East to West, are Chinese Students Willing to Communicate? A Mixed-method Study about Chinese Students' Willingness to Communicate

Chengying Yang

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East to West, are Chinese Students Willing to Communicate? A Mixed-method
Study about Chinese Students’ Willingness to Communicate
in Intensive English Program in the US

by

Chengying Yang

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
St. Cloud State University
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Thesis Committee:
John Madden, Chairperson
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Abstract

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) has been “proposed as one of the key concept in L2 learning and instruction” (Kang, 2005, p. 278). This study examined Chinese English learners’ WTC in an Intensive English program (IEP) in the US. The study used both the WTC Survey and semi-structured interview to identify the variables that impact Chinese students’ WTC and how different language environment (China and America) affects their WTC. There were a total of 12 participants who filled out the Survey and 11 of them were interviewed. The Survey results indicated that there was one participant who tended to talk less which matched with the participants’ interview answer. Interview data showed that there were various factors impacting students’ WTC. The significant finding from this study was that the participants all became more willing to communicate after they studied in IEP. It indicated the predisposition of L2 (second language) WTC does not remain the same across from various situations, in addition, there are different variables impact WTC.
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Chapter I: Introduction

When I taught English in China, I noticed that more and more parents were willing to pay supplemental tuition to English training schools which specialized in improving students’ speaking abilities. Families with economic means were eager to send their children to English speaking countries for they knew their children would have better opportunities for success in learning English and receive a better education. Passing the TOEFL/IELTS is one of the first steps that can be obtained in China; however, the ability to master communication with native speakers would generally require immersion in an English speaking culture which would be difficult to achieve in China for there are limited opportunities. Furthermore, many Chinese employees who work for Chinese-American joint venture companies also generally require specialized English training schools to enhance their oral English speaking abilities to facilitate communication with their foreign coworkers. For many Chinese students who are studying English in China right now, English study is not about grammar or vocabulary which has been primarily emphasized in the past in Chinese English education, but there is now more concentration on how to use English to communicate with native speakers in real life situations. This concept of how to study and teach English in China has slowly but significantly changed over the course of the past 10 years.

Today, the grammar based English teaching approach is still commonly used in Chinese English classroom. For many Chinese learners, the dilemma they face in English studying is that on the one hand, they have to study grammar rules, memorizing large amount of vocabulary, and doing lots of exercise in order to achieve high grades on tests; but on the other hand, they are required to use language in real life situations which is hard to achieve when English study is only limited inside the classroom. With the rapid growth of Chinese
economy, how to develop competent language fluency to meet businesses demands has become a real challenge for many Chinese English teachers. Learning English for application is more beneficial for students. Therefore, how to improve Chinese English learners’ communication skill becomes more and more important.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) was first conceptualized as personality–based, trait-like predisposition that remained stable across different situations (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). In the beginning, WTC was studied as a common human communication behavior and with reference to native language (L1).

WTC in L2 (second language), however, is quite different. I have seen many of my Chinese students have very high WTC in L1 but could hardly talk in L2 although they have high English proficiency. What are the reasons to cause this barrier in application of the language? What are the factors that impact on Chinese students’ WTC?

My primary goal is to examine the variables that impact Chinese students’ willingness to communicate and how these different factors vary in terms of different language environment, ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language). The findings from this study will help both ESL and EFL language instructors to have a better understanding about Chinese students’ willingness to communicate. With this knowledge and understanding, they can be more efficient in using various teaching strategies in order to improve Chinese students’ English proficiency.

**Problem Statement**

English is a mandatory academic requirement in China and is studied from elementary school third grade (since 2001) to the university level. Chinese students who graduated from
universities commonly have more than ten years’ English learning experience. However, after 6 years of teaching English in China, I observed that many of my students’ primary focus is achieving high marks on their tests. They are generally more interested in how to improve their grades and they are willing to spend extra money and time in attending English training schools to achieve this endeavor. However, few of them can actually have a natural conversation with native speakers although they have learned enough vocabulary and sentence structure.

Outside of the classroom, using English is challenging for there is limited opportunity or practical environment for application in China. It is difficult to practice English when it is considered a foreign language and the dominant language, and rightly so, is Chinese. It is very challenging for students to apply their English knowledge in everyday situations.

Inside the class, with the average class size of 50 students, only a few students will have an opportunity to interact with their English skills with the teacher due to time limitations and the number of students in class. There are many barriers in the Chinese English classroom setting. For instance, the grammar-based teaching approach is still commonly used in English classes and the teacher-centered classroom still dominates with little opportunity for students to spend time to engage speaking English in real world application. Coupled with relatively few volunteers in class to help students with their skills and a culture for students to be dependent upon following the teachers’ instructions than to communicate with each other in English to elevate their competence, one can see the virtue of studying English in an English speaking culture.
After three years of instructing non English-major students in one of the secondary colleges in China, I was frustrated that, except for a few students, the majority of these students were not interested in the class, let alone wanting to be fluent in English. I pondered on the following questions: Why are my students so disinterested in wanting to speak English in class? What are the factors, the barriers that contribute to their willingness or unwillingness to communicate in English? What kind of teaching strategies should I use in order to encourage them to communicate in English both inside and outside the classroom? The focus of my thesis is to find answers to these presented questions. Researching the underlying problems and highlighting fundamental understanding on factors that impact Chinese students’ WTC will shed light on both ESL and English instructing in China and help Chinese students improve their language proficiency more successfully.
Chapter II: Literature Review

The fundamental goal of language learning is to use the language for communication, “with increased emphasis on authentic communication as an essential part of L2 learning and instruction, willingness to communicate (WTC) has been proposed as one of the key concepts in L2 learning and instruction” (Kang, 2005, p. 278). This chapter concludes with a brief description of WTC construct and different variables that affect L2 WTC.

Defining Willingness to Communicate

The WTC construct “has evolved from the earlier work of Burgoon (1976) on unwillingness to communicate, Mortensen, Arntson, and Lustig (1977) on predispositions toward verbal behavior, and McCroskey and Richmond (1982) on shyness” (McCroskey & Baer, 1985, p. 3).

There is a kind of regularity (consistent behavioral tendencies) in communication behavior across interpersonal communication situations; therefore, it indicated the existence of the personality variable, willingness to communicate (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Willingness to Communicate (WTC) was originally introduced with reference to first language (L1) communication in 1985, and it was considered to be a personality–based, trait-like predisposition that remained stable across different situations (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). “Willingness to communicate is the one, overwhelming communication personality construct which permeates every facet of an individual’s life and contributes significantly to the social, educational, and organizational achievements of the individual” (Richmond & Roach, 1992, p. 104).
WTC has different influences on interpersonal communication. According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990), interpersonal communication occurs in three environments, including school environments, organizational environments and social environments. Among all these three different settings, “high willingness is associated with a wide variety of positive outcomes; low willingness is associated with a wide variety of negative outcomes” (p. 33). In addition, WTC has an influence on people’s interpersonal relationships as well. People who have a high willingness to communicate are more likely to achieve positive communicative outcomes from their teachers, employers and friends (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990).

WTC in second language (L2), however, is quite different. “It is highly unlikely that WTC in the second language (L2) is a simple manifestation of WTC in the L1” (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, & Noels, 1998, p. 546). There are not many studies that contribute in comparison of WTC between L1 and L2. Limited studies reported, “It is possible that L1 and L2 WTC are independent” (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Dörnyei, 2003, p. 593). WTC does not simply transfer from one language to another (MacIntyre et al., 1998). “L2 use interacts in a more complex manner with those variables that influence L1 WTC” (p. 546). That could be one of the possible explanations that why some L2 learners have high WTC in L1 but do not like to communicate with others in L2 regardless of their language proficiency.

L2 WTC is described as “is seen as a behavioral intention to initiate communication when free to choose to do so” (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 137). Later, MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a “heuristic model” to present variables that impact L2 WTC. Based on this model, L2 WTC is defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific
person or persons, using L2” (p. 547). Instead of personality-based, trait- like predisposition in L1 WTC, L2 WTC varies depending upon time and different situations.

Kang (2005) further developed the definition of L2 WTC, “Willingness to Communicate (WTC) is an individual’s volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication is a specific situation which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables” (p. 291). Kang’s definition primarily focused on the situational variables that impact L2 WTC.

According to different definitions, L2 WTC is more complicated, and there are different variables associated with the process of L2 WTC.

**Foundational Research for Willingness to Communicate Construct**

**Unwillingness to communicate.** Burgoon (1976) designed a self-report scale to measure the construct of unwillingness to communicate. She described unwillingness to communicate as “a chronic tendency to avoid and/ or devalue oral communication” (p. 60). The major variables that contribute to the construct of unwillingness to communicate are “anomia and alienation, introversion, self-esteem, communication apprehension and reticence” (p. 60). Among these variables, communication apprehension and reticence were considered as the most directly related to the construct of unwillingness to communicate. “Communication apprehension is anxiety that is directly related to the communication situation” (p. 61). Reticence, “it is a nonspecific anxiety that is aroused in a board range of contexts” (p. 62).

The unwillingness to communicate scale (USC) is a self-report measurement. There are 24 items on the scale that was modified from Burgoon’s earlier unwillingness to
communicate scale. There were 222 university students who participated the study to test the validity of USC and 152 university students verified the stability of the scale. The result showed that the USC was valid, however, the USC didn’t show the predisposition of unwillingness to communicate.

**Predispositions toward verbal behavior.** Mortensen et al.’s (1977) study went further to examine the predisposition of verbal behavior in communication. They developed a scale to measure predispositions toward verbal behavior. The authors suggested, “The more global features of speech tend to be consistent from one class of social situations to another” (p. 146). The consistency within individual’s communication behavior across different situations is labeled as “predisposition toward verbal behavior” (p. 147). There were 1,127 undergraduates who participated the study to test the reliability and validity of the PVB. The PVB data analysis showed that there was only one factor had strong correlation with communication situations. Therefore, the validity of PVB is in doubt.

**Shyness.** The third foundational research is McCroskey and Richmond’s (1982) study on shyness. This study focused on examining conceptual distinctions between communication apprehension and shyness (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). Shyness is described as “the tendency to be timid, reserved and most specifically, talk less; communication apprehension is “the tendency to behave in a shy manner (talk less) because of fear or anxiety (p. 461). The study used both self-report measures and “observer-evaluation measures”, which was completed by 590 participants (half subjects and half observers). The data analysis showed the conceptual distinction between communication apprehension and shyness (p. 468).
All these three studies focused on examining the predisposition of communication behavior.

**Variables Contribute to Second Language (L2) Willingness to Communicate Construct**

Communication and second language acquisition are closely related to each other, not only because L2 pedagogy focused on develop learners’ language proficiency but also because communication is more than just a means of facilitating language learning but an important goal in itself (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Therefore, understanding different variables that impact L2 WTC is crucial to help learners to improve their language proficiency. Previous studies have investigated different variables, including communication apprehension, motivation, self-perceived communication competence, and international posture.

**Communication apprehension.** Communication apprehension has been defined as “a broadly based fear or anxiety related to the act of communication held by a large number of individuals” (McCroskey & Richmond, 1977, p. 40). Later, he advanced the definition in a more specific way, it was “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (McCroskey, 1984b, p. 13). General personality traits such as quietness, shyness, and reticence are usually related to CA, CA has an influence on oral communication, social skills and self-esteem (Holbrook, 1987).

In order to identify why WTC varies within individual, McCroskey and Richmond (1987) examined six variables that they believed lead to differences in willingness to communicate, and the variables were referred as “antecedents”. Due to the WTC’s predisposition orientation, “antecedents” which cause WTC variability cannot be
distinguished clearly; “it is more likely that these variables may be involved in mutual
causality with each other, and even more likely that both the antecedents and the willingness
to communicate are produced in common by other elements” (p. 138). The six variables are
“introversion, anomie and alienation, self-esteem, cultural divergence, communication skills,
and communication apprehension” (p. 138). The results showed that people who have high
level of communication apprehension tended to talk less whereas people with lower level of
communication apprehension tended to talk more. Among all these variables, communication
apprehension, according to McCroskey and Richmond “CA is probably the single best
predictor of his or her willingness to communicate” and “the most potent of the antecedents of
willingness to communicate.” (p. 142). Roach (1999) also pointed out that “communication
apprehension is one of the major reasons an individual might be unwilling to communicate”
(p. 168).

MacIntyre (1994) proposed a model to present the factors that impact on willingness
to communicate in L1. In the model, two key elements that directly related to willingness to
communicate are communication apprehension and self-perception to communication
competence. “The model postulates that higher levels of willingness to communicate are
based on a combination of greater perceived communicative competence and a relative lack of
communication apprehension” (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996, p. 7).

Communication apprehension in L2 belongs to part of foreign language (FL) anxiety,
which is described as “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with
second language (L2) contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (MacIntyre &
Gardner, 1994, p. 284). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) presented three components of
foreign language anxiety, including communication apprehension, test anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is defined as “a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). Horwitz (1995) pointed out “speaking publicly in the target language has been found to be particularly anxiety provoking for many students, even those who feel little stress in other aspects of language learning” (p. 575).

Liu and Jackson (2008) had a quantitative study to examine Chinese EFL learners’ unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety, 547 first-year undergraduates (non-English major students) participated the study, the data analysis showed that Chinese students’ unwillingness to communicate was significantly positively correlated with their foreign language anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008). Yu’s (2008) research investigated Chinese students’ WTC in both Chinese and English, 235 English major undergraduates took the survey. The results showed that “communication apprehension was negatively correlated with both languages, communication apprehension had larger negative correlation with the students’ willingness to communicate in English than Chinese “(p. 84). In Shao, Yu, and Ji’s latest study (2013), 510 Chinese university students participated this study; the results showed that more than one third of participants continued to experience anxiety in English classes even if after more than 12 years of English studying.

**Self-perceived communication competence.** According to McCroskey and Richmond (1990), self-perceived communication competence might have a strong influence on individuals’ WTC. Larson, Backlund, Redmond, and Barbour (1978) described perceived
communication competence as “the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation” (p. 16).

Kelly (1983) studied differences between reticent and non-reticent students in terms of communication skills. The results provided evidence that there were no difference in terms of communication skills between self-identified reticent students and non-reticent students. Therefore, people’s own opinion about communication skills might be weight more than the actual skill level (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990).

The advanced definition of communication competence was defined by McCroskey (1984a) as “adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing” (p. 261). For anxious language learners, they may concentrated on potential negative outcomes, rather than focusing on language itself (MacIntyre, Noels, & Clément, 1997). Since whether to communicate or not is a cognitive choice, thus, it is possible that people’s own opinion of ability is more influential than their actual ability (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990).

“Throughout the process of acquiring a second language (L2), learners often assess their own developing abilities” (MacIntyre et al., 1997, p. 266). In Liu and Jackson’s (2008) study, the result showed that Chinese students unwilling to communicate and their foreign language anxiety were significantly correlated to their self-rated English proficiency and access to English. In Yu’s study (2008), the result found out that Chinese students’ “self-perceived communication competence was positively correlated with willingness to communicate and was a better predictor of the students’ willingness to communicate than was communication apprehension in both languages (p. 84)”.
Shimizu’s (2004) study, they surveyed 220 Japanese high school students in two different investigations and data analysis demonstrated that students’ self-perceived communication competence is “strongly related to how willing he or she is to communicate in an FL” (p. 135).

Previous research (Liu & Jackson, 2008; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; Yu, 2008) has shown that communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence are regarded as two of the strongest predictors that affect both L1 and L2 willingness to communicate. MacIntyre et al. (1997) investigated relationship within perceived competence, actual competence and language anxiety. Thirty-seven first year Anglophones in a bilingual university participated in the study. Participants filled out a questionnaire and took a series of French proficiency tests. The results reported negative correlation between participants’ language anxiety and their competence. Furthermore, the results also suggested the discrepancy between self-perceived competence and participants’ actual proficiency. Peng and Woodrow’s study (2010) examined WTC in EFL context, there were 579 university students filled out the questionnaires, the result reported that Chinese students “who have high self-evaluation of L2 competence and less anxiety arousal tend to be more willing to enter into communication” (p. 855).

**L2 motivational self system.** Motivation is one of the most common terms that language teachers use to describe successful and unsuccessful learners (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010). “Language learning theory has generally accepted the axiom that language learners with higher levels of motivation will be higher achievers” (Chen, Warden, & Chang, 2005, p. 610). Based on the previous researches, Dörnyei (2009) put forward the new framework of L2
motivation, which is called “L2 motivational self-system”. The definition of L2 motivational self-system includes the following three components:

(1) Ideal L2 Self, which is the L2-specific facet of one’s ‘ideal self’: if the person we would like to become speaks an L2, the ‘ideal L2 self’ is a powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves. Traditional integrative and internalized instrumental motives would typically belong to this component.

(2) Ought-to L2 Self, which concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes.

(3) L2 Learning Experience, which concerns situated, ‘executive’ motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience (e.g., the impact of the teacher, the curriculum, the peer group, the experience of success) (p. 29).

Li’s (2014) study compared Chinese learners’ motivational differences in EFL and ESL learning contexts. The study surveyed 132 EFL Chinese learners and 122 ESL (New Zealand context) Chinese learners to investigate the motivational differences in different contexts by using self-report motivation questionnaire. The results demonstrated the remarkable differences in terms of Chinese leaners’ motivation in different learning contexts, “the ESL learners were more motivated to learn English than the EFL learners in that the ESL learners expended or intended to expend more effort in learning English than the EFL learners” (p.458). Moreover, the ESL learners developed “stronger idealized self-images as competent users of English and had more favorable attitudes toward learning English than the EFL learners, while the EFL learners had a higher level of preventative instrumentality than the ESL learners” (p. 458).

Munezane (2013) examined “the structural relationship among different variables that affect WTC” (p. 176), 373 Japanese university students participated in the study. The data analysis reported that, among all the variables, Ideal-L2 Self was “the second most significant predictor of overall WTC” (p. 193). Ideal-L2 Self was particularly important in Japanese EFL
context because students didn't have the opportunity to practice English outside of the classroom, therefore, students who consider themselves as members of the larger global community would willing to communicate more using English (Munezane, 2013).

Attitude toward the international community: international posture. Yashima (2002) had a quantitative study to examine Japanese students’ WTC in Japanese EFL setting. She considered learners’ attitude toward international community, which she refers to as “international posture”, as a possible factor that influence on students’ WTC. The result showed that “international posture” directly influences on motivation and indirectly predicts proficiency and L2 communication confidence (p. 63) “The more internationally oriented an individual was, the more willing he or she was to communicate in English” (p. 62). Yashima proposed this variable that contributed to WTC construct based on Japanese EFL context. However, it can be applied to Chinese EFL context as well.

Yashima (2002) described international posture or attitude toward international community as an “inclination included in the concept are interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural, and, one hopes, openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures, among others (p. 57)”. China, like Japan, English is also studied as a foreign language and due to the development of county’s economy; the society needs more competent learners. Dörnyei (1990) indicated, “when English is studied as a foreign language, learners often haven’t had enough contact with native speakers of English, and it is not likely that learners can form a clear attitude toward it “(p. 69). Yashima et al. (2004) studied the influence of attitudes and affect on WTC and second language communication. In this study, two groups of participants
were involved, Japanese students who studied in a high school that focused on English 
communication and group two participants who had one year study abroad experience in US. 
She surveyed both two groups, the correlational analyses in both studies showed that 
“students who have a greater interest in international affairs, occupations and activities seem 
to be more willing to communicate in the L2 and voluntarily engage in communication more 
frequently”, in addition, for participants who are “internationally oriented” also more likely to 
be motivated to study L2 (p. 142).

The heuristic model. MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a model to demonstrate the 
conceptualization of WTC in L2 setting. Rather than L1 trait-like WTC predisposition, this 
model presents a range of potential factors that influence on L2 WTC. A pyramid shape model 
presents the potential relationships between various factors that determine WTC. The pyramid 
is divide into six different levels, the bottom three levels demonstrate “stable, long-term 
properties of the environment or person that would apply to almost any situation” which is 
referred as “enduring influences”; the top three levels is more “transient and dependent on the 
specific context in which a person functions at a given time”, which is associated with 
“situational influences” (p. 546). L2 WTC is affected by both “influences”. Since WTC is on 
the top level, it presents its predisposition is tended to be more situational.

Based on the model, the two factors that directly related to WTC are “desire to 
communicate with a specific person” and “state communication self-confidence” (p. 548). In 
Peng and Woodrow’s (2010) study, they presented and tested a model based on Chinese EFL 
classroom setting, and the findings showed that “communication confidence is a primary and 
universal precursor to L2 WTC “(p. 855).
Due to the inspiration of this model, many different L1 groups have studied this model based on different learning contexts (Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre et al., 2003; Wen & Clement, 2003; Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004; Yu, 2008). This model also contributes to the development of L2 pedagogy. From grammar-based language teaching approach to emphasis on improving L2 learners language proficiency, “WTC is a crucial component of modern L2 pedagogy”, “by engendering a willingness to communicate, language instruction may achieve its social and political goal of bring cultures into contact and nations together (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 558).

**Chinese conceptualization of willingness to communicate.** Based on MacIntyre et al.’s model, Wen and Clement (2003) presented a model of Chinese conceptualization of willingness to communicate in English classroom setting. They argued that cultural values play an important role on individual’s perception and way of learning. Two cultural values that correlate with Chinese students’ unwillingness to communicate in public and in classroom; “Other-directed self” and submissive way of learning (p. 19). Confucian’s philosophy is deeply rooted in Chinese culture and has profound influence in Chinese people’s life. “in Chinese culture, the social and moral process of “conducting oneself” is to be aware of one’s relations with others”(p. 20). That also explains why “face” is so important for Chinese. In addition, Chinese also prefer to interact with people they know, there is a clear distinction between insider and outsider. That is why “individuals who are in-group-oriented are likely to choose to function within the confines of their in-group and keep a certain distance from members of others groups” (p. 22).
Submissive to authority, as a tendency in Chinese culture, provides another perspective to explain why Chinese students are not willing to communicate in class (p. 22). In Chinese classroom, teachers are considered as the only authority in the classroom, source of knowledge and a model of the native target language (p. 22); students need to follow teachers’ instruction rather than questioning it or challenging it. The communication between teachers and students in classroom tends to be like answering teachers’ questions instead of actual communication.

Compare to MacIntyre et al.’s model, this model only focused on two levels of pyramid model, which is level 2 “desire to learn” and level 3 “WTC”. The model is a linear model, it starts from desire to communicate (DC) leads to WTC. Different variables are presented in between to present the relation between DC and WTC. “Chinese students overwhelmed with their traditional social orientation, only when they feel effectively comfortable, will they feel they will not run the risk of losing face in the presence of significant others, and will be willing to engage in speech” (p. 25). There are four different contexts, including “societal context, motivational orientation, personality factors and affective perception” (p. 25). Due to the importance of teacher’s role in China, “teacher support” becomes an integral part of societal context in this model. Peng (2007) studied Chinese students’ WTC in EFL setting, the interview data analysis suggested that “Chinese students tend to adopt a passive profile and rely on teacher support because they deem that it is the teacher who can and should control how and where the class is going” (p. 260).
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China

“Since 1992, the State Commission of Education has set teaching of Chinese English leaners’ communicative competence as the ultimate pedagogic goal in the new English Teaching Syllabus” (Hu, 2010, p. 78). However, communicative language teaching (CLT) is not very successful in China; Hu (2010) pinpointed four main obstacles of CLT in China:

First, some Chinese teachers lack of English proficiency, some teachers do not know how to answer questions that related to culture or sociolinguistics. Second, comparing with traditional teaching practice, which primarily focuses on vocabulary and syntax, CLT, on the other hand, focuses on students’ communication skill which is not tested by standardized tests such as University Entrance Exam, CET (College English Test). Third, the teachers’ authority and students’ passive role hinder classroom interaction, “students have been trained to be obedient ever since kindergarten” (p. 79). In other words, students don’t know what to do if their teachers don’t give them instructions. Fourth, the “populational constraint”. The English classrooms are quite large and average size in K-12 is around 50 students. It is very difficult to do activities in such crowded classrooms. In addition, students’ language proficiency level varies so teachers cannot provide equal opportunities to all the students in the limited teaching hours (p. 79).

Chapter Summary

As we have seen, L2 WTC is not simply a personality trait that remains stable under different circumstance, but it is situational and there are different variables affect L2 WTC. Since developing L2 learners’ authentic communicative competence becomes more and more important in L2 learning and instruction, therefore, investigating WTC construct will be very
beneficial for both L2 learners and instructors. By conducting more interviews from L2 learners who are from Chinese learning context, it may provide valuable information to WTC construct. In addition, the results from this study may also be useful for learners who are from different learning contexts.
Chapter III: Research Method

The following chapter presents the research questions and the description of the study design, including participants and setting, data collection instruments and procedure of data analysis.

Research Questions

1. What are the variables that impact Chinese students’ WTC?
2. From the learner’s perspective, is WTC a stable, trait like characteristic or does it vary according to different language environment (EFL and ESL)?

Participants and Setting

The 12 participants in this study were Chinese students who studied in an Intensive English Program (IEP) in a public university in US. Chinese students were chosen to be the participants for this study because Chinese learners constituted the second largest population after the students who came from Saudi Arabia in this program. Furthermore, in contrast to “哑巴英语” (deaf English) that was a phrase specifically used to describe Chinese English learners around 20 years ago because majority of them could not speak but only read and write in English. Nowadays, more and more Chinese English learners are eager to improve their oral proficiency. Therefore, the findings from this study could be beneficial for both IEP and many English learners in China. Thirdly, all the participants’ language proficiency varied from barely speaks English to speak fluent English, thus, both the WTC Survey and the semi-structured interview conducted in Chinese to not only avoid language barrier but also get more data that are meaningful from participants’ L1.
The primary goal of the IEP is to develop international students’ English skills for academic studies in American universities. Due to international students various English education backgrounds, all the new students in the program take the Michigan English Test in order to be placed into appropriate language level. Students may be placed from pre-beginner level (students who barely speak English) to advanced level (students speak fluent English) after they take the test, for the lower level students, they will move up to the higher level gradually. While the majority of students in the IEP enroll because they plan to get their undergraduate or graduate degree from American universities, however, there are small amount of students who join the program only to improve their English proficiency, therefore they may not complete all the levels.

The twelve participants signed the consent form and answered WTC survey, and eleven of them voluntarily participated the semi-structured interview. Table 1 is the description of these participants demographic information.

As it can be seen in the Table 1, the overwhelming majority of participants were male (N=10), with females making up only 16.7% (N=2). When it comes to education background, majority of participants (66.7%) were high school graduates, their average age was 20. All the participants have had English learning experience in China, 41.7% (N=5) participants have studied English for more than 10 years, since the average age for children to start the school is 7 years old in China, the number indicated that these participants have started to learn English either from kindergarten or first grade in elementary school. These participants haven’t studied in this program for a long time, 58.3% (N=7) participants was in their second semester in IEP. In terms of language level, 66.7% (N=8) participants’ level was intermediate,
which suggests that they had the basic language skills but they needed to improve their academic skills in order to enter American universities.

In order to protect participants’ privacy, the pseudonyms were used in the later section.

Table 1

*Individual Characteristics of the Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Background (age)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school graduate (18-20)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University student (20-23)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University graduate (26)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of studying English</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 +</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual Level in IEP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-beginner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instruments**

This study used the WTC Survey and interview to identify Chinese students’ WTC. The WTC Survey has 20 items on it and it is widely used in previous studies (Cao & Philp, 2006; Hashimoto, 2002; McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). It has strong content validity and reliability (McCroskey, 1992), and predictive validity (Chan & McCroskey, 1987; Zakahi &
McCroskey, 1986). However, I changed item No. 1 “Talk with a service station attendant” to “talk with a salesperson in the convenience store at the gas station” which is still the same content. The reason I changed this item is that many Chinese do not know what service station is, therefore it is very hard for participants to answer these type of questions.

The WTC Survey includes “four different communication contexts–public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, and talking in dyads–and three types of receivers–strangers, acquaintances, and friends” (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). The results demonstrate participants’ WTC level is high or low in different contexts (see Appendix A).

I decided to use interview in this study for the following reasons. First, Dörnyei (2001), the leading researcher in the motivation field which is closely correlated with WTC, suggested that “the richness of qualitative data may provide new slant on old questions” (p. 239). He also pointed out that interview studies “is more appropriate to uncover the complex interaction of social, cultural and psychological factors with the individual learners” (p. 240). Second, the best way of knowing whether students are willing to communicate or not is to talk to students. Face-to-face communication provides more detail information about students’ communication behavior. Being a Chinese myself, I understand participants’ cultural background and therefore it minimized cultural misunderstanding, in addition, participants should feel more comfortable talking with me because I am one of them (Chinese culture “insider effect”).

These 10 questions were semi-structured interview questions. In order to answer Research Question 1, the following interview questions were designed. Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, and Q9 related to WTC variables, which came from previous literature review. Q6 and Q7
emerged from WTC Survey. Q6 asked about participants’ WTC towards different types of receivers: stranger or acquaintance. Q7 tended to ask Chinese students’ opinion toward the two most commonly used teaching strategies in the US classrooms: group discussion and presentation. Q8 was directly related to the topic of this project, the description of an ideal situation of WTC.

Table 2

Research Question One with Related Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>What are the variables affect Chinese students’ WTC?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td>Do you like to talk or interact with people? Why or why not? After you came to US, English has become your first language, do you still consider yourself as people person? Give me an example. (personality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Why do you want to study English? Given me an example (L2 motivational self-system)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>American movies and TV shows are very popular among young Chinese people, what is your opinion on this? Give me an example (international posture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tell me a situation that you felt nervous or worried in speaking English when you were in China? How about after you came to the US? Why were you nervous? (communication apprehension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>What kind of situations made you feel uncomfortable in using English or that you rather not use English at all even though the occasion called for it? (unwillingness to communicate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How do you feel talking with a total stranger or somebody you barely know (acquaintance)? Have you had this kind of experience before in China and US? Giving me an example (relate to WTC survey, Chinese culture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How do you feel when you gave a speech in front of your classmates? How about when you have small group discussions? Which one do you feel more comfortable with? Show me an example.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What is the most relaxing and comfortable situation for you when you communicate in English? (willingness to communicate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>On a scale of 1-10, how good do you rate your English in general? How about speaking? Why do you think so? (self-perceived communication competence)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Four interview questions (Q1, Q4, Q6, and Q10) were designed to answer Research Question 2. These questions attempted to compare how different learning environment affect participants’ WTC.

Table 3

*Research Question Two with Related Interview Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>From the learner’s perspective, is WTC a stable, trait like characteristic or does it vary according to different language environments (EFL and ESL)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Questions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you like to talk or interact with people? Why or why not? After you came to US, English has become your first language, do you still consider yourself as people person? Give me an example. (personality)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tell me a situation that you felt nervous or worried in speaking English when you were in China? How about after you came to the US? Why were you nervous? (communication apprehension)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How do you feel talking with a total stranger or somebody you barely know (acquaintance)? Have you had this kind of experience before in China and US? Giving me an example (relate to WTC survey, Chinese culture)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>When you were in China, are you willing to talk in your English class, such as answer questions or talk to your teacher in English? Show me an example. How about in IEC? Tell me a situation that you talk the most and another situation that you barely talk, and explain why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Procedure*

I went to different classes and asked Chinese students to fill out the WTC survey first, for students who would willing to participate the semi-structured interview left their contact information on the consent form and I contacted with each of them and had the semi-structured interview. The interview was conducted face-to-face at the study room in the university’s library. It took 30-50 minutes to finish the face-to-face interview. The interview was recorded using a digital voice recorder. Since it was a semi-structured interview, I, the interviewer, took notes and asked some follow-up questions based on the participants’ answer.
either for clarification or in order to get in depth meaning. The interview was transcribed by myself using Microsoft Word. Both audio files and word documents were saved in the file space, which is provided by the university.

**Data Analysis**

The WTC Survey includes four different communication contexts (public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, and talking in dyads) and three types of receivers (strangers, acquaintance and friends). The overall WTC score adds the sub scores participants received from three types of receivers and then divide by three. For each type of receiver, there are four items related to it (see Appendix 1). To distinguish participants’ WTC is either high or low, Table 2 presents the rubric of WTC survey.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rubrics for Willingness to Communicate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stranger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall WTC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview data was analyzed by the following process. “Qualitative researchers code data by identifying patterns” (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The data were analyzed by searching for “the emerging categories and investigate potential connections among categories” (p. 241). The coding procedure will be: “labeling phenomena”, highlight frequently mentioned keywords or themes based on the interview transcription (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 65); then “identifying patterns in the response and reassembling the information into overarching and hierarchical themes and arguments” (Dörnyei, 2001, p.
(p. 239).

Before I started the data analysis, first I transcribed all the data I gathered from the semi-structured interview. Second, I grouped the transcription based on each interview question, then I color coded repeated emerging themes, including the key words, short phrases, and complete sentences from each question and found out how different themes related to each other. Then I grouped the similar themes in one category. Finally, the two research questions were answered based on different categories and previous literature reviews.
Chapter IV: Results

The two research questions of this study aimed for identifying different variables that impact Chinese students’ WTC, and how WTC varies according to different language environment. This chapter presents the results of WTC survey and detailed interview data analysis.

WTC Survey

Table 3 presents the results of WTC survey. The four different columns represent three different types of receivers of WTC (stranger, acquaintance, and friend) and overall WTC on the bar chart. The rubrics of WTC (see Table 4) is presented as different color on each column (high blue, middle orange, low green). The dots which were spread on each column represent each participants’ score in each section.

Participants’ average overall WTC score was 74, according to the rubric (see Table 4), it can be seen that participants’ WTC was in the middle, which shows that participants were willing communicate in English, however, their tendency of communication was not very high. Among all the participants, five participants scored high WTC, which suggests five of them might willing to communicate more under various circumstances. In addition, only one participant scored low WTC, which indicates that participant was not willing to communicate in English.

When it comes to three types of receivers, the average score was stranger 56, acquaintance 87, and friend 80. The WTC of these three types of receivers was all in the middle according to the rubric (see Table 4). Half of participants scored higher than average in friend even if none of their score was high enough to be considered as high WTC. Since
naturally people talk more with their friends so the rubric of friend is very high, participants were still more willing to talk to their friends. Between stranger and acquaintance, the results showed that five participants scored high WTC in stranger but only two scored high WTC in acquaintance which indicates that participants were more willing to communicate with strangers rather than acquaintance in English.

To sum up, except for one participant, all the rest participants showed the tendency to be willing to communicate in English.

*Figure 1. Students’ Score for Willingness to Communicate Survey*
Semi-structured Interview

Each interview question was designed to contain one specific theme, therefore the results of semi-structured interview was categorized under different themes. Table 5 presents the interview questions and related themes.

Table 5

*Interview Questions and Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you like to talk or interact with people? Why or why not? After you came to US, English has become your first language, do you still consider yourself as people person?</td>
<td>Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do you want to study English?</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American movies and TV shows are very popular among young Chinese people, what is your opinion on this?</td>
<td>International posture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me a situation that you felt nervous or worried in speaking English when you were in China? How about after you came to US? Why were you nervous?</td>
<td>Communication apprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of situations made you feel uncomfortable in using English or that you rather not use English at all even though the occasion called for it?</td>
<td>Unwilling to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel talking with a total stranger or somebody you barely know (acquaintance)? Have you had this kind of experience before in China and US?</td>
<td>Stranger vs acquaintance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel when you gave a speech in front of your classmates? How about when you have small group discussions? Which one do you feel more comfortable with</td>
<td>Presentation vs Group discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most relaxing and comfortable situation for you when you communicate in English?</td>
<td>Willingness to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On a scale of 1-10, how good do you rate your English in general? How about speaking? Why do you think so?</td>
<td>Self-perceived communicate competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When you were in China, are you willing to talk in your English class, such as answer questions or talk to your teacher in English? Show me an example. How about in IEC? Tell me a situation that you talk the most and another situation that you barely talk, and explain why?</td>
<td>Different learning contexts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following section reports the emerging themes from different thematic categorizations and the frequency indicates the times that each emerging theme has been mentioned by different participants during the interview. In addition, the sub-section summarizes the results of thematic categorization and in the connection with answering research questions while the possible explanations why participants answered as they did.

**Results of Research Question One**

**Motivation**

In the case of motivation, according to Dorynei’s (2009) L2 motivational self system, the subthemes was categorized by ideal L2 self and ought to L2 self. Thus, the highest variable in the table indicates that going to a university was the greatest motivation for participants to study English and communication. In addition, after they came to US, adapting to US lifestyle became important as well.

Table 6

*Frequencies of Motivation Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. High score, going to a university, more job opportunities</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Adapt to American life</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Broaden/widen someone’s horizons, want to study another language (“长见识”)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ideal L2 self suggests that learners have the desire to learn English by themselves, such as “broaden/widen someone’s horizons, want to study another language”. Ought-to L2 self, on the other hand, it indicates that learners have to study English for practical reasons, such as “going to universities or getting a better job”. Participants’ answer also shows that their motivation changed from ought-to L2 self to ideal L2 self after they came to US. The
following two statements demonstrated the differences between ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. Qiang stated:

I don’t like English, but right now English is like a world language, if you want to keep pace with the time, you have to study English. The situation in China is the same. I am not willing to study English, however, I have been forced to study English since kindergarten because of the surroundings of the society. When I first came here, my purpose of learning English was to pass exams in order to get into an American university. Right now, on the one hand, I still want to get into university, but on the other hand, I also need to adapt to American lifestyle. (Qiang)

It can be inferred from the comments, the phrases such as “don’t like”, “have been forced” indicated the participant was not interested in English but still needed to study English. However, after he came to US, he was more motivated to study English in order to “adapt to American lifestyle”. A total of 8 participants had the same comments. In contrast, there are other participants who like English and they have a deeper understanding about the benefits they can gain from learning a new language. They developed a stronger idealized self-image to study English. Like Liang said:

In the very first beginning, I think English is a tool, it includes both exam-orientated English learning and studying English for communication. After I came to US, I realized that English is also like a key, having this key can open an entire new world for you. It gives you an opportunity to know more about the local customs. I have read many books, it all says that studying another language leads to a new world. Right now, personally speaking, English is an important part of my life, it is also like a treasure waiting for me to discover. (Liang)

Liang wanted to study English, he has discovered another new world after studying English, he was motivated to study English not only just for enrolling an American university but most importantly, his own interests in English.
Personality

MacIntyre and Charos (1996) said, “language learning based on communication would likely favor the extrovert” (p. 9). Therefore, the table of personality shows that six participants described themselves as extroverted, only one participant claimed as introverted. The results indicated that extroverted students showed more willing to communicate over that of an introverted student. However, when it comes to L2 WTC, participants showed less talkativeness under certain circumstances. The explanation for this phenomenon is that L2 WTC is situational, it is affected by different factors.

Table 7

*Frequencies of Personality Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Extroverted, people person</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introverted, unwilling to talk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It depends on the situation, or first impression</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Six participants liked to talk with people both in Chinese and English, but their language proficiency affected their L2 WTC in ESL setting, as Ping stated:

I have been easy-going since I was a child, people think I am very outgoing and love talking when I speak Chinese. After I came here, in the beginning, I was afraid of making mistakes. Therefore, I didn't want to communicate with others. For instance, when I am with people who speak better English than I am, I would rather not talk because I don't want to show my weakness in front of others […](Ping). Qi also said “I became more introverted after I came here, because of the language barrier, I don’t understand what others’ saying, and I cannot communicate […]”.

From both comments, phrases such as “afraid of making mistakes, didn’t want to communicate”, “more introverted”, explained why some participants were very extroverted
when speak their L1 but less talkative when they speak English. It shows the characteristic of L2 WTC is situational.

**International Posture**

This question was looking for the participants’ attitude toward the international community. Studies (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004) have showed that if learners have more positive attitude towards international community, they are more motivated to learn and more willing to communicate in English. The table shows that except for two participants who were “not interested”, all the other participants were inclined to have more positive attitude towards international community. Their interests included traveling, other country’s culture, watching foreign movies, and TV shows.

Table 8

*Frequencies of International Posture Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Interested in different cultures, desire to learn new things</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Want to travel to different countries</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Not interested</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Liked to watch English TV shows, movies, and listen to English music</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since there were only two participants showed less interests toward international community, so for the other nine participants, international posture played a role in their studying but the degree varied. The international posture was also closely related to participants’ interests. For participants who were interested in foreign cultures, such as food, movies, music, they were more willing to get involved with international community. That also became one of the reasons that motivated them to learn English and study abroad.
I am longing to live abroad, otherwise I will not be here. My father said I 崇洋媚外 (worship everything foreign), I think 外国的月亮更圆 (the grass is greener on the other side) […], it was challenging to come here but it was also an incentive for me to study English harder […]. (Ping)

From Ping’s statement, it was obvious that international posture directly affected her motivation to study abroad. The phrases such as “崇洋媚外” (worship everything foreign), “外国的月亮更圆” (the grass is greener on the other side) showed her attitude toward international community. These two phrases were also typically used to describe people who prefer other countries’ culture to their own in Chinese. In contrast, two participants who showed negative attitude to international community were both not very interested in English. Thus, they both said “I haven’t paid any attention to it”. For the participants who were interested in foreign culture usually took initiative and paid more attention to international community.

**Communication Apprehension (CA)**

Communication apprehension is considered as one of the most important factors impacts learners’ WTC in previous literature. In this section, some key factors have been found: the idea of “losing face” and “a sense of inferiority” are significant because these two elements are so closely related to Chinese culture, therefore, it directly impact on Chinese learners’ learning style.

Based on the emerging themes, ten participants have all experienced anxiety when they speak English both in ESL and EFL settings. Their biggest concern was that they did not understand what other people’s saying and they might make mistakes. Like Chao stated: “Before I came here, I didn’t have a lot training in English, I was worried about my fluency and others didn’t understand what I said.” The reason that participants worried when they
speak English because they think their language proficiency was relatively low so they make mistakes when they speak English. Moreover, there were two emerging themes under this theme were particular interesting and it also showed that Chinese culture profoundly influences students’ learning behavior.

Table 9

*Frequencies of Communication Apprehension Themes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Don’t understand, making mistakes</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 丢脸 (Losing “face”)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. A sense of inferiority</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Teacher’s “气场” (aura)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Losing “Face” (丢脸).** “Face” is such an important concept in Chinese culture. Chinese care about other people’s opinions. They do not want to make mistakes in public in order to “protect their face”. During the interview, one Chinese phrase “尴尬” (embarrassed) was been mentioned constantly to describe public situations such as in a bank or restaurant. The participants felt embarrassed when they couldn’t communicate with others in English; in other words, they were worried about losing their face in front of others. Therefore, Chinese culture affects participants’ WTC. Yi said, “When I was in high school, I was very nervous to answer question in English […], I was worried about my pronunciation. If I make mistakes, I lose my face and other classmates may laugh at me.” From this comment, it can be seen that afraid of losing face directly had an influence on participants’ WTC.
A sense of inferiority (自卑感). This one is particular interesting because as a Chinese, I noticed this phenomenon commonly exists in China. As Liang stated:

I participated in a volunteer activity once in China, all the foreign volunteers came from prestigious universities, such as Cambridge, Yale, Oxford, I was really nervous when I worked with them although I was the team leader. Subconsciously, I felt a sense of inferiority […] part of the reason to cause that because I was worried about my English, and I am not a native speaker […] (Liang)

The phrase “a sense of inferiority” was directly used by Liang in the interview. Other participants also mentioned that they did not want to speak English in front of people who speak better English than themselves. These comments indicated that participants who considered themselves have relatively lower language proficiency felt a sense of inferiority. In other words, they compared their language proficiency with others subconsciously. One of the explanations to this phenomenon is that lack of confidence lead participants to talk less.

For the last emerging theme: teacher’s aura was mentioned by only one participant. The participant told me that he was very afraid of speaking English with his English teacher simply because the teacher’s aura or presence.

Unwillingness to Communicate

As it was mentioned in the previous literature review, unwillingness to communicate was linked to different areas such as reticence, communication apprehension. The table presents the situations that participants were unwilling to communicate. An interesting subtheme is that more than half of participants unwilling to communicate with Chinese in English. It suggests that even if it is an ESL context, participants still felt uncomfortable to speak English with Chinese.
Table 10

*Frequencies of Themes Regarding Unwillingness to Communicate*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Talking to a Chinese in English</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Formal situation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Depending on topics</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jing stated “I feel embarrassed to speak English in front of Chinese, if their level is higher than me, they judge and ask me to repeat what I said[…]”, “[…]due to various Chinese students’ English backgrounds, I feel embarrassed speak English in front of a large group of Chinese, they think you might want to show off” Nan said. The phrases “embarrassed”, “show off” demonstrated why participants were unwilling to speak English with Chinese.

Participants also mentioned that they were less willing to talk if the situation is too formal that also explained why Q7 majority students preferred group discussion to presentation. Two participants talked about how their WTC changes based on their interests to the topic.

**Stranger and Acquaintance; Group Discussion vs Presentation**

**Stranger and acquaintance.** These two questions were emerged from the WTC survey to identify participants’ WTC with different receivers and under different contexts. The table shows that participants had different attitude towards strangers in different contexts. Talking to a stranger was more common in US but not in China. In addition, participants have gained more confidence after talking to a stranger.

The results from the interview also match with the WTC survey (see Figure 2) that participants’ WTC varies in different contexts. In the interview, three participants told me that they have gained more confidence in English after talking to strangers. Yi stated, “Once, I
talked to a stranger in the elevator. After the conversation, I felt great, and I realized that talking to somebody was not that difficult”. The phrases “felt great”, “it was not that difficult” shows the participant became more confident after talking to a stranger. In contrast, few participants had experience talking to a stranger in China. Participants used the phrase “警戒心” (put guard up) to describe the situation talking to a stranger. It suggests that Chinese are more cautious when they need to talk to people they don’t know. Chinese usually tend not to talk to strangers unless it is necessary. Chinese culture “insider effect” is one of the possible explanations for this phenomenon. The stranger is not considered as “one of us”, therefore, participants showed no intention talking to a stranger. In the US, on the contrary, many people are very friendly toward strangers that explains why participants were more willing to communicate with strangers in the US.

Table 11

*Frequencies of Themes Regarding Stranger and Acquaintance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Had good experience talking to a strange (in the US)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Will not talk to a stranger unless it is necessary (in China)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gained more confidence in English after talking to a stranger</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Put guard up (警戒心) to stranger (in China)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Nervous or uncomfortable talking to a stranger at the first time</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Group discussion vs presentation.** On the WTC survey, different contexts also include group discussion and public speaking (see Appendix 1). According to the rubric, the results in these two sections show that one participant had high WTC in group discussion while five had high WTC in public speaking. It means that participants were willing to talk
more in public. However, the result was totally opposite from the interview. As it shows in the table, the overwhelming majority of participants preferred group discussion to presentation.

Table 12

*Frequencies of Themes Regarding Group Discussion vs Presentation*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Prefer group discussion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Prefer presentation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reason contributes to the differences between the WTC survey and interview is that on the survey, these two contexts also related to three different types of receivers: stranger, acquaintance, and friend. While the interview question was only limited into classroom, there is only one type of receiver, classmates. For participants, classmates can be either friends or acquaintances but not strangers.

As the two most commonly used teaching strategies in US classroom, participants agreed that both two approaches have their own advantages and disadvantages. Two participants mentioned that this was the first time that they had presentation or group discussion in the classroom setting since their Chinese English classroom did not use these two approaches. However, the overwhelming majority of participants preferred group discussion not only because it was casual, and more comfortable. But more importantly, they can exchange different ideas and they were able to communicate with each other. Lei stated:

[...] in US, there are different kind of supporting groups, one thing is in common that all these supporting groups sit like a circle and talk with their group members [...] presentation is about express opinions but group discussion focused more on discussion.
In contrast, presentation made participants feel more nervous. They felt more stressed talking in front of a group of people, and they were worried about making mistakes. One participant also mentioned that presentation was a one-time thing, he did not get the second chance to improve his presentation. In addition, for lower level students, if the class is dominated by one group of students, most likely students use their L1 for group discussion rather than practicing in English.

**Willingness to Communicate**

This question directly asked participants’ willingness to communicate. Among all the questions, this question is also the easiest one to code. As the table presents, there are three components attribute to situations that participants would willing to communicate: 1) Mutual topics of interest; 2) Outside of classroom; and 3) Small groups. It indicates that L2 WTC is affected by various factors.

Yong stated “[…] it doesn’t matter whether I know that person or not, random talking with somebody outside of the classroom is the most relaxing way, especially when we are both interested in the topic and willing to talk to each other”. Yi said” […] inside of the classroom, talking usually involves answering questions, it has a purpose and it is more like finishing a task. Outside of the classroom you can talk anything you are interested in […]”. From these comments, it is easy to see that L2 WTC varies based on different situations, students are not willing to communicate inside of the classroom does not mean they have low WTC outside of classroom. The most important thing is topic, as long as the participants were interested in the topic; they were all willing to communicate.
Table 13

Frequencies of Themes Regarding Willingness to Communicate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mutual topics of interest</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Outside of the classroom</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Small groups</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-perceived Communication Competence

As another important factor that affects L2 WTC, how participants perceive their own communication competence had an influenced on their WTC. The table of data analysis shows that participants had relatively high self-perceived communication competence after they came to US. Participants became more confident after they studied in IEP.

Table 14

Frequencies of Themes Regarding Self-perceived Communication Competence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Self-perceived high oral proficiency (6 or above)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Self-perceived low oral proficiency</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Confidence</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interview question asked participants to rate their self-perceived both oral and overall English proficiency from the scale 1-10. Figure 2 shows participants’ rating on both their overall English ability and oral proficiency. I also asked participants the rubric of their rating in the interview, since the scale is 1-10 so participants decided 6 as the passing score. From participants’ perspective: 1 means cannot speak English; passing score 6 means that they could have daily conversation with native speakers like intermediate level speakers; 10
means speak fluent English like native speakers. As it is shown on the Figure 2, the mean of overall proficiency is 5.73, lower than 6, it suggests that participants overall proficiency still needed to be improved such as reading and writing. However, the mean of oral proficiency is 6.27, higher than 6, it indicates that participants considered themselves had the ability to communicate with native speakers, and their oral proficiency has reached intermediate level. In the interview, I also asked several participants how would they rate their oral proficiency before they came to US, their rating range was from one to four, which was much lower than their rating now.

**Figure 2.** Self-perceived Overall English Proficiency and Oral Proficiency

All the participants acknowledged that their oral proficiency have been improved remarkably since they came to US, especially in daily conversation. Like Yan said “[…] I have been studying English for so many years, I couldn’t communicate in English, but right now, I can speak fluent English after I studied in IEP, I am more confident and the progress is obvious.” On the other hand, participants also admitted that they were good at using English in daily conversation rather than academic circumstance. In fact, they did not have a lot of opportunities interact with native speakers even if they were in US. In IEP, their classmates
were all international students, and they spent most of time with Chinese outside of classroom.

In addition, the longer they stayed in the US, the less they worried about losing their face. In fact, several participants said that they “脸皮厚” (have thicker skin) now. It shows that they were more used to speaking in English and less worried about losing their face. For three participants who rated themselves as relatively lower scores, they all agreed that their oral proficiency was better than they were in China but their oral English was still the worst compare to other English skills. Jun said,

[…] I have a lot of good ideas, but I am either too nervous when I speak or I cannot find the proper words to express my opinion. The biggest issue is that I have the translation process when I speak English, sometimes I get stuck and I cannot express myself fluently.

One participant pointed out that “translation process” from his L1 directly affected his confidence in speaking. Two other participants said that they were more used to read and write before they came to US, therefore, their oral proficiency was relative low.

One of the biggest differences between EFL and ESL in terms of oral proficiency is that participants were more confident in using English in ESL.

**Results of Research Question Two**

**Learning Contexts**

For L2 learners, the classroom is the most important place for them to study English. Therefore, classroom environment directly influences their L2 WTC. The result, as it shows in the table, indicates that participants’ WTC significantly different in China and US classrooms. It implies that WTC is situational. Participants were all more willing to communicate in English in IEP, whereas less talkative in China due to exam-orientated teaching approach and
unbalanced English education development in China. In addition, communicative language teaching also emerged as an important factor in English classroom. Teacher’s teaching style was closely related to participants’ WTC in IEP, they had high WTC in classroom if they liked their instructor’s teaching style. Two participants encountered self-perceived teacher’s bias, therefore, there were unwilling to communicate in IEP classroom.

Table 15

*Frequency Comparisons between China and the US Regarding Learning Contexts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Grammar/Exam-orientated teaching approach, teacher-centered, less communication</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional differences in terms of English education</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicative language teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US (IEP)</td>
<td>Teacher’s teaching style</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to talk more in IEP</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-perceived teacher’s bias</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the interview questions, there are four questions connected with two language environment. The analysis of Q1, Q4, and Q6 in previous section, the results has already demonstrated that there are various factors influences learners’ L2 WTC. Interview Q10 specially focused on how different learning contexts affect learners’ WTC.

**English Learning Context in China**

**Grammar/exam-orientated teaching approach.** When it comes to learning environment in China, the most common theme that has been brought up constantly by different participants was that English education uses a grammar/exam orientated, teacher-centered teaching approach. Therefore, most participants did not have the opportunity to talk
or communicate in English in English class. Yi said “English class for me was “sleeping class”, I answered questions once or twice a semester. I always had to take notes no matter whether I listen to class or not. […] there was no opportunity to communicate in class, our questions mainly focused on grammar.” Yong said “[…] during that time, there was no communication in class at all, the English class was concentrated on exams, grammar […]. Participants also mentioned that even if it was English class but Chinese was the dominant language for communication in classroom.

Based on participants’ comments, it has shown that traditional grammar-oriented approach is still dominated in Chinese English classroom. Students don’t have the opportunity to develop their language proficiency in order to communicate. The purpose of English studying is to pass tests, receive certifications rather than using English for communication. In EFL setting, there is no language environment outside of classroom which makes it harder for students to improve their speaking. However, due to the unbalanced education development, the quality of English education varies from province to province in China.

**Unbalanced English education development.** This theme emerged because six participants talked about unbalanced English education in different regions in China based either on their personal experience or on what they have noticed between themselves and their friends who studied in different cities. One participant who came from the southern part of China, his English learning experience was totally different from all the other participants. His high school tried to create the English immersion environment, foreign teachers’ speaking class was provided twice a week to improve students’ oral proficiency, and different group activities were applied to English class. To be able to communicate with native speakers
fluently after students graduate from high school was one of teaching objectives in that high school. Therefore, he was easily fitted in with IEP learning context. Another participant also talked about her short period of learning experience as a transferred student in southern part of China. She was surprised at seeing middle school students had presentation in class but she hadn’t even heard of it. Therefore, unbalanced education development could also explain Chinese learners’ various language proficiency level.

**Communicative language teaching (CLT).** This topic was emerged from a story that one participant told me. He said when he was a first-year student in high school, a new English teacher started to teach him. The teacher studied abroad, and his class focused more on communication instead of grammar. The classroom environment was very relaxing and they had different activities in class. However, after a while his English exam score went down, and some of his classmates complained about this class because they were worried they cannot pass exam if the teacher taught English like that way. The second year he had another teacher who started using exam-orientated teaching approach again and his English exam score went up. This is a typical example to show the dilemma of CLT in China. On the one hand, more and more people started to realize the purpose of language learning is to communicate, but on the other hand, students need to get high score in order to enroll into universities. Therefore, majority English learners in China pay more attention to exam scores rather than studying English for the purpose of communication.

**IEP Learning Context in the US**

All the participants were willing to talk more in IEP, not only because they were ESL students, but also because their instructors focused on improving their oral proficiency and
using different teaching approaches in the classroom. And teacher’s teaching style directly related to participants’ WTC. Yan stated “I talk the most in my structure class, the teacher is young, we play games, she gives us candy, and we can chat or joke with each other. Her class is so relaxing.” Liang also said” among all the teachers, writing teacher is my favorite. I always answer questions voluntarily or ask questions, because her teaching style is great and I am interested in her class.” From his comment, it shows that teachers’ teaching style directly influence on students’ performance in class. In addition, students have a closer relationship with their teachers, such as “we can chat and joke with each other”. The biggest difference for participants in terms of classroom environment was that the instructors in IEP didn’t use grammar/exam –orientated teaching approach any more, instead, it focused on improving students’ language proficiency.

**Self-perceived teacher’s bias.** Bias is an unexpected emerging theme. The interview question asked about the classes that participants unwilling to talk and the reason behind that. For most participants they were unwilling to talk in class because they thought the class was boring or they didn’t like instructors’ way of teaching which still related to teaching style. However, two participants pointed out that they felt biased in the IEP classroom.” Yan stated:

> When I was in my previous IEP, my grammar teacher was a middle-aged male, he had worked in Japan and his wife was also Japanese. He kind of doesn’t like Chinese. He is biased against Chinese sometimes when he talks, such as “Diao Yu Island issue”(the islands’ sovereignty over the territory is disputed by China and Japan). Americans have the right of free speech, so we cannot call the police. During that time, many Chinese didn’t like him […], when I was in his class, unless I had to answer questions otherwise I only took notes and ignored him. I felt that kind of bias, the patriotic feeling was not that obvious when I was in China, since I studied abroad, I felt very uncomfortable if others say something about my country”.
Another participant felt biased in the classroom when one instructor used Arabic in class to talk to Arabic learners, which was the dominant group in class. After that, he felt disrespect and biased. He did not like that class after that.

From both comments, it can be seen that participants perceived bias in their ESL classroom, which obviously impact their classroom performance. Both of them barely talked in that class or even skipped the class.

**Chapter Summary**

The data analysis suggests that L2 WTC is not based on trait like characteristics, which is stable across different situations but is situational and that there are various factors contributing to leaners’ L2 WTC. The following factors were identified as factors impact L2 WTC from this study: motivation, personality, international posture, communication apprehension, self-perceived communication competence, Chinese culture and learning contexts. The significant difference between EFL and ESL is that participants were all more willing to communicate in IEP, which indicated that language environment, and learning context directly affected learners’ WTC.
Chapter V: Discussion

The results of WTC survey, to some degree, matched with participants’ interview answers. There was one participant scored low WTC on the survey, and there was also only one participant indicated less tendency to communicate in English in the interview. The significant difference between ESL and EFL is that participants were all more willing to communicate in ESL context.

On WTC survey, for the three types of receivers (stranger, acquaintance, friend), interestingly though, there were more participants had high WTC (see Figure 2) in stranger (5 high WTC) than acquaintance (2 high WTC) which was different from “the Chinese, very cautious in their contact with strangers” (Wen & Clement, 2003, p. 21). For most participants, they came to US in a relatively young age, and they were exposed into an environment where people are friendly to strangers so they had more opportunities to talk to a stranger. In addition, these participants have chosen to study abroad, in some ways, it also indicates that they were more willing to meet new people and learn new things. Therefore they were more willing to communicate with strangers in US. In the interview, several participants all shared their wonderful experience talking with strangers in the US. In contrast, participants also mentioned their talking to a stranger experience in China; it suggests that “insider effect” plays an important role in social interactions. Chinese usually do not talk to strangers unless it’s necessary. Furthermore, the participants were also likely to spend most of their time with Chinese outside of the classroom which was described by Wen and Clement (2003) as “[…] in a native environment, most Chinese still adhere almost exclusively to their ingroup” (p. 21). In the interview, participants also mentioned that they had few chances talking with a
native speaker or making friends with them outside of classroom since they spent majority of their time with their Chinese friends only.

The responses from 11 participants suggest that L2 WTC is not stable but situational, and there are different variables affect WTC. Motivation, according to Dörnyei’s L2 motivational self-system, majority of participants’ motivation was “ought-to L2 self” when they first came to US. They wanted to study English in order to enroll American universities, however, after they came to US, they started to develop stronger image of “ideal L2 self” so they could adapt to American life style. In EFL setting, “ought-to L2 self” is also the main motivation for learners. Since there is no language environment outside of classroom, most participants were more motivated to study English after they came to the US and they wanted to study English by themselves instead of “being forced to learn English”. The results was similar to Li’s (2014) study that “ESL learners had a stronger ideal L2 self than EFL learners” (p. 456) the interview data revealed participants’ attitude changed from “ought-to L2 self” to “Ideal L2-self.”

In Liu and Jackson’s (2008) study suggests that EFL learners’ unwilling to communicate significantly related to language anxiety and self-perceived English proficiency and access to English. The results of this study revealed that when learners were exposed into second language environment, their language anxiety reduced as time goes by. They were still worried to receive negative evaluation from their peers or make mistakes but mostly in front of Chinese instead of their international classmates. The participants did not worry too much about speaking English in front of their international classmates because they were all L2 learners, so it was totally understandable if they make mistakes. Moreover, their teachers in
IEP always encouraged them to speak English even if they make mistakes. A lot of their classroom activities involved speaking, thus, after studying in IEP for a while, they were more used to speak English and felt less anxiety. The reason that the participants were more worried to speak English in front of Chinese when they were in China or unwilling to speak English to other Chinese in ESL setting, because the influence of Chinese culture “face protection”. Chinese students are less likely to be involved in classroom communication because they would be more sensitive towards public judgment about their language behavior (Wen & Clement, 2003).

Self-perceived language proficiency also showed very different results in ESL and EFL. Majority participants rated their English proficiency very high, which indicates that they were more confident speaking English in ESL. Self-confidence has been identified as the combination of less anxiety and high self-perceived communication competence (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2002). In MacIntyre et al.’s (1998) model, state self-confidence was considered as most immediate determinants of WTC. The results also presented that self-confidence is a significant indicator for WTC. The participants’ confidence has gained from different aspects, including talking to a stranger, helping somebody whose level was lower than participant him/herself, received positive feedback from their family members and so on. ESL environment definitely helped participants build up their confidence, especially after they passed which was described by participants as “translating everything into Chinese stage”. The more they were fluent in speaking, the more confident they had and they were more willing to communicate in English.
Furthermore, self-confidence is also closely related to international posture. In EFL setting, there is no language environment outside of classroom; it is hard for students to have the opportunity to interact with English speakers. Although more and more people would willing to pay extra money to English training schools to improve their oral proficiency, that is still only limited several hours of practicing English in a week. For leaners who have more positive attitude towards international community (international posture) would willing to look for other opportunities to access to English. One participant reported watching American TV shows significantly improved his oral proficiency, he has learned so many useful daily expressions from watching American TV shows. The results of this study showed strong connection between international posture and motivation, especially ideal L2 self. Participants who showed more positive attitude toward international community were willing to put more effort into English learning, especially in oral proficiency. Language is considered as a key to open the entire new world. Yashima (2002) suggested that in EFL contexts “students expand their self by creating new image of themselves linked to global concerns, and through the process find meaning in learning English while leaning to use the language (p. 15).

In Kang’s (2005) study, he presented three categories of situational variables affecting situational WTC, including “topic, interlocutors, and conversational context” (p. 288). Cao and Philp (2006) also suggested that “group size, familiarity with interlocutor(s) and interlocutor participation were most commonly identified as factors contributing to or reducing WTC” (p. 488). In this study, the results also demonstrated these variables. Participants preferred small groups to large groups, and they were more comfortable talking in small groups. “Mutual topics of interests” was one of the most important factors
contributing to WTC in the interview. One participant said that he hated English class in China because English class was all about grammar, doing exercise, taking tests, and he had no interest about what was been taught in class. MacIntyre et al.’s (1998) also claimed that “the topic of the communication will significantly affect the ease of language use”, the participants all claimed that they would willing to talk as long as they are interested in the topic. Kang’s (2005) study showed that if participants “didn’t have the background knowledge on the topic, they tended to feel insure about talking” (p. 283). In this study, one participant said her anxiety level went up because she had to do a presentation about an unfamiliar topic that she had no background knowledge. While another participant mentioned that she liked to talk about Chinese culture in class, she felt very proud to show her classmates something that they didn’t know. Therefore, the importance of topic is very obvious in L2 WTC.

Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1994) suggested good classroom atmosphere should have two components, reducing students’ anxiety and promoting students’ self-confidence. This study, classroom atmosphere directly impacts participants’ WTC. Participants had low or no communication in Chinese English classroom but they all became more willing to communicate after they studied in IEP. The primary reason to contribute this phenomenon, according to the data, is that participants liked IEP instructor’s teaching style. In IEP, small class size and students-centered classroom provided participants more opportunities to interact with both their teachers and classmates. On the other hand, participants also pinpointed the issues about Chinese English classroom that included grammar/exam-orientated teaching strategy, large classroom size, and teacher-centered teaching style. In
addition, regional differences also attributed to the unbalanced development of Chinese English education. Hu (2003) concluded two issues existed in the underdeveloped regions, “teachers’ lack of professional training and students’ insufficient exposure to English” (p. 313). Thus, if English teachers in China do not have professional knowledge in terms of second language acquisition and pedagogy, but only use the grammar-translation approach, it will be very difficult to improve English education in China.

**Pedagogical Implications**

WTC is considered as a crucial component of modern L2 pedagogy, which concentrates on the authentic use of language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). In order to develop learners’ oral proficiency, L2 instructors need to use teaching strategies that help learners improving their communication competence. The highlight of pedagogical implication for both ESL and EFL teachers is that WTC is not determined by only one factor but different factors together. So it is important to take all these factors into consideration when teachers design their lesson plans or classroom activities.

**For ESL Teachers**

Interview data demonstrated that the topic of interest directly influence participants’ WTC, participants were all willing to communicate as long as they were interested in the topics. Therefore, L2 instructors need to choose the topics that could draw learner’s attention so learners are willing to participant in communication. Kang (2005) suggested several good ways to identify the common interest topics, such as brainstorming, taking a survey, and letting L2 learners bring in topics. In that case, instructors have a better understanding about
learners’ interests and the classroom activities can be generated from these common interest topics.

ESL teachers need to take L2 learners’ cultural background into consideration. In the interview, to some extent, all the participants were affected by Chinese culture. For instance “face” and “insider effect” were the reasons that contributed to participants’ unwilling to communicate. Thus, it’s critical for teachers to have knowledge about L2 learners’ cultural background so educators have a better judgment in terms of learners’ learning behavior. It is important to create a safe and comfortable classroom environment that learners feel less worried about making mistakes.

Group discussion and presentation were both very beneficial in terms of promoting participants’ WTC. However, some participants have never had this kind of activities in China, thus it took time for them to adapt to the new situation. Educators could start from group discussion and then do the presentation since majority of participants were more comfortable talking in small groups. Presentation, one participant pointed out that he did not have second chance to correct his mistakes because presentation is a “one time deal”. In order to give students a second chance to perform better, instructors could use the similar topics for different presentations. Having a good group discussion in class, the key is to conduct it very efficiently. ESL instructors should pair students across languages to avoid students using their L1 to communicate. If the classroom is dominated by one group of students, assigning different roles to each group member will increase students using L2 to communicate.

Educators also need to be very cautious about showing their own preference or attitude in front of their students. Participants felt discouraged and disrespectful after they noticed
their instructors were biased, and they refused to communicate in the class ever since. Therefore, in order to improve students’ WTC, language instructors need to be sensitive about what they say in class and try not to express their personal opinions in front of their students.

ESL teachers also need to help students to build-up their self-confidence. Both language anxiety and how learners perceive their own language proficiency are all related to self-confidence. In the study, the more confidence learners have, the higher WTC they presented. Instructors should encourage their students be engaged into different classroom activities and give them positive feedback whenever they can.

**For EFL Teachers**

After 6 years of English teaching in China, I struggled with how to motivate and improve my students’ oral proficiency. The data analysis from this study showed that there were different reasons contributing to participants’ unwillingness to communicate in English in China. The findings from this study have implications for EFL teachers as well.

First of all, many participants mentioned during the interview that they were not willing to communicate in English class when they were in China not because they did not want to but because they had no opportunity to practice their oral proficiency in class. The reason to cause this phenomenon is that since oral proficiency is still not the part of the standard assessment, therefore, teachers pay less attention to oral proficiency but mainly focused on teaching such as grammar or vocabulary, the content that will be tested. So unless oral proficiency becomes part of the standardized test, otherwise majority of EFL students only study English for “ought-to-self” rather than “Ideal L2-self”, they are not interested in improving their communication competence because it will not help them improving their test
scores. To improve this situation, EFL teachers could add oral proficiency as part of assessment to encourage and motivate students practicing their oral English both inside and outside of the classroom.

Secondly, the best way to improve students’ WTC is to practice communicative language teaching (CLT), which specifically concentrated on improving students’ communicative competence. However, CLT was not very successful in China. Yu (2001) pointed out that the most important constraint of CLT in China is lacking of qualified teachers. According to participants, their English class was dominated by Chinese and their teachers just delivered English grammar rules in Chinese. Many language instructors in China are not capable of practicing CLT in their classroom because they do not have relevant language proficiency. In order to improve this situation fundamentally, Chinese language instructors need to have professional training in terms of linguistics, L2 pedagogy and other knowledge that related to second language acquisition. If the ultimate goal of language learning is to develop learners’ communication competence, instructors need to reinforce their own language proficiency so they are able to help students’ improve their language proficiency.

Thirdly, as the only authority in the classroom, teacher-centered classroom leads Chinese students’ “submissive way of learning”. One participant told me that he didn’t know how to study English after his new teacher started to practice CLT in class. Therefore, rather than being teacher-centered, student-centered classroom should be promoted. Instructors could design different activities and encourage collaborative learning so students feel more engaged in class.
Fourth, the large classroom size is also another main limitation that teachers are reluctant to do classroom activities in English classroom. However, one participant described how CLT was successfully practiced in his high school class. His comments can be highlighted into two key points: first, English is the dominant language in the classroom, most of his teachers studied abroad so they were qualified to deliver knowledge in English. Second, students constantly had activities such as presentation or group discussion in class. It is very challenging to bring a new approach into classroom. In the beginning, majority of students resisted and worried about doing these kind of activities, however, as time goes by, they were used to do it and more willing to communicate in English in class. It is not impossible to create activities such as role-playing, presentation, or group discussion in large classroom as long as teachers carefully design the activity and do it systematically.

Finally, English instructors also need to help Chinese students’ to overcome the influence of Chinese culture on language learning. Instructors should encourage students to build up their self-confidence and less worry about “losing face” or feeling “embarrassed” to speak English in front of their peers. Most importantly, EFL teachers should let students know that it is normal to make mistakes when they study another language. Therefore, students should less worry about the mistakes they make but more focused on practicing English whenever they have the opportunity.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations for doing qualitative research. First of all, the sample size was relatively small. There were total 12 students participated this study, 11 students participated the semi-structured interview. The overwhelming majority of participants were...
intermediate male students, therefore, the data was only limited to present intermediate level students’ WTC rather than showing WTC in different proficiency levels.

Second limitation is that self-report WTC survey related to different communication situations, however, some of the situations that had never been encountered by participants in their real life. For instance, “Talk with a secretary” or “Talk with a garbage collector”, thus, they had to answer these questions based on their own judgment. Although the dyads were not counted in total WTC rubric, it would still be better if participants had these communication situations in their real life.

Finally, due to the time limitation, this study didn't conduct classroom observation to examine the differences between participants’ self-perceived WTC and their actual classroom performance. Several participants rated their self-perceived communication competence very high, however, current study couldn’t verify if their self-perceived communication competence matches with their actual communication competence.

**Suggestions for Future Studies**

The suggestions for future studies draw from the limitations of current study and previous literature review. Due to the sample size of current study, future studies could choose participants who are from different proficiency levels to investigate the connections between participants’ language proficiency and WTC. In addition, participants’ gender should also be taken into consideration. Donovan and MacIntyre’s (2004) study indicated that junior females had higher WTC than males. Therefore, males and females may need to be equally presented in the study.
Cao and Philp (2006) suggested “the triangulation of data and the inclusion of a qualitative approach may be essential to investigating the situated nature of L2 WTC and situational variables affecting WTC” (p. 488). Current study only used self-report survey and interview, future studies can use triangulation in the addition of classroom observation, or “interviews with the participants’ past and present teachers, and a longitudinal investigation of the WTC of the participants over a semester or more interview events” (Cameron, 2013, p. 192) could add validity to the findings of current study. In addition, all the participants claimed that they would willing to communicate more outside of the classroom, it would be interesting to compare participants’ WTC inside and outside of the classroom, although it would be more difficult to conduct this type of research.

This study only focused on WTC in speaking, the future studies could focus on the other aspects of WTC, for example participants’ WTC in writing. Furthermore, it would be very beneficial if the similar studies could be conducted in EFL setting. To compare the similarities and differences of WTC between EFL and ESL context can be very beneficial to WTC construct as well as pedagogical implications.
Chapter VI: Conclusion

This study reveals that the participants’ WTC varied in different situations and there are various factors affect WTC construct. It is obvious that all the participants became more willing to communicate after they studied in ESL context. Therefore, it indicates the predisposition of L2 WTC is not stable but situational. To compare EFL and ESL context, the significant difference is that participants were more motivated and confident to communicate in English in ESL context.

The purpose of language study, eventually, is to be able to communicate with others. This study highlights that WTC is not affected by one single factor but various factors together. Thus, language instructors should take all these factors into account when it comes to designing lesson plans or classroom activities in order to promote learners’ communication participation. Having a better understanding of L2 WTC not only improves language teachers’ communicative language teaching method, but more importantly, “by engendering in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them” (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547).
References


Appendix A: WTC Survey

Willingness to Communicate Survey

How old are you? ________________

How many years have you been studying English? ________________

How long have you been studying in IEC? ________________

What is your current level in IEC? Pre-Level ______ Level 1 ______ Level 2 ______ Level 3 ______ Level 4 ______ Level 5 ______

What is your gender? Male ______ Female ______

Directions: Below are 20 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate. Presume you have completely free choice. Indicate the percentage of times you would choose to communicate in each type of situation. Indicate in the space at the left of the item what percent of the time you would choose to communicate. (0 = Never to 100 = Always)

____ 1. Talk with a salesperson in the convenience store at the gas station.

____ 2. Talk with a physician.

____ 3. Present a talk to a group of strangers.

____ 4. Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.

____ 5. Talk with a salesperson in a store.

____ 6. Talk in a large meeting of friends.

____ 7. Talk with a police officer.

____ 8. Talk in a small group of strangers.

____ 9. Talk with a friend while standing in line.

____ 10. Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.

____ 11. Talk in a large meeting of acquaintances.
12. Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
13. Talk with a secretary.
14. Present a talk to a group of friends.
15. Talk in a small group of acquaintances.
16. Talk with a garbage collector.
17. Talk in a large meeting of strangers.
18. Talk with a spouse (or girl/boyfriend).
19. Talk in a small group of friends.
20. Present a talk to a group of acquaintances.

**Scoring:**

Context-type sub-scores--

Group Discussion: Add scores for items 8, 15, & 19; then divide by 3.
Meetings: Add scores for items 6, 11, 17; then divide by 3.
Interpersonal: Add scores for items 4, 9, 12; then divide by 3.
Public Speaking: Add scores for items 3, 14, 20; then divide by 3.

Receiver-type sub-scores--

Stranger: Add scores for items 3, 8, 12, 17; then divide by 4.
Acquaintance: Add scores for items 4, 11, 15, 20; then divide by 4.
Friend: Add scores for items 6, 9, 14, 19; then divide by 4.

To compute the total WTC score, add the sub scores for stranger, acquaintance, and friend. Then divide by 3.

All scores, total and sub-scores, will fall in the range of 0 to 100

Norms for WTC Scores:

- **Group discussion:** >89 High WTC, <57 Low WTC
- **Meetings:** >80 High WTC, <39 Low WTC
- **Interpersonal conversations:** >94 High WTC, <64 Low WTC
- **Public Speaking:** >78 High WTC, <33 Low WTC
- **Stranger:** >63 High WTC, <18 Low WTC
- **Acquaintance:** >92 High WTC, <57 Low WTC
- **Friend:** >99 High WTC, <71 Low WTC
- **Total WTC:** >82 High Overall WTC, <52 Low Overall WTC
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. Do you like to talk or interact with people? Why or why not? After you came to US, English has become your first language, do you still consider yourself as people person? Give me an example. (personality)

2. Why do you want to study English? Given me an example (L2 motivational self system)

3. American movies and TV shows are very popular among young Chinese people, what is your opinion on this? Give me an example (international posture)

4. Tell me a situation that you felt nervous or worried in speaking English when you were in China? How about after you came to US? Why were you nervous? (communication apprehension)

5. What kind of situations made you feel uncomfortable in using English or that you rather not use English at all even though the occasion called for it? (unwillingness to communicate)

6. How do you feel talking with a total stranger or somebody you barely know (acquaintance)? Have you had this kind of experience before in China and US? Giving me an example (relate to WTC survey, Chinese culture)

7. How do you feel when you gave a speech in front of your classmates? How about when you have small group discussions? Which one do you feel more comfortable with? Show me an example.
8. What is the most relaxing and comfortable situation for you when you communicate in English? (willingness to communicate)

9. On a scale of 1-10, how good do you rate your English in general? How about speaking? Why do you think so? (self-perceived communication competence)

10. When you were in China, are you willing to talk in your English class, such as answer questions or talk to your teacher in English? Show me an example. How about in IEC? Tell me a situation that you talk the most and another situation that you barely talk, and explain why?