

ABSTRACT

Willingness to communicate (WTC) used to be seen as a stable, trait-like communicative tendency; however, in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), attention has recently shifted to its more dynamic, state-like components. This article systematically reviews the literature on the situational antecedents that might contribute to variation in WTC. It aims specifically at furthering our understanding of the interaction between WTC and the learning situation. After searching major databases (Web of Science, ERIC and the British Education Index), findings of 35 studies were analyzed. Different kinds of situational antecedents of WTC suggested in these studies were then systematically organized into a multi-layered framework. The framework raises awareness of the role of the learning situation, and how the learning situation is perceived by second language learners. The framework has the potential to guide future research by offering a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the study of situational antecedents of WTC and the dynamic processes that underpin WTC.

Keywords: willingness to communicate; dynamic approach; situational variables; trait; state; learning environment; communicative activity

To Talk or Not to Talk: A Review of Situational Antecedents of Willingness to Communicate in the Second Language Classroom

1. Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), willingness to communicate (WTC) has been seen as both a facilitating factor of language development and a nonlinguistic outcome of language learning (MacIntyre, 2007). A large body of research on WTC focuses primarily on its trait characteristics (see Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017, for a recent overview of research on trait WTC) with the assumption that higher WTC brings about better L2 learning outcomes. Whilst selected studies report significant and positive correlations between WTC and L2 learning outcomes (e.g., Baghaei & Dourakhshan, 2012; Mahmoodia & Moazam, 2014), others report findings to the contrary (e.g., Joe, Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2017). We argue in this article that the inconsistency in the empirical findings indicates that investigating WTC merely at the trait level can only provide an incomplete answer to the problem; hence, the need for research that reflects the dynamic nature of WTC at the state level.

L2 WTC is defined as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément & Noels, 1998, p. 547). This definition already alludes to a dual perspective that combines both trait and state levels (Peng & Woodrow, 2010). At the trait level, a general communicative tendency is assumed that is rooted in an individual’s personality, whilst at the state level, an individual’s communicative behaviors fluctuate across time and situations. To better understand WTC at its state level, more recent studies have explored whether, how, and why learners show more WTC in some situations than in others (e.g., Cao, 2014; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Bielak, 2016; Peng, 2014).

Although a number of situational antecedents (e.g., interlocutors, task, etc.) have been found to affect L2 learners’ WTC, they have not been investigated systematically. Most of the

situational antecedents that have been studied are the *objective* features of situations, i.e. physical or concrete elements of the situation, such as the persons (who), activities (what), locations (where), and time (when) that constitute a situation (Rauthmann, Sherman & Funder, 2015). For example, Khazaei, Zadeh and Ketabi (2012) focused on the effect of class size on students' WTC, whilst Freiermuth and Jarrell (2006) compared students' WTC in different activities held in language classrooms, including group discussions, role-plays, and games. By contrast, *subjective* perceptions of situations refer to the learner's idiosyncratic perceptions and interpretations of situations, such as whether they feel supported when engaging in a task. In that sense, subjective perceptions of situations offer a psychological dimension to the study of situations, and it is expected that learners differ inter-individually in their perceptions of objectively similar situations.

Task-interest is an example of the subjective perceptions of situations that might serve as situational antecedents. For example, Dörnyei (2009) regarded interest as a motivator for task participation, and this assertion has been supported by empirical evidence provided by Eddy-U (2015). As Eddy-U (2015) suggests, students' perceptions of a task and their interlocutors are more direct situational antecedents of WTC than the task and the interlocutors themselves or other people's opinions. This finding corresponds with MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) proposition in the original model of WTC, which stresses that self-perceived L2 competence is a more significant factor than actual L2 competence in influencing WTC. However, it seems that subjective perceptions of situations have neither received much attention in the research nor been clearly distinguished from objective features of situations. We suggest that the consideration of individual differences in how learners perceive situations and how these perceptions influence learners' communicative behaviors is essential for further developing our understanding of and ultimately informing our practice in L2 teaching.

The inconsistency in the nomenclature is another challenge to research into state WTC.

Previous research has used various terms to represent the same situational variable, or used the same term yet with reference to different variables. For instance, Peng (2007b) reported that students' WTC was influenced by group cohesiveness and classroom climate. In her later article, Peng combined the two antecedents into one called classroom atmosphere, "the mood, emotions, or climate sensed and shared by the class group" (Peng, 2012, p. 208). However, for Riasati (2012), classroom atmosphere is co-created by the class group as well as the teacher.

This review attempts to address the question: What are the situational antecedents (both objective and subjective) that might affect L2 learners' WTC reported in published research? Based on our literature review we will then present a multi-layered framework of the different kinds of situational antecedents of WTC. The framework will contribute to the literature by (a) proposing a consistent terminology for future research on state WTC and its situational antecedents, (b) achieving more conceptual clarity regarding the different types of situational antecedents of WTC, and (c) providing guidance for future research into the dynamic processes underpinning state WTC.

As an individual difference variable, WTC has primarily been studied from a personality trait perspective (e.g. McCroskey & Richmond, 1991). As we currently witness a rekindled interest in the dynamic, more state related, aspects in personality research (e.g., Anonymous, 2017a; Anonymous, 2017b; Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015; Rauthmann et al., 2015; Rauthmann & Sherman, 2016a), we aim to explore in this review how an inclusion of a dynamic perspective can productively inform research on WTC and its antecedences.

2. Dispositional and Dynamic Approaches to Personality

There are at least two approaches to the study of personality. The dispositional or trait approach in personality provides a useful framework for researchers to describe people's *typical* thoughts, feelings and behaviors in relation to others, i.e., the focus is on individual differences variables. However, insights gained from research that rely on a trait perspective

are limited in their usefulness in (a) predicting thoughts, feelings and behaviors in specific situations that are of interest as well (Fleeson, 2001), and (b) in describing and explaining structure and processes at the level of the individual (e.g., Anonymous, 2010; Borsboom, Mellenbergh & van Heerden, 2003; Grice, 2015). Hence, the dynamic or processing approach introduces the concept of a ‘personality state’ and suggests studying within-person variability in the states underlying behavior (Anonymous, 2010; Fleeson & Leicht, 2006). By contrast to a trait, a state is one’s thinking, feeling, and acting at a given moment in time. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of personality, researchers have highlighted the need to integrate the two approaches, thus going beyond describing one’s general behavioral tendency to explaining the behavior generation process. (Fleeson & Jayawickreme, 2015; Fleeson & Leicht, 2006; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Shoda, Mischel & Wright, 1994; Anonymous, 2017a). In other words, an integrated approach involves going beyond *describing* between-person individual differences, such as trait WTC, and studying the within-person processes that underlie and hence *explain* between-person differences in WTC.

Variation in personality states can – at least to some degree – be explained by the impact of situations (see Fleeson, 2001, 2007; Fleeson & Leicht, 2006). Situational information can be categorized into three levels: classes, cues, and characteristics (Rauthmann et al., 2015). Situation *classes* describe types of situations (e.g., study or work situations), and situation *cues* refer to the physical elements that constitute a situation (e.g., interlocutors, tasks). Situation cues are the objective features of situations, whereas the processing of these objective features depends on how they are interpreted by individuals, and thus creates subjective perceptions of situations, i.e., situation *characteristics* (e.g., task-confidence, task-interest, and task-usefulness). A taxonomy of situation characteristics proposed by Rauthmann et al. (2014) is referred to as “Situational Eight DIAMONDS”, in which situation characteristics are categorized into eight major dimensions: Duty (Does work have to be completed?), Intellect

(Does the situation require deep thinking?), Adversity (Is someone being blamed?), Mating (Are there potential romantic encounters?), pOsitivity (Is it a pleasant situation?), Negativity (Does the situation cause negative feelings?), Deception (Is someone being deceived?), and Sociality (Are there opportunities for social interaction?) (Rauthmann & Sherman, 2016b). Although other taxonomies of situation characteristics have recently been proposed (e.g., CAPTION, Parrigon, Woo, Tay & Wang, 2017), in this article we use Rauthmann et al.'s (2014, 2015) terminology.

3. Dynamic Approaches to SLA

Similarly, in the field of SLA there is a growing interest in the study of dynamic phenomena. As Larsen-Freeman and Cameron (2008) suggest, the field of applied linguistics can be characterized as an interplay of dynamic systems. For example, when learning a language, a set of individual and situational variables interact, jointly affecting the learning process. That is to say, language is a dynamic system, and the process of language learning is dynamic in nature (de Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, 2007). The dynamic systems perspective takes into account interactions among different influencing factors in a specific situation (e.g., a L2 classroom), instead of analyzing linear relationships between variables in isolation as the dispositional approach tends to do.

Although the dynamic systems perspective is relatively new to the field of SLA, it has received growing attention. Dörnyei, MacIntyre and Henry (2015) have adopted a dynamic systems perspective to conceptualize L2 motivation. They suggest that research interests have shifted from the linear relationships between motivational dispositions to a more dynamic perspective, such as the fluctuation in L2 motivation across different situations and its impact on L2 behaviors. Recently, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017) have taken this a step further, integrating a macro-perspective and a micro-perspective in order to provide a comprehensive interpretation of both trait and state WTC. The macro-perspective focuses on

the linear relationships between relevant dispositions and trait WTC; while the micro-perspective is more context sensitive through its exploration of state WTC in specific situations and its fluctuation over time. Most of the previous empirical studies on WTC adopted a macro-perspective. However, the dynamic nature of WTC cannot be studied without adopting a micro-perspective (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017). Therefore, the traditional dispositional approach needs to be supplemented by a dynamic systems perspective (Dörnyei et al., 2015).

In sum, WTC in L2 is conceptualized as both a trait and a state. Whilst the former emphasizes individual differences in one's general communicative tendency, the latter mainly focuses on observable, moment-by-moment changes in one's communicative behavior. Authors like MacIntyre (e.g., MacIntyre, 2012; MacIntyre & Doucette, 2010) have suggested switching the focus from the trait characteristics of WTC to its dynamic components in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the communication generation process. Unlike trait WTC, which is relatively fixed, state WTC changes with situations and might therefore be more malleable. Hence, identifying the situational antecedents of state WTC is of practical importance for researchers and practitioners who aim to elicit communication and participation in L2 classes in order to ultimately facilitate students' language learning.

4. Methods

Aiming to identify the full breath of relevant studies, we searched databases through Web of Science and EBSCO (which includes ERIC and the British Education Index) up until July 2017 using the key words: willingness to communicate (WTC) and second language (and its variations: L2, foreign language, English, EFL, ESL, FSL). The search was limited to publications in English since 1996 when WTC was first introduced to the field of SLA by MacIntyre and Charos (1996).

Altogether, 219 studies on L2 WTC were found. Most of the studies were concerned with trait WTC. The authors of these studies tried to isolate different variables to determine their

correlations with WTC at the trait level (e.g., MacIntyre, Baker, Clément & Donovan, 2003; Peng, 2007a; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide & Shimizu, 2004). However, not all studies clearly distinguished between trait and state WTC. Some studies saw WTC as a dynamic phenomenon and investigated fluctuations in WTC across situations, though they did not specify that they were interested in state WTC or the dynamic nature of WTC. Hence, rather than using more specific search terms (such as state WTC), the studies on state WTC were manually selected from the complete list of WTC studies by reading the abstracts and checking the full articles when needed. It was found that 26 empirical studies discussed the dynamic nature of WTC and its situational antecedents. In addition, the references of the 26 studies were examined in order to identify other relevant studies that were not included in the above databases. Nine additional studies were found through such snowballing and included in the analysis.

All studies that investigated situational components of WTC were included in this review. The 35 empirical studies were analyzed in terms of the situational variables reported and the study's methodological quality. We extracted findings and discussion concerning state WTC and its antecedents from each study. In these studies a wide range of situational antecedents, both situation cues (objective features of situations) and situation characteristics (subjective perceptions of situations), were addressed. We coded the situational antecedents into different categories and sub-categories, and arranged them into different levels. No study was excluded from this review; however, we did take the methodological quality of the studies into consideration in judging the strength of the evidence. The methodological quality of the studies was analyzed in relation to the research designs and data collection methods reported. Findings as well as methodological information of the studies will be discussed in the following section. A list of the studies and the methodological approach adopted in these studies is included in the appendix to this article.

5. Findings

5.1. Methodological considerations

Participants in studies on state WTC are mainly university students, including undergraduates and adult language learners in university-based language courses. Four exceptions include a study of primary school students aged between eight and nine (Buckingham & Alpaslan, 2017), two studies of adolescents in secondary schools (Joe et al., 2017; MacIntyre, Burns & Jessome, 2011), as well as a case study of a Korean physician in the US (Kang, 2006). Most studies have been conducted with participants from Asian countries (China, Korea, Japan, Iran and Turkey), and only a few studies (eight studies) included participants from other countries, such as Canada, Poland, and Australia.

Amongst the 35 studies considered, there are eight cross-sectional survey studies, with relatively large sample sizes (ranging from 101 to 2,156). For example, Peng and Woodrow (2010) studied how WTC was affected by the Chinese EFL classroom environment, by employing a questionnaire with 579 university students from eight universities in eastern China. Although it was not explicitly stated that WTC was studied at the state level, these studies, to some extent, paid attention to the impact of situations upon WTC. However, as WTC and relevant situational antecedents were only measured once in these studies, it is difficult to determine how WTC might fluctuate and how such fluctuations might be causally linked to the changes in situations.

Nearly half of the 35 studies (i.e., 15) are small-scale studies, among which ten explicitly state that they are case studies. From a single case or a small number of cases (not more than twelve), a large amount of data were collected using various data collection methods (e.g., simulated recall interviews, observations, reflective journals), and the majority of these (i.e., 11) use longitudinal designs with durations ranging from a few weeks to several months. For instance, Zhong (2013) studied five Chinese students in a language school in New Zealand for

18 weeks using semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, stimulated recall and learning logs. The sample sizes as well as the particular settings in which these studies were conducted impose a challenge to the generalizability of the respective findings. Such studies, however, have the potential to provide some orientation in generating testable hypotheses with regard how state WTC might fluctuate across different situations and in terms of what learner and/or situational characteristics might trigger such fluctuations.

We found only three relatively larger-scale, longer-term longitudinal studies (de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; MacIntyre et al., 2011; Zarrinabadi, 2014). In Zarrinabadi's (2014) study, 50 English major undergraduates in Iran were asked to write focused essays over a six-week period, describing the situations in which they communicated with their teacher in English. This study sought to establish how students' WTC was influenced by the teacher. Another example is MacIntyre et al.'s (2011) study of 100 Canadian adolescents in a French immersion program. MacIntyre et al. (2011) showed that students' WTC fluctuated across contexts, and gave numerous examples of different learning contexts; however, these researchers did not clearly identify the underlying situational antecedents for these instances.

Interestingly, five recent studies, three small-scale studies (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015) and two relatively larger-scale studies (Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2014; Pawlak et al., 2016), explicitly measured students' state WTC (and other relevant variables) repeatedly within very short periods of time (e.g., during a task or a class). Some of these studies were conducted in labs (e.g., MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011), whilst others were conducted in the field, such as real language classrooms (e.g., Pawlak et al., 2016). For example, with the aim of identifying moment-by-moment variation in WTC and the factors that cause such variation, Pawlak et al. (2016) asked a sample of 60 Polish undergraduates separated into four groups to report their WTC every 5 minutes over a 60-minute period in class. These researchers found not only

differences between the four groups, but also fluctuations over time both within one of the groups and within the individual members of that group ($n_{group1} = 12$). Although such short-term repeated measurement designs are relatively novel for research in SLA, such designs have been employed as a prime method in the personality literature to measure individuals' momentary thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, and to capture their fluctuations across time and situations. Such studies point to the dynamic nature of WTC and provide new and interesting insights for future research on state WTC and its situational antecedents.

Strictly speaking, to establish causal links between different situational antecedents and state WTC, the adoption of an experimental research design would be necessary. This is because the inclusion of at least one randomized control group allows controlling for effects of potentially confounding variables (i.e., those unrelated to the experimental manipulation, yet with a potential impact on the outcome). This allows the researcher to more confidently attribute an effect to a particular cause (e.g., a situational factor) (de Vaus, 2001). However, in the course of the current research only four experimental studies with rather small sample sizes were found in the literature, each focusing on a certain element of the classroom setting. For example, using a sample of 18 students, Yu (2015) investigated the effect of interlocutors' WTC on L2 learners' state WTC in dyadic interactions and found that L2 learners' state WTC changed across interlocutors with different levels of WTC. The lack of experimental studies of sufficient size is one major challenge to validly establishing whether causal links exists between presumed situational antecedents and WTC.

To offer a comprehensive review of the possible situational antecedents of WTC, in the following section, we will first present findings from research about situation cues (according to Rauthmann's terminology). The situation cues include interlocutors, classroom atmosphere, topic, and activity, which have been studied relatively widely. We will then present findings from research about situation characteristics, which are relatively under-explored, such as task-

confidence, task-interest, and task-usefulness.

5.2. Situation cues

5.2.1. *Interlocutors*

A situational variable proposed in the original model of L2 WTC is the specific person one is communicating with (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This person is commonly termed as the “interlocutor”. Previous studies have shown that L2 learners’ WTC is influenced by some characteristics of their interlocutors, such as their familiarity with the interlocutors (e.g., Kang, 2005; Riasati, 2012), the interlocutors’ participation and cooperation (e.g., Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Riasati, 2012), as well as other demographic features of the interlocutors (e.g., Cao, 2011; Eddy-U, 2015; Kang, 2005; O’Sullivan, 2002; Pawlak et al., 2016; Riasati, 2012).

Familiarity, participation and cooperation. Findings on interlocutors’ familiarity, participation and cooperation are relatively unambiguous. It has been found that students prefer talking with friends in comparison to strangers or acquaintances (e.g., Kang, 2005), and enjoy communicating with those who are cooperative and actively participating in the discussion (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Kang, 2005; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Riasati, 2012). Familiar and cooperative interlocutors reduce learners’ fear of speaking a L2; while participatory interlocutors contribute to the discussion, thus making learners feel excited in and responsible for delivering information (Kang, 2005). The findings indicate that one’s WTC is not only influenced by one’s relationships with the interlocutors and the communication behaviors of the interlocutors, but more importantly, affected by the person’s own perceptions of the interlocutors’ cooperation and contribution.

Demographic features. Some demographic features of the interlocutors, such as ethnicity (e.g., Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005, 2006), L2 proficiency (e.g., Cao, 2011; Eddy-U, 2015; Kang, 2005), gender (e.g., Eddy-U, 2015; Riasati, 2012), age (e.g., Riasati, 2012), and appearance

(e.g., Kang, 2005), have been found to affect L2 learner's WTC as well, although relevant studies are still limited and the findings are tentative and inconsistent.

5.2.2. *Classroom atmosphere*

In classroom settings, students' L2 WTC seems to be influenced by the classroom atmosphere. Several researchers (e.g., Eddy-U, 2015; Lee, 2009; Riasati, 2012) have shown that a positive and stress-free classroom atmosphere – conceptualized as being co-created by classmates who cooperate with each other, as well as teachers who support their students – is likely to facilitate students' WTC.

Classmates. It has been argued that, when a student finds that his or her classmates are actively engaged in class, his or her WTC can be boosted (Peng, 2012). Nevertheless, it is noted that if a few students dominate the interaction in class, the rest of the students' WTC and opportunities to participate are dramatically reduced (de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009). Class cohesiveness has been suggested to contribute to higher WTC and better performance in class (e.g., Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Khajavy, Ghonsooly, HosseiniFatemi & Choi, 2014; Peng, 2007b; Wen & Clément, 2003).

Class size. A link between class cohesiveness in class and class size has been suggested. As it would be harder to achieve close contact and cohesiveness in a larger group of students, a bigger class size might reduce students' WTC in class (Wen & Clément, 2003). To clarify the effect of class size on students' WTC, Khazaei et al., (2012) compared WTC between three classes of 5, 10, or 15 adult EFL learners, respectively. They found that students in bigger classes felt more anxious and thus avoided communicating, whereas smaller classes provided students with more opportunities for interaction and built up students' confidence, thus facilitating WTC.

Teachers. Some students perceive the teacher as a more influential factor than their classmates in contributing to a supportive classroom atmosphere (Lee, 2009). Research (e.g.,

Cao, 2011; Fallah, 2014; Peng, Zhang & Chen, 2017) suggests that teacher support is mainly manifest in *teacher immediacy*, which refers to a teacher's verbal and non-verbal behaviors that reduce the distance and enhance close relationships with the students (e.g., encouragement, confirmation, and smile). Fallah (2014), for example, found that teacher immediacy indirectly affected WTC through confidence and motivation. Students' WTC is also influenced by the teacher's *teaching styles* and *classroom management* (e.g., Cameron, 2013; Peng, 2012; Riasati, 2012; Zarrinabadi, 2014). For instance, Zarrinabadi (2014) suggested that students' willingness to participate in a communicative activity in class is influenced by their teacher's time given for task preparation, topic selection, and error correction. However, different students may interpret the same behaviors of the teacher differently, especially in regard to non-verbal expressions. Hence, it should be noted that what directly influences WTC might not be the teacher's immediacy behaviors as such, but student's subjective perceptions of the teacher's support based on those behaviors.

5.2.3. Tasks

We consider *task* as an overarching label to include all situation cues related to the work students are asked to do. Hence, situation cues related to either the content being discussed during the task (i.e., the topic) or the design of the task (i.e., the activity) will be included in this section.

Topic. The thematic categories of topics have been found to influence L2 learners' WTC. Students prefer topics that they are familiar with and interested in, which reduces the difficulty of the conversation and increases their confidence and WTC accordingly (e.g., Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Riasati 2012; Wolf, 2013). The attractiveness and familiarity of a topic is linked to a student's *topic relevant background knowledge* as well as the extent of *L2 vocabulary* that the student possesses (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015).

Type of activity. A range of research has found that students' WTC fluctuates across different types of activities (e.g., Cao, 2011; de Saint Léger & Storch, 2009; Eddy-U, 2015; Ghasemi, Kermanshahi & Moharami, 2015; Pawlak et al., 2016; Peng, 2012). Pawlak et al. (2016) and Eddy-U (2015) reported that participants enjoyed game-like communicative activities most, while Cao (2011) showed that students preferred group projects. Instead of emphasizing any particular type of activity, communicative activities in classrooms have been roughly categorized into dyadic, group, and whole-class activities. Findings about which type of activity is preferred by students are not conclusive, but it seems that students prefer group activities with three or four interlocutors (e.g., Cao, 2011; Cao & Philp, 2006; Riasati, 2012). With a small number of peers, a group activity causes potentially less anxiety and offers more opportunities for students to communicate and generate multiple perspectives (Cao, 2011). However, some students, especially those with lower language competence, tend to prefer dyadic activities (e.g., Cao, 2013; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016), because the turn-taking in dyads is less competitive and makes students feel more obliged and less fearful; while others prefer whole-class activities because they believe that they can learn more through teacher-led activities than cooperative activities (e.g., Lee, 2009; Riasati, 2012; Zhong, 2013). Other than comparing dyadic, group, and whole-class activities, Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2014) went further by comparing monologue and dialogue tasks. They found that students preferred monologues to dialogues, although the initially high WTC in monologues tended to decrease during the task, whereas the initially low WTC in dialogues tended to increase.

Preparation time. The time given for task preparation has been suggested to be another contributor to activity participation (e.g., Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Riasati, 2012; Zarrinabadi, 2014; Zhong, 2013). For example, students regard simultaneous conversations (e.g., face-to-face talking) as more demanding and thus show lower levels of WTC than in written communications (e.g., online chatting) because they do not have enough time to formulate

opinions, search for appropriate vocabulary, and check the grammar (Freiermuth & Jarrell, 2006; Zhong, 2013). Providing students with sufficient preparation time is likely to raise their confidence and WTC in communicative activities (Riasati, 2012).

Assessment. Whether the performance in an activity is assessed or not is another factor that might influence a student's WTC. Some researchers (e.g., Riasati, 2012) suggest that when students are being assessed, they would be more anxious and thus reluctant to communicate. However, others (e.g., Eddy-U, 2015) argue that assessment is the only antecedent that contributes to pressure, but which at the same time prompts WTC, because students might see the grades as requirements or short-term goals that motivate them to overcome negative feelings (e.g., anxiety). However, as the relevant research is rather limited and the sample sizes of the existing research tend to be rather small (not more than 25 participants), there is a need for future studies to clarify the impact of assessment on WTC in classroom activities.

The antecedents previously discussed are the objective features of situations, and there are many studies available that investigate such situational variables. It should be noted that the objective features of situations are effective only as individual learners subjectively perceive them. For example, learners might differ in their interpretations of whether a teacher's behavior is indeed supportive. However, the evidence base for our understanding of situation characteristics and their effects on WTC is still limited.

5.3. Situation characteristics

5.3.1. *Task-confidence*

In MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) original model, *state communicative self-confidence*, which is defined as "a momentary feeling of confidence, which may be transient within a given situation" (p. 549), is one of the immediate precursors of WTC. Previous studies have suggested that the lack of confidence in task performance has a detrimental effect on WTC (Cao & Philp, 2006; Riasati, 2012). A lack of confidence is often underpinned by a fear of

making errors and being negatively evaluated by others, preventing students from speaking a L2 (e.g., Eddy-U, 2015; Kang, 2005; Riasati, 2012).

However, the terminology used in relation to confidence varies across studies. Examples of confidence-related terminology used in various studies are: *security* (e.g., Kang, 2005), *ease* (e.g., Liu & Littlewood, 1997), *anxiety* (e.g., Liu, 2002), and *embarrassment* (e.g., Liu, 2002). Most of these studies are based on relatively small samples of participants (ranging from three to 25 subjects). For example, after interviewing a group of 25 Chinese residents in Macau, Eddy-U (2015) found that most of the confidence-related responses were linked to a fear of making errors, though participants expressed it variously as anxiety, embarrassment, unease, etc. The only large-scale survey study investigating task-confidence was conducted by Liu and Littlewood (1997). Collecting data from 437 university lecturers and 2,156 English learners in a university in Hong Kong, Liu and Littlewood (1997) were interested in why East Asian students were often seen as passive learners who tend to keep silent in class. They concluded that East Asian students were willing to communicate but experienced unease when speaking English, and this sense of unease was strongly associated with their lack of confidence in their English competence (Liu & Littlewood, 1997).

5.3.2. *Task-interest*

Another situation characteristic that might influence WTC is task-interest, which is defined as the curiosity in and engagement with a specific task (Dörnyei, 2009). Some authors (e.g., Kang, 2005) refer to the feeling of elation when engaging in L2 communication as *excitement*, which might subsequently be related to task-interest. It could be argued that being interested in a task is a necessary (yet not sufficient) precondition for excitement; at the same time, previously experienced excitement might trigger interest in engaging in a similar task next time. Compared to findings related to negative affect (e.g., lack of confidence or fear), less is known about positive affect relevant to L2 communication, such as excitement and joy.

In order to better facilitate students' L2 learning, future research could focus more on identifying what affectively prompts – in addition to what hinders – learners' WTC in a L2.

5.3.3. *Task-usefulness*

In some situations, even if students are not interested in a task, they may feel motivated by their perceptions of task-usefulness, which has been variously labeled as *task effectiveness* (e.g., Zhong, 2013), and *task orientation* (e.g., Khajavy et al., 2014; Peng & Woodrow, 2010). Kang (2005) conceptualized such perceptions as *responsibility*, which is particularly related to the purposes of maintaining some kind of interpersonal relationships and/or gaining personal benefits. Similarly, Bernales (2016) reported that students' L2 use was influenced by both their self-imposed goals of becoming proficient in the L2 and their teachers' expectations. The motivation to use the L2 to achieve personal goals and meet teachers' expectations suggested by Bernales (2016) seems to resonate with Kang's (2005) concept of 'feeling responsible to talk'.

5.4. Systematicity of previous studies

Although a number of situational antecedents of WTC have been discussed in the literature, such discussions tend to ignore the necessary differentiation into situation cues and situation characteristics. As situation characteristics are conceptualized as subjective perceptions of objective situation cues, this conceptual distinction is best accommodated by a multi-layered framework. Nevertheless, research on relevant situation characteristics of WTC is rather limited, and concept labels are used inconsistently.

To our knowledge, only one study (Kang, 2005) distinguished clearly between situation cues and characteristics. Kang (2005) observed and recorded four Korean students' participation in an ESL module at a North American university over a period of eight weeks. After each class, participants were asked to watch the recordings of that class and to retrospectively reflect on how their WTC was affected at different points in time. Kang (2005)

concluded that the underlying situation characteristics affecting L2 learner's WTC are security, excitement, and responsibility. Each of the situation characteristics is influenced by various situation cues related to the topic, interlocutors, and conversational context.

Security is defined as feeling safe from the fear of making errors or losing face when communicating in L2. Kang (2005) found that a student's security is mainly perceived based on the features of the interlocutors, such as familiarity with the interlocutors, support offered by the interlocutors, number of interlocutors present, as well as the interlocutors' ethnicity and L2 proficiency. The student's topic-related prior knowledge and the stage (e.g., at the beginning) and process of a conversation (e.g., after making errors) also influence the feeling of security.

Excitement refers to the feeling of elation about participating in communication, which is partly perceived based on the topic, such as the attractiveness of the topic and one's familiarity with the topic. The self-perceived level of accomplishment of the task also plays a role. Kang (2005) found that excitement is also perceived in response to situation cues related to the interlocutors, including the interlocutors' ethnicity, appearance, cooperation, and participation.

Another situation characteristic suggested by Kang (2005) is *responsibility*, the sense of duty to deliver or understand a message during the communication. Kang (2005) suggested that responsibility is affected by the perceived usefulness, importance and sensitivity of the topic being discussed, together with one's prior topic knowledge. The number of interlocutors present and the interlocutors' participation and cooperation also influence one's perception of responsibility.

However, due to the small sample size, Kang's (2005) findings might provide a limited basis for generalization, and other antecedents that might influence L2 learners' WTC in other contexts might remain unidentified. Nevertheless, Kang's (2005) attempt to systematically organize situation cues and situation characteristics in relation to WTC provides a useful basis

for future research.

6. Proposed Framework of Situational Antecedents of State WTC

To systematically organize major situational antecedents of WTC as suggested by previous research and to provide a consistent terminology for future research, a multi-layered framework of situational variables is proposed. In the proposed framework, situational antecedents of WTC are systemically combined into three interlinked layers, i.e., situation cues, situation characteristics and the underlying dimensions of situation characteristics (see Fig.1). The proposed framework emphasizes the role of situation characteristics (subjective perceptions) in influencing a learner's WTC.

<INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

6.1. Major dimensions of situation characteristics

Based on our review of prior empirical evidence, three out of Rauthmann et al.'s (2014) eight major dimensions of situation characteristics were deemed to be relevant to L2 learning situations and therefore selected, namely negativity, positivity, and duty. *Negativity* refers to any sort of negative feeling caused by the situation. It covers the lack of confidence or fear of making errors in using a L2 regularly mentioned in the literature (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Eddy-U, 2015; Kang, 2005, 2006; Liu, 2002; Liu & Littlewood, 1997; Riasati, 2012). In contrast to negativity, *positivity* is suggested as representing the elation elicited by the situation. Because of the breadth of this concept, i.e., it captures any positive feeling elicited by the situation, both interest (Dörnyei, 2009; Eddy-U, 2015) and excitement (Kang, 2005), reported as situational antecedents of WTC, can be seen as parts of the positivity dimension. *Duty* refers to the extent to which students perceive a task has to be accomplished, which is parallel to Kang's (2005) concept of responsibility.

In Kang's (2005) work, security is used as an antonym to "the fears that non-native speakers tend to have in L2 communication" (p. 282). Through using this understanding of

security, all of the three subjective perceptions of situations suggested by Kang (2005) are labeled as relatively positive situation characteristics. However, it is evident in the literature that, comparably, more emphasis is placed on negative thoughts and feelings (e.g., lack of confidence and fear) that might prevent students from communicating in a L2. Apart from a few studies, such as Kang (2005), even fewer studies looked at potential facilitators of WTC, such as positive affect or the sense of duty when communicating in a L2. As MacIntyre (2007) argued, the decision to enter into a discourse should be understood as a volitional process, which is under the conflicting influences of both restraining and motivating forces. Thus, both negativity and positivity, together with duty, are included in the proposed framework as the underlying dimensions of situation characteristics.

6.2. Situation characteristics and cues

As the proposed framework focuses on the L2 learning situation, a number of situation characteristics directly relevant to class settings are specified as underlying the major dimensions. Based on the literature review, the specified situation characteristics are summarized as support, cooperation, and objectives. These situation characteristics are subjective perceptions of various situation cues, which are categorized into five themes (i.e., teacher, class, peers, activity, and topic). Kang's (2005) conversational context is excluded from this framework. Although similar situation cues, such as the stage of a task or class session, are also reported by Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak, and their colleagues (Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2017; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Pawlak et al., 2016), they are not commonly reported situation cues and existing findings are markedly inconsistent. For example, Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2016) reported that students' WTC increased from the beginning to the middle of a class and then declined towards the end; while Mystkowska-Wiertelak and Pawlak (2017) reported different tendencies with three groups of students: a consistently high level of WTC throughout a class in Group 1, a gradually

increasing trend in Group 2 and a slightly decreasing trend in Group 3. It may be argued that what actually influences WTC is not the stage of a class, but one's perception of the learning situation at that particular point in time. As discussed by Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2016), students' relatively low WTC at the start might be because they were waiting for the teacher to outline the session and present something interesting, while the downward trend towards the end might be explained by fatigue after engaging in the learning/communication activities during the middle of the class. That is, students' momentary thoughts and feelings (e.g., task-interest) can be more important than the actual stage of a class in influencing WTC.

Support refers to a student's perceptions of the teacher's attitude and immediacy, which are perceived based on situation cues relevant to the teacher, such as the teacher's teaching style and classroom management (e.g., time for task preparation, topic selection, and error correction), as well as other verbal and non-verbal behaviors (e.g., smile, nod, and feedback).

Cooperation refers to a student's perception of their peers' participation and cooperation. In whole-class activities, class cohesiveness, classroom climate, and class size might be influencing factors; while in dyadic or group activities, situation cues relevant to the specific interlocutors one is talking with might make a difference, including one's relationship with the respective peer, peers' communicative behaviors and their demographic features (e.g., gender, ethnicity, and L2 proficiency).

Objectives refer to how a student perceives the task according to the dimensions of task-interest, task-usefulness, and task-difficulty. Objectives are mainly perceived based on the type of the activity (e.g., dyadic, group, or whole-class activity), task preparation time, as well as assessment. The thematic category of the topic functions as another situation cue affecting one's perception of a task, as both content knowledge and topic-related L2 vocabulary might also be relevant.

7. Discussion and Future Research

The present article offers a comprehensive overview of the literature relevant to L2 WTC, with emphasis on state WTC and its situational antecedents. To facilitate future research, we have identified the underlying patterns common to previous findings and integrate the main situational variables into a coherent framework. The proposed framework systemically categorizes situational antecedents of WTC into three interlinked layers: situation cues (i.e., teacher, class, peers, activity, and topic), situation characteristics (i.e., support, cooperation, and objectives), and the underlying dimensions of situation characteristics (i.e., negativity, positivity, and duty)

By suggesting a comprehensive framework of situation cues and characteristics, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of the situational antecedents of WTC and to provide a consistent terminology for future research. When considering situational antecedents of WTC, situation characteristics (subjective perceptions of situations) ought to be distinguished from the situation cues (objective features of situations). However, as the proposed framework is the first attempt to arrange previously suggested situational antecedents of WTC together, further studies are required to test the validity of the framework and to further refine it.

A high density repeated measurement approach might be the most appropriate approach to study the dynamic nature of WTC. This promising, relatively new approach in SLA makes it possible to capture state WTC in specific situations and monitor its fluctuation over time. However, only a handful of recent studies have employed this approach to study WTC (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2014; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Pawlak et al., 2016). For a more in-depth understanding of WTC at its state level, more studies using a high density repeated measurement approach are required as a complement to cross-sectional surveys, and experimental studies.

As previously discussed, students' communicative behaviors are interactively impacted by their general personal characteristics or traits (i.e., personality) and their perceptions of the specific situation. Hence, when studying WTC it may be necessary to pay more attention to the malleability of WTC, with the aim of designing strategies to develop language learners' WTC within and beyond L2 classrooms. However, only a few studies have been conducted to examine whether L2 learners' WTC can be improved (e.g., DeSteffen, 2015; Munezane, 2015; Watanabe, 2013). For example, Munezane (2015) conducted quasi-experiments with 373 Japanese EFL learners to examine whether L2 WTC can be boosted via classroom interventions such as visualization and goal setting. Munezane (2015) used visualization activities to help students imagine their ideal L2 selves as proficient English speakers. It was found that the visualization intervention alone was not effective in improving L2 WTC; however, when it was combined with a goal setting intervention (activities that helped students develop L2 learning goals), a significant increase in L2 WTC was found. Nevertheless, Munezane (2015) emphasizes the impact of personal characteristics, such as ideal L2 selves and self-regulated learning, rather than the impact of systematically shaping classroom situations to enhance WTC. The potential malleability of WTC is the most practical implication of research on WTC for language teachers, and this research deserves more attention.

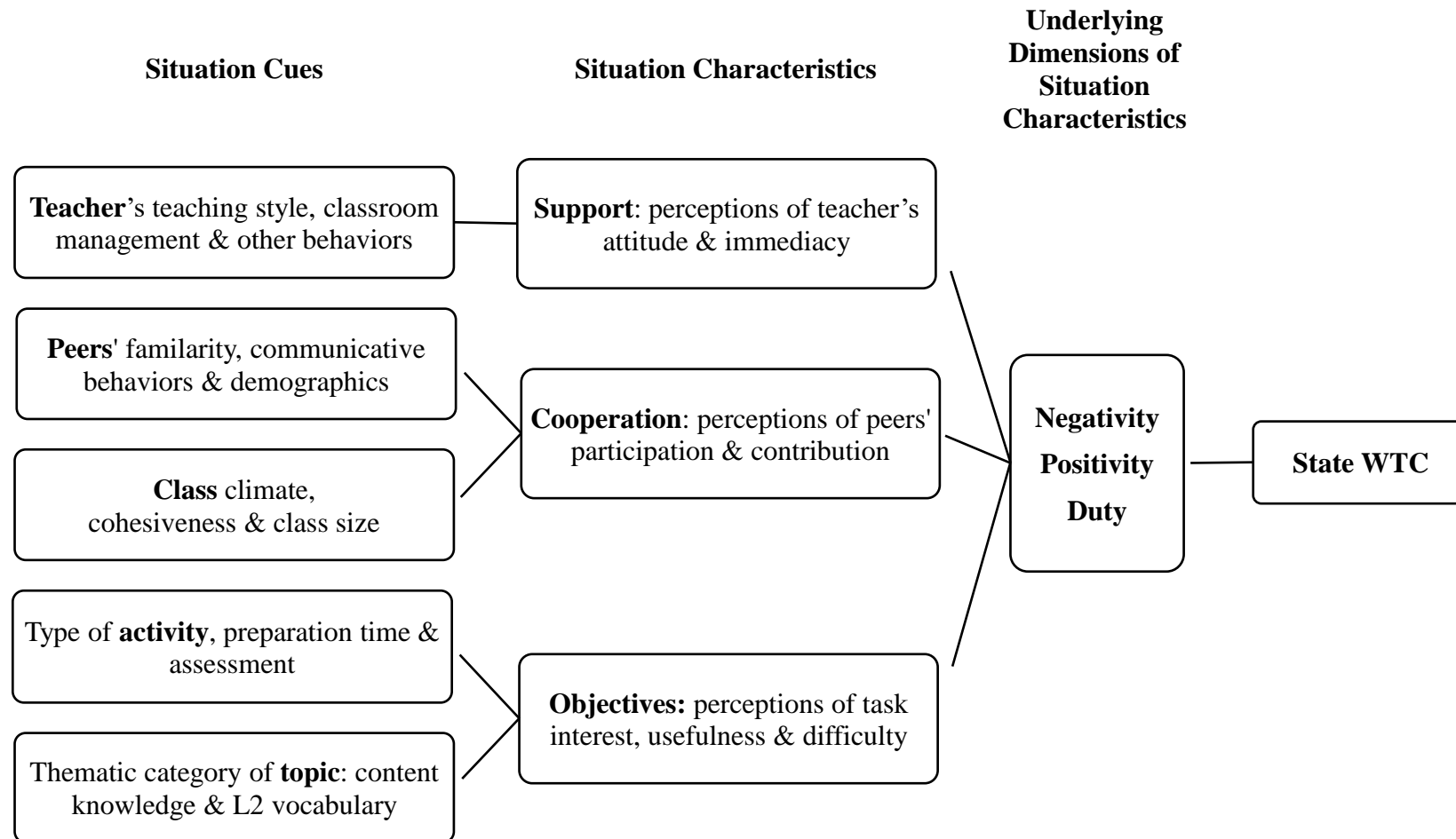
8. Conclusion

The current study has distinguished state WTC from the widely studied trait WTC and has emphasized the potential fluctuation in WTC across situations. The concepts of situation cues and characteristics have been introduced to the SLA literature to distinguish the subjective perceptions of situations from objective features of situations. The work sheds light on the different types of situational antecedents that may trigger or hinder L2 learners' WTC, which should provide useful insights for those who are interested in the variability and malleability of WTC. This is the first attempt to systematically organize both situation cues and situation

characteristics into a multi-layered framework of situational antecedents of WTC. We hope this work will raise awareness of relevant situation characteristics and lead to a more comprehensive understanding of state WTC and why it might fluctuate across situations.

Figure 1

The Proposed Framework of Situational Antecedents of State WTC



Appendix

Overview of the Relevant Studies on State WTC

Authors	Participants	Design	Measures	Relevant situational variables
Bernales (2016)	4 German-as-foreign-language learners in a Midwestern university in the US	Longitudinal (15 weeks)	Class observation/videotaping Stimulated recall interview	L2 speaking goals Confidence in L2 skills Activity and topic Teacher's expectations
Buckingham & Alpaslan (2017)	40 Turkish young learners of English	Experimental	Class observation	Asynchronous audio-visual speaking activities
Cameron (2013)	3 Iranian ESL learners in a New Zealand university	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire Interview Teacher report	Teaching methods & approaches Teacher support
Cao (2011)	12 ESL learners of various nationalities in a university-based language school in New Zealand	Longitudinal (20 weeks)		
Cao (2013)	12 ESL learners (mainly from China or Korea) in a university-based language school in New Zealand	Longitudinal (5 months)	Class observation Stimulated recall interview Reflective journal	Topic: content knowledge, familiarity, interest & sensitivity Task type: opportunities to talk & contribution to progress Interlocutor: familiarity, language proficiency, personality, nationality, participation & cooperation Teacher support and immediacy & teaching style Group size: dyadic, group or whole-class activity
Cao (2014)	6 Chinese ESL learners in a university-based language school in New Zealand	Longitudinal (5 months)		
Cao & Philp (2006)	8 ESL learners of various nationalities in a university-based language school in New Zealand	Longitudinal (1 month)	Questionnaire Class observation Audio record Interview	Group size: pair, group or whole-class activity Confidence Interlocutor: familiarity & participation Topic: familiarity
de Saint Léger & Storch (2009)	32 advanced learners of French in an Australian university	Longitudinal (12 weeks)	Questionnaire Focus group interview Teacher assessment	Source of difficulty: fluency & vocabulary Lack of confidence/anxiety Whole-class or small group discussion: opportunities for communication

Eddy-U (2015)	25 Chinese EFL learners in two universities in Macau	Cross-sectional	Focus group interview	Perception of the interlocutors Group members: familiarity, talkativeness, motivation, participation, L2 proficiency & gender Classroom atmosphere: the teacher & classmates Perception of the task: interest (topic & type of activity), effectiveness & difficulty State motivation: marks Confidence
Fallah (2014)	252 Iranian English-major university students	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire	Teacher immediacy: students' motivation & security
Freiermuth & Jarrell (2006)	36 English learners in a university in Japan	Experimental	Questionnaire Task performance (discourse)	Online chatting vs. face-to-face mode: anxiety & attractive
Ghasemi et al. (2015)	137 English-major students in Iran	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire	Task type
Joe et al. (2017)	381 Korean secondary school EFL learners	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire	Classroom social climate: teacher emotional support, teacher academic support & classroom mutual respect
Kang (2005)	4 Korean ESL learners in an English Language Institute in the northeast of the US	Longitudinal (8 weeks)	Interview Video & audio record Stimulated recall	Security <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interlocutors: language proficiency, nationality, familiarity, number & support • Topic: background knowledge • Conversational context: stage in a conversation & when facing difficulties Excitement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: interest, personal experiences & background knowledge • Interlocutors: nationality, appearance & support • Conversational context: when asked for additional information Responsibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Topic: perceived usefulness and importance, background knowledge & sensitivity • Interlocutors: number & support • Conversational context: when misunderstood
Kang (2006)	1 Korean physician in the US	Longitudinal (13 months)	Observation in various situations Informal conversation	Interlocutor: native or non-native speaker Insecurity
Khajavy et al. (2014)	243 English-major students in Iran	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire	Teacher support Student cohesiveness Task orientation:
Khazaei et al.	30 adult Iranian EFL	Experimental	Class observation	Class size

(2012)	learners in the same institute in Iran		(talk time & turn-taking)	
Lee (2009)	6 Korean graduates students in a university in the southwest of the US	Longitudinal (1 semester)	Interview Class observation Informal conversation	Perception of teachers and classmates Whole-class or small group discussion
Liu (2002)	3 Chinese graduate students in a university in the Midwestern of the US	Longitudinal (1 year)	Interview Class observations Prolonged engagement with the participants	Security & self-protection
Liu & Littlewood (1997)	2,156 Chinese EFL learners & 437 lecturers in a university in Hong Kong	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire	Teaching style Confidence & anxiety
MacIntyre et al. (2011)	100 Canadian junior high school students in a French immersion program	Longitudinal (6 weeks)	Questionnaire Diary	Context Interlocutors
MacIntyre & Legatto (2011)	6 Canadian learners of French in universities	Short-term longitudinal (intensive repeated measurement within 8 tasks)	Self-rated WTC per second Stimulated recall Observation	Topic familiarity & vocabulary retrieval
Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2016)	12 English-major undergraduates in Poland	Longitudinal (intensive repeated measurement within different lessons throughout a semester)	Self-rated WTC every 5min Questionnaire Interview	Class-arrangement modes: pair, group or whole-class (security & pleasure) Interlocutor: familiarity, language proficiency, reaction & personality Topic interest & familiarity: vocabulary & knowledge Activity type & variety Stage of the class: the beginning, middle or end of the class (interest)
Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak (2014)	44 English-major undergraduates in two institutions of higher education in Poland	Short-term longitudinal (intensive repeated measurement within 2 tasks)	Self-rated WTC every 30s Questionnaire	Task type: monologue or dialogue Stage of the task: the trend from beginning to the end

Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak(2015)	8 English-major undergraduates in an institutions of higher education in Poland	Short-term longitudinal (intensive repeated measurement within a task)	Self-rated WTC every 30s Questionnaire Stimulated recall	Topic: interest, content knowledge & vocabulary retrieval Time for preparation Interlocutor: familiarity, involvement & cooperation Presence of the teacher
Pawlak et al. (2016)	60 English-major undergraduates in Poland	Short-term longitudinal (intensive repeated measurement within a class)	Self-rated WTC every 5min Questionnaire Lesson plan The teacher's comment	Pair, small group or whole-class activity Interlocutors: familiarity & proficiency The teacher: classroom arrangement, teaching style, personality, enthusiasm & rapport with the students Topic: personal experience & interest Activity type: game Stage of the class: beginning or end
Peng (2007b)	118 Chinese university students	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire Group interview Diary	Group cohesiveness Teacher support, teaching styles & classroom management
Peng (2012)	4 EFL learners in a university in southern China	Longitudinal (1.5 semesters)	Interview Class observation Learning journal	Classroom atmosphere Teacher support & teaching style Task: interest, usefulness & importance
Peng & Woodrow (2010)	579 non-English-major undergraduates in 8 universities in eastern China	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire	Teacher support Student cohesiveness Task orientation: importance & usefulness
Peng et al. (2017)	4 non-English-major students in a university in China	Two scenarios from a same class period	Stimulated recall Learning journal Scenarios transcription & annotation	The teacher's pedagogic discourse: language, gesture & gaze
Riasati (2012)	7 Iranian EFL learners in a private language institute	Cross-sectional	Interview	Interlocutor: gender, age, familiarity & participation Task type: individually, in pairs or groups Graded or not Confidence Topic: familiarity, interest & preparation Teacher attitude & teaching style Classroom atmosphere: students & the teacher
Wolf (2013)	101 EFL learners in a university in Japan	Cross-sectional	Questionnaire	Topic: interest & learner's knowledge (related to self-confidence)
Yu (2015)	18 English-major students in a university	Experimental	Questionnaire Task performance (number of	Interlocutor's WTC (in dyadic interactions)

	in China		words & turn-taking)	
Zarrinabadi (2014)	50 English-major undergraduates in Iran	Longitudinal (6 weeks)	Focused essay	Teacher: wait time, decision on topic, error correction & support
Zhong (2013)	5 Chinese ESL learners in a language school in New Zealand	Longitudinal (18 weeks)	Interview Learning log Class observation Stimulated recall	Teacher-fronted or collaborative learning activity Time for preparation

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