LEARNERS’ MODE PREFERENCES AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN FACE-TO-FACE VERSUS ORAL COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents Mary, Dave and Larry, all of whom have fostered, supported and encouraged many different types of educational experiences throughout my life.
Communication works for those who work at it.

- John Powell
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Learners’ Mode Preferences and Willingness to Communicate in Face-to-Face Versus Oral Computer-Mediated Communication
by
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Master of Arts in Spanish
San Diego State University, 2011

The present study has three main goals: first, to investigate participants’ preferences for oral Spanish practice in face-to-face (FTF) versus oral computer-mediated communication (OCMC) modes. Second, this study explores differences in performance between FTF and OCMC groups. Finally, this investigation looks into the relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC) and performance in different oral Spanish practice groups (FTF and OCMC). To accomplish these goals, students from two intact intermediate university Spanish classes were administered two decision-making tasks. Participants were randomly assigned to groups of three and performed the tasks on different days; one task was carried out via Skype in the computer lab, and the other was performed face-to-face in the classroom. A WTC questionnaire, which was adapted from Cao and Philp's 2006 study, was administered to each participant to determine L2 WTC, and a debriefing questionnaire measured students’ reactions to both modes of classroom communication. The study shows that though learners profess to prefer face-to-face (FTF) communication in the L2 classroom, they initiated a significantly higher number of speaking turns in the OCMC mode. Another interesting finding is that the significant positive correlation found between WTC and the number of turns and words spoken in the FTF setting does not hold for the OCMC group. In other words, number of turns and words produced reflect WTC in the FTF mode; however, they do not reflect WTC in the OCMC mode. This interesting finding reveals that learners interact differently through OCMC and FTF. This could pose advantages for L2 teaching and learning in the modern classroom that should be further investigated.

Keywords: Oral computer-mediated communication; Willingness to communicate; Decision-making tasks; L2 Acquisition.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In second language (L2) acquisition studies, the holy grail of how students learn second languages has long been hoped for, yet more and more solidly proved to be myth. There is no single answer as to how L2 learners acquire their non-native languages; in fact the ways of acquisition may be as varied as fingerprints. As a result, the investigation of individual differences (IDs) in the acquisition of a L2 has gained more significance and attention in L2 studies.

In the 1990s the concept of IDs was adopted by L2 investigators from their counterparts in first language (L1) acquisition studies. IDs are extremely varied and range from some physically distinguishable traits to other impalpable characteristics of an individual; some examples are age and sex, motivation, anxiety, perceived ability to communicate and willingness to communicate.1

All of these IDs interact dynamically to aid and or inhibit the process of L2 acquisition, and like a thumb print, no two people are exactly the same in their specific combination of IDs and the way that they interact with each other. An individual who is motivated is more likely to be willing to communicate, and thus more apt to successfully acquire an L2 than a person who is unmotivated and unwilling to communicate. Skehan (48) observed that students have to speak in order to learn, but a student must first be willing to speak in order to initiate a communicative act. It could then be argued that L2 learning cannot be fully realized in the absence of willingness to communicate (WTC); what is language if not for communication? Furthermore, it could be hypothesized that the greater an L2 learner's WTC, the more ample his opportunities to acquire the L2.

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1 Zakahi and McCroskey 96-104; MacIntyre, “Variables Underlying Willingness” 135-142; MacIntyre et al., “Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate” 545-562; MacIntyre et al., “Sex and Age Effects” 537-64; McCroskey and Richmond, “Willingness to Communicate: A Cognitive View” 19-37; Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond 1-14.
Although many IDs have been researched both empirically and theoretically over the last several decades, the WTC construct has largely been left to theory, with a few notable exceptions.\(^2\) This leaves an important gap in practical study and application of this ID variable, which is key in L2 communicative teaching practices and also in interactionist approaches to L2 acquisition. It is thus very necessary to gain further insight into this internal variable in the context of second language acquisition (SLA).

WTC can then be argued to be a crucial factor in communication. Another factor that can have a bearing on how learners communicate is certainly the mode through which they interact. Since the early 1990s the field of computer assisted language learning (CALL) has witnessed the publication of myriad studies that investigate computer-mediated communication (CMC). Either synchronous (i.e. real time) or asynchronous (i.e. delayed time) written CMC has been the subject of much research in the field\(^3\) but, as Yanguas argues repeatedly in his research, the time is right to begin investigating oral CMC (OCMC). Yanguas’ studies investigated the type of interaction that this OCMC mode fostered (Yanguas, “Oral Computer-Mediated” 72-93) and whether OCMC interaction promoted L2 vocabulary acquisition (Yanguas, “Task-Based Oral” 1-42). The present study follows up on those investigations by exploring participants’ mode preferences (face-to-face vs. OCMC) to communicate in the classroom, differences in performance between modes, and the relationship between WTC and performance in both modes.

**STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

In this technological world that we live in, do learners still prefer traditional classroom methods, or is their WTC for L2 acquisition stunted by old-fashioned approaches? Would the implementation of more modern methods of language instruction increase students’ WTC, hence their L2 acquisition? The focus of the present investigation was to compare OCMC to traditional face-to-face communication; the present study seeks to fill a gap in the fields of second language acquisition and instruction. As teaching and learning L2s

\(^2\) MacIntyre et al., “Willingness to Communicate, Social Support” 369-388; Cao and Philp 480-493; Kang 277-292; Yashima 54-66.

become more technological, the need for inquiry into this area grows. Though there is a expanding body of work published that explores WTC in relation to online chat, to the author’s knowledge there is no study to date that investigates WTC within the context of oral computer-mediated communication through Skype. Skype (as only one example of the many OCMC software programs) is becoming more widely used, both for instructional and personal purposes, and is extremely accessible in part because it is completely free when used computer-to-computer. While use of Skype in the L2 classroom seems like it would promote language use and learning, there is no research to support this theory. This study aims to begin opening the door toward enlightening teachers, students and researchers as to the potential that Skype and similar programs have in language classrooms, specifically as to whether students prefer it over traditional face-to-face communication, whether it promotes better communicative performance, and whether there is a relationship between WTC and performance in this mode.

The following research questions guided the study:

**RQ1:** Which oral communication mode is preferred by participants: FTF in the classroom or OCMC with Skype?

**RQ2:** Why is the selected communicative mode preferred?

**RQ3:** Is there a significant difference between the FTF and OCMC (Skype) groups in terms of the number of words spoken and the number of turns taken?

**RQ4:** Is there any significant relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC), as measured in this study and the number of words and turns produced by participants in either mode?

**THEORETICAL BASES**

This study is based on the Interaction Hypothesis. Long proposes that learners need to engage in conversation and negotiate for meaning in order for language acquisition to occur. Gass and Mackey define interaction as “the conversations that learners participate in” (178), and further state that “interactions are important because it is in this context that learners receive information about the correctness, and more important, about the incorrectness of their utterances” (178). Furthermore, to gain L2 oral proficiency, learners must deal with any interactional difficulties that arise from the incorrectness of their

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4 Long 413-468; Gass and Mackey 178.
utterances (or those of a conversation partner) through adjustments, including one or more of the following strategies: simplification, recast, restatement, repetition. Learners thus theoretically learn from their mistakes and acquire L2 skills during the course of interaction in the L2.⁵

L2 interaction, according to the Interaction Hypothesis, is a process which involves and requires input, output, and most importantly, negotiation of meaning. Gass and Mackey claim that “input is the sine qua non of acquisition” (177) because “if learners cannot understand the language that is being addressed to them, then that language is not useful to them as they construct their second language grammars” (177). Output is of similar importance in that it allows L2 learners to develop syntax and morphology, test hypotheses about their target language, and promote automaticity in the use of the L2 (Gass and Mackey 177). Under this theory, “…negotiation of meaning, and especially negotiation work that triggers interactional adjustments by the NS (native speaker) or more competent interlocutor, facilitates acquisition because it connects input, internal learner capabilities, particularly selective attention, and output in productive ways” (Long 451-452). In other words, L2 acquisition is promoted when learners realize that they cannot produce a desired construction, and attention is called to these deficits; additionally learners may notice new grammatical constructs or lexical items in the course of interaction which are then added to their communicative repertoire (Gass and Mackey 178).

The present investigation assumes the Interaction Hypothesis as a component of the theoretical base, founding the study on the idea that learners must engage in communication in order to improve in the L2 classroom; however, in order to engage in said conversation, they must be willing to initiate and follow through with communicative acts. Because of the need for this willingness, the present study also relies heavily upon various theories of individual differences (IDs), which “refer to dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree. In other words, they concern stable and systematic deviations from a normative blueprint” (Dörnyei, “Individual Differences” 42). Dörnyei also noted that “IDs have been consistent predictors of

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⁵ Bearden 178-181; Gass and Mackey 178.
success in L2 acquisition.” (“Individual Differences” 42) Dörnyei is one of several important researchers in the field of ID investigation, whose theories and conclusions regarding willingness to communicate and other ID constructs have guided and informed this study.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As the present study is particularly interested in learners’ WTC and their demonstration of this ID in two different communicative modes (FTF and OCMC), it is necessary to look at the history of research and the advances that have been made. WTC will be looked at from three different perspectives: in its relationship CALL, CMC, and to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) in general.

WTC IN CALL

CALL has been a field of interest for researchers and language instructors for nearly as long as computers have been accessible to the public, and the field continues to grow as these machines become ever more universal. As Rahimi and Yadollahi note, the study of CALL has been divided into many different segments, perhaps the two most important being why to utilize CALL and how to do so (168).

In researching willingness to communicate in the CMC context, the questions why and how are both of tantamount importance. It has generally been observed that in CALL situations, motivation and attitude tend to increase,6 and motivation is commonly believed to have a very close causal relationship with WTC.7 If, then, researchers such as MacIntyre (“Variables Underlying Willingness to” 135-142; “Willingness to Communicate in the Second Language” 564-576) and Dörnyei (The Psychology 207-211), who are pioneers in the study of WTC, recognize this partnership between motivation, attitude and WTC, and as numerous researchers have linked CALL to more positive attitudes and higher motivation, it can be hypothesized that a strong argument for why to use CALL is that it would be very likely to boost WTC. Higher levels of WTC would theoretically result in more production of output and more reception of input, which under the interactionist theory of SLA, promotes

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6 Rahimi and Yadollahi 170; Ushida 65; Yanguas, “Task-Based Oral” 29.
7 MacIntyre et al., “Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate” 547; Yashima 56-57.
negotiation of meaning and language acquisition by drawing the learner’s attention to new L2 elements, as well as personal L2 capabilities and shortcomings.

The question of how to utilize CALL is a broad one. The areas of software, task design, and learners are the three domains that Chapelle and Jamieson (27-46) emphasize, of which software and learners are of particular interest here. In their findings, Chapelle and Jamieson (27-46) caution that certain learners may be better suited for CALL than others, and that the consideration of learner variables is important. In that vein, this study explores one particular learner variable, WTC, within the context of CALL, or more specifically, CMC.

**WTC in CMC**

Since the 1990s, written CMC has been an important focal area for many L2 acquisition researchers; however, surprisingly, OCMC has only recently started receiving some attention. In today’s world, computers are widely available to students through computer labs and libraries, and it is safe to say that a majority of university scholars own personal computers as well. These once luxury machines have transformed themselves over a short span of years into necessities; in fact, many college courses require the use of computers both inside and outside of the classroom in order to comply with such basic requirements as accessing course documents (Blackboard) and receiving essential instructor communication (email), not to mention more specialized courses or technically-inclined instructors who may take educational computer use much further. We are, therefore, long overdue in exploring the obvious potential benefits of using free and extremely accessible software and web-based programs such as Skype, MSN, and Google voice chat in the L2 classroom in order to facilitate the acquisition process.

In 1996 Susan Herring speculated about the then-cutting edge field of written computer-mediated communication. She wrote that “Back in 1993 I entertained fears that the subject matter of this volume would appear marginal or arcane…Rather than wondering whether CMC scholarship is legitimate, a more appropriate question now is how scholarship can best keep pace with the continued expansion and diversification of CMC” (Herring 115-145). In fact, as far back as 1984 and earlier, CMC was an emerging topic of interest. Kiesler, Siegel, and McGuire (1123-1134) did one of the first comparisons of CMC with FTF
interactions, though the study was not specifically for L2 learners, rather for communication in general. They found that CMC encouraged much more uninhibited language, though less of it, which they hypothesized could be due at least in part to technical complications. The same article speculates about the future possibilities of CMC for social networking and educational applications, both of which have since been pioneered and widely popularized.

More recent inquiry into written CMC has shown it to be very valuable in promoting language production and enhancing language negotiation, developing oral fluency and constructing meaning, developing skills such as turn-taking and forming and responding to questions (Chun 17-31), and even developing L2 humor and social cohesiveness (Darhower 267). Studies have shown that synchronous CMC (SCMC), such as text chat, improves oral production and shares many important characteristics with FTF oral communication, leading to the conclusion that written SCMC can be a valuable tool in helping learners acquire an L2. While that assertion is valuable, more exploration into even more useful and authentic ways to use CMC is due.

It should be mentioned that CMC is not restricted to instant messaging or emailing, but is rather a diverse collection of tools and technologies that have been shown to influence and affect learners in very different ways (Smith et al. 703-729). The fact remains that no matter what form of CMC is considered, and how similar it may be to oral L2 use, the term CMC is often synonymous with written language production, and the bulk of the literature to date exploring CMC has focused on its written forms. Whereas written CMC may have benefits for oral L2 skills, it is perhaps not the best, nor the only, technological tool for fomenting L2 oral production skills.

As recently as 2009, Christopher Blake opined that “Although the use of video chats is now prevalent in one-to-one synchronous CMC communication, the text-based mode continues to be the more reliable and economically feasible way to connect groups of learners around the globe” (228). This statement, however, is negated by the popular and

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8 Blake, “Computer Mediate Communication” 120-136; Warschauer 477-478; Chung et al. 61-74.
9 Beauvois 165-184; Payne and Whitney 19-32; Abrams 157-167; Smith, “Collaborative and Interactive” 77-87.
10 For examples see: Herring 115-145; Blake, “Potential of Text” 234-236.
completely free programs such as Skype which have become easily accessible. In reality, if one has access to a computer in order to engage in CMC to begin with, then taking the next step to utilize OCMC is actually just as simple and economically feasible as traditional written CMC.

While use of written CMC for L2 acquisition has been shown to be valuable and should continue to be explored, the important gaping difference in using written CMC to improve and exercise oral communication skills is that the former requires absolutely no verbalization whatsoever. The obvious issue is that while FTF oral communication is enhanced by such factors as environment, facial expressions, and gestures, its main tool by definition and practice is the use of verbal language to communicate. So while students may develop skills to aid them in communication using written CMC, they are still not being asked to “cross the Rubicon” (Dörnyei, The Psychology 207-211), or take that last step to actually verbalize the strand of L2 communication that they have already formulated in their minds.

Yates notes that: “One difference between speech and writing that many researchers have commented upon is that of the differing modes of production and consumption. Speech is produced “on the fly” and is intended to be consumed, heard, in the same rapid and dynamic manner” (35). Writing on the other hand is static; it is produced at the pace set by the writer alone and can be consumed at any speed that the reader chooses. The effects of such differences in production are likely to generate differences in the language used. Furthermore, Yates asserted that the results of his large-scale study “seem to indicate that CMC is more akin to writing than speech in terms of vocabulary used” (35). Yanguas (“Oral Computer-Mediated” 78) confirmed that both audio OCMC (AudCMC) and video OCMC (VidCMC) share turn adjacency conventions with FTF communication, which is contrary to written CMC turn-taking convention. Thus, despite the commonalities that CMC may share with FTF communication, there are also many differences which set it apart (turn-taking and negotiation routines outlined by Varonis and Gass 71-90).

Yanguas’ comparison of the task-based interaction between AudCMC, VidCMC, and FTF dyads demonstrates that the speakers’ responses throughout their tasks take the form of elaborations in 95% of the AudCMC interactions, though this number is significantly lower in VidCMC and FTF interaction owing to their partial reliance on gestures. This would seem to show that more oral language is being produced using audio communication. It is
possible then that omitting the visual aspect lends to more language production, perhaps because there are fewer visual distractions and cues that may reduce the necessity of oral production in a FTF or video conferencing situation. Therefore, not only does OCMC foster the use of oral production skills in a way that written CMC cannot, it also shares some of the benefits of written CMC, such as anonymity and the leveling of the social playing field (Ho and McLeod 200-204).

The issue of mode preference by the learner is another extremely important aspect of L2 acquisition through OCMC. Though OCMC may be shown to foment oral production skills, students’ attitudes and opinions are bound to have a notable effect on their performances and outcomes. Much support has been demonstrated as far as students’ attitudes toward written CMC, however little research has been done to explore this topic in the context of OCMC. Lee (“Fostering Second Language” 635-49) found that extroverted students tended to have a more positive attitude towards videoconferencing, while shy students found it to be a more harrowing experience. Another study (Rahimi and Yadollahi 170) found a positive correlation between foreign language learning (FLL) attitudes and computer-assisted language learning, which suggests that a positive attitude towards CMC can be predicted by a positive attitude toward FLL. Yanguas (“Task-Based Oral” 29) investigated learners’ attitudes towards OCMC, and found them to be generally positive. Though there was a segment of about a third of the class that felt more nervous in this mode, there was still a high enough consensus among learners for Yanguas to conclude that “…the implementation of these types of communication in the foreign language classroom would be welcome by students and therefore could be a tool through which to practice interaction in the classroom in a modern, relevant, and fun manner” (“Task-Based Oral” 30).

It seems, then, that OCMC has promising possibilities for application in the L2 classroom, both in terms of bolstering the second language acquisition process, as well as fostering positive learner attitudes toward L2 communication.

11 Ushida 65; Pérez 89-104; Lee, “Going Beyond Classroom” 115-117
WTC IN SLA

MacIntyre posed the question “why is it that some students seek, while other avoid, L2 communication?” (“Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate” 545). The answer lies in the unique differences that each learner possesses, as individual as their fingerprints. Willingness to communicate is the individual trait that leads a person to either communicate or not, and can play a vital role in the level of success that an L2 learner attains.

WTC’s roots stem from the ID Communication Apprehension (CA), which McCroskey (“The Communication Apprehension” 13) viewed as “a broadly based anxiety related to communication,” and later redefined as “an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.” These definitions of CA seem to be more closely related to the ID Communication Anxiety rather than WTC, and indeed Communication Apprehension, WTC and Communication Anxiety are all intricately intertwined. McCroskey also noted that though forms of CA have been studied since ancient Greek times, they were always studied in public address situations (“Willingness to Communicate” 75-108). This leaves the interpretation and interpersonal modes unexamined, yet they are probably the two most important modes of daily communication in most L2 acquisition situations. Even Phillips (“The Problem” 22-38; “Reticence: Pathology” 39-49), who used his ‘reticence’ research to move the concept away from public speaking into “real life” realms of communication, found that anxiety was main cause of his reticence construct.

In later work, however, Phillips advanced the view that, although anxiety may be present, the major cause of reticence is the individual’s lack of communication skills-a view that harkens back to the earlier area of theory about why people experience public speaking stage fright. (McCroskey, “Willingness to Communicate” 77)

Therefore, reticence, or communication anxiety was found in all modes of communication, and furthermore was entangled in a hopeless battle of cause and effect with other IDs such as communication skills and perceived communication skills.

With these early studies as a backdrop, Burgoon pioneered work on unwillingness to communicate, or “a chronic tendency to avoid and/or devalue communication” (60), and found communication apprehension to be one of the predictors of unwillingness to communicate. She went on to assert that “individuals with communication reticence exhibit
the predisposition to unwillingness to communicate” (60). With that assertion, yet another thread was woven into the web of IDs.

From these early studies and others, the WTC trait evolved and was applied initially to L1 research in the 1980s.12 WTC was initially defined as an individual’s tendency to initiate communication when possible (McCroskey and Richmond, “Willingness to Communicate” 129-56) and it was viewed as a stable, unchanging personality characteristic. From this perspective WTC in both L1 and L2, like unwillingness to communicate, is closely bound to other IDs, though the research began to reach beyond the traits from early ID studies, like CA and shyness. Some limited examples include perceived ability to communicate, communication anxiety13, attitudes toward specific international communities14, and previous immersion experiences (MacIntyre, “Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate” 564-576).

Following the trajectory of WTC research to date, various studies have supported the initial conceptualization of WTC as a stable or unchanging characteristic, and others have gone further to assert that WTC is the opposite: a situational and thus temporary or changing trait. McCroskey found WTC to be very closely correlated with the introversion/extraversion domain of personality, and suggested that that relationship increases the likelihood that WTC is a very stable trait, supported by MacCrae and Costas’ observation that (qtd. in McCroskey, “Willingness to Communicate”):

Stability appears to characterize all five of the major domains of personality-neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and contentiousness. This finding suggests that an adult’s personality profile as a whole will change little over time, and studies of the stability of configurable measures of personality support that view. (82)

McCroskey asserts that “because introversion/extroversion has been demonstrated to have a substantial genetic component, this is an indication that these communication predispositions

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12 McCroskey, “The Communication Apprehension” 13-38; McCroskey and Baer 1-11; McCroskey and Richmond, “Willingness to Communicate: Differing Cultural Perspectives” 129-56; Chan and McCroskey 47-50; Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond 1-14.

13 Baker and MacIntyre 311-347; MacIntyre, “Variables Underlying Willingness” 135-142; MacIntyre et al., “Willingness to Communicate, Social Support” 369-388; McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond 185-192; Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond 1-14.

14 Yashima 57; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu 119-152; Tannenbaum and Tahar 283-294.
may, in part, be genetically produced and not purely a function of environmental influence as some have thought”.15 Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide’s empirical study appears to reinforce McCroskey’s initial stable trait conceptualization, as WTC remained rather stable throughout their two and a half year longitudinal study (11). It should be stated, however, that they were not specifically focusing on WTC as a situational construct.

WTC continues to be thought of as a stable characteristic by some, however, not by all. MacIntyre et al. changed their working definition of the construct to reflect what they saw as the situational nature of WTC, and redefined the ID as “the willingness of an individual to enter into a discourse at a particular time, with a specific person or people, using L2” (“Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate” 547). Kang narrowed the definition even further by asserting that willingness (or lack of willingness) to enter into a discourse can change according to the speakers, the topics, and the conversational context, among other situational variables, and that WTC is “an individual’s volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation” (279). MacIntyre, and Kang to an even greater extent, likened WTC to a situational decision more than a lasting trait. Most present-day research finds a middle ground in considering WTC to be present on many different levels, including the stable trait level as well as on the situational decision-like plane. Cao and Philp (485-487) found both levels to be influential in their empirical investigation of WTC; however, they found a strong correlation between context and WTC which suggests the importance of the construct as a situational variable. Previous theory supports these results (MacIntyre and Babin 215-29), and visualizes WTC as a pyramid with different levels of influence over speakers in respect to their communication (see Figure 1).

According to MacIntyre et al., the base of the pyramid, the sixth level, consists of lasting trait factors; these are inherent in a person from birth and consequently the individual has very little influence over them. On the fifth level we continue to see more or less permanent characteristics which create the tension between the desire to approach a group of L2 speakers and the fear of doing so. The last of the unchanging trait-like characteristics is

15 McCroskey, “Willingness to Communicate” 82; McCroskey and Richmond, “Willingness to Communicate: Differing Cultural Perspectives” 72.
located on level four, where motivation and the role of the individual in a group combine with self-confidence in the L2 and lack of anxiety. With the leap from the fourth to the third level MacIntyre et al. show us the transition from trait-like to state-like, also called situational or decisional WTC; more simply stated, from the influences that do not change to those which are very impermanent. Here lies the desire to communicate with a specific person and the state of communicative self-confidence. This is the level that directly affects WTC on level two, and thus use of L2, which is found at the tip of the pyramid (MacIntyre et al., “Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate” 547).

Kang also proposes a multilayered construct of situational WTC “in which WTC is suggested as a dynamic situational concept that can change moment-to-moment, rather than a trait-like predisposition” (277). Kang recognizes the importance of WTC in the classroom in order to produce more active language learners, especially as the instructional emphasis continues to shift further away from traditional methods and emphasizes more heavily the importance of authentic communication. She concluded her study by stating that “WTC
needs to be an important component of SLA and L2 pedagogy” (291) after proposing her original construct of WTC (see Figure 2). While it shares the multi-layered aspect of MacIntyre et al.’s model, Kang proposes that situational WTC is influenced far less by trait-like WTC, and far more by both situational variables and psychological antecedents (277-292). Her model places a great importance on the influence of diverse IDs, including security, excitement and responsibility, and also takes into account important situational variables such as topic, interlocutors and context.

![Figure 2. A preliminary construct of situational WTC. Source: Kang, Su-Ja. "Dynamic Emergence of Situational Willingness to Communicate in a Second Language." System 33.2 (2005): 277-92. Print.](image)

The present study shares the views of MacIntyre et al. and Kang of WTC as a multi-layered construct in which the deeper layers are trait-like lasting elements of a person’s personality and have some influence over the shallower, situation-activated layers. Though an individual’s unchanging WTC is determined by genes and personality differences on that deeper level, ultimately the WTC that we are concerned with at present is the situational one, which determines whether WTC will lead to communication acts taking place more readily in one specific type of learning environment or another.

Yashima writes that “when communication is a goal of language instruction, such questions as “communication with whom?” and “for what?” arise….WTC (among other
variables) need to be examined as variables that affect communication outcomes” (54). The author proposes that some common answers to these questions from language instructors would be “with anyone” and “for anything.” Many language educators strive to give their L2 students a “tool box” of language that they can use to cope with any communicative situation that arises. If that were the case, then the very box itself that can keep the language tools available is WTC, because without it we are forming L2 students who cannot (or do not) communicate with anyone in any situation. Thus the need to understand and bolster WTC is stronger than ever in the fields of L2 acquisition and instruction.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Thirty-one students of Spanish as a second language participated in this study, which sought to find out whether L2 Spanish students prefer to communicate in the FTF or OCMC mode in the classroom, as well as what differences there are between oral performances in the two different modes. In addition, this investigation looks into the relationship between WTC and performance in different oral Spanish practice groups (FTF and OCMC). The explanation of methodology will be broken down into three sections: population, treatment, and data analysis procedures.

POPULATION

Two intact intermediate Spanish classes from a major Southern California university participated in this study. Students in these classes had taken an average of 2.75 semesters of college or university-level Spanish classes, as the Background Questionnaire at the beginning of the study showed (see Appendix A). One of the classes had forty enrolled students, and the other thirty-one; excluding students who were disqualified, there were a total of thirty-one participants in the study. Students were disqualified for any of the following reasons: being absent on one or both of the study’s sessions; having major technical difficulties during a task which impeded communication by all three parties involved; and having any number of participants in a group other than three. Of those who were included in the study, eleven were male and twenty female; they ranged from second-year undergraduates to graduate students.

TREATMENT

On the first day of the study, one class met at its usual time and place, and the other convened in the university’s language acquisition computer lab where each student had access to an individual computer station. In both situations, the researcher was introduced to the class by the instructor and proceeded to explain the broad scope of the study. Time was taken to answer questions, though unnecessary detail about the study and the research questions were omitted so as to avoid skewing the results. Each potential participant was
presented with an informed consent letter and given time to review it (see Appendix B). It was emphasized that though all students were required to do the assigned tasks for class participation, their inclusion in the study was optional and their data would be excluded from the results if for any reason they wished it to be. No students approached the instructors or the researcher in order to opt out of inclusion in the study.

After the introduction of the study, each person was given two questionnaires to complete. The first was the Background Questionnaire (see Appendix C) which was created by the researcher to elicit some basic relevant information about the participants. The second questionnaire, the Communication Questionnaire, was adapted from Cao and Philips’ 2006 study (90; see Appendix D). It presented the learners with twenty-five different situations in which it was assumed that the people involved would be able to speak Spanish and all communication would take place in Spanish. Participants had to decide how willing they would be to communicate in each one on a four-point Lykert scale (0-25%, 26-50%, 51-75%, 76-100%). They were asked to circle the range that best identified their personal WTC in Spanish for each distinct situation.

Following the collection of both questionnaires, the learners were given approximately three minutes as warm-up time to read the task instructions and note ideas individually before being randomly placed in groups of three (refer to task prompts in Appendices E and F). The two classes received different tasks on each day, as shown below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Schedule of Tasks and Modes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class B</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OCMC could be either video- or audio-conference; in the present study the latter was chosen because most programs do not allow for more than two person video conferencing. Skype in particular, one of the most universally used and easily accessible programs for OCMC, did not offer this capability when this study was conducted (though the latest version, Skype 5.0, does offer this feature at the time of writing).
Task 1 (Appendix E), Prize Money, required the students to think of five ways that they would like to spend $10,000 with their group of three (adapted from Freiermuth & Jarrell); task 2 (created by the researcher to be a comparable task in complexity and duration; Appendix F), Peruvian Visitors, required individuals to think of five places in the USA that the group of three Spanish students would like to take a group of teenage Peruvian exchange students for a two-week, unlimited-expense trip with their group serving as the guides. After the warm-up, they were randomly put into groups of three using their student numbers from the instructor’s roster and a seating chart. It was decided that triads were appropriate for this study due to the fact that in dyads there is some level of forced language production in order to sustain conversation, while in groups of four or more there may be too many speakers to allow for ample opportunity for each individual to fully demonstrate WTC.

The task that took place in the classroom was administered in two sections; the researcher took roughly half of the class into another classroom to conduct the study with less ambient noise, while the instructor remained with the other half of the students. For each section, the groups of three were seated with their desks clustered closely together in a classroom, as far away from other groups as possible. A small digital recorder was switched on and placed in the middle of each group after all questions were addressed and group clusters formed. There was a time limit of twelve minutes allocated and the students were asked to discuss each of their five individual ideas, and then reach a mutual group agreement as to the three best ideas for each task. The time limit of twelve minutes was decided upon after two instructors of intermediate Spanish piloted one of the activities and suggested an optimal time limit. The participants were asked to talk about their ideas and reasons in as much detail as possible, and told to sit quietly at their desks until the end of the twelve minutes if they happened to finish early.

The same process was followed in the computer lab on the first day with the other class, except that they were given a brief tutorial on using Skype before the warm-up. When they were assigned their random groups of three they were asked to use Skype to initiate a conference call between all group members. Given the counterbalanced design of this study (shown in table 1), on the second day the classes convened in the location that they had not previously used, and did the activity that they had not yet done. Most participants had prior L2 classroom experience with Skype, and the researcher, instructor and lab assistant
circulated throughout the sessions assisting with all questions and issues that arose. Some groups had technical difficulties and therefore had to be excluded from the study results.

At the end of the second day, all participants were given the Debriefing Questionnaire (see Appendix G; adapted from Freiermuth and Jarrell 194-195) to assess their reactions to the distinct modes by which they performed the two communicative tasks.

The definition of a task varies from researcher to researcher, but Ellis (37) asserts that tasks require students to function as language users, in more real-world communication situations, whereas exercises require them to function as language learners in more artificial and intentional learning situations. Though many kinds of tasks are commonly implemented in L2 classrooms, including narrative, information gap, opinion gap, open, closed, and decision-making tasks. Two decision-making tasks were utilized in the present study in order to allow for free choice in producing language or not; they do not oblige participation. Decision-making tasks support the interactionist stance of language learning, and they have been shown more effective than other types of tasks because they provide more ample opportunity to speak (Pica, Kanagy, Falodun 91) Using a more structured task or activity could force language production and negate individuals’ WTC.

According to Thurman “for autonomy, the most important device is choice. In many of the operationalizations of intrinsic motivation, if there is no choice, there is no autonomy, and if there is no autonomy, there is no intrinsic motivation” (71). Though this reference applies to motivation, WTC requires autonomy as well, so that the speaker is making the choice to be willing or unwilling to communicate. Much research also suggests that tasks that are enjoyable increase students’ motivation, and therefore theoretically lower anxiety and promote WTC (Freiermuth and Jarrell 206). The aim was to give participants two inherently similar tasks, each of which provided an interesting topic and allowed for a range of L2 competencies and any level of contribution desired

**DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES**

In order to address the four research questions that guided this study, three types of analyses were performed. In order to seek answers to the first two research questions qualitative analyses were carried out using the debriefing questionnaire, which was administered after the last session (see Appendix G). To gauge the participants’ preferences,
FTF in the classroom or OCMC with Skype, all participants’ answers to the question were tallied and percentages of respondents calculated; the range was from very favorable to very unfavorable (see Table 2 for response data, p. 24). In order to find out why the selected communicative mode is preferred, participants’ written responses were analyzed and compared to find the most representative remarks describing their preferences and supporting reasons.

Secondly, two separate independent samples t-tests were carried out. In the first one, Task was entered as an independent variable in order to explore whether there were any differences between the tasks in terms of performance. In the second one, Mode was entered as an independent variable in order to address research question number three. In regard to the final research question, correlation analyses were conducted to examine the possible linear relationship between WTC, as measured in this study, and the outcome variables utilized: number of words and number of turns.

Word and turn data for analyses were collected after a thorough transcription was performed of every triad interaction in the study, both actualized via Skype and recorded in the classroom. Using the transcriptions, the number of turns by each interlocutor was carefully counted by hand. A turn was considered to be a completed utterance of any length by an individual. Excerpt 1 below is a sample passage from one of the conversations which illustrates how turns were counted. Some single turns have pauses in the middle, because the speaker is completing the thought that he or she is trying to express (see Turn 1, Participant B). Other times, even if the same speaker comments back-to-back, separate turns were counted if the two contributions are clearly different thoughts (see Turns 3 and 4, Participant A). Conversational turns that contained no L2 utterances were not counted (see two examples, labeled “0 Turn” below); on the other hand, even if an utterance contained only one L2 word it was considered to be a turn (Turn 2, Participant A).

Words were manually counted in the same manner, and again, L1 words and “fillers” (such as um, uh, yes, so, etc.) were not included in the count. For example, Turn 1, Participant A was counted as 7 words. In this case there was some negotiation of meaning as to how to say “to invest” in Spanish, and both the correct and incorrect vocabulary words were counted, as the interlocutors were both attempting to communicate and negotiate meaning in the L2. Finally, the number of words spoken and number of turns taken by each
participant in each mode were organized into a chart for comparison and analysis (see Appendix H).

EXCERPT 1

Turn 1A: So, yo pienso que invertir es más mejor.
So, I think that *to invest* (incorrect word) is more better.

Turn 1B: Invertir. I wanna ask... (pause) Uh, me parece que es invertir.
*To invest* (correct word). I wanna ask (pause) U, I think that it’s *to invest* (correct).

Turn 2A: ¿Invertir?
*To invest*? (correct word)

Turn 2B: Sí, porque es un palabra diferente.
Yes, because it’s a different word.

Turn 1C: Invertir...
*To invest*... (correct word)

Turn 3B: ¿Sí o no?
Yes or no?

0 Turn C: Uh...sounds right.

0 Turn A: What is it? Inver...

Turn 4B: Me parece que es invertir, pero no estoy seguro.
I think that it’s “to invest,” but I’m not sure.

Turn 3A: Yo voy a poner los dos: invertir o investar el dinero. (laughs)
I’m going to write both: to invest (correct) or to invest (incorrect) the money.

Turn 4A: So ¿estamos terminados?
So, are we finished?

Turn 5B: Sí.
Yes.

Turn 2C: Sí.
Yes.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main goals of the present study were threefold: to investigate participants’ preferences between FTF and OCMC modes for Spanish oral practice; to explore differences in participants’ performances in FTF and OCMC modes; to look into the relationship between WTC and performance in the two modes, FTF and OCMC. In order to fully address each aspect of the investigation, the findings will be presented as responses to the individual research questions that were posed and which drove the study.

RQ1: Which oral communication mode is preferred by participants: FTF in the classroom or OCMC with Skype?

The results of the post-task questionnaire showed that participants preferred FTF. A strong majority of 80.6% favored FTF communication in the classroom, while fewer than 13% selected OCMC as their preferred communicative mode. 6.4% of participants claimed that they preferred both modes.

Participants were asked to provide more detailed feedback for each mode by circling the best answer on a five-point Lykert scale that ranged from very favorable to very unfavorable (see Table 2). The opinions here are less clear-cut: the majority of students’ choices for both OCMC and FTF modes fell in the average and slightly favorable categories, not showing strong favor or dislike for either communicative mode. However, the scale was tipped toward FTF with the 29% of learners who found the FTF task to be very favorable, yet only 12.9% felt the same way about the task using OCMC. The results are clear: FTF is preferred by participants for oral L2 interaction.

RQ2: Why is the selected communicative mode preferred?

The most consistent comment that participants made on the task feedback questionnaire was that FTF was more personal and thus it was easier to complete the task and understand their partners using this mode. The FTF situation gave them a feeling of connection by being able to look at the other interlocutors; in this mode they were also free of technological hitches, able to read lips and faces, and hear who was saying what with ease.
Table 2. Participants’ Reactions to Communicative Modes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FTF</th>
<th>OCMC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Favorable</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Favorable</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
<td>38.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly Unfavorable</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Unfavorable</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conversely, many students found Skype to be “less like a natural conversation,” in the words of one participant. Other widely-expressed disadvantages associated with the Skype task were the high level of noise, problems with connection, hearing static and other conversations through their microphones, their feeling that it was harder to regulate turn-taking, and inability to see the other speakers and interpret their facial expressions and emotions to aid the communication process.

However, participants’ feedback to Skype was not all negative by any means. Numerous people appreciated the anonymity that Skype afforded them to not feel embarrassed by mistakes, or to look up a word without anyone knowing that they had forgotten it. Quite a few participants found it to be a less stressful situation and thought that it made them focus more on words and pronunciation. Several students thought that Skype was a lot more fun, and one person stated that it was “cool to use technology with Spanish and evaluate benefits and barriers,” while another liked that she “got to see what it would be like on a business call.” One favorer of the OCMC mode wrote: “I liked the environment; I’m on the computer quite frequently so it’s a comfortable, regular environment. Headphones make it easier to cancel out background conversations and noises.”

Overall, FTF is clearly the preferred mode for L2 communication in the classroom. Personality and opinions will always differ, and this case is no exception; one student’s preference is to another’s distaste. Though a few students saw little or no value in Skype for communication in the L2 classroom, most participants’ comments make it clear that they recognize Skype’s distinct advantages, even if FTF is their general preference. It seems that the majority of students felt that as long as OCMC does not entirely replace FTF, both communicative modes have value in the classroom for their distinct advantages and disadvantages. Below comments of six participants on the feedback questionnaire that are
representative of the participants overall and illustrative of the benefits they noted in each mode. Each bullet point represents two thoughts from one individual:

- (FTF) “It was easier to organize who was going to talk because you could see when someone wanted to say something.” / (OCMC) “I was less shy to speak because the people were not looking directly at me. I had more to talk about.”

- (FTF) “It was more personal and the classroom was not as crowded.” / (OCMC) “It was cool to use technology with Spanish and evaluate the benefits and barriers.”

- (FTF) “You could see what the person was saying in a closer manner.” / (OCMC) “We got to see what it would be like on a business call.”

- (FTF) “There was no technological interference.” / (OCMC) “It’s a bit embarrassing to speak Spanish in front of people, so I liked the anonymity of the Skype conversation.”

- (FTF) “I enjoyed it more than if we had simply written our answers.” / (OCMC) “It was a fun activity to do with the class.”

- (FTF) “It is easier to assess the reactions of the group and it is more personal.” / (OCMC) “It was more comfortable speaking in Spanish in that total communication was through words and intonation.”

Overall, these comments reveal that the participants found benefits in each communicative mode, thereby validating use of each in the L2 classroom for their different advantages.

**RQ3: Is there a significant difference between the FTF and OCMC groups in number of words and number of turns?**

An independent sample \( t \)-test was first performed to check whether the different versions of the task utilized in this study differed from each other on the variables of interest (number of words and number of turns). Results of this analysis revealed that there was not a significant difference in the number of words for Task 1 (M: 196.5, SD: 128.2) and Task 2 (M: 170.9, SD: 119.5) conditions; \( t (60) = .814, p = .419 \). In a similar vein, no significant difference was found in the number of turns for Task 1 (M: 36.1, SD: 16.7) and Task 2 (M: 30.2, SD: 15.4) conditions; \( t (60) = 1.433, p = .157 \). Therefore, research question 3 was answered based on the assumption that both tasks that were utilized are sufficiently similar.

In order to further answer this research question, another independent \( t \)-test was conducted with Mode (FTF vs. OCMC) as independent variable and number of words and number of turns as dependent variables. Results showed a significant difference in the number of turns for FTF (M: 26.9, SD: 14.1) and OCMC (M: 39.5, SD: 15.9) conditions; \( t \)
(60) = -3.278, p = .002, d = -.83. On the contrary, results of this analysis did not show a significant difference in the number of words for FTF (M: 161.1, SD: 125.7) and OCMC (M: 206.3, SD: 119.2) conditions; \( t(60) = -1.450, p= .152 \). In other words, it was shown that participants in the OCMC group took significantly more turns than participants in the FTF group. This statistically significant difference was not found for number of words, though the OCMC group did produce more words than the FTF group.

**RQ4: Is there any significant relationship between willingness to communicate (WTC), as measured in this study, and the number of words and turns produced by participants in either mode?**

Prior to the correlation analysis, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were computed for the items on the questionnaire utilized to measure WTC. Results showed the alpha coefficient to be .97, which is very high and indicates strong internal consistency among the items on the questionnaire. Put in other words, this coefficient shows that participants’ answers to the items on the questionnaire can be predicted from their answers to the other items. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for the correlation analysis carried out.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Correlation Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turns FTF</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26.9355</td>
<td>14.17024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words FTF</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>161.1935</td>
<td>125.77027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns OCMC</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39.5161</td>
<td>15.99556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words OCMC</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>206.3226</td>
<td>119.22343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTC</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.1185</td>
<td>.78371</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results for the correlation analyses carried out (see Table 4) show two significant correlation coefficients, both at the 0.01 level. First, there is a significant relationship between WTC and number of words used in FTF communication (\( r = .597 \)); second, results show a significant relationship between WTC and number of turns taken in FTF communication (\( r = .705 \)). In other words, the more willingness to communicate the more participants participated in the conversations, as shown by the number of turns, and the more words they produced. In the same manner, the less willingness to communicate the fewer
Table 4. Correlation Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
<th>Turns</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Turns</th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>WTC</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FTF</td>
<td>FTF</td>
<td>OCMC</td>
<td>OCMC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turns FTF</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.869**</td>
<td>.550**</td>
<td>.774**</td>
<td>.705**</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correlation</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words FTF</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>.869**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.406*</td>
<td>.828**</td>
<td>.597**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td>.024</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Turns OCMC</td>
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<td>.406*</td>
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<td>Words OCMC</td>
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** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

words they produced or the fewer turns they took in the conversations. Interestingly, however, this positive linear relationship was not found between willingness to communicate and the number of words and number of turns in the OCMC mode.

Results for this research question seem to indicate that WTC is not the same for OCMC and FTF, since no significant linear relationship was found between this internal variable and the outcome variables in the performance of the tasks using Skype.

In summary, these results indicate that the majority of students prefer L2 communication in the classroom to take place via the FTF mode. Participants note that FTF is more personal, it facilitates easier turn-taking, and it provides visual cues. It is a fact,
however, that participants in the OCMC mode produced a significantly larger number of turns. In other words, participants intervened more often in the conversation through the computer as compared to the similar task that was carried out face-to-face. Interestingly, however, this difference was not shown for number of words, since no significant difference was shown between the FTF and OCMC groups. It seems, therefore, that participants were more willing to take part in the conversation using the computer but that their interventions were not any longer.

Finally, results for RQ4 indicate that the measure of WTC taken is not applicable in the OCMC mode. It seems, therefore, that this new technological mode neutralizes participants’ willingness to communicate: how often participants take turns or how much they produce cannot be predicted from their willingness to communicate in this mode. This seems to indicate that OCMC is distinct enough from FTF that an individual’s normally predictable WTC in a communicative situation is reset in the OCMC mode. The number of words and turns produced by an individual in the OCMC mode are not indicative of their WTC.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The results of this investigation allow us to conclude the following: it appears that the L2 Spanish learners in the study almost universally prefer to communicate in the classroom using the face-to-face mode. This is an interesting finding, as it seems to contradict the results of numerous studies that involve comparisons of FTF and CMC, and which have found positive attitudes towards and preference for CMC modes.\(^\text{16}\) The difference, however, is that most previous studies have focused on written CMC, not oral CMC.

Satar and Özdener conducted a comparison of text versus voice chat, and found that learners’ anxiety levels were higher in the voice chat group, despite the fact that both groups showed significant improvement in target skills (602-606). The authors hypothesized that some reasons for this could be that text chat is more forgiving of pauses in communication, and that voice chat might involve a higher cognitive load. Similarly, Hampel and Hauck wrote that:

> As we move from relatively simple text-chat applications to more complex software that supports synchronous audio communication online, another aspect that has to be taken into account is the multimodal nature of these new environments... While such environments offer great opportunities, we must not ignore the fact that they also make greater demands on the user. (68)

Drawing on these studies, it could be hypothesized that in the present study the Skype interaction may have involved a higher cognitive load, as well as slightly higher anxiety levels than the same task conducted by written CMC would have involved. More than one third of the participants in Yanguas’s forthcoming study reported slightly more nervousness using OCMC in a comparison of FTF and OCMC (audio and video) modes. Satar and Özdener (602-606) also reported diminished anxiety in text chat, but not in voice chat. A

\(^\text{16}\) Darhower 273; Baralt 92; Lee, “Going Beyond Classroom” 115-117; Pérez 89-104; Ushida 65; Freiermuth and Jarrell 195-205; Yanguas ,“Task-Based Oral” 29.
potentially higher cognitive load, coupled with more anxiety, could have had a diminishing effect on participants’ attitudes towards the OCMC mode.

That being said, positive attitudes and preferences are distinct. In the present study, though the participants generally preferred FTF, they had an overall positive attitude about OCMC as well. Below are some of the participants’ comments about the Skype task which support their positive attitudes of the OCMC mode (as collected from the debriefing questionnaire, Appendix G):

- “It forced you to speak Spanish.”
- “It’s a good experience.”
- “I got to wear a headset.”
- “I was less shy and I had more to talk about.”
- “It was cool.”
- “It made you pay attention to listen to different voices.”
- “It was more comfortable speaking Spanish in that total communication was through words.”
- “You could hear the person very well.”
- “It was a fun activity to do with the class.”
- “Less stressful.”
- “Got a lot of laughs from this activity.”

Therefore, it should not be concluded that because the participants in this study preferred FTF it was due to negative experiences or attitudes towards OCMC in the classroom; in fact the opposite appears to be true.

Despite their professed preference for FTF, qualitative analysis of word and turn counts revealed that the majority of the participants actually produced more language in the OCMC mode, both in terms of number of turns and number of words. A deeper quantitative analysis of the results revealed a significant difference in the number of turns produced between FTF and OCMC groups but not in the number of words. Thus, participants may not have produced any more language in the OCMC mode, but they certainly did interject and participate in the conversation more in terms of the number of times that they initiated speaking. This seems to show a greater willingness to communicate, even if it does not necessarily demonstrate a greater quantity of communication.
These results must be interpreted with care, since previous studies have not addressed these issues. It is plausible to conclude, based on these results, that Skype may be a valid instrument which fosters communication in the classroom. Satar and Özdener (602-606), in their comparison of text and audio chat groups to a control group, found that both CMC groups increased their L2 proficiency while the control did not. Though that particular study did not take WTC into account, the fact that there was a proficiency increase in the OCMC group seems to indicate that more communication took place in order to achieve that L2 progress. In addition, as many studies have shown the interrelatedness of different IDs such as L2 proficiency, motivation, anxiety, and WTC\(^\text{17}\), it can be hypothesized that other related individual factors can probably indicate an individual’s WTC to some extent. For example, an individual with low anxiety, high motivation, and high L2 proficiency is likely to have a higher WTC than an individual with a different set of IDs might have. For example, the increased proficiency that Satar and Özdener demonstrated after using OCMC potentially indicates higher WTC as well (602-606). Applied to the present study, the significant increase in turn-taking that resulted in the OCMC task might indicate that participants were less anxious, more motivated, or perhaps had a more desirable interlocutor; however, whatever combination of factors and IDs that account for the increase, it is likely that they are all closely related to each other and to WTC, given the communicative nature of the assignment.

Some of the participants’ comments indicate increased WTC in OCMC as well, for various possible reasons and in relation to various other IDs. Some of these include external motivation (“We were able to carry our skill over and not regress to English as easily because we were being recorded.”), increased ability to communicate (“I could think about the topic without having the group anticipate my answer.”), increased L2 support offered by the mode (“I was able to use the internet to look up words while Skyping.”), and decreased anxiety (“I liked that we weren’t seeing each others’ faces, which gets me nervous.”). Other comments indicate that the increase in turn-taking could be due not solely to the OCMC mode, but other

\(^{17}\) Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond 1-14; Dörnyei, “Individual Differences” 42-68; Kang 277-292; MacIntyre et al., “Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate” 545-562; Freiermuth and Jarrell 189-212.
factors (“The topic was more desirable.”); however, comments of this type were limited to very few participants.

As far as WTC is concerned, the present results are very interesting: OCMC seems to neutralize this variable as measured here. This could be a result of negative factors, such as: turn-taking patterns in audio conferencing or technical problems; however, it could also be due to factors that could be extremely beneficial for the SLA process, such as anonymity or positive attitudes toward technology. Traditionally, WTC has been measured in non CMC contexts; this analysis is opening the field up to a new variable for WTC. To date, the researcher is unaware of any studies that have tried to measure WTC in an OCMC context, and this should be considered when interpreting the data.

Several of the participants’ comments support the idea of anonymity. Data in Freiermuth and Jarrell (189-212) also support the assertion that for some learners privacy, or anonymity, is a key factor that directly influences comfort level and WTC: “there were a total of 19 participants who mentioned that their preference stemmed from not being in a face-to-face setting.” (196) In the present study, several examples illustrate a common appreciation of the same sense of anonymity:

• “I got to use a dictionary and nobody knew.”
• “I liked that nobody could see my face.”
• “Less stressful than actually facing someone.”
• “I was less shy to speak.”

As explored previously, positive attitudes towards technology in general, and Skype specifically, could have a direct effect on the neutralization of WTC in OCMC, as well as the participants’ increased turn-taking. Many participants praised the novelty factor or “coolness” of using technology. Some illustrative comments include:

• “It was cool.”
• “I got to wear headphones.”
• “Headphones make it easier to cancel out background noise.”
• “I liked the environment.”
• “(I liked) being on the computer.”
Numerous other studies support learners’ generally positive attitudes toward technology for L2 communication in written, oral, and video CMC modes.\textsuperscript{18}

In any case, these results warrant further investigation in order to explore this issue more deeply, as it could have very positive consequences for L2 learners. If Skype, and OCMC in general, has the potential to increase learners’ willingness to take turns speaking in L2 conversations, that is an excellent step towards increased interaction in L2, which is essential for L2 acquisition according to the Interactionist Theory (Long 413-468). OCMC seems to cancel out the old rules of WTC in FTF communication, and create a new pattern of interaction and communication between users. In this neutralization of WTC in the OCMC mode we, as instructors and researchers, have encountered an extremely fertile ground for a new and different type of L2 interaction in this exciting and unexplored realm of technology which is OCMC. Willingness to communicate remains the important variable that researchers began to analyze decades ago; however what have changed are modern modes of communication. Darhower noted that:

Whereas much SLA research on social interaction deals with face-to-face conversation, the emergence of synchronous CMC brings forth a whole new set of research and practical issues concerning social interaction within the L2 learning context. (250)

Though some of these concerns have been addressed to some extent, the computer-mediated default mode has been chat and other synchronous written CMC modes. There need to be some oral communication options, and these just haven’t been explored yet. Given the present results, and the fact that WTC seems to not transfer between FTF and OCMC modes, this reveals exciting potential for bolstering WTC in new and interesting ways, and perhaps even tapping into levels of WTC that are as yet unachievable in any other communicative mode.

\textsuperscript{18} Robinson; Gardner and Lambert 274; Darhower 273; Baralt 92; Lee, “Going Beyond Classroom” 115-117; Pérez 89-104; Ushida 65; Freiermuth and Jarrell 189-212; Yanguas, “Task-Based Oral” 29.
CHAPTER 6

CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Though the findings in the present study are extremely exciting and add valuable new information to the field, the study had several limitations. To begin with, there were only 31 participants, which is a rather small sampling of L2 Spanish learners. It would be beneficial to conduct further research on the topic on a larger scale, so as to make it more generalizable.

The study focused exclusively on intermediate students, which is limiting as well. As several other investigations have noted, CMC and OCMC have different potential benefits with learners of different proficiency levels. It is speculated that OCMC may be too much of a cognitive load and anxiety-inducer for beginner L2 students, while potentially the perfect challenge for more advanced students. The results from this study may not be applicable to students at other levels of L2 study, and OCMC may have increased or diminished benefits in diverse proficiency contexts.

Video conferencing is another emerging variety of OCMC that was not touched upon in this investigation; however, future studies could greatly inform the field by exploring the potential benefits of video CMC as compared to audio CMC and FTF. Though audio and video may seem to be similar modes, they are significantly distinct in that video CMC factors facial cues and gestures back into the communicative repertoire, yet still employs technology to do so. Yanguas has begun to explore and compare these distinct modes of OCMC, yet the iceberg still lurks below the surface, waiting to be explored. As Skype has recently come out with version 5.0, it would be a very accessible and widely-used program with which to investigate WTC further within the context of group video conferencing.

Another interesting direction for future studies to consider is employing different task types and topics. Hampel and Hauck (69) point out that there is a growing demand for authentic tasks and materials. This study employed decision-making tasks, but using jigsaw, gap-fill, or any number of other task varieties, especially those involving authentic materials,

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19 Rahimi and Yadollahi 171-172; Satar and Özdener 602-606
would surely reveal important differences in outcome. Additionally, topic has an inevitable effect on WTC. As one student noted on a feedback questionnaire, his reason for enjoying one of the communicative modes during the study was: interesting task. Technology is neutral, but the way we use it isn’t (Blake, *Brave New Digital* 11), and the same is true of a communicative mode; so it matters very much why and how we choose to use them. What that student really liked was the topic, not the mode, which demonstrates that if well-planned tasks with interesting topics are employed, they can go a long way towards promoting the kind of language use that all instructors strive for.

Using interesting topics, as well as other variables such as desirability of interlocutor are extremely difficult to control for, but they certainly have sway in how much individuals choose to communicate, or not communicate, in the L2 classroom (Kang 277-292). These and other such variables like anxiety and communicative competence are considered to be like many other IDs that recognizably affect WTC, but analysis of other IDs was not attempted in this investigation, though several other studies in different contexts have (Kang 277-292; Freiermuth and Jarrell 189-212). Future studies on WTC may help fill in the gaps in our present knowledge by focusing on this particular trait and how it interacts with other individual differences.

WTC, on both trait and state levels, is intricately tied to and influenced by other IDs. This study attempted to examine L2 WTC in isolation; however the probable reality is that IDs function in orchestra with each other, and in the case of L2 WTC, IDs such as anxiety, motivation, language competence, perceived language competence, and L1 WTC, surely have a quantifiable and important influence. It is important to both analyze IDs such as WTC from a detailed and isolated perspective, and to retain the more global view of how people, with their unique systems of individual differences, function like machines that have many essential parts which are all integral to overall performance.

Perhaps most important, more research is also needed to investigate the neutralizing effect that OCMC seems to exert on WTC. This was an unexpected and exciting finding which indicates that OCMC is such a new and unexplored realm of L2 acquisition studies, more specifically the study of L2 learners’ IDs, that a greater pool of knowledge is necessary in order to begin to understand its advantages and disadvantages in relation to WTC in the SLA context. Though word and turn counts can successfully report WTC in FTF, a new
conceptualization is needed to explore WTC in the OCMC mode, and help us to understand the way that it affects learners practicing oral skills using audio technology. This study opens the door to a new type of oral language practice in the classroom, which has vast potential for increasing learners’ WTC and practice of L2. Though the researcher would not recommend converting the entire conversational component of an L2 course into nothing but OCMC practice, it is nevertheless a valuable tool for use by instructors and learners. The present results indicate that even though WTC cannot be measured in comparison with FTF by the means used here, OCMC was proven to be a valuable mode of oral practice that promotes more turn-taking, a roughly equal amount of language production, and was thought to be an above average way of using L2 oral skills by more than 50 percent of the participants (see Table 2).

In conclusion, OCMC would seem to be a helpful and enjoyable communicative complement which foments oral language production. It could be a valuable starting point from which to introduce L2 learners to new, modern, and different ways of communicating in their second language, as well as a way to offer an enjoyable, “cool,” and effective tool for valuable L2 oral practice.
REFERENCES


Robinson, Gail. Personal Interview. 22 March 2011.


APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANTS’ BACKGROUND INFORMATION
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APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Hello!

You are being asked to participate in this research because you are a student of Spanish as a second language at San Diego State University. You will be asked to carry out two tasks and fill out two questionnaires for this study. You will be asked to complete two communicative language tasks in groups of three, with a different setting for each task: one will take place in the lab using Skype to communicate with your group; the other you will be carried out face-to-face in your classroom.

The purpose of the study is to help the researcher determine the usefulness of technology, Skype specifically, for foreign language classrooms and language learning. The data will be stored anonymously so that nothing will be linked to you, and it will be incorporated into the researcher’s thesis. This research will hopefully aid instructors in continuing to improve their language programs in the future. Don’t forget that participation is completely voluntary.

Thank you very much for your consideration,

Alayne Lewis
Graduate Student and Spanish Instructor at SDSU
Department of Spanish and Portuguese
Office: AL
619.987.4547
alaynelewis@hotmail.com

If you have any questions or concerns related to your rights as a participant in research, please feel free to contact the SDSU Institutional Review Board at: IRB@mail.sdsu.edu or 619.594.6622
APPENDIX C

BACKGROUND QUESTIONNAIRE
Spanish Language Background Information

1. You are (please circle): male female

2. Please circle the answer which best corresponds to your current academic year:
   - Freshman
   - Sophomore
   - Junior
   - Senior
   - 5th year or higher

3. What is your major?
   _______________________________________________________

   What is your minor?
   _______________________________________________________

4. How many college level Spanish classes have you taken (anywhere, not strictly at SDSU)?

5. Have you ever studied abroad? Yes No
   Where?
   _______________________________________________________________________
   How long?
   _______________________________________________________________________

6. Do any members of your family speak Spanish? Yes No
7. Do you speak or hear Spanish at home?
   Speak: Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
   Hear: Never Rarely Sometimes Often Always
APPENDIX D

COMMUNICATION QUESTIONNAIRE
Communication Questionnaire

DIRECTIONS: Below are 25 situations in which a person might choose to communicate or not to communicate in Spanish. Presume that you have completely free choice and indicate what percentage of time you would choose to communicate in Spanish in each type of situation by circling the percentage range.

1 Talk with an acquaintance in an elevator.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

2 Talk with a stranger on the bus.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

3 Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of strangers.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

4 Talk with an acquaintance while standing in line.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

5 Talk with a salesperson in a store.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

6 Volunteer an answer when the teacher asks a question in class.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

7 Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of friends.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

8 Talk to your teacher after class.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

9 Ask a question in class.
   0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

10 Talk in a small group (about five people) of strangers.
    0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

11 Talk with a friend while standing in line.
    0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%
12 Talk with a waiter/waitress in a restaurant.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

13 Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of acquaintances.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

14 Talk with a stranger while standing in line.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

15 Present your own opinions in class.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

16 Talk with a shop clerk.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

17 Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of friends.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

18 Talk in a small group (about five people) of acquaintances.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

19 Participate in group discussion in class.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

20 Talk with a garbage collector.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

21 Talk in a large meeting (about 10 people) of strangers.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

22 Talk with a librarian.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

23 Help others answer a question.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

24 Talk in a small group (about five people) of friends.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%

25 Speak in public to a group (about 30 people) of acquaintances.
0%-25%  26%-50%  51%-75%  76%-100%
APPENDIX E

TASK 1: PRIZE MONEY
TASK 1: PRIZE MONEY

Su grupo ganó $10.000 en la lotería en la cafetería de la universidad. La única condición es que tienen que gastar el dinero juntos. Ustedes juntos (su grupo) van a gastar el dinero. Piensa en cinco maneras en que te gustaría gastar el dinero a ti.

1. __________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________
4. __________________________________________________
5. __________________________________________________

Ahora discutan en el grupo cuáles son los tres mejores planes para gastar el dinero y por qué.

1. __________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________
APPENDIX F

TASK 2: PERUVIAN VISITORS
TASK 2: PERUVIAN VISITORS

Un grupo de cuatro jóvenes peruanos de dieciocho años va a llegar a en San Diego el 2 de diciembre. Ustedes (su grupo) van a ser sus guías. Piensa en cinco lugares que te gustaría visitar a ti con el grupo.

1. __________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________
4. __________________________________________________
5. __________________________________________________

Ahora discutan en el grupo cuáles son los tres mejores lugares para que los chicos peruanos visiten y por qué.

1. __________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________
APPENDIX G

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONNAIRE
Debriefing Questionnaire

1. Rate your experience working in the face-to-face conversation group.
   a. very unfavorable
   b. slightly unfavorable
   c. average
   d. slightly favorable
   e. very favorable

2. What did you like about discussing an issue in the face-to-face conversation group?

3. What did you dislike about discussing an issue in the face-to-face conversation group?

4. Rate your experience working in the Skype conversation group.
   a. very unfavorable
   b. slightly unfavorable
   c. average
   d. slightly favorable
   e. very favorable

5. What did you like about discussing an issue in the Skype conversation group?

6. What did you dislike about discussing an issue in the Skype conversation group?

7. Which type of group communication do you prefer?
   a. face-to-face conversation
   b. Skype conversation

8. Explain your answer from Question 7:
APPENDIX H

NUMBER OF TURNS TAKEN AND WORDS SPOKEN
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