

Predicting Willingness to Communicate with Goals and Successful Communication Experiences

Authors: Satomi Shinohe, Hokkaido Information University

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Presenter Name: Satomi Shinohe

Abstract

A growing body of literature recognizes the importance of willingness to communicate (WTC) in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). While WTC has been studied in many EFL contexts, few empirical studies have examined how learners' past successful communication experiences and their goals for learning English predict WTC. The author's prior research found that EFL learners' successful communication experiences correlated positively with WTC, while unsuccessful communication experiences correlated negatively with WTC. Moreover, the author found a positive correlation between English learning goals and WTC. Based on the author's preliminary findings and other research in various EFL contexts, the current study constructed a theoretical model to examine the relationships among WTC in English, successful communication experiences (Success), actions for goal achievement (Actions), and goals for learning English (Goals). Accordingly, this study aims to (1) test whether the hypothesized model holds for Japanese EFL learners, and (2) identify factors influencing WTC in this context. Using structural equation modeling (SEM), the relationships among WTC, Goals, Actions, and Success were analyzed. Data were collected from 200 undergraduate students in Hokkaido, Japan. Regarding model fit, the results indicated a good fit between the hypothesized model and the observed data. Although the chi-square test was significant ($\chi^2 = 194.502$, $df = 100$, $p < .001$), other fit indices met the recommended thresholds: $CMIN/DF = 1.945$, $CFI = .938$, $TLI = .926$, $SRMR = .072$, and $RMSEA = .069$ (90% CI [.054, .084]). Given that the multivariate kurtosis (24.420) indicated a violation of multivariate normality, the Bollen-Stine bootstrap method with 2,000 resamples was employed, which confirmed the robustness of the model fit. The standardized path coefficients were examined to determine the relative influence of each factor on WTC. As a result, all hypothesized paths were statistically significant ($p < .001$). Among the predictors, Success had the strongest direct effect on WTC, followed by Goals. Furthermore, Success had a significant positive impact on Actions, which in turn influenced Goals. These results suggest that while both Success and Goals are critical drivers of WTC, Success plays a more dominant role both directly and by fostering Actions and Goals. These findings suggest that learners with successful communication experiences are more willing to communicate in English, and those who take positive steps toward their goals tend to have clearer learning goals, leading to greater WTC. These findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized framework and highlight the importance of examining EFL learners' past experiences and future goals to foster learner WTC.