



The Role of Willingness to Communicate and Motivation in Language Learning in Iran

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Abstract

Willingness to communicate and motivation can be two important affective variables to cause success in language achievement. The current study aimed to investigate the role of willingness to communicate (WTC) and second language motivational self-system (L2MSS) in relation to learners' language achievement. To this end, 100 homogeneous learners both male and female aged from 16 to 20 were chosen through placement test from four language institutes in Meshgin Shahr, Iran. The researchers, then, collected data through WTC inventory, L2MSS questionnaire and learners' language achievement test of four English skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking based on the Preliminary English Test (PET). The results based on multiple regression analysis indicated that WTC and L2MSS can significantly predict learners' language achievement test scores.

Keywords: Language achievement, L2 motivational self-system, Willingness to communicate

INTRODUCTION

With the increase in popularity of English as an international language, effective communication is one of the indispensable parts of language teaching and learning. Recent approaches to teaching a second language (e.g., communicative language teaching) gave great importance to the role of meaningful communication in gaining second language (L2) competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Motivation can be one of the most significant elements in the process of second/foreign language learning. It is also one of the most important concepts in language education. Teachers and students usually use this

term to explain what causes success or failure in language learning. Without motivation, even individuals with the most significant abilities cannot accomplish long-term goals, and neither are appropriate curricula and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student learning/achievements (Dörnyei, 2008).

One of the main purposes of language education is to prepare successful learners with effective communicative ability. With different methods of teaching and learning, however, the results show that some learners in spite of several years of studies English in high schools and even language institutes could never become successful English speakers. It is believed that most students neither achieved full competence in using the

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English language nor could interact with peers and/or other people in confidence (Dahmardeh, 2009).

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Willingness to communicate

The concept of willingness to communicate (WTC) was first introduced by McCroskey and his colleague (McCroskey & Richmond 1990), with reference to first language communication. This was considered to be a trait-like predisposition that remained stable across different communication situations. Later, MacIntyre and his colleagues applied the WTC in a second language context. They reinterpreted the WTC model as a situational variable and defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2” (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) is expected to facilitate language learning because higher WTC among students translates into increased opportunity for authentic use of L2 (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément & Conrad, 2001), which is one of the best predictors of success in language learning.

Second language motivational self-system

Research on second language (L2) motivation has mainly been influenced by Gardner (1972, 1985). He distinguished two types of motivation in language learning namely integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation refers to learner's desire to participate and identify with the L2 community and culture. Instrumental motivation involves the effective value of learning the L2 such as studying to achieve career aspirations (Gardner, 1972). Gardner's motivational theory in L2 met a number of criticisms about its international posture (Yashima, 2002), distinguishing instrumentality from integrativeness at the age of globalization (Lamb, 2004), cognitive-situated phase in L2 research (Dörnyei, 2005), and inapplicability of integrativeness in many EFL contexts (Csizér and Kormos, 2009, Ryan, 2009, Yashima, 2009).

To respond to the criticisms raised against Gardner's (1972) L2 motivation model, Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed his second language motivational self-system (L2MSS) model based on his research on motivation in Hungary (Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005). The new conceptualization of L2 motivation was a combination of empirical research findings (Noels, 2003; Ushioda, 2001), and major theoretical developments in psychology including possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987). L2MSS consists of three main components as follows (Dörnyei, 2005, p. 106):

- “Ideal L2 Self, which is the L2-specific facet of one's ideal self: if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the Ideal L2 Self is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves
- Ought-to L2 Self, referring to the attributes that one believes one ought to possess (i.e. various duties, obligations, or responsibilities) in order to avoid possible negative outcomes
- L2 Learning Experience, which concerns situation-specific motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience”.

Due to the importance of motivation in language learning, the L2MSS was tested and validated by researchers in English as a foreign language (EFL) settings (e.g., Al-Shehri, 2009, Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009).

RESULTS FROM SOME RESEARCH STUDIES IN THE FIELD

In Iran Alemi, Daftarifard, and Pashmforoosh (2011) examined university students' WTC and its interaction with language anxiety and English proficiency. Results of the study revealed that university students' WTC was directly in relation to their language proficiency. In addition, there was no significant interaction between WTC and anxiety. Alemi et al. discussed that anxiety did

not affect the learners' participation in communication and it was reported that anxiety and language proficiency were negatively correlated.

In another study, Baghaei (2012) investigated relationship between willingness to communicate and success in learning English as a foreign language. Results showed a correlation between learners' WTC and their proficiency in English. In addition, more detailed analysis revealed that WTC in the classroom context had the highest correlation. WTC with native speakers of English had the second highest correlation and WTC with nonnative speakers of English was not correlated with success in foreign language learning.

Ghonsooly, Khajavy, and Asadpour (2012) also examined willingness to communicate in the second language construct and its underlying variables among non-English major students. They used WTC and socio educational models for investigating L2 communication and L2 learning. The results of study indicated that L2 self-confidence and attitudes towards international community were two predictors of L2WTC in Iran. Their model indicated a potential use of the L2WTC construct in English as a foreign language context.

Pourjafarian (2012) investigated the relationship patterns between socioeconomic factors, i.e. parental occupations, cultural capital, and WTC in English among Iranian high school students in Shiraz (a city in Iran). The findings revealed noticeable evidence of the existence of a strong relationship between WTC in English, socioeconomic orientations and language achievement.

Recent research studies on L2 motivational self-system such as Ghapanchi, Khajavy and Asadpour (2011) examined the predictability of the L2 proficiency by personality and L2 motivational self-system variables among university students. Results of regression analyses showed that extroversion and openness to experience accounted for 13% of the variance in L2 proficiency; and ideal L2 self and L2 learning experience accounted for 35% of the variance in L2 proficiency. Further, extroversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness explained 25% of

the variance of in ideal L2 self; neuroticism and conscientiousness explained 24% of the variance in ought-to L2 self; and conscientiousness and extroversion explained 26% of the variance in L2 learning experience. Finally, hierarchical regressions also showed that L2 motivation is a more powerful predictor of learners' language proficiency.

Azarnoosh and Birjandi (2012) investigated male and female junior high school students differences based on three main components of L2MSS, intended effort towards learning English and predictive power of L2MSS. The results of the studies indicated that there was no substantial difference between male and female students' attitudes towards learning English. For both group of learners high correlation was found between attitudes towards learning English and intended effort (criterion measure). Azarnoosh and Birjandi also stated that the best predictor of students' motivated behavior was their attitude towards learning English.

In another study Rajab, Roohbakhsh Far and Etemadzadeh (2012) conducted a study to investigate relationship between L2MSS variables, integrativeness and criterion measure (learners' intended effort to learn English). The main purpose of research was to test finding of previous studies on L2MSS and investigate it in a different context. The results confirmed a high correlation between ideal L2 self and criterion measure.

Also, Azarnoosh (2014) examined the students' status of L2 motivation, the relationship between motivational factors, and the possibility of predicting learners' motivated behavior based on L2 MSS theory. Results revealed that attitude towards learning English was the main predictor of learners' motivated behavior.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Willingness to communicate and motivation are two salient affective factors, which can significantly explain success or failure in learning a language. To add to their major roles in foreign language learning, Dörnyei (2005, p. 2) argued that individual differences, which include WTC

and motivation, are “the most consistent predictors of learning success”. However, related literature shows that few studies examined the role of WTC and L2MSS variables simultaneously in Iran. This study, therefore, investigated the role of willingness to communicate (WTC) and second language motivational self-system (L2MSS) in Iran. The relationship between WTC/L2MSS and learners’ language achievement was also further investigated in this study. Hence, to investigate the role of WTC and L2 MSS as predictors of Iranian learners’ language achievement, the following research questions were put forward:

RQ1. Can willingness to communicate and L2 motivational self-system predict learners’ language achievement test scores?

RQ2. How much can willingness to communicate contribute to the prediction of learners’ language achievement test scores?

RQ3. How much can L2 motivational self-system contribute to the prediction of learners’ language achievement test scores?

METHODS

Participants

The researchers chose 100 male and female learners (56 female and 44 male; between 16-20 years old) from four English language institutes in Meshgin Shahr in Iran. The selection of the participants was through a placement test, which was conducted to check and select the homogenized participants. The questionnaires (i.e. the willingness to communicate questionnaire and the L2 motivational self-system questionnaire) and the language achievement test-Preliminary English Test (PET) were administered to the participants.

Instruments

Variables in the study were measured by WTC, L2MSS questionnaires and learners’ language achievement test of four English skills based on

the Preliminary English Test scores. The willingness to communicate questionnaire was developed and validated by Baghaei (2012). This questionnaire consisted of 20 close-ended items. The instrument was composed of three subscales: (a) willingness to communicate with native speakers of English (6 items), (b) willingness to communicate with foreigners who are not native speakers of English (6 items), and (c) willingness to communicate in the classroom context (8 items). The questionnaire format was in the form of 5- point Likert scale. For each question, there were five choices including scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral =3, Agree =4, Strongly Agree=5) to measure how they were willing to communicate.

The L2 motivational self-system questionnaire was developed and validated by Taguchi et al. (2009). This questionnaire consisted of 18 close-ended items. The instrument included three main dimensions from the L2 motivational self: (a) ideal L2 self (6 items), (b) ought-to L2 self (6 items) and (c) attitudes to learning English (6 items). The questionnaire format was in the form of 5- point Likert scale, ideal L2 self and the ought-to L2 self there were five choices including scale from 1 to 5 (Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral =3, Agree =4 Strongly Agree=5) and attitudes to learning English, there were choices from 1 to 5, (Not at all=1 Not so much=2, A little=3, Quite a lot=4, and Very much=5).

Learners’ language achievement was measured through Preliminary English Test (PET), which includes four English language skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking). This test consisted of three sections: First section included reading (35 questions) and writing (7 questions). This was to measure whether learners could read and understand signs, newspapers, journals and magazines and correctly use vocabulary and structure. The second section was about listening skills (25 questions), which examined if learners could understand a range of spoken material, including announcements and discussions about everyday life. The third section

included speaking questions (4 parts), which was to assess learners' speaking ability with activities concerning asking questions, talking about favorites and interviewing face to face with one or two other learners.

PROCEDURE

Permission was first obtained from managers of the institutes, teachers and the students to administer the questionnaires and PET. As a part of validation procedure, before administering the questionnaires to the learners, the researchers asked two experts (language teachers with research experience) to comment on different parts of the instruments, then it was piloted with 20 male and female learners to see if there were any difficulties in understanding the questions. Finally, the reliability indexes for the instruments were calculated. Cronbach's alpha estimated for the WTC questionnaire was $\alpha = .78$, and for the L2MSS questionnaire was $\alpha = .83$.

Before distributing questionnaires to the participants, the researchers explained the purpose and the directions to answer the questionnaires so that learners could complete the questionnaires with no problems. In each class, participants were first given WTC and L2MSS questionnaires and then PET pamphlets. Learners' scores on four skills on PET indicated their English language achievement test scores.

DATA ANALYSIS

The research data was analyzed using SPSS version 20. The Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to investigate the predictive role of WTC and L2MSS in relation to learners' language achievement test scores.

As the analysis demonstrated in Table 1, WTC ($r = .699$, $p < .05$) and L2MSS ($r = .731$, $p < .05$) were significantly related to language achievement test scores.

Table1
Correlation Coefficients

		Language Achievement	WTC	L2MSS
Pearson Correlation	Language Achievement	1.000	.699	.731
	WTC	.699	1.000	.544
	L2MSS	.731	.544	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Language Achievement		.000	.000
	WTC	.000		.000
	L2MSS	.000	.000	

p < 0.05*

Before using the multiple regression analysis, it was necessary to ensure that the assumptions of no multicollinearity and normality had been met. Table 2 below displays two checks for multicollinearity of the predictor variables. The tolerance levels are not below .10 and the VIF scores are well beneath 10, the relative threshold levels that highlight trouble with the data. Based on the values, there is no reason for concern that the predictor variables excessively influence each other. In fact, the tolerance value for each independent variable (WTC and L2MSS) was .28; and the VIF value was 3.48.

Table2
Results of Multi-Collinearity Measures

Variable	Tolerance	VIF
WTC	.287	3.481
L2MSS	.287	3.481

In addition to multicollinearity, the normality of the score distributions was checked through skewness and kurtosis as numerical measures related to the shape of data. Table 3 below shows that the skewness and kurtosis of the scores obtained fell within the approximately acceptable range from -1.0 to +1.0.

Table3**Results of Skewness & Kurtosis**

Variables	N	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Language Achievement	100	-.682	.241	.186	.478
WTC	100	-.309	.241	-.549	.478
L2MSS	100	-.357	.241	-.678	.478

Given the results of assumption testing, there were no serious violations of the assumptions in terms of the multicollinearity and normality of the data.

To examine whether WTC and L2MSS can predict learners' language achievement test scores, a standard multiple regression model was used. Based on table 4 below, seventy-one percent of the variance is explained by the predictor

variables (adjusted R2 = .71 x 100 = 71, $p < .05$). The adjusted R square in a multiple regression represents that explained variance can be contributed to all the predictors in a progression. The model summary shows the adjusted R square of .71, or rather 71% of the variance in the dependent variable (language achievement), which is related to the predictors (WTC & L2MSS).

Table4**Multiple Regression Results of Language Achievement on WTC & L2MSS Scores**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F	*Sig.
1	.851	.724	.718	6.731	127.238	.000

* $p < 0.05$

To tackle the first research question (i.e. can willingness to communicate and L2 motivational self-system predict learners' language achievement test scores?) it can be said that WTC and L2MSS can predict learners' English language achievement scores, $F(2, 97) = 127.238$, $p = .00$ and can account for 71% of the differences in overall language achievement.

The secondary purpose of the study was to test the unique contribution between the predictor

variables and the dependent variable by assigning coefficients to each predictor variables. As displayed in Table 5 below, the Beta weight and statistical significance were analyzed. The rank order of the most significant variables relative to their Beta weights and statistical significance in language achievement scores were: L2MSS ($\beta = .546$, $t = 5.485$, $p = .000$) and WTC ($\beta = .338$, $t = 3.399$, $p = .001$). Based on the results of the Beta weights, all the two variables reached significance.

Table5**Regression Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	95% Confidence Interval	
		β	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	41.845	2.644		15.828	.000	36.598	47.092
	WTC	1.248	.367	.338	3.399	.001	.519	1.977
	L2MSS	2.035	.371	.546	5.485	.000	1.299	2.772

$p < 0.05^*$

To tackle the second research question (i.e. how much can willingness to communicate contribute to the prediction of learners' language achievement test scores?), the results, as demonstrated in Table 5 above, indicate that WTC can significantly predict learners' language achievement scores ($\beta = .338, p < .05$); that is, it can explain 33% of the variance in language achievement.

To tackle the third research question (i.e. how much can L2 motivational self-system contribute to the prediction of learners' language achievement test scores?), the results in the Table 5 above, indicate that L2MSS can significantly predict learners' language achievement ($\beta = .546, p < .05$); that is, it can explain 54% of the variance in language achievement scores.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

This study examined the role of willingness to communicate (WTC) and second language motivational self-system (L2MSS) in terms of learners' language achievement test. The results of correlation and multiple regression analysis showed that WTC and L2 MSS could predict learners' language achievement test scores. The findings of this study concur with the results of Hashimoto's (2002) study in that, the second language (L2) learners with high levels of WTC and motivation may have greater possibility to develop actual L2 use and also have more frequency of communication in the classroom.

The finding of this study based on WTC and language achievement scores are also similar to the results of Alemi et al. (2011), Baghaei (2012) and Pourjafarian (2012). Alemi et al. found that Iranian students' WTC was directly related to their language proficiency. Baghaei's (2012) investigation on the relationship between WTC and success in language learning indicated that WTC in school context and WTC with native speakers of English were in correlation with language learning success.

Concerning the L2MSS and language achievement scores, the finding of this study are also in alignment with the results of some re-

search studies (e.g. Azarnoosh and Birjandi, 2012; Azarnoosh, 2014; Ghapanchi, Khajavy, & Asadpour, 2011; Rajab et al., 2012). Ghapanchi et.al (2011) found that EFL learners' L2MSS was a good predictor of their English language proficiency. Also, Azarnoosh and Birjandi (2012) and Azarnoosh (2014) stated that a good predictor of students' motivated behavior was their attitude towards learning English. Finally, Rajab et al.'s (2012) investigation on the relationship between L2MSS indicated that there was a high correlation between ideal L2 self and intended effort, which can be related to learners' language achievement.

Willingness to communicate (WTC) and second language motivational self-system (L2MSS) are multidimensional constructs that can provide an effective and successful explanation of learners' language achievement. The findings of this study can provide significant data to expand our understanding of learners' language achievement based on WTC and L2MSS concepts and the amount of their predictive roles. It can provide good foundation for English teachers and educational authorities to consider learners' WTC and L2MSS as two effective factors for improving their language achievement.

Teachers can also help learners' with their communicative needs and provide opportunities for them to be able to communicate in an authentic setting, to participate in classroom interaction and to develop effective motivational activities. Dörnyei (2009) suggested some techniques to help create positive language learning environment (e.g. techniques related to awareness raising, visualization training, enhancing learners' motivation, or actual learning classroom activities such as warmers and icebreakers).

Material developers can contribute to designing useful tasks to raise learners' language achievement, classroom interaction and learning process. Researchers, in the field of second language education, can consider learners' communicative and motivational needs, difficulties, and complexities and discover appropriate and practical ways to improve learners' language achieve-

ment. Researchers can also conduct a mixed methods study with larger population and different proficiency levels e.g. advanced language learners to examine the predictive role of WTC and L2MSS in relation to language learning.

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