

### Do Perceived Communication Behavior and International Posture Impact Iranian English Learners' Communication in English?

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**Abstract:** Many studies have been conducted on the ways of promoting willingness to communicate in learners in EFL/ESL contexts. While different scholars have undertaken studies on many of these variables, few of these studies have aimed at EFL university students in Iran. This study reports on the role of international posture and perceived communication behavior on Iranian EFL learners' communication in English. The participants who accepted to attend the survey completed questionnaires on WTC, international posture and perceived communication behaviors. The results driven based on this research indicated that Iranian English BA students are generally tended to speak in English. The participants' willingness to communicate in English was found to have a significant relationship with their perceived communication behaviors and international posture. The findings of this study will be beneficial for various policy makers and practitioners, including those dealing with curriculum development and teacher education to focus more on the elements influencing communication in English.

**Keywords:** International Posture, Perceived Communication Behaviors, Willingness to Communicate.

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## Introduction

studies conducted on communication in second language has shown that some of the highly proficient second or foreign language (L2) learners refuse to communicate in the target language, whereas the ones with lower levels of language skills tend to use it continuously (Baghaei, Dourakhshan, & Salavati, 2012). That is to say, possessing the command of a second or foreign language does not mean that the learners are willing to put it to use frequently. Dörnyei (2005) contends that even individuals with a high communication competence might avoid communicating in L2. Considering communication as an integral part of language learning, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) maintain that the fundamental reason for language acquisition is to develop the ability to communicate, regardless of any other purpose e.g., making new friendships, finding a job that requires communicating in another language, etc., . The ability to use language to communicate is often the first reason for language learning.

Individual differences (IDs) have already proved to be of high significance in second language acquisition (SLA) investigation. (Andreou, Andreou, & Vlachos, 2004, 2006; Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). IDs are associated with qualities which distinguish individuals from one another and appear to impede the precise construction of generic themes concerning the way in which humans master a particular language feature with the passage of time (Dörnyei, 2005). Similarly, Andreou et al. (2006) assert that how individuals acquire and develop a language is immensely colored by individual differences. Willingness to communicate (WTC) is another ID variable which has been the focus of research in SLA. The willingness to communicate construct was initially suggested to discover the type of personality individuals demonstrate when using their mother tongue (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). In order to ascertain other contributing factors in L2 learners' psychological preparedness to begin communication, this construct was applied to L2 context based on the assumption that some other variables may be at work except for language aptitude and competence (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). Nevertheless, western setting, especially the US and Canada, have been the focus of such considerable studies over the past two decades. (e.g., Clément, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003). In the following years, this was regarded as an independent influential variable (Kormos & Dörnyei, 2004). In Japan, some studies were conducted on WTC (e.g.,

Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004); moreover, similar studies were carried out in Iran (Baghaei et al., 2012; Ghonsooly, Khajavy, & Asadpour, 2012).

Meanwhile, researchers propose that conversation-based interaction is a crucial component of acquiring a second language (Mackey, 1999). It is also proposed that WTC is one of the most important determining factor in the use of L2 (Clément et al., 2003). Hence, training language users who tend to produce communicatively authentic language needs to be a central goal of L2 classrooms, which can help to train more active learners (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Absolutely, making WTC in L2 as the underlying objective of L2 instruction can help create more dynamic students (MacIntyre et al., 2003). As it were, higher amounts of WTC in L2 essentially add to L2 improvement and effective interaction in a scope of L2 interaction settings. These possible benefits of L2 WTC provide the vital stimulus for the researchers to strongly examine different factors and precursors underlying the construct in language study.

Therefore, this study seeks to find EFL learners' willingness to communicate at different Iranian universities. The main objective is to find the possible relationships among communication factors, i.e. international posture and perceived communication behavior and L2 WTC. The importance of this study is in its hypothetical contribution to the WTC construct in L2 and its implications for English teaching. For this purpose, the following questions were posed for the present study:

1. Is there any significant relationship between international posture and Iranian intermediate EFL students' WTC in English?
2. Is there any significant relationship between perceived communication behaviors and Iranian intermediate EFL students' WTC in English?
3. Does perceived communication predict WTC?
4. Does international posture predict WTC?
5. Does the interaction between perceived communication and international posture predict WTC?

## **Review of the Literature**

### ***Willingness to Communicate L2 (L2 WTC)***

WTC in L2 was described by MacIntyre et al. (1998) as being prepared to communicate with people at a particular time through L2. This multidimensional construct joins various personal and communicative factors and can portray, clarify and anticipate communicative behavior of language learners in a L2. Researcher often dichotomize situational and

personality trait WTC. Based on McCroskey and Baer (1985), the WTC at trait level relates to the constant personalities or ‘enduring influences’ which show no fluctuations in various settings. The situational WTC, whereas, is seen as a specific situational variable which is a brief impact reliant on a specific setting and open to changes crosswise over (MacIntyre et al., 1998). MacIntyre, Babin, and Clément (1999) claim that these two levels of WTC complement each other and could be involved in second language acquisition. Furthermore, the trait WTC has an introductory role in L2 communication setting, while the latter can make learners capable to start interaction within a particular setting (Xie, 2011).

Lots of direct and indirect matters in SLA research are said to affect one's WTC in L2 e.g., communication competence (skills) and cultural diversity. The mentioned variables, or predictors of WTC, are fundamental to effective language learning (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). It is also claimed that language learners' interaction can be affected by teachers' teaching style and appropriate feedback during class. Zarrinabadi (2014) showed that some other factors like error correction and encouragement can persuade WTC in English.

### ***International Posture***

International Posture is the notion introduced by Yashima (2002) and Yashima et al. (2004) to describe Japanese students' attitudes towards and preference to learn English. Since the notion of integrativeness was found unfit in the Japanese context, Yashima reformed this attitudinal orientation to predict motivated learning behavior that is more particular to Japan. It could be considered a modification from one ethnolinguistic group to a more global community at large with English language as belongs to the international community (Aubrey & Nowlan, 2013). International posture refers to enthusiasm for traveling or working abroad, interest in making intercultural friendships, etc. (Yashima, 2002).

### ***Perceived Communicative behaviors***

Communicative competence relates to proper use of syntax, morphology, phonology and social knowledge about the manner and time to use utterances. A research conducted by Bachman (1990) on communicative competence, splits it into the more general titles of “organizational competence,” which encompasses both grammatical and discourse (or textual) competence, and “pragmatic competence,” which comprises both sociolinguistic and “illocutionary” competence. The significance of a person's opinion of her/his communication competence was shown by different researches on WTC (McCroskey & McCroskey, 2002; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987, so the more willing individuals to involve in communication,

the more they perceive themselves as competent. In this way, communicative competence is accepted to fundamentally impact WTC.

There have been a number of researchers (e.g., Matsuoka, 2005; Yashima, 2002) who explored the link amongst, anxiety and perceived communicative competence in college students. Findings disclosed the positive relationship between WTC and perceived communicative competence and a negative one between anxiety and perceived communicative competence. Ghonsooly, Khajavy, and Asadpour (2012), in line with Clément (1980, 1986), regarded self-confidence in L2 along with perceived communicative competence and anxiety. His study indicated that through anxiety reduction, WTC and perceived communicative competence and WTC increase.

## **Method**

### ***participants***

The participants of the present study included 189 among them 119 females, 58 males and 12 unidentified Iranian EFL learners who were selected through convenient sampling. They were intermediate BA (bachelor of art) students of four universities in Isfahan, Iran. Their age ranged between 19 and 38 and they were informed that participation was not mandatory and their answers to the questions would be kept secret.

### ***Instruments***

Three questionnaires are employed in this study, namely willingness to communicate scale, perceived communication behaviors scale and international posture scale.

*Willingness to Communicate Scale:* The willingness to communicate (WTC) 12-item scale (McCroskey, 1992) was employed to appraise the participants' WTC. The participants are required to rate how often they communicate in each of the situations indicated in the scale indicated the percentage of times they would choose to communicate in each type of from 0 (never) to 100 (always). The scale's internal consistency estimated by Cronbach's alpha was .94.

*Perceived Communication Behaviors in English:* The section taken from Yashima et al. (2004), was used to assess how often respondents volunteered communication, and included 5 self-report items to assess, on a 10-point scale from 1 (not at all) to 10 (always). The internal consistency of the scale estimated by Cronbach's alpha was .70 both in the present and original study.

*International Posture:* which was taken from studies by Yashima (2002) and Kim (2004) explores the level of interest a second language learner has in international culture and in living in English speaking countries. This section included four indicators designed to define respondents' international posture: a) interest in foreign affairs; b) intergroup approach-avoidance tendency; c) interest in international vocations/activities; and, d) intercultural friendship orientation in English learning. The participants were requested to rate their agreement on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The scale's internal consistency estimated by Cronbach's alpha was .65 both in the original and in the present study.

*Intercultural Friendship Orientation:* with regard to Yashima's (2000) study of Japanese learners' orientations, four 7-point scale items of intercultural friendship orientation were utilized in the present study. The participants were requested to rate importance of the items relating to their reasons for using English. The scale's internal consistency was .85 in the present study.

*Motivational Intensity:* this is a six item measure with a 7-point Likert scale for motivation which was taken from Gardner and Lambert (1972). The participants were requested to rate the extent to which each statement agreed with their mentality. The scale's internal consistency was .88 in the present study.

*Desire to Learn English:* this scale also measures motivation and is comprised of six items related to the Desire to Learn English, proposed by Gardner and Lambert (1972). The original format was converted into a 7-point Likert scale. The scale's internal consistency was .78 in the present study.

*Approach-Avoidance Tendency:* Seven items were selected to evaluate the tendency to approach or avoid foreigners within Japan. The items inquire about voluntarily helping foreigners or sharing a room or a house with them. The scale's internal consistency was .79 in the present study.

*Interest in International Vocation/Activities:* Six items were selected to measure the extent to which a person was attracted by an international job and living abroad. The participants were requested to rate their answers on a 7-point scale. The scale's internal consistency was .73 in the present study.

*Interest in Foreign Affairs:* Two items revealed the participants' interest in international matters. The first item is reacted to reading and watching foreign news and the second one deals with discussing the foreign countries' issues and news with friends and

family. The participants were requested to rate their answers on a 7-point scale. The scale's internal consistency was .67 in the present study.

### *Procedure and Data Analysis*

The questionnaires were distributed among BA students of English and they were totally informed about the purpose and the way of answering. Furthermore, there was no time limitation for filling in the questionnaires. After collecting the data, they were put into SPSS and both correlation and regression were run.

### **Results**

To find the answer to the proposed research questions of the present study, the relationship between international posture, perceived communication and WTC among intermediate English learners were considered. Prior to the analysis, the normality of data was checked by Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests which indicated that the performance of the learners on three scales was not always normal ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ), therefore, the non-parametric statistics were used, i.e. Spearman correlation, was run instead of Pearson correlation.

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Statistics of International Posture, Perceived Communication and WTC*

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Perceived communication behavior	189	33.76	8.26	8	50
International posture	189	152.02	20.03	87	192
Intercultural friendship orientation in English learning	189	22.79	4.86	6	34
Desire to learn English	189	31.72	6.04	12	42
Interest in international vocations/activities	189	26.16	5.79	3	38
Motivation intensity	189	31.47	5.84	12	41
Intergroup approach –avoidance tendency	189	31.78	5.39	13	45
Interest in foreign affairs	189	9.66	3.14	2	14
Willingness to communicate	189	640.87	247.98	40	1120

**Table 2.** *Spearman Correlation for International Posture, Perceived Communication and WTC*

No	Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Perceived communication behavior	1								
2	International posture	.42**	1							
3	Intercultural friendship orientation in English learning	.29**	.49**	1						
4	Desire to learn English	.41**	.66**	.30**	1					
5	Interest in international vocations/activities	.07	.54**	.03	.17**	1				
6	Motivation intensity	.36**	.75**	.26**	.49**	.27**	1			
7	Intergroup approach –avoidance	.25**	.63**	.28**	.22**	.27**	.33**	1		

		tendency								
8	Interest in foreign affairs	.23**	.42**	.20**	.16**	.04	.28**	.16**	1	
9	Willingness to communicate	.47**	.28**	.28**	.21**	.03	.23**	.21**	.17**	1

\*\*significant at  $p < .05$

As Table 1 and 2 reveal, perceived communication was correlated positively and significantly with international posture, its subscales and WTC ( $p < .05$ ). International posture was also correlated positively with WTC ( $p < .05$ ). The subscales of international posture were also significantly positively correlated with WTC ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, it can be concluded that there were positive relationships between perceived communication and WTC and also between international posture and its subscales and WTC.

To answer the last three questions, the predictive power of perceived communication and international posture and their interactional effect on WTC was investigated. In so doing, a multiple regression was run in order to find out the predictive power of international posture and perceived communication as the independent (explanatory) variables on WTC as the response or dependent variable. It is worth mentioning that prior to the analysis, the assumptions of regression were checked and the finding was that none is violated. Therefore, the regression analysis was run.

**Table 3.** *Prediction Model of Perceived Communication and International posture*

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
dimension0	1	.45 <sup>a</sup>	.21	.20	220.89	.21	49.95	1	187	.00
	2	.47 <sup>b</sup>	.22	.21	219.65	.01	3.10	1	186	.08
	3	.47 <sup>c</sup>	.22	.21	219.94	.00	.519	1	185	.47

a. Predictors: (Constant), perceived communication

b. Predictors: (Constant), perceived communication, international posture

c. Predictors: (Constant), perceived communication, international posture, perceived communication X international posture

d. Dependent Variable: WTC

As the above table shows, the first model ( $r^2 = .21$ ;  $p < .05$ ) is a good predictor of the response variable (WTC). The second model ( $r^2 = .22$ ;  $p > .05$ ) is not a good predictor of WTC. The third model, the interaction is not a good predictor of the response variable ( $r^2 = .22$ ;  $p > .05$ ). R square change also reveals that the first model accounts for .21 of the variation in the response variable while the second model and third model account for .01 and .00 of this variation, respectively.

**Table 4.** *ANOVA Results for Perceived Communication and International posture*



	Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2437314.44	1	2437314.44	49.95	.000 <sup>a</sup>
	Residual	9124244.55	187	48792.75		
	Total	1.156E7	188			
2	Regression	2587149.37	2	1293574.68	26.81	.000 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	8974409.62	186	48249.51		
	Total	1.156E7	188			
3	Regression	2612270.25	3	870756.75	18.00	.000 <sup>c</sup>
	Residual	8949288.74	185	48374.53		
	Total	1.156E7	188			

a. Predictors: (Constant), perceived communication

b. Predictors: (Constant), perceived communication, international posture

c. Predictors: (Constant), perceived communication, international posture, perceived communication X international posture

d. Dependent Variable: WTC

Above table checks if the regression model is a good fit to the data. The table shows that the first model ( $F(1,187) = 49.95, p < .05$ ), the second model ( $F(2,186) = 26.81, p < .05$ ), the third model ( $F(3,185) = 18, p < .05$ ), all very well fit the data.

**Table 5.** *Coefficients of Perceived Communication and International posture*

Model		Unstandardize d Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	156.56	65.49		2.39	.01	27.36	285.761			
	Perceived Communication	13.77	1.94	.45	7.06	.00	9.92	17.616	.45	.45	.45
2	(Constant)	-24.66	121.72		-.20	.84	-264.80	215.48			
	Perceived Communication	12.33	2.10	.41	5.86	.00	8.18	16.48	.459	.39	.37
	International posture	1.52	.86	.12	1.76	.08	-.18	3.24	.283	.12	.11
3	(Constant)	-334.73	447.20		-.74	.45	-1217.01	547.55			
	Perceived Communication	22.19	13.84	.74	1.60	.11	-5.11	49.50	.459	.11	.10
	International posture	3.63	3.04	.29	1.19	.23	-2.37	9.63	.283	.08	.07
	Perceived Communication X International posture	-.06	.09	-.42	-.72	.47	-.24	.11	.461	-.05	-.04

Unstandardized coefficients show how much of our response variable varies with an explanatory variable, while all other explanatory variables are held constant. As is clear from table above, the unstandardized coefficient for model one is (13.77,  $p < .05$ ), which shows that interpersonal trust can predict the response variable or account for the variation in the response variable (WTC). The second and third models cannot predict the response variable with their unstandardized coefficients being (1.52, .06, respectively;  $p > .05$ ).

To sum up, a multiple regression was conducted to predict WTC from perceived communication and international posture, its subscales and the interaction. It revealed that perceived communication can predict the WTC among learners while international posture and the interaction between them are not good predictors of WTC.

## **Discussion**

Prior works has documented that a noticeable aim of English as Second Language (ESL) and English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning is to promote better understanding and communication among individuals from various cultural and language backgrounds. It is not unusual to find that some English language learners are willing to communicate in the classroom in English, while others are silent. It is also recognizable that less proficient learners may communicate in English outside school when they are willing to, while on the contrary, highly proficient learners may be much less likely to talk. However, these studies have not focused on WTC in the EFL settings. In this study, the role of international posture and perceived communication behavior on Iranian EFL students' communication in English was investigated.

The first and second research questions indicated that perceived communication was positively and significantly associated with international posture, its subscales and WTC. International posture was also correlated positively with WTC. The subscales of international posture were also significantly positively correlated with WTC. Therefore, it can be concluded that there were positive relationships between perceived communication and WTC and also between international posture and its subscales and WTC.

There seem to be great consistency between the results of the present investigation with those of the currently conducted studies within the context of EFL and ESL. Like Japanese (Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004), Korean (Kim, 2004) and Turkish students (Cetinkaya, 2005), there is a positive linkage between Iranian students' willingness to have interaction with interlocutors in English and their perceived communication behaviors. This

study demonstrated an association between those students who typically had more communication in class and their propensity to communicate. As Liu (2001) stated, greater and higher frequencies of participation in class interaction provide the students who are active in class with an opportunity to promote their language abilities. The findings of the current study support the effect of self-perceived communication competence on WTC in the English language. Likewise, lower self-perceived communication competence appear to have negative influence on one's strong tendency to have communication in English (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; Clement et al., 2003; Yashima, 2002).

This study, furthermore, is in line with Wen and Clément's (2003) proposition which lays much more emphasis on the association between the desire and the willingness to communicate. Most participants intensely tended to alter their inadequate communication experience in spite of their high or low scores showing WTC in English.

The instrument of international posture is possibly to be an element for learners engaged in learning within the context of English as a foreign language in their native country. This research could assume two subdivisions for the international posture instrument. The first one is referred to as an intercultural relationship and the second one as an international orientation. Intercultural relationship is the degree of acculturation or assimilation showing propensity for foreign affairs and international vocations/activities. International orientation is viewed as the attitudes towards natives or nationals in a given English-speaking country, which is composed of intergroup approach-avoidance inclination and intercultural friendship orientation in learning English as a foreign or second language. Conducting an in-depth analysis on these two subdivisions could put a variety of interpretations on the connection between international posture and willingness to communicate. Moreover, the significant effect of attitude toward intercultural communication or international interest on WTC in the L2 has been revealed in a bulk of previously conducted research. This finding of the study is in consistent with that of Yashima (2002) indicating the positive relationship between an internationally oriented individual and the degree of his/her willingness to communicate in English. Such persons are also provided with more motivation to study English, and this can be conducive to communicative competence improvement. Thus, it seemed to be significant correlational path between international posture and communicative competence. In the end, it can be concluded that individuals with a high degree of competence in language production show great enthusiasm to participate in international interaction.

With regard to the last three research questions of the study which investigated the predictive power of perceived communication and international posture and their interactional effect on WTC it was revealed that perceived communication could predict the WTC among learners while international posture and the interaction between them were not good predictors of WTC. Since L2 communication includes various matters, the existence of political and social effects are not usually clear when using the first language and the patterns in L1 WTC will not mechanically move to L2 WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Perceived communication competence and international posture among different factors, are the two key prognosticators of WTC in English. The predictability of Perceived communication competence and international posture in interactional behaviors and language learning is evident (MacIntyre, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

The current study exploited a quantitative research design. It contained survey questionnaires in which *willingness to communicate in English*, *international posture*, and *perceived communication behaviors* in English, as well as interrelations among the three variables among Iranian respondents were analyzed statistically. Gathering data through quantitative method gave an exhaustive comprehension of the research questions investigating how willing Iranian students are to interact in English and what factors are behind their WTC. The findings are compatible with recent studies in willingness to communicate in English (Kim, 2004; Yashima et al., 2004). The findings of this study will be beneficial for various policy makers and practitioners, including those dealing with curriculum development and teacher education to focus more on the elements influencing communication in English and also for English teachers to describe effective features for communication in English.

The impediments of the present research are very much perceived and interlocutors ought to analyze and sum up the discoveries with due attention. In this study the small sample size, 189 participants, restrains the generalizability of the results. Since a few factors, for example, age and sexual orientation were not controlled, future research is recommended to look at in the case of controlling these components would change the accomplished outcomes.

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