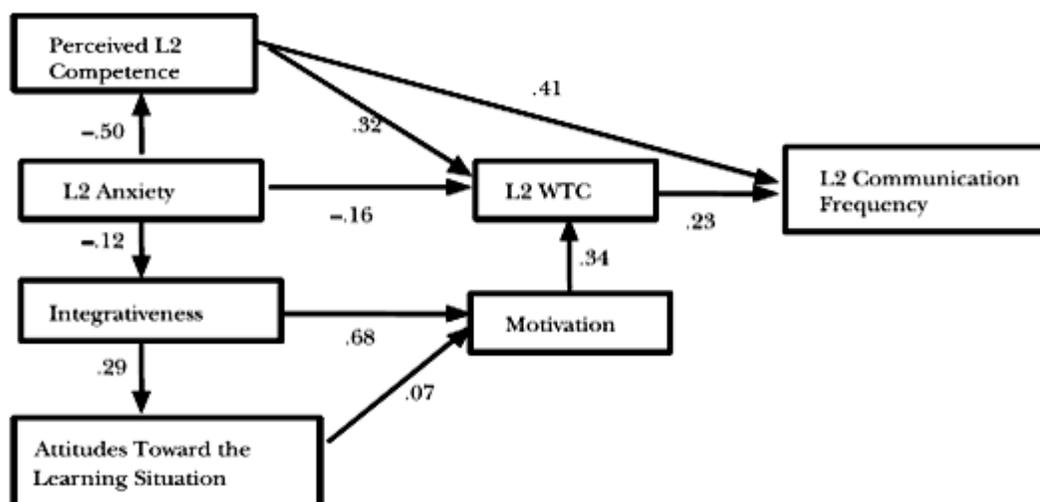


Figure 1. MacIntyre and Charos's (1996) model of L2 WTC

They employed this new hybrid model in their study to examine how often learners use the second language in their daily communication. The study was carried out with the participation of 92 Anglophone students whose native language was English and who took an elementary-level French speaking course in Canada. Through this study, it was also aimed to find out the relations between such variables as motivation, integrativeness, perceived L2 competence, communication apprehension, attitudes toward the learning situation, and their influence on the frequency of L2 communication. The results of the study indicated some salient findings. It was

found that there is a positive correlation between the frequency of communication, motivation, L2 SPCC, context, and L2 WTC. The participants with higher motivation were reported to use the L2 in communication more frequently. Among the variables examined in the study, self-perceived communicative competence was found to be the most influential variable on the frequency of communication in L2. Given the L2 WTC, both communication apprehension and perceived competence had a direct influence on it, which was a striking result of this path model. Further, there was a positive relationship between context and WTC, which indicates that students are likely to feel more willing and so initiate communication with others when they are provided with more opportunity to interact in L2 (Dörnyei, 1994). Hence, increased opportunities to use L2, a lower level of speaking anxiety, and perceived communication competence were considered as factors resulting in more WTC in a L2 communication context.

However, the results indicated that the correlation between motivation and WTC was not significant, which means that motivation was not an effective predictor of L2 WTC in this study. As a personality trait, agreeableness was reported to influence WTC as well. This finding shows that individuals who are adaptive in communication with the members of the L2 group have a more amenable character than the others who are not. Similar to the findings of the aforementioned L1 WTC studies, it was reported that communication apprehension hinders individuals from both disposing their SPCC and engaging in communication accordingly (as cited in Akdemir, 2016). Regarding both the results of this study and utility of their structural model, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) argued that this model could also be used responsively in L2 context to investigate the factors affecting communication in the second language.

In 2002, Hashimoto adapted some parts of the MacIntyre and Charos's (1996) model into the Japanese context in order to further the WTC studies in Japan. The researcher conducted a study to examine to what extent such affective antecedents as motivation and WTC would predict the L2 communication frequency of ESL Japanese students. The researcher grounded his regenerated path model on the socio-educational model and WTC model to be able to conceptualise the findings of his study. The data analysis revealed a number of remarkable results. Contrary to the findings in some of the studies mentioned previously, it was seen that motivation and WTC influence how frequently the students use English in their classroom

communications (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004). In addition, while perceived competence had a direct impact on WTC by contributing to more frequency of L2 use in classes, L2 speaking anxiety had a negative correlation with WTC and perceived competence. Considering the results for L2 speaking anxiety and perceived competence as two variables underlying WTC, it is clear that there is a similarity between the results of Hashimoto's (2002) study and MacIntyre and Charos's (1996) study.

After reconceptualizing WTC according to L2 context, MacIntyre et al. (1998) suggested that there is no sense in limiting WTC to simply a trait-like variable. This is indeed a significant argument since the use of an L2 is liable to have some contextual differences based on unpredictable fluctuations in individuals' L2 perceived competence and inter-group relations (as cited in Şener, 2016, p. 56). Given the fact that L2 use has such a latent nature, the researchers postulated that WTC should not be regarded as a fixed variable, but in fact as a situational variable. In line with this, they developed a theoretical model in an attempt to conceptualize WTC in L2 context too. This redeveloped WTC model consists of twelve constructs as well as six categories as the layers of the model. Figure 2 displayed below shows the six major categories or layers of this model. These layers lined up from top to bottom are as follows: communication behavior (I), behavioral intention (II), situated antecedents (III), motivational propensities (IV), affective cognitive context (V), and social and individual context (VI).

In this model, factors influencing WTC are divided into two groups: enduring influences, which are the first three layers from the top, and situational influences, which are the last three layers from the bottom. The top layers (I, II, III) of the pyramid are assumed to have an immediate influence on WTC, while the bottom layers (IV, V, VI) specify relatively stable and enduring influences on WTC. They postulate that the enduring influences (e.g., intergroup relations, learner responsibility, and etc.) show long-term properties of the environment or person that would apply to almost any situation. They see situational influences (e.g., desire to speak to a specific person, knowledge of the topic, etc.) as more transient and dependent on specific contexts in which a person functions at a given time (p. 546). In this pyramid figure model of L2 WTC, MacIntyre et al. (1998) placed WTC in the Layer II and identified it as a behavioral intention, the final step before using L2. They explain WTC and some cognitive affective

variables interacting with other social factors. The cognitive affective variables displayed in the model are attitudes, motivation, personality, L2 competence, and self-confidence.

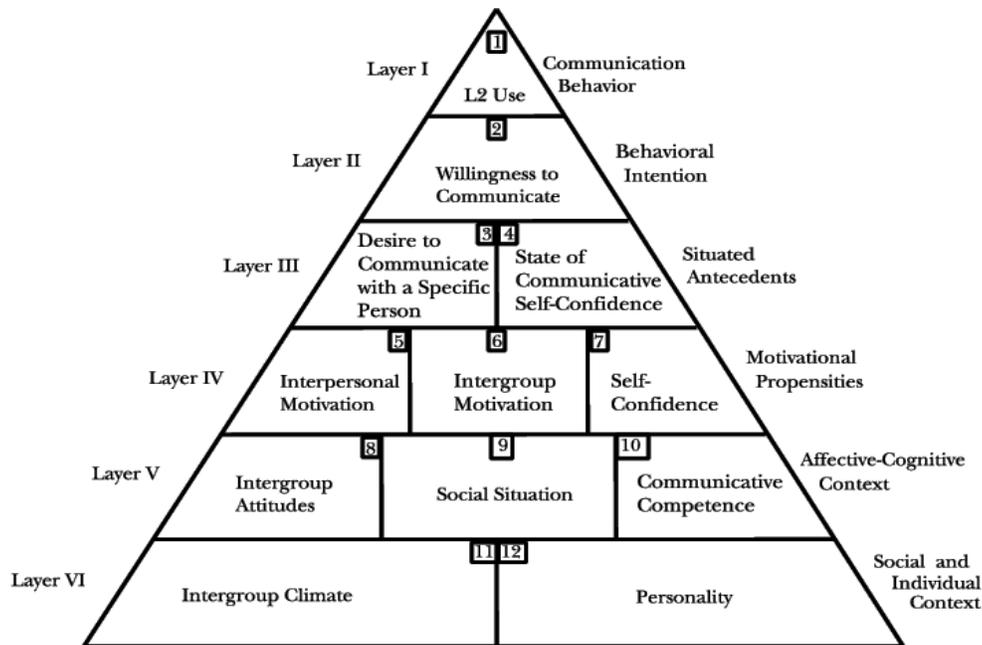


Figure 2. Heuristic model of variables underlying WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998)

As suggested by MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 558), the heuristic model they developed was significant as it was “the first attempt at a comprehensive treatment of WTC in the L2”. Since it was generated in 1998, a number of researchers have tried to customize some parts of the model according to different EFL or ESL contexts (Bektaş, 2005; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Jung, 2011; Kim, 2004; MacIntyre et al., 2001; MacIntyre et al., 2003; Matsuoka, 2006; Sun, 2008; Wen & Clemént, 2003; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004; Yu, 2009). When these studies are considered thoroughly, it can be concluded that motivation, self-perceived communicative competence, and language anxiety are the primary antecedents of WTC.

MacIntyre and his associates conducted a considerable number of studies in Canada. To exemplify, MacIntyre et al. (2001) carried out a study through which they intended to examine WTC in each of four skills, that is, reading, writing, speaking, and listening comprehension in a L2 French immersion program. In the study, the role of motivation and social support on L2

WTC was investigated. The participants of the research were 79 students in the ninth grade from a secondary school in Eastern Canada. In this sense, the researchers examined the participants' predispositions or reasons for learning a L2 in five sub-categories, such as school achievement, travel, job related, personal knowledge, and friendship with Francophones. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents considered these reasons as highly eligible in learning French as a L2. And so, it was seen that there was a positive correlation between these reasons for L2 learning and WTC both inside and outside the classroom. The results further indicated that social support from friends was highly correlated with WTC outside the classroom, whereas it was not so much the case inside the classroom. It was also found that there was a positive relationship between the support of friends and orientations for travel and friendship with Francophones. This result highlights an important fact in two ways.

On one hand, it is clear that situational influences like support from friends tend to display a more transient and context-dependent aspect. On the other hand, they have a crucial role in determining the specific goals of individuals in particular contexts (MacIntyre, Babin, & Clement, 1999). Regarding these results, it was agreed by MacIntyre et al. (2001) that the pyramid model was influential in both integrating different variables and demonstrating their roles with respect to WTC. In a similar study, MacIntyre et al. (2003) investigated the relationships between WTC, communication apprehension, perceived competence, and integrative motivation. The study primarily sought to explore whether these relationships differ in individual experiences. They also wanted to find out how prior immersion experience would affect motivation, integrativeness, and attitudes toward L2 learning. And lastly, they investigated the effects of prior immersion experience and language, which is L1 and L2, on WTC, communication apprehension, perceived competence, and frequency of communication. The participants of the study were 59 first-year Anglophone university students from L2 French-speaking courses.

The data analysis revealed a positive correlation between full immersion experience and higher WTC, perceived competence, and frequency of communication. This means that the students' prior immersion experience contributed significantly to their WTC and L2 communication frequency in French as a L2. It was concluded that motivation was highly associated with L2 communication, whereas L2 communication apprehension induced the

students to be less motivated in communication. It was also indicated that the relationship between L2 learning motivation and WTC could not be simply explained with certain factors. In other words, some other individual, situational, or contextual variables should be considered as well to be able to explain such a tacit relationship (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

In the study that was carried out by Yashima (2002) in the Japanese context, it was aimed to investigate the antecedents of WTC in English. There were 389 Japanese EFL students as participants in the study, the main objective of which was to examine the relations among L2 learning and L2 communication variables in English within a foreign language context. The researcher employed the WTC model and the socio-educational model as the basis of her study. However, the researcher did not include frequency of communication as a construct in her model since the Japanese university students do not have much contact with native speakers of English in an EFL context. As such, she developed a L2 communication model which she tested by employing AMOS version 4.0. The study was conducted with a sample of 297 Japanese tertiary level students. The main hypothesis of the study was that such variables as attitude toward the international community, L2 proficiency, L2 learning motivation, and confidence in L2 communication would influence the students' L2 WTC. The results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) indicated that a higher level of L2 communication competence and a lower level of perceived communication apprehension were the strong predictors of WTC. Thus, this finding was in accordance with the findings of MacIntyre and Charos's (1996) study.

In addition, the results revealed that the students' international posture had an impact on their L2 learning motivation, and motivation had an impact on their proficiency in English. Although L2 proficiency was considered to affect confidence in L2 communication, the correlation between these two variables was not found so significant. Another finding of the study was the positive correlation between motivation, self-confidence in L2 communication, and L2 WTC. In other words, it appeared that motivation influenced self-confidence in L2 communication positively, which influenced L2 WTC indirectly. A direct path was also found from international posture to WTC in a L2 indicating that there was a significant relation between these two variables. In this study, the key variable influencing WTC in this context (international posture) was defined as a 'general attitude towards the international community that influences

English learning and communication among Japanese learners'. He concluded that EFL lessons should be designed well to promote students' interest in different cultures and international affairs and activities, and reduce anxiety by building confidence in communication (p. 63).

In another study in Japan, Yashima et al. (2004) conducted two different studies with the participation of adolescent learners of English from a high school in Kyoto. In the study, they examined the factors or predictors underlying willingness to communicate in a L2. The results revealed that the Japanese students' WTC was affected by both state and trait variables as well as intergroup motivation, self-confidence, personality, and intergroup attitudes in the classroom context. Considering the first study, it was found that the students having more willingness to communicate in different interpersonal situations were more oriented to start communication in the classroom environment. As for the second study, the results revealed that, before their departure, the foreign students who were temporarily entitled to stay in this country were more willing to communicate by getting in contact with the Japanese students more frequently than the host nationals. (Yashima et al., 2004, p. 142). Therefore, it was concluded by the researchers that WTC was an efficient construct in terms of elucidating the Japanese EFL learners' communication behaviors, the nature of L2 communication, and some WTC-related affective variables such as motivation and anxiety.

In a more comprehensive study conducted by Matsuoka (2006), the researcher intended to develop a modified WTC model by integrating MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) model with Wen and Clément's (2003) model. In doing so, the researcher aimed at testing if the modified model would be practicable in the case of Japan as an Asian country, where traditionality is still relatively more prevailing than the Western countries in many areas of social life, even in the communication modes of individuals. In this sense, she examined the relationship between L2 WTC, L2 proficiency, and a number of individual difference variables, such as motivation, attitudes, self-perceived competence, communication apprehension, integrativeness, and introversion. The participants of the study were 180 Japanese university students, and a questionnaire as well as some tests were employed in order to gather the necessary data. The data analysis revealed four prominent variables as the predictors of the L2 willingness to communicate. Out of the four variables, SPCC was reported to be the most effective factor in contributing to L2 WTC (22%), and introversion was the second most effective factor in predicting L2 WTC (11%). The third

factor was communication apprehension accounting for almost 6% of the total contribution, while integrativeness was the fourth factor contributing to L2 WTC (4%). With the lowest percentage (3%), motivation was considered as being the least influential factor contributing to L2 WTC. On the other hand, attitudes and English proficiency were not regarded as two significant factors in the contribution of WTC.

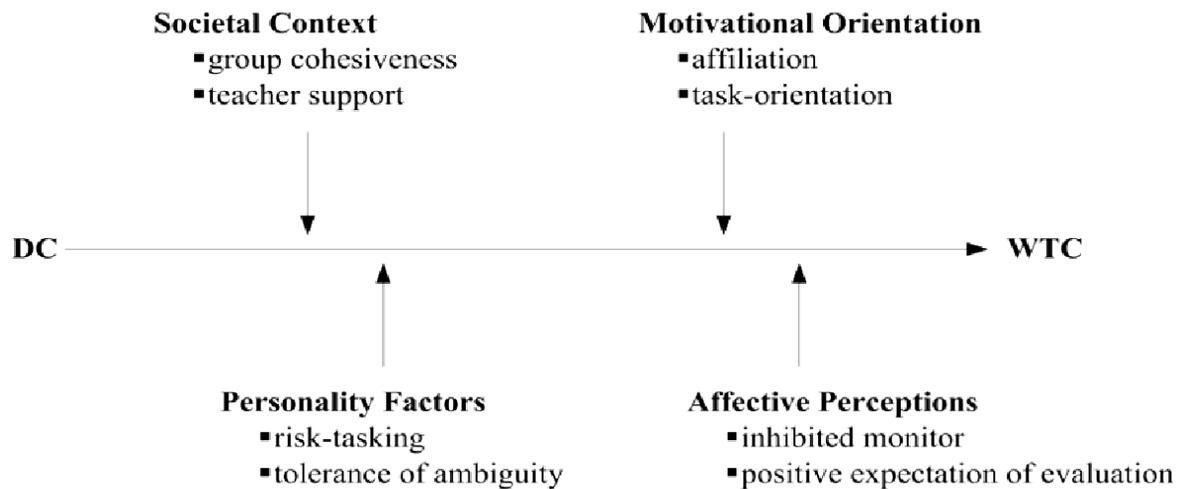
In her study, the researcher also employed the Structural Equation Model (SEM) to investigate any causal relationships between WTC and some other variables. The results of the SEM showed that international posture was the most significant factor in predicting self-perceived competence and self-efficacy. This finding enabled the researcher to argue that international posture is likely to affect L2 WTC indirectly through self-efficacy or motivation. Similar to the findings of some previously-mentioned studies (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 1998; MacIntyre et al., 1999; MacIntyre et al., 2001; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004), it was found that communication apprehension had a direct influence on L2 WTC. That is, the more apprehensive the students were in their communication, the lower L2 WTC they exhibited, notwithstanding to what extent they felt self-confident prior to L2 communication (Cao, 2013; Liu & Huang, 2011). As stated by the researcher, the significant point to consider is that having a positive international posture will considerably contribute to both the learners' self-efficacy and motivation. And similarly, a substantial increase in the learners' self-efficacy or motivation will enhance their L2 WTC levels in turn. Considering the findings of this inclusive study, she could eventually develop a path model to demonstrate the correlation between L2 WTC and the variables underlying it.

In the Korean EFL context, Kim (2004) carried out a study in which she investigated the Heuristic model of MacIntyre et al. (1998) in order to understand if it had situational or trait-like properties. She utilized Yashima's (2002) study as the basis for her study, whose participants were 191 Korean university students. The data obtained from the SEM analysis indicated that motivation, attitude toward learning English, and desire to learn English were associated with WTC positively. Although a direct relationship between the students' WTC and their self-confidence in L2 communication was reported, the relationship between their WTC, L2 attitudes, and motivation was indirect; that is, through their confidence in L2 communication. The fact that

there was not a direct relation between the learners' attitudes and WTC was a significant finding, which was different from Yashima's (2002) study. With respect to the results of the study, the researcher argued that WTC was more traitlike rather than being situational or state (Şener, 2014).

As being one of the prominent studies, Wen and Clément's (2003) study paved the way for the subsequent researchers to be able to delve more into the nature of L2 WTC and the factors underlying it. For this, the researchers tried to readapt MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic model according to the Chinese EFL context. Besides, they made some necessary changes in the original structure of the model so that they could reinterpret some of the variables within the Chinese context. During their long-term observations of Chinese students' communication modes and behaviors inside and outside the school, they could find out what actually lies behind the Chinese students' reluctance to communicate in the community they live. As stated by Şener (2010), one of the underlying reasons for this problem is how individuals develop their interpersonal relations with others. In other words, their relations are usually either directed by others or they are mostly submitted to the ingrained social tenets of the established order in China. Since a collectivist way of life is dominant in China, individual initiatives or attempts are often not welcomed so much. Considering this undeniable reality, the researchers argue that the Chinese students usually tend to refrain from interacting with others or initiating communication with them (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007).

The final version of the structural model they modified according to the Chinese EFL context is as displayed in Figure 3 below (as illustrated in Şener, 2014). Their conceptualized model includes such components as motivational orientations, affective perceptions, personality factors, and social context. Through their structural model, Wen & Clément (2003) attach particular importance to the relationship between desire to communicate and L2 WTC. One point worth mentioning is that they consider willingness to communicate as a construct different from desire to communicate. That is, no matter how much the L2 learners desire to communicate, they are likely to be unable to engage in communication if they are already unwilling to do so (McCroskey, Burroughs, & Marie, 2003). Lastly, they underlined the fact that the model they developed is just a theoretical work, so it is necessary to see whether it is pertinent to different contexts or not by testing its applicability in various studies to be conducted in EFL contexts.



*Figure 3.* Wen and Clément's (2003) model of WTC and DC with their moderating variables for EFL students in the Chinese context

### **Trait versus Situational WTC in L2 Communication**

Since it was first introduced to the literature as an affective construct in the 1990s, there have been a considerable number of researchers who have employed self-report data in their studies to investigate the trait-like aspect of WTC. However, it cannot be said that the number of the studies examining the state-level or situational side of WTC through interviews or observational data is sufficient. Kang (2005) is one of such researchers who conducted a qualitative study to further probe into how situational variables and WTC are related, and how these variables influence L2 WTC as well as any potential fluctuations in WTC in L2 communication. The data for the study were obtained from four Korean male students participating in a student exchange program at a state university of the USA voluntarily. The results of the study revealed that situational variables lead to immediate variations and fluctuations in WTC during the participants' communication. With respect to this emergent and dynamic aspect of WTC, the researcher identified situational WTC as a tacit construct that might change transiently in communicational contexts due to such psychological factors as responsibility, excitement, and security. Thus, she postulated that L2 WTC is a complex

situational construct rather than a trait-like disposition, which is, by its very nature, affected by the factors stated above.

In another qualitative study conducted by Peng (2007), the researcher investigated how integrative motivation would predict L2 WTC, with the participation of 174 university students who were enrolled to an intensive English language program in China. The results obtained from the interviews and questionnaire indicated that the Chinese students were not so oriented or willing to engage in a class communication. Another significant finding of the study was that integrative motivation was not a strong predictor of L2 WTC. However, it was found that motivation was relatively more effective than attitudes towards the L2 learning situation in terms of predicting the Chinese students' WTC.

In their study, Peng and Woodrow (2010) investigated WTC in English, learner beliefs, motivation, communication confidence, and classroom environment through a hypothesized model. They employed Structural Equation Model (SEM) in their heuristic study which aimed at finding out the effects of learner beliefs and classroom environment on the participants' WTC in the EFL classroom. The data were obtained from 579 undergraduate freshmen and sophomore college students majoring in non-English disciplines from eight different universities in China. For this, the researchers used six scales by adapting them from the previous studies. Data analysis showed a strong correlation between communication confidence and WTC. In this sense, this result of the study was similar to the results found in the studies by MacIntyre et al. (1998) and Clément et al. (2003) in the Canadian context, and also Yashima's (2002) study in the Japanese context. Hence, it was concluded that communication confidence is one of the most significant predictors of L2 WTC in all L2 learning contexts. Next, the results revealed that the classroom environment played an important role in influencing the students' WTC, motivation, communication confidence, and learner beliefs. In addition, it was reported that motivation had an indirect influence on the L2 learners' WTC through their confidence. Another salient finding of the study was the direct effect of learner beliefs on the participants' communication confidence and motivation. These findings once again justified the common assumption that students with less communication anxiety and more perceived confidence tend to be more willing to communicate in the EFL classroom environment (Donovan & MacIntyre, 2004). Considering these seminal findings, they suggested that it is highly essential to investigate how diverse

situational and individual factors might influence each other and lead to L2 learners' WTC conjointly.

In the study conducted by Cao & Philp (2006), it was aimed to examine both the trait-like and situational characteristics of L2 WTC. The participants of the study were four male and four female international students having enrolled in an intensive language course for general English grammar in New Zealand. In order to measure trait-like WTC, the researchers employed a 25-item questionnaire used previously in various studies (Hashimoto, 2002; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). For the state-level WTC, they collected the necessary data through a number of classroom observations by using in-class observation reports. And also, the data required for the participants' perceptions of the variables predicting their WTC were obtained with some semi-structured interviews.

By employing semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and in-class observations, they aimed to examine if the students' self-report WTC would show consistency with their actual WTC behaviors in the L2 classroom environment. The self-report survey results related to trait-like WTC indicated that the students showed a tendency to communicate in their classes. Likewise, the results from the classroom observations and individual interviews regarding the participants' situational WTC justified their actual behaviors. Finally, it was concluded that contextual factors such as the level of support from friends, peer pressure, the classroom interaction, teaching styles, and the topic and tasks to be handled, whether appealing or not to the students, all have a significant effect on the learners' decision to initiate interaction with the others in the L2 classroom. To this end, it was suggested that language teachers need to take account of both individual and situational factors interdependently in order to enhance L2 learners' WTC inside or outside the classroom (as cited in MacIntyre et al., 2011; Öz et al. 2015).

In their study, Barjesteh, Vaseghi, and Neissi (2012) investigated the EFL learners' perceptions of L2 WTC across four types of context and three types of receiver or interlocutor. Having high levels of WTC in L2, the EFL learners were found to be willing to communicate in two context-types (group discussions and meetings) and one receiver-type (friend), which is a finding partly similar to the abovementioned finding of the present study. According to the researchers, the main reason why a majority of the Iranian EFL learners are not willing to initiate

communication in other situations is that they are generally accustomed to initiating communication only in language classrooms rather than the other settings unfamiliar to them. In other words, as further argued by them, since the Iranian EFL learners do not often have an opportunity to communicate with native speakers or travel to English speaking countries, they tend to communicate with others familiar to them and in situations experienced before.

In another study similar to Barjesteh et al.'s (2012) in the Pakistani context, Bukhari, Cheng, and Khan (2015) investigated the Pakistani undergraduate EFL learners' L2 WTC perceptions across four types of contexts and three types of receivers. Having relatively a high level of WTC in English, similar to the WTC-related findings of the present study, the Pakistani students were found to prefer initiating talk with friends and acquaintances instead of strangers. It was also revealed that they were most willing to communicate in English with a small group of friends either in dyadic or small-group conversations rather than communicating in front of a large group of strangers in the format of a public speaking or formal presentations. In the Arabic EFL context, Mahdi (2014) conducted a study in an attempt to examine the main communication difficulties faced by tertiary level EFL learners as well as their communication preferences and behaviors in four types of communicative contexts with three types of interlocutors. Similar to the findings of the previously-mentioned studies, the context-related results of this study revealed that the Arabic EFL learners were more willing to communicate in the interpersonal conversation and group discussion contexts. However, they were found to be less willing to communicate in the public speaking and meeting contexts. The students also displayed greater WTC with friends or classmates than with strangers or acquaintances. Considering these findings, it was concluded by the researcher that personality traits and contextual factors greatly affect L2 WTC in terms of their preference of interlocutor(s) in various communicative situations (p. 22). Additionally, as cited in Başöz (2018), the potential changes or fluctuations in the learners' communication behaviors in diverse communicative contexts and their changing preferences for interlocutor types obviously show the dynamic and multifaceted nature of L2 WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998; Peng, 2015). And due to this multidimensional feature of L2 WTC, research into L2 WTC needs to be done as meticulously as possible by taking into account these variations emerging in diverse settings with more sophisticated research perspectives (Henry, Thorsen & MacIntyre, 2021; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Peng, 2020; Sulis, Davidson & Michel, 2020).

### **Willingness to Communicate in Turkish EFL Context**

Although recently there has been an undeniable increase in the number of the studies conducted on WTC, it would not be untrue to argue that there is still absolutely a great need to do more research on this research area in Turkish EFL context. Of the studies conducted from past to present, Bektaş's (2005) study takes an important place in L2 WTC research since it was, to the knowledge of the researcher, the first study that was carried out to examine the Turkish EFL learners' WTC and its underlying variables. In her study, the researcher investigated whether the Turkish EFL learners were willing to communicate when they were provided with an opportunity to do so. As well as the relationship between WTC and socio-psychological, linguistic and communication variables, she also intended to examine how these variables would influence L2 learners' WTC. Since it was a study with a hybrid design in which quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis procedures were used, both a number of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed to collect the necessary data for the study. As the sampling of the study, 356 university students at a state university in Turkey were selected randomly to administer the questionnaires. After the administration of the questionnaires, the interviews were done with 15 students chosen randomly for this purpose. In order to investigate the relations between L2 learners' WTC, their communication apprehension, SPCC, motivation, personality, and attitudes toward the international community, Structural Equation Model analysis was used in the study.

The interviews were also transcribed by the researcher for further interpretation and analysis of the questionnaire results. The data analysis of both the questionnaires and interviews revealed a number of striking results. It was found that L2 learners were not willing enough to communicate and also so motivated to learn English as an L2. However, they were reported to have a positive attitude towards the international community, with also a low level of L2 communication anxiety. Next, it was revealed that the students did not perceive themselves communicatively so competent in English. In addition, they indicated that they would not perceive themselves so extraverted or sociable in their relations with others. And also, it was found that their perception of a strong personality was closely related to their perception of L2 self-confidence. Regarding the relations between the variables, the results revealed a direct

relationship between the students' WTC, their perceived linguistic self-confidence, and their attitudes toward the international community. However, there was an indirect correlation between the learners' motivation, personality, and L2 WTC through their linguistic self-confidence (as cited in Yashima, et al., 2004, pp. 121-124). It was lastly found that there was a positive correlation between the L2 learners' personality and their attitudes toward the international community (See Figure 4).

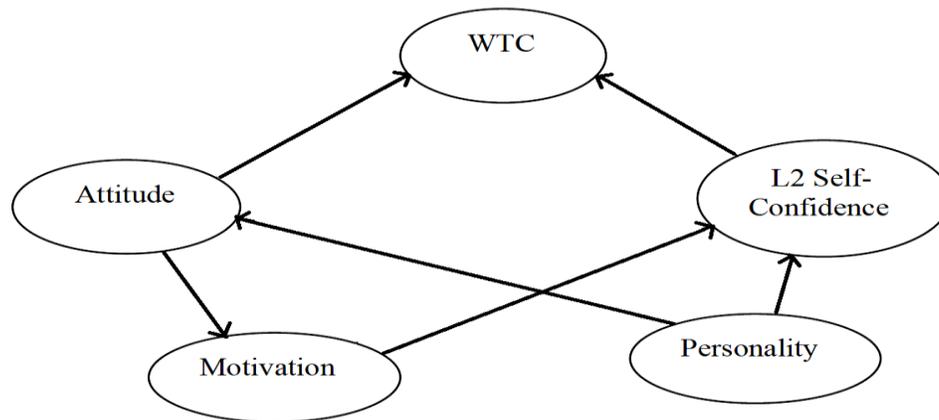


Figure 4. Model of WTC proposed by Bektaş (2005)

In Atay et al. (2009) study, it was aimed to investigate the factors underlying the L2 WTC of Turkish EFL learners and their perceptions of how competent they were in their communication inside and outside the classroom. It was both a qualitative and quantitative study in which the data were gathered from 159 students at a preparatory school of a state university in Istanbul. For data collection, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were employed by the researchers. The results indicated a highly positive and strong correlation between the EFL learners' perceived competence and WTC, which was a finding similar to the findings of some studies previously mentioned (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991; MacIntyre & Charos 1996; Yashima, 2002). Further, the results revealed that the students' higher L2 WTC levels were closely related to their positive international postures. However, a non-significant correlation was reported between desire to learn English and their WTC, which denotes desire to learn English as an ineffective antecedent of WTC in this study. The results of the interviews also elicited a significant finding in that the students' WTC was influenced by a number of situational variables.

At this point, it was especially noted that teacher, background knowledge, peers, and topic were found to be the most influential factors of WTC in this study.

In a cross-cultural comparative study conducted by Asmalı, Bilki, and Duban (2015) in the Turkish and Romanian contexts, the two EFL groups' L2 WTC and some of its key antecedents were investigated. Although both of the student groups were found to have a moderate level of L2 WTC, the Romanian students were reported to be relatively more willing to communicate than the Turkish students inside and outside the classroom. The fact that the EFL learners had a moderate level of WTC inside and outside the classroom is a significant finding that is in line with the previous research studies (Bursalı & Öz, 2017; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Öz et al., 2015; Şener, 2014) in the literature. However, these findings differ from the findings in Wang and Liu (2017) and Al Amrani (2019) in that the participants in these studies were found to have a fairly low level of WTC in English. On the other hand, the EFL learners' L2 WTC was found to be at a high level in such studies as Bukhari, Cheng, and Khan (2015) and Bukhari and Cheng (2017). As suggested by Cameron (2013), changes or variations in learners' L2 WTC levels are due to the significant impact of the learning contexts on students. It is significant to note that the EFL learners' L2 WTC level was mostly found to be moderate in the previous research studies conducted in the Turkish EFL context (Bektaş, 2005; Bursalı & Öz, 2017; Hişmanoğlu & Özüdoğru, 2017; Öz et. al., 2015; Şener, 2014). Besides, the high willingness of ESL students to communicate in English, as reported in Buhari and Cheng's research (2017), can be attributed to the adequate opportunities for them to use English in real-life communication. However, it is an undeniable fact that students do not have the opportunity to use the target language a lot in communication outside the classroom (Oxford & Shearin, 1994). As argued by the researchers, lack of opportunities for L2 communication inside or outside the classroom may result in relatively less WTC in students. Lastly, it was concluded that there is a need to do more cross-cultural studies similar to theirs in order to attain more generalizable results with respect to EFL learners' WTC and different variables affecting it.

Öz et al. (2015) conducted a study to investigate EFL learners' perceptions of their WTC, communication apprehension, perceived communicative competence, L2 motivation and attitudes, and their ideal L2 self in the Turkish context. A total of of 134 EFL learners who were

also enrolled in an EFL teacher education program at a state university in Turkey participated in the study. For data collection, the researchers employed a number of questionnaires in order to analyze the variables under investigation. The results indicated that there was statistically a significant difference between male and female students in terms of their communication apprehension. That is, the female students were found to be more apprehensive in L2 communication. It was argued that higher levels of speaking anxiety might inhibit L2 female learners' willingness to communicate. In addition, the male students were found to have higher mean scores in WTC, SPCC, and integrativeness, and instrumental orientations, whereas the female students were found to have relatively higher mean scores in their motivation and ideal L2 self. According to the researchers, this was a strong indication of their being highly motivated and less anxious learners who indeed hope to achieve their personal goals, wishes, and future aspirations with respect to their L2 self (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009).

The results of SEM showed a strong positive correlation between the learners' SPCC and WTC. However, there was a significant negative path from PRCA to WTC (regression coefficient =  $-.17$ ) as well as a significant negative path from PRCA to SPCC (regression coefficient =  $-.21$ ). In this sense, the researchers suggested that high levels of communication apprehension influence learners' communicative competence negatively, while possessing high levels of communicative competence results in more willingness to communicate in the target language. Thus, SPCC was considered as the most influential predictor of WTC in this study.

According to them, there is a considerable congruence between the findings of this study and some other studies conducted on WTC (Clément et al. 2003; Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Yashima, 2002). Additionally, the findings revealed that motivation influenced L2 WTC indirectly through the mediation of SPCC and CA. What is deduced from this, according to the researchers, is that the more motivated the L2 learners feel, the less apprehensive they get in their communication, which in turn contributes to their WTC and communicative competence. And so, they reported an indirect path from motivation to L2 WTC, which was a finding similar to several other previous studies (Ghonsooly et al., 2012; Kim, 2009; Yashima, 2002; Yu, 2009).

Regarding this, they concluded that motivation cannot be an effective antecedent of L2 WTC by itself. Lastly, the results indicated no direct correlation between instrumental orientation, attitudes towards L2 learning, and WTC. However, it was stated that they were

directly related with motivation. The SEM model proposed by the researchers indicates the relationship between L2 WTC and the other variables stated above in detail (See Figure 5).

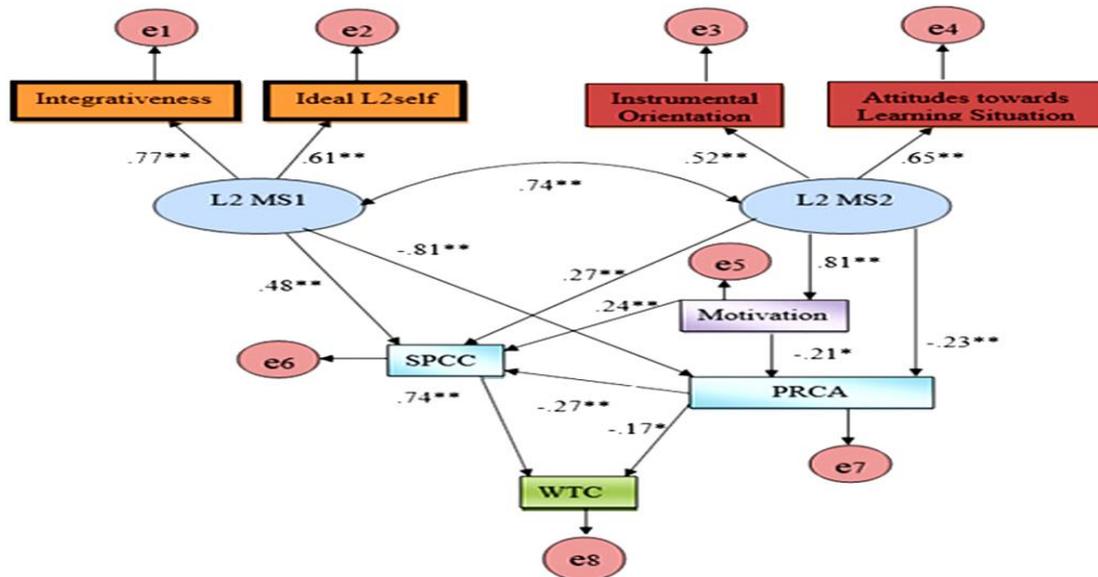


Figure 5. Öz et al.'s (2015) proposed L2 WTC model for EFL learners

Note: L2 MS 1&2= L2 Motivational System; SPCC= Self-perceived Communicative Competence; PRCA= Perceived Communication Apprehension; WTC= Willingness to Communicate

Altınır (2017) carried out a study in order to gain a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between L2 learners' motivation, perceived communicative competence, communication confidence, and WTC in the Turkish EFL context. The study was conducted through the participation of 106 EFL students who were registered in the preparatory school at a state university in Turkey. The researcher employed two different questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as a means of collecting the necessary data from the participants. The results revealed that the participants were highly motivated both extrinsically and intrinsically. Therefore, a high correlation was noted between the EFL learners' motivation and WTC. According to the researcher, this finding was congruent with the findings of such studies as MacIntyre and Clement's (2002) and Jung's (2011). Besides, a direct relationship was found between SPCC and WTC according to the results obtained from the SEM analysis, which justifies SPCC as a highly influential predictor of L2 WTC as in the studies mentioned previously (Bektaş, 2005; Hashimoto, 2002 ; MacIntyre et al., 1998; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Peng &

Woodrow, 2010 ; Öz et al., 2015; Yashima, 2002). A direct path was also found from motivation to SPCC. Unlike in the case of motivation, an indirect path was found from attitude to L2 WTC. Another significant result of the study was the direct paths from self-perceived communication confidence to WTC and motivation to L2 confidence. Further, the results of the qualitative data analysis indicated that the participants considered motivation and L2 communication confidence as the most influential factors predicting their WTC in the target language.

In addition to many qualitative and quantitative studies based on various analysis methods and results, in recent years there have been a number of comprehensive research articles that have shed light on the nature of WTC and the variables underlying it, too. Two of these prominent research articles were written by Akdemir (2016) and (2021) in order to further explore the L2 WTC studies by elaborating their research foci and WTC-related variables. In an attempt to make more contribution to the relevant literature research in WTC, the researcher indicates that, despite a considerable number of studies conducted in this research area, they are generally limited to similar research designs and perspectives. Considering this fact, he argues that current research hinders the diachronic development of the L2 WTC conceptualization. In line with his arguments, he makes a comprehensive review of the featured academic studies of the last two decades and before. In his studies, the researcher reviews the relationships, effects, and different pedagogical implications made with respect to different variables and WTC previously discussed in these studies. By recapitulating and scrutinizing the sociocultural factors, individual difference variables, and situational or contextual factors mentioned in these studies in a holistic perspective, he provides a discussion on how all of these variables influence L2 learners' WTC interdependently.

After providing a detailed analytical review of current research on WTC, Akdemir (2021) finally makes a number of effective suggestions to both clarify and fill in the gaps in the literature for further studies. One of the gaps identified by the researcher is constraining L2 WTC research to a narrowed scope of research area in which only correlational and attributional kind of studies are conducted most commonly. However, the researcher suggests an effective way out for this gap by indicating that we need to take all of the language skills as well as sociolinguistic trends such as identity, ideal L2 self, and learner autonomy into account in order to cover all the aspects of L2 communication. Another significant gap stated in the study is limiting L2 WTC studies

mostly to one-dimensional research design: quantitative research. According to the researcher, an effective suggestion for this is integrating both qualitative and, if possible ethnographic research methods, into the process as well in order to expand the exploration scope of L2 WTC research (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

Considering all these prominent studies conducted in various EFL contexts, it is clear that WTC as an affective construct can be influenced by a number of diverse variables or predictors, and it is either directly or indirectly interrelated with different factors as indicated above. Besides, contrary to the ongoing common assumption, L2 WTC is not limited to an enduring or trait-like disposition. As Akdemir (2021) suggests, although it was initially considered as a fixed variable that was conceptualized within a constrained framework of cause-effect relationships and linear progression theories, in recent years there has been a paradigm shift from a stereotypical point of view to a more inclusive one. In other words, it has been acknowledged that WTC has a dynamic nature that is bound to contextual changes and variations (Cao, 2011; Dewaele, 2019; Peng, 2020). It is due to this unpredictable and latent nature of WTC that it has drawn considerable attention in many academic circles and it has become one of the primary research subjects in different academic studies. As such, it is highly significant to better understand the nature of WTC and search into diverse factors or variables underlying learners' WTC in the process of L2 learning in order to promote a more effective language acquisition process. To this end, through this review article, it was primarily aimed to provide a comprehensive review of various studies that have been carried out in diverse EFL and ESL contexts so far. And more specifically, it was aimed to investigate thoroughly a number of affective, context-specific or situational, and individual difference factors that might influence L2 learners' WTC inside and outside the classroom as well as the relationship of these factors with and effects of them on learners' WTC.

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