

”In Iran I didn’t speak English any more”: The effects of contextual changes on the willingness to communicate in English of Iranian migrants to New Zealand.

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Since the development of the willingness to communicate (WTC) construct by MacIntyre et al. in 1998, a variety of psychological factors which enhance or diminish an individual’s desire to speak in a second language have been investigated as to whether they are fixed or fluctuate according to contexts such as time, place, or social environment. More recently the principles of dynamic systems theory, which provide ”an ecological theory” to describe ”a moving tapestry of interacting systems” (Larsen-Freeman, 2016, p. xi), have been seen as an appropriate way to analyse the WTC phenomenon (e.g., King, 2013; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011).

However, the dominant methodological approach of many WTC researchers is still quantitative and focuses on learners in a context where English is primarily the language of the classroom. In this presentation I will report on a qualitative and longitudinal case study which investigated the WTC of Iranian migrants in their past Iranian English classrooms, in their present New Zealand pre-university classrooms, and in the community outside. By means of observations and multiple interviews with the learners and their teachers, I addressed the question as to whether past learning experiences affected their present WTC and which elements of classroom and community context facilitated or inhibited their readiness to speak. In the process of this study, I explored the relevance of dynamic systems theory and the usefulness of an ecological framework to describe my findings as to the nature of their WTC, ranging from the micro context of the classroom to the macro context of the wider society of Iran and New Zealand.

By revealing ”the learners’ own subjective interpretation” (Mercer, 2016, p.17) of the meaning of contextual factors which affect their WTC, I hope to provide a more holistic picture of the interplay between learners and their pedagogical and community environment.

Keywords: migrants, Willingness to communicate, context.