(Un)Willingness to Communicate in English among Korean Study Abroad Students in the Philippines

EDWARD JAY M. QUINTO
BERNARDINO C. OFALIA
JINHO BAE
LEAN SYHING B. SALONGA
Mapúa University, Manila

ABSTRACT

Internationalization has prompted schools to send out students in study-abroad programs. Many inbound international students come to the Philippines often to learn the English language at lower tuition costs, lower costs of living, and well-trained teachers. Among Koreans, many feel strongly motivated to learn English, yet many remain unwilling to communicate in real-life situations. The researchers explore the notion of (un)willingness to communicate among ten Korean EFL learners in study abroad programs in Manila. Findings from an indepth focus group discussion support previous studies within the Korean social context, in that the participants generally exhibit unwilling-to-communicate tendencies. Three themes that explain this phenomenon were identified: communicative situation's level of formality, learners' intercultural sensitivity, and their subject matter anxiety. Both level of formality and subject matter anxiety support willingness to communicate (WTC) as a situationally-dependent construct. However, intercultural sensitivity seemed to be a mixture of intercultural complex (IC) and L1 audience sensitivity (L1AS) previously found among learners within the Korean school system. It could then be that, as a factor of WTC in a study abroad context, intercultural sensitivity involves a knowledge of 'Non-Korean world', i.e., the Filipino language learning context, and an intense awareness of the inequalities perceived between Koreans and their Non-Korean audience. Results may assist communication coaches, international programs staff, and language teachers in minimizing the 'generalized baggage' that Korean learners carry around and bring with them when communicating in a foreign language.

Keywords: *Willingness to communicate, unwillingness to communicate, intercultural sensitivity, Korean EFL learners, study abroad programs.*

INTRODUCTION

Internationalization has become one important goal for 21st century education institutions around the globe (Egekvist, Lyngdorf & Du, 2017; Idid, 2019). In turn, more and more students are sent in study abroad programs who deal with challenges related to English as an international language (Crooks et al., 2001). One issue is whether students, after considerable exposure and formal learning, would be ready and willing to communicate in English when the need arises.

Underlying psychological, linguistic, and communicative mechanisms that explain why certain individuals seek, while others avoid, communication in a second or a foreign language have been the interest of research into *willingness to communicate* (WTC)*,* which is 'the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so' (Macintyre, Dörnyei, Clément & Noels, 1998, p. 546). WTC researchers have traditionally focused on investigating the factors and conditions with which individuals become ready to engage into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons and in a second language

(L2) (Macintyre et al., 1998). In the context of study abroad students, WTC was reconceptualized as a volitional inclination affected by situational variables, such as the interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context (Kang, 2005). In such context, Kang (2005) maintains that WTC emerges from a dynamic ensemble of situational factors.

To gain an understanding of WTC as an emergent situational phenomenon, the current study investigates from a cross-cultural perspective the willingness or unwillingness to communicate of Korean study abroad students in the Philippines. The researchers deem Korean study abroad students an interesting case which can illuminate (un)willingness to communicate. For one, most Korean students strive to learn, and even spend time and money to learn English (Adid, 2008; Choe, 2016). The economic and social benefits of English are recurring themes in studies that involved study abroad students (Borlongan & Quinto, 2015; Quinto, 2015; Quinto & Castillo, 2016). In real-life situations, however, many Koreans exhibit unwilling-to-communicate tendencies (Edwards, 2006).

The Philippines, where English is used widespread, could potentially provide rich insights into this phenomenon. The Southeast Asian country remains to be the most preferred English language learning hub due to its low tuition costs, low cost of living, and a population of well-educated and well-trained ESL teachers. In fact, around 30,000 Korean students study in universities, elementary and secondary schools, and language academies in the Philippines (Choe, 2016).

Understanding factors that contribute or hamper students' readiness to engage in communicative situations using English could assist communication coaches, international programs staff, language teachers, and other stakeholders in improving internationalization-related activities in general and the study abroad experience as a communication phenomenon in particular.

Although there exist WTC studies involving Korean students in their home country (Edwards, 2006; Jung, 2011; Kang, 2005; Kim, 2004), WTC among Korean study abroad students remains underreported. To help fill this gap, this paper reports the results of a qualitative investigation of (un)willingness to communicate with the aim of exploring factors that affect (un)willing to communicate tendencies of Korean study abroad students in the cross-cultural and cross-linguistic context of the Philippines.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the most recent studies on willingness/unwillingness to communicate in English. To arrive at an understanding of what previous studies posit with respect to willingness/unwillingness to communicate in English among Korean students, the review adopts a thematic funnel structure. As such, the review is divided into two subsections. It begins with a general review of studies that involved participants other than Koreans. A majority of studies in the first subsection are those on East Asian participants. In the second subsection, the review looks at the small but considerably substantial body of studies on WTC and Korean participants. In its entirety, the review pays particular attention to the situation factors that contribute to individuals willingness/unwillingness to communicate in English (Kang, 2005). Thus, the review of literature herein is guided by the question *What contributes to willingness/unwillingness to communicate in English among individuals?*

WTC among Non-Korean Participants

A look at past WTC studies involving non-Korean participants reveals factors that contribute to this feeling of psychological readiness/unreadiness to begin discourse in a second or foreign language. Increasingly, attention is paid into understanding factors that support or hamper WTC for its array of positive and negative communicative and language use outcomes in English as a second (ESL) and foreign (EFL) language contexts (Riasati, 2012). Such can be surmised from findings of WTC studies that involved East Asian participants.

Among Japanese participants, some antecedents of willingness to communicate found include perceived competence and L2 anxiety (Hashimoto, 2002; Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004); personality, proficiency, and contextual influences (Yashima, Macintyre, & Ikeda, 2018); and its dynamic interplay with L2 speech fluency (Wood, 2016).

In the Chinese learners' context, factors that contribute to WTC include linguistic factors, socio-cultural factors, self-efficacy, and learner beliefs (Zhong, 2013), language anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008), the topic, interlocutors, task focus, learners' proficiency and task complexity (Chichon, 2019), and learner beliefs, motivation, cognitive factors, linguistic factors, affective factors, and classroom environment (Peng, 2012).

More recent studies found person-level individual differences factors of WTC among Taiwanese learners (Lin, 2019), while perceived competence, language use anxiety and motivation for language learning were identified as WTC components among Macau students (Grant, 2018).

These studies dealt with exploring factors that contribute to East Asian students' readiness or unreadiness to enter discourse in English. In contexts where English is learned and used as a foreign language, WTC is particularly 'vital in creating conditions for engagement in communication and input generation' (Wood, 2016, p. 13). Thus, across these studies, recurring factors found to cotribute to WTC include language anxiety (Grant, 2018; Hashimoto, 2002; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Yashima et al., 2004), which has long been identified as a critical factor in language performance contexts (Macayan & Quinto, 2015; Macayan, Quinto, Otsuka & Cueto, 2018b; Quinto & Macayan, 2019). Motivation constructs also recurred as a WTC factor in these studies (Grant, 2018; Peng, 2012; Zhong, 2013), which supports what the literature on language motivation points to as the essential role of goal orientation on language learning and use (Macayan, Quinto, Otsuka & Cueto, 2018a).

At the backdrop of these studies on East Asian' learners (un)willingness to communicate, the review zooms in on WTC studies that dealt with Korean learners, who themselves belong to the East Asian region.

WTC Among Korean Participants

Like their East Asian counterparts who learn English as a foreign language, Koreans' (un)willingness to communicate in English had also been a subject of interest of previous researchers.

Kim (2004) examined the reliability of MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC model among a sample of Korean EFL students. The study found that their WTC in English was directly influenced by perceived self-confidence and indirectly by motivation stemming from self-confidence. The study revealed low levels of WTC in English of these Korean EFL students, which was corroborated by a mixed methods investigation among 226 Korean undergraduate students (Jung, 2011). Arguing that MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC in L2

model exhibits good fit in the Korean EFL context, Kim (2004) explained that it is more likely a personality-based predisposition than it is situation-based.

In contrast, Kang (2005) in an investigation of how WTC can dynamically emerge and fluctuate during a conversation situation found that Korean EFL learners felt more secure communicating with people they were familiar with. Further, it was reported that the psychological conditions of excitement, responsibility, and security jointly interacted with situational variables of topic, interlocutors, and conversational context in explaining the dynamic emergence of WTC among the Korean learners in a study abroad context in the United States. Thus, Kang (2005) opposed Kim's (2004) argument a year earlier and suggested otherwise that WTC is more of a situation-based variable than a trait-like disposition.

Edwards' (2006) large scale survey of WTC in English among Korean university students found intercultural complex and L1 audience sensitivity as two major factors that explain why students seemed simultaneously eager and reticent to speak English. Through a series of interviews that led to his quantitative analysis, Edwards (2006) also found that fear of mistakes and communication anxiety significantly debilitated Korean learners' willingness to communicate in English.

Given the relative newness of WTC as a construct affecting the learning of a second or foreign language and given the initial findings of WTC studies in the Korean context, other areas still needs to be examined. For one, most WTC studies in the Korean context reviewed in this section were all participated by Korean students in their home country and predominantly used quantitative surveys and other techniques. One direction that then needs focus, as Edwards (2006) implied, would be to consider WTC of Korean learners in Asian contexts outside their own. Kang's (2004) investigation, although was set in a study abroad context as well, focused on Korean learners in the United States. Also, another recent effort to investigate Korean learners in study abroad contexts was set in non-Asian context (Nam, 2018). Methodologically, Edwards (2006) suggested continued research involving qualitative methods.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The foregoing studies on WTC in Korean context rationalizes the need for the present study. Given the backdrop provided by previous studies, a qualitative investigation of Korean EFL learners in a study abroad context would particularly address conceptual and methodological research gaps. As earlier mentioned, most studies of Korean WTC so far were conducted within the Korean social context or non-Asian, study abroad contexts.

In Asian study abroad contexts like in the Philippines, Korean EFL learners have the potential to exhibit certain behaviors, given, for example, that one major context in Edwards (2006), which is L1 audience sensitivity, would clearly not hold true in the second language context of the Philippines, where English instruction is carried out predominantly by non-native speakers. Since this study is exploratory in nature, a qualitative method would address Edwards' (2006) suggestion to further research using other methods.

Among other learner variables in foreign language learning, WTC is one that is relatively understudied. In the Korean context, much is still to be understood. As one of the first attempts to focus on Korean EFL learners' willingness (or unwillingness) to communicate in an Asian study abroad context, it focused on a qualitative investigation centered on two research questions:

1. *Do the Korean participants in study abroad programs in the Philippines exhibit willing (or unwilling) to communicate in English tendencies?*
2. *What factors explain Korean EFL learners' willingness (or unwillingness) to communicate in English?*

METHODOLOGY

In an attempt to address the methodological challenge posed by Edwards (2006), the study used a qualitative method in investigating willingness to communicate in English of Korean learners in study abroad programs in the Philippines. The aim is to explore context-specific evidence on their psychological readiness or unreadiness to begin discourse in a foreign language when they are free to do so and the factors that contribute to this phenomenon. Because the study is exploratory in nature, the findings are not meant to be generalizable, instead are specifically applicable in the context of Korean study abroad students in the Philippines.

The participants were Korean students who were in their respective study abroad programs in various universities, where English is taught and used as a second language (ESL). In this sense, they are similar with participants in past WTC studies (Cameron, 2015; Kang, 2005; Yashima et al., 2004; Zhong, 2013), but are different with them because they are in an Asian study abroad context. They had been in the Philippines for one to six months and were enrolled in four-year tertiary degree programs. They were freshmen in their respective degree programs. Their ages ranged from 16-18. As a sampling criterion, each participant must have been enrolled in an English as a foreign language class in his or her university.

Using snowball sampling, ten participants (male = 5; female = 5) were purposefully selected to participate in the study. The data gathering technique was an in-depth focus group discussion (FGD). As a qualitative research technique, the FGD is an effective way to gather individuals with similar backgrounds and experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest, i.e., the research topic. An FGD facilitator introduces the topics for discussion and facilitates the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion. One of the researchers acted as the facilitator during the FGD. One advantage of the FGD, particularly compared with individual interviews, is that it allows for the participants to openly agree or disagree with each other thereby providing insights on what the group thinks about the issues raised. Also, any disagreements or differences in opinion or beliefs are discussed openly during the session.

An FGD guide based on the two-fold aim of the present study was developed prior the session. The guide was designed to facilitate discussion on the context-specific nature of willingness (or unwillingness) to communicate in English and the factors that contribute to the Korean participants' WTC. English was the preferred medium during the FGD. However, at times when some participants found it difficult to express their ideas in English, they were allowed to speak Korean. This was also made clear among the participants before the FGD started. One of the researchers who speaks fluent Korean facilitated this language issue during the FGD. He offered translations and clarifications in their L1 when the FGD facilitators' questioning proved challenging for the participants. The FGD sessions lasted for 90 minutes. The entire session was tape-recorded. After the FGD, the researchers transcribed the recording. The material ready for analysis was the FGD transcript.

To make sense of the data, the researchers began with data coding. During this step, the researchers focused on identifying interview extracts that were directly related to the two research questions, i.e., (a) whether the participants exhibited willing or unwilling to comunicate in English tendencies and (b) the factors that contributed to this phenomenon. The relevant parts of the FGD transcript were highlighted on initial reading, during which each code was given equal attention. As the coding went on, some codes became recurring while others proved rare. Only recurring codes were used in the development of themes.

Coding was carried out in the tradition of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytic technique aims to 'unearth the themes salient in a text' (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 387). A theme is defined as follows: 'a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). The researchers reviewed and finalized the themes to ensure that each identifies 'a feature of the data that appears interesting' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 94) and could be 'assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). These procedures for data analysis are similar with those in an earlier project where the first author was involved (Quinto & Macayan, 2019).

To meet the ethical requirement of ensuring anonymity, the researchers shall refer to the participants using their initials in presenting extracts from the transcript in the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the thematic analysis of FGD data from the ten Korean participants and discusses these results in relation to previous studies on WTC. Following the two research questions, the researchers first present codes explaining the (un)willingness to communicate in English of Korean learners in study abroad programs in the Philippines. Then, three themes corresponding to three factors contributing to this phenomenon among the study participant are presented and discussed.

Do the Korean participants in study abroad programs in the Philippines exhibit willing (or unwilling) to communicate in English tendencies?

Results from the focus group discussion indicate that the Korean participants do not seem to engage in random conversations unless necessary, reporting feelings of discomfort when doing so. When asked when they engage in random conversations, which reflects what McCroskey and Richmond (1987) explains as 'consequences of communication apprehension, introversion, reticence, and shyness' and of the 'situationally-dependent nature of WTC' (p. 129), most participants seem to exhibit unwilling-to-communicate tendencies:

(1) **Only when I need to**, like favors or asking stuffs. It's not that I'm afraid but I **don't really feel the need to talk** to random people as much as it was before. (SYM)

(2) Not really because I just **feel uncomfortable talking to people** I do not know very well but if I have to I would and it doesn't scare me. (JHC)

(3) Sometimes I guess. But not a random conversation, if they talk to me first I would answer them, but I **rarely initiate conversations**. (DHC)

It appears that not many of the participants feel the need to engage in random conversations. They reported 'not feeling the need to talk to strangers,' 'uncomfortable talking to strangers,' 'rarely initiating conversations'. The participants seemed to exhibit in excerpts (1) to (3) apprehension and introversion, suggesting that they are unwilling to communicate using a English. Moreover, excerpts (4) and (5) suggest that the participants do not exert effort to overcome apprehension and introversion in more communicatively demanding situations, which suggest that they tend to be more unwilling than willing to communicate in English:

(4) **If I have questions to my teacher or friends I would** but not strangers even classmates I am not close with, unless I'm lost or in need. (MJL)

(5) I talk in English a lot but majority of it is **when I am talking to my friends in school**, not at home. (DHC)

In excerpts (4) and (5), the participants revealed that their English conversations are limited their teachers, friends and classmates, and neither to strangers nor at home. This is in consonance with Kang's (2005) finding that Korean learners were willing to communicate only when they felt secure with people they talked to. Had participants MJL and DHC reported that they were also ready to communicate in English with strangers and those at home, they would have exhibited the necessary psychological readiness of the WTC construct. When asked further whether they would be ready to engage in random English conversations with strangers or with their relatives at home, participants MJL and DHC responded:

(6) **With strangers, I am not sure if I can talk to them**. It depends maybe if it's a serious matter and I will see that they are in bad situation I can try to talk to them. If not, I would rather not talk to them at all. (MJL)

(7) I never tried using English at home. I would probably never because I'm **too shy** if I do. (DHC)

If put in specific situations, participants MJL and DHC reported that they would be apprehensive or 'too shy', respectively, which going back to the theoretical definition of WTC are not indicative of a consequence but a manifestation of apprehension and shyness. This further strengthens that claim that these participants exhibit predominantly unwillingness to communicate in English.

One consistent finding in Korean WTC literature is that, although Korean EFL learners often exhibit low levels of WTC, they still enthusiastically pursue learning the language. When asked if this case is similar to them, most of them agreed:

(8) **I am definitely very much motivated to learn English**. In fact it is one of the reasons why I came here in the Philippines, because I want to improve my speaking skills. (AKP)

(9) Actually, **I participate a lot in my English class**. I consider it my practice. It's just different when you are out there and you apply what you learned. (SYM)

(10) **I am very motivated to learn this language**. I find it an important skill to learn how to speak it so I always do my best in my English class. This is why I left Korea to study here in the Philippines. (JLK)

In excerpts (8) to (10), participants AKP, SYM and JKL all reported that they are 'very much motivated', 'participate a lot', and 'very motivated' in learning English, going as far as AKP and JLK both chose to study in the Philippines to improve their English speaking skills.

As with findings in the literature, questions about the participants' language learning motivation yielded consistent findings. Korean EFL learners are very motivated and pursue learning English enthusiastically, although in real-life situations they exhibit unwillingness to communicate in English (Adid, 2008; Edwards, 2006). As the FGD progressed, the researchers focused more intently on factors that explain why Korean EFL learners in this context exhibit willing or unwilling to communicate tendencies.

What factors explain Korean EFL learners' willingness (or unwillingness) to communicate in English?

In relation to the second research question, three themes corresponding to three factors that explain their unwillingness to communicate in English tendencies emerged: (a) level of formality, (b) intercultural sensitivity, and (c) subject matter anxiety. Each is discussed in relation to their exploratory description and similarity or difference with previous findings in the literature.

Level of Formality and WTC

In consonance with McCroskey and Richmond's (1987) definition of WTC as a situationally-dependent factor, excerpts (11) and (12) reveals one factor which might explain why Korean learners exhibit unwillingness to communicate in English.

Whether the situation these Korean EFL learners are in formal or informal communicative set-ups appears to influence their willingness or unwillingness to communicate. When asked what situations usually make them feel uneasy and uncomfortable speaking English, they reported that the level of formality matters:

(11) **I feel nervous when it's a formal conversation** like meetings, classroom report and formal interviews. In these situations, I don't feel that I have enough skills to speak English formally. (SYB)

(12) I agree with (Participant SYB), because like him **I also feel very nervous when I report in front of class**. Maybe I can memorize my report but when my teacher and classmates start asking me questions that's when I am too worried. I do not speak as fast and as clear as them. (AKP)

Participants SYB and AKP both agreed that, in formal situations, they tend to exhibit unwillingness to communicate in English. On the surface, one might argue that the degree of formality of a communicative event expectedly affects one's WTC tendency; however, in this case, participant SYB admitted that his skills are not 'enough to speak English formally,' while participant AKP thinks he does not 'speak as fast and as clear' as his Filipino teachers and classmates. Hence, unwillingness to communicate among Korean learners in this context seems to be triggered by an evaluation of a gap between their current language

skills and expected language skills in formal contexts. This seems to corroborate the findings in the Chinese context which reported that the focus of the task and its complexity do have an influence on students' WTC (Chichon, 2019).

Intercultural Sensitivity and WTC
Another factor that emerged from the focus group discussion deals with intercultural sensitivity of Korean learners among Filipino interlocutors. Even in studies conducted within the Korean social context, audience sensitivity was found to affect willingness and unwillingness to communicate. However, set outside the Korean social context, the participants seem to simultaneously evaluate the nature of their audience when speaking English. In excerpts (13) to (15), participants JHC, SYB and DHC reported how their intercultural sensitivity works in this context.

(13) I'm very new in the Philippines, although I find everyone friendly so far, I am not very sure about what they think when I am speaking English and that worries me a lot. **I know they have their own standards and I'm afraid I don't meet those standards**. (JHC)

(14) When I am with Filipino classmates, **I feel that they look at me and judge me** since they are very good in speaking English. Unlike when I'm with my Korean friends, speaking English is less stressful since I know them and I know they will not judge me that much. So I feel really uncomfortable. (SYB)

(15) Filipinos and Koreans are very different. In Korea, we are used to memorizing English words, but Filipinos are more on the communication side. **I often feel too shy when I'm speaking in front of them because their English is way better than Koreans' English**. (DHC)

Excerpts (13) to (15) suggest that audience sensitivity among Korean EFL learners in a study abroad context is influenced by a knowledge of the non-Korean world, in this case the Filipino language context, and an intense feeling brought by a recognition of the difference between the Korean and non-Korean world. In Edwards' (2006) Korean WTC paradigm, these participants seem to exhibit a mixture of the two major factors, i.e., intercultural complex and L1 audience sensitivity.

Outside the Korean social context, the Korean learners seemed to exhibit knowledge of the Filipino context, particularly of Filipino teachers' and students' language skills. For example, participant JHC manifested knowledge of Filipinos' language standards. Participant SYB also mentioned that Filipinos are very good in speaking English, while participant DHC went as far as differentiating Filipinos and Koreans, saying Filipinos' English (skills) are better than Koreans' English. This recognition of aspects of the non-Korean world is akin to Edwards (2006) notion of intercultural complex.

As for audience sensitivity, the participants did not experience sensitivity as a result of L1 speakers' presence, but because of their knowledge of Filipinos' language abilities, causing 'intense awareness of the differences, or more specifically, the inequalities speakers perceive between themselves and the Korean audience present in the communication situation' (Edwards, 2006, p. 150). Because of their knowledge of the language context in

the Philippines, the participants felt a great deal of sensitivity of their audience. As reported in previous studies, the interlocutor is another factor that influences WTC (Cao, 2011; Chichon, 2019; Kang, 2005; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Wood, 2016).

Hence, it can be said that the audience sensitivity that Korean EFL learners would exhibit in a study abroad context is a mixture of the intercultural complex and L1 audience sensitivity Korean learners would experience within the Korean social context.

Subject Matter Anxiety and WTC
A final factor that emerged explaining WTC in the Korean EFL context is that of subject matter anxiety. Excerpts (16) and (17) exemplify the importance of the subject of discussion as a necessary ingredient of willing- and unwilling-to-communicate tendencies. When asked whether the subject of discussion is an important factor of their willingness (or unwillingness) to communicate in English, participants (16) and (17) both agreed.

> (16) When I engage in conversations I never did, **the topic matters too,** for example we talk about science, and I don't know much about science especially in English terms, that would make me nervous and I would not talk at all. I study with my tutor when I get home so that in classroom activities, I could participate too. (JSK)
>
> (17) **About topics I am not aware of I would rather keep quiet.** I don't want to be embarrassed talking about something I don't know. (SHJ)

In excerpts (16) and (17), participants JSK and SHK explain how the subject matter of conversations is a necessarily element of willingness to communicate. For participant JSK, the 'topic matters too' and if he talks about science, something he knows little about especially English terms, it makes him nervous and he 'would not talk at all.' For participant SHJ, she admits she 'would rather keep quiet' and does not want to be 'embarrassed taking about something' she does not know. Understandably, they feel less nervous and afraid discussing familiar topics. When asked whether the ease of topic makes them willing to communicate using a foreign language, participant JSK answered:

> (18) Definitely. In fact, when there is an opportunity to engage in conversations about topics I love, even with my Filipino friends, **I try my best to join them**. And I like it when I can get along with them. (JSK)

The participants' willingness and unwillingness to communicate as a result of subject matter anxiety corroborates McCroskey and Richmond's (1987) original theoretical construct that WTC is situationally-dependent. This finding also supports previous studies that reported that the topic contributes to WTC (Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005). On topics Korean participants felt not very knowledgable about, they reported feelings of anxiety, which is also a common theme in previous WTC studies (Grant, 2018; Hashimoto, 2002; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Yashima et al., 2004). In this case, the subject matter in a communicative situation explains why Korean learners exhibited unwillingness to communicate in English. Particularly, the subject matter was reported to cause feelings of anxiety and in turn led the participants to be unwilling to communicate in English.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative investigation of Korean EFL learners' (un)willingness to communicate (WTC) in a study abroad context in the Philippines provided interesting insights, which enrich both knowledge and practice relating to factors affecting this psychological construct among Korean learners. Using an in-depth focus group discussion among ten purposefully selected Korean EFL learners enrolled in various universities in the Philippines, the researchers identified themes that extend and challenge findings in previous studies involved participants studying in their own country, therefore within the Korean social context.

The study found that Korean EFL learners in study abroad context exhibited predominantly unwilling to communicate tendencies in using the English language, although they reported high motivation level toward learning the language. Previous studies also already documented how Korean EFL learners often exhibit lower levels of willingness to communicate and how they often engage in conversation only with people they feel secure with. In this context, three factors emerged as potential explanations to the participants' unwillingness to communicate in English.

First, the level of formality of communicative situations was reported to impact Korean learners' willingness to communicate. Particularly, more formal situations led to unwilling to communicate tendencies among the participants. This tendency is often caused by a mismatch between the Korean EFL learners' current language skills and expected language skills in formal situations. The conceptualization of WTC as a situationally dependent construct rationalizes how this theme emerged from the focus group discussion.

Second, intercultural sensitivity as a factor of WTC explains how, outside the Korean social context, Korean EFL learners exhibited knowledge of Filipino teachers' and students' language skills and that this knowledge caused intense awareness in the communication situation, leading to the unwilling-to-communicate tendencies. Importantly, intercultural sensitivity of Korean EFL learners in study abroad contexts appears to combine aspects of previously conceptualized factors of Korean EFL learners' WTC, i.e., intercultural complex and L1 audience sensitivity.

Finally, subject matter anxiety emerged as another situational factor that explains why Korean EFL learners would exhibit willing- or unwilling-to-communicate tendencies. This theme further strengthens the conceptualization of WTC as a construct which is intricately linked with the situation.

The results of this qualitative investigation point to a number of future research directions. First, as the qualitative findings provided exploratory information about WTC of Korean EFL learners in a study abroad context, future researchers may investigate the extent at which the factors may be generalized among a bigger group of Korean learners in study-abroad programs. To do this, standardized measures of WTC have to be used or developed. One course of action would be to follow up Kim's (2004) study and also test MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC in L2 model among these learners. Another manner through which to accomplish this is to quantitatively explore factors of WTC in this context. The themes that emerged in this investigation may be used as conceptualized factors of a WTC in study abroad context scale. Aside from measuring levels of WTC, quantitative studies among this sample may also test how WTC influences or is influenced by other language learning variables as did previous researchers (Jung, 2011; Peters, 2006; Kang, 2005; Kim, 2004). Such studies should further peel off WTC's dynamic theoretical content.

In terms of international academic practice, international programs staff, those involved in managing inbound foreign students, may use the findings to inform their efforts in assisting foreign students to better acculturate in the host country. Specific attention maybe given to the notion of intercultural sensitivity and how local student partners and teachers could assist foreign students to bridge the cultural and language gap. Toward this, a more nuanced approach to designing programs aimed at initially assisting foreign students to cope with the local culture may be thought about. In the Philippines, for example, many universities design Filipino for Foreign Students courses as a compulsary requirement for international students. While this may really be helpful among students who already have a considerable proficiency in the English language, Korean students who themselves still struggle with English might need not a local language course, but a more specialized and targeted course designed to raise their English language skills, such as an English Conversation course.

In terms of teaching, knowledge of Korean EFL students' (un)willingness to communicate may assist language teachers in thinking about classroom situations that bring about certain WTC tendencies. Specifically, an understanding of learners' unwillingness to communicate in more advanced and more demanding communicative situations may help teachers choose specific tasks and activities that can encourage participation among students. The goal should be to provide opportunies for language use that is not face threatening, not anxiety-provoking, and not discouraging, so that the the learners will be able to connect with their classmates and teachers using the language with a certain degree of psychological readiness, which is what WTC is about. Around this, greater challenge is faced by EFL teachers. Given that those who are motivated are not necessarily willing to communicate, the challenge is to think about not only a need for motivating classroom experience, but also a useful and helpful one – one where international students would be psychologically ready to engage in.

For both international programs staff and language teachers, efforts should be exerted toward blurring the perceived 'inequalities' between the Korean world and the non-Korean world, in this case the Filipino language learning context, to minimize what Edwards (2006) calls 'generalized baggage' Korean EFL learners 'carry around with them and bring to any communication event' (p. 149).

BIODATA

Edward Jay Quinto is associate professor at the School of Social Sciences and Education, Mapúa University, Manila, the Philippines. He has taught English language, public speaking, education, and research writing courses. Email: ejmquinto@mapua.edu.ph

Bernardino C. Ofalia is associate professor at the School of Social Sciences and Education, Mapúa University, Manila, the Philippines. He has taught education, educational technology, psychology, and research courses. Email: bcofalia@mapua.edu.ph

Jinho Bae earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Mapúa University, Manila. His research interests includes studies on Korean learners and culture. Email: jjinob@gmail.com

Lean Syhing Salonga earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Mapúa University, Manila. His research interest is on psychology of language learning. Email: syhingme@gmail.com

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