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Attributions in High and Low Willingness to Communicate in L2

Abstract: “Attributions” make up a psychological process that allows the individual to interpret and understand the behavior of others. As such, attributions refer to communicative behavior, enabling us to explain and understand the diversity of meanings given to communicative acts. Foreign language learners’ attributions regarding communication in L2 may be shaped by their willingness to communicate (WTC) in that language.

The participants in this study were 609 secondary grammar school students. The results demonstrated that high levels of L2 WTC allow for responsible, internally driven, and stable behavior, firmly grounded in the student’s self-confidence. Learners willing to communicate in L2 demonstrate an unflinching belief in their own abilities, and can take control of their own learning and fully rely on their hard work, irrespective of the hardships of the FL process. They are able to adapt to new challenges and new resources — a fact that makes them valuable assets to modern society. Conversely, students with low L2 WTC levels display serious maladaptive behaviors. They are not only convinced of their inferior abilities, but also reject investing more effort into their language learning processes. In effect, their self-confidence is extremely low, while their lack of volitional control makes them victims of blind fate governed by an FL context that they cannot understand or countenance. Ultimately it is very hard for them to adapt to new challenges, possibly resulting in fewer chances for success in adulthood.

Keywords: attributions, willingness to communicate in L2, communication, locus of control, stability, controllability

The demand for effective foreign language instruction has been growing due to globalization and international migration. For this reason linguists and pedagogues have been trying to facilitate the language learning process by understanding the interplay and influence of various factors that may hinder or, conversely, smooth the progress of language acquisition. One of the factors that has quite recently caught the attention of researchers, both psychologists and linguists, is willingness to communicate (WTC), which focuses on the individual’s readiness to enter into a communicative event. WTC seems especially pertinent regarding communication in a language that has not been fully mastered. Hence, there has been growing interest in willingness to

communicate in L2 (also called a foreign language). There is, as well, another feature of human behavior that has quite recently caught the attention of linguists — “attributions,” or the ways in which people understand and interpret the behavior of others. Understanding this aspect of human behavior may be worthwhile, as the degree of foreign language learners’ willingness to initiate communication may largely be explained by their ways of interpreting the behavior of users of a foreign language, as well as one’s own. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to shed light on the relationship between attributions and willingness to communicate in L2 in the foreign language (FL) classroom through a research study on Polish adolescents learning English. For this purpose, the issues in question are explained from the perspective of foreign language acquisition (FLA), followed by the results of empirical research on WTC carried out in six Polish secondary grammar schools.

1. Attribution theory

Attribution theory proposes one of the ways of explaining how people interpret and understand the behavior of others and certain events. The founder of the psychological theory of attribution, Fritz Heider, was first to focus on the concept of attribution as the perception of other persons as “action centers.” Regarding these action centers Heider states: “They can benefit or harm us intentionally, and we can benefit or harm them. Persons have abilities, wishes and sentiments; they can act purposefully, and can perceive or watch us” (1958: 21). In his view, people are like amateur scientists, trying to understand other people’s behavior by piecing together information until they arrive at a reasonable explanation or cause. His approach is called “naïve” or “commonsense” psychology, because in this view individuals interpret aspects of their environment, together with the underlying causal properties. His theory was subsequently further developed by Weiner (1985), who, among others, proposed that a person’s own perceptions or attributions concerning the reasons why they have succeeded or failed at an activity determine the amount of effort they will put into such activities in the future. Following a three-stage process (observation, determination of behavior, and attributing to causes), future behavior is determined by the casual properties of the behaviors they experience. When the individual’s attributions induce positive affect and high expectations of future success, greater willingness to approach similar achievement tasks in the future can be expected. On the other hand, when attributions produce negative affect and low expectations of future success, avoidance of such tasks is a likely result. All in all, it can be deduced that people can explain their everyday actions by justifications that make their choices intelligible and understandable (Weiner 1980).

Weiner’s achievement attribution proposes that people can explain successes and failures by causal attributions that can be put into three categories: locus of causality, stability and controllability (1979). *Locus of causality* is related to the

expectation of success that can be placed within the individual (internal) or outside of them (external). One's behavior may be due to personal disposition or situational factors. External attribution relates causality to outside agents, whereas, internal attribution — the person himself for any behavior. *Stability* influences the individual's expectations about the future, as it refers to whether or not the cause of the event will change with time. Hence, there are causes that vary over time (unstable) and causes that do not (stable). Finally, *controllability* influences emotional responses to the outcome of the task, differentiating causes that can be volitionally altered (controllable) in comparison to causes that cannot (uncontrollable). Beliefs about control play a focal role in attributional inquiry (Weiner 2008). Hence, control is related to one's persistence in completing a task.

In achievement situations there are four main causes of outcomes that can be classified alongside the above dimensions: ability, effort, task difficulty (context), and luck. As far as *ability* is concerned, it can be regarded a fixed (stable) cause, providing a more stable basis for expected change (Wolf and Savickas 1986), because high ability induces greater expectation of success after a success, while a failure leads to lower expectations of success. Moreover, ability can also be regarded as internal (Weiner 2000), as it resides within the individual, and is also stable and inalterable. It follows that failure resulting from inferior ability (or aptitude) gives rise to perceptions of uncontrollability, as well as of non-responsibility, because lack of effort is not the result of freedom of choice (Weiner 1995). On the other hand, *effort* is considered internal, unstable, and controllable. Trying, therefore, is considered volitional; it is the product of free will because the individual decides how much effort to put into achieving a certain goal. Effort differs from task to task, and the person is fully responsible for the outcome (e.g., Weiner 1986). It can now be seen that ability and effort differ in controllability and stability. In the case of failure controllability induces affective reactions, like anger and sympathy, while failure connected with stability is related to cognitive reactions (expectation of success in future performance) (Struthers et al. 1998).

The remaining causes, task difficulty and luck, are both external and uncontrollable. *Task difficulty (context)* is regarded stable, and allows one to predict future outcomes. It cannot be assigned to the individual because it is placed outside, and assumed to be inferred from the degree of success of other individuals in the task (Parsons et al. 1985). Task difficulty is largely beyond the person's control and may in effect evoke feelings of hopelessness in cases of failure. Similarly, *luck* cannot be controlled, but inferred from a prior pattern of random or variable task outcomes that do not render a reliable point of reference. Nevertheless, attributing outcomes to variable and external causes, such as luck, allows one to hope for good future outcomes (Weiner 2010). Objectively, relying merely on luck excludes any control over task accomplishment, because there is no reason for more effort.

Attribution theory has been used to explain the difference in motivation between high and low achievers. High achievers approach rather than avoid tasks related to

success, because they believe performance is due to ability and effort. High achievers also attribute failure to bad luck or adverse external conditions (e.g., a poor exam). This way failure cannot affect self-esteem, and instead high achievers work on their successes, building pride and confidence. Conversely, low achievers have doubts about their ability and assume success is the effect of luck or other factors that they do not control. Even when they are successful, they cannot feel responsible for the outcome. Hence, the low achiever's pride and confidence cannot be increased.

Attribution theory has been tested in many domains, the educational context being one of them. In this achievement context success and failure are social events that elicit causal explanations, whose aim is to give rewards and assess students (Mateucci and Gosling 2004). The results of empirical research seem to prove links between causal beliefs and academic achievement (e.g., Batool and Akhter 2010; Perry et al. 2008; Sorić and Palekčić 2009). However, there are a few studies in the SLA field that point to encouraging results by confirming links between foreign language achievement and attributions, as in the case of Williams et al. (2004), who investigated secondary students. Williams et al. concluded that among the most important attributions for success and failure were: effort, strategy, ability, task, teacher, interest, and peers. Hsieh (2004) has also confirmed that learners who have a tendency to make more internal, personal, and stable attributions receive higher achievement grades in English language classes than those with more external, unstable, and non-personal attributions. Moreover, Hsieh and Schallert (2008) show that ability attributions are strongly predictive of foreign language achievement on the part of learners, as has also been confirmed by Hashemi and Zabihi (2011) and Kun and Liming (2007). However, there are studies that do not prove a direct causal link between attributions and FL proficiency, for instance Yilmaz (2012). Also, in a study by Bain et al. (2010) the students identified as gifted did not differ from their non-gifted peers in their attributions for ability, effort, teacher impact (context), or chance (luck). In view of these findings, it is quite understandable that, as Peacock maintains, more research is necessary — as “this may help teachers better understand EFL students and intervene to avoid undesirable attributions” (2009: 185).

2. Willingness to communicate in L2

Success in the foreign language classroom is strongly linked to the learner's ability to use the language actively in many communicative situations. For this reason active in-class participation appears to be a primary characteristic of a successful foreign language learner. It follows that initiating communication willingly may be a significant manifestation of foreign language proficiency.

The concept of *willingness to communicate* (WTC) in psychological studies is identified with a stable “predisposition toward approaching or avoiding the initiation

of communication” (McCroskey 1992: 16). More specifically, WTC is associated with constructs related to apprehension or anxiety about communication, as well as to the constructs associated with a behavioral tendency referring to talking frequency, which encompasses the individual’s general personality orientation towards talking (Barraclough et al. 1988: 188), and particularly, denotes “a person’s predispositional preferences with regard to communication” (McCroskey 1992: 20). WTC is also defined as “a personality-based, traitlike predisposition which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers” (McCroskey and Richmond 1982: 134). It follows that the construct pertains to a stable tendency within an individual to initiate or terminate communication (McCroskey 1992), which is one’s readiness to talk, seen as the individual’s general attitude toward initiating communication with other people (McCroskey and Richmond 1987). Aside from its personality-oriented character, the WTC concept is also conceived of as situation-dependent. Situational variables may influence a person’s willingness to communicate at a certain point of time in a given context. (e.g., one’s mood or previous experience with communicating with a specific person or a probable gain or loss signaled by the specific communication act).

It has been proven that willingness to communicate is extremely important for the individual’s effective functioning. People with higher WTC are generally better evaluated in various contexts, such as school or other organizations (Richmond and McCroskey 1989). High WTC is also crucial in developing positive relationships (McCroskey et al. 1995). Obviously, the social and emotional happiness of those with low WTC is greatly reduced (Sallinen-Kuparinen et al. 1991).

In the foreign language classroom the individual’s decision to initiate communication (L2 WTC) is not only influenced by personal predilections towards talking, but also by the situational variables that shape the communicative event. A factor that is of paramount importance is the change of language, whose active use is a necessary requirement in learning (Skehan 1989). This “dramatic” transformation of the communication setting (MacIntyre et al. 1998: 546) induces the necessity to rely on one’s unskilled language abilities, posing a considerable threat to the learner’s “self-perception of genuineness in presenting themselves to others” (Horwitz 1999: xii). In this way participants in a communicative act in L2, in the classroom and outside it, present varying levels of L2 communicative competence, which may further hinder effective communication and jeopardize one’s inclination to initiate verbal exchanges.

For this reason L2 WTC is viewed as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre et al. 1998: 547). It is seen as a state of eagerness, influenced by anxiety, a perception of one’s L2 competence, and a desire to communicate with another person (MacIntyre 2004). Thanks to a significant degree of WTC the student is able to commence a task in a foreign language, give attention to it, and carry on with it until it is completed (MacIntyre and Doucette 2010). As a product of

the action control system, the task of WTC is to adjust preplanned actions to sudden changes. This means that L2 learners initiating communication need to be sure that they are able to send an understandable message to which they are later capable of responding.

The early model of L2 WTC included two variables affecting its levels: perceived communication competence and communication anxiety (MacIntyre 1994). Greater WTC was connected with high levels of perceived competence combined with low levels of anxiety. The interplay of these two factors induced more frequent communication in L2. Nevertheless, the model was reshaped in order to cater to WTC's situational profile, affected not only by the linguistic, communicative, social, and psychological characteristics of the individual, but also the group to which he or she belongs, and the L2 community. The heuristic (pyramid) model of L2 WTC now includes proximal and distal causes that impact the individual's variation in WTC (MacIntyre et al. 1998). The enduring (stable) influences are included in three bottom layers, situational stimuli in three upper ones. The bottom levels accommodate the social and individual context (intergroup climate and stable personality characteristics), the affective-cognitive context (social situation, intergroup attitudes, and communicative competence), and motivational propensities (interpersonal motivation, intergroup motivation, and L2 self-confidence). The upper layers contain the situated antecedents: the most proximal determinants of WTC. These are the desire to communicate with a specific person, state communicative self-confidence, and behavioral intention, i.e., the actual phenomenon of willingness to communicate (the final psychological step in preparing for L2 communication). At the top of the pyramid sits communication behavior, i.e., actual L2 use.

The empirical research on L2 WTC undoubtedly shows that greater willingness to communicate is associated with higher self-perceived competence in both the mother tongue (Barracough et al. 1988) and the foreign language (e.g., Yashima 2002). Students who have a higher degree of L2 WTC are found to use the language more frequently in the classroom (e.g., Cetinkaya 2005; Clément et al. 2003; Hashimoto 2002; Simic and Tanaka 2008). Also, in the context of the Polish secondary grammar school students with higher WTC display greater foreign language achievement and higher self-perceived skill assessment (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) (Piechurska-Kuciel 2011). Moreover, L2 WTC can also be reliably predicted on the basis of final grades in foreign language courses (Piechurska-Kuciel in press).

Unfortunately, empirical research on the relationship between L2 WTC and attributions is practically non-existent. However, it may be interesting to investigate the relationship of these variables due to their direct link to the communicative behavior of foreign language students. As far as attributions are concerned, they constitute a psychological process that allows the individual to interpret and understand the behavior of others. As such, they also refer to communicative

behavior, not only helping to explain it, but also to understand the diversity of meanings that can be given to communicative acts (Manusov and Spitzberg 2008). Thus, the foreign language learner's attributions regarding communication in L2 may be shaped by their willingness to communicate in that language. When a student feels less inclined to initiate communication in a foreign language, they may also be negatively biased towards communication, trying to avoid exposing themselves in the face of the danger created by the language learning situation. Here they may consider their L2 skills to be inadequate in allowing them to communicate freely. Also, they may be convinced that they do not possess any knack for languages or believe that the task of communicating in the foreign language is far too difficult and beyond their control. Moreover, they may rely heavily on luck when completing communicative tasks successfully. Conversely, students who are willing to communicate in L2 may not only have a better opinion of their FL skills, but may also have faith in their own potential. They may be ready to enter into communication in a foreign language while firmly relying on their own abilities, without resorting to luck or task difficulty when explaining their successes and failures. The main aim of this research is therefore to investigate the association of attributions and L2 willingness to communicate. This paper speculates that students with higher L2 WTC levels declare higher levels of ability and effort, and lower levels of context and luck. As a result, it formulates the following hypothesis:

H: Students with high levels of L2 WTC display significant differences in their measurement of attributions (ability, effort, context, and luck) in comparison to their low L2 WTC peers.

3. Method

In order to describe the research carried out for the purpose of this paper, its participants and the instruments used are described, followed by an outline of the study's procedure.

3.1. Participants

In the study there were 609 students from 23 randomly selected classes in the six secondary grammar schools in Opole, southwestern Poland. The sample consisted of 384 girls and 225 boys (mean age: 17.50, range: 16–19, $SD=.53$), all second grade students with three to six hours a week of compulsory English instruction. Their proficiency level was predominantly intermediate, with the average length of their English language experience of almost nine years, with the vast majority (above 90%) learning it for six to 16 years. Apart from English, they also studied another compulsory foreign language: French or German (four to two lessons a week). The participants came from different residential locations, mostly urban

(286 of them from the city of Opole, 122 from neighboring towns), with 213 students from rural regions.

On the basis of the students' level of willingness to communicate in L2 in and out of the classroom (MacIntyre et al. 2001), the sample was divided into quartiles. The lower quartile (called LWTC) comprised 157 students with low levels of willingness to communicate, who obtained less than 132 points on the WTC scale (90 girls and 67 boys). The upper quartile (HWTC) comprised 156 participants characterized by high levels of willingness to communicate in L2, with 189 or more points on the WTC scales (109 girls and 47 boys). The two middle quartiles were excluded from further analysis.

3.2. Instruments

The basic instrument was a questionnaire that included these demographic variables: age, gender (1 — *male*, 2 — *female*), and place of residence (1 — *village: up to 2,500 inhabitants*, 2 — *town: from 2,500 to 50,000 inhabitants*, 3 — *city: over 50,000 inhabitants*).

Also used were two scales called *Willingness to communicate in/out the classroom* (MacIntyre et al. 2001). Each of them included 27 items that measured students' willingness to initiate communication during and outside of class. Eight items measured WTC in speaking, six in reading, eight in writing, and five in comprehension (listening). Sample items in the scales were: *How often are you willing to speak to your teacher about your homework assignment?* — or — *How often are you willing to read personal letters or notes written to you in which the writer has deliberately used simple words and constructions?* The participants indicated when they would choose to use English on a Likert scale from 1 (*almost never willing*) to 5 (*almost always willing*). The minimum score on each scale was 27, while the maximum was 135. On both scales the scores were, respectively, 54 and 270. The scale's reliability, measured in terms of Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .94$ in the case of in-class language use, and .96 in the case of out-of-class language use.

Three scales for measuring causal attributions assessing students' feelings of control (internal or external) over events in the language classroom were also applied. They were adopted from Causal Attribution Measures by Tremblay and Gardner (1995). Each of them had three items that were assessed on a Likert scale from 1 (*I totally disagree*) to 7 (*I totally agree*). The maximum number of points was 21, and the minimum 7. The first was the *Effort-Failure* scale, whose aim was to determine if a student ascribed failure in English to lack of effort. Sample items were: *I can overcome the obstacles to learning English if I work hard* — or — *If I receive a poor mark in English it is because I didn't study much*. The scale's reliability was .60. The next scale was *Context-Failure*. Its aim was to measure

the degree to which one ascribes failure in English to context. The sample items were: *When I receive a poor grade in English it is because the teacher failed to make the course interesting* — and — *The reason that my English grades are not higher is because English is a difficult subject*. Its reliability was .62. Finally, the *Luck-Success* scale measured the degree to which one ascribes success in English to luck. The sample items were: *My success in English is due to destiny* — or — *My success in English depends on lucky breaks*. Its reliability was .75.

Students also assessed *length of their English instruction* by stating the number of years they had studied the language in a formal context (private classes, school education, etc.).

Another instrument used in the study was a scale that calculated *self-perceived levels of FL skills* (speaking, listening, writing and reading through an aggregated value of separate assessments of the FL skills on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*unsatisfactory*) to 6 (*excellent*). The minimum number of points on the scale was 4, while the maximum was 24. The scale's reliability was Cronbach's $\alpha=.88$.

The last source of data was final *grades*; or more specifically, the aggregated value of the previous year's grade and the prospective semester and final grades. They were assessed by means of the Likert scale ranging from 1 — *unsatisfactory* to 6 — *excellent*. The scale's reliability was $\alpha=.87$.

3.3. Procedure

The data collection procedure took place in February and March of 2010. In each class, the students were asked to fill in the questionnaire. The time designated for the activity was 15 to 45 minutes. The participants were asked to give sincere answers without taking excessive time to think. A short statement introducing a new set of items in an unobtrusive manner preceded each part of the questionnaire.

The data were computed by means of the statistical program STATISTICA, with the main operations being descriptive statistics (means and SD), correlations, and an inferential statistics operation: a t-test for independent samples. It is used to compare the performance of two groups (students with low and high levels of WTC) on the scale measuring their attributions (ability operationalized as final grades and self assessment of the four skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading, as well as context, effort, and luck).

4. Results

First the means, SD, and correlations for all the variables were calculated, then correlations of all the variables for the primary cohort were carried out (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Means, SD, and correlations for the sample (N = 609)

	M	SD	WTC	Final grades	Self- -asses- -ment	Effort	Context	Luck
WTC	158.75	44.07	—	.25***	.41***	.12***	-.11*	-.26***
Final grades	11.46	2.28	—	—	.45***	.12**	-.26***	-.23***
Self- -asses- -ment	15.88	3.48	—	—	—	.18***	-.29***	-.33***
Effort	14.74	4.24	—	—	—	—	-.21***	-.18***
Context	10.48	3.74	—	—	—	—	—	.38***
Luck	8.71	4.69	—	—	—	—	—	—

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

The results show that all the correlations were statistically significant, proving that there is a meaningful relationship between L2 WTC and all the forms of attributions: ability, effort, task difficulty (context), and luck. In the next step a t-test for independent samples was performed in order to compare levels of attributions in students with high and low levels of L2 WTC (see Table 2).

Table 2. Means, SD, and between-group comparison of students with low and high levels of WTC

Variable	LWTC (N = 157)		HWTC (N = 156)		t
	M	SD	M	SD	
Effort-Failure	14.31	5.48	15.57	3.98	-2.13*
Context-Failure	10.95	4.11	9.71	3.87	2.53*
Luck-Success	10.46	5.87	7.22	4.10	5.16***
Final grades	3.59	.75	4.02	.67	-4.85***
Self-assessment	3.52	.92	4.46	.68	-9.01***

* p<.05, *** p<.001.

The comparative analyses confirmed the significant differences in the measurement of all the types of attributions (ability operationalized as self-assessment of the four skills and final grades, as well as effort, context, and luck) in students with high and low WTC in L2 levels. They appear specially marked in measurements of FL abilities (final grades and self-assessment of the four skills) and Luck-Success.

5. Discussion

The primary aim of this study was to corroborate the hypothesis according to which *students with high levels of L2 WTC display significant differences in their measurement of attributions (ability, effort, context and luck) in comparison to their low L2 WTC counterparts*. Indeed, such a result was found, notably contributing to the discussion on the interplay of attributions and WTC.

As proposed by the research in the field, WTC is viewed as a state of readiness to initiate communication, influenced by language anxiety, a perception of one's L2 competence, and a desire to communicate with another person. Obviously, from this point of view the FL user is completely free to decide whether they want to engage in communication. However, in the context of formal education such choices may not constitute regular occasions, because learners have to communicate, no matter how willing they are, due to educational demands. This observation can be confirmed by the finding that the mean result on both WTC scales in all the study participants was only 158.75, which demonstrates that on average FL secondary grammar school students are not very keen on commencing verbal exchanges in a foreign language. The finding proves that the strong emphasis put on the development of communicative skills is connected with the unavoidable threat connected with using a language that has not been fully mastered in various interpersonal communication situations. Doing so obviously evokes extreme stress, further augmented by the prospect of the coming *matura* exam (high-school exit exam) and its washback effect. It is also worth pointing out that the WTC scales also measure out-of-class use of the foreign language, which is hardly possible within the region where the study was carried out. In this geographical location the FL lesson may be regarded as the sole source of language input, however authentic it may be. Accordingly, the respondents that gave their assessments in the *Willingness to communicate out the classroom* scale must have greatly relied on their imagination. However, a very optimistic finding is that it was possible to extract from this cohort a group of students eager to initiate communication in the foreign language, whose responses to attribution measures allowed for carrying out reliable inferential statistics operations.

In the case of correlations carried out for the whole sample, it seems vital to note the most important findings. First of all, willingness to communicate in L2 is strongly related with self-assessment in a positive manner. This means that students ready to initiate communication in the language they do not know well have a good opinion of their language abilities, which confirms the early WTC model (MacIntyre 1994). Also, the attribution of ability (self-assessment of the four skills) is strongly correlated with that of luck, in a negative manner. It follows that able students do not rely on luck when looking for an explanation of their success in the FL learning process. Furthermore, the attribution of luck is strongly related to

context, proving that failure in difficult tasks is attributed to bad luck, which is not a pessimistic finding because here the students do not take responsibility and are able to maintain their positive self-image.

As far as the attribution of ability in groups with high and low WTC levels is concerned, it was measured by means of the participants' self-assessment of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) and final grades. Comparison of the results of high and low WTC students undoubtedly demonstrates significant differences with high WTC respondents declaring definitely higher self-assessment and grades. Both types of estimations are powerful; however, the one connected with self-assessment is extremely so. It can be inferred that the learners' opinions about their FL abilities may be key to understanding their attributions. Students with high WTC levels are convinced of their good FL skills, which clearly demonstrates their greater expectation of success. They can understandably rely on their greater internal locus of control — they take responsibility for their own learning by means of attending extracurricular FL classes, eagerly seeking opportunities to expand their language proficiency or take well-calculated risks while pursuing FL proficiency. On the other hand, the situation of their low WTC counterparts is much worse. Their self-assessment of FL skills, further confirmed by final grades, depicts an image of disillusionment and helplessness. They refrain from willing communication in the classroom, depriving themselves of chances to develop language mastery. It may be inferred that their FL learning history must have been quite difficult, with failures leading to lower expectations of success. Beyond a doubt, they perceive themselves as victims of school demands that extend way beyond their reach, and they strongly lack control over the FL learning situation. This mindset leads to passive, though temporary, acceptance of the inevitable, as responsibility for their awkward position is never theirs. They blame the unfavorable situation on the system, teachers, or external circumstances, a fact that deprives them of any control over the language learning process.

The above observations can be further confirmed by the significant differences between the two groups in the measurement of effort. High WTC students freely decide to engage in L2 communication and, by the same token, choose how much effort to put into achieving the goal of FL mastery. They are ready to accept responsibility for their effort, enjoying the feelings of pride and satisfaction that come with success. At the same time, when they fail they can acknowledge their lack of effort, feeling anger directed towards themselves. Subsequently, they try to control their effort and double it in order to expect success in their future performance. It is noteworthy, though, that low WTC students demonstrate a disappointing inclination to avoid FL learning demands. They may consciously keep away from communicative activities by not attending classes, or coming late for the lesson. However, when communication cannot be escaped, withdrawal is a likely choice. Students who are unwilling to communicate become very reticent, and avoid direct eye contact with the teacher in order not to draw attention. They stubbornly refuse

responsibility for their actions, abstain from hard work, and expect further failures in the FL learning process.

Regarding task difficulty (context) the high WTC student is likely to predict their future successes in the field of foreign language study. In the second grade of secondary grammar school they have already become familiar with the demands, task types, and the amount of work they should put into the FL classroom. They are already able to calculate risks and stress they need to face in order to achieve success. Although the context factor is well beyond their control, the situation allows them to envision optimistic scenarios connected with future FL prospects. Unfortunately, low WTC peers feel at a loss because their FL history indicates little chance of success. They already know (and are convinced) that there is hardly anything they can do to change the situation, while subsequent failure is an indicator of helplessness and passivity. Low WTC students are not inclined to show interest in FL communication or in general FL study because they have already fallen victim to the belief that whatever they experience is unchangeable or inescapable. In their view the language learning situation is extremely threatening, for they have failed so many times in the past that they conclude they are incapable of improving their performance. They therefore give up trying to engage in any FL communication.

Like task difficulty (context), luck cannot be controlled because it occurs beyond one's intentions. High WTC learners do not resort to luck in order to achieve success because they want to be in control of their own learning. They wish to achieve their success consciously, so they prefer to internalize their effort and rely on positive and stable clues. Thanks to these, they create their own reliable path of development, of which their high willingness to communicate is a necessary part. As a result, their no-pain, no-gain approach allows them greater personal satisfaction and FL mastery. However, low WTC students feel at a complete loss. In their long history of failures they often try to resort to luck, hoping for a break. When acting upon chance opportunities, they may occasionally become successful, though it may be only a one-time episode that does not lead to a string of further successes. Their self-assessment of skills and final grades undoubtedly show that their hopes are futile, because in missing their chances for expanding their communication skills they do not allow for language development. Resorting to luck and losing control over FL task accomplishment, they are unable to recognize a reason to put in more effort, so they consequently give up and lag behind those who do not let themselves be fooled by unrealistic prospects of effortless success.

Overall, the results of this study undoubtedly prove that the concept of L2 willingness to communicate is a powerful variable that makes it possible to explain the adaptive behavior of foreign language learners. Most of all, high levels of L2 WTC allow for the responsible, internally driven and stable conduct of an FL learner, firmly grounded in their high self-confidence. Such students demonstrate an unfaltering belief in their own abilities, take control of their own learning, and fully rely on their hard work — irrespective of the hardships of the FL process.

They are able to flexibly adapt to new challenges and new resources, which makes them valuable assets to the modern society. Conversely, students with low L2 WTC levels display serious maladaptive behaviors. They are not only convinced of their inadequate abilities, but also reject investing more effort in the language learning processes. In effect, their reasoning is counterproductive and self-confidence — extremely low, while their lack of volitional control makes them victims of blind fate governed by an FL context that they cannot understand or countenance. Such self-handicapping makes it very hard for them to adapt to new challenges, a sad fact that may greatly lower their chances for success in adulthood.

6. Implications for the FL classroom

The results of this study highlight the importance of attribution theory in motivating students more effectively. It seems of key importance to reinforce ability and effort attributions (Schunk 1983). This can be done by giving positive feedback on FL students' abilities, as well as commenting on their hard work. At the same time, it is worth stressing that ability attributions cannot be developed independently, because it may turn out quite disastrous in the face of failure. Instead, attention should be drawn to a lack of appropriate effort. Providing such feedback in the context of competency development should be maintained to promote rapid problem solving, self-efficacy, and achievement. This helps to support the student's self-perceptions of progress and validates their sense of efficacy (Schunk 1983). In such circumstances task motivation is sustained and greater skills acquisition is provided. Aside from that, it is also possible to conduct training programs designed to promote attributions that are likely to lead to higher levels of motivation and productivity. The teacher should also be aware of the fact that an extremely competitive grading and evaluation system may eventually damage the learning process of many students. It may actually induce the belief that success in competition is completely beyond one's control, because more competent students are likely to win. Aside from that, students need to be instructed on how to believe that FL success can be gained due to their own behavior, rather than external circumstances (easy tasks or luck). Hence, they must take full responsibility for their actions and the effort they make when working towards FL mastery.

The issue of willingness to communicate should also be addressed directly, as it focuses on the volitional process of initiating, sustaining, and finishing communication. In the case of students who feel threatened and do not wish to engage in communication it is extremely difficult to count on free choice to initiate communicative acts. Therefore it seems vital for the language teacher to create opportunities to gain positive experiences when learning a foreign language. One of the key strategies is providing a stress-free environment. Emotional support, extremely important in threatening situation of the language learning process, should

be provided for those in need. Likewise, a warm and friendly teacher is a key figure all students look up to whenever they feel assured that s/he is genuinely interested in their problems, ready to help them to effectively manage their learning, and facilitate their communication attempts.

Obviously, the teacher may also allow learners to take control of their own learning, which will further augment their effort attributions. Students may be advised to choose tasks or strategies to apply while working on an activity. Furthermore, they may also be encouraged to set immediate and distant goals for themselves. They should also be instructed on how these goals may be achieved, what strategies to use, and in what groupings.

Moreover, higher WTC levels can be induced more directly through creating greater chances for learning and using an FL within the Polish cultural context. It is especially important that authentic communication in L2 outside the school context is quite rare, if non-existent. Hence, it is worthwhile to introduce foreigners to classes, or organize TV, Internet surfing sessions, or Skype conferences that may allow students to come into contact with real users of L2. It is also possible to organize partner school exchanges, enabling every student to find their own pen pal, whom they can visit or communicate with. Obviously, enhancing students' interest in different cultures and international affairs is also of great importance.

This study has some limitations that should be mentioned. First of all, the cohort researched was quite homogeneous, consisting of secondary grammar school students from natural groups only, which might limit the generalizability of the results. Random sampling might garner different results. It seems, though, that its greatest weakness lies in the absence of data triangulation, as the data all comes from the questionnaire. It is apparent that the study might benefit from introducing data from other tools, like observation (e.g., of the behavior of students with high and low L2 WTC levels), or interviews with teacher, who could shed more light on learner characteristics. Ultimately, however, willingness to communicate as the immediate antecedent of L2 use shaped by attributions deserves more study, which will undoubtedly broaden our knowledge and understanding of the psychological readiness to use foreign languages, and better enable successful language acquisition.

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