



Task-Dependent Discrepancies Between EFL Learners' Willingness to Communicate and the Actualization of L2 Talk

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제2언어 의사소통 의지, 제2언어 발화 실현, 과제 유형, 과제 구조, 과제 기반 상호작용

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between second language (L2) willingness to communicate (WTC) and the actualization of L2 talk across three differently structured communicative tasks, focusing on the discrepancies between willingness and its behavioral enactment. Thirty-two university EFL learners completed three communicative tasks representing convergent-closed, convergent-open, and divergent-open conditions. Situational WTC ratings were synchronized with objectively quantified speech production, and stimulated recall interviews were conducted to explore learners' perceptions of factors associated with these discrepancies. The findings revealed that the WTC–L2 talk relationship was limited and task-dependent, with discrepancies observed in the convergent-closed and divergent-open tasks. Qualitative analyses further suggested that task structure played an important role in shaping this relationship. In tightly sequenced tasks, role-based responsibilities and procedural progressivity sustained production despite temporary declines in WTC. Conversely, in open-ended interactions, turn-taking negotiations and interpersonal coordination constrained the realization of L2 talk, even when WTC was elevated. Overall, the findings reconceptualize the relationship between WTC and the actualization of L2 talk as dynamic and context-sensitive, highlighting how task structure shapes the manifestation of WTC in L2 talk and offering pedagogical implications for task-based L2 instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Willingness to communicate (WTC) has long been recognized as a central construct in second language (L2) research for explaining why some learners speak while others remain silent under comparable classroom conditions. Since its conceptualization as the immediate antecedent of communicative behavior in L2 contexts (MacIntyre et al., 1998), WTC has often been assumed to translate linearly into speech. Yet this assumed linear translation has rarely been subjected to systematic empirical scrutiny, leaving the interface between communicative intention and behavioral realization insufficiently theorized. Recent research has demonstrated that L2 WTC is dynamically shaped by psychological, linguistic, and contextual factors and fluctuates in response to evolving interactional conditions (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; J. Lee, 2018;

MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; S. J. Kang, 2005; Yashima et al., 2018). From this perspective, if learners' momentary WTC changes continuously throughout interaction, its relationship with actual L2 talk is also likely to vary across different moments of task performance rather than remain constant. The alignment between L2 WTC and L2 talk cannot be assumed to be stable or automatic; rather, it may shift as task demands, participation structures, and interactional contingencies evolve.

Previous studies examining the relationship between WTC and L2 production have reported mixed findings. While some studies have found positive associations between WTC and actual L2 talk (Nematizadeh & Cao, 2024; Yu, 2015), others have reported only weak or inconsistent relationships, suggesting that learners' willingness does not always translate directly into actual L2 talk (Cao & Philp, 2006; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). However, these studies have primarily examined whether WTC and its behavioral realization are associated, paying relatively little attention to the interactional process through which momentary communicative willingness is transformed into actual L2 talk under varying task conditions. This gap limits our understanding of how communicative intention becomes behavioral participation during classroom interaction.

Such gaps necessitate a closer examination of the actualization of L2 talk in classroom interaction—the process through which communicative readiness is transformed into overt spoken contribution (Ducker, 2022). This transition marks the critical point at which learners, in Dörnyei's (2001) terms, “cross the Rubicon” and commit to speaking despite potential hesitation or perceived risk. In many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, pedagogical tasks organize classroom interaction and constitute the structural conditions within which the actualization of L2 talk occurs, shaping participation requirements, communicative goals, and opportunities for speaking. Yet prior research has frequently treated pedagogical tasks as contextual backdrops for communication rather than as interactional structures that actively condition how and when communicative readiness is behaviorally realized. Moreover, despite evidence that task features influence communicative behaviors (Loewen & Sato, 2018; Nakamura et al., 2021), little is known about whether and how different task dimensions influence the relationship between learners' momentary WTC and actual L2 talk during task-based interaction. Without specifying how particular task features mediate this translation, episodes of silence risk being attributed solely to insufficient communicative willingness rather than to structurally induced constraints. Furthermore, WTC and the actualization of L2 talk have rarely been measured concurrently, which restricts our understanding of how WTC is realized during real-time task interaction.

To address this gap, the present study takes pedagogical tasks as the primary context for investigating the intention–execution interface. To capture this transition, the present study conceptualizes the intention–execution interface as the moment-to-moment process through which learners' WTC is either realized as observable L2 talk or remains unrealized during task interaction. The study employs fine-grained, temporally synchronized measures of learners' momentary WTC alongside speaking time as an operational measure of L2 talk actualization. Rather than assuming a fixed relationship between WTC and the actualization of L2 talk, the study adopts a process-oriented perspective by examining how this relationship evolves over the course of interaction under different task conditions. Specifically, it investigates when communicative willingness converges with actual L2 talk (i.e., higher WTC accompanied by greater speaking time) and when it diverges (i.e., higher WTC coinciding with relatively little speaking time). By doing so, the study explains how pedagogical task structures shape the translation of communicative intention into behavioral participation in task-based instructional contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

WTC was first introduced in L1 research as a relatively enduring personality disposition describing an individual's tendency to initiate communication when free to do so (McCroskey & Baer, 1985). This dispositional perspective was subsequently adopted in L2 research to account for learners' readiness to engage in communication despite limited linguistic resources (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The extant literature, however, has demonstrated that L2 WTC cannot be fully understood as a stable trait; rather, it emerges from the interaction between relatively enduring personal characteristics and situationally bound influences (MacIntyre, 2020). A significant theoretical development was MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) heuristic pyramid model, which differentiates between distal, enduring determinants and proximal, situation-specific antecedents, conceptualizing WTC as the final psychological stage preceding L2 use. However, although WTC is theoretically positioned as the immediate antecedent of communicative behavior (MacIntyre et al., 1998), many trait-oriented investigations did not systematically examine whether self-reported WTC corresponded to observable L2 production (e.g., Donovan & MacIntyre,

2005; Khatib & Nourzadeh, 2015; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2016; Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002). This gap highlights the lack of empirical evidence regarding the assumed alignment between communicative intention and behavioral execution.

More recent studies informed by complex dynamic systems theory (CDST; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) have reframed WTC as a temporally fluctuating and context-sensitive state situated in interaction. CDST-oriented research has identified multiple psychological, interpersonal, and situational factors associated with shifts in WTC, including topic familiarity, task design, interlocutor characteristics, classroom climate, anxiety, perceived communicative competence, and peer or teacher support (Cao, 2011, 2014; Cao & Philp, 2006; J. Lee, 2018; Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; S. J. Kang, 2005; Yashima et al., 2018). Nevertheless, even these dynamic investigations have tended to prioritize identifying the forces that drive or restrain WTC rather than exploring the mechanisms through which momentary willingness is translated into, sustained during, or decoupled from actual communicative engagement.

The Intention–Action Interface: The Discrepancy Between L2 WTC and Actual L2 Talk

Although heightened WTC is often assumed to naturally lead to increased L2 talk in language education, relatively little research has directly examined the intention–action interface between L2 WTC and observable L2 talk (Ducker, 2022). Empirical findings regarding this interface have been mixed (e.g., Bernales, 2016; Cao & Philp, 2006; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Nematizadeh & Cao, 2024; Yu, 2015), with several studies reporting weak or inconsistent associations therein. Early classroom-based comparisons of trait-like WTC ratings and observed participation demonstrated the limited predictive power of communicative intention over subsequent action (Cao & Philp, 2006). Similarly, moment-to-moment WTC ratings have not consistently aligned with speech production during test-like speaking activities (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). These findings indicate that self-reported willingness does not straightforwardly translate into actual L2 talk, highlighting a decoupling between intention and action. However, prior studies have primarily documented these weak correlations without systematically investigating the structural or situational mechanisms underlying such discrepancies. Furthermore, they have overlooked nuanced variations in intensity and possible asymmetries between intention and behavior—for instance, situations in which learners report increasing willingness yet remain silent, or produce speech despite decreasing or negative WTC.

Subsequent research has sought to explain this intention–action gap by identifying psychological, interpersonal, and contextual mediators. A classroom-based study distinguished between learners' thoughts intended for articulation and those ultimately expressed, suggesting that communicative intentions may be shaped by multiple contextual and interpersonal influences, including classroom norms, speaking goals, and peer-related concerns such as turn-taking norms or the desire to create space for others (Bernales, 2016). By foregrounding the social regulation of classroom participation, the study highlighted how interpersonal dynamics may intervene between intention and action. Studies employing idiodynamic methodology further advanced this line of inquiry by eliciting moment-to-moment WTC ratings and comparing them with recorded instances of learner talk. A recent study reported minimal correlation between reported situational WTC and actual L2 talk, while identifying four interrelated clusters of factors—motivational forces, listening-related issues, topic-related issues, and language production issues—that mediated the realization of talk (Ducker, 2022). The findings further suggested that learner silence did not necessarily indicate low willingness, but often reflected the interaction of multiple cognitive, affective, and contextual constraints. Extending this line of research to a highly internationalized Chinese-as-a-foreign-language classroom, a qualitative multiple-case study revealed thirteen learner-internal and contextual factors, including learner beliefs, motivation, linguistic resources, interlocutor relationships, and classroom dynamics, that interacted to facilitate or impede the realization of WTC (Zhou, 2026). Collectively, these studies underscore the multivariate and emergent nature of the intention–action gap in L2 communication, suggesting that this relationship may vary depending on the communicative context in which interaction unfolds.

Despite these advances, several conceptual and methodological gaps remain. Conceptually, while existing research richly documents the interaction of psychological and contextual variables, it pays insufficient attention to the micro-structural features of pedagogical tasks through which communication is enacted. Structural affordances and constraints embedded within specific task designs—such as turn-allocation, participation requirements, information distribution, interactional interdependence, and cognitive load—have rarely been examined as systematic conditions shaping the behavioral realization of WTC. Methodologically, WTC has frequently been measured through global questionnaires or retrospective self-reports (e.g., Cao & Philp, 2006; Ducker, 2022; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011), and L2 talk has often been described impressionistically or indexed indirectly (e.g., speaking or not speaking, increased participation) rather than quantified through objective measures (e.g., Ducker, 2022; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). Furthermore, a notable limitation of prior

research is that WTC and actual L2 talk have rarely been measured concurrently within specific task episodes. Table 1 summarizes how WTC and observable communication have been operationalized and temporally aligned across relevant studies. As shown in the table, previous studies have often relied on measures that were not closely aligned in time. Such temporal misalignment limits our understanding of how momentary communicative intention translates into actual L2 production and may obscure nonlinear or context-dependent associations. By implementing temporally and behaviorally aligned measurement protocols within specific task episodes, it becomes possible to compare momentary WTC with actual L2 talk in real time, enabling a more precise identification of the relationship between learners' communicative intention and its behavioral actualization.

TABLE 1

WTC–Actualization of L2 Talk: Measurement and Alignment Across Studies

Study	WTC measurement	Speech/behavior measure	WTC–speech alignment	Task/context	Analysis
Cao & Philp (2006)	Trait WTC (Questionnaire)	WTC behavior	Overall WTC ↔ observed participation	Whole-class, group, dyadic	Correlation; qualitative
MacIntyre & Legatto (2011)	Situational WTC (retrospective)	Total speaking time	Mean WTC ↔ total speaking time	Brief oral tasks	Correlation
Yu (2015)	Trait WTC (questionnaire)	Words; turns	Overall WTC ↔ total output	Dyadic interaction	Correlation
Ducker (2022)	Situational WTC (retrospective)	Communicative behavior	Momentary WTC ↔ communication instances	Classroom interaction	Correlation; qualitative
Nematizadeh & Cao (2024)	Situational WTC (real-time, 5-min)	Total speaking time	Mean WTC ↔ total speaking time	Online group discussion	Correlation
Present study	Situational WTC (real-time, 5-min)	Speaking time, 5-min	5-min WTC ↔ concurrent 5-min speaking time	Three task types	Correlation; qualitative

Task Types and Their Potential Influence on L2 WTC and Actual L2 Talk

Pedagogical tasks are a central component of classroom instruction in many EFL contexts, providing learners with regular opportunities to engage in communicative interaction. Despite their widespread use in L2 classrooms, previous WTC research has paid relatively little attention to how different task types shape learners' WTC, with much of the existing literature instead focusing on monologic speaking tasks (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021; Nematizadeh, 2022; Sato, 2023; Wang & Xu, 2025). Consequently, little is known about how task dimensions influence the relationship between WTC and actual L2 talk during task-based interaction.

Among the various dimensions used to classify pedagogical tasks, goal orientation (convergent vs. divergent) and outcome options (closed vs. open) are particularly relevant because they shape learners' communicative goals, participation requirements, and opportunities for interaction. Convergent tasks require learners to reach a shared solution, whereas divergent tasks allow multiple viewpoints without requiring consensus. In terms of outcome options, closed tasks involve a limited range of acceptable outcomes, whereas open tasks permit multiple acceptable outcomes and greater flexibility during interaction (Long, 1989; Pica et al., 1993). These dimensions therefore create different interactional conditions under which communicative behavior unfolds.

Previous research has shown that task characteristics influence learners' engagement, interactional patterns, motivation, and strategy use (Dao, 2021; Dörnyei, 2019; Loewen & Sato, 2018; Nakamura et al., 2021; Pawlak, 2018). For example, convergent tasks have been associated with greater cognitive and social engagement than divergent tasks (Dao, 2021), while differences in communicative goals and task constraints have been shown to influence learners' interactional behaviors and speaking strategies (Nakamura et al., 2021; Pawlak, 2018). Collectively, these findings suggest that task characteristics may shape not only learners' momentary WTC but also whether that willingness is translated into actual L2 talk. However, how different task dimensions influence the relationship between learners' momentary WTC and actual L2 talk during task-based interaction remains largely unexplored.

The Present Study

The present study addresses these intertwined gaps by adopting pedagogical tasks as the primary context for investigating the intention–execution interface and implementing fine-grained, temporally synchronized measures of both WTC intensity and observable speech production. Examining task-specific fluctuations in WTC alongside objectively quantified L2 output allows for a micro-analytic investigation of the conditions under which WTC is translated into talk or remains unrealized. Importantly, this study examines variations in WTC intensity and possible discrepancies between communicative intention and observable speech—for example, when learners report increasing willingness yet remain silent, or produce speech despite decreased WTC. The study, which is part of a larger research project, investigates the following research questions:

Research Question 1. What is the relationship between EFL learners' L2 WTC and actualization of L2 talk across different task types?

Research Question 2. How do learners perceive task characteristics as contributing to discrepancies between L2 WTC and the actualization of L2 talk across task types?

METHOD

Participants

A total of 33 female university students in Seoul, South Korea, participated in the study, of whom one was excluded from the analysis due to missing WTC ratings, resulting in a final analytic sample of 32 participants. The final sample ranged in age from 19 to 33 years ($M = 24.03$, $SD = 3.70$), and all participants were learning English as a foreign language. To control for the potential influence of target-language exposure, none of the participants had prior residence in English-speaking countries, as such experience has been shown to enhance L2 WTC (S. J. Kang, 2005; Yashima et al., 2004). Participants were drawn from a range of academic majors, including the humanities and social sciences, natural sciences, engineering, and arts, excluding English-related fields. Based on standardized English proficiency test scores (TOEIC, TOEIC Speaking, and TOEFL iBT), participants were classified into an intermediate-proficiency group. Since scores from different proficiency tests are not directly comparable, all scores were mapped onto the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) proficiency levels following previous research (e.g., Abe & Roever, 2019; Y. Kim & Taguchi, 2015). The B1 CEFR level served as the criterion for intermediate proficiency in the present study. Descriptive statistics for the participants' proficiency test scores and the corresponding CEFR B1 classification criteria are presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Descriptive Statistics and CEFR Classification Criteria for Participants' English Proficiency

Proficiency test	<i>N</i>	Score range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	CEFR B1 criterion
TOEIC	26	600–785	671.54	76.76	550–785
TOEIC Speaking	2	130–150	140	14.14	110–150
TOEFL iBT	4	73–84	79.75	4.72	41–94

Communicative Speaking Task

Participants completed the three communicative tasks in groups of three, with 25 minutes allotted to each task. They were unfamiliar with one another prior to the study, as familiarity with interlocutors has been shown to influence L2 WTC (e.g., Li et al., 2024; MacIntyre et al., 1998; Salbaş & Ekmekçi, 2025; S. J. Kang, 2005). An icebreaker activity was conducted at the beginning of the session to promote peer affiliation, familiarity, and mutual acceptance within the group (Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003). Each group consisted of participants from the same proficiency level, and the same three-person groups were maintained across all three tasks.

Three communicative tasks were developed based on the task typology proposed by Pica et al. (1993), which classifies tasks according to goal orientation (convergent vs. divergent) and outcome options (closed vs. open) (Long, 1989; Loschky,

1988). Accordingly, the study implemented an information-gap task (convergent/closed), a decision-making task (convergent/open), and a free-conversation task (divergent/open) (see Table 3). Specifically, the information-gap task was classified as convergent and closed because learners were required to exchange complementary information to reach a single predetermined solution. In contrast, the decision-making task required learners to negotiate toward a shared decision despite multiple acceptable outcomes and therefore represented a convergent/open task. The free-conversation task, by comparison, allowed learners to express individual opinions without being required to reach consensus or produce a predetermined outcome, representing a divergent/open task.

These task formats have been frequently employed in research on related constructs such as engagement, interactional patterns, and task motivation (Dörnyei, 2019; Nakamura et al., 2021; Pawlak, 2018; Y. Park, 2023). They were additionally chosen because L2 learners commonly encounter these task types both inside and outside classroom contexts (Kormos & Wilby, 2020), consistent with task-based learning principles that emphasize learning through performance (Willis & Willis, 2007). Despite their prevalent use in language pedagogy, empirical investigations into their specific effects on L2 WTC and actualization of L2 talk remain limited. To ensure content familiarity and reduce potential confounding effects of prior knowledge, task topics were drawn from participants' shared experiences in everyday campus life (see Table 4). The task instructions and materials are provided in the Appendices.

TABLE 3
Operationalization of Three Communicative Tasks (Pica et al., 1993)

Task type	Interactant relationship	Interaction requirement	Goal orientation	Outcome options
Information-gap task	Two way	Required	Convergent	Closed
Decision-making task	Two way	Optional	Convergent	Open
Free conversation	Two way	Optional	Divergent	Open

TABLE 4
Descriptions of Three Communicative Tasks

Task type	Description
Information-gap task	Choosing the best location for a booth at the university festival
Decision-making task	Selecting contents and sequence for making university life vlog
Free conversation	Talking about new facilities or improvements they would like their university to add

Data Collection

Each participant completed three communicative tasks in triads, with each task lasting 25 minutes. To control for potential order effects, participants were assigned to one of the six possible task sequences. Because eleven groups participated, five of the six sequences were repeated to balance task order across groups. Situational L2 WTC was assessed using a computer-based real-time rating program, adapted from procedures employed in prior studies (e.g., MacIntyre, 2012; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; MacIntyre & Wang, 2021). Participants rated their WTC every five minutes, signaled by a prerecorded beep, on a touch-screen scale ranging from 0 (least willing) to 10 (most willing). This methodological decision was informed by both theoretical and methodological considerations regarding the dynamic measurement of WTC. Although second-by-second idiodynamic assessment provides fine-grained temporal resolution, it relies on retrospective self-ratings and may be less suitable for extended communicative tasks because of concerns regarding delayed judgments and participant fatigue (Boudreau et al., 2018; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2019; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2022). Accordingly, researchers have suggested longer sampling intervals to improve data reliability and reduce participant burden (Boudreau et al., 2018; Hiver & Al-Hoorie, 2019). Classroom-based studies have commonly employed five-minute interval assessments to capture fluctuations in situational WTC during extended classroom interaction (J. Lee, 2018; Mystkowska-Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2016; Nematizadeh & Cao, 2024; Pawlak et al., 2015; Peng, 2020). Following this approach, the present study employed five-minute interval sampling during 25-minute group speaking tasks to assess situational WTC in real time while minimizing disruption to task performance. WTC ratings were aligned with speaking time measured over the corresponding interval, providing a common temporal unit for examining how fluctuations in situational WTC relate to actual L2 talk.

In the present study, the actualization of L2 talk was operationalized as learners' speaking time during task interaction. Speaking time was selected to maintain methodological consistency with previous studies examining the relationship

between WTC and L2 talk (Ducker, 2022; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Nematizadeh & Cao, 2024). Given that the purpose of the present study was to examine how and under what task conditions situational WTC was or was not realized as actual L2 talk, rather than the linguistic characteristics of learners' production, speaking time was considered a suitable indicator of L2 talk actualization. The recorded performances were manually reviewed using a digital timer to calculate each participant's speaking time, in seconds, for each five-minute interval of each task. The speaking-time measure included verbalized talk and communicative non-lexical vocalizations (e.g., laughter, "uh-huh," "umm," "oh," and "err"), following previous research (Ducker, 2022; Goodwin, 1981, 2007; Goodwin & Goodwin, 2005; J. Lee, 2018). L1 utterances were excluded from the speaking-time measure, and overlapping speech was timed separately for each participant.

Following the two-minute preparation period, participants rated their WTC on a 0–10 scale at the onset of each task and at five-minute intervals, prompted by a prerecorded beep. For the analysis, the ratings collected at five-minute intervals were paired with the corresponding speaking time during the 0–5, 5–10, 10–15, 15–20, and 20–25-minute intervals. Participants were instructed in advance to select the first situational WTC rating that came to mind at each beep and immediately resume the task.

WTC ratings were automatically plotted as time-series graphs, allowing continuous monitoring of WTC dynamics throughout each task (see Figure 1), and all task performances were video-recorded. Participants were given a five-minute break between tasks to reduce participant fatigue. Upon completing all three tasks, nine participants volunteered to participate in individual stimulated recall interviews. The interviews were conducted to explore learners' perceptions of factors contributing to discrepancies between their WTC and the actualization of L2 talk during task performance. During the interviews, participants reviewed their WTC rating graphs alongside the corresponding task performance videos. Discrepancy cases were identified through visual inspection of these materials, focusing on salient instances in which changes in WTC did not correspond with changes in speaking time. Of the 90 paired observations examined across the two tasks, 34 were identified as discrepancy cases. Instances in which momentary WTC increased relative to the preceding measurement without a corresponding increase in speaking time, as well as cases in which WTC decreased while speaking time was maintained or increased, were identified. Participants were then asked to account for these intention–action divergences, thereby clarifying the factors contributing to the observed misalignment between reported WTC and actual L2 talk. Rather than conceptualizing WTC realization as a binary outcome (i.e., speaking vs. not speaking), the analysis treated behavioral actualization as a graded phenomenon, indexed by the extent to which observable speech corresponded to the intensity of momentary WTC. All interviews were conducted individually in Korean, lasted approximately one hour, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis.

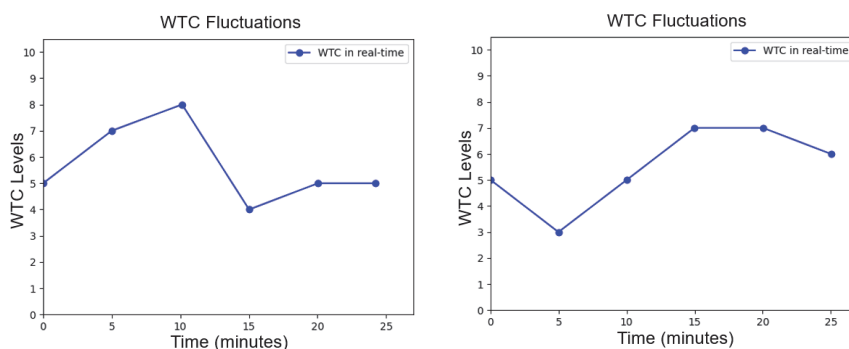


FIGURE 1
Examples of Participants' Time-series WTC Rating Graphs Across Tasks

Data Analysis

With respect to the relationship between EFL learners' L2 WTC and actualization of L2 talk across different task types, the participants' situated WTC rating scores and speaking times at five-minute intervals were calculated for each of the three tasks. The relationship was analyzed using Pearson correlation, following previous studies (Ducker, 2022; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; Nematizadeh & Cao, 2024). The analysis used each participant's WTC rating and corresponding speaking time within the same five-minute interval as the unit of analysis, rather than aggregated scores. The interview transcripts were segmented into communication units (C-units), defined as independent clauses with their associated modifiers, including elliptical or incomplete utterances (Loban, 1976), following procedures employed in prior stimulated recall and L2 interaction research (e.g., H. Kim, 2012; Sato & McNamara, 2019). C-units were adopted as the unit of analysis because they represent meaning-bearing units in spoken discourse and allow for systematic and fine-grained examination of learners'

explanations while minimizing subjective segmentation decisions. For example, the stimulated recall statement, "I felt I had to speak because it was my turn to provide the information," was treated as a single C-unit for subsequent coding. Each C-unit was then assigned to an initial analytic category, operationally defined as a provisional label capturing the primary factor explicitly identified by the participant as influencing their WTC at that moment (e.g., turn-taking issues, responsibility). These initial categories were generated inductively through repeated readings of the data and were subsequently refined through iterative processes of comparison, merging, and redefinition to enhance conceptual coherence and analytic clarity. To enhance the rigor and reliability of the analysis, the interview data were subjected to multiple coding cycles, with repeated re-evaluation sessions conducted over several weeks after the initial analysis (Alderson et al., 1995; Sato, 2023). The codes were reviewed and confirmed by two experienced researchers in data sessions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Relationship Between L2 WTC and Actualization of L2 Talk

Correlational analyses revealed that the translation of WTC into actual L2 production was limited and highly task-dependent (see Table 5). In the information-gap task (Task 1), the correlation between WTC and L2 output was slightly negative and non-significant ($r = -.10, p = .190$). The decision-making task (Task 2) exhibited a small but statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .17, p = .034$). In free conversation (Task 3), the correlation was weak and non-significant ($r = .08, p = .310$). These findings suggest that the relationship between intermediate learners' WTC and actual L2 talk was influenced by task characteristics. Among the three task types, only the convergent-open task showed a small but statistically significant positive relationship between WTC and L2 production, suggesting that this task configuration may be particularly conducive to aligning learners' communicative intention with their actual speaking behavior.

Previous research has generally reported weak associations between self-reported WTC and actual communicative behavior (Cao & Philp, 2006; Ducker, 2022; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011). However, these studies have largely relied on global or retrospective measures of WTC, and observable speech production was often characterized impressionistically or indexed indirectly rather than quantified systematically. By contrast, the present study employed fine-grained, temporally synchronized measurements of both WTC intensity and L2 output. Within this analytic framework, the relationship between momentary WTC and actual L2 talk appeared to vary across task types, highlighting the importance of task context in shaping the translation of communicative intention into observable L2 talk.

Specifically, the decision-making task may have supported the alignment between communicative intention and observable speech by combining a clear communicative objective with sufficient interactional flexibility. This interpretation is supported by previous research suggesting that convergent tasks promote interaction, engagement, and negotiation of meaning because learners are required to work toward a shared outcome (Dao, 2021; Doughty & Pica, 1986; Gass et al., 2005; Loewen & Sato, 2018). Extending these findings, the present study suggests that convergent-open tasks may provide conditions under which learners' momentary WTC is more likely to be translated into observable L2 production by combining a shared communicative goal with opportunities for flexible interaction. To further investigate the discrepancies observed in Task 1 and Task 3, supplementary analyses of scatterplots and stimulated recall interviews were conducted.

TABLE 5
Correlation Coefficient for L2 WTC-L2 talk

Task type	WTC M(SD)	Speaking time M (SD)	r	p -value
Information-gap task (Convergent/closed)	6.14 (2.12)	63.0 (88.4)	-.10	.190
Decision-making task (Convergent/open)	5.90 (2.22)	61.2 (34.8)	.17	.034*
Free conversation (Divergent/open)	6.38 (1.85)	71.2 (39.2)	.08	.310

L2 WTC–Actualization of L2 Talk Discrepancy: How Task Structure Shapes the WTC–Talk Relationship

No systematic relationship was observed between learners' WTC and actual L2 output in either convergent-closed or divergent-open tasks (see Table 5). As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the red dashed line represents the linear regression,

indicating the overall trend between learners' WTC and L2 actualization. The near-zero slope of the regression line suggests that changes in WTC were not associated with systematic changes in L2 output. Blue data points scattered above and below the regression line indicate considerable individual variability. Consistently, the distribution of points and the flat regression line confirm the absence of a meaningful correlation between WTC and L2 actualization in both task types (Task 1: $r = -.10$, $p = .190$, Task 3: $r = .08$, $p = .310$). This pattern indicates that increases in WTC did not consistently lead to greater L2 output, and that, in some cases, decreased WTC still resulted in observable L2 production. These discrepancies suggest that factors beyond momentary willingness may influence whether WTC is translated into actual L2 talk. To explore the contextual factors underlying this divergence, learners' perceptions of and decisions regarding communication during task interaction were examined through stimulated recall interviews. The qualitative analysis identified multiple task-related features associated with the discrepancy, including cognitive demands, structural constraints, and interactional requirements. In reporting these findings, participants are identified by number (e.g., P1), and representative excerpts from the interviews are provided to illustrate the emerging themes. Percentages indicate the proportion of cases in each category within each type of discrepancy.

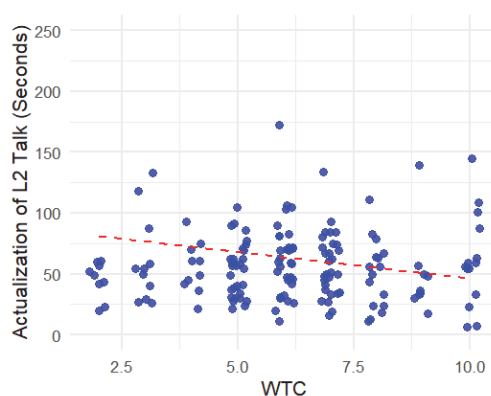


FIGURE 2

Divergence Between L2 WTC and Actualization of L2 Talk (Information-gap Task)

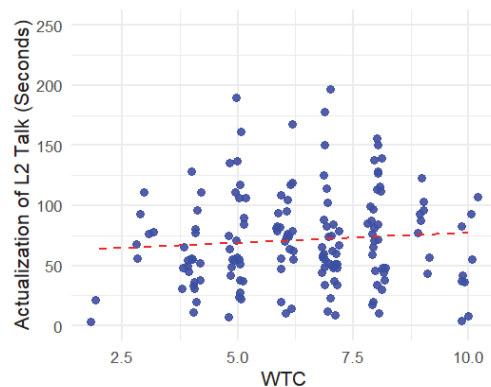


FIGURE 3

Divergence Between L2 WTC and Actualization of L2 Talk (Free Conversation)

Information-Gap Task (Convergent-Closed Task)

Across task phases where learners' WTC decreased relative to earlier moments, some learners nevertheless continued to engage actively in L2 communication during the information-gap task, revealing a divergence between situational WTC and the actualization of L2 talk. This discrepancy was primarily associated with *task progressivity*, referring to learners' orientation toward maintaining or advancing the task flow even when their WTC temporarily declined (see Table 6). Within this overarching category, several subtypes emerged. *Responsibility-driven progressivity* (34%) reflected learners'

perception that someone needed to initiate or sustain the interaction. During the stimulated recall interview, one learner explained that "I thought someone had to move the task forward. I felt some kind of responsibility, so I decided to speak and get things going" (P1), illustrating this sense of task-related obligation. This finding can be understood in relation to the structural characteristics of the information-gap task. Because successful completion required learners to exchange missing information and collaboratively construct the final outcome, participants were often required to maintain the flow of interaction even when their momentary WTC decreased. In such situations, task demands and shared responsibility for task completion appeared to support learners' L2 talk.

Furthermore, *Information-seeking/clarification progressivity* (34%) involved requesting missing information or verifying shared content to ensure task completion. This motive was explicitly articulated by one participant, who noted, "I didn't have that piece of information, so I think I asked if anyone else knew it" (P7). Such information exchange was not merely an optional conversational choice but a task requirement arising from the distributed nature of the information-gap activity. Therefore, the learner's speech was associated with the need to obtain and confirm information necessary for successful task completion. The procedural nature of the task may have further contributed to *task-role progressivity* (16%), occurring when learners spoke primarily because it was their assigned turn. One learner clarified this functional requirement, stating, "I felt I had to speak because it was my turn to provide the information... I simply had to say something" (P5). *Other factors* included the physiological factor of hunger. Overall, these task-related patterns indicate that the predetermined sequencing of information exchange may have created interactional obligations that encouraged learners to produce L2 talk even when their momentary willingness fluctuated. The findings suggest that the structurally sequenced and goal-oriented design of the information-gap task, particularly the requirement to exchange distributed information, may have sustained L2 production even when learners' WTC momentarily declined.

TABLE 6

Task-related Features Shaping the WTC–Production Discrepancy (Information-gap Task)

Task Type	WTC Level	Actualization	Category
Info-gap	Decrease	High	1. Responsibility-driven progressivity (34%) 2. Information-seeking/Clarification progressivity (34%) 3. Task-role obligation (16%) 4. Other factors (16%)
	Increase	Low	1. Turn-taking difficulty (75%) 2. Information-sharing misalignment (25%)

However, discrepancy was also observed in the opposite direction: heightened WTC was not consistently realized in actual L2 talk (see Table 6). The primary reason was *turn-taking difficulty* (75%), reflecting uncertainty regarding appropriate timing and entry points into the interaction. One learner clarified this challenge, noting that "I had a bit of trouble... finding the right timing to speak." (P2). This difficulty can be understood in terms of the interactional demands of the information-gap task. Although learners possessed the willingness to contribute, the sequential organization of information exchange required them to monitor ongoing talk and identify appropriate opportunities to enter the interaction. As a result, heightened WTC did not always immediately translate into speech when learners perceived that their contribution might interrupt the flow of communication. The interviewed learners often hesitated when unsure whether interjecting would disrupt the flow of information exchange, a constraint particularly salient in tightly sequenced information-gap tasks.

Information-sharing misalignment (25%) represented another task-related constraint that was associated with interviewed participants' willingness not being immediately realized as L2 production. Even when willingness was elevated, uncertainty about others' informational states or incomplete coordination of distributed knowledge appeared to constrain immediate L2 output. This frustration was captured in the remark that "I've looked everywhere, but I still can't find it—so why haven't they told me?" (P3). This pattern suggests that in information-gap tasks, successful communication depends not only on learners' willingness to speak but also on the alignment of participants' informational resources. When learners lacked sufficient understanding of what information others possessed or expected, their willingness alone was insufficient to initiate productive interaction. Taken together, these findings indicate that the information-gap task structure may have both supported and constrained L2 production. While shared task responsibility and the necessity of information exchange appeared to encourage learners to continue speaking despite reduced WTC, sequential turn organization and coordination

demands could limit the extent to which heightened WTC was immediately converted into observable talk.

These findings suggest that the discrepancy between WTC and actual L2 production cannot be interpreted simply as a failure of communicative intention. Previous research has demonstrated that learners' non-participation does not necessarily reflect a lack of willingness but may emerge from multiple interactional, interpersonal, and contextual constraints (Bernales, 2016; Ducker, 2022; Zhou, 2026). In particular, learners may regulate their participation according to perceived interactional appropriateness, including concerns about turn-taking, maintaining conversational flow, and allowing opportunities for other participants. Building on this perspective, the present study demonstrates that such discrepancies are also shaped by the procedural organization of pedagogical tasks.

The present findings suggest that task structure may simultaneously sustain production under conditions of declining WTC while constraining the enactment of heightened WTC due to interactional timing and coordination constraints. These findings resonate with previous research indicating that motivational force shapes not only momentary L2 WTC but also its behavioral enactment in classroom interaction (Ducker, 2022). In this classroom interaction-based study, learners frequently reported speaking because they "had to," reflecting immediate communicative goals such as task-completion responsibilities and turn-taking obligations. These goal-directed pressures dynamically shaped the relationship between WTC and its behavioral realization, with turn-taking obligations sometimes co-occurring with increased WTC despite the presence of anxiety.

Similarly, in the present information-gap context, interviewed learners attributed their continued L2 production despite temporary declines in WTC to the structured sequencing of information and clearly defined participant roles, reflected in responsibility-based, information-seeking, and role-based progressivity. These findings support the view that goal-directed pressures embedded within the procedural and role-based structure of the task can counteract transient decreases in WTC and facilitate continued L2 output. Extending this account, the present study suggests that task structure functions as a regulatory condition shaping the relationship between WTC and actual L2 production. In tightly sequenced task environments, procedural organization appeared not only to sustain production during periods of declining willingness but also occasionally to constrain the enactment of heightened willingness when learners faced timing and coordination uncertainties.

The present findings also align with the view that WTC realization emerges from the dynamic interaction of learner-internal and contextual factors rather than from a single psychological variable (Zhou, 2026). The present study demonstrates that pedagogical task structure represents an important contextual condition shaping how WTC is translated into actual L2 production. These patterns underscore the context-sensitive and nonlinear nature of the WTC-actualization relationship, suggesting that it is contingently shaped by task structure rather than being a fixed or unidirectional process. From a CDST perspective, discrepancies between WTC and actual L2 production can therefore be understood as emergent outcomes arising from the continuous interaction among learners' momentary willingness, task demands, and moment-to-moment interactional conditions.

Free Conversation (Divergent-Open Task)

In the free conversation task, instances in which decreased WTC co-occurred with sustained L2 production appeared to be grounded in interactional orientations that prioritized maintaining conversational continuity rather than reflecting momentary internal willingness (see Table 7). Unlike the information-gap task, the free conversation task did not provide predetermined information exchange requirements or clearly assigned interactional roles. Therefore, learners needed to actively manage the development of the conversation and negotiate their participation in order to sustain interaction. Learners frequently engaged in *self-imposed speakership* (30%), voluntarily assuming the speaker role to prevent interactional breakdown during pauses or hesitations. This proactive stance was exemplified by a learner who remarked, "Since no one else was stepping up to start, I felt like I should be the one to get things going" (P4). This pattern suggests that, in the absence of externally imposed task demands, some learners constructed their own responsibility for maintaining conversational continuity and initiated talk despite reduced momentary WTC. Others demonstrated *interaction maintenance* (30%), making an effort to keep the conversation alive by elaborating on peers' comments, introducing related ideas, or prompting further responses. One participant illustrated this strategy, explaining that "I thought if I gave a few examples first, it would help the other person come up with their own experiences, like, 'Oh, I had something like that too'" (P7). Such behaviors reflect learners' orientation toward sustaining mutual engagement rather than simply producing individual turns. In open-ended interaction, maintaining shared conversational involvement may have been an important condition for continuing communication.

A smaller proportion exhibited *responsibility-driven progressivity* (20%), continuing to contribute out of a perceived obligation to move the discussion forward or to fulfill their part in the collaborative exchange, even when their confidence

or motivation to speak had temporarily declined. This finding further highlights that, in less structured tasks, continued L2 production may emerge from learners' sensitivity to the needs of the interaction and their perceived responsibility for collective conversational success. *Other factors* (20%) included time pressure arising from the limited time remaining, as learners felt the need to continue speaking despite decreased WTC. Overall, these predominant interactional orientations indicate that, in the unstructured free conversation task, learners' engagement was often shaped by social awareness and a sense of conversational responsibility rather than by internal willingness alone. Such socially grounded motives appeared to support participants' efforts to sustain communicative momentum despite fluctuations in their WTC, suggesting that perceived obligation and cooperative intent may have helped learners maintain communication despite temporary decreases in willingness in open-ended and less structured interactional contexts.

TABLE 7

Task-Related Features Shaping the WTC–Production Discrepancy (Free Conversation)

Task type	WTC level	Actualization	Category
Free conversation	Decrease	High	1. Self-imposed speakership (30%) 2. Interaction maintenance (30%) 3. Responsibility-driven progressivity (20%) 4. Other factors (20%)
	Increase	Low	1. Turn-taking difficulty (40%) 2. Enjoyment/Intrinsic interest (30%) 3. Listening for noninterruption (20%) 4. Other factors (10%)

However, a discrepancy was also found in the opposite direction: increased WTC did not consistently result in immediate L2 production (see Table 7). The finding can be understood in relation to the interactional characteristics of the free conversation task, where learners were not provided with predetermined roles or obligatory information exchanges. Instead, successful participation depended on learners' ability to negotiate entry into an ongoing conversation and interpret appropriate opportunities for contribution. The most frequently reported constraint was *turn-taking difficulty* (40%), as learners struggled to identify appropriate entry points when peers dominated the floor. This difficulty was underscored by a learner's observation that "It was a bit difficult to find the right timing to speak because the person sitting here spoke quite frequently... so it was hard to interject" (P8). Although learners may have been willing to contribute, the absence of externally structured turn allocation appeared to make it difficult for them to transform that willingness into actual speech. Additionally, *enjoyment or intrinsic interest* (30%) was reported in cases where learners felt willing and positively engaged yet chose to remain silent, indicating that elevated WTC may coexist with non-verbal participation. One participant rationalized this silence by noting, "Even without speaking, I was still enjoying the interaction, so my willingness to communicate could have remained high throughout" (P9). This finding suggests that, in open-ended conversations, learners' situational WTC does not necessarily require immediate verbal expression. Rather, attentive listening and emotional engagement may represent alternative forms of participation that allow learners to remain involved in the interaction despite limited speech production.

Listening for noninterruption (20%) further indicated that learners refrained from speaking because they perceived attentive listening during others' turns as polite and socially appropriate behavior. This social consideration was captured in the remark, "I felt that I should just listen while they were speaking, as it seemed like the polite thing to do" (P6). Such behavior highlights the socially regulated nature of conversational participation. In less structured interactions, learners appear to prioritize maintaining a supportive conversational environment over maximizing their own speaking opportunities, leading to situations in which high willingness does not immediately correspond to observable L2 output. *Other factors* (10%) included a lack of ideas, which left learners unsure of what to say despite their willingness to speak. Overall, these findings indicate that, in free conversation tasks, L2 production is shaped not only by learners' WTC but also by interactional norms, turn negotiation, and socially appropriate participation. Therefore, heightened WTC may remain unrealized in speech when learners' willingness is moderated by the demands of maintaining smooth and cooperative interaction.

These findings indicate that heightened WTC in free conversation did not always result in immediate L2 production, with interviewed learners reporting that interactional timing, affective engagement, and politeness considerations played a role in their decisions about whether to speak. Notably, *turn-taking issues* also emerged as a major reason for reduced L2

production despite heightened WTC in the information-gap task, and a similar tendency was observed in the free conversation task. While task structure differed substantially, sensitivity to floor management and peer coordination appeared to shape whether willingness was translated into overt production.

The structural openness of free conversation provides a plausible explanation for these patterns. Unlike tightly sequenced, goal-oriented tasks, free conversation does not prescribe turn allocation or externally defined progress markers. Learners therefore need to self-regulate participation, negotiate entry points, and collaboratively manage conversational flow. In such contexts, decisions about speaking become highly contingent on emergent interactional dynamics. Interviewed learners reported refraining from interrupting ongoing turns despite expressing a strong desire to contribute, indicating that silence may reflect interactional restraint rather than diminished willingness (Ducker, 2022). This pattern also resonates with the distinction between planned and articulated speech, suggesting that communicative intentions may not always be immediately realized in overt production, particularly in loosely structured interactional contexts (Bernales, 2016). At the same time, the absence of externally imposed goals may account for the persistence of production during periods of reduced WTC. Without task-driven pressure to complete predetermined outcomes, some learners reported assuming shared responsibility for sustaining the exchange, reinforcing socially oriented motives such as speakership and interaction maintenance. From a CDST perspective, these findings suggest that free conversation constitutes a highly dynamic interactional environment in which the relationship between WTC and L2 production is continuously reorganized through reciprocal coordination among participants. Taken together, the nonlinear relationship between WTC and L2 production appears to be dynamically configured by the affordances and constraints of the task environment. Rather than directly determining output, fluctuations in WTC are mediated through task-specific interactional processes, including turn negotiation, shared responsibility, and conversational coordination, which may delay, suppress, or sustain speech depending on contextual conditions.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between L2 WTC and the actualization of L2 talk across differently structured classroom tasks, with particular attention to discrepancy between situational WTC and actual L2 talk. Using temporally synchronized measures of WTC intensity and speech output, the findings revealed that the association was limited and highly task-dependent: WTC predicted output only in the convergent-open task, but not in the convergent-closed or divergent-open tasks, suggesting that the relationship between communicative willingness and behavioral realization is contingent upon task-specific interactional conditions. The findings extend previous reports of weak WTC-behavior links by demonstrating that the strength and direction of the WTC-actualization relationship vary across task types. Rather than functioning as a stable predictor of output, WTC operates within task-embedded interactional conditions that shape when and how willingness becomes enacted.

Qualitative findings from the stimulated recall interviews further illuminated these discrepancies. In tightly sequenced tasks, role-based responsibilities and procedural progressivity sustained production even during temporary declines in WTC, while occasionally constraining the enactment of heightened WTC. In open-ended interaction, speech emerged through ongoing negotiation of turn-taking and interpersonal coordination, leading to delays or suppression of output despite elevated WTC. Across tasks, interactional turn-taking difficulty repeatedly emerged as a factor associated with these discrepancies. Overall, the findings suggest that the relationship between WTC and L2 production may not be fully explained by a simple linear or unidirectional account but is instead dynamically configured by the affordances and constraints of the task environment.

The findings carry important implications for L2 pedagogy, particularly in task-based settings. Rather than assuming that enhancing learners' WTC will automatically increase L2 production, instructors should recognize that task structure shapes whether and how willingness can be enacted. In convergent-closed tasks such as tightly sequenced information-gap activities, speaking opportunities are often constrained by procedural order and role distribution. Given that turn-taking difficulty emerged as the primary constraint on the realization of heightened WTC in the information-gap task, teachers may therefore need to make participation slots more visible and predictable. Designing explicit checkpoints within the task, where learners are prompted to summarize shared information, verbalize their current understanding, or state a tentative group position, may help prevent willingness from remaining unrealized. Clear role rotation, overt signals for turn transition, and brief required reporting phases can further ensure that learners have identifiable moments in which speaking is expected. In divergent-open tasks, including free conversation, the challenge lies less in procedural restriction and more in social coordination. As reflected in turn-taking issues and listening for noninterruption, learners may hesitate not because they lack

willingness, but because they are uncertain about when self-selection is appropriate or how to enter an ongoing exchange without disrupting peers. Pedagogical support in these contexts should therefore focus on legitimizing proactive speakership. Teachers can model practical entry strategies (e.g., signaling agreement before adding a point, building on a peer's idea, or explicitly requesting the floor), encourage learners to monitor participation balance, and normalize self-initiated contributions. Such practices help ensure that willingness is not suppressed by social caution but instead finds appropriate avenues for expression.

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged. The sample consisted solely of Korean female university students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other learner populations. In addition, the study examined a restricted range of task types; alternative tasks such as problem-solving or role-play may yield different patterns of WTC enactment. As the analysis focused on WTC-production dynamics within a limited timeframe, longitudinal research is needed to determine how such alignments develop over time and across repeated task experiences. Finally, Pearson correlations provide limited insight into potential lagged relationships between WTC and L2 talk, which could be further explored through time-lagged analyses in future research.

Despite these limitations, the study reconceptualizes the WTC-production relationship by showing that communicative behavior is not solely determined by willingness but is dynamically shaped by the affordances and constraints of task design. Rather than attributing discrepancies only to internal psychological factors, the findings illustrate how task structure can support, channel, or suppress the expression of WTC in observable speech. By examining the moment-to-moment relationship between willingness and behavior at the micro-task level, the study moves beyond descriptive accounts and provides an empirically grounded analysis of how WTC and L2 production dynamically converge and diverge within pedagogical tasks. These results underscore the critical role of task design in understanding and facilitating L2 communicative engagement, highlighting the need to integrate psychological and structural perspectives in future research.

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Appendix

Task Instruction and Materials

1. Information-Gap Task



EWHA FESTIVAL 2025
WHERE IS THE BEST BOOTH SPOT?

Name: _____

What to do

You are working as a team. Your goal is to choose the **best location** for your department's booth at EWHA festival. Each team member has different information about the four school buildings.

How to do

1. Share information and fill in the table.
2. Decide on **one best** location based on the check-list below.
3. Write an email requesting the spot and any needed equipment.

* You have **25 minutes**.

2. Decision-Making Task





Vlog Contest
SHOWCASE CAMPUS LIFE

Name: _____

What to do

Your team will join a vlog (video blog) contest hosted by the university promotion team. Your goal is to showcase campus life for future students. Work together to plan your campus life vlog.

How to do

1. Talk about the strengths of your university's facilities and student support.
2. Select **3 main items** to include in the vlog:
2 from School Facilities and **1 from Student Support**.
3. Discuss **why** you want to promote each item based on your experience.
4. Then, decide the 1) specific content (e.g., location, activities, key moment, etc.), and 2) order of the **3 items** of your vlog.

* You have **25 minutes**.

3. Free Conversation

Name: _____

FREE CONVERSATION

JUNE 2025

WHAT TO DO

What new facilities or improvements would you like your university to add?

HOW TO DO

1. Share any unhappy experiences or problems that you had with university facilities
2. Make suggestions for adding new facilities or improvements.
(ex - better study spaces, fun places for free time, more technology, or diverse food options, etc.)
3. Discuss how these changes can help students learn better and enjoy campus life more.

*You have **25 minutes**.

