Effect of Implicit Self-Esteem on Willingness to Communicate in Second Language

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Abstract. Students' willingness to communicate (WTC) using second language (L2) plays an undeniably influential role in English education context. An accumulation of research has been conducted exploring L2 WTC and its influencing variables. However, whether implicit self-esteem has an impact on L2 WTC changing remains under-answered. The present study aims to find the association between implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC among Chinese senior high school students. A total of 255 senior high school sophomores who are studying in Tangshan City, Hebei Province, China, will be recruited to take part in the study. Name Letter Test will be conducted to test participants' implicit self-esteem while a questionnaire involving various classroom situations will be used for measuring L2 WTC level. After calculating the collected data in Pearson's correlation, it is predicted that there is a positive correlation between implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC. The study would provide pedagogical implication that English teachers should pay more attention to students' self-esteem in class. Teaching methods that protect students' self-esteem while enhancing L2 WTC should be encouraged.

Keywords: L2 WTC, implicit self-esteem, Chinese senior high school students, Name Letter Test

1 Introduction

1.1 Effect of Implicit Self-Esteem on Willingness to Communicate in Second Language

In second language (L2) learning process, communicative interaction in class is of significant importance for facilitating students' L2 speaking proficiency and in-class engagement. However, not all students are willing to speak in class due to various reasons. Willingness to communicate (WTC) in L2 refers to the willingness or intention of individuals to communicate using L2 in various occasions spontaneously [1]. Because of the variety in individuals' L2 competence, influencing factors of L2 WTC are considered more diverse than those of WTC in first language. In EFL (English as a foreign language) education context, WTC in L2 has received extensive research attention focusing on factors affecting L2 WTC and pedagogical approaches enhancing L2 WTC.

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L2 WTC can be affected by multiple factors, ranging from communication intention to social and individual domains, where personality functions as the fundamental contributing factor [2].

Implicit self-esteem is considered a crucial part of personality, which refers to individuals' unconscious perceptions and feelings about themselves [3]. Differ from explicit self-esteem, implicit self-esteem is measured in an indirect way, without making participants aware of their self-esteem being assessed [4]. More detailed information about implicit self-esteem measurement is mentioned in the Method section. Moreover, East Asians are likely to be influenced by the quality of "modesty, humility" rooted in their cultural belief which inhibits assertive self-expression [5]. However, East Asians feel as positive about themselves as Euro-Americans in an implicit self-esteem measurement test, mainly because implicit self-esteem measurement assesses people's subconscious awareness which fails to guide behaviors. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to use implicit measurement to test Chinese students' implicit self-esteem, who are the subjects of the study.

Numerous research has been conducted to explore the associations between L2 WTC and influencing variables. Some research focus on linguistic dimension, such as L2 learning experience and competence, stating that success in L2 learning and compliment from peers and language teachers are more likely to enhance L2 WTC. Some studies explored the association between personality and L2 WTC. Personality traits identified in the Five Factor Model could predict the frequency of L2 WTC. Personality-based variables (i.e. self-esteem, extraversion/introversion and emotional stability) influence L2 WTC. Moreover, WTC is reported to be changed by the integration of many variables, combining individual personality, classroom environment and linguistic factors. However, the association between implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC remained underexplored [6-12].

This study aims to find out the correlation between senior high school students' implicit self-esteem and their L2 WTC in English class. The research objective leads to the following research question and a hypothesis:

Research Question: For Chinese senior high school students, what is the relationship between their implicit self-esteem and in-class L2 WTC?

Hypothesis: For Chinese senior high school students, implicit self-esteem is positively correlated to in-class L2 WTC.

I predict that there is a positive correlation between implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC. The higher the implicit self-esteem is, the higher the L2 WTC would be. The result can be inferred from relevant studies, noting that extroverted people with high self-esteem are more willing to communicate than introverted people [8,9]. In terms of the importance of the study, theoretically, the study would deepen the understanding of the relationship between L2 WTC and personality. Pedagogically, the study would make EFL teacher pay attention to individuals' differences during L2 learning process, thus promoting L2 acquisition.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

Participants involved in this study are Chinese senior high school sophomores who are now studying in Tangshan No.1 High School, Tangshan City, Hebei Province. I hope to achieve a sample size of 255 (120 female students, 135 male students). I performed a power analysis using the software package G*Power [13]. The results indicated that with 255 participants, the experiment could detect an effect size of 0.2, using a paired t-test at a 5% alpha level (two-tailed) threshold with 90% statistical power. I will send each participant a consent form to make sure they are clearly informed of the content of the study. All data collected from participants will be kept strictly confidential.

2.2 Design, procedure and material

Passive design is the main research design, because all information I need is based on participants' own conditions, which can't be manipulated. I mainly use the quantitative method in the study. I run a Likert scale to test implicit self-esteem level and L2 WTC level. Likert scale quantifies subjective perceptions, attitudes and preferences into an objective numerical scale. It offers participants a scale from point 1 to point 5, 7 or 9, which is more likely to generate accurate and valid responses [14].

Name Letter Test was applied to measure participants' implicit self-esteem, which is one of the most common and authorized method approaches to test implicit self-esteem [15,16]. Implicit self-esteem is associated with self-evaluation which occurs unconsciously. People's preference for item is related to themselves, such as letters involved in their names and personal belongings, reflects a positive self-evaluation [17]. The notion of name letter effect, presented by Nuttin states that people tend to show a positive bias towards letters involved in their names. Inspired by name letter effect, Name Letter Test requires participants to rate all 26 English letters on a 9-point or 5-point Likert scale based on how much they like the letter [18,19]. A higher rate for name letters than non-name letters can be regarded as high implicit self-esteem [20]. In his study, participants need to write down their full name first, then rate all letters from A to Z on a table on a 9-point Likert scale (see Table 1).

For measuring participants' L2 WTC level, I adapted a questionnaire as shown in Table 2. Many classroom situations are included in the questionnaire, ranging from presenting argument to taking part in discussion. The people who are talked with also vary, including peers, group members and English teacher. The participants will rate each situation on a 7-point Likert Scale which best describes their level of willingness.

The two questionnaires will be attached to a mobile application called "questionnaire star" and they will be sent to each participant. All data will be organized into an Excel form for later calculation.

Your full name (in English) _____

Rate each letter from 1 to 9 points.

1=dislike extremely

2=dislike very much

3=dislike moderately
4=dislike slightly
5=neither like nor dislike
6=like slightly
7=like moderately
8=like very much
9=like extremely

Table 1. Likert scale for preference of 26 letters

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z

Table 2. Likert scale for L2 WTC [21]

Situations in an English class	Rate
1.I am willing to present my arguments in English to the rest of my class.	
2.I am willing to give a presentation in English in front of the class.	
3.I am willing to do a role-play in English in a small group.	
4.I am willing to do a role-play in English in a pair.	
5.I am willing to take part in a discussion in English in a small group.	
6.I am willing to take part in a discussion in English in a pair.	
7.I am willing to ask the teacher in English to repeat what s/he said.	
8.I am willing to ask the teacher in English about words or structures s/he just used.	
9.I am willing to ask my peer in English about forms/words related to the topic.	
10.I am willing to ask my peer in English about ideas/arguments related to the topic.	

The following statements describing situations inside an English class. Please imagine you are in these situations and rate each of them from 1 to 7 based on the following standard.

1=strongly disagree
2=disagree
3=somewhat disagree
4=either agree or disagree
5=somewhat agree
6=agree
7=strongly agree

2.3 Data analysis

A few things about Chinese name initials should be noticed. Chinese names are written in Chinese characters, which is impossible to be covered in one single table. Thus, I

choose to use pinyin, the pronunciation of Chinese name written with English letters, to present participants' full names. For example, a Chinese name "李明" written in pinyin is Li Ming, with "L" and "M" as initials. For implicit self-esteem, I will use Pearson's correlation in SPSS to calculate each participant's implicit self-esteem in two steps. Take participant 001 for example, firstly, I will calculate the mean of 001's initial liking score (X). Then, I will calculate the mean of other participants' liking score of 001's initial (Y). Secondly, I will calculate the implicit self-esteem of 001, which is X minus Y. The specific formula is presented below.

Implicit self-esteem level of Participant 001:

X= the mean of 001's initial liking score

Y= the mean of other participants' liking score of 001's initial

Implicit self-esteem=X-Y

Moreover, some research compares the liking score between initial letters and non-initial name letters [4,16]. In this study, I merely calculate participants' liking score of initial. Because it is rare for Chinese to see or use their full name written by pinyin in a Chinese environment. However, many Chinese will use their initials to register personal online accounts such as e-mail, online game, music app, etc. Compared with their full name letter, Chinese tend to be more familiar with their initial letter. Therefore, liking score for non-initial name letters will not be put into consideration in this study.

Before conducting the calculation, I want to check whether participants will be affected by letter frequency effect, stating that people tend to prefer high-frequency letters than low-frequency letters [22]. I will compare participants' liking score for the 6 high-frequency letters (A, E, I, N, S, T) as well as the 6 low-frequency letters (J, K, Q, W, X, Z). I will use t test in SPSS to run the mean, SD, and p-value of these two groups of letters. I predict p-value will be higher than .05, which means there will be no significant differences between participants' preferences of high and low frequency letters. The possible reason is that participants live in a Chinese context, where English is not usually seen in daily life except for schoolwork. High or low-frequency English letter might make no sense to them. Therefore, the possible distraction caused by letter frequency effect is eliminated in the study.

For L2 WTC measurement, I use Excel to calculate the mean of L2 WTC in each situation for each participant. After I get the implicit self-esteem score and L2 WTC score, I set up a line chart with implicit self-esteem as the x axis and L2 WTC as the y axis to see whether there is a correlation.

3 Results

After calculating Pearson's correlation in SPSS, I expect a strong relationship between implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC ($r>0$). The p-value is smaller than .001, suggesting that the result is statistically significant. In Figure 1, I expect that implicit self-esteem in the x axis will be positively correlated with L2 WTC in the y axis. The predicted results provide evidence for the hypothesis that implicit self-esteem is positively correlated to in-class L2 WTC for Chinese senior high school students.

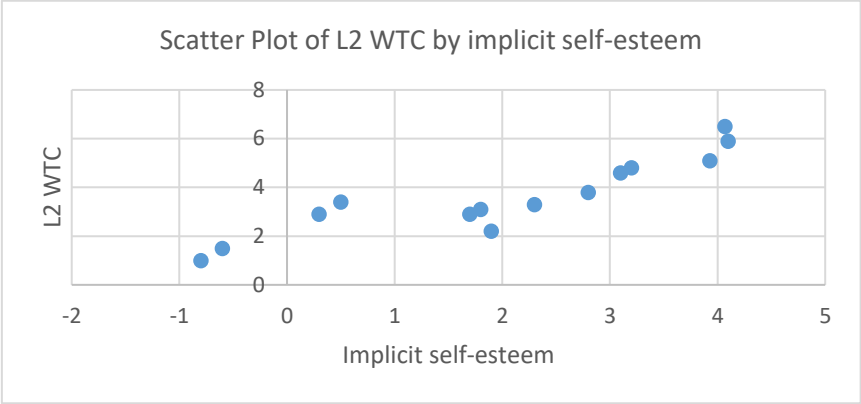

Fig. 1. Scatter plot of L2 WTC by implicit self-esteem (self-painted)

4 Conclusion

Seldom research has been conducted to discover the relationship between implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC. The study aims to fill the gap, trying to find out the correlation between the two variables. The predicted result shows that the correlation is statistically significant, demonstrating a positive association between implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC. From Figure 1, it is not hard to find that participants with low implicit self-esteem have low L2 WTC, while participants owning high implicit self-esteem, are more willing to communicate in L2. Based on the correlation figure, future research could shed light on finding a valid explanation for why the two variables are associated with each other. A semi-interview is worth implementing involving participants with 1) both high implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC, and 2) both low implicit self-esteem and L2 WTC. Questions could include: How do you perceive yourself? How much do you value yourself? Do you think that the reason you have a high/low L2 WTC is related to your high/low implicit self-esteem?

Certain limitations of the present study should be noted. Firstly, all participants come from the same school, which may not generalize all Chinese senior high school students. Secondly, L2 WTC is a complex component and could be affected by multiple factors, such L2 competence and confidence, desire to communicate, L2 learning motivation, etc. Therefore, the correlation might be distracted by other variables, some of which might play a dominant role in influencing L2 WTC.

Despite the limitations, it is hoped that the study would provide promising pedagogical implications for EFL education and L2 acquisition. EFL teachers should pay more attention to each student's L2 WTC in class, while taking care of their self-esteem. Establishing a rapport with students, creating a relaxing and encouraging classroom atmosphere is beneficial to enhance students' willingness to communicate. Meanwhile, teachers need to avoid approaches that could harm students' implicit self-esteem, such as criticizing students in front of the whole class, showing disrespect to students, excessive teachers' talking time, etc.

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