

Review

An overview on the willingness to communicate (WTC) across disciplines of Teaching Language (TL)

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Willingness to communicate (WTC) has recently become an important concept across disciplines of Teaching Language (TL) and communication. It has been proposed that pedagogic goals should be to increase learners' WTC so as to facilitate language learning. Some students seek, while others avoid, communication. Many language teachers have encountered students high in linguistic competence who are unwilling to communicate whereas other students, with only minimal linguistic knowledge, seem to communicate whenever possible. English teachers are highly suggested that they pave the way for the students to move beyond their linguistic or communicative competence as the primary goal of language instruction.

Key words: Willingness, communication, linguistic competence, communicative competence, self-perceived communication competence, affective variables.

INTRODUCTION

"One cannot communicate in the presence of another" according to McCroskey and Richmond (1990: 20). To develop physically as well as mentally, a human being is born with a few basic needs, one of which can be stressed as the need to communicate. This need, unlike other certain needs, can be hardly ignored or subjected to noticeable variability. Communication (verbal or nonverbal) is required at almost every phase of life to help a human being fulfill other crucial needs. It can even determine the degree of his success or failure in different stages of life. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) believed that to be a poor communicator or not to be willing to communicate with others is one of the dysfunctional behaviors in society. MacIntyre et al. (1998) argued that we normally communicate with people around us for a specific purpose; we either need their assistance, their cooperation or their services. Riffle and Seiffert (1987) believed that, among all human activities communication may be the most important one. How well we communicate, how willing we are to communicate, and

the degree of our apprehension about the process of communicating have profound effects throughout our entire lives.

In order to accomplish this enterprise, hence, the human being resorts to many ways from the early ages to get his self-types serve on him. He nonverbally communicates by crying, laughing, sound making, and facial expressions until the language is activated to permeate into his being. He picks up the words and phrases one by one through his folks and by exchange of expressions with other surrounding people and the media. In this way he then gradually masters this fascinating means of communication, i.e., language. This interaction, first in primitive atmospheres and then in broader domains helps him get command of the native language. Context and its role in interaction, hence, has long been the focus of scholarly attention (Clément and Kruidenier, 1985; MacIntyre et al., 1997) and language learning contentions (Clément et al., 1994) have been constantly recognized in tandem with the context in which they are presented. In a similar way, pedagogically-oriented research (Cummins, 2000) has also found the active application of language inside and outside the class a strong predictor responsible for internalized language learning.

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The major role of communication has been clearly stressed in modern language pedagogy and its inherent functions covering a range of individual as well as contextual characteristics have been valued more than the past. Individuals demonstrate invariable tendencies in their amount of first language (L1) talk (Borgatta and Bales, 1953; Chapple and Arensberg, 1940; Goldman-Eisler, 1951; as cited in McCroskey and Richmond, 1987), which suggests that a predisposition toward or away from communicating with others inevitably exists in all individuals' communication orientations given the choice.

This personality-based orientation toward communication (McCroskey and Richmond, 1987) represents willingness to communicate (WTC).

Affective variables such as attitudes, motivation and language anxiety are important factors in second/ foreign language acquisition. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is related to affective variables, so it is an important factor in second/ foreign language acquisition as well. The concept was first developed in L1 communication by McCroskey and his associates (McCroskey and Baer, 1985) and was applied to L2 communication by MacIntyre and Charos (1996).

McCroskey and Baer (1985) offered WTC as a stable trait, while MacIntyre et al. (1998) believed that WTC is a situational trait and proposed a conceptual "pyramid" model designed to account for individual differences in the decision to initiate L2 communication.

WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE (WTC)

An interpersonal communication advocates the participants to engage themselves in either attentive listening or responsive production of phrases. Although talking is a critical component in interpersonal communication and the opening of interpersonal relations, people are not alike in the degree to which they actually do talk.

Some individuals tend to speak only when spoken to – and sometimes not even then. Others tend to verbalize before being asked to. Context can prove to be so determining in encouraging certain people to embark on a conversation.

Briefly put, the underlying tendency of talking to others which is rooted in a personality variable is what is referred to as willingness to communicate (McCroskey and Baer, 1985).

The origin of the WTC is related to the first language (L1) communication (McCroskey and Baer, 1985). WTC was first used to measure the speaker's tendency to approach or avoid starting communication (McCroskey and Richmond, 1987). McCroskey believed that factors such as fear and anxiety play an important role in oral communication and he applied these issues as main elements of WTC in the second language context (McCroskey et al., 1985).

Willingness to communicate; a personality trait-like or situational state-like construct?

Hardly can anyone deny the dominant role of personality constraints in the type of communicative situations one voluntarily engages in. Nevertheless, some perceive situational variables as more determining factors. These variables include: How the person feels that day, whether he is motivated in the topic of discussion, what might be achieved or lost through communicating, type of communication the person has had with the others recently, who their interlocutor is, what the interlocutor looks like, and even the demands of time can all have a major impact, as can a wide variety of other elements. McCroskey and Richmond (1987) held that willingness to communicate is considerably influenced by situation. All the same, individuals are inclined to exhibit consistent willingness to communicate tendencies across situations. Indeed, it is decades that the research literature has been accumulated with records of consistent behavioral tendencies with regard to the frequency and amount of the talk (Borgatta and Bales, 1953; Chappel and Arensberg, 1940; Goldman-Eisler, 1951). This systematic pattern among communication behavior across interpersonal communication contexts suggests the presence of a personality parameter, a tendency, which is known as WTC. This personality orientation enables us to explain why one person will communicate and another will not under identical, or seemingly identical, situational constraints (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990).

Individuals proceed in a discernibly regular pattern in their frequency and amount of communication initiation which is a strong evidence of the trait-like characteristic of WTC (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990). This trait-like aspect of WTC was first developed to interpret individual differences in L1 communication and was stable over time and situations. From this perspective, WTC was defined as the tendency to involve in interactions when free to do so (Kang, 2005).

A new perspective of WTC was later presented to the communication literature by MacIntyre et al. (1998). They combined communication studies in L1 WTC and motivation studies in L2, and presented a schematic model of the WTC construct showing multiple layers of variables. They believed that some of these variables influence L2 learners' WTC. They defined WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (p. 547). According to their heuristic model, WTC is affected by immediate situational antecedents – the desire to communicate with a specific person and the state of communicative self-confidence – and more enduring influences, such as interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, self-confidence, intergroup attitudes, social situation, communicative competence, intergroup climate, and personality. Kang (2005), however, argues that the previous studies examined situational variables mainly

through a quantitative method using questionnaires which has not been insightful enough to explore situational characteristics of WTC in an actual situation.

Foundations of willingness to communicate construct

Having its roots in the works of Philips on *reticence* (1965, 1968), the present construct of willingness to communicate has emerged from the endeavors of Burgoon (1976) on the concept of *unwillingness to communicate* and also from Mortensen et al. (1977) efforts on *predispositions toward behavior* as well as McCroskey and Richmonds' (1982) focuses on the construct of *shyness*. All of these works place an emphasis on a presumed trait-like tendency toward communication (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990). According to McCroskey (1997), this construct was operationally defined by Burgoon which was conducive to developing a self-report measure. This measure consisted of two factors, approach-avoidance and reward. McCroskey held that in place of obtaining a general predisposition of unwillingness to communicate, Burgoon's research only confirmed that fear and anxiety could negatively affect the communication among interlocutors (Matsuoka and Evans, 2005). *Predisposition toward verbal behavior* which was initially introduced to the literature by Mortensen et al. (1977) for the phenomenon of consistency in the amount of communication of individuals across situations was observed by the data using a self-report scale known as the predispositions toward verbal behavior (PVB) scale. According to McCroskey (1997) this scale does not function as a general predisposition of unwillingness to communicate, but supplies evidence that individuals communicate in regular amounts (Matsuoka and Evans, 2005).

In 1987, McCroskey and Richmond decided to introduce the antecedents of WTC to the communication literature. They attempted to specify the variables which were most likely to lead to the predisposition of willingness to communicate. In fact, these variables can concurrently develop with WTC and are not necessarily the causes of variability in WTC. Put differently, it is very likely that these variables be involved in mutual causality with each other, and even more likely that both the antecedents and the willingness to communicate are engendered in common by other causal elements. These variables are introversion, anomie and alienation, self-esteem, cultural divergence, communication skill level, Perceived Communication Competence, and communication apprehension (McCroskey and Richmond, 1987). Three of these (anomie, alienation, and self-esteem) were reported to be statistically significant, but very modest correlations with WTC ($r < 0.25$). Consequently, although quite sensible to presume that people who are anomic or alienated from the people

around them or who have low self-esteem are less willing to initiate a conversation, the likelihood of any causal association of WTC with these antecedents would be quite small, taking into consideration the observed correlations, and these variables could be expected to account for very little variance in WTC (McCroskey and Richmond, 1986). In contrast, we could observe correlations of WTC with introversion, communication apprehension, and self-perceived communicative competence in variety of cultures and in considerable degrees (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990).

A good number of studies have indicated noticeable correlations of WTC with a variety of trait-like orientations of individuals. McCroskey and McCroskey (1986a) found that WTC is negatively associated with communication apprehension, introversion, anomie, and alienation and positively associated with self-esteem (statistically significant fair correlations). They also found WTC to be associated with Self-Perceived Communication Competence, SPCC, (McCroskey and McCroskey, 1986b). Zakahi and McCroskey reported that students who rated high on WTC were considerably more likely to verbally participate in class than were those scoring low on WTC (Zakahi and McCroskey, 1989). In another study, the personality-based variables underlying WTC were investigated by MacIntyre (1994) in a causal analysis. He regarded the sources of WTC among the constructs initially identified by Burgoon (communication apprehension, anomie, alienation, introversion, self-esteem) using a causal modeling. This model focused on the way perceived competence and anxiety influenced WTC separately, whereas in Clement's model (Clement and Kruidenier, 1985; as cited in Yashima et al., 2004), the two were seen to form a higher order construct, self-confidence in using the L2. The results indicated that communication apprehension and communicative competence were the two most immediate variables responsible for the amount of WTC. In other words, as a person experiences more anxiety for communicating, he will develop more negative thoughts about his own ability to initiate a communication (less self-perceived competence) and this accordingly leads to a decline in willingness to communicate. Further, it was reported that the changes in SPCC were more strongly reflected in WTC while a decrease in CA would increase WTC both directly and indirectly through its impact on SPCC (Yashima et al., 2004).

Willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2

The students' willingness to communicate in a second language has always followed unidentifiable patterns. It is hard to know why some students seek while others evade second language (L2) communication. McCroskey and Richmond (1991) held that the personality variable known as WTC determines why certain individuals initiate a conversation in certain times while others nominate

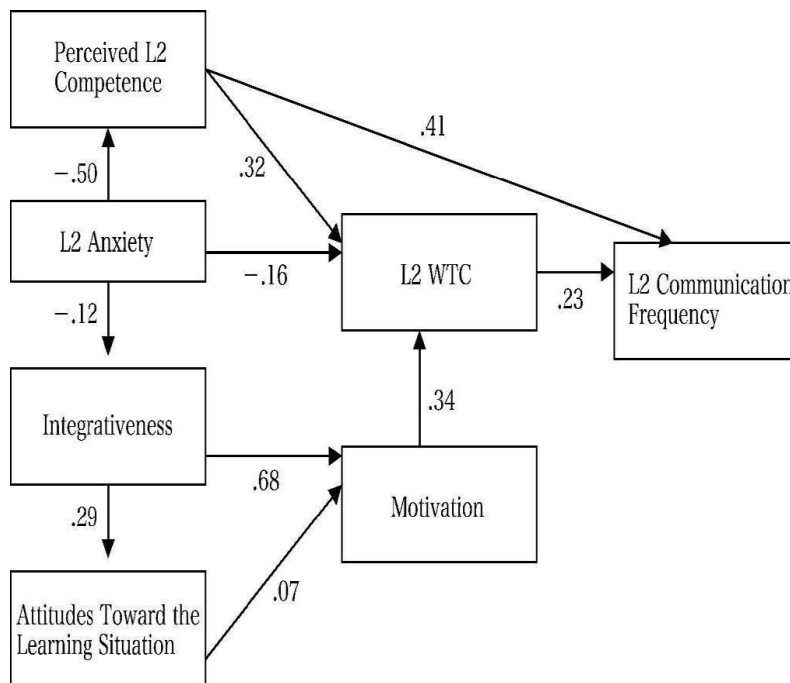


Figure 1. First path model of L2 WTC.

reticence in similar situations. There are many language teachers who have found students high in linguistic competence who do not desire to use their L2 for communication; whereas, other students with only minimal linguistic knowledge have greater tendency to communicate in the L2 in every opportunity they have and without the least apprehensive influences. However, many individuals seem to be taking advantage of their remarkable communicative competence in many ways. Even the people with very minimal language abilities are observed to initiate conversations without being the victim of apprehensive restraints. Body language, common gestures, shared words are some of the means they often use to facilitate communication. On the other hand, as mentioned above, linguistically-competent people might be poor interlocutors. Indeed, despite strong communicative competence, spontaneous and sustained use of the L2 is hardly guaranteed.

In 1996, MacIntyre and Charos developed the first path model of L2 WTC. The initial figure which was known to examine the interaction among the variables of community-affected interlocations was later modified to encompass a broader range of variables which were responsible for individual and inter-personal encounters. The relationship between affective variables, that is, attitudes, motivation, perceived competence, and anxiety and their impact on WTC and the actual use measured by the frequency of L2 communication were tested. As the Figure 1 indicates, significant paths influencing L2 communication via WTC were provided from motivation, and perceived communication competence. It was

depicted that both anxiety and integrativeness influence WTC indirectly. Anxiety influences WTC through perceived communication competence and integrativeness affects WTC through motivation. This model was the first model focusing on WTC in L2 (Matsuoka and Evans, 2005).

The construct of Willingness to communicate was first introduced into communication literature by McCroskey and Baer (1985), and McCroskey and Richmond (1986) based on Burgoon's (1976) earlier efforts (Wen and Clement, 2003). Conceptualizing WTC in L1 as the probability of engaging in a communication when free to choose to do so, McCroskey and Baer portrayed WTC as a trait-like construct insignificantly influenced by short-lived situational variables. McCroskey and associates showed that WTC is related to such attributes as communication apprehension, perceived communication competence, introversion, extroversion, self-esteem and so forth. In other words although WTC is undoubtedly affected by situational factors, McCroskey and Baer conceptualized it explicitly as a personality trait. They characterized it as a stable and invariable predisposition to talk in various situations. The model that was proposed by MacIntyre (1994) viewed WTC from another perspective. The model examined the interrelations among several individual difference variables as predictors of WTC in the L1. Results were consistent with a model in which WTC was seen to be most directly influenced by a combination of communication apprehension and perceived communication competence. In turn, these variables were seen to be

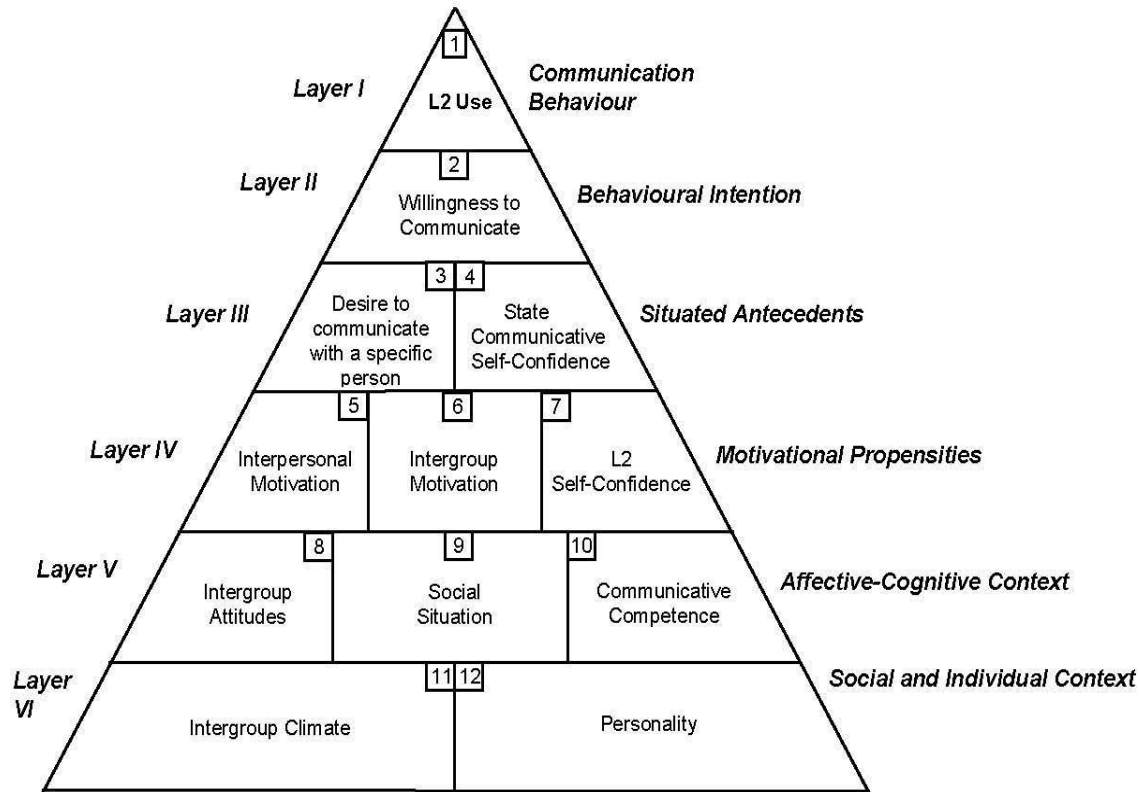


Figure 2. Pyramid model of WTC.

caused by introversion and self-esteem, and to some extent anomie. The study concluded that approximately 60% of the variance in WTC can be accounted for by this model. Further MacIntyre suggested that this model may also be applied when examining variability across situations (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

MacIntyre and Charos' model (1996) was followed by a heuristic model of L2 WTC developed by MacIntyre et al. (1998). They presented a model with different layers of variables that feed into WTC. In other words, WTC is a final-order variable that is determined by other factors. This model, known as a heuristic model of variables influencing WTC, considers the grounding precursors of WTC rooted in six layers which are as follows: communication behavior, behavioral intention, situational antecedents, motivational propensities, affective-cognitive context, and social-individual context (Figure 2).

At the base of the model the societal and individual context of communication are noticed to have the most noticeable share of significance. This layer is concerned with an interaction between society and the individual. Basically, the intergroup climate in which interlocutors evolve is referred to as societal context; whereas, the individual context refers to the fixed personality characteristics known to be particularly linked with communication. The societal context prepares the opportunities for both learning and using a second

language (Clément, 1986), imposing attitudes and values of society members, bias, prejudice, and discrimination. Following Gardner and Clément (1990), intergroup climate can be described in the light of two complementary dimensions involved with the structural characteristics of the community and their enduring and affective correlates. Thorough intergroup relations entail the learning of a second language and its subsequent use; whereas, inferior intergroup relations may distort the motivation, reduce the tendency to learn and communicate in another language (Gardner and Clément, 1990).

The next factor that explains how individuals react to and communicate with the members of their own cultural group as well as out-group members is the individual's personality. Personality traits such as extrovertedness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience can determine the degree of second language learning and the willingness to communicate in that second language (MacIntyre and Charos, 1996; Lalonde and Gardner, 1984). Yashima (2002) examined how individual differences such as attitude (international posture), English learning motivation, and English communication confidence influence WTC in English in the Japanese context. Different types of personalities may imply more or less willingness to learn a second language as well as

different levels of competence and/or confidence in using another language to communicate (Ehrman, 1990; Ehrman and Oxford, 1990; as cited in MacIntyre et al., 1998). As presented in MacIntyre (2007) WTC is a complex construct influenced by a number of other individual differences such as communication anxiety, perceived communication competence and perceived behavioral control.

Affective and cognitive context of second language communication is another influential factor. These variables are known to be individually-based and not typically specific to any situation (MacIntyre et al., 1998). These involve intergroup attitudes, communicative experience, and communicative competence. Intergroup attitudes entail the concept of integrativeness. A likely powerful motive for an individual to learn a second language has been known as the desire to mix and identify with the members of a second language community (Gardner, 1985); whereas, a fear of assimilation and losing one's identity may be a strong drive to avoid learning or using a second language (Clément and Kruidenier, 1985). Attitudes toward the second language itself are also included in intergroup attitudes. It is believed that having a positive attitude toward learning the second language, might promise more willingness to use it in the future. Communicative experience also plays a significant role. Put differently, experiencing certain situations may render an individual more willing to communicate in other similar situations, but that experience may not transfer to all situations. Sometimes for an alteration of an individual's communication experience in a better way, the relative frequency and pleasantness of prior contact with the L2 community is recommended. This leads to varying levels of willingness in the same person to communicate in different situations. Communicative competence, either real or perceived, is also very likely to bring about changes in WTC. In the past it had been assumed that communicative competence in an L2 led to the use of that L2, but it is never that simple. There are varying types of communicative competence that affect the whole, namely linguistic competence, discourse competence, actional competence, socio-cultural competence, and strategic competence.

The next layer in the model can be referred to as motivational tendencies which can be described as consistent individual difference traits present in many situations (MacIntyre et al., 1998). It involves interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and second language self-confidence. An individual's relationship to the second language and the people who speak that language is what we know as interpersonal motivation. Intergroup motivation is defined as the attitudes and relations between individuals representative of language-related groups (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Communicative competence, in the light of experience, increases self confidence. More perceived

communicative competence is conducive to higher self-confidence, and consequently a greater willingness to communicate in a second language. Our certain patterns of communication are known to be relatively consistent over time. This means that people depict systematic patterns in their communication behavior across situations (MacIntyre et al., 1998). However, specific situations might arouse specific communicative reactions which differ over different situations. These variables are dealt with in the next layer which can be referred to as situated antecedents of communication. These variables are defined as a predilection to communicate with a specific person and state communicative self-confidence. This desire to communicate with a specific person is affected by the elements of affiliation and control. Control also affects second language communication. If a communicator can comfortably apply his second language for achieving a goal, control may be a motive. People generally attempt to influence each other's behavior, and in a second language situation achieving a goal by influencing another person's behavior can become a motive for communicating in a second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

State communicative self-confidence is affected by two parameters: perceived competence and lack of anxiety (Clément, 1986). People might be subject to varied amounts of competence and anxiety at different times. This, in turn, brings about varying levels of willingness to communicate in a second language which can be situation-dependent. Indeed experiencing a particular situation affects both perceived competence and the level of anxiety. This is why unfamiliar situations would be known to result in a lower WTC, while familiar situations in which the interlocutor is free of apprehension positively affect WTC because there would be less anxiety felt and higher perceived competence experienced. The final two layers in the model are willingness to communicate and actual communication. Willingness to communicate evolves from a joint effect of the variables listed above and can be defined as a predisposition to speak in the second language at a particular time (McCroskey and Baer, 1985). A person might be inclined to speak even without the opportunity to do so, although WTC is characterized as having a direct impact on second language use. Ideally, individuals with higher willingness to communicate would be assumed to use that second language more often, and would be expected to voluntarily experience situations requiring a second language more frequently. This is why MacIntyre and associates argue that willingness to communicate entails a greater likelihood of using a second language (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

MacIntyre et al. (2001) studied willingness to communicate as a measure of social support, and language learning orientations of immersion students. Matsuoka (2004) focused on WTC among the college students in Japan both in L1 and L2. Matsuoka and

Evans (2005) argued that willingness to communicate plays a significant role in the second language development of Japanese nursing students.

Clement et al. (2003) focused on the effects of context, norms, and vitality. They combined both social context model, which stresses the importance of contact, L2 confidence, and identity in acquiring a L2 and WTC, which concerns with the functions of L2 use. The aim of their study was to consider both contextual and individual differences in L2 use. Participants of their study were both Anglophone and Francophone students attending a Canadian bilingual university.

Kang (2005) reported a qualitative study of the situated WTC of four adult male Korean learners of English in the United States. The learners were paired off with native speakers and invited to engage in free conversation. In this context international posture did not appear to play any role. Rather the participants situational WTC in their L2 appeared to emerge under psychological conditions of excitement, responsibility and security.

Ellis (2008) contended that work on WTC is in its infancy and it is a promising construct in several respects. WTC constitutes an obvious link between other, more thoroughly investigated constructs (such as learner attitudes and motivation) and language proficiency. It is also a construct of obvious relevance to language teaching. Dornyei (2005) suggested that developing WTC is 'the ultimate goal of instruction'.

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