To talk or not to talk, that is the question.

Unpacking the complexities underlying Chinese students’ willingness to communicate in the second and foreign language classrooms

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Warmer questions

1. Based on your experience teaching Chinese students, have you found some of them very quiet in class?

2. Do you find it problematic if they don’t actively participate in speaking activities in class? Why or why not?

3. What do you think are the reasons for their quietness in class?

4. What do you usually do to encourage their participation in class?
Outline

- Project 1: exploration of willingness to communicate (WTC) in ESL classrooms (New Zealand context)
- Project 2: relationship between teacher interaction strategy and student WTC in EFL classrooms (Chinese context)
- Recent studies on Chinese students’ WTC
Importance of willingness to communicate

• Development of learners’ communicative competence valued in modern language pedagogy.

• Output hypothesis (Swain 1985, 1995):
  pushed output → awareness of gaps in interlanguage system → analyse gaps explicitly and experiment with new target structures and forms.

• L2 WTC → frequent communication → facilitates language development (MacIntyre and Doucette 2010) & creates positive learning experience (MacIntyre 2007)
Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in L2


- **Definition**: “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels 1998, p. 547)
2 levels of WTC

- **Trait WTC** prepares individuals for communication by creating a tendency for them to place themselves in situations where communication is expected.

- **State WTC** influences the decision to initiate communication in a particular situation (MacIntyre et al. 1999).
Quantitative survey studies on L2 WTC

• L2 WTC is closely related to:

1. Motivation, attitudes and L2 confidence (Ghonsooly et al., 2012, MacIntyre et al. 2001)
2. International posture (Yashima 2002, Yashima et al., 2004)
3. Learner beliefs (Fushino 2010, Peng and Woodrow 2010)
4. Personality (MacIntyre and Charos 1996)
5. Gender and age (MacIntyre et al., 2002)
6. Classroom environment (Khajavy et al., 2016, Peng and Woodrow 2010)
Qualitative studies on L2 WTC

• Methods: interview, classroom observation, journal and stimulated recall

• L2 WTC intertwines with:
  2. Teacher factor: teaching style, teacher support and immediacy behaviour (Cao 2014, Peng 2014)
Project 1: ESL classroom WTC

- To explore the dynamic and situated nature of L2 learners’ WTC within the immediate classroom context.

- To investigate the interdependence between the individual and environmental factors underlying classroom WTC.
Research Design

- Classroom-based, multiple case study approach
  - Phase I Study (n=6, 3 weeks)
  - Phase II Study (n=12, 2-5 months)
  - Phase III Study (n=10, 1 semester)
Phase II Study (20 Weeks)

- **Participants** (n= 6, 20 weeks; n= 6, 10 weeks)
  - Advanced level ESL learners enrolled in a pre-university EAP program in New Zealand

- **Data collection**
  - Classroom observations (2 hours/week)
  - Stimulated-recall interviews with students (3 rounds)
  - Journal entries (1 entry/week)
  - Semi-structured interviews with teachers (twice)
Data Analysis

- **Quantitative data**
  - WTC token: WTC classroom observation scheme (Whole Class & Pair/Group) (Cao & Philp 2006)
    - Volunteer an answer (comment) Va / Vc
    - Give an answer to the teacher’s question Gg / Gi / Pr
    - Ask the teacher (a question, or for clarification) Aq / Ac
    - Guess the meaning of an unknown word Gm
    - Try out a difficult form (lexical, morphological, syntactical) TrL / TrM / TrS
    - Talk to (neighbour, a group member) Tn / Tg
    - Present own opinion in class (Respond to an opinion) Po / Ro
    - Volunteer to participate in class activities Vp

- **Qualitative data**
  - Stimulated-recall interviews and journal entries: content analysis (Guba and Lincoln 1994)
Main Findings

• The L2 classroom WTC construct is a dynamic situational variable rather than a trait disposition.

• The situational WTC in L2 classrooms results from the interdependence between individual characteristics, classroom environmental conditions and linguistic factors.
The Three Dimensions

• **Environmental dimension**: topic, task type, interlocutor, teacher, class interactional pattern

• **Individual dimension**: self-confidence, personality, emotion, perceived opportunity to communicate

• **Linguistic dimension**: language proficiency, reliance on L1
Driving and Restraining Forces

➢ Type 1
  • Facilitating factors > Inhibiting factors
    - Self-confidence
    - Topical knowledge
    - Interesting task
    - Higher communicative competence
    • Dominant interlocutors

➢ Type 2
  • Inhibiting factors > Facilitating factors
    - Challenging task
    - Low language proficiency
    - Feeling of frustration
    • Extroverted
    • Teacher support
A Classroom L2 WTC Model

Microsystem – English L2 Classrooms

Environmental Dimension
Linguistic Dimension
Individual Dimension

High(er) WTC
Low(er) WTC

Participation in Classrooms
Case studies (20 weeks)

• Case I: Yi-yun – sensitive to interlocutors’ performance
• Case II: Chen-feng – extremely sensitive to the environment
• Case III: Cai-wei – a shy student
• Case IV: Ai-ling – a confident speaker
• Case V: Rong-rong – a frequent user of private speech
• Case VI: Mu-cheng – a reticent and introverted student
Characterising Case Studies

Figure 5.1. Continuum of dynamic fluctuations in WTC.
Contributions to Theory and Research

• This study provided a new perspective (sociocognitive/ecological) on researching the WTC construct.

• This study acknowledged the interplay and complex interrelationship between the social and cognitive factors underlying dynamic situational WTC in L2 classrooms.
Harmonious Relationship between Person and Context

“I co-exist with the world, and everything in the world and I are one.”

Equality of All Substances

Chuang Tzu
(Chinese Philosopher, 369-286 B.C.)

天地與我并生
而萬物與我為一
莊子《齋物論》
Project 2: EFL Classroom Context

- **Context:** A British university in China

- **Participants:**
  - 12 English tutors (native or near-native speakers)
  - 12 classes (240 students)
    - Year 1 classes: 9
    - Year 2 classes: 3
Research Aims

• To explore factors underlying Chinese students’ WTC in English classes

• To investigate what teacher interaction strategies promote students’ WTC in class
Data Collection

- Classroom observation
  (video-taped 12 classes, 1 hour per session)

- Stimulated-recall interviews with 40 students

- Semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers
Data Analysis

- Teacher interaction strategies (Classroom discourse analysis)
  (Clifton, 2006; Cullen, 1998; Toth, 2011; Walsh, 2002)

- Speech modification
  - asking display or referential questions
  - scaffolding: reformulation, direct error correction
  - content feedback: elaboration, comment
  - checking for confirmation
  - giving instructions

- Extended wait time
Learning History

- Characteristics of English classes in Chinese high schools:
  - Highly teacher-fronted
  - Focusing on transmission of textbook knowledge
  - Geared for examinations
    (Peng 2011)

- Transition from high school to tertiary study can be difficult.
  - From learning English for passing examinations to professional communication
    (Benson and Lor 1999)
Influence of Chinese Culture

➢ Chinese Confucian heritage
  • Other-directed self
    Face concern
  • Submissive way of learning
  • Teacher authority

Factors Underlying WTC

- Learner-internal (Individual & Linguistic)
- Learner-external (Environmental)
- Cultural
Learner-internal factors

• Personality
• Language anxiety
• Self-confidence
• English proficiency
• Perceived opportunity to communicate
• Mood
Learner-external factors

- Teacher support
- Interlocutor
- Interactional pattern
- Topical knowledge
- Task/activity type
- Question type
Interactional Pattern

- **Teacher-fronted pattern**
  - Anxiety-provoking
  - Face-threatening

- **Pair & group work**
  - Preferred pattern
  - Peer enthusiasm
  - Teacher facilitation
Task/activity type

- **Accuracy-based activities**
  - Discuss lesson materials
  - Exchange ideas about notes

- **Fluency-based activities**
  - Role-play (favorite)
  - Debate
  - Fun type discussion
  - Seminar
Cultural dimension

• Cultural embarrassment of volunteering answers (showing-off)

• Controlling effect on self-confidence

• Submission to teacher’s authority

• Face-saving (avoid risk-taking, concerned about accuracy over fluency)
Teacher Interaction Strategies

- Approach behaviour
- Referential questions vs. display questions
- Content feedback
- Teacher elicitation and prompting techniques
- Extended wait time
- Thinking time for quiet students

Question type

- Display questions
  (request information known to the teacher)
- Referential questions
  (request information unknown to the teacher)

E.g.

*T1:* What about the second one? -- display

SS: Toyota.

*T1:* How do you know? -- referential

S1: Symbol.

S2: It’s obvious.

(Year 1 Finance)
Excerpt 1:
1. T3: Have a look at this (pointing at a socket on the wall), what’s this thing here? (Ss looking at it with interest) Do you know this in English, s--- (No response)
2. T3: Socket, an electric socket, an electric wall socket, how many how many holes has that thing got?
3. SS: Five
4. T3: There are actually two different ones. Why are there two different ones?
5. S1: Different standard
6. T3: Two different standards, if I want to bring in something called an adapter, (board up ‘adapter’), how many of you have been to different countries where electricity standard is different?
7. S2: Hong Kong, Japan, England
8. T3: What happens in Hong Kong or England, do you know? (eye contact with S2) With electricity, is it the same as China?
9. S3: No (from another table, T3 turns around to look at him)
10. S2: It’s strange
11. T3: It’s strange, how is it strange (turns to S2 and moves closer to him) if I’ve brought my laptop and tried to plug it in in Hong Kong,
12. S3: It won’t work
13. S4: It won’t work
14. S2: It can’t get in

(Year 1, Engineering class)
Excerpt 2:
2. S2: Yes
3. T4: That’s potentially a very very big market for electric vehicles. XX Are there other technologies, think of what batteries do?
4. S3: Power source.
5. T4: So it stores what?
6. S4: Energy
7. T4: So what other technologies do we have storing energy? Need not be battery, but could possibly be used for example in cars or something else?
8. S1: Solar panel or something
9. T4: Do solar panels store energy?
10. S1: yeah stored in the battery within the solar panel.
    (Year 2 Science)
Recent research on Chinese students’ WTC

- Multiple case study
- Video taped classroom interaction
- Fluctuations of WTC in EFL classroom in China.
- Semiotic resources: gesture, gaze and language use

(Peng, Zhang and Chen 2016)
Findings

• The occurrence of mental processes in high WTC scenario > low WTC scenario

• Positive attitudes and engagement → students’ perception of teacher immediacy → enhance L2 WTC

• Adjacent moves evenly distributed between teacher and student in high WTC scenario; fewer adjacent moves in low WTC scenario

• High WTC scenario: student produced more output

• Low WTC scenario: teacher verbally kept holding the floor
Conclusions

- Chinese students’ WTC in English language classrooms are affected by their psychological factors mediated by classroom environmental factors.

- Within the Chinese sociocultural context, the influence of traditional culture still plays an important role in shaping students’ WTC.

(Cao 2014)
Conclusions

- Teachers should be mindful of the multimodal nature of classroom teaching and learning.

- Meaning potential in classroom communication is instantiated not only in language but also in instances of accompanying body language and other semiotic resources.

(Peng et al., 2016)
Pedagogical Recommendations

➢ Be mindful of the joint effect of classroom environment and psychological factors on learners’ WTC.

➢ Maximize the effect of positive factors
  • Motivating topics
  • Challenging but manageable tasks
  • Group & pair work
  • Cooperative interlocutors
  • Teacher support
Pedagogical Recommendations

Teachers can employ a range of interaction strategies to promote students’ WTC in class.

- Approach behaviour
- Elicitation/Prompting strategies
- Content feedback
- Extended wait time
Open Discussion

- What other factors have you noticed to affect students’ WTC?

- What interaction strategies do you employ in your own classes to promote students’ WTC?

- What interaction strategies might work in what circumstances?
• **Cao, Y-Q.** (2016). Teacher support and student willingness to communicate: The Chinese context. *TESL Reporter*.


