



BRIDGING THE SOCIO-COGNITIVE DIVIDE: RETHINKING THE WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE CONCEPT FROM A CONVERSATION-BASED ELF PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Extending earlier research on the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) (e.g., MacIntyre et al., 1998), this paper tests the WTC concept on a secondary school in Singapore where English is used as a lingua franca. In doing so, a layer of complexity is added to the WTC concept. By focusing on classroom interactions involving one immigrant student from China and examining how her WTC changes over the course of a school year, this paper argues that the sociolinguistic notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) can enhance earlier conceptualizations of WTC. Such a theoretical and methodological renovation of WTC is vitally important in order to take into account the lived and learning experiences of immigrant students in an increasingly globalized education landscape.

Keywords: Willingness-to-Communicate, English as a Lingua Franca, language ideology, immigrant learners

Özet: Bu çalışma, İletişim Kurma İstekliliği kavramı ile ilgili daha önce yapılmış olan araştırmaları genişleterek, İletişim Kurma İstekliliği kavramını İngilizce'nin ortak dil olarak kullanıldığı Singapur'da orta dereceli bir okulda test etmektedir. Bu şekilde, İletişim Kurma İstekliliği kavramına yeni bir boyut kazandırılmaktadır. Çin'den göç etmiş bir öğrenciyi de içeren sınıf içi etkileşimlere odaklanarak ve o öğrencinin bir okul senesi boyunca İletişim Kurma İstekliliğinin nasıl değiştiğini inceleyerek, bu çalışma Ortak Dil olarak İngilizce'nin İletişim Kurma İstekliliğinin kavramsallaştırılmasını geliştirebileceğini ileri sürmektedir. İletişim Kurma İstekliliğinin bu şekilde kuramsal ve yöntemsel olarak yenilenmesi giderek globalleşen eğitim düzeninde göçmen öğrencilerin yaşanan ve öğrenilen tecrübelerini göz önüne almak için son derece önemlidir.

Anahtar sözcükler: İletişim Kurma İstekliliği, Ortak Dil olarak İngilizce, dil ideolojisi, göçmen öğrenciler

1. Introduction

Theory in second language acquisition (SLA) research, as R. Ellis (2010) points out, is market-driven in that theories which cease to have relevance “slip slowly and gently into oblivion” (p. 38). At the same time, the field has witnessed much debate in terms of contradictory calls for theory culling (e.g., Long, 1997) and pluralism (e.g., Lantolf, 1996). In the spirit of the latter, and instead of advancing a ‘big’ and all-encompassing theory, this article focuses on how a widely used SLA construct – Willingness to Communicate (WTC) – can be enhanced when used in conjunction with the sociolinguistic notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). As this article will demonstrate, an updating of WTC is necessary in order to take into account the learning experiences of immigrant students in the age of globalization.

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Over the last two decades, since being imported to SLA from the field of communication by Canadian researchers Clément, MacIntyre and associates (Ortega, 2009), WTC has made inroads into L2 learner anxiety-related research. Described as “a state of readiness to engage in the L2, the culmination of processes that prepare the learner to initiate L2 communication with a specific person at a specific time” by MacIntyre et al. (1998, p. 82), WTC is viewed as a situational variable with both transient and enduring influences. Further, MacIntyre et al. (2001) argued that higher WTC among learners translates into increased opportunities for practice in an L2 and authentic L2 usage, with communicative confidence and L2 attitudes playing pivotal roles in fuelling its occurrence. Hence, WTC is shaped by the frequency and quality of past L2 contact as well as L2 learners’ willingness to seek and engage in future L2 contact.

In this article, WTC is complexified by situating it in a Secondary 3 (Grade 9) classroom in Singapore, where English is used as a lingua franca by immigrant students from China, Indonesia and Vietnam with their Singaporean classmates. By tracing, through the use of microethnographic methods, how the WTC of an individual student from China evolves over the course of a school year, I demonstrate that a theoretical collaboration between the constructs of WTC and ELF is both timely and necessary as it takes into account the learning experiences of immigrant students in the age of globalization. I end by discussing the research and pedagogical implications of working with immigrant learners in a lingua franca context.

2. WTC and Its Significance

Kang (2005) highlights three ways in which WTC can contribute to learning a second language. First, L2 learners with a high WTC are more likely to use their L2 in authentic communication and language learning. This, in turn, allows them to function as autonomous learners. He adds that learners can extend their learning opportunities by becoming more involved in learning activities both inside and outside classrooms.

Not surprisingly, the relevance and significance of WTC to SLA research prompted MacIntyre et al. (1998) to suggest that it be the primary goal of language instruction. Crucially, the strong interest in this construct has resulted in a body of research investigating the various factors which are seen to be predictive of WTC. These factors include attitude (e.g., Yashima, 2002; Yashima et al., 2004), communication anxiety (Baker & MacIntyre, 2000; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Yashima, 2002), motivation (MacIntyre et al., 2001; MacIntyre & Charos, 1996), and social support (MacIntyre et al., 2001). Increasingly, some of the research on WTC has sought to situate this construct within a contemporary globalized context. Yashima (2002), for example, showed that WTC of the Japanese university EFL students with whom she worked was directly related to the variable ‘international posture’, which she defined as an “interest in foreign or international affairs, willingness to go overseas to stay or work, readiness to interact with intercultural partner, and ... openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures, among others” (p. 57). Overall, the usefulness of WTC has prompted R. Ellis (2008) to describe it as a promising construct.

However, as useful as the insights gleaned from WTC research have been in illuminating the links between these factors and language proficiency, WTC in its current form is not without its limitations. One key limitation is its overreliance on self-report questionnaires. MacIntyre and his colleagues are aware of the limitations of using self-report questionnaires. MacIntyre et al. (2001), for example, conceded their lack of reliability in examining WTC as reflected in their admission: “thinking about communicating in the L2 is different from actually doing it” (p. 377). With the notable exception of Cao and Philp (2006), Imai (2011), and Sert (2013), who examined classroom conversations, WTC research needs to go beyond investigating learners’ thoughts about communicating in the L2 to examining how these learners actually communicate in the L2. This need to examine actual communication has become more pressing in the wake of the dynamic turn in SLA as seen in the growing recent interest in complex systems perspectives (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; N. Ellis, 2008) which have begun to influence the wider field of SLA. Within pragmatics, for example, Taguchi (2011) framed pragmatic development as a dynamic complex process, while motivation researchers Ushioda and Dörnyei (2012) reconstituted motivation in dynamic terms to better understand the situated complexity of the L2 motivation process. This dynamic shift has also emerged in WTC research, as seen in MacIntyre and Legatto’s (2011) attempt to widen the scope of the WTC concept by studying dynamic changes in affect.

Further, Dörnyei and Kormos (2000) observed that the construct of WTC is “more a measure of whether someone will initiate talk rather than how much the person actually speaks” (p. 286). As explained, this limitation can be overcome by extending our conceptualization of WTC as a state of mind or trait to include a focus on mediated action. In other words, a revised WTC would examine how WTC translates into situated talk. This objective can be realized by enhancing WTC with the notion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which is fast gaining traction within the field of sociolinguistics (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; De Costa, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2011; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2011).

3. A Practice-based Approach to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

ELF taps into the contemporary reality of how English is acquired, given that it is defined by Seidlhofer (2011) as “any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (p. 7). Hence, its value and currency lies in the fact that it reconnects with the social contexts in which English is used. More importantly, ELF nicely complements WTC, whose ultimate goal is “authentic communication between persons of different languages and cultural backgrounds” (MacIntyre et al. 1998, p. 59). In other words, the goal of WTC dovetails with the function of ELF. What is more, ELF fits well with the interdisciplinary nature of WTC, which integrates psychological, linguistic and communicative approaches to L2 research. Introducing a sociolinguistic dimension to WTC through ELF not only reinforces the former construct, but also updates it so that it keeps abreast with the dynamism of an increasingly globalized world. On a broader level, mating WTC with ELF brings with it the opportunity to inject theoretical pluralism into SLA, thereby contributing to an enriched and multidimensional field. This need to bring these two research tracks together has been underscored by Jenkins (2006), who has called for more sociolinguistically-oriented SLA and a research agenda that uses ELF as

a means to address the ideological blind spots prevalent in mainstream SLA. Relatedly, Seidlhofer (2011) has lamented that “the sociolinguistic reality of ELF has not, it would seem, impacted mainstream SLA.” Commenting further on the dearth in ELF-oriented SLA research, she added, “[i]ronically, English is the language most studied in SLA research – but in the guise of ESL/EFL, not ELF” (p. 11).

While earlier ELF work focused on identifying features of ELF talk such as lexicogrammar (e.g., Seidlhofer, 2004) and phonology (e.g., Jenkins, 2000, 2007), more recent work has looked at the underlying processes that give rise to the emerging forms used by interactants in lingua franca communication (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; House, 2012; Jenkins, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2011; Seidlhofer, 2011). This shift in emphasis to illustrate the dynamic ways in which the language is manipulated is compatible with the dynamics perspective (e.g., N. Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 2008) discussed earlier. Admittedly, like WTC, ELF is not without its limitations. ELF critics (e.g., Ferguson, 2008; O’Regan, 2014; Park & Wee, 2011, 2013) have argued against the codification of ELF and have pointed out that apparent attempts to establish ELF as a variety has resulted in the “hypostatization and fetishism of ‘ELF’ as a thing-in-itself” (O’Regan, 2014, p. 7)ⁱ. Consonant with this critique that ELF researchers appear to be attempting to establish ELF as variety, Park and Wee (2013) contend that a scenario of proliferating ELFs (e.g., ‘European ELF’, ‘ASEAN ELF’, ‘South African ELF’) needs to be avoided. As they rightly point out, “the assumption of language as having a pre-existing structure can only run into the traps of having to impose a unity and coherence upon the diverse and dynamic range of practices that speakers engage in through communication” (p. 357).

Other valid criticisms of earlier ELF research include its failure to take into consideration key conceptions such as ideology, discourse, and power (O’Regan, 2014). However, as illustrated elsewhere (e.g., De Costa, 2012) the notions of ideology, discourse and power are not incompatible with ELF. One way to account for ideology, discourse and power is to take a practice-based approach to ELF (De Costa, 2012; Park & Wee, 2011; 2013), which is adopted in this study. For the remainder of this paper, and building on insights from earlier WTC research, I analyze the pragmatic strategies of an ELF speaker from China in an English-medium Singapore secondary school. My objective is not to establish a school variety of ELF. Rather, in focusing on how the focal learner mobilized her linguistic resources to facilitate communication over the course of a school year, I seek to demonstrate that combining the constructs of WTC and ELF can yield useful insights into the language acquisition dynamics surrounding immigrant learners, and thereby address the dearth in ELF-oriented SLA research (Seidlhofer, 2011).

4. The Study

The study reported here focuses on a subset of the data from a larger year-long ethnographic case study which involved five immigrant students from China, Indonesia and Vietnam. This study was based in an all-girl secondary school, which is referred to in this paper as Orchid Girls Secondary School (OGSS)ⁱⁱ. I was personally familiar with the interactional dynamics of the Secondary 3 classroom at OGSS as they developed over the course of the year, having collected 28.5 hours and 65 hours of video-taped and audio-taped data, respectively, from their English, Social Studies, Chemistry, Biology, and

Social Emotional Leadership classes. These classroom interaction data were supplemented by field notes based on in- and out-of-school observations, and artifacts of their work (e.g., written work they produced and progress reports). Collectively, these research tools provided a thick description (Holliday, 2004) of how they used English in order to acquire it. In appreciation of their participation, supplementary English lessons and organized excursions for the immigrant students were conducted by myself. I also made myself available to the teachers if they wanted to consult me on lesson planning. Together, these data collection methods allowed me to gain a better understanding of the sociolinguistic realities of the students in this study, and their willingness to communicate in English.

The data were coded and analyzed using Merriam's (1998) case study analysis and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding strategies. The cases of my focal students were examined individually, with a focus on their willingness to communicate with their Singaporean peers. This was achieved by studying their interactions with peers and examining different turns of talk. Guided by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded approach, I coded and re-coded the data until a 'saturation' point was reached and no further new coding was possible. Subjecting the data to ethnographic microanalysis (Garcez, 2008) also provided me with empirical evidence of my immigrant participants' willingness to communicate as enacted in actual classroom talk.

This paper focuses on Wendy, from China. Wendy came from Chongqing, a city in Southern China. Aged 16 at the time of the study, she had attended a foreign language school in Chongqing before being awarded a Singapore government scholarship. At that school, she had daily English lessons which lasted for 45 minutes. Each morning, for 20 minutes before school began at 7:40am, her entire class would engage in choral reading in English. For English lessons, a grammar-oriented textbook, arranged according to units, was used and these grammar exercises were supplemented by listening tasks. Once a week, an American teacher conducted informal oral lessons, often telling students in her class stories and engaging them in conversation.

Wendy's linguistic profile is presented for two reasons. First, it needs to be acknowledged, as N. Ellis (2006) points out, that the language foundation of ... [a] learner is not a *tabula rasa*, but a *tabula replete*. Indeed, Wendy came to Singapore with a level of English proficiency that enabled her to pass the rigorous scholarship selection process. This process included an interview conducted in English by the recruiting Singapore school officials and paper-based diagnostic English test designed by Singapore's Ministry of Educationⁱⁱⁱ (De Costa, 2010a). Before being mainstreamed into a Secondary 3 class in January 2008, Wendy and her immigrant counterparts attended an intensive seven-week English bridging course provided by external vendors hired by OGSS. Second, given that Wendy's English proficiency, one could argue that she had the necessary linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) to navigate the Singapore school system.

5. Analysis

In keeping with Byrnes's (2012) observation that research on L2 pragmatics has expanded its focus on speech acts to utilizing discourse-analytic approaches, I adopt a

microethnographic discourse analytic approach (Erickson, 2004; Garcez, 2008) to analyze Wendy's advanced pragmatic proficiency while drawing on classroom interaction and interview data. Such an approach, which views "the conduct of talk in local social interaction ... [as being] profoundly influenced by processes that occur beyond the temporal and spatial horizon of the immediate occasion interaction" (Erickson, 2004, p. viii), is relevant given the contemporary globalized context in which this study is situated. After all, I was interested in (a) tracing the linguistic practices of transnational students like Wendy as they moved over space (across countries) and time (over the course of a school year), and (b) examining the interactional dynamics surrounding them in order to be privy to "learning in flight" (Atkinson et al., 2007). Further, underpinning my analysis in this paper is the central belief that Wendy and her interactants are creating their own space as they mobilize their linguistic resources for successful communication.

5. 1. Establishing Wendy's WTC

As noted, Wendy had arrived in Singapore with a reasonable level of English. However, the English she had been accustomed to in China was restricted to grammar exercises in her textbooks, choral reading, and listening tasks. With the notable exception of an American teacher who provided some oral practice once a week, Wendy's learning of English took place in primarily in Chongqing, China, where English was taught as a foreign language. When asked if she felt comfortable speaking in English five months after arriving in Singapore, this is what she had to say.

Excerpt 1

Peter: Do you feel comfortable speaking English?

Wendy: Sometimes, not very comfortable.

Peter: Tell me when do you feel comfortable and when you do not feel comfortable?

Wendy: With my friends more comfortable. Teachers, not so comfortable.

Peter: Can you explain why with your teachers you're not comfortable?

Wendy: I don't know.

(IntW4/24/2008)

At first glance, Wendy's WTC in English appears to be constrained by her comfort level with the language. Understandably, and also noted in Taguchi (2011), she felt more comfortable using English with her peers than her teachers. However, that is not to say that Wendy lacked a desire to learn English, as revealed in the next excerpt.

Excerpt 2

Peter: Why is learning English important to you?

Wendy: Because I can use it later, later in my future. The English is more convenient to work and live in the world.

Peter: Do you think you will stay in Singapore?

Wendy: No.

Peter: Where will you go?

Wendy: Anywhere. I want to travel around the world.

(IntW4/24/2008)

To compensate for shortcomings in earlier ELF research, Park and Wee (2013) argue that future ELF researchers need "to delve into the practices and ideologies of [ELF] speakers"

(p. 358). As the above excerpt reveals, Wendy viewed English as bearing capital in that would allow to “work and live in the world.” Thus, in keeping with the neoliberal reality surrounding her which has resulted in the commodification (Heller, 2011) of English, what becomes evident is Wendy’s investment (Norton, 2000; Pennycook, 2007) in learning English. It can also be surmised that her WTC stems from her wish “to work and live in the world”, a stance which is consistent with the international posture identified by Yashima (2002). Interestingly, Wendy had no plans to live in Singapore, and when prompted about where she would like to travel, she disclosed her plan to visit Australia and the United States.

5. 2. Enacting WTC as Classroom Practice

Having been introduced to Wendy’s WTC-as-intent as displayed in interview data, I explore WTC-as-action, which is depicted in actual classroom talk. Unlike in Chongqing where oral communication played a peripheral role in the school English curriculum, oral communication at OGSS was a cornerstone of the curriculum. The emphasis on oral communication can be attributed to a national oral examination for which OGSS students were being primed. This examination required candidates to read aloud a passage, participate in a picture description activity, and hold a conversation with two examiners. In short, OGSS students received extensive training and practice in developing their repertoire of “literate talk” (Wallace, 2002). In the excerpts which follow, the focus is on oral communication tasks assigned to Wendy during her mainstream and supplementary English lessons.

Excerpt 3 comes from Wendy’s supplementary English class. As scholarship recipients, immigrant students at OGSS met with an outside instructor, Ms. Gopinathan (Ms. G), for three hours (from 2:15-5:15 pm) on Monday after the school day officially ended. In this excerpt, Wendy presented her prepared written response to an assigned topic: *Write about a time when you were forced to do something against your will*. Although given the option to read out loud her response, Wendy hardly looked at her paper during her presentation.

Excerpt 3

Wendy: My story is happened in China when I was a little school kid. One day my teacher told me I was to do the morning reflection in the flag raising ceremony.

Ms. G: Explain what is morning reflections.

Wendy: Er, like you choose a meaningful, thoughtful thing, and then you tell a story or you give some elaboration, and you stand in front of the whole school and speak. So immediately I refused to do this and because ... I’m very, I’m very frightened. So I refused to do it. My form teacher ... said, “you have no choice, you must do it.” I was forced to do it. And during the reflection, at the very beginning, I was still very scared. But as I talked more, I found it was not very hard, so I did it successful, successfully. After that, I realized that I er, I became more confident, and I realized that in real life, we must force ourselves to do certain things. (class applause)

(ELGSupplementaryW 8/25/2008)

One prominent feature of this retrospective narrative is Wendy's remarkable confidence. Even though she felt "afraid", "very frightened", and "very scared", she was able to bolster enough courage to overcome her fear of delivering the morning reflection at her school in Chongqing. This speech event, however, turned out to be a crucial turning point for her: as disclosed by Wendy, "I became more confident, and I realized that in real life, we must force ourselves to do certain things." Baker and MacIntyre (2000) have observed that speakers in a high-use L2 environment have typically developed higher communicative competence and are relatively accustomed to successful experiences. In keeping with their observation, I maintain that this event and other classroom interactions that subsequently took place in the school year at OGSS subsequently reinforced her WTC.

5. 3. Socratic Questioning

While Excerpt 3 marks an episode that took place in August, the next excerpt is representative of a curricular innovation by OGSS – Socratic questioning – which was implemented across two semesters during my year of study. In introducing Socratic questioning into the curriculum, the English department at the school sought to develop the students' literate talk repertoire. As a new pedagogical practice, Socratic questioning was introduced in stages: beginning in the third week in April, Mrs. Tay, Wendy's mainstream English teacher, gradually introduced the principles and practices associated with Socratic questioning. In essence, students in Wendy's class were expected to read assigned materials provided by Mrs. Tay and subsequently participate in discussion groups where peers would ask each other questions based on the readings. Staggered over a four-week period, the students were expected to eventually produce a group Powerpoint presentation and an individual essay. In the first semester, the topic of discussion was *Mobile phones have become an addiction instead of a necessity*.

Excerpt 4

- 1 Elaine: Do you think they're really addicted to it?
- 2 Mili: Ya, when their phone doesn't ring for some time, they think there's something wrong with it because it doesn't ring. Wendy, you have that example of your friend, right?
- 3 Wendy: Ya, in my room (girls laugh). Ya, just now I told them one of my friends, she'll get very happy when she gets SMS. When there's a whole day without SMS, she will complain, "Why the whole day no one send SMS to me." We just say, "Your friends are in school." But she'll say, "Even when they're in school, they'll send SMS^{iv}." So her friends, they're in school, but they're also sending SMS to her. So we can say, er ...
SMS affects our daily life.
- 4 Mili: Yes, affects our daily life.
- 5 Wendy: Ya, when they don't get an SMS, they think something's wrong.
- 6 Mili: So they like thinking about imaginary messages.(girls laugh.)
- 7 Nancy: Just like, just now, students, they use SMS, they can't concentrate on the teacher, and they cannot study.
- 8 Wendy: Sometimes, they rather play with their handphone^v than go out.
- 9 Mili: So when you revise your work, you must turn off the handphone.

10 Wendy: Otherwise, you cannot concentrate.

(SQ1W 5/2/2008)

Earlier, I argued that Wendy's past experience emboldened her to speak. Here, her WTC-as-intent is realized in the form of social action as Wendy and her Singaporean classmates discuss mobile phone addiction. Admittedly, Mili's (Turn 2) invitation to Wendy to elaborate on a personal example triggers Wendy's response (Turn 3). However, one could also argue that the extended turn she produces is an indicator of her WTC. Writing from an ELF perspective, Friedrich (2012) notes:

[I]n lingua franca situations, there is not necessarily a coincidence of linguistic forms but rather an acceptance that people need to communicate within a certain functional realm despite their possible pronunciation, grammatical, vocabulary, cultural and rhetorical differences. (p. 44)

Relatedly, Jenkins (2000) maintains that "intelligibility is dynamically negotiable between speaker and listener" (p.79). This mutual objective is realized in Mili's response at Turn 4 ("SMS affects our daily life"), when she supplies Wendy with a rejoinder as the latter searches for the appropriate words. Wendy's lingering utterance, "So we can say er ..." serves as a preparatory clue that she is in need of assistance. Wendy (Turn 5) immediately echoes Mili's suggestion, an open acknowledgment of her contribution. The conversational rhythm is sustained by Nancy (Turn 7) and Wendy and Mili (Turns 8 through 10), as they keep the discussion on track by reiterating how text messaging on mobile phones can be a major source of distraction. Overall, one cannot ignore the choreographic complexity (Halliday, 2002) as demonstrated by active listenership and collaborative talk in this excerpt. Bound together by the norms that characterize Socratic questioning and using English as a lingua franca, Wendy and her Singaporean peers generate a productive group discussion.

This excerpt also sheds light on Wendy's L2 sociopragmatic knowledge which, according to Kasper (2001), is "the link between action-relevant context factors and communicative action" (p.51). Research on pragmatics in SLA (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Dörnyei, 1998; Lo Castro, 2011; Schauer, 2006) has revealed that English as a second language (ESL) learners in host environments demonstrate higher awareness of pragmatic infelicities than English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in foreign environments. As illustrated, Wendy appears to have developed a high level of L2 sociopragmatic knowledge in relation to Socratic questioning. Also crucial to note is how ELF becomes a pragmatic resource for her classmates and her (Clark, 2013) as they attempt to make meaning out of this Socratic Questioning context. In this respect, these findings in an ELF classroom context corroborate with those in SLA pragmatics, thereby suggesting that common ground might exist between SLA and ELF research. Importantly, the successful communication in which Wendy is engaged becomes not only a visible form of her WTC, but also fuels it, as is seen shortly in the next excerpt.

As N. Ellis (2008) aptly observes, "the dynamics of language are inextricably linked with the dynamics of the sociopolitical world as well" (pp. 242-243). In other words, the classroom is not a bubble and the events that take place within it cannot be divorced from reality. As revealed in Excerpt 2, Wendy's WTC was sparked by a desire to travel and

see the world. However, we see the world intruding upon the classroom in Excerpt 5 to influence Wendy's WTC. On May 12, 2008, a massive earthquake hit Wenchuan county in Sichuan province, in which Wendy's home city, Chongqing, was located. Understandably, this natural disaster was followed closely by the Chinese students in this study (Wendy, Xandy, and Jenny) on sina.com, a popular web-based media portal, as they were concerned about their friends and family. By continuing to maintain ties with friends and family in China, all three students engaged in social practices associated with transnational learners (Lam & Warriner, 2012; Li & Hua, 2013). Excerpt 5 comes from one of the supplementary English lessons I conducted on Wednesday afternoons after school, in appreciation for their participation in my study.

Excerpt 5

- 1 Peter: You know this past week there's been two disasters, the cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and of course more recently, just last weekend, there was the earthquake in Sichuan, China. What have you heard about the cyclone in Myanmar and the earthquake in China?
- 2 Xandy: A lot of death.
- 3 Wendy: A lot of building was destroyed.
- 4 Xandy: Collapsed.
- 5 Peter: Where was this?
- 6 Jenny: Wenchuan, a place in China. In Sichuan province. 7.8 degrees. The earthquake was about 7.8 degrees, and it's very harmful. And it destroyed many buildings, and killed many people.
- 7 Wendy: Especially because before the earthquake there is no alarm. And the timing, when the students were having class. And so a lot of schools in Sichuan, about a thousand schools in Sichuan have been, the building have been pulled down.
- 8 Peter: Okay. So the buildings are not in a good state. What else have you heard about the earthquake in China?
- 9 Xandy: Our Prime Minister has went to Sichuan.
- 10 Jenny: Many cities near Sichuan province, many people in those cities also feel the earthquake, just like our city.
- 11 Xandy: Chongqing.
- 12 Peter: How far is that?
- 13 Jenny: About 100km.
- 14 Wendy: No, more than that. Much more than that.
- 15 Peter: Okay, so even people far away could feel the tremors.
- 16 Xandy: Even people in Beijing.

(ELPSupplementaryW 5/15/2008)

According to Zuengler (1993), a language learner's linguistic self-confidence is boosted as a result of topical expertise, to the point of overriding proficiency limitations that may exist. This becomes evident when we examine how verbally forthcoming Wendy and her Chinese peers are when discussing the Sichuan earthquake: they provide further information about the strength of the earthquake (Turn 6), its level of destruction (Turns 2, 3 and 7), and its physical location (Turn 13). Wendy, in particular, provides details of this tragedy by adding the number of schools that were pulled down (Turn 7) and

correcting Jenny in terms of the distance of Chongqing from the site of the earthquake (Turn 14). Having been introduced to Socratic questioning (Excerpt 4), the residual effects of engaging in a group discussion within the same semester are probably also manifested in the above excerpt and consequently positively influence Wendy's WTC. Also important to note is that the entire exchange is mediated through ELF. As observed by Seidlhofer (2010), "they [ELF speakers] draw on the underlying resources of the language, not just the conventional encodings of English as a native language, and adjust and calibrate their own language use for their interlocutors' benefit." Seidlhofer further notes, "thus they exploit the potential of the language while fully focused on the purpose of talk and on their interlocutors as people rather than on the linguistic code itself" (p. 364). That the linguistic code was not the primary focus is exemplified in Turns 2 through 4 when Xandy and Jenny collectively describe the destruction wrought by the earthquake in China. As a rejoinder to Xandy's comment at Turn 2 ("A lot of death."), Wendy adds "A lot of building was destroyed." (Turn 3). This observation in turn is extended by Xandy, who also adjusts and calibrates her own language use for their mutual benefit by offering the follow up comment, "Collapsed" (Turn 4). Given the collaborative nature of their talk, one could argue that Wendy's WTC was enhanced through and as a result of her use of ELF.

As noted, Socratic questioning was a new curricular initiative that was introduced at OGSS. Given the emphasis placed on it, this initiative re-emerged in the second semester. It is from this semester that Excerpts 6 and 7 come. During the month-long June school vacation, the Secondary 3 students at OGSS were assigned readings based on natural disasters. The cyclone and earthquake which devastated Myanmar and China in May that year prompted the English department to develop their next round of Socratic questioning activities based on the topic of environmental destruction. By then, Wendy and her classmates had completed four weeks of Socratic discussion on mobile phone addiction (Excerpt 4) and had submitted individual essays on the topic. A similar four-week cycle was set up in semester 2, with the students having to discuss this specific question: *Human greed is the sole cause of environmental problems*. By semester 2, the importance of providing evidence to support their arguments, a feature which will become evident shortly, had become ingrained in the students.

Excerpt 6

- 1 Eileen: What are some examples of human greed?
- 2 Wendy: Like they overfish.
- 3 Sheng: Overmining.
- 4 Wendy: And cut down the trees.
- 5 Sheng: Okay, so we have three examples for our viewpoint. Now we need evidence.
- 6 Naomi: Tina, Tina, can I see the blue file?
- 7 Wendy: Some evidence?
- 8 Sheng: Like the floods in Indonesia could be due to carbon dioxide emissions because of deforestation.
- 9 Eileen: And this leads to global warming.
- 10 Sheng: What else ah?

- 11 Naomi: Manufacturing products, like factories.
 12 Wendy: So it's because of the industries?
 13 Sheng: What?
 14 Wendy: Because of the industries. They pollute the air and the water.
 15 Naomi: Industrial waste, causes air pollution, then water pollution.
 16 Wendy: And soil.
 17 Sheng: So land pollution also?
 18 Wendy: Ya. We should add global warming as a reason.
 19 Tina: Can you give one example?
 20 Eileen: Like the Indonesia floods.
 21 Sheng: Now we need to talk about 'disagree'.

(SQ2W 8/7/2008)

As in Excerpt 4, noticeably present are the supportive moves exhibited by Wendy and her Singaporean peers, who establish a conversational synchrony as they build on each other's turns. In keeping with the Socratic questioning protocol of supplying evidence, the girls provide examples of human greed in response to Eileen's request (Turn 1) for examples. Wendy, specifically, provides two examples: overfishing (Turn 2) and the cutting down of trees (Turn 4), points which are subsequently ratified by Sheng (Turn 5). Wendy's WTC, however, does not stop there. She takes on the mantle of questioner herself at Turn 7 when she asks her peers to provide evidence. This request triggers another round of examples: floods in Indonesia (Turn 8) and factory production (Turn 11). However, the rhythmic smoothness is momentarily disrupted at Turn 13 when Sheng asks Wendy to clarify her point (Turn 12) about industries. Writing about ELF speakers, Cogo and Dewey (2012) observe that such speakers "collaboratively achieve communication through accommodative manipulations" (p. 167). Noting that her point required clarification, Wendy (Turn 14) quickly resolves the problem by adding that industries "pollute the air and water." Her reformulation is successful: Naomi (Turn 15) chimes in with further elaboration, "Industrial waste, causes air pollution, then water pollution." That communicative alignment is accomplished is seen through Wendy's further contributions at Turn 16 ("And soil.") and Turn 18 ("Ya. We should add global warming as a reason.").

Together, this series of turns produces a ratcheting effect as the group puts forward a well articulated case of how human greed has destroyed the environment. Byrnes (2012) distinguishes between overt and covert dialogicality of conversations. While the former is demonstrated by backchannels such as "Okay" (Turn 5) and "Ya" (Turn 18) in this excerpt, the latter takes the form of "coherence and cohesion, and of various forms of intertextual references" (p. 512). In Excerpt 6, discussion of global warming (Turns 9 and 18) and the floods in Indonesia (Turns 8 and 20) contributes to the intertextuality and coherence of the discussion as these issues are raised by one speaker and reinforced later by another. Such reinforcement and collaborative moves initiated by Wendy and her peers created a conducive conversational environment which, in turn, both spurred and exemplified Wendy's WTC.

Crucially, Wendy's WTC was carried over into a new context. While her WTC played a pivotal role in her Socratic questioning repertoire development as seen in Excerpts 4

through 6, it also had a spillover effect in assisting her to engage in small talk among her Singaporean classmates. Excerpt 7 represents a continuation of the discussion activity which began in Excerpt 6, the five-day break in between the two excerpts being the result of a long holiday weekend. By the time this excerpt begins, the girls in Wendy's group had finished discussing the topic of human greed and environmental destruction.

Excerpt 7

- 1 Wendy: Do we need to do mind map individually? I'm not sure, so I didn't do.
2 Eileen: No, tomorrow.
3 Wendy: I'm so tired. Yesterday, I ran a lot, round Sentosa^{vi} the whole day.
4 Eileen: Why did you go there?
5 Wendy: Because it was MOE^{vii} workshop. Lots of students wearing red t-shirts.
6 Eileen: What did you do there?
7 Wendy: We're divided into group, and then every group there are certain jobs done, then you have to go out to the nine points. Then we have the bearings of the nine points and an accurate map, and a GPS.
8 Eileen: What's GPS?
9 Wendy: Global positioning the, the, the.
10 Eileen: So you were walking?
11 Wendy: Ya, ya, ya, to the point, and then you answer the questions.
12 Tina: Did you go to the beach?
13 Wendy: Ya, the first station was the beach.
14 Sheng: Then you were really close to us cos we were also there playing volleyball yesterday.

(SQ2W 8/12/2008)

Cogo and Dewey (2012) observe that in a typical language classroom setting students are normally given activities and tasks to focus on, and they may "have little or no agency regarding the subject matter of their talk, or how, and under what circumstances they may engage in communication". They add that students may feel "the pressure of performing to a certain standard ... and [that] their performance may be 'staged' for the teacher rather than [be] spontaneous" (p. 28). Though I do not dispute the fact that to some extent the Socratic questioning discussions seen thus far contain a 'staged' element, as Wendy and her peers were displaying literate identities, I also recognize that students in an ELF classroom context have some agency in determining what is discussed and how they engage in communication.

In Excerpt 7, Wendy and her group digress from their assigned topic of human greed. Except for a logistical inquiry (Turn 1), the conversation slips into everyday phatic talk, with Wendy recounting (Turns 3, 5, and 7) what she had done on Sentosa the day before. The conversation is spontaneous, and Wendy freely supplies details when prompted by Eileen (Turns 4 and 6). Clearly, there is avid interest on Eileen's part – she proceeds to seek clarification on what GPS means and even before Wendy (Turn 9) can provide a complete answer, Eileen moves on to her next question (Turn 10: "So you were walking?"). This productive convergence of interest in what Wendy has to say is buoyed by Tina's query (Turn 12) and Sheng's (Turn 14) volunteered information that she and her friends were also at Sentosa that day. Collectively, this taut discussion and genuine

interest in finding out about Wendy's activities on Sentosa had a positive impact on her WTC, as demonstrated in her energetic contribution to the conversation.

In closing, as Excerpt 7 and the preceding excerpts have illustrated, when adopting a dynamic understanding of WTC, one needs to view ELF speakers like Wendy as agentive beings who mobilize their linguistic resources from various timescales in order to sustain successful communication and to facilitate their language development.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In a recent commentary on the state of SLA, DeKeyser (2010) observed “a bifurcation taking place in the field between on the one hand, ever more tightly controlled psycholinguistic experiments and ever more sophisticated statistical analyses and, on the other hand, qualitative research that uses neither experimental treatments nor inferential statistics” (p. 647). Such a bifurcation, he lamented, places SLA at risk of being absorbed “into psycholinguistics or cognitive psychology, on the one hand, and anthropology or sociology, on the other hand” (p. 647).

6. 1. Bridging the Socio-cognitive Divide

Rather than augmenting the rift described by DeKeyser (2010) and in keeping with recent calls in SLA to reduce the gap between cognitive and social approaches to second language learning and teaching (e.g., Hulstijn, Young & Ortega, in press), this paper attempts to bridge this growing divide by drawing on two constructs, namely, WTC and ELF which are increasingly adopted in cognitive-oriented mainstream SLA and sociolinguistics, respectively. By invoking ELF, which is part of the larger World Englishes paradigm, to enhance our understanding of WTC, I join other World Englishes scholars (e.g., Kachru, 2005; Sridhar, 1994; Zuengler, 1989) who have argued that SLA research and theory can benefit from knowledge of developments in non-native varieties of English settings (see also De Costa, 2010b). Further, in drawing on ELF to problematize and complexify WTC, I am distinctly aware of Dewaele's (2010) critique that “so far, nobody has yet come up with the Grand Unified Theory of Individual Differences [ID]” (p. 626). Thus, instead of attempting to present a unified ID theory, I focused on how shortcomings in current WTC work can be addressed. Specifically, I examined actual conversations in which my focal learner, Wendy, engaged while using English as a lingua franca with her peers and me. This decision to analyze classroom talk was motivated in part by MacIntyre and Legatto's (2011) own recommendation “to study conversation between persons in the L2” (p. 167). Though we might find much to criticize in how the Socratic questioning activities at OGSS were organized, the overall goal of this pedagogical innovation was to develop the students' ability to produce literate talk. As demonstrated in Excerpts 4 through 7, Wendy's WTC translated into active discussion. The collaborative linguistic moves of her classmates who used English as a bridge language fostered her WTC. In that respect, these excerpts illustrated how an ELF perspective can contribute towards developing a dynamic understanding of WTC as enacted in conversation.

Finally, the lingua franca English used by English language learners such as Wendy should be viewed as a pragmatic resource (Clark, 2013) and not as a liability. ELF's

potential to help alter ideologies about language and align SLA with contemporary language use is underscored by Seargeant (2012) who notes:

Studies in second language acquisition (SLA) ... have postulated that prior to fluency, learners produce what Larry Selinker refers to as an interlanguage (Selinker, 1972)... Many of the innovations that ELF research is now showing to be habitual and systematic were previously thought to be features of this intermediate stage in the learning process ... [and] many of these ‘errors’ are being reconceptualized as legitimate features of new varieties or strategies of use, and a more accurate and nuanced picture of the various forms the language takes around the world is emerging. (p. 103)

6. 2. Classroom Applications

While the study took place in a Singapore secondary school, the implications drawn from it can be applied to ELF classrooms all over the world, where English is used “among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option” (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). Confronted with this current reality, teachers, as House (2012) recommends, need to help learners develop “appropriate meta-language with which to describe interactional moves and strategies” (p. 341). This includes making learners aware of basic pragmatic tenets. A similar point is raised by Cogo and Dewey (2012) who highlight the significance of awareness raising in terms of learner accommodation skills, gauging and adjusting to interlocutors’ repertoires, and using strategies to signal non-understanding. While Wendy and her peers exhibited a high degree of pragmatic awareness, such awareness can be enhanced through explicit instruction. On a less explicit level, learners can be tasked with becoming mini ethnographers (House, 2012). The benefit of such a measure is that learners are allowed to exercise their own agency as they gain greater awareness of how spoken language is used.

Within the classroom, teachers should strive to create pedagogical safe houses (Canagarajah, 2004), which enable them to speak as freely as possible. In this study, the Socratic questioning activities, while geared toward exam purposes, also afforded the students relative freedom to discuss assigned topics. Gradual induction into this academic practice of literate talk further facilitated WTC development. A central part of this process is selecting topics on which they possess sound content knowledge (e.g., Excerpt 5), or scaffolding the discussion exercise by giving them the opportunity to read up on topics before discussion (e.g., Excerpts 4 and 6).

Dörnyei (2005) has suggested that developing learners’ WTC is the ultimate goal of instruction. This goal, however, requires a multi-pronged effort, one that is supported by creative pedagogical practices in the classroom and informed by a dynamic and ELF-oriented understanding of WTC. Incorporating an ELF perspective into future WTC research not only takes into account the wider societal norms, classroom norms, and the individual repertoires of the speakers but also recognizes the sociopolitical factors that shape the language learning experiences of immigrants students like Wendy, who increasingly are the norm than the exception.

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ⁱ This indeed is a contentious point, as observed by Seargeant (2012, p. 101) who notes, "ELF focuses on the various strategies that people employ when using the language as a medium of cross-cultural communication. For many people studying this aspect of language use, ELF is best not conceptualized as a 'variety' at all, and instead is understood as "a naturally adaptive linguistic development" (JELF, 2011)."

ⁱⁱ All names in this paper, including those of participants, are pseudonyms.

ⁱⁱⁱ Wendy and her other immigrant scholarship counterparts were part of a national recruitment policy mounted by the Singapore government. Details of this elaborate recruitment process can be found in De Costa (2010a).

^{iv} SMS = text message.

^v handphone = mobile phone.

^{vi} A resort island.

^{vii} MOE=Ministry of Education, Wendy's scholarship sponsor.