

## Exploring the Relationship between International Posture and Willingness to Communicate in Iranian EFL context

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**Abstract:** WTC (willingness to communicate) emerged as a concept to account for individuals' first language (L1) and second language (L2) communication. It is important to know what factors affect WTC in acquiring English proficiency. It has been conceptualized a heuristic model according to which authentic communication in L2 could be seen as a result of complex set of interrelated variables. They claimed that their heuristic model can provide a pedagogical use for L2 education. Relations among L2 learning and L2 communication variables in the Japanese context. In his model, a latent variable, international posture, was hypothesized to capture the general attitude toward the international community and foreign language learning in Japan. The current research is intended to partially assess Yahima's model concerning the relationship between attitudes defined as international posture and WTC. The data for the study were collected students studying English language teaching (ELT) in Tabriz Azad University by using five surveys in instruments. Data analysis showed a positive correlation between attitude (international posture) and WTC, and also a direct path from attitude to WTC. All components of attitude (international posture) including Interest in International Vocation/Activities (IVA), Intercultural Friendship Orientation in Learning English (IFO), Interest in Foreign Affair (IFA) and Intergroup Approach Avoidance Tendency (AAT) had positive effects on WTC. In this research, Tabriz Azad University students demonstrated positive attitude which made them have high WTC and motivation.

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### 1. Introduction

Why do some students seek, while others avoid, second language (L2) communication? Many language teachers have encountered students high in linguistic competence who are unwilling to use their L2 for communication whereas other students, with only minimal Linguistic knowledge, seem to communicate in the L2 whenever possible.

L2 researchers have attempted to explore what factors can determine individual differences in L2 use. There are some affective variables that cause individual differences in the success of learning behavior. These affective variables are personality, attitudes, motivation, self-confidence and language anxiety (Onwuebuozie, Bailey, & Daley 2000; Gardner, 1985, 1988, MacIntyre, 1994; Schumann, 1975). These affective variables cannot affect L2 alone. They must be in relationship with each other. For example less anxiety leads to more confidence and both of them make the person get positive attitude toward learning L2. In addition, lower anxiety leads to higher motivation and causes to learn L2 (Clement et al., 1994; Ely, 1986; Gardner, 1985, 1988; Onwuebuozie et al., 2000; Yashima 2002). In order to explain the inter-relationship between affective variables, a comprehensive theoretical model is needed to show the individual differences in

SLA (MacIntyre et al, 1998). This theoretical model that explains the interrelation among affective variables is conceptualized as "willingness to communicate" (WTC) and is described as the probability of initiating communication specifically talking when the opportunity arises (McCroskey, 1992; McCroskey & Baer, 1985). The theoretical concept of WTC has improved from the perspective of many researches and empirical studies that have tested affective variables in order to identify the construct of WTC. WTC conceptualized with reference to first or native language communication was introduced by McCroskey and Baer (1985), building on the earlier work of Burgoon (1976) and others.

Eventually, MacIntyre et al (1998) have proposed a conceptual "pyramid" model designed to account for individual differences in the decision to initiate L2 communication. Later, Yashima (2002) explained L2 student WTC with four affective variables including language motivation, attitude, L2 competence, and self confidence in L2. In fact, MacIntyre et al. (1998), who conceptualized a heuristic model of WTC in a L2, claim that there are a number of affective variables that have potential impact on WTC. It looks that WTC in L2 is the

interaction among affective variables influencing individual differences in SLA.

These affective variables influence individual differences in L2 communication behavior, which in turn produces individual differences in getting L2 proficiency (Oller & Perkins, 1978; Rubin, 1975). According to Gardner, the students who are more active in L2 use have more potential to develop L2 communication competence (Gardner, 1985, 1988; Long, 1982, cited in Strong, 1983). The theoretical perspective of WTC can explain the interrelations among attitude (international posture and WTC. Thus, this study investigates the interrelationships between the concepts of WTC on the one hand and L2 attitude defined as international posture and its components on the other in Iranian EFL content.

## 2. Methodology

The important purpose of this study was to examine the reliability of MacIntyre et al.'s models of WTC in L2 in explaining the interrelations of attitudes (international posture) influencing WTC in English among students learning English as a foreign language in Tabriz Azad University. In current research the research questions are.

1) Is there any significant relation between the EFL learners' attitude and their WTC?

2) Are there any significant relation between the four components of attitude and the learner's WTC?

Based on the research question, the following null hypotheses were developed.

1) There is no significant relation between the EFL learners' attitude and their WTC.

2) There are no significant relation between the four components of attitude and the learners' WTC.

The examination of the research hypotheses will provide explanation to the main question of the relationship between attitude and WTC.

### 2.1. Research Design

The present study uses a quantitative correlational research design. A packet of questionnaires which will assess the participant's level of attitudes and WTC are employed to show the relationship between WTC and attitude (international posture). We can replace attitudes in Gardner's conceptualization with international posture.

With four variables: Intercultural Friendship Orientation, Interest in International Vocation/Activities, Interest in Foreign Affairs and Intergroup Approach Avoidance Tendency (see figure 1). The current study measures WTC in English with a single indicator variable: WTC in English (see figure 2).

The structural model is illustrated to show the latent variables and indicator variables (see figure 2).

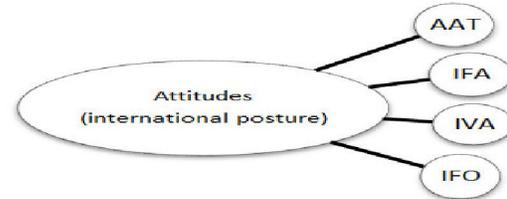


Figure 1: Four variables of attitude

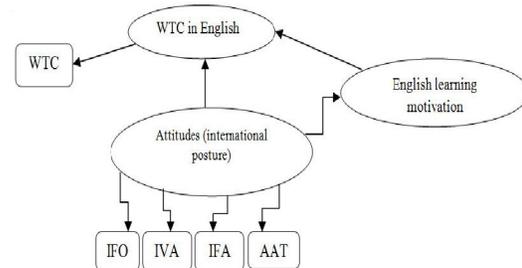


Figure 2: The structural model of attitude and WTC

Data collected from questionnaire were processed using a statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) to analyses descriptive statistics, reliability estimates and correlational analyses. As we see in Figure 2 the four components of attitudes are IFO / IVA / IFA and AAT. For IFO we use four items, IVA we use six items, IFA we use two items and AAT we use seven items. In WTC we use 12 items.

### 2.2. Participant selection

The participants were 150 Iranian BA students that study in Tabriz Azad University. Of these, 109 were female and 41 were male. All of the participants spoke English as their foreign and Turkish as their first language. The students answered all the questions carefully. All the participants had been learning English for approximately 7-8 years before starting their university education.

### 2.3. Research instrument

In this research we want to examine the relationship between MacIntyre et al.'s concept of WTC in English and attitude influencing WTC among Tabriz Azad University students. The other research that complete MacIntyre et al.'s heuristic model WTC in EFL context was Yashima (2002) which was performed in Japan. We use instruments that Yashima (2002) used in her study. The instrument was a questionnaire entitled as: A package of questionnaires measure indicator variables.

In the structural model for this research two latent variables were included: Attitude (international posture) and WTC. Five indicator variables were:

1) Intercultural Friendship Orientation: On the basis of Yashima's investigation of Japanese learner's orientation (2002) four items in intercultural

friendship orientation that were similar to integrativeness were used (cronbach's  $\alpha=.85$ ). Student rated with regard to their reasons for taking English on a 7-point scale.

2) Approach – Avoidance Tendency. Seven items served to assess the tendency to approach or avoid non Iranians within Iran (cronbach's  $\alpha=.79$ ). Examples are: "I want to participate in a volunteer activity to help foreigners living in the neighboring community" and "I would share an apartment with international students". Students were again to evaluate their own behavioral inclinations on a 7-point scale for each of the seven items.

3) Interest in International Vocation / Activities. Six items (cronbach's  $\alpha=.73$ ) indexed how much an individual was interested in an international career and living overseas (e.g., "I'm interested in volunteer activities in developing countries such as participating in Youth International Development assistance" or "I'd rather avoid the kind of work that sends me overseas frequently"). Respondents recorded ratings on 7-point scales.

4) Interest in Foreign Affairs. Two items (cronbach's  $\alpha=.67$ ) reflected student's interest in international issues. They are: "I often read and watch news about foreign countries" and "I often talk about situation and events in foreign countries with my family and or friends". Ratings were recorded on 7-point scales.

5) Willingness to communicate in English. Was measured by 12-item scale (cronbach's  $\alpha=.91$ ) formulated by MacCroskey (1992) The scale asked participants to indicate the percentage of time they would be willing to communicate in English when free to do so in each type of communication situation between the numbers (totally not willing to) and 100 (totally willing to). (e.g., present a talk in English to a group of stranger).

## 2.4. Procedure

Free and informed consent was obtained from all participants. Students in Tabriz Azad University were tested with permission of professor. I gave the entire question to the students and they looked them carefully. They asked some questions about the research and I tried to explain them. The questions were about willingness to communicate in English. They were 12 situations. I said that you are free in choice. They had to choose the percentage of times they would choose to communicate in each type of situation.

The other questions were about attitude as defined international posture the four components of international posture were Interest in Foreign Affair that has two items, Intergroup Approach-Avoidance Tendency (AAT) with seven items, Interest in International Vocation or Activities (IVA) with six items and Interest in Foreign Affair (IFA) with two items. Items were from strongly disagreeing to strongly agree.

They were from number one to seven. The purpose and different terms of the questionnaire were explained before the distribution by their professor. During the completion process of the questionnaire, the professor helped the respondents to understand and all parts. Students were informed that the information they gave would be kept confidential and be used for research purpose only. After 25 minute they gave back to me.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Data analysis to answer research questions

For data analysis of this research we used SPSS which is common in many researches. Data, collected from questionnaire were processed using SPSS. Table 1 represents the descriptive statistic of the participants' response to the items in WTC.

**Table 1:** Distribution for L2 WTC

N Valid	WTC	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12
	1800	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
Missing	0	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650	1650
Mean	51.07	48.80	49.07	57.60	55.80	58.60	42.00	44.60	59.20	48.80	41.60	62.00	44.80

Table (2) represents the participant's response in Intergroup Approach-Avoidance Tendency (AAT), Interest in International vocations / Activities (IVA), Intercultural Friendship orientation in English (IFO), Interest in Foreign Affair (IFA).

**Table 2:** Interest in Foreign Affair (IFA)

Items	Q1	Q2	Total
1	12	6	18
2	21	24	45
3	21	21	42
4	33	30	63
5	27	21	48
6	30	27	57
7	6	21	27
<b>Total</b>	150	150	300

**Table 3:** Intercultural Friendship Orientation in English learning (IFO)

Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
<b>1</b>	1	0	3	3	7
<b>2</b>	6	0	3	3	12
<b>3</b>	6	0	27	6	39
<b>4</b>	15	15	12	9	51
<b>5</b>	36	21	18	18	93
<b>6</b>	30	33	30	39	132
<b>7</b>	56	81	57	72	266
<b>Total</b>	150	150	150	150	600

**Table 4:** Intergroup Approach-Avoidance Tendency(AAT)

Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Total
<b>1</b>	0	99	0	51	14	51	0	215
<b>2</b>	15	18	6	21	10	24	0	94
<b>3</b>	9	15	15	30	21	12	0	102
<b>4</b>	15	3	15	15	37	36	14	135
<b>5</b>	21	3	6	15	14	6	10	75
<b>6</b>	21	3	45	9	36	9	45	168
<b>7</b>	69	9	63	9	18	12	81	261
<b>Total</b>	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	1050

**Table 5:** Interest in International Vocation or Activities (IVA)

Items	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Total
<b>1</b>	42	6	9	6	15	45	123
<b>2</b>	15	6	12	18	30	24	105
<b>3</b>	15	9	9	15	27	21	96
<b>4</b>	27	36	21	21	45	21	171
<b>5</b>	18	9	33	36	15	9	120
<b>6</b>	12	27	18	27	18	30	132
<b>7</b>	21	57	48	27	0	0	153
<b>Total</b>	150	150	150	150	150	150	900

**Table 6:** The distribution of five variables

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
IFA	4.19	1.727	300
AAT	4.25	2.278	1050
IVA	4.19	2.006	900
IFO	5.78	1.446	600
WTC	51.07	30.654	1800

Following the scoring of L2 WTC scale adapted from MacIntyre, Baker, Clement and Contod (2001). The L2 WTC mean (51.07), AAT (4.25), IFA (4.19), IVA (4.19) and IFO (5.78) were obtained by averaging the sum of all participants total scores on the items designed to the five components. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was further

performed to assess the correlation between WTC and Attitude (international posture). The result of correlation analysis showed that there was significant positive relationship between L2 WTC and IFA ( $r = .990$   $p < 0.01$ ), AAT ( $r = .993$   $p < 0.01$ ), IVA ( $r = .995$   $p < 0.01$ ) and IFO ( $r = .924$   $p < 0.01$ )

**Table 7: Correlations between WTC and Components of International posture**

		IFA	AAT	IVA	IFO	WTC
IFA	Pearson Correlation	1	.985**	.988**	.933**	.990**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
AAT	Pearson Correlation		1	.987**	.915**	.993**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000
	N		150	150	150	150
IVA	Pearson Correlation			1	.941**	.995**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000
	N			150	150	150
IFO	Pearson Correlation				1	.924**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.000
	N				150	150
WTC	Pearson Correlation					1
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N					150

Table 4 shows the correlation matrix of four components of attitude and WTC. The data analysis shows there are positive relationship between WTC and four components. All components of attitudes effect on WTC.

Then the answer to research question that.

1- Is there any significant relationship between EFL attitude and their WTC?

2- Are there any significant relation between the four components of attitude and the learner's WTC?

Is positive. As we see in table 4 there is positive relationship between attitude and WTC and all four components of attitude (international posture) IFA, AAT, IVA and IFO have significant correlation and all components effect on WTC.

Tabriz Azad university students have positive attitudes and this leads to high WTC in L2. The data analysis indicated that there is positive relationship between attitude (international posture) and willingness communicate. As the tables and figures show all the correlations were positive.

Yashima (2002) reported that attitudes were directly related to WTC in English and that attitude was also directly related to English learning motivation. The present study replicated the findings of Yashima study. The present study indicated that there was a positive relationship between the two variables.

All components of attitude (international posture) have positive affect on WTC. As we see in table 4. The four variables i.e, Interest in Foreign Affair (IFA), Interest in International Vocation/Activities (IVA), Intercultural Friendship Orientation in learning English (IFO) and Intergroup Approach Avoidance Tendency (AAT) have significant correlation at the 0/01 level (2-tailed).

This finding shows that the selected Tabriz Azad University students show high level of WTC. They have positive attitudes and high motivation. Positive attitudes effects on WTC. Their willingness to communicate can potentially contribute to their acquisition of English as a foreign language.

#### 4. Discussion

The findings of this research show that Tabriz Azad University students learning English as a foreign language had high levels of WTC in English. Considering the theoretical perspective that WTC in L2 is one of the important factors determining success in developing L2 proficiency, to be successful in L2 learning Tabriz Azad University students need a high level of willing to communicate in English.

MacIntyre et al., (1998) claimed that involving many affective variables such as personality, attitudes, motivation and self-confidence, "authentic communication in L2 can be seen as the result of complex system of interrelated variables" (p.547). Iran EFL educators need to be aware of the relationship between these affective variables and their influence on WTC because a higher level of WTC leads to success in achieving proficiency in L2.

MacIntyre et al (1998) explained that their heuristic model of WTC can be put to practical and pedagogical use in explaining the diversity in WTC. MacIntyre et al.'s heuristic model of WTC was reliable in explaining the diversity of WTC among Azad university student's learning English as a foreign language.

L2 researchers have argued that positive attitude toward L2 learning are important for success and quality of L2 use with L2 speaker. L2 students with positive attitude consider L2 learning enjoyable and beneficial, and this leads them to get actively

involved in communication and L2 use (see Gardner et al., 1978; Naiman et al., 1975). Although attitude is important in accomplishing L2 proficiency, many studies reported that the relationship between attitudes and success in SLA is inconsistent. Some L2 researcher reported negative relationship between attitudes and success of SLA. (see Gardner, 1980; Oller et al., 1977).

L2 researcher showed that the attitude cannot influence the SLA alone but via interaction with other affective variables (see Gardner, 1985, 1988). Attitudes, located in layer V in MacIntyre's model, have more remote and indirect effect on WTC in L2 through affective variables (see MacIntyre et al., 1998, pp 551 – 551). There is not direct path from attitude to WTC. However the current research show that attitude (international posture) were directly related to WTC. Attitude (international posture) is one of the important factors influencing WTC in English with interaction with other affective variables. If somebody has positive attitude toward learning L2 it will definitely influence motivation and WTC. In this research the relation between attitude and WTC was positive. According to the finding of current study, attitudes were directly related with WTC in L2.

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