

The Relationship between Willingness to Communicate and Vocabulary Learning Strategies among Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract—Two of the variables apparently contributing to the processes of EFL achievement are Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS). They seem to be fundamental among Iranian EFL learners due to the fact that semantics and its backbone—vocabulary—as well as the incentive or motivation, Willingness to Communicate (WTC)—influence the progress and improvement of the proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the review of literature clarifies the fact that few studies have tried to open up the relationship between these two variables, i.e. WTC and VLS. Hence, the present study explored the relationship between the WTC and VLS among Iranian EFL learners. Based on this, 137 intermediate Iranian EFL learners who were studying in a language institute in Tehran were selected as the participants of the study. They were asked to fill out two questionnaires including WTC and VLS. The finding indicated that there is a significant correlation between the two variables. The study provided some pedagogical implications for those who are concerned with language learning and teaching including language teachers, teacher trainers, syllabus designers, and EFL learners.

Index Terms—Willingness to Communicate (WTC), Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS), EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a notion which indicates the tendency by which individuals like to participate in communication and especially talking. In fact willingness to communicate denotes a relatively permanent temperament for talking and communicating which is considered as a personality type by researchers such as McCrosky and Baer (1985) or McCorsly and Richmond (1987, as cited in Simić, 2014). Barraclough, Christophel, and McCroskey, (1988) on the other hand, considering WTC as a situational variable, argue that WTC is not a stable factor and may change in different times by different individuals.

Distinguishing between first language WTC and the one in second or foreign language, Macintyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998) consider a new representation and manifestation for WTC in the second or foreign language and reject the claim that the WTC in the second or foreign language is in effect, the representation of first language's WTC. Macintyre et al. (1998) also point to the association between WTC and proficiency as well as anxiety.

Considering the aforementioned issues demonstrates that WTC is a relatively complicated entity mainly affected by individual variables among which personality is paramount.

Thereupon, some individual variables which apparently manipulate the process of second or foreign language acquisition in general and WTC in particular are the sets of learning strategies including vocabulary learning strategies (VLS).

VLS is in fact a domain a domain of language learning strategies which refer to the contextualized conscious actions taken in order to tackle different language r-related problems in the process of communication. It is suggested that language learning strategies including vocabulary learning strategies may enhance language learning and acquisition (Oxford, 1996). Cohen (1998), on the other hand, refers to language learning strategies as the "processes which are consciously selected by learners, and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a second or a foreign language, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about this language" (p.5).

There are a number of classifications for vocabulary learning strategies among which Gu and Johnson's (1996) classification seem to be comprehensive and composed of three parts of vocabulary learning beliefs, metacognitive strategies, and cognitive strategies. Schmitt (1997), on the other hand, argues about two parts of strategies related to the discovery of the meaning of a word and strategies for strengthening the learned word.

There is no doubt about the crucial role played by vocabulary learning in the process of language learning. Here, the role played by language learning strategies in general and vocabulary learning strategies, in particular become crucial. It seems that vocabulary knowledge is important for communication which may influence the confidence and even WTC.

Based on these premises, the present research endeavor explored the direction and extent of the relationship between willingness to communicate and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners. To this end the following two research questions were proposed:

Q1: Is there any significant correlation between WTC and VLS among Iranian EFL learners?

Q2: Is there any significant difference among female and male learners regarding this relationship?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the late 1980s, vocabulary was regarded as heated debate which had drawn scholar's attention within the mainstream of second language acquisition (Nation, 1990). Researchers postulate that many learners' difficulties, not only receptive but also productive, is as a consequence of insufficient vocabulary, and language learners at advanced levels of both language competence and performance need to learn vocabulary.

According to Gu and Johnson (1996), a vast amount of research on vocabulary learning strategies has concentrated on multifarious methods of presenting vocabulary, and their impact on retention. Furthermore, Nation (2001) suggested that vocabulary learning strategies can be considered as part of language learning strategies in general which in their own turn classified under of general learning strategies respectively.

Oxford (1990) postulated learner of a second language employed such distinct activities called language learning strategies to make learning more pleasurable, easier, and more self-directed to new situations. Nation (2001) proposed that vocabulary learning strategies assist learners to take on responsibility for their own learning. According to Nation's point of view learners can achieve a large number of vocabularies can be obtained by adopting vocabulary learning strategies.

A. Classification of Vocabulary Strategies

Schmitt's taxonomy (1997) is regarded as a complete inventory vocabulary learning strategies. The strategies were categorized into two groups by Schmitt: the first group is to determine the meaning of new vocabularies when language learners face new vocabulary items for the first time, the second group is to establish the meaning upon encountering the novel items of vocabulary on another occasion.

The first one encompasses determination and social strategies; the latter includes metacognitive, cognitive, memory, and social strategies (Schmitt, 1997). According to Schmitt (1997) social strategies are placed in all groups because social strategies can be used for both ends.

In Schmitt's point of view, determination strategies are applied when "learners are faced with discovering a new word's meaning without recourse to another person's experience". In the same vein, language learners attempted to guess the meaning of new words in order to find the definition of new words with the help of context, linguistic knowledge, and reference materials.

To Schmitt, language learners can discover the meaning of words by recruiting social strategies such as asking someone else to discover the meaning of new words. Discovering the meaning of a new word, language learners require applying different strategies not only to practice but also to retain words. Hence, learners employ social, cognitive, memory, and metacognitive strategies to combine their vocabulary knowledge.

In social strategies learners practice the new vocabularies in a group which is called cooperative learning, is an example of social strategy for consolidating a word. Memory strategies relate new words with previously learned knowledge with the help of some imagery or grouping. In Schmitt's taxonomy, cognitive strategies and memory strategies are partially alike. Cognitive strategies contain repetition and employs mechanical tools such as word lists, vocabulary notebooks, and flash cards to study vocabularies. At the end, metacognitive strategies defined as strategies that opted by learners to assess and monitor their own learning

According to McCroskey and Richmond (1982), more communication leads other people to have a better evaluation of a person, making him/her socially and emotionally happy. MacIntyre et al. (1998) stated that in order to be effective, a SL/FL learning curriculum needs to concentrate on encouraging the willingness to communicate, and if a program fails to do so, it is a failed program. As pointed out in McCroskey and Baer (1985), the concept of WTC has been developed from three different constructs: "unwillingness to communicate" (Burgoon as cited in McCroskey & Baer, 1985), "predispositions toward verbal behavior" (Mortensen, Arntson, & Lusting as cited in McCroskey & Baer, 1985), and "shyness esteem"; however, self-esteem was highly correlated with the general language ability.

Although the WTC construct was originally applied in L1 communication context it is now a "necessary part of becoming fluent in a second language, which is the ultimate goal of many L2 learners" (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010, p.196). Interaction plays an important role in the development of language. Higher language proficiency leads to higher WTC and Higher WTC is an outcome of language learning. WTC has been defined by MacIntyre et al. (1998) as the aim for second language instruction which can enhance language learning and exert significant impacts on society. Kang (2005) also conceptualizes WTC as the key component of second language acquisition. Various studies have examined the role of different variables which are directly or indirectly responsible for the emergence of WTC (e.g. MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Kang, 2005; etc.). However, the role that a person's type of intelligence can play in his degree of willingness to communicate with others is an area that has not been explored yet to briefly summarize the main components of the term.

B. WTC, Social Support, and Language Learning

Past research indicates that learner characteristics such as aptitude, attitudes, motivation, and language anxiety correlate with a a many factors associated with ESL language achievement (Gardner & Clement, 1990). In a context where modern language pedagogy emphasizes real exchange of information as an essential section of acquiring the language, it would follow, then, that the observed points of departure in people in communication tendencies will play a meaningful role in language learning outcomes, both linguistic and nonlinguistic. Adopting a social psychological position on these topics, the effect of these and other factors has been described in a theoretical model (MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998) that proposes willingness to communicate (WTC) as a construct combining their impacts on genuine exchange of information in the second language . Some studies focus on WTC both in and out of classroom settings, more accurately as it pertains to the motivational social roles the acquisition second language learners. WTC was initially introduced to account for the case by case differences in L1 daily exchanges. The roots of WTC can be observed in a number of related constructs.

Burgoon (as cited in McCroskey & Baer, 1985) elaborated on the "lack of willingness to establish communication as a tendency to shy away from oral communication based on such personal features as low communicative competence , introversion, anomie, communication apprehension, and a sense of being alienated. Mortensen, Arntson, and Lustig (1977) postulated an overall pattern in the general characteristics of L2 communication. They considered that as general orientation to communicate orally. McCroskey and Richmond (1982) used the term "shyness" to investigate this predisposition and defined it as the propensity to be timid and reserved and to do less talking. These modules were proposed to explain frequently occurring features in communication across contexts to a certain degree.

McCroskey and Baer (1985) proposed WTC as a more definite concept, defined as the intention to initiate communication given the opportunity. This delicate modification in definition leaves room for establishing a clear path to the overall purpose behind communication research projects and directs research towards an array of factors that bring about this purpose, including the specific context of communicating in a second of foreign language.

The other main direct effect of self-confidence includes perceived level of competence and lower anxiety level (Clement, 1986). In this interpretation, WTC exercises a more straight effect on communication than does either level of anxiety or perceived communicative competence collectively. This leaves room for interpreting cases where competent learners stop using L2 and where learners try to manage with their existing level of competence they can muster as a tool for communicating so that they can boost their learning. Some proof has been found that implies WTC can regularly predict the start of communication in both the first and the second or foreign language when the impact of competence and anxiety are largely irregular. The model also suggests some aspects of lasting influences on WTC based on several variables including motivation, intergroup issues, and the social situation. Yet another contextual difference denotes the classroom compared authentic communication in the real cases, settings where WTC's role is highlighted. Many of the factors suggested to trigger WTC are exclusively pertinent to L2 communication settings.

C. The Pyramid Model Significance

Macintyre et al. (1998) introduced their well-known Pyramid Model (Figure 1) of factors impacting WTC in the second or foreign language which is composed of six layers, namely, communication behavior (language use), behavioral intention (willingness to communicate), situated antecedent (desire to communicate with a specific person, state communicative self-confidence), motivational propensities (interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, L2 confidence), affective cognitive contexts (intergroup attitude, social context, communicative competence), and finally social and individual context (intergroup climate, personality).

It is important to realize that the presented Pyramid Model involves six layers which may be divided into two groups of variables—lasting ones (motivational propensities, affective cognitive contexts and social and individual context) and contextual ones (communication behavior, behavioral intention, and situated antecedent).

Hence, WTC is, in effect, the second layer—behavioral intention—which indicates having a purpose to communicate for which. In the same way, the third layer—situated antecedent—which involves two variables of the desire to communicate with a specific person, and state communicative self-confidence affect WTC (Macintyre et al., 1998).

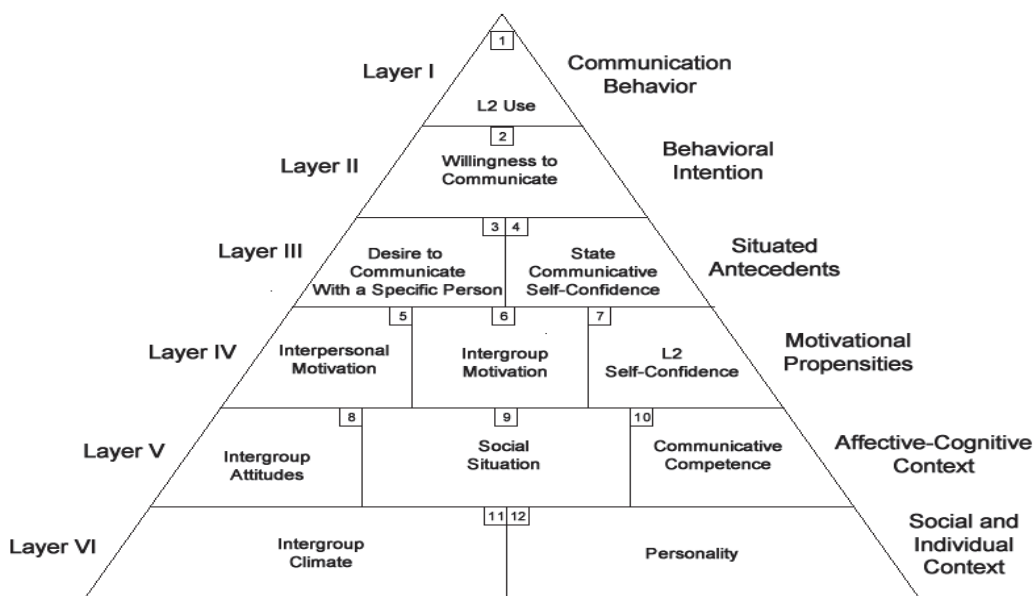


Figure.1. Schematic representation of the variables influencing WTC. MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels (1998).

The pyramid model puts forward an array of factors pertaining to motivation and attitude that may underlie WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Gardner (1985) suggested that a crucial factor in second language learning is the type of orientation the learners adopt. Although other orientations are possible, Gardner (1985) focused on a binary model that in his opinion are behind the motivation level namely instrumental and integrative. The first type reflects a desire "to acquire the language of a valued second-language community in order to facilitate communication with that group" (Gardner, Smythe & Clement, 1979, p. 199). Integrative orientation also suggests a favorable tendency towards the speakers of the other language. The second type of orientation bears more of a direct and practical value for learning a second language (Dornyei, 1990). Adopting an instrumental orientation, the learner approaches a task since it may bring about some specific desirable result. However, it should be born in mind that such conceptualizations are very general. In other words, they are not dichotomous in nature and may not completely explain the impact of a particular linguistic setting on the learner's level of motivation (Clement & Kruidenier, 1985).

III. METHODOLOGY

The next sections include some information on the subjects of the study, two questionnaires which were used during this research endeavor, and the steps taken in the process of research.

A. Participants

The participants were 137 EFL learners who were learning English as a foreign language in a language institute in Tehran. In fact, they were Iranian EFL learners between 16 and 25 years old from the both genders. Their native language was dominantly Persian. They were intermediate EFL learners studying English based on the Passages Standard Placement test. Table 1 shows the distribution of the both genders in the study. In effect, the participants were 70 (51%) female and 67 (49%) male EFL learners.

TABLE 1
PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY IN TERMS OF GENDER

gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	=female	70	51.1	51.1	51.1
	=male	67	48.9	48.9	100.0
Total		137	100.0	100.0	

B. Instruments

Two instruments were utilized in this study, i.e. MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod's (2001) WTC questionnaire ($\alpha=0.83$) which has composed of 27 Likert-scale items based on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ) ($\alpha=0.87$) was the other instrument. It consists of two parts—one for personal information of the participants, and the second part includes 40 items on students' vocabulary learning strategies in Likert-scale format. It is worth mentioning that the forty-item VLSQ had five main parts including Determination, Social, Memory, Cognitive, and Metacognitive strategies.

C. Procedures

After administering the two questionnaires of MacIntyre, et al. (2001) WTC and Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLSQ), the data were extracted based on the scoring rubric—for the WTC counting the selected choices which means the higher the score the higher the extent of the WTC and for the VLSQ according to the dominant selected choices categorized as Determination, Social, Memory, Cognitive, and Metacognitive.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The main purpose of the study was to explore the correlation between WTC and vocabulary learning strategies among Iranian EFL learners. Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics obtained from WTC questionnaire.

TABLE 2
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATION QUESTIONNAIRE

	Statistic	Std. Error	
Willingness to communicate (WTC)	Mean	123.7737	.05648
	Median	123.7748	
	Variance	.437	
	Std. Deviation	.66114	
	Minimum	122.18	
	Maximum	125.30	
	Range	3.13	
	Interquartile Range	.88	
	Skewness	-.027	.207
	Kurtosis	-.383	.411

As Table 2 shows WTC has a mean of 123.88, the median of 123.77 and variance of 0.437. Likewise, the WTC demonstrates the minimum of about 122 as well as maximum of about 125 and the range of 3.13. Moreover, the results of the WTC reveals the negative skewness (-0.27) as well as the negative kurtosis (-1.268). In fact, the results of the WTC indicate that the data were not normally distributed and are a bit skewed with left tail which means that mean is lower than median and median is lower than the mode.

TABLE 3
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS: VOCABULARY LEARNING STRATEGIES QUESTIONNAIRE

	Statistic	Std. Error	
Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS)	Mean	175.1381	.75760
	Median	177.0000	
	Variance	78.632	
	Std. Deviation	8.86748	
	Minimum	101.92	
	Maximum	189.00	
	Range	87.08	
	Interquartile Range	7.00	
	Skewness	-4.390	.207
	Kurtosis	33.536	.411

Table 3 demonstrates the descriptive statistics for the vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) among the participants. As Table 3 reveals the VLS has the mean of 175.13, the median of 177 and variance of 78.63. Moreover, the VLS shows the minimum of about 102 as well as maximum of 189 and the range of about 87. Furthermore, the results of the VLS illustrates the negative skewness (-4.390) as well as positive kurtosis (33.539). In fact, the results of the VLS denote that the data were skewed with left long tail.

Before conducting the correlational coefficient test, the data were explored in terms of normality as table 4 shows.

TABLE 4
TEST OF NORMALITY

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
WTC	.066	137	.200*	.991	137	.548
VLSs	.166	137	.000	.696	137	.000

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Considering the fact that then number of participants is lower than 2000, Shapiro-Wilk test is preferable. According to table 4, both sets of data are skewed and not normally distributed which were also expected by paying attention to the descriptive statistics and skewness as well as kurtosis. Accordingly, a non-parametric correlation analysis, Spearman's rho, was applied as table 5 shows.

TABLE 5
CORRELATION STATISTICS: WTC & VLS

Correlations			WTC	VLSs	gender
Spearman's rho	WTC	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.402**	-.035
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.681
		N	137	137	137
	VLS	Correlation Coefficient	.402**	1.000	.113
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.189
		N	137	137	137
	gender	Correlation Coefficient	-.035	.113	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.681	.189	.
		N	137	137	137

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

Table 5 reveals that the two variables of willingness to communication and vocabulary learning strategies are correlated significantly at the level of 0.01 (correlation coefficient=0.402, sig (2-tailed)=0.000). Furthermore, no significant correlation was found between gender and either WTC or VLS. It means that the higher the WTC the higher VLS irrespective of the fact that the students were male or female.

Considering the fact that words and lexis are backbone of language use, the significant correlation between the two variables of WTC and VLS is evident. Likewise, the vocabulary size may be affected by the learners' VLS which according to Gu (1994), highly influences language capability. Some researchers consider learners' difficulty in learning a second or foreign language including English to be rooted in their insufficient lexical knowledge (e.g. Subekti & Lawson, 2007). Subekti and Lawson (2007) point out that vocabulary learning is fundamental for both language learning and development.

Yunhao (2011) also argues that vocabulary learning strategies influence and direct the process of vocabulary learning. Nation (2005) emphasizes that the teacher should spend some part of the class' time into the instruction of vocabulary learning strategies. Likewise, learners, as stated by Nation (1990), need to learn storing, recalling, and using the new exposed words by utilizing different suitable vocabulary learning strategies.

Willingness to communicate which is generally interpreted as the tendency to participate in conversation and communication is also a factor which is affected not only by the personality characteristics but also by the proficiency level of the EFL learners and vocabulary size and knowledge is a dimension of general language ability which is also influenced by the vocabulary learning strategies and the present study reveals that is significantly correlated with the WTC. considering the complex nature of language learning and WTC as well as VLS as two variables which may influence the process of language learning justify the results of the study due to the fact that the presented Pyramid Model by Macintyre et al. (1998), whose framework consists of two categories of variables—lasting ones (motivational propensities, affective cognitive contexts and social and individual context) and changing ones (communication behavior, behavioral intention, and situated antecedent), may indicate that VLS possibly makes an interface with the both categories of lasting and changing variables.

V. CONCLUSIONS & PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study was an attempt to explore whether there is any relationship between the two variables of willingness to communicate and vocabulary learning strategies. To this end, 137 EFL learners were selected as the participants of the study who took the two questionnaires of MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod's (2001) WTC questionnaire and Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLSQ). After summarizing, tabulating and analyzing the data, it was concluded that the two variables are significantly and positively correlated which mean increase of one is resulted into the increase of the other. Vocabulary learning strategies may facilitate the process of language ability directly or indirectly due to the fact that vocabulary is the foundation of any language and vocabulary-related errors may lead into global errors which break the communication.

However, vocabulary leaning strategies are among the individual characteristics; they are procedures which are utilized consciously which mean they can be instructed. In addition, willingness to communicate is an individual characteristic which is affected by the both changing and lasting individual characteristics. Considering the results of the study, it seems that vocabulary learning strategies affect the vocabulary size and knowledge which in turn may influence WTC (communicative self-confidence, behavioral intention and desire to communicate).

The results of the study may be of interest to language teachers to devote some part of the classroom's time into teaching VLS in order to improve students' vocabulary learning and their language ability which seem to be significantly correlated with the WTC. The curriculum developers and syllabus designers may also benefit from the results of the study to include the instruction of VLS. Students may attempt to study VLS in order to improve not only their language proficiency but also their WTC. Likewise, all people who are concerned with teaching or learning a foreign language may benefit from the results of the study to some extent especially through consciousness raising in order to understand and consider the roles played by the two variables of WTC and VLS in the process of learning or teaching a second or foreign language.

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