

## The Roles of Class Social Climate

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### Abstract

Willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language (L2) is of great importance in second language learning. The present study examined L2WTC among 811 Chinese college students learning English as a foreign language. A hypothesized model integrating class social climate, language mindset, academic emotions (i.e., enjoyment, pride, anxiety, and boredom), and L2WTC in and out of class was tested using confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling. The results showed that the effects of class social climate on L2WTC in class were fully mediated by the four academic emotions; and the effects of language mindset on L2WTC in class were fully mediated by enjoyment, pride, and boredom. Unexpectedly, pride was negatively associated with L2WTC in class, and boredom was positively related to L2WTC in class. Moreover, L2WTC inside the classroom and language mindset had direct effects on L2WTC outside of class.

**Keywords:** Classroom, Education, Management, Language

### Introduction

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is a crucial aspect of second language acquisition (Clément et al., 2003; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Yashima et al., 2004), since learners with a high level of WTC in the second language (L2) are more likely to achieve learning outcomes (Chu, 2008; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003; Yashima et al., 2004). Therefore, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998, p. 547) proposed that willingness to communicate in the second language (L2WTC) should be “the ultimate goal of the learning process”.

There is considerable evidence that L2WTC is influenced by individual factors including L2 anxiety (Khajavy et al., 2018; Liu, 2017), L2 confidence (Clément et al., 2003; Ghonsooly et al., 2012), motivation (Knell & Chi, 2012; Yashima, 2002), personality (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), and learner beliefs (Peng & Woodrow, 2010), as well as situational factors, such as classroom environment and interaction among students and teachers (Cao, 2006; Peng, 2012). However, although previous research has found that learners’ general learning beliefs play an important role in L2WTC, little research has discussed the specific impacts of foreign language beliefs on L2WTC. Also, research concerning how learners’ emotions affect L2WTC has mainly examined the influence of L2 anxiety and enjoyment (Khajavy et al., 2018; Saito et al., 2018), so the effects of other emotions on L2WTC still need to be examined. Thus the present study examined the interactive effects of both positive and negative emotions as well as foreign language beliefs on L2WTC in and out class.

**Section snippets**

L2 willingness to communicate

WTC was a construct originally proposed in L1 communication research to describe individuals' inclination to engage in interpersonal spoken communication, including frequency of talking, anxiety or apprehension about communication, and overall tendency to approach or avoid communication (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). Both stable speaker characteristics and situational factors such as interlocutor relationship and context can influence WTC (Reid & Trofimovich, 2018).

**The present study**

In general, previous studies suggested that class social climate can impact learners' L2WTC in class through effects on the emotions that students experience during class (Cao, 2011; Khajavy et al., 2018).

However, little research has examined the lasting effects of class social climate, emotions in class, and L2WTC in class on L2WTC outside of class. Also, previous quantitative research on how learners' emotions affected L2WTC in class mainly examined the influences of enjoyment and anxiety.

**Participants and procedure**

A pilot study to test measure translation included 168 undergraduate students (126 women, 42 men) who were studying English as a foreign language in universities across China. Of the sample, 55 students (32.7%) were English majors. The ages of the students ranged from 18 to 24 years ( $M = 20.55$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ). The average number of years studying English was 12.21 years ( $SD = 3.01$ ). Data from the pilot study were not used in the main study.

In the main study, participants were 811 university

**Descriptive statistics**

Correlations, means, and standard deviations of all variables are presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, participants generally had a moderately high level of L2WTC both in and out of class. Class social climate was positively related to willingness to communicate in class. Similarly, all the measured emotions were significantly related to willingness to communicate in class. In addition, language mindset was positively associated with willingness to communicate both in and out of class.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the interactive effects of class social climate, foreign language beliefs (i.e., language mindset), and positive and negative emotions on Chinese college students' willingness to communicate in a studied foreign language (specifically English) inside and outside the class setting. Findings indicated that WTC both in and out of class was influenced by students' beliefs about the nature of language learning and their experiences in the foreign language

**Implications**

In the current study, we found that foreign language class social climate, language mindset, and

academic emotions in the class played a role in Chinese college students' L2WTC in different situations, indicating that L2WTC was affected by both stable predispositions and situational variables (Macintyre et al., 1998). The findings also implied that L2WTC in class had a strong relationship with L2WTC outside of class. Thus, the current findings may have some implications for foreign language

#### **Limitations**

It is worth noting that the findings of the present study should be interpreted within certain limitations. First, the data of the present study were collected at the beginning of July 2020 in China. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, students who joined this study would have taken fully online coursework for approximately four months leading up to this data collection. Thus, the class social climate might be changed due to this transition. Future research can further explore if there is a

#### **Conclusion**

The present study examined the interactive relationships between class social climate, foreign language mindset, and academic emotions with L2WTC in and out of English class among Chinese college students. The findings of the present study showed that both class social climate and language mindset played a role in positive and negative emotions, which in turn affected individuals' L2WTC in and out of the foreign language classroom. In addition, the unexpected findings regarding the relations of

#### **Author statement**

Hui Wang: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis, Project Administration, Writing – Original Draft; Anqi Peng: Methodology, Investigation, Formal Analysis; Meagan Patterson: Methodology, Writing – Review and Editing, Supervision.

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