Exploring the Relationship between Willingness to Communicate in English, and Social/Cultural Capital among Iranian Undergraduate English Majors

Hesamoddin Shahriari Ahmadi
Department of English Language and Literature, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Ahmad Ansarifar
Department of English Language and Literature, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

Majid Ansarifar
English Department, Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e Heydarieh Branch, Iran

Abstract—**Previous research into willingness to communicate in a second language (L2WTC) has focused primarily on its psychological aspects, and its socio-cultural nature is under explored. Framed with a socio-cultural perspective on second language learning, this study examined the relationship between L2 willingness to communicate, social/cultural capital and its five underlying factors including cultural competence, social competence, social solidarity, literacy, and extraversion in the Iranian EFL context. To this end, the Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) by Pishghadam, Noghani, and Zabihi (2011) and WTC questionnaire by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrad (2001) were administered to a sample of 312 English-major students from three universities in Iran. The Pearson product-moment correlation showed the existence of highly significant correlations between all five factors of SCCQ and learners' L2WTC. Moreover, results from the regression analysis revealed that cultural competence and literacy were the best predictors of WTC. The implications of the study are discussed.**

Index Terms—**willingness to communicate, social capital, cultural capital, Iranian EFL learners**

I. INTRODUCTION

The construct of willingness to communicate was originally conceptualized by McCroskey and Baer (1985) as an individual difference in first language (L1) and was defined as the probability to engage in communication when given the choice (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). In recent decades, the construct has received a great deal of attention in the field of second language (L2) education. The reason for such interest may be the important role accorded to interaction and communication in L2 acquisition within modern language pedagogy (Kang, 2005). Indeed, as stated by Dörnyei (2005), the goal of language learning is to improve the learners' communicative competence in the target language.

The construct of willingness to communicate in second language (L2WTC) was conceptualized by MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998). They defined WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse, at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" (p. 547). According to this model, WTC could be affected by various social, linguistic, and communicative variables. The review of related literature shows that many studies have explored L2 WTC in relation to various individual differences (ID); these studies have focused on variables such as motivation (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre et al., 2001; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), personality (MacIntyre & Carre, 2000), self-confidence (Ghonsooly, Khajavy, & Asadpour, 2012), shyness, and anxiety (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000, 2003; Yashima, 2002), attitude (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004). Yet, despite the rich findings from previous research, little effort has been devoted to studying L2 WTC in association with socio-cultural aspects of language learning in EFL contexts. In countries where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL), learners' socio-cultural background significantly affects their L2 communication (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Peng, 2007; Wen & Clément, 2003). Therefore, the role which socio-cultural factors play in L2 WTC is in need of close examination. However, to date, these aspects have remained largely underexplored. This study, framed with a socio-cultural perspective, aims to investigate social and cultural capital interrelations with L2 WTC, by focusing on Iranian Undergraduate English-Majors within the context of their EFL classrooms.

The study also attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between social and cultural capital and L2 willingness to communicate in the EFL context?

2. Which factors underlying social/cultural capital (i.e., social competence, social solidarity, cultural competence, literacy, and extraversion) can best predict L2 willingness to communicate in the EFL context.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Trait-like vs. Situational WTC

The concept of WTC was first developed on the basis of Burgoo's (1976) concept of unwillingness to communicate, and was considered to explain individual differences in L1 communication. This construct was conceptualized as a trait-like, personality-based predisposition which tends to be stable over time and across situations and with various receivers (Kang, 2005). From this viewpoint, McCroskey and Richmond (1987, 1990) defined WTC as the intention of an individual to commence communication when free to do so. Reflecting the trait-like view of WTC, researchers have investigated the effect of other individual difference (ID) variables on WTC and have found self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension to be the strongest predictors of WTC (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre, 1994; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). Research has also shown that self-confidence (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003), motivation (Hashimoto, 2002), international posture (Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004), gender and age (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2002) also influence WTC.

The situational WTC which was first introduced by MacIntyre et al. (1998) called the trait-like view of WTC into question. This new perspective claims that there are some situational factors which can potentially affect an individual's WTC. MacIntyre et al. (1998), defined L2WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (p. 547). They proposed a heuristic model in pyramid-shaped structure (figure 1) to show the range of potential influences on WTC in the L2.
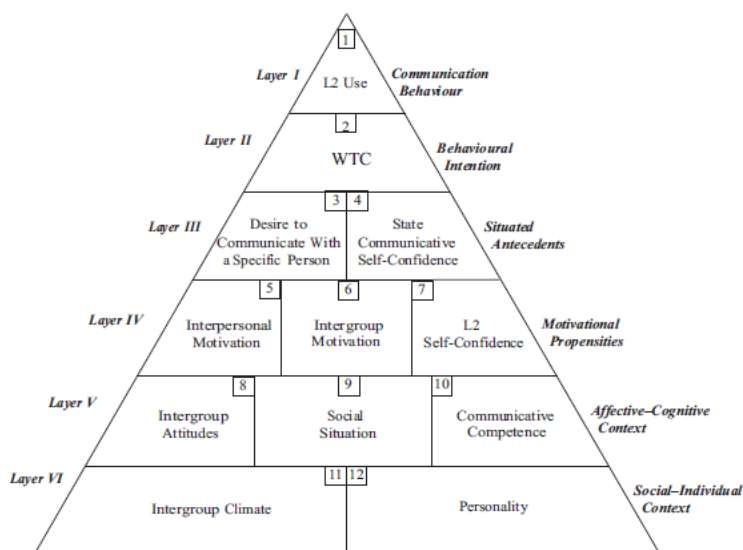

Fig. 1. Pyramid model of WTC by MacIntyre et al. (1998).

This model integrates various linguistic, psychological, and social variables as constitutive influences underlying L2WTC and L2 use. These variables encompass personality, communicative competence, social situation; intergroup climate, attitudes, and motivation; interpersonal motivation; L2 self-confidence (trait and state); and the desire to communicate with a specific person. This theoretical model implies that L2 WTC is a composite variable influenced by the joint effect of both internal and external variables to individual learners (Peng & Woodrow, 2010).

Subsequent research has supported the intertwined relationships between L2 WTC and individual difference variables. For example, self-confidence was found to be the most immediate antecedent of L2 WTC (Cl ément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; Yashima, 2002). Attitudes and motivation conceptualized under the social psychological approach (Gardner, 1985) are also found to be closely related to L2 WTC. Many L2 WTC studies, conducted by this model have identified significant correlations between L2 WTC and attitudes and motivation (MacIntyre, Baker, Cl ément, & Donovan, 2002).

In the EFL context, studies were conducted to explore the influence of culture on learners' WTC. For example, Wen and Cl ément (2003) in their study on WTC in the Chinese setting found that elements such as other-directed self, face concerns and a submissive way of learning are the driving force shaping Chinese students' perceptions and learning behaviors in class. Peng's (2007) qualitative study among Chinese university students also showed similar cultural influences. Peng identified eight themes (classified into two contexts) that influence L2 WTC: Themes under the individual context are communication competence, language anxiety, risk-taking, and learners' beliefs, and the social context includes classroom climate, classroom organization, group cohesiveness, and teacher support, (Peng 2010).

B. Social and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu (1986) refers to cultural capital as different forms of knowledge, education, skills, and advantages that a person possesses, which give them a higher status in society. It has three subtypes: embodied, objectified and institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied state refers to long-lasting dispositions of the individual's mind and body (Bourdieu, 1986). The objectified state refers to cultural goods such as paintings, writings, dictionaries, and monuments (Bourdieu, 1986). The institutionalized state refers to educational degrees and formal qualifications. There is growing evidence that cultural capital tends to be a crucial factor in students' progress in different areas of academic achievement such as school grades (DiMaggio, 1982; Khodadady & Zabihi, 2011), educational attainment (De Graaf, De Graaf, & Kraaykamp, 2000; Merenluoto, 2009; Nakhaie & Curtis, 1998), and student persistence (Sandefur, Meier, & Hernandez, 1999; Wells, 2008).

Social capital has also been studied extensively in various fields. It was first introduced by Bourdieu (1986) who defined it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition." (p. 248).This concept was used by Coleman (1988) for the family context, with emphasis on the parent-child relationship, and the outcomes of this relationship on the educational achievement of the children. Bourdieu (1986) approached social capital from a sociological perspective and Coleman (1988) from an educational perspective. These arguments put forward by Bourdieu and Coleman resulted in a large volume of research studies which examined the relation of social capital to other variables, such as academic achievement (Pishghadam & Khajavy, 2013; Pishghadam & Zabihi, 2011). Several research studies have attempted to examine the relationship between social capital and different psychological traits and mental states. For example, Scheffler et al. (2007) examined the role of social capital in reducing psychological distress. Their results showed that social capital was negatively correlated with psychological distress. In a longitudinal study, Steinfield, Ellison, and Lampe (2008) investigated the association of self-esteem and social capital. They analyzed data collected from the users of an online social network (Facebook). The results revealed that there was a significant association between social capital and users' self-esteem. In another study, Epcacan and Epcacan (2010) investigated the effect of socio-economic and cultural factors on students' reading comprehension and self-efficacy perception. The results of their study highlighted the role of the family environment and the habits of buying newspapers and reading books on students' self-efficacy perception and reading comprehension. In a research project Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) reported students with different levels of social and cultural capital were given nonexistent words and were asked to define each of those words; they observed that students from higher classes were creative enough to venture a guess for each word, but working class students just admitted that they did not know what the words meant. Many other studies have explored the importance of the socio-cultural aspects of creativity (e.g., Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Fischer, 2005; Fischer, Giaccardi, Eden, Sugimoto, & Ye, 2005; Glaveanu, 2010; John-Steiner, 2000). Although many studies have highlighted the importance of social and cultural capital on psychological traits and individual differences, no study has conducted to examine their effects on willingness to communicate in second language. The present study seeks to occupy this existing niche.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

The participants in this study included 312 Iranian EFL learners majoring in the two sub-fields of English language studies, namely English Literature and Language Teaching. The data was collected from three universities in Mashhad and Bojnord, two cities located in north east of Iran. The participants' age ranged from 17 to 36 years (M =21.65 SD = 3.10). 232 students were female (74.35%), and 78 (25%) were male; while the gender of two of the participants (0.64%) was unspecified in the administered questionnaire. The participants' class standing at the freshmen level was, 18.8 % at the sophomore level, 33.9% at the junior level 29.5%, and 17.9 % at the senior level. The reason for selecting the participants from college students was that all of the students prior to entering college had studied English as a foreign language for six years in high school and secondary school, and the majority of the them (more than 90%) had also studied English as a foreign language in language institutes prior to entering college. Moreover, the students passed courses in General English (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) as well as courses in English literature, and language teaching such as short stories, poetry, teaching methodology, and language testing in their university curriculum. All of the university courses were taught in English by Iranian non-native speaker instructors. The students interacted in English with teachers and classmates. Therefore, they were assumed to have adequate exposure to both written and spoken English input in almost all of their classes. In Iran, students majoring in English generally receive the most amount of English instruction, compared to other available university majors. Therefore, the participants' language proficiency ranged from intermediate to advance level; and it could be stated that language proficiency, as a factor which affects willingness to communicate (Alemi & Pashmforoosh, 2012), was for the most part controlled.

B. Instruments

Social and Cultural Capital questionnaire

The Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) constructed and validated by Pishghadam, Noghani, and Zabihi (2011) was used to measure social and cultural capital. It consists of 42 items on a 5-point scale, measuring five

factors underlying social and cultural capital including social competence (15 items), social solidarity (11 items), cultural competence (7 items), literacy (6 items), and extraversion (3 items). The reliability index for five sub-scales of the SCCQ (.84) is at an acceptable level.

Willingness to communicate questionnaire

L2WTC inside the classroom was tested using a 27-item-questionnaire developed by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrad (2001). Items were on a 5-point scale ranging from *almost never willing* to *almost always willing* (with 1 = almost never willing, 2 = sometimes willing, 3 = willing half of the time, 4 = usually willing, and 5 = almost always willing). The items were grouped into four skill areas: speaking (8 items), comprehension (5 items), reading, (6 items), and writing (8 items). All four sub-scales of the L2WTC enjoy a high rate of reliability (.92). This scale includes both active (e.g., speaking) and receptive skills (e.g., reading), because receptive skills may foster the learners' WTC in other areas of language use, if given the opportunity.

C. Procedure

Before the data collection, permission was obtained from the instructors to use their class time for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaires were administered during the period of two weeks in the second semester of the 2013–2014 academic year. Prior to distributing the questionnaires, students were all informed of the objective of the study and they were assured that their participation would be anonymous and at no cost to their academic assessment.

The data gathered from the two questionnaires was analyzed using SPSS version 16 program. The Pearson product-moment correlation was applied to the data to examine the relation of SCCQ subscales to learners' willingness to communicate. Moreover, The Multiple Regression Analysis with a Stepwise Method was run to detect the best predictors of willingness to communicate in terms of social and cultural capital subscales.

IV. RESULTS

A. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive results of the two instruments: The L2WCand the SCCQ.

All four sub-scales of the L2WTC enjoy a high rate of reliability (.92), and the reliability index for five sub-scale of the SCCQ (.84) is at an acceptable level.

TABLE1:
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS OF LEARNERS' SCORE ON SCCQ AND WTC

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
wtc	93.50	21.31	312
sc	45.60	11.46	312
ss	42.13	7.92	312
lit	22.70	5.31	312
cc	23.32	4.73	312
ex	9.80	3.03	312

B. Correlation between SCCQ Subscales and L2WTC

The Pearson product-moment correlation was used to explore whether there is a significant correlation between the learners' social and cultural capital and their L2 willingness to communicate (L2WTC). As shown in Table 2, there are significant correlations between learners' L2WTC and all subscales on the SCCQ: social competence (r = 0.36, p < 0.01), social solidarity (r = 0.35, p < 0.01), literacy (r = 0.44, p < 0.01), cultural competence (r = 0.55, p < 0.01), and extraversion (r = 0.24, p < 0.05). Moreover, a significant correlation was found between L2WTC and learners' total score on SCCQ (r = 0.55, p < 0.01) (see table 3).

TABLE 2:
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SCCQ FACTORS AND LEARNERS' SCORES ON WTC

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1- Willingness to communicate	1					
2-Social competence	.36**	1				
3-Social solidarity	.35**	.42	1			
4-Literacy	.44**	.28	.20	1		
5-Cultural competence	.52**	.36	.41	.42	1	
6-Extraversion	.24**	.22	.28	.19	.22	1

* P<0.05,* *p<0.01,

TABLE 3:
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN TOTAL SCCQ AND LEARNERS' SCORE ON WTC

		scc	wtc
scc	Pearson Correlation	1	.55**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
	N	312	312
wtc	Pearson Correlation	.55**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	
	N	312	312

* P<0.05,* *p<0.01,

C. Prediction of Willingness to Communicate by SCCQ Factors

The results for learners' willingness to communicate were regressed on the variables of interest in this study (SCCQ subscales). The results reveal the variables which are important in predicting higher willingness to communicate on the part of learners. As shown in Table 4, social and cultural capital accounted for 34 % of the variance in WTC [F (5) = 12.57, p<.001, Adj. R2=.34]. Literacy (β=.24, t=2.79, p<.05), and cultural competence (β=.31, t=3.38, p<.05), were the best predictors of L2 willingness to communicate.

TABLE 4:
THE RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR SCCQ SUBSCALES AND LEARNERS' WTC

Factor	Predictor	Beta	T
WTC	Social competence	.12	1.43
	Social solidarity	.10	1.13
	Literacy	.24	2.79**
	Cultural competence	.31	3.38**
	Extraversion	.07	.88
	F(5)	12.57***	
	Adj R^2	.34	

* P<0.05,* *p<0.01, ***p<0.001

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine the role of social-cultural factors (i.e., social competence, social solidarity, cultural competence, literacy, and extraversion) in L2 willingness to communicate, and to determine their predictive power in L2WTC. Results of the study showed that social-cultural factors significantly correlated with L2WTC. Having conducted the regression analysis, however, it was found that only two subscales of the SCCQ (i.e., cultural competence and literacy which are the components of cultural capital) were best predictors of higher L2WTC scores.

Cultural competence, which is a component of cultural capital, is the label for the factors measuring the extent to which individuals enjoy listening to classical music, visit museums, theaters, or attend concerts, know famous music composers, take art or music classes outside school and their proficiency in using language (Pishghadam, Noghani, & Zabihi, 2011). Our findings suggest that "cultural competence" is a good predictor of L2WTC. This may be because some English major students who wish to improve their listening ability are advised by their instructors and more proficient peers to make use of English language media. These forms of media can partially compensate for the lower level of exposure received by learners in an EFL setting. These media forms include movies, music, various forms of publications (e.g., books, newspapers, magazines and comics) in the English language. This engagement with authentic materials, like English songs, increases the learners' ability to comprehend and use the English language. Hence, it can be said that EFL students who are exposed to such forms of media frequently enjoy a good level of language proficiency (Bahrani, & Sim, 2011). As shown by Matsuoka and Evans (2005), Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) Alemi and Pashmforoosh (2012), learners with high language proficiency are more willing to communicate in a second language. In addition to contributing to the learners' proficiency level, English movies, music and publications also add to their grasp of culture, in general, and the target language culture, in particular. Moreover, it is quite common for people who exhibit an interest in the arts by attending concerts, going to the theater and taking part in music classes, and visiting museums to be more social (e.g., Eun, 2009) and probably more willing to communicate.

Literacy, as the other factor which was found to predict WTC, is a sub-scale of cultural capital and refers to the learners' interest in reading and knowing of literature, their general taste in books, their buying/borrowing/ownership of books, and their parents' degree of encouragement with regard to their reading behavior during school days (Pishghadam, Noghani, & Zabihi, 2012). This predictive can possibly be explained by the fact that the participants of the study were English- major student, and they have passed some courses in literature (courses such as poetry, novel, short stories, to name but a few). As a result, it is not unexpected for them to read and know a good deal about literature and to also enjoy a high level of literary knowledge. Moreover, in literature classes, students take the opportunity to share their ideas, attitudes, and feeling with others.

Social capital components (i.e., social solidarity, social competence, and extraversion) did not show any predictive power for WTC. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as children's relationships with teachers, parents, siblings, and peers. From this definition, it can be inferred that social capital primarily concerns children and cannot be easily applied to adults. In the Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire (SCCQ) by Pishghadam, Noghani, and Zabihi (2011), which was used in this study, 23 out of the 29 questions which measure social capital were directly concerned with child-parent relationships (see appendix 1). In the present study, the participants' age ranged from 19 to 37; some were married and a few were parents; therefore, it is safe to say that the majority of participants in this study led lives independent from those of their parents. This might account for the failure of social capital components to predict WTC.

In the end, it must be emphasized that students from richer socio-cultural backgrounds, who are receiving social support seemingly tend to be more willing to communicate in English (MacIntyre, Baker, Cl ément, & Conrod, 2001). It is therefore vital to study the ways in which parents and teachers can function as enablers and foster the students' willingness to communicate in English through the enrichment of home-school socio-cultural situations. Teachers and parents can contribute to the enrichment of these situations by providing more books, especially literary ones, encouraging reading habits, using multi-media, computers, and the internet during the teaching and learning process, establishing a friendly atmosphere and allowing students to express their ideas, feeling, and attitudes.

This research was conducted among Iranian English-major university students. Further research might be conducted for other EFL contexts and other university majors. Regarding the socio-cultural factors, only subscales of social and cultural capital were examined in this study. Future studies can examine the role of the other socio-cultural factors in EFL contexts.

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APPENDIX

The factors of Social and Cultural Capital Questionnaire

Factor 1: Social Competence
1. My mother used to get involved in my primary schooling.
2. My parents usually get involved in my daily activities.
3. My parents used to help me with my homework regularly.
4. I frequently perform activities together with my parents.
5. My mom used to encourage me in my school activities regularly.
6. My mom used to attend school meetings regularly.
7. I feel I have a strong help network for my activities.
8. At home, my parents keep track of my progress.
9. My parents used to volunteer for school projects.
10. My parents used to have a regular connection with my school.
11. My parents know parents of my friends.
12. I used to participate in school activities regularly.
13. I used to participate in extracurricular activities.
14. My parents used to monitor my homework regularly.
15. My parents used to have a say in school policy.

Factor 2: Social Solidarity
1. I regularly talk with my parents.
2. I like to get involved in activities designed for young people.
3. I have friends with high educational expectations.
4. I had an excellent school with high quality.
5. My parents know where I am, what I do.
6. I usually talk about job/education with family.
7. I usually talk about job/education with other adults.
8. I feel I have strong ties with the community.
9. I feel I have strong ties with my peers.
10. My parents have strong ties with each other.
11. We have an intimate home environment.

Factor 3: Literacy
1. I enjoy reading literature.
2. I know a lot about literature.
3. I frequently buy/borrow books.
4. I enjoy reading (in general).
5. As a child, my parents regularly encouraged me to read.
6. We have lots of books at home.

Factor 4: Cultural Competence
1. I enjoy listening to classical music.
2. I am a cultured person.
3. I know all famous music composers.
4. I frequently visit museums, theaters, or attend concerts.
5. I like to attend symphony concerts.
6. I used to take art or music classes outside school.
7. I am highly proficient in using language.
Factor 5: Extraversion
1. I see my siblings weekly.
2. I see my grandparents weekly.
3. I see my friends weekly.

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Hesamoddin Shahriari Ahmadi is an assistant professor at the department of English at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. He earned his PhD from the same university in applied linguistics.

He teaches undergraduate and MA-level courses, especially in the field of academic writing. His research interests include academic writing instruction, learner English and corpus linguistics.

Ahmad Ansarifar is an MA candidate of TEFL at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. His major area of research interest is individual differences in second language acquisition.

Majid Ansarifar obtained his MA in TEFL from Islamic Azad University of Torbat-e Heydarieh Branch, Iran. His research interests include Teacher Education, Pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. He was also a member of the editorial boards of six national conferences.