

Short Paper

Lost in Translation: Connectedness, Willingness to Communicate and Display of Agency in the Classroom

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Abstract

This explanatory sequential method was used in this study to investigate the non-native English speakers' extent of connectedness and willingness to communicate and their display of agency in the Filipino classroom. The participants of the study were foreign students whose first or second language is not English and who completed surveys on classrooms related to connectedness and willingness to communicate. They are currently enrolled in the University of Baguio during the school year 2019-2020. They have been in the Philippines for at least one year. Furthermore, these students are presently enrolled in at least one major subject of their field of specialization. The respondents often ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.63$) connect and are occasionally ($M = 3.25$; $SD = 0.48$) willing to communicate with their classmates in a classroom setting. Moreover, purposive sampling was used in the selection of the research's participants. Twenty (20) respondents participated in the study. An interview and focus-group discussion were used to determine their styles in displaying agency in the classroom. Outcomes show that foreign students connect with their classmates often. Further, they also occasionally demonstrate a willingness to communicate with their classmates. Thus, the study reflects a low, positive relationship between the foreign students' connectedness and willingness to communicate within the classroom. The non-native English speakers exhibited agency



in the classroom by initiating individual empowerment, participating in communicative interactions, and gaining social recognition.

Keywords – classroom connectedness, willingness to communicate, agency, language

INTRODUCTION

The market for professionals and laborers with English skills has increased over the years because the English language has become that global communication tool across diverse cultures, races, religions, linguistics, ideology, and socio-economic status. The English Language has become a necessity in the world of communication, either reality or virtual, spoken or written (Cameron, 2012). This is the foremost reason, among many, why people especially from non-speaking English countries would like to learn English. Most of them prefer to learn the basics but some pursue higher learning in different fields and go on to enroll in further studies at an English-teaching college or university (Wambaleka & Joseph, 2007).

Many studies are in English which is the most widely spoken language; it opens more opportunities and makes one desirable to employers, gives access to some of the world's best universities; it is the language of some of the world's greatest literature, gives wider access to knowledge and gets one more from popular culture. Students who are proficient in the Academic Language for the different subject areas will be much better equipped to acquire new knowledge through reading and listening and to express this knowledge and their ideas through oral discussions, writing, and test-taking (Willis, 2013).

According to the Bureau of Immigration, around 60,000 foreign students are studying in the Philippines in 2017 statistics. This number has increased today. Foreigner students choose to study in the Philippines because courses are more affordable than in Western and European countries (McGeown, 2012). The Philippines Daily Inquirer (2011) reported that foreign students prefer to study in the Philippines because of the affordable but high-quality education. Region III or Central Luzon has various higher educational institutions that offer quality English programs for international students. It is believed that because the medium of instruction in the Philippines is English. It made the Philippines an English training hub in the Asia Pacific region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several languages research investigated students' connectedness with their classmates. Classroom connectedness, which refers to a cooperative and supportive climate among students is another significant factor contributing to student involvement (Sidelinger & Booth-Butterfield, 2010). Classroom connectedness plays an important role

in the learners' active engagement and participation in the classroom. This means that a conducive learning environment increases students' assertiveness in the English language.

Thus, classroom connectedness, like care, contributes greatly to the promotion of educational achievement among students, particularly young adolescents, and is one of the strongest factors that ensure the decrease in the likelihood of exhibiting negative behavior such as substance abuse, violence, and the risk of unintentional injury among both male and female students (Blum, 2005).

Connected Classroom. Dwyer et al. (2004) defined a connected classroom environment as "student-to-student perceptions of a supportive and cooperative communication environment". This construct focuses on the interactions that take place between peers in the classroom. In the ideal connected classroom, strong bonds exist, allowing students to express themselves freely. In this conceptualization, and other connected classroom research, the responsibility for this connected feeling is placed with the student (e.g., Dwyer et al., 2004). Using this concept has increased the researcher's understanding of the research participants' extent of connectedness in the classroom.

Willingness to Communicate. MacIntyre (1994) developed a path model that postulates that WTC is based on a combination of greater perceived communicative competence and a lower level of communication anxiety (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Willingness to Communicate Model

He then applied this model to L2 communication and showed that anxiety about L2 communication and perceived L2 communicative competence consistently predicted WTC in L2. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) conceptualized WTC in an L2 in a theoretical model. In this model, learner personality, intergroup climate, intergroup attitudes, intergroup motivation, L2 self-confidence, and communicative competence, among other factors, are interrelated in influencing WTC in L2 and L2 use. This model, represented as a layered pyramid, illustrates the complexity of the concept of WTC in L2 (Figure 2). The first three layers (I, II, III) are seen to have situation-specific influences, whereas the latter three (IV, V, VI) are believed to have stable influences on WTC.

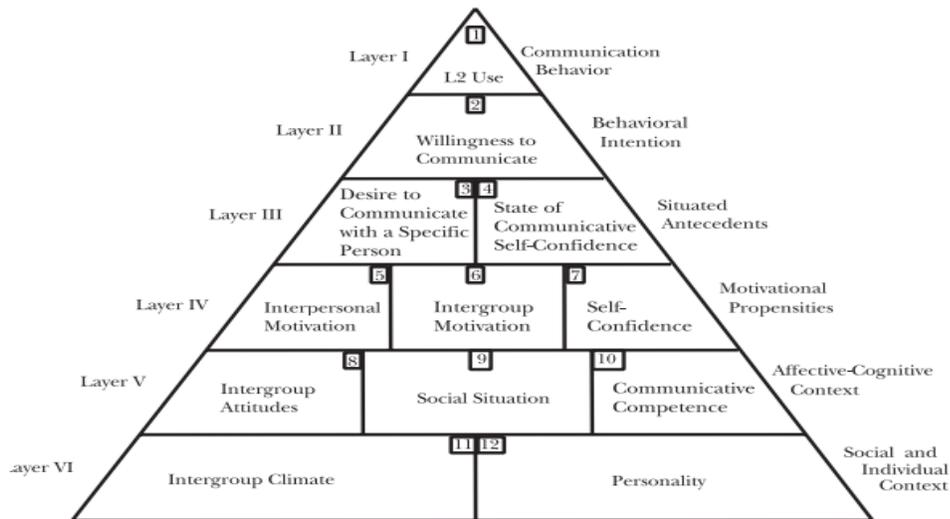


Figure 2. Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing WTC (MacIntyre, Clemént, Dörnyei, Kimberly, & Noels, 1998)

The willingness to communicate theory was used in discussing and explaining the extent of the student's willingness to communicate in the classroom.

The Theory of Agency. Agency theory (also known as the principal-agent or principal agency theory/model) describes the relationship between two or more parties, in which one party, designated as the principal, engages another party, designated as the agent, to perform some task on behalf of the principal. The theory assumes that once principals delegate authority to agents, they often have problems controlling them, because agents' goals often differ from their own and because agents often have better information about their capacity and activities than do principals. The key question of the principal-agent framework is, 'How does one empower an agent to fulfill the needs of the principal, while at the same time constraining the agent from shirking on their responsibilities?'

This research was anchored on three principal variables.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the study design, population and local, data gathering procedure, treatment of data, and the ethical considerations of the research.

Study Design

This research used a mixed method of research. Mixed methods have been referenced as “empirical research that involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data” whereas defined as: "... the type of research in which a

researcher or team of researchers combine elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.”

Quantitative Design. Tabular descriptions and presentations, analysis, and interpretation of the data which were collected from the students were used to determine the extent of foreign students’ connectedness and willingness to communicate in the classroom. This descriptive survey was used in the first phase; quantitative research questions addressed the extent of the foreign students’ connectedness and willingness to communicate in the classroom.

Qualitative Design. This information from this first phase was explored further in a second qualitative phase wherein Qualitative interviews were used to probe the significance of classroom connectedness and willingness to communicate by exploring the aspects of “agency” of the selected key informants. Probing into the establishment of "agencies" aided in understanding and explaining the degree of connectedness and willingness to communicate with foreign students.

Population and Local

The respondents of the study were foreign students’ whose first or second language is not English. They are currently enrolled in the university during the school year 2019-2020. They have been in the Philippines for at least one year. Furthermore, these students are presently enrolled in at least one major subject of their field of specialization. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of the research’s participants. Twenty (20) respondents participated in the study.

The researcher selected qualified participants for the study. Qualified students answered the questionnaire and were also subject to a one-on-one interview. The conduct of the research was communicated and explained to the qualified informants. Before the actual interview, the interviewees were informed of the nature of the investigation and the extent of their involvement. The interviews were scheduled based on their availability and convenience. The interviews were done online via video calling.

Data Gathering Tool and Procedure

A four-part instrument for data collection was utilized for this quantitative–qualitative study. The first part included a robotfoto, a Dutch term relating to the preliminary sketch of the subjects. For purposes of confidentiality, the names of the participants were not disclosed.

The second part was the Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI). To address the concept of a classroom climate that is created through communication

among students. The Connected Classroom Climate Inventory (CCCI), developed by Dwyer et al. (2004), was used to measure the students' connectedness with their classmates. They conceptualized classroom climate as students' perceptions that the students in a particular classroom are supportive and cooperative.

The third part of the data gathering tool will be the Willingness to Talk in Class Scale. The willingness to talk in class scale was used to measure students' likelihood to talk in class. This 19-item 5-point Likert scale was adapted from the Willingness to Communicate scale. The scale involved several situations: Interest in class or topic, motivation, similarity to the rest of the students, similarity to the instructors, and seating arrangement. The current reliability in this study was .96.

For the qualitative part of the research, a semi-structured in-depth interview (Patton, 1990) was used to determine how the respondents display their "agencies" in the classroom. Depth interviews are a method of qualitative data collection used when the phenomenon under study cannot be directly observed or measured. Interviewers asked people for their opinions, views, experiences, recollections, feelings, etc. on the topic, issue, or phenomenon under study. An interview guide developed by the researcher was utilized to probe the students' ways of establishing their "agencies". The probing emphasized on foreign students' lived experiences in asserting themselves in class and creating their respective "agencies".

Codes are an important part of qualitative research because they are analyzed and organized into patterns. Identifying patterns is useful for interpreting data and developing conclusions and recommendations. The data that was obtained from the participants was coded and analyzed. The data analysis consisted of three parts: reduction, description, and finding the essence (Creswell, 2003). All analyses were based on the transcribed interviews and were supported by analyses and corroborations.

RESULTS

This presents the results of the study namely connectedness, willingness to communicate, and display of agency in the classroom.

Foreign Students' Classroom Connectedness

Table 1 shows that the respondents often ($M = 4.08$; $SD = 0.63$) connect with their classmates in a classroom setting. This means that these foreign students regularly interact with their classmates and peers in the classroom.

Table 1. Foreign Students' Classroom Connectedness

Items	M	SD	VI
1. I feel a sense of security in my class.	4.15	0.88	Of
2. I have common ground with my classmates.	4.10	0.79	Of
3. I feel a strong bond with my classmates.	3.90	1.17	Of
4. The students in my class share stories and experiences with one another.	4.20	0.70	Of
5. The students in my class study together.	3.60	1.14	Of
6. The students in my class are friendly with one another.	4.40	0.82	VO
7. The students in my class respect one another.	4.20	0.77	Of
8. I feel included in class discussions in my class.	4.35	0.93	VO
9. The students in my class are courteous with one another.	4.10	0.91	Of
10. The students in my class praise one another.	4.00	0.86	Of
11. The students in my class are concerned about one another.	3.95	0.89	Of
12. The students in my class smile at one another.	4.50	0.83	VO
13. The students in my class engage in small talk with one another.	4.40	0.75	VO
14. The students in my class bring treats for one another.	3.35	1.14	Oc
15. The students in my class are non-judgmental with one another.	3.80	1.01	Of
16. The students in my class laugh with one another.	4.40	0.82	VO
17. The students in my class are supportive of one another.	4.15	0.99	Of
18. The students in my class show interest in what one another is saying.	3.80	1.01	Of
19. The students in my class cooperate.	4.00	0.86	Of
20. The students in my class feel comfortable with one another.	4.20	0.95	Of
Overall Mean	4.08	0.63	Of

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, VI = very often, Of = Often, Oc = occasionally

This connectedness becomes a social linkage that can either facilitate or impede learning. Even though instructor behaviors and teaching methods greatly influence the classroom experience, students are integral to the classroom community and take part in the responsibility for class interactions. Peer interactions are especially important in courses that involve group collaboration. These results reflect that foreign students' connectedness with their classmates suggests that they are comfortable communicating thus, establishing relationships with other students enhancing the perception of a group identity, and appraising student involvement.

According to Sidelinger et al. (2011), student-to-student connectedness is built on a collection of behaviors—including praise, smiling, or sharing personal stories or experiences—that have positive effects on educational processes and outcomes. This means that the foreign students' connectedness with their classmates would result in future academic success.

Students' Willingness to Communicate in the Classroom

Table 2 shows that the respondents are occasionally ($M = 3.25$; $SD = 0.48$) willing to communicate with their classmates in the classroom. This means that the foreign students randomly communicate with their classmates fully.

Table 2. Students' Willingness to Communicate in the Classroom

Items	M	SD	VI
(How often would you choose to talk in class?)			
1. When the class is engaged in an open discussion.	3.65	1.09	Of
2. When I am in a small group in class.	3.75	0.91	Of
3. When the professor asks for a response from the class.	3.65	1.04	Of
4. When the topic is interesting.	4.40	0.68	VO
5. When my views differ from my classmates' views.	3.20	1.15	Oc
6. When I am sitting in the back of the class.	3.05	1.54	Oc
7. When I am prepared for class.	3.85	0.88	Of
8. When everyone is talking.	2.85	1.27	Oc
9. When I am graded on participation.	4.05	0.94	Of
10. When the class is engaged in a heated debate.	3.65	1.04	Of
11. When an assignment is being discussed.	3.25	1.02	Oc
12. When no one else is talking.	2.65	1.14	Oc
13. When I am sitting in the front of the class.	3.10	0.97	Oc
14. When my views differ from the professor's views.	2.45	1.36	R
15. When I am angry about a topic.	2.45	1.23	R
16. When I know the correct answer.	3.55	1.32	Of
17. When I can help clarify the discussion?	3.40	1.05	Oc
18. When I dislike my classmates.	1.60	0.75	N
Overall Mean	3.25	0.48	Oc

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, VI = verbal interpretation, VO = very often, Of = often, Oc = occasionally, R = rarely, N = never

These results show that the participants intermittently talk in their classes. They rarely feel confident to initiate communication and be talkative. The students who participated in this study were thus quite willing to communicate in an interpersonal conversation context. Learning English in a foreign context and communicating in English can be an anxious experience for learners, which is primarily related to their willingness to communicate (WTC) in that language. This could be a factor for foreign students to occasionally communicate with their classmates. Additionally, people differ dramatically from one another in the degree to which they willingly communicate with others. Some people talk very little, they tend to speak only when spoken to and sometimes not even then. According to McCroskey (1992), this variability in talking behavior among people is

alleged to be rooted in a personality variable, which is called "Willingness to Communicate.

DISCUSSION

Foreign Students Display of Agencies as Learners in the Classroom

The foreign students were interviewed and asked a series of questions. The participants' significant statements were coded and themed to cull out how these foreign students display agency in a foreign classroom that primarily uses English as a medium of instruction.

An agency can be construed as a personal trait that operates outside of culture and is designed to liberate the individual from cultural constraints (Ratner, 2000). In social science, agency is defined as the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices (Barker, 2005). Thus, establishing one's agency means acting on one's will independently.

There were three main strategies that the informants used to display agency in the classroom.

Initiating Individual Empowerment. Since foreign students tend to be outsiders in an unknown environment, with a language unknown to them, they survive daily by empowering themselves. According to the respondents, they must find means to be able to manage during the earlier years of their stay in the Philippine classroom.

An informant stated: *"I can't understand- they can speak English, but they are really shy, so when the teacher and the Filipino student when they speak- they use mixing? Tagalog and English. I also must like to listen to them, but it's hard to understand the terms"*. According to the respondent, to be able to cope, she allots time to study at home or seek help from teachers and classmates.

Moreover, informant 1, *"I will study in the nighttime after my class and also, I try to approach the teacher if I don't understand the question in class or the activity, I will approach them and then I ask them for suggestions and advise on how I can improve my skill..."*. These significant statements illustrate that foreign students initiate individual empowerment as they assert themselves in the classroom. When initiating individual empowerment students begin to believe that they can have better control over their lives; they understand their situation and begin to act to improve their lives and their environment. As these foreign students empower themselves in a strange classroom, they learn about themselves and their environment, plan solutions, and act for their own good and the good of the environment. According to Kristiansen (2014) establishing an

agency is the ability to decide and pursue a course of action given the constraints and opportunities captured.

A similar experience on individual empowerment was mentioned by another informant. *“Actually, for me when I came here, what I learn most with self- study. So, whatever the teacher teach in the class, I try to note down or I try to ask my classmates so that I can do the self-study in class because I believe I cannot solve the problem from the teacher, but I can only solve the problem for myself. So, I focus on myself first, so I just don’t stop learning from home”* (informant 3).

Initiating individual empowerment takes many shapes and forms for these foreign students. It includes self-directed work and asking for support and others’ ideas. These strategies are tools for empowerment. Establishing an agency only ‘takes place’ in opposition to structure, agency is defined as a specific set of actions that are counter to the ‘constraints’ imposed by the social context (Coffey and Farrugia, 2014). In this case, constraints could include a lack of skills, difficulty in comprehension, and the new classroom atmosphere.

Participating in Communicative Interactions. Communicative interaction describes the interactive process that exists among members of an organization. Interviewed foreign students mentioned that to be able to assert themselves in the classroom, they manage to communicate with their classmates and their teachers. An informant mentioned: *“Actually my classmates- in my major subjects- we are not really a crowd- only- 19 or 20, so because our group is small, we easily talk together and because my class is English- all my classmates are really good in speaking in English. And they are so friendly to share- when I ask questions and they share the answers, and they teach me if I don’t know. So, my relationship with they is quite close”* (informant 9).

Accordingly, these foreign students also try to connect and be friendly with their classmates by being more casual and intimate with their classmates during informal conversations. *“We sometimes talk about: “How is your daily life because some of my classmates are working, so we also ask our classmates, “How is your work? “Some of them are online teachers and we also talk about their jobs, “how is their teaching, and how they deal with students” and how they set time for studying and working. And other things”* (informant 10). Further, *“The conversations are like: we need to meet and like eat something delicious “And we talk about daily life worries (boyfriend, girlfriend) and also we talk about our teachers, (who’s your favorite teacher? and we have like- vote the best teacher, we like among us”* (informant 4).

Effective communication in any language is a two-way, social process and needs to be exercised consistently; thus, non-English speaking students need to practice the oral language they are learning or have learned. By this means they can gain confidence in using the foreign language orally (Allwright, 1988). In the case of foreign students in a Filipino classroom, they become confident and develop social relations with their

classmates and peers while doing things together. According to various studies on optimistic views of cooperation, "the awareness of doing things together jointly suggests that the experience of subjects engaging in cooperation involves a positive here-and-now experience of the activity being under joint control (Dow, 2018).

Socialization theory focuses on how individuals are socialized as members of a society through interactions with surroundings in a social setting (Hastings, 2007). It entails individuals' acquisition of important social learning properties such as social skills, social understanding, and social behaviors (Maccoby, 2007). Thus, participating in communicative interactions is another display of agency among foreign students in a Filipino classroom.

Gaining Social Recognition. Individuals have always had a deep need to be praised, appreciated, and recognized for their contributions. Learners want to feel valued for their contributions to in-class activities. Foreign students mentioned in their interviews that gaining social recognition during group activities and classroom engagements enriches their establishment of agencies.

"I think when I know how to assert myself in the classroom. The class is more fun because I feel that I'm part of the lecture and I can express myself more and my classmates also are supporting me when I give my opinions or share my thoughts. The teacher also, I can feel that she is impressed whenever I try to speak my mind and participate in the discussion. I think lecture became more fun" (informant 6).

"...Some people are good in one subject; others are good in another. I am good in memorizing the story, so when I study in LibArt subject- there are many stories that we need to memorize, my classmates or my friends- they cannot understand or memorize the stories so I try to have group meetings with them and I try to tell them again the story and give them examples or act the story using body gestures- acting the story so that they can memorize it. I can see that they are happy and appreciate me because even though I'm foreigner, I can help them with something. Also, I feel good about myself because I am good at something, like I can share something to them" (informant 4).

Recent research indicates that engagement not only should be related to the individual but also should be anchored in the social context (Jonasson, 2012). Recognition given by peers and even by mentors encourages these foreign students to assert themselves and display their agency in the classroom. Recognition in the classroom is the acknowledgment of achievements and conveys approval by the person, group, or organization doing the recognition. Hence, working together towards a common goal tends to cause an increased feeling of agency. In the classroom, when asking students to explore issues of personal and social identity, teachers also take an important role in providing safe spaces where students are seen, valued, cared for, and respected. It is also important that students have opportunities to learn from one another's varied experiences and perspectives.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This concludes a low, positive relationship between classroom connectedness and willingness to communicate with foreign students with their classmates in the classroom. The interview data further described students' display of agency by (1) initiating individual empowerment, (2) participating in communicative interactions, and lastly (3) gaining social recognition in the classroom. As a recommendation, regarding the challenge of increasing students' classroom connectedness and consequently students' participation in classroom activities, teachers as well as students are invited to consider the strategies that will stimulate bonding, supportiveness, and cooperation in the classroom. Similarly, to address the challenge of willingness to communicate, a country like the Philippines which makes use of English as a major medium of instruction emphasizes authentic L2 communication thus it is recommended to provide foreign students additional avenues or platforms to practice and apply their use of the English language like special language classes separate from their regular academic subjects.

IMPLICATIONS

In fostering connectedness, willingness to communicate, and display of agency in the classroom, continuous support from peers, teachers, and the school should be given to these students for them feel a sense of home and belongingness even in an overseas country and a foreign classroom, this experience will encourage them to be for independent, confident, and courageous as an agent. The use of the English language like special language classes must separate from their regular academic subjects.

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DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest

All authors declared that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent

All authors declare that this study is covered by the exceptions in the need for informed consent as no personal details are obtained.

Ethics Approval

No ethics approval is necessary for this piece of work as the research does not involve living human participants and does not utilize any personal data.

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Author's Biography

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