

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHNICITY DIFFERENCES AND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

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Abstract

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is defined as the intention to communicate given a choice, continue to establish itself as a determining construct in bringing about success or failure in learning a foreign language (Dörnyei, 2005, Peng & Woodrow, 2010). One of the factors affected it was cultural diversities from various ethnics. Hence, learners' ethnicity in willingness to communicate is a necessity that has to be considered in language education in multilingual context. In this study, the researchers investigated whether there is any statistically significant relationship between learners' ethnicity and willingness to communicate in classroom discussion of graduate students of Universitas Negeri Padang that focused on minority and majority group. To collect the data, the questionnaire of willingness to communicate was distributed to the participants that consist of 38 graduate students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang. The quantitative data gathered through these instruments were analyzed to determine the degree of correlation between these two variables. Besides, individual semi-structured interviews with some of the participants were used to obtain supportive data. The result of correlational analyses revealed that there was a strong relationship between learners' Willingness to Communicate and their ethnicity differences. So it can be concluded that a significant relationship between learner ethnicity and willingness to communicate can be seen in classroom discussion that the majority ethnic dominate and have willingness to express their ideas rather than minority group that come from minority ethnic in classroom discussion.

Keywords: *Willingness to Communicate, Multilingual, Minority and Majority Group.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a multilingual society with 726 languages (Crystal, 2000; Martí, et al., 2005), since, the multilingual education is still a new issue that must be examined in depth to explore many sites which have contributed to the multilingual education. Thus, there are many aspects and approaches that should be considered before developing the

multilingual education. One of the aspect is the social aspects that include students' ethnicity differences that will influences their participation in classroom interaction especially in the multilingual classroom.

In the learning activity of multilingual classroom, there is the condition where students did not active in the classroom. This activity is known as WTC which defined as, "the intention to initiate communication, given a choice" (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément & Conord, 2001, p. 369). WTC is affected by many factors such as age, anomie and alienation, anxiety, attitude, communication apprehension, communication skills/competence, self-perceived communication competence, gender, introversion/ extroversion, motivation, self-confidence, self-esteem and culture. According to MacIntyre (2007), one can identify both individual factors (such as anxiety, motivation, attitudes, interpersonal attraction, etc.) and social contextual factors (such as ethnolinguistic vitality, language contact, etc.) that either enhance or reduce WTC.

This condition usually happen to minority-culture-students in the classroom. Based on the pre-observation of the research, minority-culture-students in the multilingual are seen as the non-competence students. Majority-cultural-students feel as the good language learners in the classroom since they can actively participate in the teaching learning activity, are free in sharing their ideas or opinion in the classroom and understand the course well. In other context, minority-culture-students cannot freely share their opinion and be active in the classroom because of their position in the classroom as the minor one – from the other culture and tradition. Actually, in the activity that pushes minority-culture-students to participate in the classroom, they could follow the activity in the classroom well especially in oral activities such as classroom discussion.

This research focuses on the relationship between WTC towards majority and minority group in classroom discussion. If learners have a high WTC they will be effective in their learning and others will have a positive attitude toward them (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987); in this research, the researchers formulate two research questions as follows:

1. Is there any significant relationship between language learners' willingness to communicate and their ethnicity differences?
2. Do the minority students feel the differences in this regard?

2. REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

Multilingual

In the *Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics (2010)*, multilingual is defined as a person who knows and uses three or more languages. Furthermore, Multilingualism is traditionally used as an umbrella term that includes bilingualism. The Oxford dictionary, however, a multilingual person is described as the person who is able to speak or uses many languages. Based on these definitions, main conclusion could be drawn that multilingualism refers to the ability to using many languages.

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

The Definition of WTC

L2 WTC is defined by several experts such as MacIntyre et al. (1998) as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2". It is indeed a multi-faceted construct that integrates affective, social-psychological, linguistic, and communicative variables and can describe, explain, and predict language learners' communicative behavior in a L2. Burgoon (1976) originated the first construct on this field. She called her construct "Unwillingness to Communicate" and defined it as "enduring and chronic tendency to avoid or devalue oral

communication.” Furthermore, Dörnyei, (2005) and Peng & Woodrow (2010) stated that WTS is the intention to communicate given a choice, continues to establish itself as a determining construct in bringing about success or failure in learning a foreign language.

Factors influence WTC

Research in SLA indicates that there are many factors that directly and indirectly influence one's L2 WTC including introversion, self-esteem, communication competence (skills), communication apprehension, and cultural diversity. These factors, or antecedents of WTC, are considered to be central to successful language learning (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). According to Cao and Philip (2006) other variables such as group size, familiarity with interlocutors, interlocutors' participation, familiarity with topic under discussion, self-confidence, medium of communication, and cultural background were also found to affect learners' WTC levels.

Situational WTC is explained through some models, e.g. MacIntyre et al.'s model (1998) in which both trait-like and situational factors influencing WTC are explained. The Heuristic Model of L2 WTC developed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) took into account an interaction between personal, societal and affective variables which influence learners' L2 use and distinguished these variables in terms of their situational (Layers I, II and III) and enduring (Layers IV, V and VI) influences on L2 WTC (see the diagram below). Moving from the top to the bottom of the model means moving from the most immediate situational and transient influence to the more stable and enduring influences on L2 communication situations.

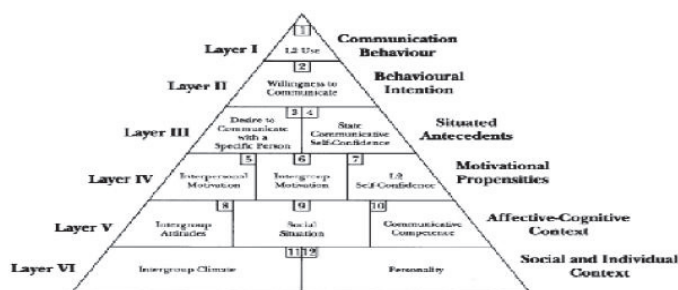


Figure 1. *Heuristic model of variables influencing WTC* (Source: MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998, p. 547)

In this model the first three layers are situational influences which are seen as transient and dependent on the specific context in which a person functions at a given time; and the last three layers are enduring influences, which refer to stable, long-term properties of the environment or person that would apply to almost any situation.

MacIntyre (2003) says that WTC model does not explicitly deal with situations in which status-based linguistic accommodation and other social pressures might create L2 use against the personal preference of the speaker. Also Compton (2007) claims that this model may not be comprehensive enough to explain WTC in all L2 environments.

The need for doing correlational studies on the issue is deeply felt. In the Indonesian context, as an EFL context, there is a common sense that majority learners outperform minority ones in terms of oral language proficiency.

WTC as the Objective of Language Instruction

WTC as an objective of second language learning has drawn the attention of language researchers in recent years (see, for example, Cao & Philip, 2006; Dornyei, 2005; Kang 2005). In fact, making learners talk is still a challenge for teachers, as it has been frequently reported that most EFL learners, especially Asians, are passive, quiet, shy, reticent and unwilling to answer (Cheng, 2000; Tsui, 1996; Liu, 2005).

Dornyei (2003) states that many L2 learners tend to avoid second language communication. Based on this idea Kang (2005) argues many L2 learners may not use the opportunities to learn language through authentic communication. MacIntyre et al. (1998) believe that producing WTC is a crucial component of modern language instruction. They argue that current emphasis on communicative competence may produce students capable of communication. Kang (2005) reports that the teachers will have more active learners by making them more willing to communicate. Kang states that students with high WTC are more likely to use L2 in authentic communication. He also believes that students with high WTC will have their learning opportunities and become involved in learning activities in the classrooms. The importance of WTC reaches to an extent that scholars like Dornyei (2005) consider it as the “ultimate goal of instruction.”

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is designed as survey study. The survey study is appropriate to be conducted in this research since the aim of this research is to find out the correlation of the minority and majority students towards Willingness to communicate. It is also worth noting that the information about the research participants in this research was gathered at a single point in time. The subjects of this study were 34 students of university in Padang. A close-ended questionnaire was used to elicit and gather information about research respondents. The items of the instrument were used to find out both of the minority students' perceptions towards Willingness to communicate that adopted from Valadi et al., 2015 and to support the data from questionnaire, a semi-structured interview was conducted in this research. The criteria of the questionnaire was distinguished in to two, they are the (1) statements related to ethnicity and (2) the statement related to WTC.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analyzed by using Likert scale which provides five options: strongly-agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The data was analyzed statistically by using statistical program called SPSS 17. It is used to analyze mean score of each statement and the degree of correlation for both variables. While data from the interview will analyzed by Miles and Huberman.

5. RESULTS

The first research question in this research is concerned to the relationship between the participant willingness to communicate and their ethnicity differences. The table 1 show the mean and standar deviation score of both variable willingness to communicate (WTC) and ethnicity differences.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of WTC and Ethnivity Differences

	Mean	Std.Deviation	N
Ethnicity	45.3824	4.08259	34
WTC	58.6471	4.72185	34

The correlation results of both variable WTC and ethnicity differences was investigated using Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a strong

correlation between the two variables, ($r = .979$, $n = 34$, $p = .000 < 0.05$). The coefficient of Pearson correlation is .979 that is very close to 1. It means that both variables have high positive significant correlation to the discussion activity in the classroom. The result is shown in the table 2 clearly.

Table 2. Correlation Result based on the analysis of SPSS 17

		Ethnicity	WTC
Ethnicity	Pearson Correlation	1	.979**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	34	34
WTC	Pearson Correlation	.979**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	34	34

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

For the second research question, it will be answered by the information that gathered by semi-structured interview for 5 minority students in this classroom. These informations are useful to get the depth information related the feeling of minority-ethnicity students and their willingness to communicate in discussion section. The data would be shown and discussed below with the discussion of quantitative data that presented above.

6. DISCUSSION

This study set out to investigate the relationship between a group of minority-ethnicity EFL language students' willingness to communicate and their ethnicity differences, on the one hand, and to get the information of minority-ethnicity student's feeling toward their willingness to communicate in classroom discussion. According to the findings of the study, there was a positive and strong relationship between the learners' WTC levels and the students' ethnicity differences. One possible explanation for this is that the students' ethnicity difference can decrease students' willingness to communicate in classroom discussion, particularly for minority-ethnicity students in multilingual classroom. Their "interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, self-confidence, intergroup attitudes, social situation, communicative competence, intergroup climate, and personality" as Mohsen and Niknejad (2013, cited in Valadi's et al. Research, 2015) previously found about was lower than the majority-ethnicity students in the classroom.

These findings of the study can also be accounted for by the fact that in EFL contexts where in the classroom consist of students from different ethnicity – multilingual class, where the minority students prefer to invest their input of learning rather than share and show it to the public, in this case the

discussion class activity, or to the majority-ethnicity students in the classroom. Hence, we cannot state that minority-ethnicity students do not have strong willingness to communicate, but they are not confident enough to perform it.

For the second research question, related to the students' feeling towards the different ethnicity where they belong to with their willingness to communicate, the findings showed that, as a matter of fact, the minority students prefer to be quiet rather than become active in the classroom discussion does not mean they have no willingness to communicate. In semi-interview students shared their feeling. Here the third student was afraid in speaking in public. It stated clearly in the citation below:

“To be honest, I am still afraid in making mistakes. I am afraid my friends can't understand what actually I mean when I'm talking.” (*Students 3*)

Additionally another student stated his willingness to communicate related to his status of minority-ethnic in the classroom discussion. Here, the different of background culture influence their activity in discussion section.

I don't think that I can enjoy speaking in English because sometimes my friends are laughing at me when I mispronounce a word, for example, or make mistakes in using grammar. Actually *I do not feel that way when I was an undergraduate student*. Besides, I feel that my friends are not interested in listening of what I'm saying so it's useless for me to speak English.” (*Student 4*)

From that citation, the student clearly stated the different condition when he was in undergraduate. It because he was from that group. Meanwhile, he is in different ethnicity with other students. The differences of pronounce the words – pronunciation and the way of communicate it – the different of discourse lead the minority students became passive in discussion.

“I'm still unconfident in speaking in front the class. For example, when I have to be a speaker in presentation, you know, we are not minang. I'm still asking myself whether I can do it well or not in front of them. You know, *I also lose my confidence when the lecturer commenting my performance in the middle of the presentation*. I even forget what I'm going to say.” (*Student 1*)

The citation above, the student also lose confidence in presentation. She was not confidence because of the status of minority-ethnicity and unconfidence feeling when the lecturer commenting her performance. This student shared additional factor that influence her willingness to communicate in discussion section.

From all data can be stated that they have motivation to learn English, and try to improve their communicative skill, yet they are not confident enough to communicate their thoughts and ideas in the discussion activity. It happens because they perceived that their ideas sometimes are not well listened. In addition, they are also afraid in making mistakes which sometimes triggers the other students to laugh at or mock at their mistakes. As the result, they tend to be passive in the discussion activity. It, again, proves that minority students actually have the willingness to communicate.

7. CONCLUSION

Minority students are often regarded as the students who are unwilling to communicate. However, what really happens is, they do have the willingness to communicate in English. There are some factors that affect the students' willingness to

communicate, such as self-confidence, background of culture and the feeling of minority ethnicity in the classroom.

From the discussion above, it can be seen that there is a positive and strong relationship between students' ethnicity differences and their WTC level. Based on the interview, it can be concluded that what made the minority students tend to be the passive ones in discussion activity was their anxiety in communicating their ideas in the discussion activity.

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