Exploring factors affecting EFL learners’ Willingness to Communicate

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In English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, willingness to communicate (WTC) in the second/foreign language (L2) plays a crucial role in encouraging learners’ active use of English both inside and outside the classroom. While various empirical findings have confirmed the validity of L2 WTC models in EFL contexts, there are still two issues that need to be considered. The first is that although WTC can be observed in various levels, much attention has been focused on trait-like WTC. Just as with other motivational variables, WTC is not always stable. It can be more situated and may change from situation to situation. Second, as WTC can be situational, the internal structure of this WTC can be expected to be different to that of trait-like WTC. While learners’ perceived competence has long been believed to be one of the best and most direct predictors of trait-like WTC, situational WTC can be predicted by several other variables. In order to tackle these issues, this study classified WTC into WTC in general (i.e., trait WTC), and WTC inside and outside class (i.e., situational WTC). The relationships between these WTC variables and their predictors (i.e., motivational and situational variables) were then examined. A total of 296 Japanese college students participated in this study. They responded to a self-reported Likert scale questionnaire measuring their WTC and predictor variables. Regression analyses demonstrated that perceived competence was the strongest predictor of WTC in general. However, it was also found that WTC inside the class was predicted by classroom environments most strongly, and the ideal L2 self was the best predictor of WTC outside the class. These data suggest that situational WTC has different internal structures to WTC in general. This study emphasized the need for a closer look at EFL learners’ WTC in a variety of situations.

Keywords: EFL, Motivation, Willingness to communicate, Individual difference.