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Sustainable Development of EFL/ESL Learners' Willingness to Communicate: The Effects of Teachers and Teaching Styles

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Abstract: Willingness to communicate in a second or foreign language (L2 WTC) is an important individual difference variable that influences the target language learning process. To cultivate students' communicative competence for sustainable development and help them become active citizens of the global world, language teachers and educators need to understand L2 WTC and find ways to promote it. The present study explores the effects of teachers and teaching styles (TTS) on L2 WTC of Chinese learners of English, through a comparison of a group of 148 students in mainland China and 73 Chinese students abroad. Respondents filled out online questionnaires concerning their attitudes and perceptions of TTS and self-reported L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms. Eight of them also participated in interviews. Results revealed significant differences in TTS between the two groups and a generally low WTC among them. TTS were linked more strongly to L2 WTC in the group in mainland China. The differences are attributed to the discrepancy in social expectations, culture of learning and the opportunity to use English outside the classroom while abroad. This study may provide insights into English language teaching pedagogy from the perspective of English as a pluricentric language.

Keywords: willingness to communicate (WTC); communicative competence; teachers and teaching styles (TTS); culture of learning; English as a pluricentric language

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1. Introduction

The importance of learning a second or foreign language (hereafter referred to as L2) and its contribution to the sustainable development of an individual have been highlighted in some of the articles in the current Special Issue [1,2]. According to Jämsä [3], sustainable development is mainly concerned with the personal life of each individual as they gain experience interacting with others. As we are in a world where globalisation and cultural diversity are on the rise, L2 plays a role in mediating the relationship between individuals, society and the environment in intercultural interactions. The learning, practice and consolidation of communicative skills in L2 is the key to sustainable development [4]. For instance, being able to communicate across cultures with people who speak the L2 (e.g., English) allows access to a variety of academic resources, which helps novice and experienced researchers participate in the ongoing activity of the field. Not surprisingly, learners struggling to master an L2 may prefer to primarily aim at communicative competence [5]. However, it does not straightforwardly result in actual L2 communication, and what learners also need is to be willing to communicate [6]. The inclination towards active participation in communication is referred to as willingness to communicate (WTC).

The growing emphasis on authentic communication in language learning means that boosting L2 WTC has become an important goal of L2 pedagogy worldwide [7,8]. The understanding of, and effort to foster L2 WTC (e.g., implementing specific strategies and

interventions), however, needs to consider its relevant antecedents, such as the context where communication takes place. From an instructional perspective, context can be simply defined by the first language (L1) teachers and/or learners speak and use [9]. For example, in an English as a second language (ESL) setting "the class is usually multilingual and living in the culture of the target language", whereas in the English as a foreign language setting "the class is usually monolingual and living in their own country" [10] (p.5). Significant different patterns are observed in L2 learners' behaviours in the classroom across ESL and EFL contexts [11,12]. The discrepancy in the culture of learning and teaching between these two contexts, and the ever-growing desire of studying abroad among Chinese students, who are typically described as reticent and highly receptive language learners [13–15], may make one wonder: do Chinese students who study abroad become more willing to communicate as a result of the exposure to the ESL style of teaching? Do the ESL teachers and teaching styles (henceforth TTS) exert any effects on Chinese English students' L2 WTC? We argue that answering these questions could shed light on the way teachers make sense of students' L2 WTC.

Indeed, L2 WTC has become a rich area of research in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and applied linguistics over the past two decades. Researchers from different perspectives have sought to identify the predictors of L2 WTC [16–19] (see also [20] for a review). Exploring the influence of teacher variables on students' L2 WTC is one of the research foci. While teacher attitude, involvement, immediacy, support and teaching styles have been found to be likely to have motivational, affective–cognitive and socio-cultural influences on students' L2 WTC (see [15,21–26]), several important questions regarding the effects of these teacher variables (i.e., TTS) on L2 WTC remain to be addressed. Since L2 WTC of Chinese students studying in China and of those studying abroad have been investigated separately rather than being considered simultaneously, the role of learning context in mediating the link between TTS and L2 WTC has received insufficient attention. Moreover, research on this topic has been mainly conducted inside classrooms and little attention has been paid to the influences of TTS on L2 WTC outside classrooms. The present study aims to fill these gaps by making a comparison between the effects of TTS on L2 WTC of Chinese English learners in two settings: China (an EFL setting) and abroad (an ESL setting). We will then try to find out to what extent TTS in each context affects Chinese students' L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms. Finally, we will investigate whether there are any differences in the effects of TTS on L2 WTC between Chinese students studying in China and those studying abroad.

The following section will review the literature that informs the design of the present study. To begin with, perspectives and issues on WTC in L2 research are presented, with a focus on Chinese English learners' L2 WTC. Next, the role of TTS in L2 pedagogy is examined, followed by a discussion of the relationship between L2 WTC and TTS. After that, the research questions, motivated by the literature review above, are formulated.

2. Review of Relevant Literature

2.1. L2 Willingness to Communicate

2.1.1. Conceptualising the Construct of L2 WTC

As an individual difference variable, WTC was originally introduced to refer to a personality-based, trait-like predisposition in L1 communication [27]. MacIntyre et al. [28] transformed this view by describing L2 WTC as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2" (p. 547). They argued for the situational nature of L2 WTC and proposed a pyramid-shaped, multi-layered model of the construct, explaining that one's L2 WTC behaviours are the outcome of both stable and more volatile situational factors. It has been further argued that L2 WTC in a specific moment is a volitional micro-level process and that it rises and falls rapidly as the situation changes [29]. From this perspective, in his qualitative study on the moment-to-moment changes in L2 WTC, Kang [30] has conceptualised it as "an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation,

which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables" (p. 291). Still more recently, several attempts have been made towards a fuller conceptualisation of L2 WTC (see [31]).

MacIntyre et al.'s [28] model has gained wide support among scholars. Focusing on the linear relationships between L2 WTC and the stable factors that underlie it, many studies have shown that L2 WTC is influenced by ideal L2 self [32], beliefs [33], academic emotions [16], personality [34] and motivation [24,35], just to mention a few. Researchers have also started investigating L2 WTC from a micro perspective. Evidence shows that fluctuations in L2 WTC may be due to its interaction with situational factors, such as topic, tasks, interlocutors or classroom climate [25,30,36–38]. Cao and Philp [36] conducted one of the early studies that investigated the dynamic nature of L2 WTC in classrooms and found that familiarity with interlocutors and cultural background are strong antecedents of L2 WTC. Informed by these findings, Zhang et al. [39] suggested that by distinguishing between situation cues (i.e., teacher, class, peers, task and topic) and situation characteristics (i.e., support, cooperation and objectives), the situational, dynamic nature of L2 WTC across contexts can be investigated more systematically. There is an increasing attention to understanding the situational antecedents of L2 WTC with a dynamic system approach (for a recent review, see [40]). More research of this line is needed as it would fill blank patches in the dynamic picture for L2 WTC.

2.1.2. WTC Inside and Outside Classrooms

As the WTC construct and its role in L2 learning has been extensively discussed in the literature, promoting WTC has been recognised as an essential component of L2 instruction [6,7]. Communicative competence alone does not necessarily lead to L2 communication success [41]. However, students with a high level of WTC tend to seek opportunities for L2 use in authentic communication both inside and outside classroom situations and to become independent and autonomous L2 learners [30], which in turn may lead to their sustainable learning of the target language.

L2 learners with high communicative competence who are happy to speak in one place may avoid L2 communication in another [42], meaning that students may not take full advantage of their competence and every opportunity of authentic communication to learn and use an L2. Apart from individual factors on the part of learners themselves, factors on the teacher's part are crucial as well. Students with high L2 WTC in one classroom may demonstrate lower L2 WTC in another with different TTS. Moreover, considering the central role of naturalistic contact in L2 development [43], boosting WTC outside classrooms is just as important as increasing pragmatic competence in the L2 [44]. Variables such as TTS are likely to have an important impact on students' attitudes towards the target language, which affects their L2 WTC outside classrooms. It has been suggested that boosting students' L2 WTC outside the classroom is a great challenge for teachers [45]. Very few studies to our knowledge have examined whether TTS also affects students' L2 WTC outside classrooms, and the extent to which their WTC might reflect a change of TTS.

2.1.3. Chinese English Learners' Low WTC: Mute English

The students in EFL contexts, as in the Chinese EFL setting, appear to be often silent and passive learners with low L2 WTC in class [15], a phenomenon known as "mute English" in China. Wen and Clément [15] viewed it as deeply rooted in the ethical and philosophical system, Confucianism [46], which forms the particular Chinese culture of learning [47].

One aspect of Confucianism affecting Chinese culture of learning is the value of other-directed self, characterised by such notions as "face-protection" and "insider effect" [15] (p. 3). In classrooms, students are very concerned about the judgments of teachers and peers, and are worried about making mistakes, being laughed at, being called show-offs and losing face when speaking up [19,30,48]. Outside classrooms, they maintain a sense of unity and interdependence and would keep a certain psychological distance from the outsiders.

Another product of Confucianism is the deep reverence for education and submission to authority [15]. The teacher is generally seen as the representative of the authority and the source of knowledge [49]; the teacher initiates communication and students speak when they are allowed and given the opportunity [50]. Instead of speaking up, Chinese learners of English tend to spend most of their time listening, reading, reciting and memorising both inside and outside classrooms. It should be noted that some researchers claim that the stereotypical views of Chinese learners are outdated and that they are also active and critical learners [51].

Meanwhile, research concerning L2 classrooms suggests that Chinese learners studying abroad are unwilling to participate orally [52–54]. This may be partly due to the lingering effect of the Confucianism-based culture of learning, which clashes with the norms of the ESL classroom, such as in the UK, the USA and Australia, both academically and socially. Academically, the Chinese culture of learning highly values testing practice and a teacher-centred academic environment, while the culture of learning in many ESL countries emphasises skill development and student-centred teaching. Socially, there are differences in expectations of students' participation and the use of spoken English between them [52]. Dewaele et al. [52] investigated the effect of a pre-sessional French course on the WTC of an international group of students, speculating that the differences in classroom culture could explain the increased anxiety of Asian students and might have lowered their desire to use the target language in interactions at the start of the course—a difference that had disappeared at the end of the pre-sessional course. Meanwhile, research on intercultural adaptation suggests that Chinese English learners may become accustomed to the local culture of learning gradually while studying abroad [13,51,55–58]. However, the question as to what extent the L2 WTC of those studying in China differs from those studying abroad remains to be investigated.

2.2. Teachers and Teaching Styles (TTS)

2.2.1. The Role of Teachers in L2 Pedagogy

Teachers are crucial for creating optimal learning environments [59]. It has been argued that the time spent with teachers is the single most important opportunity students have to internalise educational aspirations [60]. How students perceive their teachers' personality traits, behaviours, involvement and immediacy may exert significant influences on their engagement in classroom activities [15]. Even the way teachers dress has been found to influence students' foreign language anxiety and, by extension, their WTC. In the study by Effiong [61], the majority of Japanese students reported that when their teachers dressed formally, they experienced heightened anxiety (i.e., a female teacher wearing a skirt or a male teacher in a suit with a tie). Since the whole domain of teacher variables is too large to be considered here, we will narrow down our focus on teacher involvement, immediacy and teaching styles as they have been discussed in recent scholarship.

Teacher involvement refers to how teachers deal with their interpersonal relationship with students and "its opposite is rejection and neglect" [62] (p. 573). It takes many forms such as caring about students' needs and emotions, showing concern and dependability, expressing affection and interest or enjoying interactions with students [63]. High teacher involvement allows students to feel more relaxed and secure, and less watched and evaluated [64], thus encouraging their involvement in class activities. Wen and Clément [15] showed that teacher involvement had an impact on learners' L2 WTC.

Richmond [59] defined immediacy as the degree of perceived physical or psychological closeness between people. It partly determines a teacher's power in classrooms. Teacher immediacy is in the form of both verbal and nonverbal behaviours including the teacher's dressing style, gesture, tone of voice, body position and physical distance to students. Teacher immediacy behaviour has been found to influence students' classroom participation in general [65] and maintain their interest and motivation in English language learning in particular [66].

2.2.2. The Role of Teaching Styles in L2 Pedagogy

The attitude teachers hold towards various instructional programs, methods and resources, together with the kinds of students they would like to work with, constitute part of their teaching styles [67]. Teaching styles are reported to contribute greatly to the classroom environment [17,68]; it is an important factor affecting the psychological as well as cognitive condition of students [30]. Whether a class makes students feel comfortable, relaxed and interested is largely determined by how the teacher proceeds. For instance, the frequency of using an L2 in class might not only affect students' judgment of teacher's competence but may also contribute to or hinder creating an "L2 community" for language learning. Rao [69] demonstrated that a poor mismatch between teaching styles and learning styles may result in decreased learning motivation and achievement in the language classroom. With a focus on understanding the importance of learning styles, Ma and Oxford [70] (p. 112) speculated that teachers' teaching styles may "help create smooth, rapid learning or, on the other hand, cause resistance in individual learners".

The idea of adjusting teaching styles could also be understood through the pluricentric view of English. In a multilingual world, English is viewed as a pluricentric language [71] and the boundaries between English as a first language, a second or a foreign language have become a bit blurred [72]. Thus, there have been calls for English language teaching (ELT) professionals to adjust their teaching styles (methods, materials and models) to a pluricentric model, rather than adhere to the monolithic native speaker model, so as to benefit learners in particular social and cultural contexts [73]. This non-prejudiced view of English and adjusted teaching styles could allow learners to identify themselves as legitimate English users rather than as being inferior to first language users, as widely seen in SLA research [74]. It respects learners' unique multilingual repertoire in classrooms and recognises their complex personal identity and social relationships [75]. Learners are likely to become more confident and more likely to engage in communicative activities when they are recognised for what they are by their teachers rather than being measured against an unattainable norm.

2.3. The Effect of TTS on L2 WTC

As stated in previous sections, teachers' involvement, immediacy and teaching styles seem to play significant roles in creating positive classroom environments. In particular, TTS may exert transient or enduring influences on students' L2 WTC in motivational, affective and socio-cultural aspects.

2.3.1. Motivational Influences of TTS on L2 WTC

In the heuristic model of L2 WTC [28], "desire to communicate with a specific person" and "interpersonal motivation" (p. 548) are transient but important predictors of L2 WTC. The motivation to affiliate and control may bring about the desire to communicate. When the interlocutor is an attractive L2 speaker, a strong tendency to speak and converge linguistically with him or her by using the L2 might be expected.

2.3.2. Affective–Cognitive Influences of TTS on L2 WTC

A teacher's teaching style could be viewed as a situational variable influencing the creation of certain psychological conditions: excitement, responsibility and security, in which students' L2 WTC is likely to emerge [30]. Zhong [19] argued that students may communicate more in collaborative situations than in teacher-fronted situations. Mak [68] suggested that language professionals need to respond to students' affective needs by providing a secure and comfortable learning atmosphere, free from the anxiety of speaking and conducive to risk taking in the target language (see also [52,76]).

2.3.3. TTS in Broader Social Context

If motivational and affective–cognitive influences of TTS are viewed as "waves" for their visibility and transience, its socio-cultural influences are "currents" for its long lasting

and less visible influences [77]. MacIntyre et al. [28] defined a social situation as "a composite category describing a social encounter in a particular setting" (p. 553). The participants, as one of the five components of social situations, involve variables including age, gender, social class, power relationship, level of intimacy and the relative L2 proficiency level. These variables, when unmatched between participants, may become social constraints that affect an individual's L2 WTC in a particular communicative setting. Teachers in traditional Chinese education have certain expectations dictated by Chinese society. They are expected to be paragons of socially desirable behaviour for students to emulate [78] and should play the role of experts, mentors or parents who are caring, helpful and willing to pass on their knowledge and life experiences to students [14,47]. These socially dictated roles have put teachers and students in a stratified hierarchical relationship, reflected by the formal classroom atmosphere. Moreover, the traditional Chinese model of teaching is characterised by teachers' transmission of knowledge principally imitatively and repetitively [79], and students' reception, repetition, review, reproduction and mental activities [14]. Despite the increasingly advocated concept of communicative language teaching (CLT) in modern education in China, grammar-based language tests are still predominant in the majority of educational schools [69,80].

The situation is very different for language teachers in most ESL countries. The CLT approach views students as communicators, negotiators, discoverers and contributors of knowledge and information [81], whereas teachers are viewed as co-communicators, needs analysts, organisers, facilitators, negotiators and learners [14]. Given the incongruity of language teaching approaches, Chinese students studying abroad may either adapt to this new teaching style by participating in classroom interactions or stick to their original culture of learning by remaining silent in classes, or they could occupy some in-between position.

3. Research Questions

Our review of the literature has conveyed the importance of WTC for L2 pedagogy, especially its contribution to the sustainable development of L2 learners such as Chinese learners of English studying abroad in ESL environments. It has also highlighted an association between TTS and learners' L2 WTC and the possibility that such association varies according to the learning context. A clearer picture is needed of the association between TTS and learners' L2 WTC. The present study aims to do just that by investigating the WTC of Chinese learners of English and their attitudes towards the roles that teachers play inside and outside the classroom. To this end, the following research questions were developed:

(1) To what extent are Chinese English learners in mainland China and abroad willing to communicate in English inside and outside classrooms?
(2) What are the attitudes of Chinese English learners studying in mainland China (domestic group) and abroad (abroad group) towards their teachers and teaching styles (TTS)?
(3) To what extent do Chinese English learners' attitudes towards TTS affect their L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms in each group?
(4) Are there any differences in the influences of Chinese English learners' attitudes towards TTS on their L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms between the two groups? If any, what are the possible reasons?

4. Method

4.1. Research Design

To address the above research questions, we carried out this study with a mixed-methods research paradigm. The data were mainly collected by means of questionnaires to identify participants' demographic background and their perceived level of L2 WTC along with the attitudes they held towards TTS. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a number of participants. The interview data are a useful supplement to the questionnaire data as they can throw light on the underlying causes of the statistical patterns.

4.2. Participants

A total of 221 (141 males, 80 females) Chinese English learners filled out an online questionnaire, with 148 (102 males, 46 females) studying in China and 73 (39 males, 34 females) studying abroad. Participants in the domestic group were from various parts of China, and those in the abroad group were studying in English-speaking countries such as the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The English proficiency level in both groups was reported to be at an intermediate level on average, with the domestic group (M = 2.37) lower than the intermediate level and the abroad group (M = 3.11) slightly higher (on a 5-point scale). The average age was 21. Most of them had studied or were studying at universities. Eight students (4 males, 4 females) agreed to be interviewed after completing the questionnaires. Table 1 provides a summary of background information on the interviewees (pseudonyms are used for all students).

Table 1. Interviewees' background information.

Participants	Gender	Age	English Proficiency Level (Self-Reported)	Country of Study	Length of English Study (Domestic or Abroad)
Sun	Male	24	Intermediate	China	12 years
Zhao	Male	26	High Intermediate	China	14 years
Chen	Female	23	Low Intermediate	China	11 years
Hao	Female	23	Intermediate	China	11 years
Jia	Female	25	Intermediate	China	13 years
Luo	Female	26	Advanced	USA, UK	3 years
Zhang	Male	24	High Intermediate	UK	2 years
Ding	Male	21	Intermediate	UK	1 year

4.3. Instruments

Chinese English learners' attitudes towards TTS as well as L2 WTC inside/outside classrooms were measured using two similar versions of online questionnaires. All items were written in English to facilitate subsequent analysis. The items of the two questionnaires were the same except for the items on participants' demographic information (e.g., learning experiences) in each group (see Appendix A for the one used in the abroad group). The questionnaire consisted of four parts, and some small changes in formulation were carried out after pilot-testing the instrument with 20 participants. The analysis of the pilot data indicated that both overall internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.700) was satisfactory for the questionnaire items (Parts 2–4). Both groups were instructed to complete the questionnaire.

Part 1: background information. This part concerned participants' personal information, including gender, age, school, country of study, self-reported English proficiency level and length of English study in mainland China or abroad.

Part 2: TTS. This part consisted of 20 items regarding participants' attitudes towards their respective TTS (20 variables, see Table 2), including teachers' nationality, gender, age, dressing style, degree of friendliness and strictness, involvement and immediacy, as well as teaching styles: frequency of using English in class, time spent on language skills and predictability of his/her class. Two variables (namely, gender and nationality) were excluded due to large numbers of missing data. All items were based on those in instruments developed for previous studies on TTS [59,61].

Table 2. Independent *t*-tests comparing TTS scores of students in mainland China and abroad.

	Domestic		Abroad		
	Mean	***SD***	***Mean***	***SD***	***t***
Students' attitudes towards teachers	4.09	0.73	3.77	0.92	2.60 **
Teacher's age	1.42	0.71	1.82	0.89	−3.89 ***
Dressing style	3.07	0.85	2.92	0.79	1.32
Degree of strictness	1.95	1.04	2.47	1.19	−3.18 **
Degree of friendliness	4.45	0.56	4.26	0.83	1.95
Joking	3.2	0.62	3.36	0.63	−1.73
Showing concern	3.71	0.82	3.48	0.80	1.98
Enjoying interaction	3.78	0.85	3.61	0.82	1.39
Gesturing	3.34	0.77	3.21	0.96	1.01
Tone of voice	4.03	0.98	3.44	0.76	4.56 ***
Body position	4.17	0.98	3.45	0.91	5.23 ***
Physical distance	3.29	0.78	3.15	0.61	1.44
Frequency of using English	3.91	0.56	4.79	0.50	−11.45 ***
Time spent on writing (in %)	18.36	11.36	18.01	7.55	0.25
Time spent on reading (in %)	39.39	16.22	19.83	9.69	10.58 ***
Time spent on listening (in %)	23.52	12.41	18.62	8.73	3.19 **
Time spent on speaking (in %)	18.03	13.22	41.29	17.93	−8.96 ***
Predictability	3.45	0.88	3.32	0.80	1.14

Note: *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Part 3: L2 WTC inside classrooms. This eight-item scale was adapted from the WTC scale used by MacIntyre et al. [82] (see Table A1) which was originally used for speaking in French. Each item was accompanied by a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, from "almost never willing" to "almost always willing". Participants were required to indicate the frequency of time they would be willing to speak in English in each classroom situation (Cronbach's alpha = 0.919).

Part 4: L2 WTC outside classrooms. This was an eight-item version of L2 WTC scale adapted from the 20-item L2 WTC scale widely used in previous research [83] (Table A2). The scales related to L2 WTC in each of four common communication contexts and with three types of audiences. Only one filler item was kept (Cronbach's alpha = 0.947). Each item was accompanied by a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, from "almost never willing" to "almost always willing".

The semi-structured follow up interview mainly consisted of questions based on the results from questionnaires. Additional questions were created in light of previous research. During the interview, participants were allowed to speak in Chinese to allow them to freely express their opinions. The interviews were conducted informally (10–15 min each). The interview questions were designed to hear participants' voices and opinions on the influence of TTS on their L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms.

4.4. Data Collection and Analysis

Both questionnaires were posted online. With the help of teachers and peers, the two questionnaires were forwarded to various schools and universities. A total of 221 responses were returned. The questionnaire data were analysed with SPSS 22. Normality of distribution was verified with the Shapiro–Wilk test ($p > 0.05$). Independent and paired sample t-tests were performed to test the significance of differences in means of each variable between the domestic and abroad groups. Pearson correlation analyses were run between TTS and L2 WTC within each group to identify any significant relationships. Finally, stepwise multiple regression analyses were used to find out the best predictors of L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms. The stepwise regression method was used to avoid mutual interference among a large number of predictive variables when entered into the same regression model [84]. Results of stepwise regression were carefully adjusted for the occurrence of model selection in this study. Effect sizes were calculated using r^2, and an

r^2 value of 0.20 (or below) was considered a small effect size, and 0.50 (and above) a large effect size [84].

Semi-structured interviews were also carried out through online services. All of them were recorded and transcribed in Chinese, which amounted to a corpus of more than 11,000 Chinese words. They were later translated into English, coded, classified and used to gain a broader understanding of some of the statistical results.

5. Results

5.1. Findings from the Questionnaire Data

5.1.1. Chinese English Learners' L2 WTC

The results of paired samples' *t*-tests showed that the mean score of L2 WTC inside the classroom was significantly higher than L2 WTC outside the classroom in the domestic group: t (147) = 7.9; $p < 0.01$. However, no such difference existed between L2 WTC inside the classroom and L2 WTC outside the classroom in the abroad group (t (72) = −0.17, $p = 0.87$) (see Figure 1). Moreover, the mean score of L2 WTC outside the classroom in the domestic group is significantly lower than that in the abroad group: t (219) = −4.8; $p < 0.01$. However, there is no significant difference in L2 WTC inside classrooms between the two groups (t (169) = −0.68, $p > 0.05$) (see Figure 1).

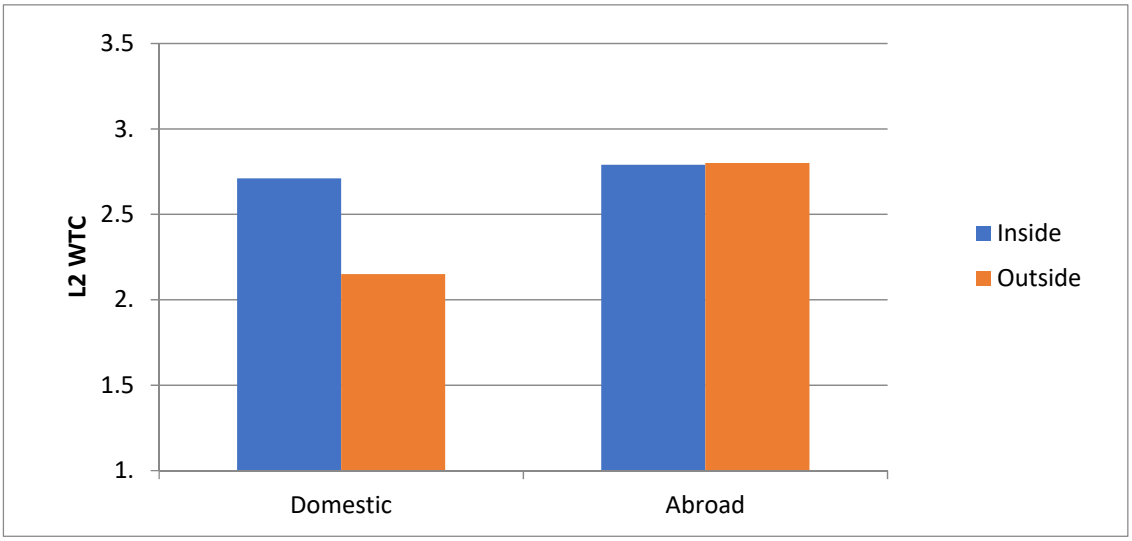

Figure 1. Group comparison of L2 WTC levels inside and outside the classroom.

5.1.2. TTS in Each Group

The results revealed significant differences (all $p < 0.01$) between the two groups (see Table 2 in bold). In particular, students' attitudes towards their teachers in the domestic group were significantly more positive than that in the abroad group. Teachers in the domestic group were perceived to be significantly younger, less strict, using a more animated voice in class and looking more relaxed but using less English in class than those in the abroad group. Furthermore, teachers in the domestic group were perceived to spend significantly more time on teaching reading and listening, but less time on speaking compared to those in the abroad group.

5.1.3. Relationship between TTS and L2 WTC

Pearson product–moment correlation analyses were used to examine the relationship between TTS and L2 WTC. Considering that making multiple comparisons may increase the probability of a type I error [85], the Bonferroni correction was applied to establish a new threshold of significance ($p < 0.003$ and $p < 0.0005$). Our results indicated that in the domestic group, two variables (students' general attitudes towards teachers and teachers' showing concern) were significantly correlated with participants' L2 WTC both inside

and outside classrooms (see Table 3), with small effect sizes (r^2 = 0.113 and r^2 = 0.136, respectively).

Table 3. Corrections between TTS and L2 WTC in each group (Pearson's *r*).

	Domestic		Abroad	
	L2 WTC Inside Classrooms	**L2 WTC Outside Classrooms**	**L2 WTC Inside Classrooms**	**L2 WTC Outside Classrooms**
General attitude towards teachers	0.369 **	0.282 *	0.125	0.045
Age	−0.129	0.003	0.319	0.254
Dressing style	0.343 **	0.190	0.006	0.059
Degree of strictness	0.114	0.054	0.044	0.120
Degree of friendliness	0.240	0.111	0.181	0.052
Joking	−0.034	0.050	0.093	−0.025
Showing concern	0.336 **	0.275*	0.280	0.263
Enjoying interaction	0.267 *	0.198	0.333	0.209
Gesturing	0.248 *	0.045	443 **	0.222
Tone of voice	0.351 *	0.232	0.343	0.118
Body position	0.164	0.081	0.097	−0.006
Physical distance	0.171	0.097	0.240	0.194
Frequency of using English	0.148	0.167	0.094	0.153
Time spent on writing	0.175	0.227	0.179	0.204
Time spent on reading	0.060	−0.030	0.177	0.239
Time spent on listening	−0.014	0.003	0.280	0.381
Time spent on speaking	0.043	0.090	−0.301	−0.385
Predictability of a class	0.059	0.015	−0.003	0.028

Note: ** $p \leq 0.0005$; * $p \leq 0.003$.

Meanwhile, another four variables including teacher's dressing style (r (148) = 0.343; $p < 0.0005$; r^2 = 0.118), enjoying interaction (r (148) = 0.267; $p < 0.003$; r^2 = 0.071), gesturing (r (148) = 0.248; $p < 0.003$; r^2 = 0.061) and tone of voice (r (148) = 0.351; $p < 0.003$; r^2 = 0.123) were significantly correlated only with L2 WTC inside classrooms. The other variables, including joking and teaching style related variables such as time spent on the four language skills, were unconnected with L2 WTC in this group. In the abroad group, gesturing was the only variable significantly positively correlated with L2 WTC inside classrooms (r (73) = 0.443; $p < 0.0005$; r^2 = 0.196).

5.1.4. Significant Predictors of L2 WTC

A stepwise regression was run to identify significant predictors of L2 WTC. No signs of multicollinearity were detected (L2 WTC inside classrooms: VIF (variance inflation factors) = 1.03; L2 WTC outside classrooms: VIF = 1). The stepwise regression analysis indicated that the most powerful predictor of L2 WTC was students' general attitudes towards their English teachers and teachers' dressing style in the domestic group (Table 4). They made a unique contribution to L2 WTC inside classrooms, explaining 20.7% of the variance in it ($p < 0.01$), which represents a small effect size. Of the two variables, students' general attitudes towards their English teachers was the strongest predictor of L2 WTC inside classrooms (β = 0.290), and it was the only predictor (β = 0.282) of L2 WTC outside classrooms in this group, explaining 7% of variance ($p < 0.01$).

As for the abroad group, there was only one variable (gesturing) significantly correlated with L2 WTC inside classrooms and none with L2 WTC outside classrooms, and thus no stepwise regression analysis was used.

Table 4. Stepwise regression coefficients—L2 WTC in the domestic group.

	Model	*B*	*t*	*p*	Adjusted *R* Square
L2 WTC inside classrooms	General attitude towards English teacher	0.321	4.31	0.000	0.207
	Dressing style	0.290	3.89	0.000	
L2 WTC outside classrooms	General attitude towards English teacher	0.282	3.56	0.001	0.073

5.2. Findings from the Interview Data

5.2.1. Relationship between TTS and L2 WTC in Both Groups

Among the variables regarding TTS, only six variables were found to be significantly related to L2 WTC (see Table 5). Interestingly, other variables such as joking were shown to have no significant effect. Joking is a form of humour, which is supposed to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere, and increase students' attentiveness, attention span, confidence in English classrooms and teacher–student solidarity [86], thus fostering students' desire to communicate. Based on participants' responses, a possible explanation for a missing link between joking and L2 WTC is the language choice for joking that may have played down its positive effect on oral participation in English. This can be demonstrated by the following excerpt reported by participants in the domestic group:

Table 5. Relationship between TTS and L2 WTC.

		China Group	Abroad Group
L2 WTC Inside Classrooms	*Correlations*	Students' attitude towards teachers; Dressing style; Showing concern; Enjoying interaction; Gesturing; Tone of voice	Gesturing
	Significant predictors	Students' attitude towards teacher; Dressing style	
L2 WTC Outside classrooms	*Correlations*	Students' attitude towards teacher; Showing concern	
	Significant predictors	Students' attitude towards teacher	

> Zhao (male, 26): My English teacher tells jokes sometimes, but always in Chinese. We will laugh and feel relaxed, but the effect is almost gone immediately when we get back to English.

Some participants in the abroad group expressed their failure of understanding their English teachers' jokes:

> Zhang (male, 24): I didn't realise that the teacher was joking until later. All I could see was my classmates' laughing.

The variable 'predictability of a class' had no effect on L2 WTC. It is possible that predictable English lessons may bore participants and weaken their interest and attention or, on the other hand, it may help them prepare in advance, leading to higher L2 WTC. Unpredictable classes may attract their attention or may cause anxiety and frustration. Chen (domestic group) remained neutral in her judgment:

> Chen (female, 23): She follows the textbook strictly. I could make preparations in advance. We always know what kind of questions she will ask. Most of the time,

> I answer her questions in the way she wants, mostly under obligation, not my free will.

Other variables seemed to have neutralised the effects of TTS, either enhancing or hindering L2 WTC, as reported by interviewees.

5.2.2. Relationship between TTS and L2 WTC in the Domestic Group

Statistical results show that students' attitudes towards teachers strongly predicted L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms in the domestic group. This is very typical among Chinese students who tend to orient their behaviours towards the judgment of the peers and teacher. According to Jia, a positive attitude towards her teacher lowered her anxiety and improved her self-confidence. Another student, Chen, who was attracted by her English teacher, wanted to practice English more to become as charming as the teacher.

> Jia (female, 23): I like her, so I want to speak English more even outside classrooms because I am not afraid of making mistakes in front of her.
>
> Chen (female, 23): My English teacher is amazing. We think it's charming for a person to speak English so fluently, and we want to be like her. So, we would grasp every opportunity to practice our English.

The significant and positive effect of teachers' dressing style in the domestic group could be attributed to an impression of authority and competence. Dressing formally conveys the image of someone competent, organised, prepared and knowledgeable [59]. Teachers in China are expected to be the authority or the expert in a field and education is regarded as a serious undertaking [14] and, not surprisingly, for some participants in the domestic group such as Sun, the feeling of security can be triggered by a formally dressed teacher, which therefore helps stimulate L2 WTC. This view differed from that of the Japanese students in Effiong [61]. However, not all participants who were interviewed agreed. Zhao felt that the teacher's formal dress may increase the teacher–student distance, which in turn impedes them to speak in class. These two students respectively stated:

> Sun (male, 24): It would be better for a teacher to dress formally. It shows that he/she is taking education and students seriously.
>
> Zhao (male, 26): Dressing too formally makes the teacher distant. I was usually too scared to talk in front of her.

5.2.3. Relationship between TTS and L2 WTC in the Abroad Group

The statistical results revealed that participants in the abroad group were almost not affected by TTS in ESL countries (Table 5). This mirrors findings by [87] in the Flemish context in Belgium, where TTS were found to have a much stronger effect on attitudes towards French (which was rarely heard outside the classroom) than on attitudes towards English (which was widely heard and used outside school), thereby neutralising the effect of TTS.

The only variable found to be correlated with their L2 WTC inside the classroom was teachers' gesturing. However, as shown in Table 2, teachers in both groups tended to use gestures frequently, and no significant differences were found between them. Richmond [59] pointed out that in U.S. culture, "we tend to use more gestures when we are excited or giving complex messages", but "use fewer gestures when we are bored or transmitting a simple message" (p. 71). Language teachers usually use gestures to express linguistic points, give directives or direct students to do something together like conductors guiding orchestras or choirs. Gestures may lighten up classrooms by making them more exciting, animated and dynamic environments. As Zhang commented, lively classrooms enable him to feel relaxed, focused and less visible, which strengthens his L2 WTC.

> Zhang (male, 24): My English teacher often makes gestures to us, and we could easily keep pace with her. Otherwise, I would probably feel too formal and would be less likely to communicate.

Ding, on the other hand, felt that teachers' gesturing had no effect at all. For instance, he stated as follows:

> Ding (male, 21): It does not make any difference whether my English teacher makes any gesture in class or not.

6. Discussion

6.1. Chinese English Learners' L2 WTC

The first research question focused on the extent to which Chinese English learners are willing to communicate in English inside and outside the classroom. The results suggest that participants were more willing to speak inside than outside the classroom in the domestic group, which confirms previous studies with Chinese learners of English [15,17,19,52]. The results also showed that the abroad group was significantly more willing to communicate outside classrooms than the domestic group, but no difference existed between the two groups inside classrooms. This makes sense as the abroad students were surrounded by English in their daily interactions beyond the classroom, whereas the students in China, which is an EFL country, had limited opportunities to be exposed to English.

The fact that no significant differences were observed in L2 WTC inside classrooms between groups suggests little influence of the learning environment on Chinese learners' low L2 WTC. This is not in line with previous studies revealing that L2 WTC appears to be context dependent [19,23]. One possible explanation could be the effect of participants' previous learning experiences on their L2 WTC. Their time abroad (ranging from several months to three years) may have been insufficient to override patterns acquired in classrooms in China [5]. In other words, the participants' L2 WTC level still reflected their previous learning experiences (see [88]). This phenomenon has been observed in some previous studies [89], although in others, the lower L2 WTC of Asian participants at the beginning of a pre-sessional course in France had disappeared after a couple of weeks [51]. As posited by Wen and Clément et al. [15] (p. 18), "Confucian cultural values are the dominant force shaping the individual's perception and way of learning, which is manifested in L2 communication". Mutual efforts are needed from both teachers in ESL countries and Chinese students to understand each other's classroom culture, rather than just expecting Chinese students to assimilate to the western ways, as described in the "culture synergy" model [90].

6.2. Differences in the TTS of Both Groups

As for the second research question, there was evidence that attitudes towards TTS were different between the domestic group and the abroad group. Firstly, teachers in ESL countries were perceived to be less immediate and less involved, less positive and less lenient, having a less animated tone of voice and being less relaxed. This result is surprising, given the role of ELT teachers and their approach to language teaching (CLT) [14,79]. However, it might be true in the eyes of Chinese students. A study by Zhao and Bourne [51] investigating Chinese students' intercultural adaptation showed that the incongruity between Chinese students and British teachers made them both go through a miserable period in the beginning: unfamiliarity, frustration, expectation gaps, academic identity conflicts and psychological struggles. Our statistical results also demonstrated that ESL teachers used English more frequently; this finding is expected because most of them have English as a first language and they usually do not speak the languages of their foreign students. Moreover, ESL teachers have been reported to spend less time on reading and writing, but much more on speaking, which is consistent with their approach of language teaching or teaching style [14].

6.3. Relationship between TTS and L2 WTC

We wondered whether different aspects of TTS would affect L2 WTC inside or outside classrooms to varying degrees in each group. This was partially confirmed by the results, as the number of independent variables found to be significantly correlated with

L2 WTC inside or outside classrooms were distinct in each group (Table 5). TTS (or at least teachers) play an important role in students' oral participation, confirming earlier research (see [15,19,25,30,36]).

Some findings were unexpected. For instance, the absence of an effect of teacher's joking on L2 WTC. Joking could be intuitively perceived as a type of teacher immediacy, which can create a relaxed and enjoyable classroom environment, thus boosting L2 WTC and the learning process [91]. However, data from interviews suggested that other factors play a role. The role of humour provided in the L1 on L2 learning merits further research [92]. Moreover, the lack of effect of time spent on language skills, frequency of using English and predictability of a class in both groups suggests that, in terms of L2 WTC, the stark contrast between teaching styles in ESL and EFL classrooms is not as all-embracing as expected. Perhaps culture may serve as a filter; the culture the learners were brought up in, along with their language learning experiences in their home country, may determine their present L2 WTC [39]. Six variables, namely students' attitudes towards teachers, dressing style, showing concern, enjoying interaction, gesturing and tone of voice were found to be significantly and positively linked to L2 WTC inside classrooms in the domestic group. The effect of four variables faded for L2 WTC outside classrooms. Support could be found from the heuristic pyramid model [28], in which situated antecedents such as "desire to communicate with a specific person" (p. 548) may only arouse the short-term desire to communicate with the teacher in classrooms and the effect may evaporate right after the class.

It is worth noting that participants' attitudes towards their teachers seemed to play a crucial role in predicting L2 WTC both inside and outside classrooms in the domestic group. It reflects the value of other-directed self [15]. That is, Chinese students tend to orient their behaviours towards the verdict of others; in this case, the English teacher [93]. Moreover, teachers' dressing style was significant in predicting L2 WTC in the classroom, which is understandable in Chinese culture, as teachers in China are expected to be the authority or the expert in a field and education is regarded as a serious undertaking [14]. Interview data suggested that not all students agreed with this view on the role of dress.

Quite surprisingly, however, in the abroad group, there was only one variable, gesturing, linked to L2 WTC inside classrooms. In a recent study, Peng [94] reported that Chinese EFL learners' WTC was significantly linked with teachers' gestures. Making gestures does contribute to making complex messages [59] or directives clear, which is beneficial for L2 WTC. Other variables, including students' attitudes and teachers' showing concern, mattered much less for L2 WTC. It seems that participants in the abroad group were less dependent on the judgments of others. It is also possible that there is a psychological distance between them and the "outside culture", and that the salience of previous beliefs has faded. This could be linked to acculturation and more intense L2 socialisation and probably also the longer length of residence abroad. Follow up research could investigate if there is any effect of TTS on these students' L2 WTC after they return to China. Furthermore, the effect of TTS on L2 WTC outside classrooms seems to evaporate completely. This seems reasonable, as teachers' input represents only a small part of total English input for students immersed in an English language environment.

A few discrepancies between the two groups were observed, which confirmed that the relationship between TTS and L2 WTC inside and outside classrooms would be different in the two groups. First, there were more variables regarding teacher immediacy and teacher involvement correlated with both inside and outside classrooms L2 WTC in the domestic group. In other words, teachers exerted a stronger influence on the domestic group than the other. This result further suggests that Chinese teachers are expected to take on the role of a mentor or a parent who is caring, sensitive and helpful [14,51]. Secondly, students' attitudes towards teachers were significantly linked to L2 WTC in the domestic group, manifesting the traditional Chinese value of other-directed self. While studying abroad, the impact of this variable diminishes. Immersion and acculturation may lead the students studying abroad to detach themselves from the outside culture and only focus

on the present moment in the classroom, such as teachers' gesturing. However, not all interviewees shared the same perception of their TTS and its effect on L2 WTC.

The important role of learners' attitudes towards TTS in L2 WTC is in line with the pluricentric view of English and it provides implications for ELT practices. To enhance learners' L2 WTC, ELT professionals from both contexts, ESL and EFL, may need to take students' socio-cultural backgrounds into consideration and adapt their teaching styles accordingly. They need to teach English in a way that meets learners' language needs and their local culture of learning [75]. In this way, learners can feel relaxed and confident to engage in communicative activities both inside and outside classrooms.

It should be noted that the term "Chinese students" used in this study does not imply homogeneity and stability. The qualitative data revealed a wide variety of opinions and self-reported behaviours among students. The Chinese cultural values may be deeply rooted, yet they are going through constant changes, as indicated by the increase of L2 WTC among students studying abroad.

The present study has a few limitations. The first one is the relatively small sample size. The second is the cross-sectional nature of the design: for example, a longitudinal comparative study of the effects of TTS on L2 WTC of Chinese students studying at home and abroad could yield rich views on differences in the evolving relationships over an academic year. Another limitation is the use of self-reported data, as respondents may inevitably overestimate or underestimate their attitudes towards or perceptions of TTS and their L2 WTC as a result of self-deception and memory limitations.

7. Conclusions

The present study explored levels of L2 WTC in English both inside and outside classrooms among Chinese students in mainland China and abroad. On average, L2 WTC was relatively low, with the domestic group showing lower L2 WTC outside classrooms than the abroad group. TTS were found to be related to L2 WTC, but the strength of the relationship depended on the context. A combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses showed that although Chinese students in both groups generally had a positive attitude towards their EFL/ESL teachers, the domestic group tended to consider their teachers to be more immediate and involved than the other group. Finally, different independent variables predicted L2 WTC in the domestic group and the abroad group. Surprisingly, "joking" and the teaching styles in two contexts had no clear relation with L2 WTC.

Moving out of the familiar cultural context means stepping out of the comfort zone. Chinese students in ESL schools may find the expected verbal interactions challenging. Likewise, the assumed obedience and the expected great effort might be absent among international students in a Chinese context, resulting in a clash of cultures and expectation gaps. The findings of our study reveal that domestic students' L2 WTC development seems to be more related to teacher factors, which underlines the importance of using appropriate strategies to boost their students' L2 WTC.

To conclude, our study highlights the dynamic nature of L2 WTC, as many more TTS factors predicted L2 WTC in the group of students in mainland China compared to the students abroad. The absence of differences in L2 WTC levels in classrooms in these two contexts could have led to the superficial observation that the processes underlying this were very similar. A closer look revealed that what was bubbling beneath the surface in both settings was in fact very different (cf. [95]). The present study offers fresh support to MacIntyre's [29] view that "the influences of psychological, pedagogical, situational, linguistic, socio-political, and other considerations wax and wane in their impact at the specific moment when one decides to communicate or not" (p. 571).

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Appendix A

Questionnaire

Background Information:

1. Gender: female/male
2. Age:
3. Is your school: a secondary school/ university?
4. Which languages do you know? (chronological order from birth; for your first language, L1, you can give more than one if you grew up in a multilingual family: L1a, L1b), by "knowing" I mean the ability to have at least a basic exchange in the language
   a. L1a_____
   b. L1b_____
   c. L1c_____
   d. L2_____
   e. L3_____
   f. L4_____
   g. L5_____
   h. Other languages (please specify)_____
5. Which English-speaking country are you studying English in?
6. How long have you studied English in an English-speaking country? (In years)
7. Have you ever lived in another English-speaking country? Yes/no
8. If you have ever lived in another English-speaking country, how long?
9. What is your attitude towards English? Very unfavourable, unfavourable, neutral, favourable, very favourable
10. What was the result of your last major English test (in %)?
11. How would you describe your English performance compared to the rest of the group in class? Far below average, below average, average, above average, far above average
12. Would you describe yourself in your English as a: beginner, low intermediate, intermediate, high intermediate, advanced, very advanced

Attitudes towards your English teacher in English-speaking countries:

1. What is your attitude towards your English teacher? (If you have several, focus on one only) (Very unfavourable, unfavourable, neutral, favourable, very favourable)
2. What is your English teacher's gender? (Female/male)
3. What is your English teacher's age? (Twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, sixties or older)
4. How does your English teacher dress? (Very casually, casually, neutral, formally, very formally)

5. How strict is your English teacher? (Not strict at all, a little strict, rather strict, strict, very strict)
6. How friendly is your English teacher? (Very unfriendly, unfriendly, neutral, friendly, very friendly)
7. How often does your English teacher joke in your English class? (Never, rarely, sometimes, regularly, very frequently)
8. How often does your English teacher show concerns about your needs? (Never, rarely, sometimes, regularly, very frequently)
9. How much does your English teacher enjoy interacting with students? (Never, little, somewhat, much, a great deal)
10. How often does your English teacher use her/his hands and arms to gesture while talking to students? (Never, rarely, sometimes, regularly, very frequently)
11. What kind of voice does your English teacher use while talking to students? (Very dull, slightly dull, neutral, slightly animated, very animated)
12. How is your English teacher's body position while talking to students? (Very tense, slightly tense, neutral, slightly relaxed, very relaxed)
13. How far away does your English teacher stand or sit while talking to students? (Very far, slightly far, neutral, slightly close, very close)
14. Is your teacher a native speaker of English? Yes/no/do not know
15. How frequently does your teacher use English in class? (Hardly ever, not very often, sometimes, usually, all the time)
16. How much class time with your teacher is spent on writing? (in %)
17. How much class time with your teacher is spent on reading? (in %)
18. How much class time with your teacher is spent on listening? (in %)
19. How much class time with your teacher is spent on speaking? (in %)
20. How predictable are your English teacher's classes? (Very unpredictable, unpredictable, it varies, predictable, very predictable)

Using English in English classrooms (abroad):

Think about the following situations in English classrooms. Presume you have completely free choice, how likely would you be to start a conversation in English? Tick the most appropriate answer.

Table A1. Using English in English classrooms.

Using English in Class	**Almost Never Willing**	**Sometimes Willing**	**Willing Half of the Time**	**Usually Willing**	**Almost Always Willing**
1. Speaking in a group about your holiday.					
2. Speaking to your teacher about your homework.					
3. You are confused about a task you must complete, how willing are you to ask for instructions/clarification?					
4. Talking to a friend during class.					
5. How willing would you be to be an actor in a play?					
6. Describing the rules of your favourite game.					
7. Playing a game in your English class.					
8. Volunteering an answer/comment					

Using English outside the classrooms (abroad):

Think about the following situations outside the classroom. Presume you have completely free choice, how likely would you be to start a conversation in English? Tick the most appropriate answer.

Table A2. Using English outside the classrooms.

Using English Outside the Class	Almost Never Willing	Sometimes Willing	Willing Half of the Time	Usually Willing	Almost Always Willing
1. Making a presentation in front of a large group.					
2. Talking with an acquaintance while standing in line.					
3. Talking with a salesperson in a store.					
4. Talking in a small group of strangers.					
5. Talking with a friend while standing in line.					
6. Talking with a stranger while standing in line.					
7. Talking in a small group of acquaintances.					
8. Talking in a small group of friends.					

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