



The Role of Education Culture on Students' Willingness to Communicate in Online Persian Language Classes in Korea Based on Complex Dynamic Systems Theory



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ABSTRACT

Willingness to communicate in a foreign language (L2 WTC) has always been one of the most prominent learning objectives in language classes. L2 WTC is not a constant component, determined by one specific variable; rather, it has a dynamic nature, which can be changed at any moment in classroom interactions according to momentary changes and reactions between its various personal/emotional, environmental/ situational, and cultural elements. Taking into account De Bot's Complex Dynamic Systems Theory, the present research investigates the role of important factors mentioned by students in their willingness to communicate in online elementary Persian Language courses at Korea University, in which students from different nationalities participate. More precisely, the present study examines the role of students' linguistic profile and education culture on their L2 WTC. For this purpose, a questionnaire was distributed among 23 students from five nationalities, followed by semi-structured interviews with all participants. Results indicate that in general, students' linguistic profiles and personal/emotional characteristics did not play an important role in their L2 WTC; however, significant differences were observed in environmental/situational components among East Asian students and students from other nationalities, especially in the type of interaction (written/spoken) and the interlocutor (teacher/classmates). In addition, East Asian students were not willing to communicate in challenging classroom interaction situations (due to lack of the necessary linguistic skills or challenging/controversial topics), while students from other nationalities embraced these situations and considered them an opportunity for developing their linguistic or communicative competencies.

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1. Introduction

Researchers in teaching and learning foreign languages have always been trying to understand the important factors that increase Willingness to Communicate (L2 WTC) in foreign language classes and consequently, the achievements of language learners. In the past two years, under the influence of the coronavirus epidemic, foreign language classes were inevitably made available to the learners in the form of online courses, so that both learners and instructors could experience a new type of education and do their best to improve this new system. Virtual education facilitated the gathering of language learners from different countries, cultures, and nationalities together to learn a single language, and also significantly affected the nature and type of interactions in the classrooms, changing face-to-face interactions into indirect interactions through cameras and microphones in various virtual platforms. This change greatly influenced the willingness or unwillingness of learners to communicate with their instructors and classmates. ([Heidaei and Moradian, 2019](#)). In general, a learner's willingness to communicate in a foreign language (L2 WTC) in language classes is not a one-dimensional issue and can be affected by the interaction of various personal, environmental, situational, and

(inter)cultural components. Through the lens of Complex Dynamic System Theory ([De Bot et al., 2007](#)), ([Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008](#)) this interaction seems to be dynamic, unpredictable, and adaptable to different variables, and at any moment or in any situation, it can demonstrate a new form of the learner's willingness to communicate in the classroom. In addition, this interaction becomes more complicated in virtual language teaching and learning platforms, since new components, including the lack of face-to-face communication between participants, multiple challenges of virtual platforms, such as internet problems, and the participant's lack of knowledge about different approaches, applications, facilities and potentials of virtual space in language education burdens this conflict. [Lee \(2019\)](#) defines the willingness to communicate in a foreign language in an online environment as "the readiness to enter into spoken and written discourse in a digital platform at a specific time with a specific person or persons, using a foreign language" (p. 5). This readiness at any time has been developed in language learners in very new and unpredictable ways and according to various personal factors (including anxiety, internal motivation, risk-taking ability and self-esteem ([Kruk 2022](#)),

environmental/contextual factors (including the classroom environment, the personality traits of the learners, and the instructor's feedback) (Lee, 2019), cultural factors (including the learners' education culture (Beacco et al., 2005) and educational factors (including methods and approaches, learning tools and the learning contents) (Khajavi et al., 2017) that have shaped their willingness to express their views, opinions, and responses to the different questions asked by the instructors and other classmates.

In recent years and due to the increasing importance of communication in language learning, several studies have been conducted on the willingness of language learners to communicate in the educational environments. These studies have explored the effect of different factors on the formation and level of willingness to communicate, including emotional factors (Lee & Lee, 2020), anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem (Lee et al., 2022), (Kruk, 2022), (Saeed Akhtar et al., 2018), the boredom of learners during the class time (Pawlak et al., 2022), the learner's fear of communication and their personal awareness of their ability to communicate (Cheraghpour Samavati and Golaghaei, 2017), the learner's self-reliance and mindset (Hosseinipour and Bagheri Nevisi, 2017/), social intelligence (Abbasi et al., 2021),

personality structure and previous experiences (Freiermuth & Ito, 2020) besides the extroversion/introversion of language learners (Bagheri Nevisi and Farmoudi, 2022) and have considered the role of personal/emotional characteristics of the language learners as a key factor in their willingness to communicate.

Discussing the role of environmental factors on the willingness to communicate, numerous research has been conducted to explore the effect of the behavior of the instructors and learners during the interactions and the type of educational interactions (Yashima et al., 2016), (Peng, 2019), the general atmosphere of the classroom (Khajavi et al., 2017), (Riasati, 2012), the instructor's feedback during interaction (Tavakkoli & Zarrinabadi, 2017), the learner's interest in the topics and the content of discussion (Boudreau et al., 2018), their interest in the class/lesson (Dörnyei, 2009), the instructor's attitude and educational approach (Dewaele, 2019), educational activities (Javidgar et al., 2022), and the instructors' personality traits and their class management abilities (Peng et al., 2017), (Zarrinabadi, 2014) in willingness to communicate. These researches consider the environmental factors and the instructors' approaches to be decisive in the degree of willingness to communicate in face-to-face and online

classes and emphasize the necessity of adapting them to the personality traits, requirements, and goals of language learners in order to increase their willingness to communicate in the classes.

The invisible dynamic in the willingness to communicate in a foreign language indicates that observing willingness to communicate in a classroom is due to and is influenced by the moment-to-moment interactions between a set of factors and components. Many of these components have been explored by researchers in multiple studies. However, most of these studies have been conducted in homogeneous environments in terms of cultural and linguistic characteristics of language learners, or they have compared learners from two different countries/cultures that include the following studies: a comparative study of Korean and Swedish L2 learners ([Lee et al., 2020](#)), American and Chinese language learners ([Lu & Hsu, 2008](#)), Korean and Taiwanese L2 learners ([Lee et al., 2022](#)), and American and Australian language learners ([Baracclough et al., 1988](#)). Since cultural/intercultural, linguistic factors, along with personal/emotional and environmental factors, play an important role in developing/not developing the willingness of language learners to communicate, and a combination of these components determines the nature and

extent of the willingness of language learners to communicate, the present research, in an environment consisting of language learners from five nationalities, who have gathered in the online environment at Korea University to learn Farsi as a foreign language, investigated multiple different factors that could influence their willingness to communicate and then, analyzes the relationship between these factors and the nationality/culture of education and linguistic profile (the learners' first language, knowledge of English language and other foreign languages). In this regard, this research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What factors play a role in the willingness of Persian language learners to communicate in the online courses at Korea university?
2. Is there a difference between the willingness to communicate in the Persian language learners at Korea University and their education culture and linguistic profile?

According to the research conducted regarding cultural, environmental, and personal factors, it is expected that regarding the components mentioned above, we observe significant differences between language learners of different nationalities with specifically distinct backgrounds and cultures regarding (L2) teaching and learning.

2. Literature Review

2.1. L2 WTC

The concept of willingness to communicate was first identified by researchers in the context of learning and using the first language in daily interactions. [McCroskey & Baer, 1985](#), building on the term "unwillingness to communicate" that was introduced by [Burgoon \(1976\)](#), used "Willingness to communicate in L2" for the first time as a term to refer to a person's free will to engage in verbal communication in L1 ([Mohammad Hosseinipour & Bagheri Nevisi, 2017](#)). In 1998, the term *willingness to communicate* was first used regarding foreign language teaching and learning by [McIntyre et al. \(1998\)](#). It has been used and studied as one of the most important objectives of teaching and learning a foreign language. Willingness to communicate in a foreign language refers to "readiness to enter into a discourse at a particular time with a particular person or persons, using a foreign language." ([MacIntyre, et al., 1998, p. 547](#)). This definition, according to the authors, consists of two components: personal and environmental, which includes characteristics and communication tendencies rooted in the individual's personality, as well as their communication behaviors over time and in different situations. According to [MacIntyre, et al., \(1998\)](#), personal components are often

constant in language learners, but environmental components are changeable and fluctuating in accordance with different communication conditions. ([Peng & Woodrow, 2010](#)). In this regard, [Kang, \(2005\)](#) defines the willingness to communicate as "readiness to communicate according to situational/environmental variables", which include the audience(s), the topic, and the field of conversation (p. 291). and ([Syed et al., 2021](#)) The willingness to communicate is defined as "the willingness of foreign language learners/users to employ the target language correctly, realistically and in accordance with the conditions for making sense and the learner's active employment of the available opportunities to communicate correctly with specific audiences in specific contexts". (p. 2). Willingness to communicate a behavioral intention for language learners that encourages them to participate in the interaction in spoken or written form. This behavioral intention is the stage before communicating and since the goal of language learning is to communicate with different audiences, researchers mention the willingness to communicate as the most sensible and important variable in achieving the general objectives of language learning. The willingness to communicate in a specific class/environment among language learners with different characteristics, objectives, attitudes, experiences, and educational backgrounds manifests itself in different ways and encourages the learners to

communicate, which defines the willingness to communicate as a multi-dimensional and dynamic concept susceptible to momentary situations.

2.2. The Theory of Complex Dynamic Systems and the Effective Factors in L2 WTC

According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), The effective variables in WTC are divided into two types: transient (environmental factors) and enduring (personal-emotional factors), which prompted researchers of teaching and learning foreign languages to explore the relationship between willingness to communicate and situational/environmental and personal/emotional variables to improve learning and teaching methods (Amiryousefi and Mirkhani, 2018). The willingness to communicate, in its evolutionary course throughout the researches of the last two decades has been subjected to extensive conceptual changes and has drifted away from a situational variable, (MacIntyre et al., 1998), converting to a process-oriented variable (Cao & Philippe, 2006) interpersonal/interdependent variable (Cao, 2009), (Peng, 2016) (Peng, 2016), and finally to a dynamic and flexible variable. (Pattapong, 2015), (Wang, 2019), (MacIntyre, 2020), (Syed et al., 2020). Thus, in each new communication situation, a set of variables instantly determine the level of willingness to communicate in the language learners. (MacIntyre & Wang, 2021), (Syed & Kuzborska, 2018), (Syed et al., 2020), (MacIntyre, 2020), (Nematizadeh

& Wood, 2020). Also, along with personal/emotional and situational variables, many momentary and transient variables, including the attitude of the interactants towards the people they are interacting with, (Ghonsooly et al., 2014), the attitude of language learners to class activities (Başöz & Erte, 2018), supportive relationships and positive interaction between the instructor and the learners (Shirvan et al., 2019), subject of interaction/activity (MacIntyre, 2020), life experience in the country of second language (Kang, 2005), interactive patterns among the language learners (Peng & Woodrow, 2021) ideals of learning (Zhong, 2013), the time of interaction (beginning or end of class) (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016) past learning experiences (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021), and in recent years, learning via online environments and using computers in language teaching and learning (Reinders & Wattana, 2012) are influential in preparing the language learners to communicate at any particular time.

Hence, the dynamic theory of willingness to communicate is directly adaptable to the dynamic systems theory (De Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011) and the complex dynamical systems theory (De Bot, 2017), and the willingness to communicate is affected by the momentary intertwining of various internal and external active procedures surrounding the language learners. In the theory of complex dynamic systems, systems are a set of entities or parts that work together and react to each other non-linearly at any time

and in any situation. [\(De Bot et al., 2007\)](#). Each system consists of embedded subsystems, which are dynamically related to other subsystems: all subsystems are self-organized, assembling and interacting in a specific way to provide the most efficient communication solution for the language learner at a specific moment. No subsystem in this process is more important than other subsystems; however, the combination of different interactions and reactions in these subsystems allows the learners to achieve their goals. In this approach, a small but critical change in a subsystem can change the entire system and lead to new interactive behavior. For this reason, WTC researches are mainly focused on the process of the situational formation of this willingness than on the result [\(Larsen-Freeman, 2019\)](#), and aiming to provide a suitable interaction situation for the language learners in a classroom environment, they try to provide solutions by exploring and constructing the interaction situation.

2.3. The Impact of Cultural Background on WTC

Although many factors affect people's orientation towards communication, culture and learning culture have a key role in people's communication behaviors due to their influence on personality, interactions, attitudes and viewpoints, and perceptions of various situations and people, as well as experiences. [\(Barraclough et al., 2019\)](#), [\(Wahid & Salwa, 2020\)](#), [\(Lee et al., 2022\)](#),

[\(Zarei et al., 2019\)](#). In general, many different cultural factors could affect the willingness to communicate. These factors include the learners' attitude toward sharing their opinions and interests [\(Klopf, 2008\)](#), the learners' opinions about the people around them and the need/necessity to communicate with them [\(Lu & Hsu, 2008\)](#) the importance of communicating in social interactions [\(Peng, 2007\)](#), the position of the instructor and the learners in the class, the relationship between the instructor and the learners, the classroom atmosphere and the instructor's methods for class management [\(Wen & Clément, 2003\)](#), the learner's motivations and the benefits of learning the target language for language learners [\(MacIntyre et al., 1988\)](#), communication skills in intercultural communities [\(MacIntyre et al., 1996\)](#) abilities regarding risk-taking in interactions and how to manage different interactive situations, besides the attitude of language learners towards themselves and the L2 learners' social self-esteem. [\(Yashima et al., 2004\)](#). The combination of these elements points out a concept that is called learning culture [\(Beacco et al., 2005\)](#) and education culture which influences the willingness to communicate with other learners from different nationalities, cultures, and educational backgrounds at any moment in the classroom environment. Learning culture is generally an acquired notion that language learners obtain during their learning experiences. This culture has been

institutionalized in many language learners and although in various interactive situations it can be influenced by environmental/situational factors and present a new form of itself in the L2 learner's willingness to communicate, it plays a key role in shaping the learners' perception of the necessity, level, importance and ways of communication in a learning environment (Wahid & Salwa, 2020) that could lead to the emergence of different types of WTC at a single time and educational situation in a classroom environment that includes learners with different nationalities.

3. Research Methodology

The required data for the present research were collected during two semesters in two introductory Persian classes at Korea University. Introductory Persian class at Korea University is offered as an optional course (as a second or third foreign language) to learners of linguistics and different languages. Due to the coronavirus epidemic, this class was available to learners on an online platform. All the participants in this class are students at Korea University; however, due to the international atmosphere of this university, students from different nationalities were present in the class. Among the eight nationalities of students participating in this class, twenty-three students with five different nationalities (including Korean, American, Italian, Hong Kongese, and Emirati) were chosen, and at least 2 learners from each nationality were

present in this research due to the difference of their cultures and their nationalities. The table below provides the demographic information of the learners.

Gender	Male-		Female		
	26%		74		
Age	20-25		26-30.		
	90%		10%		
Nationality	Korean	American	Italian	Emirati	Hong Kongese
	48%	22%	10%	10%	10%
L1	Korean	English	Italian	Arabic	Cantonese
	48%	22%	10%	10%	10%
English language knowledge	Advanced		Intermediate		
	60%		40%		

Table 1: Demographic information of learners

The data of the current research were collected in two phases: quantitative and qualitative, by questionnaires (quantitative data) and interviews in order to help expand the questionnaire data (qualitative data). This method of data collection is one of the most practical and common methods of data collecting in humanities (Creswell & Garrett, 2008), where the researchers take some of the items from the questionnaire and ask the language learners to provide more explanations about them in an interview session. Since all the learners were familiar with English, and English was employed as a

medium language in their classes, the researchers decided to collect all the required data for this research in English.

Due to the nature of the research and the presence of learners of different nationalities, at the beginning of the semester, a questionnaire was distributed among the learners of the class, consisting of 8 questions related to demographic information, including nationality, first language, familiarity with other languages, the level of familiarity with English and the method of learning foreign languages, in order for the researchers to obtain the required information regarding the learners' language/culture/nationality.

In the first phase (quantitative part), an electronic questionnaire inspired by the questionnaire of willingness to establish educational communication [Riasati & Rahimi \(2018\)](#) and [Khatib & Nourzadeh \(2014\)](#) was designed consisting of 38 questions based on the Likert scale and sent to all learners (23 persons) in Google Forms at the end of the semester. According to the changes made in the questionnaire, the reliability of the questionnaire was calculated by the researchers and Cronbach's alpha was 0.89. The questions in the questionnaire were related to the learners' willingness to establish educational communication in the classroom, including the communication situations that the learners were familiar with and had experienced during the semester in their online classes. Since willingness to

establish educational communication at any time and communication situation is affected by different dimensions, inspired by the effective factors in establishing educational communication introduced by [Khatib & Nourzadeh \(2014\)](#), the items of our questionnaire were divided into four sections: "learner's communication skills", "learner's responsibility", "learner's interest in the discussion topic" and "situational/contextual use of L2":

- Learner's communication skills: 17 questions
- learner's interest in the discussion topic: 8 questions
- learner's responsibility: 7 questions
- Situational/Contextual use of L2: 6 questions

In the second phase of the research (qualitative part), the researchers conducted a semi-structured interview with the language learners in order to expand the data collected in the first phase Interview questions were inspired by [Riasati & Rahimi \(2018\)](#) and [Le et al. \(2018\)](#) and included 10 questions about the role of environmental, linguistic and personal factors in the level and type of willingness to establish educational communication among language learners. This interview aimed to obtain the general attitude of the language learners to communication in spoken or written form in the environment/time of the class, as well as the factors effective in the language learners'

willingness to establish educational communication.

Questionnaire data were analyzed through descriptive statistics. Since the questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale (I don't want to communicate at all, I don't want to communicate, no idea, I want to communicate, and I definitely want to communicate), the responses of language learners were numbered from 1 to 5 (1 for I do not want to communicate at all to 5 for I definitely want to communicate). Then the average numbers were calculated and analyzed. Considering that the questionnaire examines the level of learners' willingness to communicate in different educational interactive situations, the average of the options (average of 1 to 5) was calculated as 3, and thus, answers above the average indicate the language learners' willingness to communicate in the mentioned item, and answers below 3 indicated the learners' unwillingness to communicate.

In the second phase and while analyzing interview data, the method of thematic content analysis of language learners' answers to interview questions was used, and then the results were obtained according to demographic information (nationality, first language, foreign languages, and learning culture/background and experiences learning/educational of language learners) and explored comparatively and quantitatively according to the multidimensional nature of willingness to

communicate in L2 classes ([Larsen-Freeman, 2019](#)). Since one of the objectives of this research was to explore the influence of the learner's language and (education) culture on their willingness to communicate in the classroom environment, all the collected data were studied according to the learners' five different nationality nationalities: Korean, American, Emirati, Italian, and Hong Kongese. In the next section, first, the results of the questionnaire will be presented according to different nationalities, and in the second section, we will explore the obtained information from the interviews. Then, all the data will be reviewed as a whole to analyze the impact of different personal, environmental, and linguistic/national factors on the level of learners' willingness to establish educational communication.

4. Results and Discussion

1/4 WTC questionnaire

Considering that the items of the learners' questionnaire are divided into four groups: "learner's communication skills", "learner's interest in the discussion topic", "learner's responsibility" and "situational/contextual use of L2", in this section the results of each item are presented separately and according to the nationality of the learners.

The first part of the questionnaire was related to the impact of "learners' communication skills" on their willingness to communicate. The findings of this section can be seen in the following table:

Korea		Hong Kong		Emirates		USA		Italy		Questionnaire item	Question No.
Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation		
1.08	3.9	4.5	00.50	5.0	00:00	4.2	00.40	4.5	00:00	I Volunteer to speak individually in class	1
1.13	3.7	4.0	00	4.5	00.50	4.6	00.48	5.0	00	I will give a presentation in class	2
00.96	3.5	4.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.4	1.09	5.0	00	I will argue with the instructor about a topic where we have different opinions	3
1.11	3.5	4.0	00	5.0	00	4.2	00.40	4.5	00.50	I speak when no one speaks	6
00.85	4.0	3.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.2	00.70	4.5	00.50	I volunteer to participate in class discussions	8
1.20	3.1	3.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.4	00.48	5.0	00	I argue with my classmates about a topic when we have different opinions,	9
1.02	3.4	4.0	00	5.0	00	4.2	00.48	4.5	00.50	I will share my personal opinion in class	11
1.16	2.9	3.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.1	00.80	4.5	00.50	If I know my speaking skills will improve, I will speak in class	13
1.06	3.6	4.0	00	4.5	00.50	4.0	00.97	4.5	00.50	I type in class if I know my writing skills are being assessed	14
1.29	3.8	3.5	00.50	4.5	00.50	4.6	00.70	4.5	00.50	I talk in small groups while doing group works	15
00.98	4.5	4.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.6	00.40	5.0	00	I answer a question when I know my answer is correct	19

00.80	2.7	4.0	00	4.0	00	4.1	1.01	4.5	00.50	i answer a question when I am not sure that my answer is correct	20
00.99	4.3	5.0	00	5.0	00	4.5	1.16	4.5	00.50	When I like an activity, I participate in it actively	21
00.89	4.4	4.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.2	00.70	4.5	00.50	I answer the instructor's questions when I am tired	22
1.08	3.2	3.5	00	5.0	00	4.2	00.74	4.5	00.50	I speak in class even if my mistakes are constantly corrected by the instructor	24
00.96	3.9	4.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.5	00.48	4.5	00.50	I speak in class even if my classmates' language skills are better than mine	25
1.06	3.6	4.5	00.50	4.5	00.50	4.2	00.74	5.0	00	I speak in class even if I make many mistakes	26
3.6		4.1		4.8		4.4		4.6		Average	

Table 2: The average of the "Learner's Communication Skills" group, separated according to 5 different nationalities

The findings of the questionnaire on willingness to communicate indicate that in the group of "communication skills of language learners" in general, the willingness of all learners to communicate is above the average level (3); however, Korean language learners have less willingness to communicate compared to other nationalities (average: 3.6 compared to averages of above 4 for other nationalities). These results are

more significant among Korean learners, especially in items such as "Establishing communication when the learner's opinion is different from the instructor's opinion" (item No. 11, average 3.1), "I answer the instructor's question when I am not sure about the correctness of my answer" (item No. 20, average 2.7), and "I talk in class when the language learner's mistakes are constantly corrected by the instructor" (item No. 24 average 3.2), while in all three items, learners of other nationalities have a higher level of WTC.

After Korean language learners, Hong Kongese language learners (average: 4.1) have the lowest average WTC in "learner's communication skills" and similar to Korean learners, these learners also have the lowest WTC in expressing opinions different from others in the class (average: 3.5), when their mistakes are corrected by the instructor (average: 3.5) and when their speaking skills are being assessed (average: 3.5) have stated

These results can indicate that, in general, Korean and Hong Kongese learners, who both have East Asian cultures, tend to communicate in situations where their social security is not challenged and they can confidently express their opinions and answers in front of the instructor and classmates (Lu and Hsu, 2008). This fact is best reflected in their high WTC in items such as "When I like an activity, I participate in it actively" (item 21) or " I answer the instructor's question when I know my answer is correct" (item 19).

American learners (average: 4.2) are in third place. These learners showed the highest level of WTC in items including "I give a presentation in class (item 2 average 4.6), "I talk in group activities" (item 15 average 4.6), "I talk while doing interesting activities" (item 21, average 4.5), and "I express my opinion when there is a difference between the learner's opinion and the instructor's opinion" (item 9, average 4.4). These learners still seem to have no particular fear of speaking despite their insufficient language

skills and even when they make many mistakes (item 26, average 4.2) and when their language mistakes are corrected by the instructor (item 24, average 4.2), they do not lose their willingness to communicate. A remarkable difference between Asian and American learners is their WTC when their opinions differ from those of the instructor or classmates, which seems to indicate that American language learners are more willing to communicate in challenging communicative situations, while East Asian language learners do not welcome these situations and prefer to engage in class discussions linguistically conceptually/thematically when they have more psychological security.

Italian learners and Emiratis learners in the "language learner communication skills" group had the highest average WTC (4.6 and 4.8, respectively). These results, despite not covering a large number of learners, indicate that these learners are generally not afraid of communicating in different classroom situations: even if they disagree with the instructor, or they have many language problems. item 26) or be corrected by the instructor (item 24), they are still willing to communicate. This is especially notable among Emiratis learners because in general, West Asian learners are more composed and less anxious ([Vally et al., 2018](#)) and they are less concerned about losing their public image in comparison to their East Asian classmates.

The second part of the questionnaire explores the items of the second group, i.e. "the interest of the language learner in the

discussion topic", in relation to WTC. The following table shows the findings of this section.

Korea		Hong Kong		Emirates		USA		Italy		Questionnaire item	Question No.
Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation		
4.0	0.6	4.0	00	4.0	00	4.4	00.80	4.5	00.50	I express my opinion about cultural differences	27
4.1	1.14	4.0	00	4.5	00.50	4.4	00.80	4.0	00.50	I express my opinion about Iranian culture	28
4.1	00.89	4.5	00.50	4.5	00.50	4.4	00.48	5.0	00	I express my opinion about the Persian language	29
4.0	00.64	5.0	00	4.5	00.50	4.4	00.40	5.0	00	I express my opinion about my own culture or language	30
4.8	00.49	5.0	00	5.0	00	4.8	00.40	4.5	00.50	I express my opinion about it more easily when the subject is interesting to me	34
3.5	1.27	2.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.2	00.60	4.5	00.50	I talk about challenging topics in class	12
4.6	00.60	4.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.6	00.40	5.0	00	I express my opinion on a topic that I feel comfortable with	17
2.9	1.04	3.0	00	3.0	00	3.4	1.16	4.0	00	I express my opinion on a topic that I don't feel comfortable with	18
4.0		4.0		4.4		4.2		4.5		Average	

Table 3: The average of the "learner's interest in the discussed topic" group,

separated according to 5 different nationalities

As can be seen in the table above, in general, the average of all learners in this section is higher than the average (3), which indicates the important role of the "discussion topic" in their willingness to communicate about it. This component is more important among Italian and Emiratis learners (average 4.5 and 4.4 respectively), but it is also remarkable among learners of other nationalities. More specifically, this table indicates that in topics with which learners do not feel comfortable (item 18), WTC is less for all of them, while only among Korean and Hong Kongese learners, the challenging topics (item 12) reduce their WTC. These results show that similar to the results of the "Learner's Communication Skills" group, in this section, American, European, and West Asian language learners are more willing to participate in challenging discussions; however, East Asian language learners prefer

to have less participate in such topics. Also, in general, learners have a high level of willingness (above 4) to talk about cultural topics, either their own culture or the culture of the second language/country, and (as will be mentioned in the interviews) they enjoy participating in these topics. Nonetheless, the results about Korean learners regarding participation in discussions about Iranian culture (item 28) and Persian language (item 29), though not low, are less than other learners, which could be due to their unwillingness to participate in discussions where they do not feel absolutely secure.

The third part of the questionnaire explores the items of the third group, i.e., the impact of "language learner's responsibility regarding learning in the class" and their relation to the level WTC. The following table shows the findings of this section.

Korea		Hong Kong		Emirates		USA		Italy		Questionnaire item	Question No.
Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation		
4.0	00.86	4.0	00	4.5	00.50	4.6	00.48	5.0	00	i ask the instructor about the correct way to express something in the target language	35
4.3	00.71	3.0	00	4.0	00	4.8	00.48	5.0	00	I would ask the instructor to explain a grammatical point to me	36
4.5	00.62	4.5	00.50	4.5	00.50	4.8	00.48	4.5	00.50	I would ask the instructor to repeat something	37

3.9	00.61	4.5	00.50	4.5	00.50	4.4	00.63	4.5	00.50	I would ask the instructor the meaning of a word	38
3.3	00.97	3.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.4	00.71	3.5	00.50	I help other classmates to answer the instructor's questions	7
3.1	1.19	3.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.4	00.48	5.0	00	I answer my classmate's questions	10
3.7	00.82	3.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.4	00.74	4.5	00.50	I react to the opinions of other learners	16
3.4		3.9		4.6		4.5		4.5		Average	

Table 4: The average of the "learner's responsibility regarding learning in the classroom" group separated according to 5 different nationalities

In this group that concerns the impact of "learner's responsibility towards learning" on the level of WTC, even though the level of willingness to communicate among all five nationalities is higher than the average level (3), it seems that Korean and Hong Kongese language learners are less willing to communicate in some situations, including "answering classmates' questions" (item 10, average 3.1 for Korean learners and 3.2 for Hong Kongese learners), "I help my classmates to answer the instructor's questions" (item 7, average 3.3 for Korean learners and 3.5 for Hong Kongese learners), and "I react to the opinion of other learners" (item 16, average 3.7 for Korean learners and 3.5 for Hong Kongese learners). Nevertheless, these learners have a relatively high WTC in situations where interaction

with the instructor is required (items 35, 36, and 37) and the instructor can easily resolve their linguistic ambiguities. In this group, American, Emiratis, and Italian learners have a relatively similar and high average and this willingness is generally at the same level in all items where interaction is required with the instructor or classmates. These results can indicate that East Asian learners have a greater desire to communicate with the instructor in the classroom and are less willing to speak in interactions with classmates, which is shown in the first group and the item "talking during group work" (item 15) also had a relatively lower average among these learners than their classmates of other nationalities. This observation can indicate that most East Asian language learners consider the instructor to be in charge of the class and a knowledgeable figure; hence, they prefer to address the instructor for their questions and answers, while for the learners of other nationalities,

this interaction happens at a relatively same level with both the instructor and other learners.

The last part of the questionnaire studies the impact of the items of the fourth group, "situational/contextual use of L2" on learners' WTC. Table number 5 shows the findings of this section.

Korea		Hong Kong		Emirates		USA		Italy		Questionnaire item	Question No.
Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation	Average	Standard deviation		
3.2	1.29	3.5	00.50	5.0	00	3.7	00.40	4.5	00.50	When the instructor asks a question, I answer voluntarily	4
4.0	00.89	5.0	00	5.0	00	4.5	1.01	4.5	00.50	I answer a when the instructor asks me a question directly by calling my name	5
3.2	00.96	4.5	00.50	4.5	00.50	4.4	00.74	5.0	00	I express my opinion more easily since I don't have face-to-face interaction with the instructor and my classmates	23
3.3	00.97	4.5	00.50	5.0	00	4.8	00.48	5.0	00	It is easier to express my opinion in an online class since my classmates and the instructor cannot see me	31
4.6	00.97	4.5	00.50	3.5	00.50	3.9	00.89	3.0	00	I can express my opinion more easily by typing (via chat boxes) than by speaking	32
3.9	00.66	4.0	00	4.5	00.50	4.5	00.74	4.5	00.50	I can express my opinion more easily because I cannot see the instructor or my classmates	33
3.5		4.1		4.5		4.5		4.4		Average	

Table 5: The average of the "situational and contextual use of L2" group, separated according to 5 different nationalities

The fourth group explores the impact of "situational and contextual use of L2", which is one of the most important components

(McIntyre et al., 1998) in the level of WTC. As can be seen in Table 5, although in all nationalities the level of WTC is higher than the average (3), like other groups, East Asian learners consider the impact of this component on their willingness to communicate to be less in comparison to learners of other nationalities (an average 3.5 for Korean learners and an average of 4.1 for Hong Kongese learners). In general, East Asian learners seem to be more willing to communicate by typing (item 32, average 4.6 for Korean learners and average 4.5 for Hong Kongese learners). Regarding the fact that the classes were in an online environment, the results of items 23, 31, 32, and 33 generally indicate that the virtual mode of the class and lack of face-to-face interaction did not have a special effect on Korean learners (except item 32); however, for other nationalities, it had a remarkable impact on increasing their WTC; hence, lack of face-to-face interaction in the class has led to an increase in their level of WTC.

4.2 Interview analysis

The second phase of this research included semi-structured interviews with all language learners (23 people). The thematic analysis of the interviews, which was about the effective factors in the learners' WTC in the classroom, led to the emergence of three categories of components as important elements in shaping the learner's WTC and the level of it. These three categories included environmental/conditional components,

linguistic/cultural components, and personal/emotional components as follows:

- Environmental/conditional components, including the role of the instructor and learning activities, the classroom atmosphere, the discussion topics in the class, the type of class activity, the interlocutor, and the type of interaction (spoken or written).
- Linguistic/cultural components, including learners' first language, familiarity with foreign languages, level of English knowledge, education culture, and the methods by which they have learned other languages
- Personal/emotional components, including learner's motivation to learn, anxiety, attitude toward and interest in the class, fear of negative assessment by the instructor, and lack of mental readiness to answer due to lacking the required information

In the discussion about *Environmental components and interaction conditions*", East Asian learners were generally more willing to communicate via typing, they strongly preferred to limit their classroom interactions to interactions with the instructor, and they considered the classroom atmosphere and also the instructor's behavior, personality and educational approach, the instructor's feedback during class interactions, and also the mood of the interactions (formal or informal, peaceful and anxiety free or

challenging) as very important factors in their willingness to communicate in the classroom environment; however, the type of activity was not mentioned by them as an important factor in their level of WTC. In the discussion about topics of interest, which leads to an increase in the willingness of this group of language learners to communicate, in general, these learners are more interested in talking about Korean culture and language, as well as Iranian and Korean cinema, Iranian and Korean food, and also Iran and Korea sports or national/cultural events.

However, in the discussion about environmental components and conditions of interaction, the American learners were more inclined to verbal/oral interaction; additionally, the mood governing the class and interactions, the type of class activities, as well as the instructor's behaviour, and feedbacks were very effective in their willingness to communicate, and they had a willingness to communicate with other classmates in the form of group activities or class discussions besides interacting with the instructor. These learners were more interested in interacting when topics such as Iranian cinema, Iranian food, sports activities in Iran, Iranian history, Iranian family, and Iranian national/cultural events were discussed in the class.

Italian learners appreciated both spoken and written interactions to the same degree, they had a willingness to interact with the instructor and other language learners, and

the classroom atmosphere, the instructor's behavior and educational approach, and the instructor's feedback in class interactions played an important role in the level of their willingness to communicate. These learners generally appreciated topics such as Iranian cinema and music, Persian literature, and Iranian history in class discussions.

Emiratis language learners did not have a particular preference for speaking or writing and they felt comfortable with both types of interaction, they had a constructive and dynamic relationship with the instructor like other classmates, and the mood that governs the class, the mood that governs the interactions and the instructor's approach, behavior and feedbacks were mentioned as factors regarding WTC. These learners were very interested in comparative topics such as comparing Persian and Arabic languages, comparing the cultures of Iran and the UAE, political issues (Iran's political positions), Iranian history, Islamic events in Iran, and education in Iran. Also, due to the linguistic similarities between the Persian language and the Arabic language, especially at the written level, and also the geographical location and religious orientations in Iran and the UAE, these learners felt a special affinity with the Persian language and Iranian culture, and they mentioned this point multiple times during the interview.

These observations indicate that for learners of all nationalities/cultures, the mood governing classroom atmosphere and the

interactions, and also the instructor's behavior, educational approach, and feedback during classes are important components in their willingness to communicate; an obvious point, mainly associated with the general and universal (and not necessarily cultural) components in the educational environment, as at any time and situation, the instructor's behavior, educational approach, and appropriate feedback could determine the interlocutor's willingness to establish/continue communication.

Hence, while discussing the difference in environmental factors among the learners with variant cultural backgrounds from five different countries, we can refer to their difference in 1) the type of communication (spoken or written), 2) (instructor and/or other classmates), and 3) topics which are interesting to the learners. East Asian language learners prefer written interaction to spoken interaction because, according to Korean and Hong Kongese learners, this type of willingness allows them to think before answering and to correct their language errors before sending the answer in typed form. This provides them with the language security they need for participating actively in discussions (Satar, & Özdener, 2008). American language learners are more willing to communicate verbally, because according to them, this type of interaction is more dynamic and better engages the interlocutors, a tendency that depends on the risk-taking personality, high social self-esteem, and

openness to express opinions in the learner's from this country, despite their probable language problems. (Lu & Hsu, 2008). However, Italian and Emiratis language learners appreciated both types of interaction and in the class, they tended to constantly express their opinions and answer the instructor's questions in both spoken and typed forms. Another noteworthy difference that was observed among the learners was regarding the interlocutor: in the class, East Asian learners have a greater willingness to communicate with the instructor and do not appreciate interacting with other learners, which can be rooted in the construct of the education/culture in their class, a culture in which, as was mentioned by Lu and Hsu (2008), only the instructor is in charge of the class and the known as the source of knowledge, therefore the instructor is the only acknowledged interlocutor to the language learners regarding the task of learning. Regarding the discussion about the topic of interaction, it seems that language learners from more distant countries (linguistically, culturally, and geographically) have a greater willingness to obtain knowledge about everyday topics which are of interest to the youngsters, including cinema, music, food, and sports in Iran, as an unknown and different country in comparison to their own country, while the Emiratis language learners emphasized more on the commonalities between the two countries/cultures/languages and enjoyed comparing the differences and similarities of

the two (seemingly similar) countries regarding religious, historical, literary and political aspects. For Emiratis, Iran was not a distant, unknown and different country, but a neighboring nation with similar and admirable ideas, attitudes, and religious and cultural constraints, which have had an important influence on their choice of Persian language as a university course.

Discussing the "*Linguistic components*", which included the first language, the level of knowledge and proficiency in English (as the medium language in the classroom), level of knowledge about other languages, and culture and education culture and background (the learner's use of different approaches and methods for learning other languages in their own countries), it should be noted that all languages learners were in intermediate or advanced levels of English and all the learners confirmed that lack of sufficient knowledge of English language had not resulted in an unwillingness to communicate in class. Besides their first language and English, the learners were familiar with at least one other language, including Chinese (3 learners), French (5 learners), Japanese (2 learners), Korean (12 learners), Spanish (1 learner), German (1 learner), and Russian (1 learner). According to the learners, their familiarity with other languages did not play a special role in their willingness to communicate; however, their educational background played an important role in this regard. Generally, in language classes

(English or other foreign languages) where the instructors were Korean, the Korean learners (except for two learners), were listeners mainly, they had direct question-answer interaction with the instructor in order for answering the exercises and hardly engaged in group activities during class time, which had led them to prefer interacting only with the instructor during the class. However, the interactions of Hong Kongese, American, Italian, and Emiratis learner's in their classes were not limited only to answering questions and language exercises; according to these learners, the instructors in English, Korean, or other languages that they have studied, had encouraged them to talk and express their opinions. Also, group activities covered a significant part of the class time, letting the learners feel comfortable interacting with their classmates. Hence, education culture can be considered an important factor in shaping the learners' attitude towards communication in the classroom and their language functionality (establishing/avoiding communication), while the language culture and linguistic profile of the learners did not have a significant role in this regard.

Regarding "*personal/emotional Components*", significant similarities and differences were observed between language learners of different nationalities: personal motivation for learning the language (22 learners), anxiety and stress (20 learners), and learners' attitude towards the class (21 learners) were indicated as the most

important factors in the level of willingness to communicate by language learners. However, fear of receiving negative feedback was something that was mentioned only by Korean learners (11 learners) and Hong Kongese learners (2 people), while American, Italian and Emiratis learners did not mention this component as an effective factor in their willingness to communicate. However, in such components as "instant mind-block while participating in class interactions", "lack of necessary information about the content of the discussion for participating in the interactions", and "unwillingness to communicate in an online platform due to the virtuality of the interaction environment", no certain pattern was observed among the learners of different nationalities, since these components could vary in accordance with the nature and content of the discussions at any time and in different conditions; besides, these items are not internalized in the learners' psyches as might be other components, including anxiety and motivation.

In general, it seems that although personal and emotional factors play an important role in learners' L2 WTC, the majority of language learners, regardless of their nationality, language, and cultural background, have considered the impact of these factors relatively equal in their WTC. The only component where there was a difference between East Asian learners (Korean and Hong Kongese) and learners of other nationalities was the fear of receiving

negative feedback, which is directly related to the "face" of the language learners in the classroom: East Asian learners do not want to tarnish their face in the class and in the presence of the instructor and other classmates, and when they feel that their answers could lead to negative feedback from the instructor or classmates in terms of language or content, they avoid participating in the discussions, as was mentioned in the questionnaire (items 9, 20, 24 and 26).

The overall analysis of the interviews of the language learners indicates that discussing the level of WTC, such items as contextual/conditional factors in the class, the learners' cultural background and education culture, and their attitude towards their role, position, and face In the class, there are more remarkable differences between learners with different nationalities in comparison with such items like language knowledge/background and personal/emotional factors. However, the thought-provoking point of this research, which was mentioned by a number of East Asian learners during the interviews was that in some interactive situations, a set of components lead to a change in the attitude and performance of language learners regarding their willingness to establish communication. According to the learners, these conditions included the times when the discussion topic had changed, the instructor had presented a joke or a funny topic, the instructor had demanded a change in the type of interaction from spoken to written, or

when the instructor had invited the learners to speak in a more composed and flexible mood. For instance, 3 Korean learners stated that in some class discussions, the instructor's mood and composure (suitable contextual/environmental conditions) and the flexible mood governing the classroom environment, had led them to communicate and participate in class interactions, while in case another instructor was their interlocutor, in if they were in a more serious or strict environment, they would not gain the required mental security to communicate; a point that indicates the priority of environmental factors over personal factors and cultural background. ([Zhang et al., 2018](#)).

In general, the differences mentioned in the interviews and the differences observed in the WTC questionnaire divided the learners into two groups: learners from East Asia (Korea and Hong Kong) and learners from other nationalities, including American, Italian (European), and Emiratis (West Asia) learners. It seems that the learners of the second group, despite their notable differences regarding culture and language, had more common cultural and educational experiences and are more willing to interact in the class environment. These learners enjoy interacting with both their instructor and classmates and are less afraid of making language errors/receiving negative feedback or dealing with differences of opinion and challenging topics. They easily demand

information and share their ideas about the country and culture that is associated with the language that they are learning, and due to their stronger risk-taking spirit and higher social self-esteem ([Lu & Hsu, 2008](#)), ([Hsu, 2007](#)), they don't let their inclination to save their face lead to avoiding class discussions. These learners appreciate the differences and consider classroom situations suitable times/places to exchange ideas and proceed with their language learning process.

East Asian learners, on the other hand, are instructor-focused in their interactions, cautious in their responses and in participating in discussions, yearning to adapt to the group, and in class discussions, they prefer to keep their interactions limited to safe situations, to the times when they have sufficient language skills. and away from challenging topics and diversity of opinions, devoting their interactions to language issues or everyday cultural issues. These results are in line with the finding of other researchers, including [Lee \(2020\)](#), [Lee et al. \(2021\)](#), and [Kim et al. \(2022\)](#).

Although in many cases studied in this research, language learners were divided into two groups of East Asian learners and other nationalities, the background and cultural characteristics cannot be considered the only cause of these differences, since these characteristics interact with other components. Specifically, the contextual/conditional components, as well as the personal/emotional characteristics of

the language learners, led to a change in the behavior/performance of the language learner at different times and as a result, presented a different view of WTC, as was observed changing WTC in some of the Korean learners in a special situation in the class when they entered a discussion. In fact, the cultural and educational background of the language learner, which is institutionalized in for learner and leads to the emergence of the learner's communicative

behavioral intentions, could change behaviorally while interacting with various situational components and might emerge in a new way at a specific moment. According to the obtained results besides the dynamic and unpredictable nature of WTC, the following model, derived from the important components in the behavior/willingness to communicate in language learners, can represent the set of variables that influence the level of WTC among language learners.

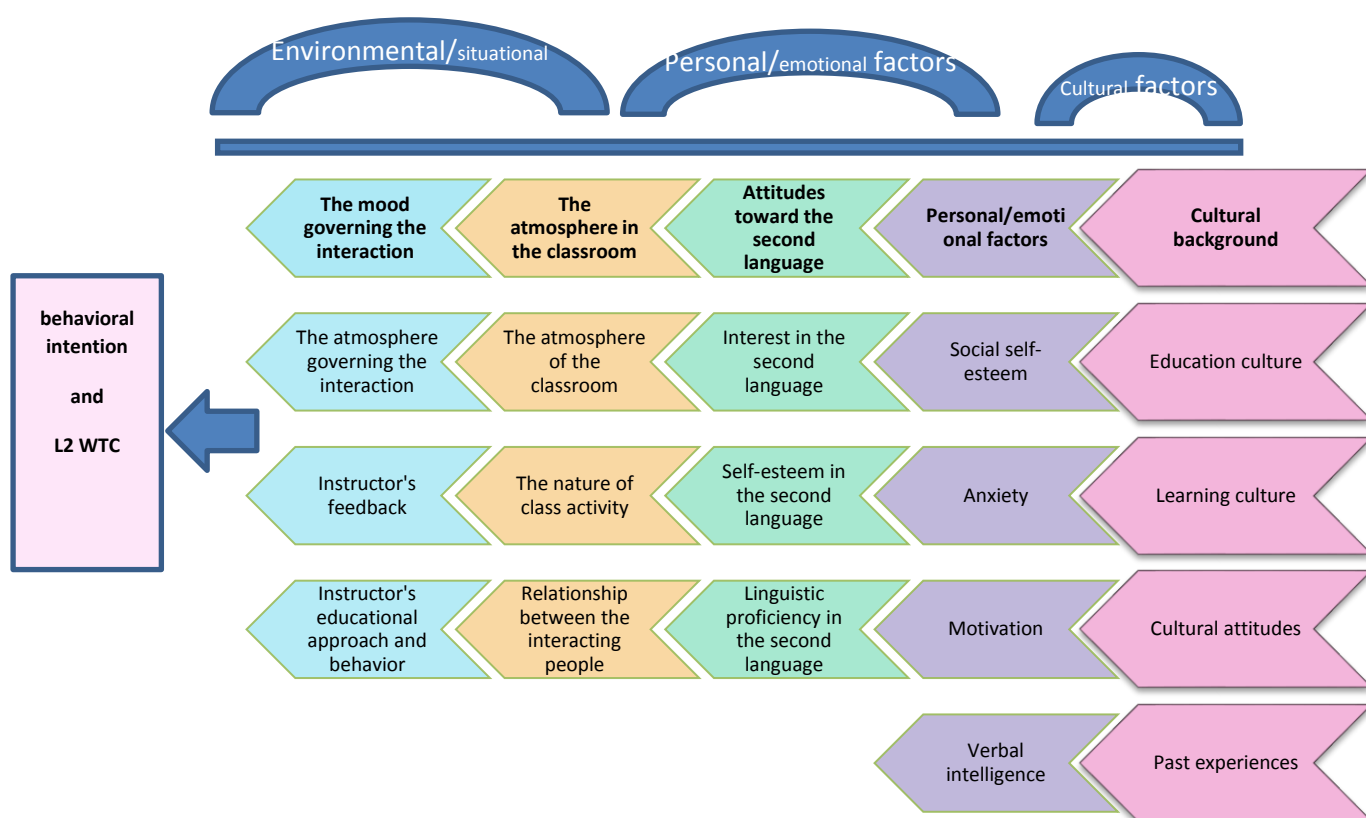


Figure1: The pattern of influential factors regarding WTC in a language class

This model actually depicts a set of factors related to WTC in the classroom as components that can combine at a moment

and lead to the formation and emergence of a new/different type/level of WTC. These factors are divided into three groups: 1) cultural factors (including education culture, learning culture, past experiences, the cultural attitudes), 2) personal/emotional components (including personal components (social self-esteem, anxiety, motivation, and

verbal intelligence) and the learner's attitude towards the second language (interest in L2, self-confidence in L2, language skills in L2)) and 3) situational/environmental components (including the classroom atmosphere (class environment, the nature of class activities, the relationship between the interactors) and the mood governing the interactions (the atmosphere governing the interactions, instructor's feedback and educational approach and instructor's behavior)); however, in this model, none of these factors are stable and while interacting with each other, all of them can transform momentarily and might express learner's WTC in accordance with different conditions. The interaction between these components actually creates a new and unpredictable behavioral intention for the learner at a certain moment and leads to participation/not-participation in classroom interactions in spoken or written forms in specific interactive situations.

5. Conclusion

This research explored WTC as a determining and key factor in the behavioral intention to communicate and as a result of establishing communication among language learners with five different nationalities in a Persian as a foreign language online course at Korea university. The main pillar of this research was to examine the relationship between the cultural background of language learners and the differences/similarities

between personal/emotional and environmental/situational factors affecting WTC. The results obtained from the "willingness to communicate" questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with all language learners in this project indicated that regarding language background/profile and personal/emotional components, there is no significant difference between language learners of different nationalities. Personal/emotional components, including "anxiety" and "not having the required information to participate in the discussions" were mentioned by the majority of learners, regardless of nationality and culture, as an important component in the level of their WTC, indicating the universal/general impact of these components among language learners participating in this research. However, in the discussion regarding the impact of environmental/situational components on the level of communication, language learners in most of the studied components (except for the topics of interest in class discussions) can be divided into two groups of East Asian learners (Korea and Hong Kong) and other countries (the USA, Italy, and UAE). The first group of learners was instructor-oriented and cautious about classroom interactions. These learners preferred to avoid challenging interactive topics and situations, and also those situations where they had to risk their language securities and their face in the class, focusing their class interactions mainly on

answering those questions that they are sure about their correct, besides questions and answers concerning the Persian language. The learners of the second group, however, had higher social/interactive self-esteem, had a willingness to communicate with both the instructor and other language learners in the class, and appreciated challenging linguistic and conceptual situations as a platform for developing their skills.

The climax of this research was in the statements offered by three East Asian learners regarding the momentary change in their WTC in certain situations due to the occurrence of a certain event and the change of atmosphere governing the class discussion, where these learners were forced to cross their boundaries and frameworks for interaction and to participate in class discussions. This process indicates that the situational components in suitable interactive conditions can be combined with the personal/emotional components in a new way and the cultural background of language learners, influencing their willingness to communicate. The findings of this research regarding the mentioned research questions indicate that nationality and cultural background have an effective role in the willingness of language learners to communicate, however, this cultural background can experience significant changes in specific interactive situations, changing unwillingness to communicate into a willingness to communicate or even an interactive intention, confirming the dynamic

and changing nature of different components regarding WTC, besides the momentary and situational interactions and contradictions between these components.

The combination of different components affecting WTC in a foreign language and the dynamic essence of this willingness have led researchers to present new and different models about the role and impact of personal/emotional and situational/environmental differences in the language learning process. . In these models, the personal/emotional and personality traits of the language learners, as well as their cultural background and educational experiences, are introduced not as stable factors, but as factors in momentary interaction with a set of other situational factors, a view that according to [Yashima et al. \(2016\)](#), changes WTC from an ontogenetic process (depending on individual developmental characteristics), turning into a microgenetic process (depending on momentary environmental changes). The microgenetic process in the language class, instead of focusing on the individual personality traits of the language learners, emphasizes changing their behavior and redefining their skills in the moment and in contradiction with other factors affecting it. In this process, at any time in the language class, instead of focusing on a single component and trying to develop and improve it, the instructor is expected to try to correct and recreate a process consisting of a set of factors that are effective in the learners'

WTC, aiming to create interactive conditions and situations that can transform a learner who is cautious, anxious, with low self-esteem into an active, flexible, adaptive, and with high self-esteem, willing to participate actively in class interactions, besides changing personal components.

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