Foreign Language Self-assessment and Willingness to Communicate in and Outside the Classroom

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Abstract The present paper concerns the problem of whether students' self-assessment of their foreign language (FL) proficiency level can be considered a predictor of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) in and outside the FL classroom. Although some observations in this area have already been carried out, in most of them, learners' self-perceptions refer to communicative skills (self-perceived communication competence). This paper reports results of a mixed-method study in which self-assessment of the FL concerned typical aspects of proficiency, such as competence in grammar and pronunciation, accuracy in the use of grammar and pronunciation, range of vocabulary, followed by self-perception of integrative skills and fluency. The outcomes imply that self-assessment operationalized in this manner is significantly related to WTC in the FL classroom. However, when the naturalistic setting is concerned, statistically significant correlations were found only in the case of pronunciation and integrative skills self-assessment. The numerical outcomes are complemented with qualitative data, which provide a deeper insight into the nature of WTC in and outside the FL classroom.

Keywords FL self-assessment · WTC in the FL classroom · WTC outside the FL classroom · Mixed-method approach

1 Introduction

There is little doubt that communicative competence is the main aim of the majority of foreign/second language (FL/L2) learners. At the same time, it is stressed that learners must "talk in order to learn" (Skehan, 1989, p. 48) and that progress in language acquisition is hardly possible if students do not take an active part in speaking activities (e.g. Savignon, 2005; Swain, 1985). Consequently, one of the

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major concerns of each FL/L2 teacher should be to regularly involve all the students in communicative tasks. Taking into consideration the fact that it is communicative language teaching (CLT) that prevails in today's FL classrooms, featured by student-student interaction, (semi)authentic materials, focus on real-life and meaningful tasks, and tolerance towards mistakes that do not impede communication (e.g. Brown, 2001), we may expect learners to join in speaking activities eagerly. Still, it is evident that some students are reluctant to participate in oral communicative exercises. This implies that the readiness and decision to speak in a FL is a highly complex phenomenon.

The tendency to engage in communication, being given a free choice to do so, is referred to as Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). First observations on this construct in reference to mastering a language other than the mother tongue (L1) were carried out among students learning an L2 in a second language context (e.g. learning English in francophone parts of Canada). In this case, the learners are exposed to the target language (TL) outside school on a daily basis and frequently experience the actual need to use it. Additionally, they receive authentic immediate feedback on their ability to talk in the L2 and to understand other speakers using this language. A different group of students constitute FL learners, whose ranking of drives to master the target language (TL) is usually completely different than that of L2 learners. Usually they reveal instrumental motivation, i.e. they show concern about passing an exam, getting a promotion, a salary rise, or aim at approximating their ideal FL self, e.g. at becoming a part of the global community, in which everybody speaks at least one other language than L1 and whose members can easily communicate with each other. Unfortunately, although a classroom may be the only place where they can actually practise the FL, they might feel that getting involved in speaking may be too risky, since they have more to lose (their face) than gain (speaking proficiency). Indeed, as MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) claim, communicating in a TL that one does not have full control of might lead to losing one's face and destroying one's self-esteem.

It seems that the classroom setting in which formal learning takes place is governed by its own set of rules. Despite the tolerant approach to errors prevailing nowadays in FL classrooms and concern for good classroom dynamics, some students may still feel that the classroom is, first and foremost, a stage at which they are constantly evaluated by others. If a student considers his/her skills poor, particularly in comparison to these of other learners, he/she can be expected to be unwilling to perform in the classroom. Several studies have proven that perception of one's FL competence is a powerful predictor of WTC. Usually, however, it is specifically *Self-perceived Communication Competence* (*SPCC*)—an individual's self-perception of abilities to communicate in an L2—that represents the FL self-assessment variable (e.g. Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002). In this study an attempt is made to examine whether WTC of Polish adult students is determined by the perception of their FL proficiency level in various aspects, i.e. pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, interactive skills and fluency. Additionally, it is verified whether self-perception of the TL level in these language areas is related with equal strength to WTC inside and outside the FL classroom. The statistical analysis of

quantitative data is supplemented by qualitative observations, which shed light on the constructs of WTC in and outside the FL classroom and the role of self-assessment in WTC in formal and naturalistic settings.

2 L2 Willingness to Communicate

The construct of WTC, defined as "the intention to initiate communication, given the opportunity" (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Conrod, 2001, p. 370), derives from studies on L1 communication, preceded by observations on related concepts, such as *unwillingness to communicate* (Burgoon, 1976), *predisposition toward verbal behavior* (Mortensen, Arntson, & Lustig, 1977), or *shyness* (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). Having observed that the predisposition is relatively stable across various settings and interlocutors, it was initially considered a personality-based trait-like variable (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1982, 1991). However, further studies (MacIntyre, Babin, & Clément, 1999) allowed the verification of the nature of L1 WTC, as a construct embracing both trait- and state-like features. According to MacIntyre (1994), there are two most immediate antecedents of L1 WTC, i.e. communication apprehension and perceived communication competence. As McCroskey and Richmond (1991) explain, "since the choice of whether to communicate is a cognitive one, it is likely to be more influenced by one's perceptions of competence (of which one usually is aware) than one's actual competence (of which one may be totally unaware)" (p. 27).

Although the concept of WTC in a language other than L1 (L2 WTC) was inspired by research on L1 WTC, MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) strongly emphasize that L2 WTC is "not a simple manifestation of WTC in L1" in the L2/FL context. In fact, in some studies a negative correlation between WTC in L1 and WTC in L2 was found (e.g. Charos, 1994), which implies that communicating in a second/foreign language is a unique process and experience, governed by its own distinct principles. In 1998 MacInytre and associates define willingness to communicate in a second language as "readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 547). Taking into consideration Gardner's socio-educational model (1985) and MacIntyre's (1994) path model, MacIntyre et al. (1998) forward a heuristic pyramid model of L2 WTC. According to this model, L2 WTC is a multi-layered construct, shaped by two major classes of variables, i.e. by situation-specific and more enduring factors which interrelate with each other. The immediate situational variables placed at the very top of the pyramid are the desire to speak to a specific interlocutor, the knowledge of the topic, and state communication self-competence. These, in turn, are shaped by motivational propensities, among others, L2 self-confidence, and by affective-cognitive variables, such as anxiety and communicative competence. At the very bottom of the model are personality and intergroup climate, which constitute "the basis or platform on which the rest of the influences operate; the foundation on which the pyramid is built" (MacIntyre et al., 1998, p. 546).

Several studies have been carried out to examine the importance of learner variables in L2 WTC. The results have proven that motivation and attitudes (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre et al., 2001), self-confidence (MacIntyre, 1994), personality (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), international posture (Yashima, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004), age, and gender (MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2002) are crucial predictors of eagerness to communicate in an L2.

3 L2 WTC in Classroom Versus Real-Life Setting

L2 WTC can be observed mainly in two settings, i.e. in an educational context, where formal learning in classroom takes place, and in real-life outside the classroom. Taking into account the fact that L2 WTC is determined by several situational, motivational and affective-cognitive propensities, as forwarded in the model of MacIntyre et al. (1998), it can be presupposed that individuals' eagerness to talk in these two different settings varies considerably.

Dörnyei (2005) emphasizes that L2 WTC has both trait and state features. Based on a few studies (e.g. Cao & Philp, 2006; MacIntyre et al., 1999), Cao (2013) explains that "the trait-level WTC reflects an individual's general tendency for communication, whereas the state-level WTC determines whether initiation of communication occurs" (p. 12). She posits that in most classroom studies, it is the trait-like level of L2 WTC that has been observed, though recently, more and more researchers have concentrated on exploring the nature of L2 WTC at the state level, determined by several situational factors. Empirical data imply that L2 WTC in the FL classroom setting is dynamic and depends on such variables as level of acquaintance with the interlocutors, task type, topic of conversations, and group size (e.g. Cao & Philp, 2006). Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) found out that WTC is influenced by the students' attitudes towards the task. It was observed that those who had a positive attitude towards particular speaking exercises talked in them more eagerly than their friends, whose attitude to the task was neutral or negative. Other studies (Weaver, 2005) proved the important role of planning before oral performance. On the other hand, some researchers stress that WTC in a FL classroom is influenced, first and foremost, by the learners' linguistic, cognitive, affective, and cultural readiness. As Peng (2006) suggests, reluctance to engage in speaking tasks may be caused by lack of or insufficient self-perceived readiness in any of these areas.

To tap into the nature of L2 WTC in the FL classroom, it seems that a synthetic approach must be applied (Peng, 2012), namely one that would explore individual trait-like variables of WTC (e.g. personality, motivation, self-confidence, anxiety, perceived self-competence) across various situational classroom contexts (depending on type of task, familiarity of interlocutors, grouping size, etc.). Finally, it may be hypothesized that irrespective of how many learners are involved in speaking, how well the learners know and like each other, what types of tasks are performed, and what the teacher's approach to errors is, for many students a FL classroom is always

perceived, though to a various extent, as a venue of mutual assessment. It is the attempt to avoid being evaluated by significant others, i.e. friends, students they have conflicts with or the teacher, that may make many students reluctant to speak and that encourages them to stay silent, if only this is possible.

When L2 WTC outside the classroom is concerned, to ensure a better understanding of its nature a similar synthetic approach should be applied. There is no doubt that the construct encompasses other situational variables than those typical of L2 WTC in the classroom. It is probable that learners reveal different levels of WTC when talking to native speakers of the TL than to other non-native speakers, representing an L1 different from that of their own. Their WTC may also vary depending on how many speakers are involved in the conversation, and on the formality level of the situation. However, what makes speaking outside of class peculiar and different from the classroom context, apart from the situational factors mentioned above, is the fact that conversations in real life usually have an authentic communicative and social purpose. Though an introverted individual may still find it difficult to join in a conversation, such a pragmatic push to speak can help many students forget about the fears connected with their imperfect language competence and skills, and result in WTC. Following the premise of Phillips (1968, p. 40), we may presuppose that the "projection of gains" from involving in conversations out-of-class "outweighs" the anticipated potential drawbacks from the attempts to speak (e.g. negative evaluation of others, ridiculing oneself). Consequently, WTC is expected to be higher in naturalistic than classroom contexts, and the relationship between the two variables less meaningful in the case of real-life settings.

4 Self-assessment and L2 WTC

As the heuristic model of L2 WTC displays, communicative competence is one of the cognitive propensities of the construct in question. According to MacIntyre et al. (1998), it refers to the "degree of one's L2 proficiency" or more specifically to "complexities of knowledge and skill required for communication" (p. 554), and embraces such competencies as linguistic competence, discourse competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence. Nonetheless, it is not infrequent that learners, despite high communicative competence, are still unwilling to take part in oral communicative tasks (see e.g. MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 1998). This may be due to the social and individual propensities (intergroup climate, personality) or affective characteristics of the learner (e.g. anxiety, integrativeness). However, as MacIntyre et al. (1998) explain, referring back to McCroskey and Richmond (1991), the decision to initiate or join a conversation can be even more significantly determined by the speaker's FL self-perceptions, than his/her factual FL proficiency level. The phenomenon is clarified by McCroskey and Richmond (1991) in the following manner: "since the choice of whether to communicate is a cognitive one, it is likely to be more influenced by one's perceptions of competence (of which one usually is aware) than one's actual

competence (of which one may be totally unaware)" (p. 27). A support for this claim seems to be provided by Anyadubalu (2010), who clarifies that self-evaluation is the motor determining one's action, being either a facilitator or inhibitor of one's decisions. It is worth adding that low self-evaluation usually leads to anxiety (e.g. Baran-Łucarz, 2011), and that the two constructs are strongly interrelated. In some models of anxiety (Baran-Łucarz, 2013, 2014; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), self-assessment is treated as one of the subcomponents of the construct or a concept closely related to it.

Indeed, many studies reveal that self-perception of the learner's FL skills is a strong predictor of L2 WTC. A path analysis conducted by MacIntyre (1994) showed that the combination of self-perceived competence and communication apprehension (anxiety) constitute the most important antecedents of L2 WTC, which has been further supported by several researchers (e.g. Clement, Baker, & MacIntyre, 2003; Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Mystkowska-Wietelak & Pawlak, 2014; Yashima, 2002). Yashima et al. (2004) explain, "If a student has low L2 Communication Apprehension and high (self) Perceived Communicative Competence in the L2, the person is considered to have high L2 communication confidence," (cf. Fushino, 2010, p. 705) which in turn can be expected to lead to higher levels of WTC.

It is important to mention that the self-assessment in reference to L2 WTC has been usually operationalized and observed as the so called *self-perceived communicative competence* (SPCC), referring to "self-perception of adequate ability to pass along or give information; the ability to make known by talking or writing" (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988, p. 109). The instrument used to measure perceived competence is frequently the one (or a battery based on the one) designed by MacIntyre and Charos (1996), in which the respondents are asked to reflect and decide on how competent they believe they are in using a FL/L2 to speak in 12 situations that vary depending on the level of acquaintance with the interlocutor(s) and type of speaking task (e.g. Hashimoto, 2002; Mystkowska-Wietelak & Pawlak, 2014).

In this study self-assessment is treated differently. It refers to perceptions students have about their fluency, interactive skills, competence and actual abilities to use correctly the TL grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. It is assumed that Polish students draw too much attention to aspects of accuracy and that they fear being evaluated by others and teachers on the basis of these criteria.

Finally, it is worth referring to Lockley (2013, after Mercer, 2011) who draws attention to the fact that self-evaluation, which can be considered an umbrella term that self-assessment belongs to, is culturally-dependent. In his further explanation of the phenomenon, he refers to other researchers (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999), who explain that self-evaluation includes "self-criticism, self-discipline, effort, perseverance, the importance of others, shame and apologies, balance and emotional restraint" (p. 769), which are deeply rooted in and shaped by the culture we are brought up in.

5 The Study

5.1 Research Questions

At the end of the year 2013 a study was launched to examine whether willingness to communicate in a foreign language in and outside the classroom setting is determined by how students perceive the level of their particular FL aspects/skills, which, as I believe, constitute components of communicative abilities, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and interactive skills. More specifically, the following research questions have been posed:

1. Are students more willing to communicate in or outside the FL classroom?
2. What is the relationship between WTC in the FL classroom and WTC outside the FL classroom? Can the two be considered separate constructs?
3. Is the level of students' WTC in the FL classroom and/or outside the FL classroom related to their FL self-assessment?
4. Is the relationship between students' self-perception of FL aspects/skills and WTC more meaningful in classroom or real-life context?

5.2 Participants

The research involved five groups of first-year students[1] (N = 70) of Wrocław University, Poland, majoring in English. The mean age of the subjects was 23, with the youngest students being 19 and the oldest 34. Among them there were 18 males and 52 females. 31 learners enrolled in two groups attended day studies (Gr 1), representing a proficiency level of C1 (according to the Common European Framework of Reference). The remaining subjects (n = 39) were extramural students (Gr 2), whose level was usually lower than that of day students, i.e. B2. Throughout the whole year, the students attended, among many others, 'conversation classes' during which they were provided with many opportunities to communicate with their classmates in various tasks and grouping arrangements.

Most of the learners (89 %) were highly motivated to approximate the pronunciation of native speakers of English, be it Received Pronunciation (90 %) or General American (10 %). 4 % of the participants wanted to reach a high level of pronunciation accuracy, though not necessarily native-like, while 6 % declared their goal to be communicative English. Although many of the students (60 %) had an opportunity to visit one of the English-speaking countries, these were usually only short one- or two-week stays. Additionally, one of the extramural students had spent most of her life in South Africa and was bilingual. Thus, although she participated in the study as her friends did, her results were not taken into

[1] Many thanks to the students participating in the research.

consideration in the analysis of data. Despite the fact that participation in the study was not obligatory, none of the students present during the data gathering lessons objected to taking part in it.

5.3 Instruments

The data necessary to answer the research questions were gathered with the use of three pen-and-pencil batteries designed by the author of this paper, i.e. a measure of FL self-assessment, a tool diagnosing the level of WTC in the FL classroom, and a battery of WTC outside the FL classroom. All of them were written in the learners' mother tongue to reduce the risk of the items being misunderstood by the respondents. Before the final versions of the instruments were ready, the tests were filled out by 26 first-year MA students of the same department, who were asked to provide feedback, sharing openly their doubts and ideas on particular items of the measures. As a result of the pilot study, a few statements were paraphrased, some eliminated, and the order of many was changed.

5.3.1 The FL Self-assessment Measure

The FL Self-assessment Measure (FLSAM) had the form of a 12-item questionnaire, based on a 7-point Likert scale. The participants were asked to evaluate the level of particular skills of their English by writing a digit from 7 to 1 next to each statement, where 7 stood for 'very high' and 1—'very low'. Additionally, the respondents could write '0' when they did not know how to assess some aspects of their English; however, they were asked to use this answer sparingly, only when they really could not make a decision about their level of particular skills.

The battery consisted of items addressing the following FL aspects/skills:

1. Pronunciation (4 items):
   - vowels
   - consonants
   - prosody (word stress, sentence rhythm, intonation)
   - word pronunciation
2. Grammar (4 items):
   - knowledge of easier and more difficult structures (2 items)
   - accuracy in production of easier and more difficult structures (2 items)
3. Vocabulary (2 items)
4. Fluency (1 item)
5. Interaction skills (1 item)

As presented above, the participants evaluated their pronunciation of various aspects, i.e. segments, suprasegmentals, and pronunciation at word level, estimated on the basis of a few examples (*determine, foreign, Edinburgh, draught, infamous*). While some of the words were more advanced, others belonged to vocabulary items frequently mispronounced by Poles (Sobkowiak, 1996). In the case of grammar, the students assessed their level of knowledge of simple and more complex grammatical structures, and how correctly they believed they could use them in speech. The items enquiring about vocabulary asked about the respondents' repertoire of active words at intermediate and upper-intermediate level. Finally, there was 1 item addressing the self-perceived level of fluency in speech, followed by a statement on interactive abilities. To eliminate the risk of the statement being misunderstood by the respondents, a brief explanation of what interactive skills are was provided in brackets, i.e. '*the ability to initiate and keep up a conversation*'.

5.3.2 The Measure of WTC in the FL Classroom

Despite the fact that a well-validated scale diagnosing the level of WTC in a FL classroom context was published by MacIntyre et al. (2001), for the purpose of this study a different tool to measure this construct was applied. There are two main reasons why such a decision was made. First of all, the battery written by MacIntyre and associates treats students' willingness to communicate in a broad sense, referring in it not only to speaking skills, but also to writing, reading and listening. In the case of this study, whose main aim was to determine the importance of learners' self-evaluation in relation to readiness/eagerness to speak in the TL, the author considered including other skills in the scale irrelevant. Secondly, although most of the items of the standardized battery proposed by MacIntyre et al. (2001) address WTC in the FL classroom, there are a few statements that seem to refer to real-life situations. Since one of the objectives of this research was to compare the importance of FL self-assessment in the case of WTC in the classroom and in real-life situations, a need to clearly differentiate between these two settings emerged, which required applying two separate instruments to diagnose WTC in the FL classroom and WTC outside the FL classroom.

The Measure of WTC in the FL Classroom (MWTC-FLC) had the form of a 12-item self-report questionnaire based on a 6-point Likert scale. The respondents specified the extent to which they were eager/willing to take part in various speaking tasks performed during a FL language course, by choosing a digit from 1 to 6, where 1 stood for '*very reluctant*', while 6 for '*very willing*'. Thus, the higher the participants scored, the more willing to communicate they were perceived to be.

The instrument suggested by the author of this paper was inspired by a scale proposed by McCroskey (1992). Despite the fact that the original instrument was designed to observe WTC in typical L1 speaking contexts and situations, it was a good basis for working on the form of the MWTC-FLC. One of the ideas borrowed from McCroskey was that of considering two criteria when designing the items of the questionnaire, i.e. (1) the degree of acquaintance with the interlocutor and

(2) number of interlocutors/listeners involved in the speaking task/type of activity. Thus, when the first category is concerned, 4 items addressed speaking tasks performed with unknown students, 4 with acquaintances, and 4 with friends. To avoid the danger of not understanding the difference between a friend and acquaintance, an explanation of how the two differ was provided both in the instructions of the test and orally. When it comes to the second category, items referring to oral communicative tasks performed in 4 various grouping sizes and arrangements were formulated, which by nature are linked to particular types of speaking activity. More specifically, the items addressed the following typical classroom speaking tasks, such as: delivering a prepared presentation to large groups (20 people), discussions/debates with approximately 10 people, explaining the rules of one's favourite game to 5 speakers, and a conversation (convincing the interlocutor) in a dyad. All of these group sizes/types of tasks appeared 3 times in the battery, each time in reference to (an) interlocutor(s) known and liked to a various extent. Here are a few examples of items of the MWTC-FLC translated into English:

- Taking part in a discussion with approximately 10 friends.
- Explaining the rules of my favourite game to approximately 5 student acquaintances.
- Convincing one student I have never met before to purchase a particular item.
- Presenting a prepared talk to approximately 20 student acquaintances.

The battery applied for the first time in an earlier study (Baran-Łucarz, 2014) revealed an acceptable internal reliability level (Cronbach alpha = .91) and high 2.5-week test-retest reliability (.89).

5.3.3 The Measure of WTC Outside the FL Classroom

The tool designed to diagnose WTC outside the FL classroom (MWTC-OFLC) consisted of 12 items addressing real-life situations in which FL learners could get involved in conversations in English. Taking into consideration the fact that WTC refers to the readiness to communicate when one is a free to do so (MacIntyre et al., 1998; McCroskey & Baer, 1985), the items in the questionnaire did not refer to a FL setting, in which one is usually forced to speak in the target language so as to function in the FL country. Instead, the battery entailed 12 statements referring to potential situations in the respondents' home country, with opportunities to initiate or join in a conversation in the TL. It is important to add that this time the items referring to particular communicative situations had two versions—one involved speaking to English native speakers, and the other involved conversations with other non-native speakers of English. Additionally, the statements were repeated in reference to a different number of people involved in the conversations. Here are a few examples of statements that the respondents were asked to agree or disagree with to a various extent on a 6-point Likert scale, where 6 meant '*strongly agree*' and 1—'*strongly disagree*'.

- I would be willing/eager to make a free tour of my city with a few (3–5) native speakers of English.
- If I was introduced to a non-native speaker of English, I would be glad to have the opportunity to talk to him/her.
- When having a conversation with a native speaker of English, I would most probably be looking for an opportunity to finish it as quickly as possible.

The instrument used earlier with a group of 152 students showed a satisfactory level of internal consistency (.88) and test-retest reliability (.85).

5.4 Procedure

All the tests were printed on one piece of paper to eliminate the risk of some of its parts getting lost or being unsigned by the participants. The subjects could remain anonymous. However, to be able to collect qualitative information from chosen subjects and to make it possible to carry out further observations later on during the students' education at the Department of English Studies, they were asked to sign the tests either with their nickname or date of birth.

The questionnaires were distributed by the phonetics teacher (the author of this paper) during one of the classes of phonetics. The learners were informed about the data being needed for scientific purposes and assured about the answers provided by them being confidential. The questionnaires were filled out in silence, with each student focusing on his/her own copy. The students could take as much time as they needed. Usually, they completed the questionnaires in approximately 20 min.

Finally, after having compiled the collected data and computed the final scores achieved by individuals on both tests, an attempt was made to encourage those participants who achieved the lowest scores on the measures of L2 WTC in and outside the FL classroom to answer two open questions concerning their FL WTL. This was done by informing students during one of the phonetics classes about an email that was going to be sent to their group email addresses, asking them to provide anonymous answers to two questions, if their nicknames appeared on the list. While the questions were written in the students' mother tongue, the answers could be provided by the students either in L1 or English.

5.5 Study Findings

5.5.1 Presentation and Discussion of Quantitative Data

The collection of data was followed by their quantitative analysis. First, descriptive statistics for the outcomes on the three measures, i.e. FLSAM, MWTC-FLC and MWTC-OFLC, were calculated. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics achieved for results on FLSAM.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics for results of the FL self-assessment measure

		Mean	Median	Low–high	SD
Pron. (max = 28)	Total	19.61	19.5	10–23	3.29
	Gr 1	20.70	20.0	16–27	2.69
	Gr 2	18.80	19.5	10–28	3.49
Gram. (max = 28)	Total	20.53	21.0	8–21	3.80
	Gr 1	22.17	22.0	14–28	2.90
	Gr 2	19.36	20.0	8–21	3.90
Voc. (max = 14)	Total	9.58	9.0	5–14	1.72
	Gr 1	9.93	10.0	7–13	1.14
	Gr 2	9.34	9.0	5–12	1.88
Fluency (max = 7)	Total	4.87	5.0	2–7	.93
	Gr 1	4.93	5.0	7–14	.70
	Gr 2	4.83	5.0	2–6	1.07
Int. skills (max = 7)	Total	4.64	5.0	1–7	1.29
	Gr 1	4.69	5.0	1–7	1.41
	Gr 2	4.62	5.0	1–7	1.30

Total—all the participants (n = 70); Gr 1—day students (n = 31); Gr 2—extramural students (n = 39)

The mean, median and standard deviations achieved for each of the components of the test for all the participants and for each of the groups (Gr 1 and Gr 2) imply that the scores were normally distributed. The analysis of descriptive statistics was complemented with the application of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, whose results confirmed the earlier observations.

The mean scores achieved for each FL aspect reveal that, from the perspective of the students, there still is a lot of space for improvement when their level of proficiency is concerned. It is clearly visible that in the case of each FL aspect/skill, the self-perceptions of the day students are somewhat higher than these of evening students, which corresponds with the actual difference in proficiency level between the two groups. What is also evident is the lower level of homogeneity in the extramural group, which again supports earlier observations. Indeed, in the extramural group some students represented an evidently higher or lower level of FL proficiency than the others.

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics calculated for the outcomes on the measures of L2 WTC in and outside the FL classroom.

As in the case of outcomes on the FL Self-Assessment Measure, the normal distribution assumption was not violated, which the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests proved. Interestingly, although the subjects were majors in English, they did not score high on either of the batteries, which shows that in many cases they are generally not very willing to talk. Moreover, as presupposed, scoring higher in the WTC-OFLC, the participants revealed more eagerness to speak outside the FL classroom than in formal classroom context. The pattern is repeated in both groups

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for results of the MWTC-FLC (measure of WTC in the FL classroom) and MWTC-OFLC (measure of WTC outside the FL classroom)

		Mean	Median	Low–high	SD
WTC-FLC (max = 84)	Total	44.97	45.0	15–71	10.52
	Gr 1	45.41	44.0	23–62	9.77
	Gr 2	44.65	45.0	15–71	11.13
WTC-OFLC (max = 84)	Total	50.16	50.0	19–72	10.70
	Gr 1	49.72	49.0	30–72	8.31
	Gr 2	50.46	50.0	19–72	12.20

Total—all the participants (n = 70); Gr 1—day students (n = 31); Gr 2—extramural students (n = 39)

(Gr 1 and Gr 2), with the difference between the setting of WTC being more evident in the case of the lower proficiency level students.

Finally, after verifying the remaining assumptions underlying Pearson correlation (the scales assumption, independence assumption and linearity assumption), the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients between the scores on the Self-Assessment Measure and on the scales of WTC in and outside the FL classroom were computed. Table 3 presents results of these calculations.

Table 3 Matrix of Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients between WTC-FLC (WTC in the FL classroom), WTC-OFLC (WTC outside the FL classroom), and self-assessment of various FL aspects/skills

		WTC-FLC	WTC-OFLC
Pronunciation	Total	.39**	.32**
	Gr 1	.07	−.09
	Gr 2	.59***	.49**
	Total	.22*	.16
Grammar	Gr 1	.24	.02
	Gr 2	.30*	.07
	Total	.48***	.14
Vocabulary	Gr 1	.32*	.03
	Gr 2	.55***	.19
	Total	.50***	.12
Fluency	Gr 1	.42**	.01
	Gr 2	.53***	.16
	Total	.64***	.44***
Int. skills	Gr 1	.67***	.30*
	Gr 2	.63***	.50**

Levels of significance for one-tailed tests: df Total = 68; df Gr 1 = 29; df Gr 2 = 37; *$p < .05$; **$p < .005$; ***$p < .0005$

Most striking is the number of statistically significant correlation coefficients in the case of WTC in the FL classroom. It appears that self-assessment of the FL aspects measured by the FLSAM is more likely to affect WTC in the FL classroom context than in the natural setting. The strongest relationship was found in the case of integrative skills, which can be linked with the general tendency to be eager to talk and to personality. The integrative skills were one of the two aspects that correlated with WTC also outside the classroom, which implies that not only actual trait-like variables are powerful predictors of WTC, but also self-perceptions about these more enduring learner characteristics. When the classroom setting is concerned, significant moderate to strong relationships appeared between WTC and self-evaluation of pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary. The self-assessment of grammar proved to be evidently less important for L2 WTC, though the correlation coefficients are still statistically significant.

Another tendency can be easily traced when interpreting the data provided in Table 3, i.e. the relationships between L2 WTC and FL self-assessment are the strongest in the lower proficiency group. In other words, the results suggest that students' self-assessment of FL skills more commonly predicts the level of WTC at lower than higher proficiency levels.

It is interesting that beside the integrative skills, the only aspect of accuracy whose self-assessment correlated significantly with L2 WTC outside the FL classroom was pronunciation. This might imply that English majors are particularly sensitive to and concerned about this aspect of their FL proficiency, more than about grammar or vocabulary. It is possible that they believe other non-native speakers and native speakers of English expect them to speak with very good native-like pronunciation, which can be referred to as their ought-to-selves (Dörnyei, 2005) or that this is what they demand from themselves (ideal-self) (Dörnyei, 2005). It must be, however, stressed that the participants of this research are not average FL learners, but English majors, who intend to become translators, interpreters, or FL teachers. If the same results were achieved with non-English majors, it would be advisable not only to raise students' pronunciation level, but also make them aware that L1 accent and pronunciation mistakes do not determine one's communicate level significantly (e.g. Munro & Derwing, 1995).

What requires further explanation is the approach to analyzing the '*I don't know*' answers, which the subjects could choose in the FLSAM, writing in '0 points' next to chosen statements. Since not being able to assess one's ability is not equal to believing in it being at an unacceptable level, before computing the correlation coefficients all the 0 points were changed into a digit that was chosen most frequently by particular students, so that it did not affect the mean scores of the students. After the Pearson correlation had been computed, a more careful analysis of these answers was carried out. The number of times each student provided the '*I don't know*' answer was summed up. It turned out that 62 % of the respondents who on the MWTC-FLC scored 1 SD below the mean and less, and 58 % of those who scored 1 SD below the mean of less on the MWT-OFL chose the '*I don't know*' response at least three times. This outcome may imply that uncertainty about one's ability is also an important inhibitor of L2 WTC.

The further step in the quantitative analysis was examining the strength of relationship between L2 WTC in the FL classroom and outside FL classroom. A correlation of moderate strength was found (r = .48 at $p < .005$; df = 68), which implies that, although the constructs of WTC in the FL and outside the FL classroom are related to each other, they are relatively independent, operationalizing different phenomena.

Finally, let us have a look at whether WTC in the FL classroom varies considerably depending on the type of task/number of speakers, level of acquaintance with the interlocutors, and how WTC in these particular situations is related to students' self-assessment of FL proficiency.

As Table 4 reveals, the speaking exercise in which students are most willing to communicate are conversations carried out in dyads (mean = 12.8). The task, in which learners are the least willing to take part in are presentations given to large groups of students. However, the outcomes of correlation analysis, computed after verifying all the assumptions underlying the Pearson correlation, show that self-assessment of FL proficiency affects WTC more strongly when working in smaller groups of approximately 5 people than in dyads. The task in which self-assessment seems to matter the least is the presentation, which might be caused by the students having been given time to prepare the task in advance.

When the level of familiarity with the interlocutors is concerned, it may be concluded that students speak more eagerly with people they know and like. However, self-perceived FL proficiency level mattered the least in tasks performed with students that are neither friends nor acquaintances. Indeed, it goes without saying that fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated is lower when talking to people we do not know, whom we have no relationship with, and who are indifferent to us.

The bottom part of Table 4 presents analogous data computed for the results obtained on the Measure of WTC outside the classroom. This time the differences between WTC with native speakers and non-native speakers are not meaningful. The same can be said in reference to the relationship between self-assessment of the perceived level and WTC with native and non-native speakers. In both cases the

Table 4 Descriptive statistics and results of Pearson correlation between subcomponents of WTC-FLC (WTC in the FL classroom) and of WTC-OFL (WTC outside the FL classroom)

		Mean	SD	r/FLSA
WTC-FLC	20/Pres.	9.00	3.90	.32**
	10/Disc.	11.00	3.40	.46***
	5/Explan.	12.20	2.60	.54***
	2/convers.	12.80	2.70	.42***
	Friends	16.45	3.40	.50***
	Acquaint.	15.60	3.60	.50***
	Unkn. sts.	12.80	3.90	.44***
WTC-OFLC	NSs	26.00	5.60	.30**
	NNSs	24.00	6.00	.36***

df = 68; **$p < .005$; ***$p < .0005$

relationships were found to be only of low/moderate strength, which lends support to the fact that self-assessment made by learners matters more in classroom setting.

5.5.2 Presentation and Discussion of Qualitative Data

From among 12 participants who scored below 1.5 SD from the mean either on the measure of L2 WTC in the FL classroom or on the battery diagnosing the level of L2 WTC outside the classroom, 8 students provided anonymous answers to the following two questions:

Q1: *What might be the reasons for your reluctance to speak in the FL classroom/ in real life with native or non-native speakers?*
Q2: *What could make you more willing to communicate in this setting?*

When the answers were too general or ambiguous, the respondents were sent another email asking for further explanations. All subjects wrote back, providing more specific clarifications. Here are a few examples of responses (or their translations) sent by the subjects:

Student A
Q1: 'Everybody wants to be perceived by others as a successful speaker. Nobody likes experiencing problems with understanding the interlocutor or being unable to express oneself, because of lacking some key words.'
Q2: 'Gaining more confidence. Breaking the ice between the interlocutor, getting to know him/her better.'

Student B
Q1: 'I don't like speaking in class 'cause I am afraid of making mistakes. I do not consider a FL lesson to be an opportunity to develop my English. The classroom is rather a place where all my mistakes are visible. I know I make mistakes because of stupidity [???]' 'I think I am most inhibited by my pronunciation mistakes. Grammar can be simplified, besides I know it quite well 'cause we had a lot of it at school…Besides, mistakes made in grammar or vocabulary can be easily corrected, while mispronunciations not really.'
Q2: 'The approach is entirely my fault. Maybe if the teacher kept reminding us that mistakes are natural and there's nothing wrong in making them and that that's the only way to learn and get rid of them, my attitude would change.'

Student C
Q1: 'I've always been very shy and even initiating a conversation in L1 is difficult for me, not to mention talking in a FL. I am afraid I could be laughed at or not understood. The mistakes that inhibit me most are in grammar and pronunciation.'
Q2: 'I would have to know English very well.'

Student D
Q1: 'Talking in front of a group is always stressful, irrespective of the language used. But when talking in L2, the stress is even higher because I fear making mistakes. It's less stressing to talk in pairs but even then, instead of focusing on trying to pass across some information, I keep thinking about all the potential mistakes I might be committing, and that surely somebody is assessing me while I am speaking.'

Q2: 'The classes should be more interesting and relaxing, so that I could stop thinking and worrying about being listened to and assessed by others.'

The examples of students' responses show some common features. What can be easily identified as the source of the learners' reluctance to speak during a FL lesson is them treating the FL class as a place where they are constantly assessed by others. Their fear of being negatively evaluated seems to be connected with their low L2 self-confidence, deriving from considering their language skills, i.e. pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar, poor (e.g. '*I would have to know English very well*' *or* '*Gaining more confidence*'). The aspect that is frequently mentioned as the cause of inhibition and anxiety is pronunciation, with which the students believe they have many difficulties. A particularly interesting response is provided by Student B, who perceives his/her pronunciation level as low and is concerned about the mistakes he/she makes in this area. It is further clarified that the inhibition caused by poor pronunciation results from him/her knowing no strategies to control this aspect in speech, compensate for limitations and correct one's mistakes made in this area. Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the fact that the student is not only aware of his/her poor pronunciation, of lacking competence in phonology and pronunciation strategies, but also of the fact that making mistakes is an inevitable part of learning. According to the learner, one of the roles of the teacher is to help students accept this truth.

In other explanations of potential sources of reluctance to join in speaking activities in the classroom respondents blame their personality, lack of inborn outgoingness, and the general tendency to feel uneasy when performing in front of others for their unwillingness to speak in the FL classroom. Finally, the respondents reveal that they would be more eager to speak if the students in the class knew each other better (Student A) and if the class was '*more interesting and relaxing*' (Student D).

Unfortunately, only two participants from among the group of students representing low WTC outside the classroom provided answers to open questions. Their responses were as follows:

Student E

Q1: 'Probably I am reluctant to talk because I am stressed that the native speaker will hear all my mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, word stress, etc., just as Poles easily hear mistakes of non-native speakers of Polish.'

Q2: 'Maybe after a few semesters of studying English and using it frequently, the anxiety would drop and I could be more confident of myself as a FL speaker.'

Student F

Q1: 'It is very challenging to talk to native speakers, definitely more than to non-native speakers. Actually, I should use the term "more terrifying!". Why? Because native speakers listen differently than non-native speakers, paying special attention to the choice of vocabulary. I guess this fact is motivating, but on the other hand, also more frightening. I am generally talkative and outgoing, but when I have to talk to native speakers, I always feel stressed 'cause I want to be 100 % correct. Then usually I "get blocked" and feel uncomfortable, which results in my having more language problems than usual and in simplifying my language.'

Both of the subjects explained that in naturalistic context talking to native speakers is more inhibiting than to non-native speakers. As in the case of the classroom setting, the main source of unwillingness to speak outside the classroom mentioned by these learners is concern about being negatively perceived by the interlocutors. According to the respondents, negative evaluation is more likely to be made by native speakers, who naturally and automatically notice all the language mistakes of the non-native interlocutors. Student E is aware of her imperfections in pronunciation, word stress and grammar when talking in the TL, which makes him/her generally an unconfident L2 speaker. On the other hand, Student F considers him-/herself a rather confident FL user. However, as the learner explains, if the interlocutor is a native speaker, he/she loses confidence and becomes anxious, which 'blocks' his/her language potential, resulting in mistakes and in him/her using simplified language. Additionally, we may speculate that student F is a perfectionist, which supports the idea of personality being a crucial variable of WTC. Finally, it is worth adding that while student E revealed a low level of WTC both in the classroom and in natural setting, Student F was one of the very few subjects who had a higher level of WTC in the FL classroom than in real-life context.

6 Conclusions and Further Research Directions

The study described in this paper sheds more light on the constructs of L2 WTC in and outside the FL classroom, and on the role that students' self-assessment plays in reference to the eagerness to talk in a FL. The quantitative data gathered among Polish students majoring in English showed that self-assessment of grammar, vocabulary and fluency is systematically related to WTC only in classroom environment. The correlation between students' self-perceptions of these aspects and their WTC was insignificant in the case of the naturalistic setting. In other words, the data imply that Polish learners are particularly concerned about accuracy in their speech when they perform during lessons, which often significantly hinders their L2 WTC. Both the quantitative and qualitative data imply that the classroom is perceived by students of English as a scene at which they are constantly assessed rather than as a place in which TL development can take place. Although the qualitative data, by and large, lend support to the numerical outcomes, they also show that some people are particularly uncomfortable when talking to native speakers. This observation seems to stress the importance of self-assessment—although some learners may consider their FL skills to represent a high level, they may believe they are still far from a native speaker's, which makes them lose confidence and lower their willingness to speak to these particular interlocutors.

One of the aspects in the case where self-assessment proved to be significantly correlated with moderate strength with L2 WTC in both settings was pronunciation. This may be due to the fact that the participants had not been provided with sufficient practice in this area during their education, and, at the same time, that they

either consider native-like accent an important part of their ideal L2 selves or believe perfection in this aspect is necessary for students and graduates of philology (ought-to selves). The other aspect which was found to determine L2 WTC both in the classroom and natural environments were interactive skills, which seem to have most trait-like personality characteristics. Consequently, this finding seems to support the importance of enduring propensities of L2 WTC, as proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) in their pyramid model of the construct.

The crucial role of pronunciation self-assessment observed in this study encourages a more thorough look at this FL aspect in relation to L2 WTC. The significance of pronunciation in connection to L2 WTC has already been proven e.g. in studies on pronunciation anxiety and L2 WTC (Baran-Łucarz, 2014). The paper describing this study explains that pronunciation constitutes a crucial element of FL self-image and is a very frequent cause of fear of negative evaluation and low L2 self-confidence, which lends support to the importance of pronunciation self-assessment for WTC.

Since the study presented in this paper involved a peculiar group of FL students, to verify the outcomes it is worth conducting an analogous observation among learners majoring in other fields than FLs. It is possible that with non-FL majors, self-assessment is less predictive of L2 WTC than in the case of FL majors. Furthermore, it would be interesting to replicate the research among FL students of other nationalities. Finally, the results would be more valuable when confronted with data on the subjects' motivation, i.e. their ideal- and ought-to-selves (Dörnyei, 2005).

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