Openness to experience as a predictor of L2 WTC

Ewa Piechurska-Kuciel

Institute of English, University of Opole, Pl. Kopernika 11, 45-040, Opole, Poland

A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 26 April 2017
Received in revised form 29 December 2017
Accepted 1 January 2018

A B S T R A C T

This paper aims to provide empirical evidence for the relationship between openness to experience and L2 willingness to communicate (WTC). The study posits that openness as a personality dimension may have a dual effect—both direct and indirect—on one's L2 WTC levels. First, openness directly influences L2 WTC through its stable character, shaping one's cognition, affect and behaviour. Also, it has a possible dual indirect impact by mediating perceived communicative competence and language anxiety. According to the results of step-wise multiple regression, openness can be regarded a significant predictor of L2 WTC, explaining 21% of its variability. It may be concluded that students with high levels of openness demonstrate their stable predispositions to look for gratification through initiating verbal encounters in a foreign language. Together, the variables included in the model explain over 45% of L2 WTC variability, stressing the mediating role of perceived communicative competence (operationalized as self-perceived levels of FL skills) and language anxiety.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This paper seeks empirical evidence for the relationship between the personality dimension of openness to experience and L2 willingness to communicate (WTC) within the Polish educational context. Although the perception of WTC has recently been more focused on its dynamic nature as a communicative event (e.g., Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Yashima, MacIntyre, & Ikeda, 2016), this study addresses its trait-like nature by exploring personality and its relative permanence (Peng, 2016) in relation to the stable personality characteristic of openness. Because the base of the L2 WTC pyramid model (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998) is comprised of the distal and prevailing influences of personality and intergroup climate, one may expect the impact of personality on one's WTC would be to notable. Specifically, openness can be hypothesized to directly regulate one's willingness to communicate in a foreign language. This relationship is likely also mediated by the immediate antecedents of L2 WTC: language anxiety and perceived communication competence (operationalized as self-perceived levels of foreign language skills). Despite the strong theoretical linkage summarized in the model, there still is a paucity of research on the indirect and direct effects of personality (openness to experience) on the foreign language process in general, not to mention L2 WTC. This fact necessitates the current study.

2. Willingness to communicate in a foreign language

The construct of willingness to communicate (WTC) was coined to examine an individual's general propensity to initiate communication with other people (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). This phenomenon has been established as "a personality-
based, trait-like predisposition which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers” (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, p. 129). Viewed from this perspective, verbal communication is a volitional act that demonstrates the cognitive nature of human communication behaviour and underlies the concept’s stable character (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). Consequently, the individual’s personality ensures the stability of the individual’s WTC by affecting one’s cognitive choices about communication, while remaining stable across contexts (e.g., public speaking, talking in meetings, small groups or dyads) and receivers (e.g. strangers, acquaintances or friends). Speaking generally, however, a higher level of WTC is usually connected with a smaller number of receivers/interlocutors and closer relationships with them (Zakah & McCroskey, 1989). Therefore, aside from being stable, the WTC concept is also conceived of as situation-dependent, i.e., modified by the personal, temporal and spatial context (Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988). It follows that situational variables may affect an individual’s willingness to communicate (e.g., one’s frame of mind or previous experiences connected with communicating with a specific person, or a probable gain or loss signaled by the specific communication act). The person’s inclination to communicate is also shaped by communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence (McCroskey, 1992). The first concept designates anxiety experienced in communicating. When the levels of anxiety are high, one’s willingness to communicate is greatly limited. The other concept is connected with one’s perception of their communication abilities. It appears that when a person is convinced they possess effective communication skills, their level of communication apprehension decreases, while the level of WTC increases (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). As a result, perceived competence may play a more significant role in predicting WTC than actual competence (MacIntyre, MacMaster, & Baker, 2001).

The above conceptualization of WTC in L1 (or universal WTC) serves as a basis for the analysis of communication performed in foreign and second languages (FL/SL). In this context WTC is defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). WTC is also seen as “an individual’s volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables” (Kang, 2005, p. 291). This concept encompasses not only a trait-like tendency to engage in communication, but also stresses the role of situational factors that may shape one’s inclination (Peng, 2012). When learning and using L2, the language of communication holds the key to the individual’s willingness, and causes a substantial modification of the communication act (MacIntyre et al., 1998) regarding, for instance, one’s readiness to initiate communication. The L2 learner’s decision to commence communication (volunteering answers in class, or seeking out an L2 conversation partner) is seen as a product of the action control system involving the ability to begin a task (hesitation), to focus on it (preoccupation), and to follow the task through to completion (volatility) (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010). These specific challenges make L2 WTC distinct from the universal (L1) concept. Consequently, L2 WTC cannot be regarded a simple transfer from the L1 trait-like model, mostly because of individually varying L2 communicative competence. Predominant positive or negative perceptions of one’s own competence in a foreign language, rooted in past L2 contact, play a crucial role in shaping L2 WTC (Dörnyei, 2003). It seems that, aside from the trait-like nature of WTC responsible for the individual’s overall predilections for communication in L2, state-like WTC also shapes verbal behaviour at a particular moment within a particular situation—when, for instance, a learner assesses an opportunity to communicate as suitable and enters into the communication act (Cao & Philp, 2006). It follows that trait-like WTC produces a tendency to behave in a certain manner in an L2 communicative situation, while situational WTC affects the decision to initiate an exchange in a specific situation (Zarrinbadi, 2014). The state-dependent and dynamic fluctuations of WTC influenced by situational variables are thus complementary to the stable trait-like nature of WTC, a fact that enables a deeper understanding of the WTC phenomenon (MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010).

The early model of WTC (adapted from L1) that accommodated perceived communication competence and language anxiety (called communication anxiety in L1 studies) has failed to explain the role of situational variables and more stable factors (such as personality) in influencing communication initiation. The current multi-layered pyramid model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998) comprises WTC antecedents arranged in a proximal-distal continuum in six layers, showing their immediate and more distant influence on the individual’s WTC. The three bottom layers contain enduring/distal influences, while situational/immediate stimuli can be found in the three upper layers. The lowest and most distal level (Layer VI) is devoted to the social and individual context (i.e., intergroup climate and stable personality characteristics—the focal point of this study). Above it, in Layer V, is the affective-cognitive context with its more individually-based variables (intergroup attitudes, social situation, and communicative competence). Layer IV comprises motivational propensities (interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and L2 self-confidence). Situated antecedents, the most proximal and strongest determinants of WTC, are found in Layer III with the desire to communicate with a specific person, and state communicative self-confidence. At the next level (Layer II) there is behavioural intention, i.e., the actual construct of willingness to communicate, representing the final psychological phase in one’s preparation for L2 communication. Finally, Layer I contains communication behaviour, or direct L2 use. All these factors included in the model, personality among them, have the potential to affect WTC. Placing personality at the lowest and broadest layer of the pyramid appears to indicate its permanent and unwavering, though subtle effect on L2 WTC. Though personality may not directly influence one’s readiness, it sets “the stage for L2 communication” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 558).

L2 WTC is now considered an influential unified complex variable underlying the second and foreign language learning processes because its higher levels offer “increased opportunity of L2 practice and authentic L2 usage” (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001, p. 382). With high WTC the student has the chances to develop the skill of using the foreign language, and to increase levels of L2 mastery. Moreover, developing WTC in the L2 classroom can help produce dynamic
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات