

The Effects of Pronunciation Anxiety and Motivation on English Learners' Willingness to Communicate¹

Los efectos de la ansiedad de
pronunciación y la motivación en
la voluntad de comunicarse de los
estudiantes de inglés

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Abstract

The present quantitative study intended to investigate the effect of Iranian EFL learners' pronunciation anxiety (PA) and pronunciation motivation (PM) on their L2 willingness to communicate (L2 WTC) in English classes. Additionally, it aimed at identifying which of these two independent variables (PA or PM) could better predict their L2 WTC. To these aims, a convenience sample of 134 upper-intermediate EFL learners were recruited from two private language institutes in one of the large cities of Iran. Their proficiency level had already been determined by the institutes using written and oral placement tests. To gather the necessary data, three questionnaires, namely, Baran-Lucarz's (2017) PA, and PM, and Simić's (2014) WTC questionnaires were used. Descriptive and inferential statistics were utilized to answer the research question of the study. Findings indicated that both variables under study, PA and PM, had significant correlations with learners' L2 WTC. However, although results suggested that both independent variables predicted the learners' L2 WTC, PA was found to be a stronger predictor. Implications of the study findings and suggestions for further research are also offered.

Key Words: EFL learners, pronunciation anxiety, pronunciation motivation, willingness to communicate.

Resumen

El presente estudio cuantitativo pretende investigar el efecto de la ansiedad de pronunciación (PA) y la motivación de pronunciación (PM) de los estudiantes iraníes de EFL en su disposición a comunicarse en L2 (L2 WTC) en las clases de inglés. Además, tuvo como objetivo identificar cuál de estas dos variables independientes (PA o PM) podría predecir mejor su L2 WTC. Con estos objetivos, se reclutó una muestra de conveniencia de 134 estudiantes de EFL de nivel intermedio alto de dos institutos de idiomas privados en una de las grandes ciudades de Irán. Su nivel de competencia ya había sido determinado por los institutos utilizando pruebas de ubicación escritas y orales. Para recopilar los datos necesarios, se utilizaron tres cuestionarios, a saber, PA y PM de Baran-Lucarz (2017), y los cuestionarios WTC de Simić (2014). Se utilizó estadística descriptiva e inferencial para responder a la pregunta de investigación del estudio. Los hallazgos indicaron que ambas variables bajo estudio, PA y PM, tenían correlaciones significativas con el WTC L2 de los alumnos. Sin embargo, aunque los resultados sugirieron que ambas variables independientes predijeron el WTC L2 de los alumnos, se encontró que PA era un predictor más fuerte. También se ofrecen implicaciones de los hallazgos del estudio y sugerencias para futuras investigaciones.

Palabras clave: Estudiantes de EFL, ansiedad de pronunciación, motivación de pronunciación, voluntad de comunicarse.

Resumo:

O presente estudo quantitativo pretende pesquisar o efeito da ansiedade de pronúncia (PA) e a motivação de pronúncia (PM) dos estudantes iranianos de EFL na sua disposição a comunicar-se em L2 (L2 WTC) nas aulas de inglês. Além disso, teve como objetivo identificar qual destas duas variáveis independentes (PA ou PM) poderia prever melhor sua L2 WTC. Com estes objetivos, recrutou-se uma amostra de conveniência de 134 estudantes de EFL de nível intermédio alto de dois institutos de idiomas particulares em uma das grandes cidades do Irã. Seu nível de competência já tinha sido determinado pelos institutos utilizando provas de localização escritas e orais. Para recopilar os dados necessários, foram utilizados três questionários, a saber, PA e PM de Baran-Lucarz (2017), e os questionários WTC de Simić (2014). Utilizou-se estatística descritiva e inferencial para responder à pergunta de pesquisa do estudo. As descobertas indicaram que ambas variáveis sob estudo, PA e PM, tinham correlações significativas com o WTC L2 dos alunos. Porém, mesmo que os resultados sugeriram que ambas variáveis independentes predissessem o WTC L2 dos alunos, encontrou-se que PA era um prognosticador mais forte. Também se oferecem implicações das descobertas do estudo e sugestões para futuras pesquisas.

Palavras chave: Estudantes de EFL, ansiedade de pronúncia, motivação de pronúncia, vontade de comunicar-se.

Introduction

With the growing demand for the use of English for social interactions worldwide, influenced by globalization as well as the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), communication has become the ultimate goal of language learning for many L2 learners (Al-Murtadha, 2017). Yet, learners need to be not only able to interact with other people but also willing to communicate in the L2. According to Clément et al. (2003, p. 191), “the most immediate determinant of L2 use” is willingness to communicate (WTC). Given this perceived importance of WTC in L2 pedagogy, during the past decades, different scholars have attempted to define it; for instance, MacIntyre et al. (1998) viewed it as readiness to participate in a particular discourse at a proper time with other interlocutors using a second language. McCroskey and Richmond (1990), on the other hand, considered it as an individual’s propensity to twitch communication when free to do so.

Growing evidence demonstrates the effect of various communicative, linguistic and social variables on WTC. Some of these variables which have already been identified in previous research include “the state of communicative self-confidence, desire to communicate with a specific person; self-confidence, intergroup and interpersonal motivation; communicative competence, social attitudes, and intergroup attitudes; and personality and intergroup climate” (Ghonsooly et al., 2012, p. 198). As one of the variables influencing WTC, anxiety has garnered much serious attention in the field of second language acquisition since the 1970s. After the introduction of language anxiety (LA), a plethora of studies were conducted to determine miscellaneous effects of LA on L2 (foreign/second language) learning and language use (Horwitz, 2010). It has continuously been suggested that low anxiety levels lead to beneficial language learning (Elkhafaifi, 2005) whereas high LA might have detrimental influences on both language learning and language use in L2 contexts (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2008; Spielman & Radnofsky, 2001).

In this regard, a variety of language specific anxieties have been identified and examined so far; for instance, listening comprehension anxiety (Kim, 2005), speaking anxiety (Woodrow, 2006), reading anxiety (Argamon & Abu-Rabia, 2002), writing anxiety (Cheng et al., 1999), and grammar anxiety (VanPatten & Glass, 1999). More recently, Baran-Lucarz (2013) put forth a new concept describing another type of language learning anxiety; that is, pronunciation anxiety or PA. Later, she (2014, p. 453) elaborated on the following subcomponents for her model of PA,

1. Pronunciation self-image: beliefs one holds about personal appearance– about the way one looks and sounds when speaking an FL, and acceptance of one’s self-image.

2. Pronunciation self-efficacy and self-assessment: perception related to one's predisposition to acquire/learn an FL phonological system and to one's perceived level of pronunciation of the TL (usually formed by comparing oneself to classmates or other speakers).
3. Fear of negative evaluation: apprehension caused by anticipating that other speakers will have negative opinions about one based on one's pronunciation.
4. Beliefs about the importance of pronunciation for successful communication, about the ease of learning TL pronunciation for learners representing a particular L1, and about the sound of the TL.

Pronunciation of a language might trigger positive reactions in some learners who might consider it as pleasant, nice, delightful, prestigious, or sexy. On the contrary, however, the very same language might provoke negative attitudes making students perceive it as unpleasant, unnatural, or even annoying. Additionally, learners who have negative perceptions towards the sound of the target language will likely have difficulties with regard to accepting a new L2 identity (Baran-Lucarz, 2014). Prior research has offered converging evidence regarding speaking being perceived as the most anxiety-generating skill among the four language skills, particularly when learners have to take the floor in front of the class and their peers (e.g., Abal, 2012; Occhipinti, 2009; Woodrow, 2006). Further, qualitative data collected using interviews and diaries emphasized that one source of common anxiety is learners' worries about losing face in front of their peers due to their accents (Price, 1991). All these studies point out the importance of attending to pronunciation in L2 pedagogy.

Besides anxiety, motivation has also been at the heart of investigation in the L2 field for more than 50 years. More specifically, pronunciation motivation is defined as a great enthusiasm to reach the highest level of communication ability, or a native-like, or at least a semi-native-like accent (Dörnyei, 2005). In this vein, previous research has suggested that the desire to be a native-like speaker and have a pleasant accent is highly associated with the level of PA and its subcomponents, such as self-image, self-efficacy/self-assessment, and beliefs about the L2 sound and its importance for communication (Baran-Lucarz, 2013; Kafes, 2018; Kralova et al., 2017).

Results of many empirical studies have confirmed the mutual relationship between anxiety and motivation. In this regard, Yan and Horwitz asserted, "further attention should be directed to understanding the relationship between motivation and anxiety in language learning" (2008, p. 176). Low level of anxiety leads to high self-confidence which is a characteristic of a motivated student (Clement, 1980); especially when high confidence and motivation result in success, while, conversely, unsuccessful experience is likely to lead to stress, discouragement, and lower motivation to learn. Although it seems logical that high motivation results in systematic work and endeavor to achieve goals, it might lead to anxiety and stress in some individuals as well, chiefly

if the outcomes do not meet their expectations (Dörnyei & Ottó, 1998). Despite the importance of these two variables in the acquisition of L2 pronunciation, to the best of our knowledge, and after an intensive review of the existing literature, we found out that no previous inquiry has attempted to systematically examine the effects of PA and PM on L2 WTC in an EFL context. Therefore, to bridge this gap, this study was an attempt to investigate the effects of these two factors on learners' L2 WTC and to find which one of these two variables could be a better predictor of Iranian EFL learners' L2 WTC. Hence, the study sought answers to the following research question:

Which of the two variables, i.e., PA or PM, better predicts Iranian EFL learners' L2 WTC in English classes?

Background

Several researchers from different parts of the world have so far attempted to study L2 WTC and the factors which influence it; for instance, Cao and Philp (2006) administered questionnaires, observations, and interviews in a multi-national ESL class in New Zealand to find what variables contributed to L2 WTC in a classroom situation. Their findings confirmed that the number of people in the task group (pairs, small groups, whole class) played a key role in learners' L2 WTC. Furthermore, self-confidence, familiarity with the interlocutor, and interlocutor participation were considered to be influential in this study.

In another study, Pawlak and Mystkowska-Wiertelak (2015) argued that the integrated nature of L2 WTC has traditionally been investigated separately, but its dynamic character is still in its infancy. Analysis of the data they collected using self-ratings, questionnaires, and interviews from 8 Polish students showed that the participants' L2 WTC changed and was influenced by different factors. These factors included the topic, planning time, cooperation and familiarity with the interlocutor, the opportunity to express one's ideas, the mastery of the prerequisite lexis, the presence of the researcher, and a host of individual variables, thereby confirming the dynamic and flexible nature of L2 WTC.

In Japan, Wood (2016) examined the relationship between L2 WTC and L2 fluency from a dynamic systems perspective. The researcher used an exploratory case study to investigate L2 WTC and fluency between Japanese English learners and non-Japanese interlocutors. Results indicated that fluency breakdowns led to lowered L2 WTC or vice versa.

In the context of Iran, Aliakbari et al. (2016) studied the synchronous impact of different variables affecting L2 WTC, including anxiety, self-confidence, communicative competence, and international posture on 194 EFL learners. Based on the results of this study, the relationship between enjoyment and L2 WTC was sturdier

than that between anxiety and L2 WTC. That is to say, whereas the environment of the classroom had a positive influence on both enjoyment and L2 WTC, it showed a negative effect on anxiety.

In another study in the same context, Khajavy et al. (2016) focused on L2 WTC in English among Iranian EFL learners in the classroom settings. Results indicated that the strongest factor that directly affected L2 WTC was classroom environment. Findings also showed that classroom environment directly affected attitudes, motivation, and communication confidence while communication confidence itself directly affected L2 WTC. However, motivation and English language proficiency indirectly influenced L2 WTC through communication confidence.

In a more recent study, Riasati and Rahimi (2018) examined the influence of situational and individual factors on L2 WTC. While the situational aspects were found to be task type, topic, interlocutor, teacher, classroom atmosphere, and seating arrangement, the individual elements were identified to be learners' personality, self-confidence, the degree of opportunity they have in language classes, fear of evaluation, and fear of correctness of their speech.

In the context of Japan, Freiermuth and Ito (2020) investigated the effect of personality and past experience on university students' L2 WTC. To this aim, using semi-structured interviews, they studied eight female Japanese students who were selected from a group of 69 students on the basis of their English proficiency test scores (high/low scorers) as well as their WTC (high/low WTC) scores. Their findings suggested that students with high L2 WTC perceived themselves as future L2 users who were stimulated through integrative motivation with their peers and teachers. Further, positive personality traits were found to facilitate WTC; therefore, they concluded that positive past experiences with language teachers and foreign peers could lead to a better understanding of second language learners' WTC.

More recently, Author (2021) attempted to identify the factors leading to Iranian EFL tertiary students' L2 (un)willingness to communicate in English classes. Conducting a classroom-based case study, they recruited a purposive sample of 10 EFL learners and studied them for three weeks. To gather data, they utilized a variety of data collection tools, namely, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and stimulated-recall interviews. Then, they thematically analyzed the data to identify and extract common themes from the participants' ideas. Results of their study indicated that there existed a complex, dynamic and non-linear interaction between individual, contextual, and linguistic factors that influence L2 WTC. These three broad factors in tandem exerted either contributing or impeding effects on each individual's WTC in the classroom context.

Attempting to determine significant PA correlates, Baran-Lucarz and Lee (2021) considered the role of learning experiences with teachers who were native speakers of

English, previous study abroad experiences, L2 learning enjoyment, and L2 WTC. To do that, they administered a questionnaire to two groups of EFL learners of different majors (English education/tourism English) and different self-perceived proficiency levels. Results of hierarchical multiple regression analyses for both groups suggested that L2 WTC was the strongest determinant of PA while foreign language enjoyment was the second most meaningful correlate only for the group whose self-perceived general English proficiency was lower.

Overall, although a host of empirical studies have investigated the effects of various factors on EFL learners' L2 WTC, they do not give us the full picture in that no previous study has examined the effect of PA and PM, as two recently introduced concepts, on EFL learners' L2 WTC. Further, even though Baran-Luczarski and Lee (2021) have recently explored the relationship between PA and L2 WTC, the focus of their study was on L2 WTC as a determinant of PA rather than the other way round. Additionally, in their study, they did not examine the role of PM as a predictor variable either. Hence, considering the paucity of research in this area, and to gain deeper insights into EFL learners' L2 WTC, the current study set out to delve into the relationship between these two variables and Iranian EFL learners' L2 WTC with the aim of identifying the one which could likely be a better predictor of L2 WTC in a foreign language learning situation.

Method

This study was a quantitative piece of research. In the sections that follow the method of the study is explained including the participants who partook in the study, instruments used to gather the necessary data, as well as data collection, and analysis procedures.

Participants

One hundred and thirty-four upper-intermediate EFL learners who had already been learning English for at least two years prior to this study were selected from two private language institutes in one of the large cities of Iran. They were recruited employing a convenience sampling procedure because the second researcher served as an English teacher at one of the language institutes under study. The proficiency level of the participating learners had already been determined by the institutes using their own oral and written placement tests. The participants were from both genders (female=100, male= 34) and their ages ranged from 20 to 40.

Instruments

In this study, three instruments were utilized to collect the data: the *Willingness-to-Communicate Questionnaire (WTCQ)* which was adopted from Simić (2014), the *Pronunciation Anxiety Questionnaire (PAQ)* which was a modified version of an earlier scale developed by Baran-Lucarz (2014, 2016) and included nine subcomponents, and the *Pronunciation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ)* which was designed by Baran-Lucarz (2017) based on the L2 Motivational Self System already proposed by Dörnyei. These instruments are explained in more detail in the following sections.

Willingness-to-Communicate Questionnaire (WTCQ)

To gather the necessary information about students' L2 WTC, a 20-item 5-point Likert scale L2 WTC questionnaire (1 = almost never willing, 2 = sometimes willing, 3 = willing half of the times, 4 = usually willing, and 5 = almost always willing) whose items were in English was used in this study. This questionnaire contained a section asking about participants' age, gender, and years of studying English. The content validity of this scale was checked and confirmed by two applied linguistics experts. Further, its reliability index was calculated using Cronbach's alpha formula and turned out to be 0.79 which seemed satisfactory for the purposes of this study.

Pronunciation Anxiety Questionnaire (PAQ)

The pronunciation anxiety questionnaire (PAQ) developed by Baran-Lucarz (2017) consisting of 50 statements with a 6-point Likert scale (Strongly agree=6, to strongly disagree=1) was utilized to measure the participants' pronunciation anxiety. The reliability of the entire scale was reported to be 0.95 and its validity was established examining its construct validity by running factor analysis (Baran-Lucarz, 2017). While the respondents could achieve a minimum score of 50 and a maximum score of 300, the higher the individuals' scores were, the more anxious they were considered to be. For items which denoted lack of anxiety, a reversed scoring key was applied. This questionnaire also included a section asking about participants' age, gender, and years of studying English. Its reliability was checked by the current researchers using Cronbach's alpha procedure and the index was found to be 0.73.

Pronunciation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ)

To collect the needed information about the learners' pronunciation motivation, a pronunciation motivation questionnaire (PMQ) consisting of 29 items with a 6-point

Likert scale (strongly agree=6, to strongly disagree= 1) was utilized (Baran-Lucarz, 2017). The highest the participants' score in this questionnaire was, the more motivated they would be considered. To calculate their scores, for some items, a reversed scoring procedure was applied. Baran-Lucarz (2017) reported the reliability of the entire scale to be 0.85 and she confirmed its validity. Its reliability index was found to be 0.72 in the present study using Cronbach's alpha procedure.

Data Collection Procedures

The three questionnaires were administered by the second author of this paper and he was present to answer any possible questions on the part of the learners or clarify any ambiguities and misunderstandings. Also, an attempt was made to administer the questionnaires one by one during different class sessions so that fatigue might not hinder the participants from giving precise answers. In addition, the order of the administration of the questionnaires was counterbalanced to avoid order affecting their performance. That is, the three questionnaires were administered in different orders in different classes. To ensure gathering accurately completed questionnaires, enough time was given to the participants so that they could answer all items. Also, they were politely asked to give honest responses to the items of the questionnaire. To this aim, the instructions given reassured them that the obtained information would be kept confidential and would only be used for research purposes.

Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze the data, multiple regression was run to uncover the possible effects of the independent variables (PM and PA) on the dependent (L2 WTC) variable of the study and to identify the independent variable which could likely be a better predictor of the participants' L2 WTC. Further, as follow-up analyses, the mean and standard deviations of the components of the predictor variable were also calculated and examined.

Results and discussion

Before conducting the multiple regression analysis, its assumptions were checked. To this end, the Pearson correlation table was scrutinized to check the relationships among the three variables of the study. Results of these analyses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlation between PA, PM, and L2 WTC

Source: the authors

		L2 WTC	PA	PM
Pearson Correlation	L2 WTC	1.000	-.488*	.302*
	PA	-.488*	1.000	.265
	PM	.302*	.265	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	L2 WTC	.	.015	.024
	PA	.015	.	.226
	PM	.024	.226	.
N	L2 WTC	134	134	134
	PA	134	134	134
	PM	134	134	134

Based on these results, there is a significant moderate negative correlation between PA and L2 WTC ($r = -.488$ sig $= .015$). Put it simply, as expected, the more anxious the participants are, the less they tend to use English in their communicational exchanges. Moreover, PM and L2 WTC also showed a moderate positive correlation which is statistically significant ($r = .302$ sig $= .024$). Therefore, contrary to their PA, their PM shows a positive correlation with their L2 WTC, thereby indicating that the more motivated the participants are in terms of their pronunciation, the more willing they will be to use English while interacting with others.

Results of the correlation analyses between the variables showed that PA had a higher correlation with L2 WTC; hence, a multiple regression analysis was run to find out which of these independent variables could more significantly contribute to the L2 WTC. To this end, first, characteristics of the variables under study were examined in order to see if the required statistical assumptions were met (Pallant, 2011). As reported above, the two independent variables showed significant medium relationships with L2 WTC. Hence, the correlation values were neither too small nor too large, which indicated that the two independent variables could be retained. Next, the multicollinearity assumption was checked. In this regard, the obtained collinearity statistics, i.e., the variance inflation factor (VIF) and tolerance values, for PA (Tolerance=0.996; VIF=1.004), and PM (Tolerance=0.996; VIF=1.004) rejected the presence of multicollinearity. Then, the normal probability plot (P-P) of the regression standardized residual (Figure 1) and the scatter plot (Figure 2) were examined.

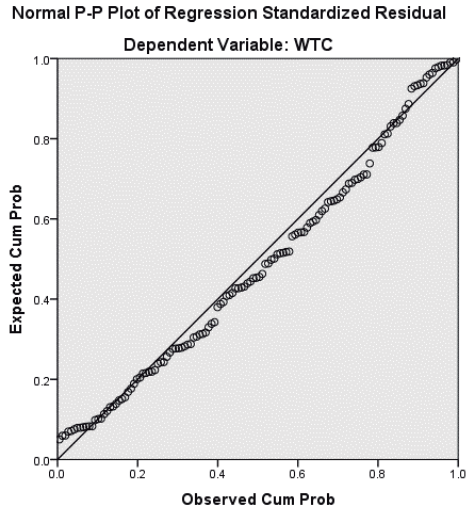


Figure 1. Normal P-P plot of regression standardized residual for L2 WTC
Source: the authors

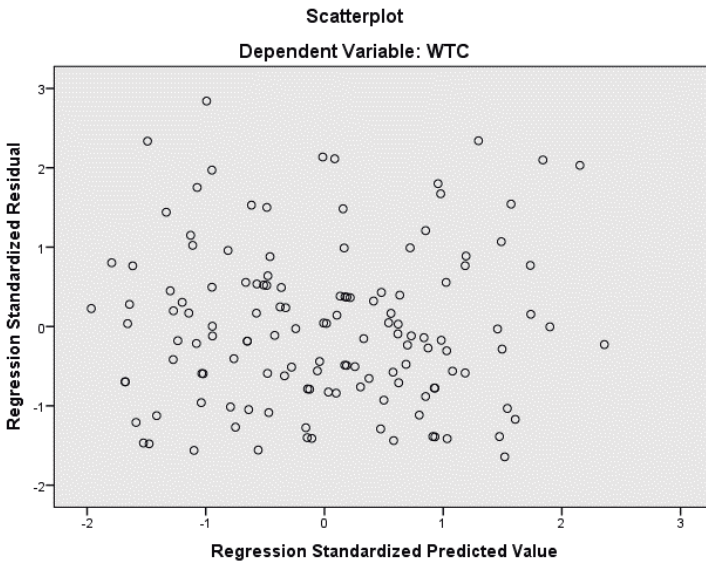


Figure 2. The scatter plot for L2 WTC
Source: the authors

As can be observed, both the normal probability plot (P-P) of the regression standardized residual and the scatter plot support the idea that the assumptions of normality and linearity were not violated. Moreover, the plots indicate that no serious outliers could be detected. In fact, none of the cases had a standardized residual greater than 3.3 or lower than -3.3. The next assumption to be checked was homoscedasticity. Table 2 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 2. Residuals Statistics^a

Source: the authors

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	38.1612	45.8518	41.6567	1.77907	134
Std. Predicted Value	-1.965	2.358	.000	1.000	134
Standard Error of Predicted Value	.712	2.255	1.172	.328	134
Adjusted Predicted Value	38.0854	45.9515	41.6507	1.78633	134
Residual	-13.35840	23.11088	.00000	8.07170	134
Std. Residual	-1.642	2.842	.000	.992	134
Stud. Residual	-1.663	2.881	.000	1.005	134
Deleted Residual	-13.69822	23.76052	.00598	8.27252	134
Stud. Deleted Residual	-1.675	2.966	.003	1.012	134
Mahal. Distance	.026	9.234	1.985	1.738	134
Cook's Distance	.000	.078	.008	.014	134
Centered Leverage Value	.000	.069	.015	.013	134

a. Dependent Variable: L2 WTC

Tellingly, given that there were two independent variables under investigation, we had to consider the critical chi-square value with the degree of freedom of two (=number of independent variables), which was 13.82 (Pallant, 2011, p. 159). As displayed in the table above, the maximum Mahalanobis distance value recorded for the cases in this sample (9.234) is smaller than the critical chi-square value (13.82), thereby showing that homoscedasticity has not been violated, or there were no serious outliers. After checking all these assumptions, multiple regression analysis was run. The results are reported in tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3. Model Summary^b

Source: the authors

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.215 ^a	.346	.320	8.13308

a. Predictors: (Constant), PM, PA

b. Dependent Variable: L2 WTC

Table 4. Coefficients^aDependent Variable: L2 WTC

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1 PA	-.062	.027	-.395	-2.282	.004	-.115	-.008	-.188	-.195	-.395	.996	1.004
PM	.051	.042	.205	1.223	.023	-.031	.133	.092	.106	.204	.996	1.004

a. Dependent Variable: L2 WTC

Table 5. ANOVA^a

Source: the authors

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	420.957	2	210.479	3.182	.045 ^b
Residual	8665.252	131	66.147		
Total	9086.209	133			

a. Dependent Variable: L2 WTC

b. Predictors: (Constant), PM, PA

A close examination of the model summary and the ANOVA tables shows that the model, including PM and PA as the independent variables, predicts 34.6% (R Square=.346) of the variance in L2 WTC as the dependent variable, and the results are statistically significant (F= 3.182, sig=.045). To see which independent variable best contributed to the prediction of the dependent variable, the coefficients table

was examined. The table shows that although both PA and PM ($\beta = .205$, $\text{sig} = .023$) significantly predicted the participants' L2 WTC, PA with a larger beta value of $-.395$ ($\text{sig} = .004$) was a more powerful predictor. This finding partially corroborates Saito et al.'s results (2018) which suggested that students' L2 speech learning patterns were primarily determined by their emotional states (anxiety/enjoyment), and secondarily, by their motivational dispositions. As mentioned above, in the next step, follow-up analyses including mean and standard deviation of different components of the PA were calculated (Table 6) in an attempt to uncover their possible differential influences.

Table 6. Mean and standard deviation of PA components

Source: the authors

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of anxiety	50.1696	6.90200
PA when talking to native and non-native speakers outside the FL classroom	30.7969	8.23222
Pronunciation self-image	27.2960	4.25976
Pronunciation self-efficacy and self-assessment	25.1250	3.72901
General FL oral performance apprehension	23.1061	8.02502
Fear of negative evaluation	21.4524	7.99260
Beliefs about the importance of pronunciation for communication	12.0862	2.47972
Beliefs about the nature/sound of the TL	10.4470	2.60743
Beliefs about difficulties with learning TL pronunciation by learners representing a particular L1	10.2941	2.28611

As Table 6 illustrates, the first component of PA, lack of anxiety, carries the highest mean amongst all the components. Considering the items of this component and the reversed scoring key applied, it could be argued that in this specific sample of the participants, most of the students suffered from high levels of anxiety because of the negative perceptions they held about themselves and their capabilities. This seemingly unexpected finding might imply that EFL learners, despite being proficient (i.e., upper-intermediate level in this study) in the target language tend to remain anxious while attempting to observe correct pronunciation of the target language during the long journey of learning English as a foreign language. This being so, given the prominent role of PA in contributing to EFL learners' L2 WTC, this finding seems to warrant further and much closer examination and investigation. In a similar vein, the role of students' self-perceived capabilities were highlighted by previous researchers such as MacIntyre and Charos (1996) who found self-perceived communication competence influenced L2 WTC. More recently, Baran-Lucarz and Lee (2021), who found self-perceived poor pronunciation as well as uncertainties about pronunciation contributed

to students' reluctance to speak English in the classroom.

In addition, the second component, authentic communication in real life situations, also aroused a high level of anxiety in this sample. Based on the items constituting this component, the participants seem to be too cognizant of the way they might be judged by native or non-native interlocutors due to their pronunciation. Being extremely conscious of others' (mis)judgment will even manifest itself in their physical functioning by showing different symptoms of being stressed. Similarly, Simić (2014) found communicating with native speakers provoked feelings of anxiety and embarrassment in EFL learners.

After these two components, pronunciation self-image holds the third rank, thereby indicating that how they look or sound while speaking English could play a decisive role in (not) being willing to communicate in English. As the fourth component, pronunciation self-efficacy and self-assessment indicates that besides others' judgment, their own judgment of their capabilities and potentials could also be influential in their decision to speak English or not. General FL oral performance apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, the fifth and sixth components, point out the reasons why some students feel anxious while speaking in English, in general and why the participants get worried about how they are judged in the classroom context by their teachers and classmates, in particular.

Likewise, Dewaele et al. (2017) also stated that some teachers may, consciously or unconsciously, cause heightened anxiety for language learners. They suggested that such teachers attempt to adapt their behavior so that they could reduce the negative effects of their anxiety-inducing behaviors.

Fear of negative evaluation because of making pronunciation mistakes has repeatedly been reported as one of the important factors which contributes to students' being reluctant to speak in the classroom. In this regard, Riasati and Rahimi (2018) found that among many other factors, fear of evaluation, and fear of correctness adversely affected learners' L2 WTC. Zarrinabadi (2014) also referred to error correction as a factor influencing L2 WTC. Results of the study conducted by Teimouri (2017) pointed out that explicit corrective feedback given by the teachers in the classroom context could induce feelings of anxiety and shame in students in front of their peers.

In a similar vein, Khajavy et al. (2016) found that the strongest factor that directly affected L2 WTC was classroom environment. Their findings also showed that classroom environment directly affected attitudes, motivation, and communication confidence. Moreover, communication confidence directly affected L2 WTC. Motivation and English language proficiency indirectly influenced L2 WTC through communication confidence. The findings of the current study lend support to their findings in that it was found that, compared to pronunciation anxiety, pronunciation

motivation was a less strong factor contributing to Iranian EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English. Additionally, similar to Khajavy et al.'s (2016) findings, it can be said that classroom environment, if it is not student friendly, can trigger pronunciation anxiety leading to less participation in classroom discussions, hence, less willingness to communicate, which was found in the current study, too.

What is worthy of notice in Table 6 is the components holding the lowest ranks, i.e., beliefs about the importance of pronunciation for communication, beliefs about the nature/sound of the TL, and beliefs about difficulties with learning TL pronunciation by learners representing a particular L1. Considering the perceived importance of these components compared to that of the previous ones from these students' perspective, it could be observed that, although these students do not regard native-like pronunciation as that critical in negotiating meaning, their weak pronunciation level could lead to anxiety and, in turn, unwillingness to communicate in English. Further, holding positive perceptions towards the sounds of English, the current participants seem not to attribute their tendency (or lack thereof) to speak English to the characteristics of the language itself. Additionally, they do not conceive that learning and mastering English pronunciation and stress is demanding for learners whose native language is Persian. Tellingly, what seems to be clear is that these findings need to be scrutinized more deeply by future researchers.

Conclusions and pedagogical implications

Results of this study could possibly contribute to theory and practice of English language teaching. Regarding the theory, as PA and PM are novel and almost under-researched, the findings of this study could enrich previously developed theories of L2 WTC by drawing researchers' attention to the role these two constructs could play in students' L2 WTC, thereby leading to possible revision of those theories. As for the practice, given that this study showed both PA and PM significantly correlated with EFL learners' L2 WTC, it seems reasonable to introduce and highlight the importance of these two variables in language teaching contexts. It was found that the participating students in this study perceived intelligibility rather than native-like pronunciation to be sufficient for meaning negotiation in L2 communicational situations. Keeping this in mind, curriculum and syllabus designers could consider the possibility of incorporating materials which highlight the priority of intelligibility over native-like pronunciation in the syllabuses and textbooks they develop. Given the importance of improving language learners' self-image and self-efficacy as perceived by the participants, it could be suggested that relevant workshops be held for pre- and in-service teachers during which they will be taught how to improve their students' pronunciation self-image and self-efficacy in classroom environment and real-life situations. Also, some training sessions could be held for the students to empower

them to evaluate their own pronunciation based on the criteria of intelligibility rather than native-like pronunciation so that their anxiety could be reduced.

This study could not be void of some unavoidable limitations. First of all, the study just focused on English learners at institutes and did not consider other educational contexts like universities and public schools. Secondly, the study focused on upper-intermediate learners while other proficiency groups were not examined. Also, a convenience sampling procedure was utilized, which restricts the generalizability of the findings of the study. That being so, we suggest that in future research, random sampling procedures be implemented in an attempt to increase the possible generalizability of the findings. Moreover, quantitative studies can be complemented by qualitative ones using other data collection instruments such as interviews and observations to examine the extent to which the current findings might be corroborated by more in-depth longitudinal studies. Furthermore, the role of other possible influential factors such as gender, age, and personality factors was not considered in this study, which could be explored in future studies.

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