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Understanding the Notion of Interdependence, and the Dynamics of Willingness to Communicate

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A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Language Teaching and Learning, Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics, The University of Auckland, 2009
Abstract

The current individual differences research in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) addresses the issue of the situated nature of individual difference (ID) factors. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a relatively new ID variable in SLA (Dörnyei, 2005) and it is seen as both a facilitating factor of SLA and a non-linguistic outcome of the second language learning process (MacIntyre, 2007). Previous research into WTC primarily focused on its trait disposition as remaining stable across situations. Only a handful of studies have revealed that the construct might be situation-specific rather than fixed.

The present study investigated the dynamic and situated nature of second language (L2) learners’ WTC in class. Framed within a sociocognitive perspective on L2 learning which draws together social, environmental and individual factors, this classroom-based multiple case study involved 18 English as an additional language (EAL) learners in New Zealand over an academic year and was implemented in three phases. Data were collected through classroom observations, stimulated-recall interviews, semi-structured interviews and reflective journals.

Evidence from self-report and observational data suggests that the classroom WTC construct is best described as a dynamic situational variable rather than a trait disposition. The findings indicate that situational WTC in class results from the interdependence between individual characteristics, classroom environmental conditions and linguistic factors. These three strands of factors interdependently exert either facilitative or inhibitive effects on an individual student’s WTC in class at any point in time. The effect of the combinations of factors differs between individuals and the interrelationship is too complex to be predicted. This study has attempted to describe and measure the WTC construct as situated in L2 classrooms and it serves as a stepping stone for further research on the role of WTC in L2 learning.
Dedication

To the memory of my mother who has always been in my heart and who would be proud to see this achievement.
“I co-exist with the world, and everything in the world and I are one.”

Equality of All Substances

Chuang Tzu
(Chinese Philosopher, 369-286 B.C.)

天地與我并生
而萬物與我為一
莊子《齊物論》
Acknowledgements

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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>Communicative Language Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAL</td>
<td>English as an Additional Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>English for Academic Purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL</td>
<td>English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Individual Difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDs</td>
<td>Individual Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2</td>
<td>Second or Foreign Language</td>
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<td>NNS</td>
<td>Non-native Speaker</td>
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<tr>
<td>NS</td>
<td>Native Speaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPCT</td>
<td>Person-Process-Context-Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLA</td>
<td>Second Language Acquisition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TESOL</td>
<td>Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>Willingness to Communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZPD</td>
<td>Zone of Proximal Development</td>
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