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[SHORT RESEARCH REPORT]¹**The Effect of Classroom Emotions, Attitudes Toward English, and Teacher Behavior on Willingness to Communicate Among English Foreign Language Learners****Jean-Marc Dewaele²****Abstract**

Willingness to communicate (WTC) in a foreign language is linked to a range of interacting learner-internal and learner-external variables. The present study identified the predictors of WTC of 210 foreign language learners of English from Spain. Multiple regression analyses revealed that the strongest (negative) predictor of WTC was foreign language classroom anxiety, while foreign language enjoyment and frequency of foreign language use by the teacher were positive predictors.

Keywords

willingness to communicate, foreign language enjoyment, foreign language classroom anxiety, attitudes toward teacher, attitudes toward foreign language

As a young lecturer of French as a foreign language (FL) in a higher education institute in Flanders in the early 1990s, I was asked to teach French conversation classes to future translators and interpreters. My highbrow conversation topics met a wall of silence and my questions elicited one-word replies. As a sense of despair grabbed me, I realized that my task was to have my students practice their French and that the conversation topic was of little importance. I realized that their daily life experiences might generate more interest than the issue of acid rain or the fall of the Berlin wall. From that point on conversations (in French) flowed seamlessly, about who had been drunk at the last school party, who had vomited in the gutter, who had flirted with whom. I had managed to raise students' engagement and, as a good actor,

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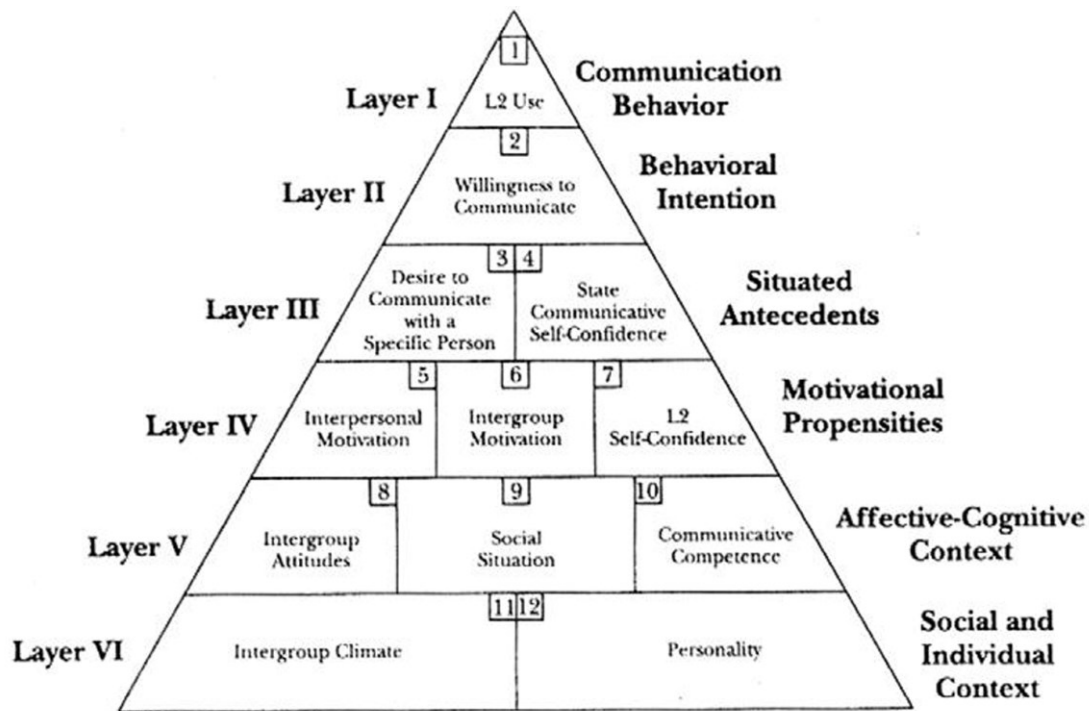
I had succeeded in making them believe that I was interested in what they had to say, which was exhausting in itself. Later, I discovered that the problem of overcoming students' (initial) unwillingness to communicate was not new nor unique. Students' silence reflects low willingness to communicate (WTC) in the FL, which has been defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons" (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998, p. 547).

The concept of WTC emerged in the first language communication literature (McCroskey & Richmond, 1991) where it was considered to be a stable personality trait. Specialists in FL learning and teaching saw the potential pedagogical benefits of research on WTC and reframed it adopting a more dynamic perspective (MacIntyre, et al., 1998). MacIntyre (2007) conceptualized WTC as a "volitional (freely chosen) process (...) with the potential to rise and fall rapidly as the situation changes" (p. 564). Further research considered WTC's more enduring learner-internal characteristics (i.e., personality traits) and more transient learner-external characteristics (i.e., social environment, peers).

Gaining a better understanding of WTC is important because of the pedagogical implications, as teachers may realize that some learners may be less talkative than others because of their personality profile, but that by creating the optimal social and emotional context, the WTC of all learners can be raised (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Joe, Hiver, & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Khajavy, MacIntyre, & Barabadi, 2018). The main purpose of the current study is thus to identify the independent variables linked to WTC that can help teachers create the optimal environment to harness learners' emotions, boosting their WTC and by extension their progress in the FL (Dewaele, 2015).

Literature Review

The theoretical basis of recent work on WTC is MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) multi-layered pyramid model of WTC (see Figure 1). The bottom layer (VI) consists of the most stable macro social variables and psychological variables, the layers above reflect variables that are more changeable and context-dependent, with WTC as layer II, just below the top layer which represents actual second language use.

Figure 1: Pyramid Model of WTC (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels 1998)

One recent avenue of investigation has been into the psychological and socio-emotional sources of variation in WTC, spread over layers VI, V, IV and III. MacIntyre and Doucette (2010) investigated WTC inside and outside of the FL class of 238 Anglo-Canadian high school learners of French. WTC inside class was negatively predicted by language anxiety and volatility, characterized as a tendency to abandon tasks and remain silent. Perceived competence was a positive predictor of WTC.

The direct and indirect effects of classroom context and emotion were also at the heart of Joe et al.'s (2017) study on WTC on 381 Korean EFL learners. They found that WTC was predicted directly and indirectly by satisfaction of learners' basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), followed by classroom climate (teacher academic support, teacher emotional support, classroom mutual respect), and to a lesser degree by prior achievement and identified regulation. The authors concluded that WTC is determined by a combination of individual and contextual variables.

A similar interest in the dynamics of WTC led Khajavy et al. (2018) to conduct a multi-level investigation into the role of learners' emotions (enjoyment and anxiety) and classroom environment on WTC of 1528 secondary school learners of English in Iran. The authors found that higher WTC was linked to a positive

classroom environment. Moreover, higher foreign language enjoyment (FLE) and lower anxiety were linked to higher WTC.

Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) observed that a pyramid might not be the best way to visualize the interaction between (potentially interacting) independent variables and WTC. They suggested a set of expanding concentric circles moving from learner-internal variables (learners' sociobiographical and psychological characteristics) at the center and outer circles consisting first of intergroup variables within the classroom (perception of peers and teachers) and at a macro scale (attitudes toward the FL outside the classroom, historical and political context, intergroup relations) to determine the emotional state of the FL user, which will in turn affect their WTC. Such a conceptualization is particularly useful for researchers who are interested in the effects of learners' classroom emotions on WTC, both of which are constantly fluctuating and simultaneously shaped by learner-internal and learner-external variables over different time spans. The study focused on the WTC of 189 British secondary school learners who were studying a FL in Greater London, UK. The strongest negative predictor of WTC was foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Weaker positive predictors included frequent FL use by the teacher, a positive attitude toward the FL, social foreign language enjoyment, and age. The authors concluded that teachers can boost WTC by creating a positive emotional classroom environment where FL use dominates and where pupils can overcome their anxiety. Moreover, by generating a genuine interest in the FL and the culture it represents, teachers can encourage their pupils to use the FL.

The final study to be included in this very brief literature review does not deal with WTC but with the effect that teachers' characteristics have on FLE and FLCA of the same 210 participants on which the present study is based. Dewaele, Franco Magdalena, and Saito (2019) found that teacher characteristics predicted close to 20% of variance in FLE but only 8% of variance in FLCA. Teacher's friendliness strongly predicted FLE while a teacher's strong foreign accent in English was linked to lower FLE. Participants reported less FLCA with older teachers, teachers who were not overly strict, and teachers who used English a lot in class. Because teachers influence not only their students' emotions but also their WTC (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018), teacher characteristics will be included in the present research design. An overview of the findings on the sources of WTC is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of the Effects of Independent Variables on WTC Reported in Previous Studies (Positive (+), Negative (-) or Not Significant (ns))

Independent variable	D&D	M&D	KM&V	JH&A
Attitude towards FL/culture	+			
Attitude towards teacher	ns			
Teacher's FL use	+			
Language level	+			
Relative standing	ns			
Perceived competence		+		+
Actual competence				+
Motivation				+
Classroom environment	+		+	+
FLCA	-	-	-	
Social FLE	+		+	+
Private FLE	ns		+	
Volatility		-		
Age	+			
Gender	ns		+	

PW: D&D: Dewaele & Dewaele (2018); M&D: MacIntyre & Doucette (2010); KMV: Khajavy et al. (2017); JH&A: Joe et al. (2017).

One of the striking patterns to emerge from the literature review is that attitudes toward the FL and culture are rarely included in the search of predictors of WTC. This is relatively surprising considering that all the studies cited here referred to MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) pyramid model where macro social variables (such as intergroup climate and intergroup attitudes) are at the base of the WTC pyramid. The only study where attitudes were measured toward FLs that did not include English (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018) did show that these attitudes predicted students' WTC. It remains to be seen whether attitudes toward English as a FL, which because of its status as a global lingua franca is less linked to any specific population group (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004), might also predict unique variance in classroom WTC of Spanish learners of English. The general research question is thus to find out to what extent learner-internal and learner-external variables predict Spanish learners' WTC in English.

Method

Participants

A total of 210 participants (151 females, 58 males, 1 preferred not to say) completed the online questionnaire. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 63 ($M = 25.6$, $SD = 9.12$). Participants were Spanish and had Spanish as their first language. They had

recently studied (or were studying) English as a FL at different levels of education, with 65% at university, 24% at secondary school, and 11% in other institutions. Participants were asked to report the grade they obtained on their last major English test ($M = 76.6\%$, $SD = 17$).

Instrument

After filling out the demographics sections, participants were asked about their attitude toward English as a FL on a five-point Likert scale: Responses ranged from “very unfavorable” (value 1), “unfavorable” (2), “neutral” (3), “favorable” (4), and “very favorable” (5). The mean score was 4.5 ($SD = 0.8$). The same descriptors were used to determine attitudes toward the FL teacher. The mean score was 3.8 ($SD = 1.0$).

The next question enquired about their FL teacher’s friendliness, with responses ranging from “very unfriendly” (1), “unfriendly” (2), “neutral” (3), “friendly” (4), to “very friendly” (5). The mean score was 4.0 ($SD = 1.0$).

Participants were then asked about their FL teacher’s strictness, with responses ranging from “not strict at all” (1), “a little strict” (2), “rather strict” (3), “strict” (4), to “very strict” (5). The mean score was 2.7 ($SD = 1.1$). The following question focused on the teacher’s frequency of use of the FL in class, with responses ranging from “hardly ever” (1), “not very often” (2), “sometimes” (3), “usually” (4), to “all the time” (5). The mean score was 4.4 ($SD = 0.9$).

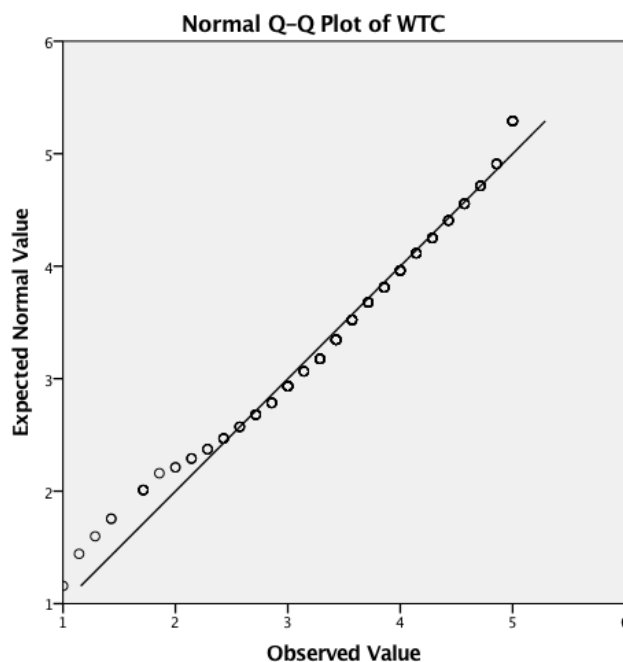
The final question in this section asked whether the teacher had a foreign accent in the FL. The responses ranged from “not at all” (value 1), “a little” (2), “moderate” (3), “quite strong” (4), and “very strong” (5). The mean score was 2.0 ($SD = 1.1$).

Participants then completed the FLE questionnaire used in Dewaele et al. (2018). Possible responses to 10 items on aspects of private and social FLE ranged from “strongly disagree” (1), “disagree” (2), “undecided” (3), “agree” (4), to “strongly agree” (5). All items were positively phrased. A scale analysis revealed high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .87). The mean score for FLE was 3.9 ($SD = 0.5$). Another eight items were extracted from the FLCAS and reflected physical symptoms of anxiety, nervousness, and lack of confidence (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). They also captured the reliability of the original scale (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). A scale analysis revealed high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.85). The mean score for FLCA was 2.8 ($SD = 1.0$).

Dependent variable

A final section contained eight items developed by MacIntyre about the likelihood to start a conversation in a FL in hypothetical scenarios with known and unknown interlocutors in a range of different situations (see appendix). Likert scales had anchors ranging from “almost never willing” (1), “sometimes willing” (2), “willing half of the time” (3), “usually willing” (4), to “almost always willing” (5). Internal reliability was good (Cronbach alpha = .80). The mean score for WTC was 3.54 ($SD = 0.87$). Although a one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the distribution was not normal because of slight skew toward the high end of the scale (KS $Z = .081$, $p < 0.002$), a Q-Q plot (quantile-quantile plot) showed that the WTC scores follow a normal distribution reasonably well except for the extreme tail (see Figure 2). I thus opted for the more powerful parametric statistics, namely, Pearson correlation analyses and stepwise multiple regression analyses. Green (1991) suggested that the minimum sample size for any regression should be 50, with an additional eight observations per term. This means the minimum sample size for a multiple regression analysis with 10 independent variables is 130, which is well below our sample size of 210.

Figure 2: Q-Q plot for Distribution of WTC Scores



Results

Preliminary Pearson correlation analyses with a Bonferroni correction ($p < .005$) revealed that 7 out of the 10 independent variables were significantly linked to WTC (see Table 2). FLCA was the only variable to be significantly negatively correlated with WTC. Further analysis will permit the calculation of the exact amount of variance that each independent variable explains in WTC.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Analyses Between Independent Variables and WTC ($N = 210$)

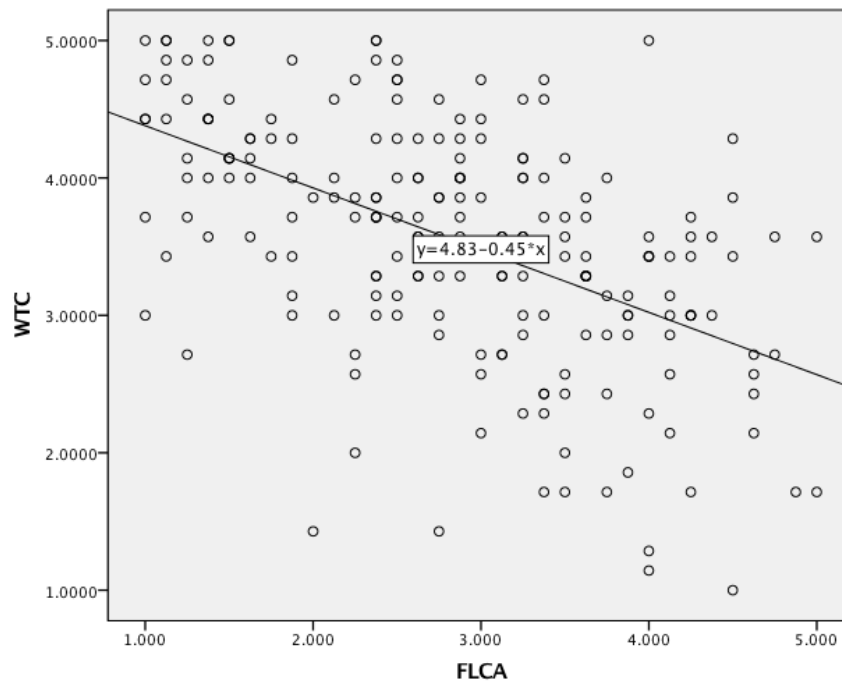
Independent variable	Pearson r	P
FLCA	-.53	.0001
FLE	.43	.0001
Teacher's English use	.39	.0001
Attitude toward teacher	.32	.0001
Attitude toward English	.27	.0001
Teacher's friendliness	.23	.001
Test results	.20	.006
Teacher's English accent	-.12	.075
Teacher's strictness	-.04	.580
Age	.00	.980

An analysis of intercorrelations of the independent variables showed that none were too highly correlated, which means there is no danger of multicollinearity in the regression analysis (see Table 3).

Table 3: Intercorrelations Between Independent Variables ($N = 210$)

Pearson correlations		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Attitude toward English	Pearson r						
	p						
2. Test results	Pearson r	.163					
	p	.028					
3. Attitude toward teacher	Pearson r	.414	.082				
	p	.000	.270				
4. Teacher's friendliness	Pearson r	.042	.099	.394			
	p	.547	.184	.000			
5. Teacher's English use	Pearson r	.209	.038	.210	.233		
	p	.002	.614	.002	.001		
6. FLE	Pearson r	.215	.284	.444	.416	.199	
	p	.002	.000	.000	.000	.004	
7. FLCA	Pearson r	-.279	-.145	-.098	-.091	-.157	-.212
	p	.000	.051	.156	.191	.022	.002

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to test if the seven independent variables significantly predicted participants' WTC. A significant regression equation was found for WTC, with three variables out of seven predicting 45% of the variance (Adjusted $R^2 = .44$, $F(3, 177) = 47.7$, $p < .0001$). The strongest negative predictor was FLCA, explaining 30% of variance ($\beta = -.48$, $p < .0001$) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The Relationship Between FLCA and WTC

Positive predictors of WTC included FLE, explaining an additional 11.6% of variance ($\beta = .32$, $p < .0001$) (see Figure 4), and teacher's frequency of FL use, which explained a final 2.7% of variance ($\beta = .17$, $p < .004$) (see Figure 5).

Figure 4: The Relationship Between FLE and WTC

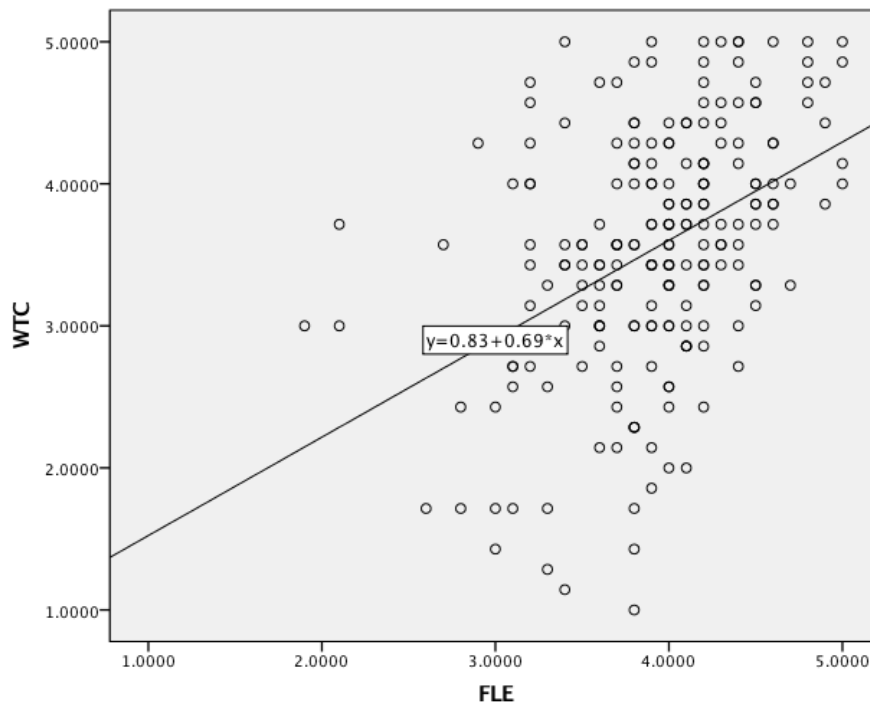
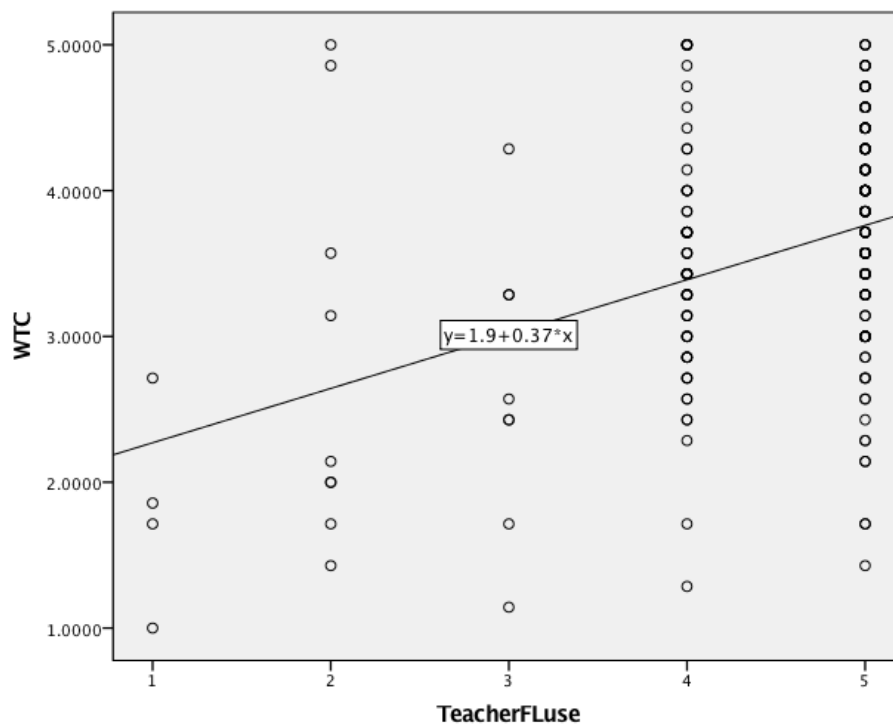


Figure 5: The Relationship Between Teacher's FL Use and WTC



Discussion

The findings suggest that attitudes toward the FL explain no unique variance in classroom WTC of Spanish EFL learners. The significant positive correlation between

attitudes toward the FL and WTC disappeared in the multiple regression analysis. This is in contrast with the finding in Dewaele and Dewaele (2018) where attitudes toward French predicted unique variance in WTC. A possible explanation is that the link between the French language and culture is tighter in the mind of learners than the link between English language and culture. In other words, EFL learners may be less interested in any specific English-speaking culture (British, North-American, or Australian) or country and just want to learn a global lingua franca (Yashima et al., 2004). British learners of French may be more focused on France, its language, and its culture.

The strongest negative predictor of WTC was FLCA, explaining 30% of variance, confirming previous research (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2018; Joe, Hiver, & Al-Hoorie, 2017; Khajavy et al., 2018; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Yashima et al., 2018). Learners' classroom anxiety drains their WTC. However, the results also show that WTC benefits from increased FLE and frequent FL use by the teacher (explaining an additional 15% of variance). Interpreting these results requires caution. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) pointed out that FLE and FLCA are two separate but related dimensions of experience that are not in a strict seesaw relationship. In other words, strategies to combat FLCA do not automatically boost FLE. Similarly, low FLCA is no guarantee for an increased WTC, as disengaged students typically lack enjoyment as well as anxiety while highly engaged students can experience high FLCA and FLE simultaneously (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Dewaele et al., 2018). Moreover, students who score high on Neuroticism are more likely to suffer from FLCA, over which teachers have relatively little control, but teacher actions can boost FLE (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). Teachers should therefore create a positive but sufficiently challenging classroom environment to lower learners' anxiety (Oxford, 2017) while offering them the opportunity to go beyond superficial pleasure: "If pleasure can occur simply by performing an activity or completing an action, enjoyment takes on additional dimensions such as an intellectual focus, heightened attention, and optimal challenge" (Boudreau, MacIntyre, & Dewaele, 2018, p. 153). Classroom activities that involved a certain amount of learner autonomy were frequently mentioned as highly enjoyable in Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014).

Finally, what is the role of the variables that turned out not to predict any unique variance in WTC? Three variables were not significantly correlated with WTC, namely, participants' age, as well as the teacher's accent and strictness. It

means that even a strict teacher with a strong foreign accent in English is perfectly able to convince adult learners to communicate in English. The four variables that did not explain unique variance in WTC, namely, attitude toward the teacher, attitude toward English, the teacher's friendliness, and learners' test results may in fact have an indirect effect on WTC through FLCA and FLE. Indeed, the same participants experienced more FLE with friendly teachers, who were more likely to use English frequently in class and not be overly strict. Dewaele and Dewaele (2017) and Dewaele, Witney, Saito and Dewaele (2018) also found that attitudes toward the teacher and the FL, as well as the teachers' frequency of use of the FL and the opportunity to speak frequently in class predicted FLE. On the other hand, a negative attitude towards the FL was linked with higher levels of FLCA. What this suggests is that WTC is at the heart of a complex and highly dynamic web of interacting emotions which are themselves affected by a range of learner-internal and learner-external variables. Some of these variables are hard to measure but can play a vital role in the decision to speak or not (Boudreau et al., 2018).

The pedagogical implication is that for learners to dare to use their FL in the classroom, surrounded by their peers and teacher, it is crucial for them to be in a non-threatening, positive emotional climate where linguistic experimentation is accepted, where errors do not lead to ridicule and where WTC is nurtured like any young sapling (Dewaele et al., 2018). Further interdisciplinary research into WTC could delve further in this tangled web of direct and indirect effects. It would be particularly interesting to see to what extent local intergroup attitudes affect WTC of learners acquiring two or more FLs simultaneously.

Conclusion

The present study showed that adult Spanish learners' WTC in English was dampened by anxiety but strengthened by enjoyment and frequency of use of English by the teacher. My own anecdote about my Flemish students, combined with ample research findings, suggests that while some variables affecting WTC are beyond the teacher's control, others can be gently manipulated to boost learners' WTC. It involves creating a friendly and sufficiently challenging and interesting emotional classroom environment, and picking conversation topics that match the students' interests.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

I declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship.

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Appendix

Instrument used to measure Willingness to Communicate

Responses: 1 = Almost never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Half of the time, 4 = Usually, 5 = Almost always.

1. I can imagine myself living abroad and having a discussion in English.
2. I can imagine myself living abroad and using English effectively for communicating with the locals.
3. I can imagine a situation where I am speaking English with foreigners.
4. I can imagine myself speaking English with international friends or colleagues.
5. I imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English.
6. I can imagine myself speaking English as if I were a native speaker of English.

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Jean-Marc Dewaele (PhD Free University of Brussels) is Professor of Applied Linguistics and Multilingualism at Birkbeck, University of London. He does research on individual differences in psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, pragmatic, psychological and emotional variables in Second Language Acquisition and Multilingualism.