

CLASSROOM CONTEXT'S INFLUENCE ON  
STUDENTS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE  
A study of upper secondary school students' views

Master's thesis  
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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Suullisen kielitaidon harjoittelua vieraissa kielissä sekä asenteita sitä kohtaan on tutkittu melko paljon niin Suomessa, kuin muualla maailmassakin (ks. esim. Mäkelä 2005 tai Yli-Renko ja Salo-Lee 1991). Sen sijaan oppilaiden ja opiskelijoiden halukkuudesta puhua vieraita kieliä, tässä tapauksessa erityisesti englantia, ei suomalaisessa kontekstissa ole tutkimustietoa. Kielen opettamisen kannalta olisi kuitenkin tärkeää ymmärtää, miten oppilaat ja opiskelijat kokevat oman halukkuuteensa puhua englantia, ja miten erilaiset tilanteet oppitunnilla siihen vaikuttavat. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena onkin selvittää suomalaisten lukiolaisten halukkuutta puhua englantia erityisesti oppitunnilla, sekä miten opiskelijat kokevat erilaisten luokkahuonetilanteiden vaikuttavan tähän halukkuuteen. Tutkimuksella halutaan selvittää myös vuonna 2009 lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteisiin lisätyn valinnaisen suullisen kielitaidon kurssin vaikutusta opiskelijoiden halukkuuteen puhua englantia.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin Etelä-Suomessa sijaitsevassa lukiossa kyselylomakkeella, johon vastasi 73 lukion toisen ja kolmannen vuoden opiskelijaa. Kyselylomake sisälsi 26 monivalintaväittämää, sekä yhden avoimen kysymyksen, ja se mittasi sekä vastaajien halukkuutta puhua englantia eri tilanteissa luokkahuoneessa ja sen ulkopuolella, sekä erilaisia tekijöitä, joilla luokkatilanteessa voisi olla vaikutusta tähän halukkuuteen, kuten keskustelukumppaneiden määrä ja opettajan läsnäolo tilanteessa. Aineisto analysoitiin kvantitatiivisesti SPSS-tilasto-ohjelman avulla, lukuun ottamatta avoimen kysymyksen vastauksia, jotka analysoitiin kvalitatiivisesti.</p> <p>Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että yleisesti ottaen opiskelijat ovat jokseenkin halukkaita puhumaan englantia sekä oppitunneilla että niiden ulkopuolella. Oppitunnilla halukkuus on suurinta tilanteissa, joissa keskustelukumppaneita ei ole montaa. Vastaavasti halukkuus on pienintä, kun tilanteessa on mukana koko opetusryhmä. Monen vastaajan kohdalla myös esimerkiksi keskustelun aihe, keskustelukumppaneiden tunteminen sekä opettajan läsnäolo olivat vaikuttavina tekijöinä heidän halukkuudessaan puhua englantia oppitunnilla. Tulokset siitä, ovatko opiskelijat halukkaampia puhumaan englantia oppitunnilla vai sen ulkopuolella jäivät ristiriitaisiksi.</p> <p>Lisätutkimukselle olisi tarvetta vielä sekä muiden oppijaryhmien, esimerkiksi yläkouluikäisten halukkuudessa puhua, että lukiolaisten halukkuuden tutkimuksessa eri tutkimusmenetelmää käyttäen. Esimerkiksi havainnointitutkimuksella saataisiin täsmällisempää tietoa opiskelijoiden todellisesta toiminnasta, verrattuna tämän tutkimuksen aineistoon, jossa opiskelijat itse arvioivat omaa toimintaansa.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Theoretical proficiency in a second language is not a sufficient goal for second language (L2) teaching, because knowing the grammar and possessing a vast vocabulary is rather useless, if one does not know what to do with them. What is needed in addition to that theoretical proficiency is the competence to use the proficiency, i.e. the communicative competence. When one has the skills of a language and the skills to use the language, all that is needed is the opportunities to use the language, and most of all, the willingness to use it when those opportunities are provided. MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1998:547) emphasize the communicative goals in second language learning, and argue that “a proper objective for L2 education is to create willingness to communicate.” The Finnish national core curriculum for upper secondary schools (2003) and the Common European Framework of Reference (2001) do not discuss the issues of building willingness or confidence to use English, but they do emphasize the communicative purposes of foreign languages and language teaching, and it is mentioned in the national core curriculum (2003:103) that on every foreign language course the students should be provided with opportunities to practice using the language also orally.

Although the globalization and the rapidly developing technology has brought the English language to our everyday lives, and make it easy for a Finn to communicate with an American or a New Zealander, for many young people the only opportunities to get to speak a foreign language are still in the language classroom. If pupils and students do not dare to speak the language in the classroom, which is supposed to be a safe environment to practice it, the threshold to start speaking it in the world outside the school can be high. It is important to make the foreign language teaching and practicing in a classroom such that the students not only gain the essential proficiency of the language and the communicative competence to use it, but they actually are willing to use the language as much as possible.

Willingness to communicate in L2 and factors that affect it have been studied all over the world during the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, and several studies have been done in, for instance, Japanese, Hungarian and French English as a second/foreign

language (ESL/EFL) contexts (e.g. Kang 2005, Yashima, Zenuk-Nishida and Shimizu 2004, Baker and MacIntyre 2003). Many studies have focused on rather stable variables such as personality, or variables related to a second language context, such as attitudes towards and contact with the second language. Yet there are few studies to be found about the willingness to communicate in the Finnish EFL classroom context, although in the Finnish language classrooms there definitely are learners who are very competent in the foreign language, but are not willing to use it, or are willing to use it only in some specific situations. It could be thought to be important, however, for teachers to understand why these competent language learners do not want to use their skills and how they could create such contexts where the students would be most willing to speak.

The present study aims at looking into the influence that classroom context and some situational variables in classroom have on Finnish upper secondary school EFL learners' willingness to communicate. Unlike, for instance, personality or attitude, these variables are not stable, and a teacher can somewhat take them into account and change them in order to increase the willingness to communicate. The aim is to see how the students themselves perceive their willingness to speak and what kind of situational variables they perceive to influence their WTC. The data for the present study was collected via a questionnaire, and the participants who filled in the questionnaire were upper secondary school second- and third-year-students.

In this paper, I will first introduce and discuss some literature that is considered central on the field of willingness to communicate, and also literature that is essential when dealing with the practicing of the speaking skills in the Finnish context. In addition, previous studies on both willingness to communicate and practicing speaking skills in Finland will be discussed. After introducing and discussing the literature, the design of the present study will be described and discussed in chapter 3. The results of the study will be presented in chapter 4, and in chapter 5 the results will be analyzed and discussed in more detail and with respect to literature and previous studies. In the final chapter, the study will be discussed with respect to reliability and validity, and also the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for further study will be presented. The final chapter will also provide some implications for foreign language teaching based on the findings of the present study.



## **2 SPEAKING SKILLS AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE**

Learning a foreign language is an extremely complex issue, and very different from what all of us have gone through as a child when acquiring the mother tongue, or the first language (L1). Using a foreign language for communication is often not any less complicated, especially when one is using a foreign language that one is only learning at the time being, and in which one's skills might still be very limited. One needs enough language skills and cultural understanding to speak appropriately, and even then there are a number of different variables that influence whether one uses the language when opportunities appear. In this chapter, the key terms related to the present study will be defined and explained, and also the field of speaking skills and willingness to communicate, as well as practicing the speaking skills in the Finnish upper secondary schools will be presented through literature and research. Moreover, at the end of this chapter, previous studies related to practicing speaking skills and willingness to communicate will be introduced and discussed.

### **2.1 Defining the key terms related to the present study**

Although in the second/foreign language research the terms 'second language' (L2) and 'foreign language' (FL) are sometimes used overlapping, they are often considered different. Oxford and Shearin (1994: 14) define a foreign language as a language "that is learned in a place where that language is not typically used as the medium of ordinary communication", whereas a second language might be defined as "a language that is spoken in the surrounding community" (Yule 2006: 163). Moreover, many English dictionaries define a second language as a language that one can speak in addition to the language one has learned as a child (e.g. Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 2008). Even though English is not spoken in the surrounding community in Finland, the presence of the English language in most Finns' lives is significant. Early on, Finnish children hear English on television, where programs are subtitled instead of dubbed, they struggle to understand the English instructions and speech on computer

and video games, and as they grow up, they will come across English in, for instance, advertisements, slogans and in many job announcements, even if they did not intentionally seek opportunities to encounter English. Thus, it could be argued that English is not really a foreign language in Finland either. Many young people, especially, would probably consider English more like a second language, as they are so used to hearing, seeing and even using it, if not speaking, at least writing when browsing the Internet (see, for instance, Leppänen, Nikula and Kääntä 2008). Still, at the same time many people, also young people, consider English as foreign as a language can be. Also, officially English is learnt as a foreign language in Finland. Thus, to overcome the puzzle of using one suitable term when speaking about English in Finland, in the present study both terms are used in the meaning of any language other than one's first language.

The term *willingness to communicate* (WTC), can be used when referring to communication orally, which is the case in the major part of WTC research, but also in a written form. In any case, willingness to communicate is based on the idea of individuals' different tendency to communicate in various communication situations that they come across (McCroskey and Richmond 1986:134). MacIntyre et al. (1998: 547) define WTC in L2 as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2." In the L2 context, WTC has also been described to be "the most immediate determinant of L2 use" (Clément, Baker and MacIntyre 2003:191), and it is affected by various different factors, both situational and enduring. In the present paper, willingness to communicate is discussed as a situational variable, although it cannot be neglected that the stage for L2 communication and WTC is set by the enduring variables (MacIntyre et al. 1998: 558). As the focus in the present study is on situational WTC, a suitable definition for willingness to communicate is offered by Kang (2005), who defines willingness to communicate in L2 based on his study on the situational willingness to communicate as follows:

Willingness to communicate (WTC) is an individual's volitional inclination towards actively engaging in the act of communication in a specific situation, which can vary according to interlocutor(s), topic, and conversational context, among other potential situational variables. (Kang 2005: 291).

As the focus in the present study, in addition to situational willingness to communicate, is on speaking English as a foreign language, thus in this paper the term willingness to communicate is used in the meaning of willingness to communicate by speaking English.

## **2.2 Communicative competence**

When a person wants to communicate in any language, what is needed in addition to a theoretical competence of the language is the knowledge and skills related to building understandable and appropriate sentences, and social interaction. These knowledge and skills together with the theoretical language competence build communicative competence, which allows people to convey spoken or written messages to each other, and which thus is usually an important goal in the language teaching and learning. The term *communicative competence* was coined by Dell Hymes (1972), and later the concept has been widely elaborated and re-constructed by, for instance, Bachman (1990) and Canale and Swain (1980).

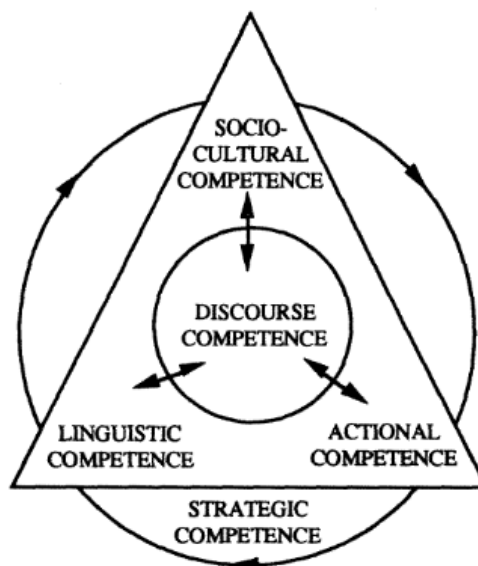
Communicative competence can be described in different ways, or thought to consist of different elements. The Common European Framework of Reference (2001: 9), which has also set frames to the Finnish national core curriculum for upper secondary schools in regard to foreign languages, defines competences as “the sum of knowledge, skills and characteristics that allow a person to perform actions”, and communicative language competences as the competences which “empower a person to act using specifically linguistic means.” Yule (2006: 169) defines communicative competence as “the general ability to use language accurately, appropriately, and flexibly.” In other words, communicative competence is knowing how to apply vocabulary and grammatical rules correctly in order to form sentences, and also knowing what kind of sentences to use in different situations and with different opponents in order to keep the conversation appropriate.

Communicative competence is often divided into different components, which are narrower competences that are needed to form the broader entity of communicative

competence. As there are various different constructs of communicative competence and all cannot be introduced in this paper, only two models will be described: one that is essential when discussing language learning in Finland, as it forms the basis for the foreign language teaching in the Finnish national core curriculum, and another which has been constructed on the basis of a classic model by Canale and Swain (1980), yet is different to many other models, because it is constructed as an aid to teaching, not testing. The first construct is the one used in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), where the communicative competence is divided into linguistic competences, sociolinguistic competences and pragmatic competences (CEFR 2001: 108). In this model, linguistic competences include issues that are related to the components that are needed when producing language, for instance, lexical, grammatical and semantic competences. Sociolinguistic competences, then, deal with the issues that are required for using a language successfully in social situations, for instance, greetings and politeness conventions. Pragmatic competences include issues about the organization and functions of the language use in order to form coherent and understandable language. The communicative competence model described in the CEFR is not the only model that exists, but it is the one which has set frames to the current foreign language teaching in Finland.

Similar to this model in the CEFR, many communicative competence models are constructed with the focus on testing language proficiency. However, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) have constructed another model of communicative competence, which is aimed as an aid for communicative language teaching syllabus design. In their model, extending the model by Canale and Swain (1980), they have divided the concept into somewhat different and in some cases narrower pieces. Their model consists of linguistic competence, discourse competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence and strategic competence (Celce-Murcia et al. 1995: 9, see figure 1 below). Also in this model, the elements are, for the most part, the same, but they are split into different kinds of entities. For instance, the sociocultural competence is the knowledge of how to express messages appropriately in a given context, and the actional competence is about matching the communicative intent with the linguistic form. Different in this model compared to the model in the CEFR, however, is that it includes strategic competence, which is the knowledge of communication strategies with which one can compensate the possible limited proficiency. For a language learner

with often more or less limited language proficiency, developing this strategic competence could be considered particularly important in order to avoid breakdowns in interaction if and when the learners come across situations where his or her language skills are not sufficient.



**Figure 1. Representation of the communicative competence model by Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (Celce-Murcia et al. 1995: 10).**

Whatever is the model that is chosen to describe the communicative competence, and whether it is constructed with the focus on teaching or testing communicative competence, they all share the idea that communicating in any language requires knowledge and skills of different competences. Without sufficient communicative competence, a speaker most probably uses the social knowledge of their L1, believing that the same rules allow them to communicate effectively also in L2 (Scarcella, Andersen and Krashen 1990: xiv). Also the Finnish national core curriculum for upper secondary schools emphasizes the knowledge of the differences in communication across cultures. One of the general learning objectives in the national core curriculum in regard to foreign languages is to “know how to communicate in a manner characteristic of the target language and its culture” (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003:102). This, in other words, could be said to mean that the objective in the upper secondary school language education is to build communicative competence.

## **2.3 Willingness to communicate in a second language**

The concept of willingness to communicate was originally developed in the 1980s on the field of communication by McCroskey and his associates, and was used for studying and understanding communication behavior in an individual's first language. In L1 communication research, WTC was considered to be a personality variable, as some people are more willing to communicate than others, even though the situational constraints are identical or almost identical (McCroskey and Richmond 1987:130). Such attributes as, for instance, self-esteem, introversion-extroversion and communication apprehension are related to WTC in L1.

In the 1990s, the concept of willingness to communicate was taken into the second language acquisition and learning research by Richard Clément, Peter MacIntyre and their associates, and in their concept of willingness to communicate in L2, WTC was no more a personality variable. On the contrary, in the model of variables that influence WTC in L2 by MacIntyre et al. (1998), personality is only one of the variables that affect WTC among several other variables.

In this chapter, literature that is central on the field of willingness to communicate research will be discussed in terms of both first and particularly second language, and what is essential to understand about how WTC in L2 differs from WTC in L1. Also, a model of factors that affect willingness to communicate in L2 will be presented and discussed.

### **2.3.1 Willingness to communicate in L1 and L2**

As willingness to communicate in a second language is certainly a far more complex concept than willingness to communicate in the first language, a person's WTC in L1 does not necessarily correlate with his or her WTC in an L2 (e.g. McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond 1985, Charos 1994, cited in MacIntyre et al. 1998: 546). Different to using one's first language, when speaking in an L2, one is often using a language which is not automatized like one's first language, which he or she has limited proficiency of, or that

one has only started learning. Whereas in L1 willingness to communicate is highly dependent on personality (McCroskey and Richmond 1987: 130), in L2 the major roles are played by one's L2 proficiency and especially his or her communicative competence in L2 (Dörnyei 2003: 12). However, not even good language proficiency and communicative competence in L2 lead directly to WTC, as in addition to those, a central variable is how one perceives their own language skills (Baker and MacIntyre 2003: 71). It is probably quite common in L2 classrooms all over the world that there are some extremely proficient speakers, according to both their theoretical skills as well as their communicative competence, but whose self-perceived language skills do not equal their actual skills, and thus they do not want to speak, even though they could, and although they might often participate actively in other classes where they can use their first language.

There are, naturally, some common features between L1 and L2 willingness to communicate. Despite considering WTC as a personality variable, McCroskey and Richmond (1987: 129) also list some situational variables that might impact willingness to communicate in L1, and among those variables are, for instance, how the speaker feels that day, who the speaker is talking with, and what might be gained or lost through communicating. All these variables do, undoubtedly, also influence WTC in L2, but in different ways and mixed with a range of other variables. Gaining or losing something through communicating is a theme also in a study by MacIntyre (1999), where he discusses the concerns that foreign language students have when using the language and that often can also provoke anxiety. His study suggests that when it comes to speaking in front of one's peers, anxious students are particularly worried about what other people think of their performance, i.e. what they might lose through communication. They might fear being embarrassed, that others will laugh at them, or that they will make a fool of themselves. These kinds of expectations of negative outcomes are, according to McCroskey and Richmond (1987: 145), the foundation to communication apprehension, as an anxious speaker perceives that these negative outcomes cannot be avoided. With this, McCroskey and Richmond address the first language communication, but it probably holds true also in regard to speaking in L2, as learning an L2 often provokes plenty of emotions (Dörnyei 2009: 181).

In L1, WTC in one context is closely related to the same person's WTC in another context (McCroskey and Richmond 1987:137). However, willingness to communicate in L2 is a completely different issue, as MacIntyre et al. (1998: 553) point out the social situation's significance in L2 WTC. Someone might be very talkative when speaking English with an exchange student outside the classroom, but unwilling to speak in class where a teacher is presumably monitoring and evaluating what one is saying. On the other hand, some students might find it easy to speak in L2 in the classroom, which can be seen as a safe and familiar environment, but still be unwilling to speak outside the class with a foreign person with whom the L2 is the only common language.

### **2.3.2 Variables that influence willingness to communicate in L2**

As mentioned above, there are some variables that might affect WTC in both L1 and L2, yet there are also differences, and in L2, the willingness to communicate is often a more complex issue. This subchapter introduces a range of variables that can have an influence on WTC in L2. According to an often-cited model by MacIntyre et al. (1998), there are a number of different variables that potentially influence willingness to communicate in a second language, and thus also the actual use of L2. These variables and their hierarchy are described in MacIntyre et al.'s model as a pyramid (see Figure 2 below), where the variables beneath affect the variables above, and finally cause the willingness to communicate and the language use. The variables can be divided into enduring influences (layers IV-VI) and situational factors (layers I-III) (Matsuoka and Evans 2005:6). The undermost layer in the model, layer VI, is called 'Social and Individual Context', and it contains 'personality' and 'intergroup climate'. This layer is a person's basis to all the L2 communication, and it contains factors over which one has very little influence.

The next layer upwards, layer V, is called 'Affective-Cognitive Context'. In this layer, there are factors 'intergroup attitudes', 'social situation' and 'communicative competence'. Communicative competence was already discussed in more detail in chapter 2.2. The variable 'social situation' is the setting where the possible communication takes place, for instance, a language lesson in school. 'Intergroup



attitude’, then, is how a person is motivated to and what his or her attitudes are towards learning and speaking in the second language.

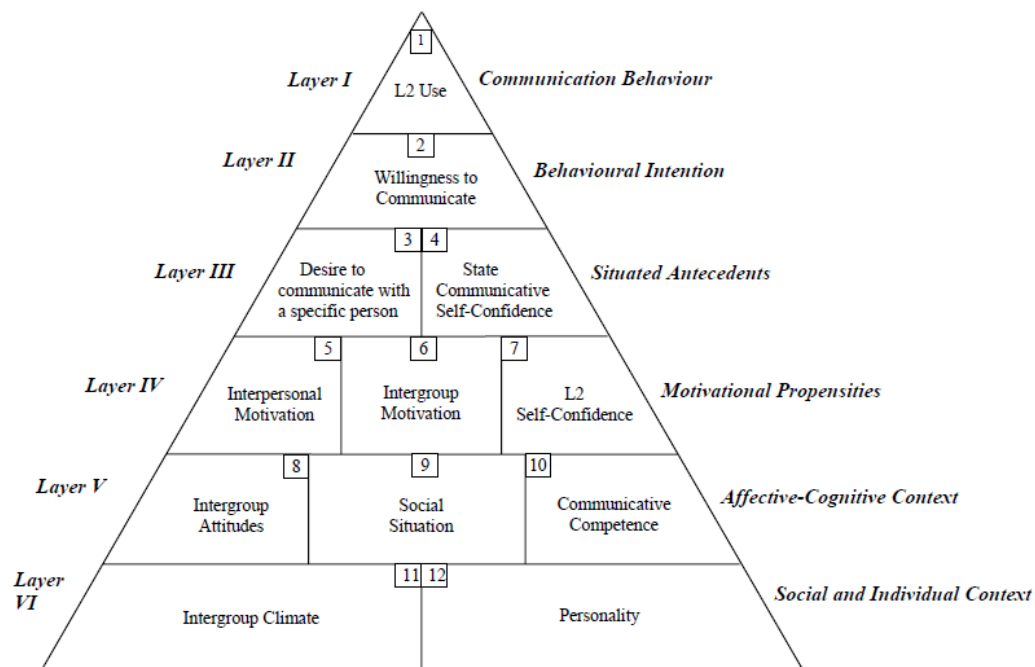


Figure 2. Heuristic model of variables influencing WTC in L2. (MacIntyre et al. 1998: 547)

Layer IV, ‘Motivational Properties’, includes also three factors: ‘interpersonal motivation’, ‘intergroup motivation’ and ‘L2 self-confidence’. ‘Interpersonal motivation’ is about the motives between individuals to communicate with each other, which can be, for instance, social roles in classroom, or interest in the opponent. ‘Intergroup motivation’ includes the same kind of motives, but between groups. These two are the communication motivation’s affective and social aspects. ‘L2 self-confidence’ is the result of communicative competence and the self-evaluation of one’s L2 skills, but also of anxiety to use the L2, or the lack of it, which is often influenced by the previous experiences of using the L2. Having positive experiences of communication in the L2 improves WTC by reducing anxiety and improving one’s own perception of his or her L2 skills, and thus motivates to participate in L2 communication again (Baker and MacIntyre 2003: 72). It is suggested that the self-evaluation of one’s L2 skills has more influence over WTC in L2 than the actual communicative competence, as, for instance, according to MacIntyre and Charos (1996: 16), despite the actual language proficiency, the self-perceived competence to communicate in L2 can affect the rate of participation in interaction in L2.

One layer upwards, which is the last layer before the willingness to communicate, is layer III, 'Situating Antecedents'. The factors included in this layer are 'desire to communicate with a specific person' and 'state communicative self-confidence'. Whereas the variables on the layers below are rather constant, at least in the sense that they do not change in a moment, these variables on layer III are situation dependent and change from one context to another. 'State communicative self-confidence' means the confidence one has to communicate in some particular moment, for instance, one feels confident to answer a question that was asked, because one knows the answer to that question and knows how to formulate the answer, and also is not afraid to be laughed at if he or she speaks. It does not, however, mean that he or she would have been confident to answer the previous question, or be confident to answer the questions that follow. Just like the 'state communicative self-confidence' is a sum of the person's skills and confidence in those skills, as well as the environment, also the other factor of this layer, 'desire to communicate with a specific person', is a sum of different factors, both interpersonal and intergroup motivations. For example, in the classroom, one might want to discuss the given topic with a person sitting nearby, because he is familiar, or seems interesting to talk to, and it is acceptable in the group to do the discussion exercises when the teacher has given one.

All these factors in these four layers lead to the willingness to communicate, which Clément et al. (2003: 191) call "the most immediate determinant of L2 use". This is the layer II in the model, and labelled as 'Behavioral Intention'. MacIntyre et al. (1998: 547) describe this as "the readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person, using a L2." According to the model, it is the sum of the diversity of factors that one is ready to use the L2 if given an opportunity, for instance, a student shows willingness to communicate by raising a hand as a sign that he or she would like to answer the question, and it is up to the teacher whether the student gets to answer and gets to use the L2, which is the last layer of the model: 'Communication Behaviour.'

In the present study, the greatest interest is on the layer III, 'Situating Antecedents', and its variables 'Desire to communicate with a specific person' and 'state communicative self-confidence'. These two variables are the nearest to influence willingness to communicate, and could be thought to have a major role also in classroom communication situations. The different classroom contexts, for instance, answering a

question in class or having a discussion in pairs, might have an influence on one's state communicative self-confidence, and also, one might be more interested in speaking with some particular person in class than others.

## 2.4 Speaking skills in curricula

In Finland, a foreign language is an obligatory school subject beginning at the latest in the third grade of comprehensive school, which means approximately at the age of 9. The first foreign language that a child begins learning is most often English (*Tilastotietoa kielivalinnoista* 2012), but it can also be some other language, depending on the range of languages the school offers and the child's and his or her parents' wish. If the first foreign language is some other than English, learning English can be started in the fifth grade. These languages that are started in grades 1-6 are referred to as the languages with syllabus A, or the A-languages. The languages that are started later during the basic education, that is in grades 7-9, are languages with syllabus B1 or B2. In 2013, 99.6 % of all the students who that year finished the upper secondary school education in Finnish, had studied English as an A-language (*Lukiokoulutuksen päättäneiden kielivalinnat 2013* 2013). Thus, in the present study, when discussing English as a school subject, it refers to English with syllabus A, because such a clear majority of the children in Finland learn English as an A-language.

The foreign language teaching in the Finnish school system is often criticized for being overly focused on the written and grammatical aspects of the language, and this focus is even more visible in the foreign language teaching in the upper secondary school. At the end of the upper secondary school, the students take the matriculation examination, and this test measures only reading, writing and listening skills. Although the official aim of the upper secondary school teaching is to offer the students good general knowledge and skills for life and for growing up to be a decent member of society (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 12), and so to prepare them for the future, the skills required in the matriculation examination often dictate what is emphasized on the lessons, and that is the case also in the foreign language teaching. However, as the speaking and communication skills are an important part of language proficiency in this

global world, they cannot be completely neglected in the teaching. Thus, also the Finnish national core curriculum emphasizes foreign languages as a mean for communication (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 102), and sets objectives that the students ought to achieve also in regard to speaking skills.

#### **2.4.1 Foreign language speaking skills in the Finnish national core curriculum for upper secondary schools**

The Finnish national core curriculum for upper secondary schools (2003) divides language proficiency into four skills: listening comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension and writing. According to the curriculum, the objective for the language learning is that an upper secondary school student would achieve the certain levels in each of these skills, depending on the syllabi in which the language is learnt. Concerning English with syllabus A, a student is expected to achieve the level B2.1 in both speaking skills and listening comprehension, as well as in the two other skills (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 102). This level is explained further in the Language Proficiency Scale, which is a Finnish application of the proficiency scales in the Common European Framework of Reference (2001). This level B2.1 is described overall as “the first stage of independent proficiency” (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 246). In regard to oral communication, a student on this level should be able to “play an active role in the majority of practical and social situations and in fairly formal discussions”. What is also emphasized is the ability to communicate with a native speaker, which is mentioned in both listening and speaking sections. What this means in practice is that the students at this stage already ought to be able to participate in most conversations when they encounter an opportunity to speak in English: both their theoretical language skills as well as their communicative competence could be expected to make the communication possible, and the actual communication behavior, i.e. the using of the language, depends on whether one is willing to speak or not.

According to the national core curriculum, the foreign language teaching in upper secondary school will “develop students’ intercultural communication skills: it will

provide them with skills and knowledge related to language and its use” (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 102). It is also emphasized that by the foreign language teaching the students’ will have competence for independent language learning and the understanding that the achievement of communication skills requires a great amount of practice in communication. However, in the national core curriculum only skills and competences are listed as aims of the teaching. There is no mention that the foreign language teaching would aim at strengthening students’ self-confidence in using the language, although, as MacIntyre et al. (1998: 545) point out, it is not uncommon that in language classrooms there are students who have very high linguistic competence in L2, but who still are not willing to use it. It could be thought, after all, that the most important goal of foreign language teaching is to have students who are not only competent in the language, but who also are willing and confident to use it.

Although the core curriculum says that on every upper secondary school foreign language course students should be given opportunities to practice speaking, as well as the three other skills (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 103), teachers might be tempted to give a major part of the time to writing, reading, listening and grammar, which are the skills tested in the matriculation examination. Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2014: 87) found that 48.1% of the 80 teachers who participated in their study strongly agreed, and 44.3% agreed to some extent that the matriculation examination “serves as a hidden curriculum”, that is, it dominates the teaching. In 1991, in a study which was responded by 431 upper secondary school third-year-students, 72% agreed that the upper secondary school language teaching offers good textual language skills, but only 42% agreed that it offers the students good oral language skills (Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee 1991). Some more recent studies have given both similar results, i.e. students feel they do not have enough practice on the oral skills (Hauta-Aho 2013), as well as results of students feeling that the oral skills are emphasized enough (Kaski-Akhawan 2013). These studies will be discussed in more detail in section 2.5.1. However, it is not only teachers who might prefer the practicing of the skills needed in the matriculation examination, but also students might urge the teachers to focus on those skills that help them be successful in the upcoming examination at the end of the upper secondary school.

In 2009, the Finnish National Board of Education gave an announcement of a change in the national core curriculum for upper secondary schools related to oral language skills. With this announcement (*Nuorille tarkoitettun lukiokoulutuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteiden 2003 muuttaminen* 2009), one optional foreign language course was changed into an oral skills course in order to offer more opportunities for all students to practice also the speaking skills. The problem of not having the oral skills test included in the matriculation examination was also a part of the discussion, but in that discussion, the major problem ended up being how to arrange the test, as the testing concerns a great amount of students in one day, and the testing should be reliable and consistent with all (*Lukiokoulutuksen suullisen kielitaidon arviointiryhmän muistio* 2006: 26). In the future, however, the oral skills test will be included in the matriculation examination, and the plan is to have it as a part of the examination at the latest in 2019 (Digabi.fi 2015). This could be thought to improve also the status of speaking skills practicing in upper secondary schools. Moreover, with more speaking, the students' confidence and willingness to use the foreign language both in classroom and outside classroom could be thought to be improved. On the other hand, if the teaching does not succeed in raising the shy speakers' confidence in speaking in the foreign language, the oral test as a part of the matriculation examination can affect a massive stress for some students. Also, if the teachers start to teach speaking skills setting the goal mainly at the matriculation examination, it could be possible that the focus of the practicing of speaking turns to correctness instead of productivity and using the language as much as possible, and thus some students might lose some of their interest and willingness in speaking in class.

#### **2.4.2 Speaking skills in the Common European Framework of Reference**

As mentioned above, the Language Proficiency Scale in the Finnish national core curriculum for upper secondary schools (2003) is an application of the language proficiency scales in the Common European Framework of Reference for language learning, teaching and assessment (2001). The Finnish application contains some additions or variations, but the Common European Framework of Reference also describes language proficiency and the levels in much more detail than the Finnish

national core curriculum. The CEFR was put together by the Council of Europe to provide guidelines for developing language teaching and for assessing learner's language proficiency (CEFR 2001: 1).

Whereas the foreign languages-section in the Finnish national core curriculum does not include any mention of other variables in language learning and using than the skills related to communicative competence, the CEFR points out that also other variables ought to be taken into account. Although the CEFR concentrates on listing the skills and competences needed in language learning and the goals and levels of proficiency, there is also a mention that there can be also other factors than just proficiency and language skills when accomplishing a communicative task, such as differences in personality or some affective variables.

In order to accomplish a communicative task, whether in a real-life or a learning/examination setting, the language user or learner draws also on communicative language competences (linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic knowledge and skills). In addition, individual personality and attitudinal characteristics affect the user or learner's task performance. (CEFR 2001: 158)

As the CEFR, similarly to the Finnish national core curriculum, deals almost completely with purely language proficiency and language-related matters, it is good that also some other variables than just the different competences as part of communicative competence are mentioned as possible influence on how one succeeds in performing in the foreign language. Of course, the CEFR is, as already mentioned, put together with the purpose of providing with guidelines for teaching and assessing, so the emphasis obviously needs to be on the skills and competences. However, communicative competence, although being a central part in using a foreign language, still is not enough on its own if there are no confidence and willingness to use the language. Thus, it is good that the CEFR takes also other variables into account. As affective factors in accomplishing a communicative task, the CEFR mentions self-esteem, involvement and motivation, state, and attitude (CEFR 2001: 161). Although in this case these variables are considered to be affecting how difficult some communicative task may be for a learner, they are quite the same variables which can be found in the model of MacIntyre et al. (1998) as affecting the willingness to communicate.

Both the CEFR and the Finnish national core curriculum emphasize that when the speaker has achieved the proficiency level B2, the speaker ought to be able to communicate with a native speaker of the foreign language, concerning both understanding the native speaker and producing speech “without unintentionally amusing or irritating the native listener” (CEFR 2001: 66; National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 246). The national core curriculum has named the proficiency level B2 as “Managing regular interaction with native speakers”, whereas, for instance, the previous level, B1, carries the name “Dealing with everyday life” (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 246). The main goal on this level is, then, that a speaker can survive in “the real world” with the foreign language, where the topics are often complex and abstract, and the interlocutors may be native speakers of the language, who do not usually speak slowly and clearly. Both the CEFR and the national core curriculum mention, however, that the speaker on this level might have difficulties in understanding the conversation between several native speakers, who do not make any modifications to their normal way or pace of speaking (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 246, CEFR 2001: 66). According to these proficiency scales, a second- or third-year-upper secondary school student could be expected to have the competence to use English not only in the language classroom, but also outside the classroom and outside the school environment.

## **2.5 Previous studies on willingness to communicate in L2 and practicing speaking skills in the Finnish EFL context**

Although willingness to communicate in L2 has been somewhat studied in Europe, North-America and Asia, there seems to be no studies carried out in the Finnish EFL context. Practicing the speaking skills, however, has been studied quite a lot in Finland. Thus, this chapter goes through some studies that have been conducted about teaching and practicing oral skills in Finland and students’ views on that, and also some studies of WTC in English as a second language that has been carried out in other countries.



### **2.5.1 Studies on practicing English oral skills in Finland**

Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006) studied teachers' opinions on how oral skills are practiced, tested and evaluated in upper secondary schools in Finland. Altogether 80 teachers from two counties in Finland participated in the study by answering a questionnaire. The results show that the majority of teachers found oral skills an important part of language skills (98.8% of the respondents), and also think it is important to teach oral skills in upper secondary school (95.1% of the respondents). The most common method for practicing oral skills was pair discussions, and in addition, also dialogues and group discussions were among the most common methods during the whole upper secondary school. Moreover, pronunciation exercises were emphasized especially during the first year. As reasons hindering the practicing of oral skills the teachers mentioned most frequently the lack of time, group sizes and student related reasons. According to Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006: 84), several teachers mentioned that their students "do not believe in their skills to speak English", which means, according to the model by MacIntyre (1998) that their L2 self-confidence is low. When it came to testing and assessing oral skills, the teachers found them difficult, and especially the lack of time and the challenges in testing and assessing were considered to cause difficulties. The most common methods in case oral skills were tested were oral presentations, interviews and reading aloud. What is particularly interesting in the teachers' reasons that hinder practicing speaking, is the mention of the lack of time. The idea that there is not enough time to practice oral skills could be seen to support the common assumption that many teachers consider the most important issue in language teaching in upper secondary schools to be the skills that are tested in the matriculation examination, and speaking is practiced if there is time left. As mentioned already in the previous chapter, a majority of the teachers in this study admitted that the matriculation examination serves as 'a hidden curriculum' (Huuskonen and Kähkönen 2006: 87).

The teachers' opinions were asked also in Korhonen's study (2014), where she looked into what the teaching is like in upper secondary schools today and what are students' and teachers' views on the teaching and the teaching methods that are used. 96 students and 84 teachers participated in the study by filling in a questionnaire. In many cases, the students and the teachers did not share the perceptions on teaching and lessons. What

came to the language used in the classroom, a majority of the students (62.1%) agreed with that students used more Finnish than English on lessons, yet 70.3% of the teachers disagreed with the same statement. Interestingly, the students and teachers had also somewhat different views on whether the focus was on written or oral skills on the lessons: 77.4% of the teachers disagreed with “We focused more on grammar and vocabulary than on oral skills and communication during lessons”, whereas almost half of the students (47.3%) agreed with the same statement, and 11.6% had no opinion. The results also show that a majority of both students and teachers disagreed with that there would have been an oral exam during the last English course they had had. Especially remarkable is the almost 80% of teachers, who disagreed with the statement, as the teachers were from all over the country, and thus can be considered to represent the situation in general. However, although the teachers had not had an oral exam during their last English course, still 54.8% of them agreed with “It is good that there is at least one oral exam during the course.” This situation might be considered to reflect the teachers’ opinions in Huuskonen and Kähkönen’s study (2006: 90), where 46.3% strongly agreed and 30 % agreed to some extent with “Testing oral skills makes the teacher’s work more difficult.”

Mäkelä (2005) studied oral exercises in English in the Finnish upper secondary school. The aim was to look at what the current situation concerning oral exercises in upper secondary schools was like. The data was collected via questionnaires, and 375 students and 235 teachers from different parts of Finland participated in the study. According to the results, students’ attitudes to oral skills and oral exercises are extremely positive, as for the majority of the students the most important area in their language learning was to learn to speak. Also, when asked what kind of tasks they were willing to have more in language class, exercises practicing oral fluency were on the top of the list. Teachers’ opinion on what task types are the most important in upper secondary school, ranked exercises practicing oral skills only on the 3<sup>rd</sup> place, behind essay writing and written grammar exercises. This supports the results in Huuskonen and Kähkönen (2006), which suggested that teachers focus more on other skills than the speaking skills. However, even though the practicing of the oral skills might not be considered the most important issue, in Mäkelä’s study 62% of the teachers still reported to practice oral skills on every lesson.

In a little older study by Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee (1991) it was suggested that what Finnish students especially want of practicing speaking is to get confidence to use English. 431 upper secondary school third-year-students participated in this study by filling in a questionnaire. Only 42% of the students agreed that upper secondary school language teaching provides good oral skills. Moreover, 36% agreed and 58% strongly agreed with a statement that there should be more practicing of fluent speaking. According to the results of the study, the students wish that the foreign language teaching would provide a better basis for independent improving of oral skills, and they believe that the key to this would be having a great amount of speaking tasks (Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee 1991: 54). Students feel that the foreign language teaching should provide so many speaking exercises that the confidence in one's own language and speaking skills is strong enough to use the skills in the "real world", that is the communication situations outside the classroom, and to take the risk of speaking a language one does not know or speak perfectly. The study is quite old and thus cannot be thought to reflect completely the situation today, yet it is unlikely that the situation would have changed completely, and some newer studies suggest that that is the case.

Similar findings came up in a quite recent study by Hauta-Aho (2013), who compared the opinions of national upper secondary school students and IB (International Baccalaureate) upper secondary school students on oral skills. The data for this study was collected via a questionnaire, and altogether 184 students participated in the study. 101 of the participants were national upper secondary school students, which in the present paper are addressed when using the term *upper secondary school student*. In this study by Hauta-Aho, 53% of the national upper secondary school student participants agreed with a statement "Oral skills' exercises done in classes do not give the student good enough skills to use the language outside school." Also, only 49.6% of the national upper secondary school students agreed with "There is enough teaching of oral skills in upper secondary school", and as much as 81% agreed that there should be more teaching of oral skills in upper secondary school. Similar to Mäkelä's study (2005), also Hauta-Aho found that students consider oral skills very important. What is positive is that the students appreciate oral skills and consider it important to learn oral skills. However, the results of this study suggest that as half of the respondents felt that the exercises done in class do not give good enough oral skills, which is quite similar to Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee's study 22 years earlier, the foreign language teaching does not

achieve the objectives that are set in the national core curriculum. The objective level of proficiency, B2, is, after all, described as “the first stage of independent proficiency” and also “managing regular interaction with native speakers” (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 246). If the students do not feel to achieve good enough oral language skills for using the language outside school, the objective of independent proficiency might not be achieved, as speaking is an important part of using a language.

Yli-Renko and Salo-Lee’s (1991) view on the lack of confidence as an explanation to the lack of willingness to speak is also partially supported in a newer study by Ahola-Houtsonen (2013), where the female respondents’ mean of answers to a statement “I have courage to speak in English in classes” was 2.87, as the answering scale was from 1 to 5. 44 students and two teachers participated in Ahola-Houtsonen’s study. The data was collected from the students via a questionnaire and also by interviewing four of them, and the two teachers were only interviewed. The aim of the study was to examine students’ and teachers’ views on learning and teaching oral skills, and what affects it. The results show that the students found practicing oral skills important, and the majority also agreed with “It is nice to speak in English.” However, according to the results, both boys and girls had more courage to speak outside school than in classroom.

A more positive situation is, however, suggested in a study by Kaski-Akhawan (2013), who studied both teachers’ and students’ views on teaching and learning oral skills in Finnish upper secondary school. 84 students and four teachers participated in the study by filling in questionnaires. 61.9% of the students considered the emphasis given to oral skills in upper secondary school language teaching sufficient. However, the results do not differ from the findings in the studies discussed above too radically, as also in this study, 36.9% considered the emphasis given to oral skills too little. In this study, the students were also asked what kind of oral exercises are the most pleasant in their opinion. Pair discussions were mentioned most frequently (50/84), followed by group discussions (33/94). Those two, as mentioned above, were also in Huuskonen and Kähkönen’s study (2006) listed by the teachers as the most common methods for practicing oral skills. Kaski-Akhawan also found that presentations were mentioned most frequently by the students as the least pleasant oral exercises.

### **2.5.2 Studies on willingness to communicate in other countries' contexts**

Although willingness to communicate has not been studied in the Finnish context, it has been a topic of interest for many researchers elsewhere. Kang (2005) studied four Korean university students who were staying in the United States for 2 to 6 months to study English as a second language, and the emergence of their situational willingness to communicate. The data was collected with semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, video- and audio-recordings, and watching and discussing the video-recordings with the participants. According to the results, the participants' situational WTC appeared under psychological conditions of security, excitement and responsibility (Kang 2005: 282). Security was related to the number, familiarity and language proficiency of interlocutors, as well as the familiarity with the topic, and conversational context. With an increased number of participants in the conversation, the willingness to communicate tended to decrease. Also the L2 proficiency of the interlocutor(s) affected the feeling of security, and thus, the WTC: all participants felt less secure and more reluctant to speak when the interlocutor was more fluent in speaking English than the participant himself. In the same way as the feeling of security made situational WTC emerge, so did excitement, for instance, when the topic of the conversation was interesting or they had experience about it, or the interlocutor showed interest and attention towards the participant. The third condition in addition to security and excitement was responsibility. Responsibility appeared, for instance, when the topic was important or the participant knew more about it than his interlocutors. Also, as the number of interlocutors decreased, the participants' feeling of responsibility to participate in the conversation increased.

Cao and Philip (2006) investigated seven EFL intermediate learners' WTC behavior in different classroom contexts in New Zealand. The participants of the study were from Asia and Europe, and they were participating in an intensive General English program in New Zealand. They conducted the study by a questionnaire, classroom observations and audio-recordings, and interviews. In observations, they found that, in general, the learners' WTC ratio was highest in pair work and lowest in whole class contexts. The most common factors that the learners identified in the interviews as factors to affect

their WTC, were group size, self-confidence, familiarity with interlocutor, and interlocutor participation (Cao and Philip 2006: 486). The learners preferred small groups in communication situations, and some also appreciated interlocutors who they are familiar with, and thus, feel comfortable with, and who participate actively in the conversation. Also, interest to and knowledge of the topic of the conversation was mentioned affecting WTC. In the discussion of their study, Cao and Philip (2006: 488) suggest that a reason for the low WTC in whole class context might be that a larger group of learners “lacks the sense of cohesiveness that would presumably lend support to learners by making them feel secure enough to speak.” The sense of security, which also came up in Kang’s (2005) study above, is undoubtedly a central part of the state communicative self-confidence, which in the model by MacIntyre et al. (1998) is one of the two nearest variables to the WTC, and that might make a person reluctant to speak even if one’s L2 self-confidence otherwise would be good.

Also Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide and Shimizu (2004: 131) found that students are more willing to speak when participating in activity involving a smaller group, for instance, a pair work, than when asking or answering a question in class. Also, those who had higher WTC scores on the basis of a questionnaire, tended to speak more in the classroom and more frequently talk to teachers outside the classroom (Yashima et al. 2004: 135). The study was conducted in Japanese EFL context, and two cohorts of 166 students participated in the study by filling in a set of questionnaires. What they also found was that it is the students’ self-perceived communicative competence which is related to willingness to communicate in L2. Similar findings were made also in a study conducted in Chinese EFL context by Peng and Woodrow (2010). Their data was collected from 579 participants, who were university students majoring in non-English disciplines, via a questionnaire. They found that L2 confidence was the most significant predictor of WTC. These kinds of findings support the idea that in the L2 classrooms there are learners who are very competent in L2, but who still are reluctant to speak due to their own perception on their competence.

All in all, considering the results of the studies discussed above, the setting for studying Finnish upper secondary school students’ willingness to speak English is interesting. On one hand, the previous studies show that in general, students seem to have extremely positive attitude towards practicing oral skills, and they also find it important. As the

attitude towards the L2 and its speakers are, according to MacIntyre et al. (1998) a part of the basis for the willingness to communicate, it could be expected to have a positive influence also on the willingness to speak. On the other hand, however, several studies suggest that students do not feel that they have enough teaching and practicing of oral skills, which might have a negative influence on their L2 self-confidence and thus to their willingness to communicate in English. In the studies on willingness to communicate conducted in other countries, L2 self-confidence appeared frequently as a factor that influence a speaker's willingness to communicate in L2. Also the number of interlocutors and familiarity with them came up in several studies as influencing WTC. Other situational factors that came up were the language proficiency of the interlocutor(s), the topic of the conversation and interlocutors' participation in the conversation.

### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

In the following sections the design of the present study will be described and discussed: the research questions will be set, the methods of the data collection will be explained and reasoned, and finally, the methods for the analysis of the data will be discussed.

#### **3.1 Aims and research questions**

The aim of the present study is to find out what kinds of situational factors upper secondary school students perceive to influence their willingness to communicate orally in English. The focus is on communication in the classroom context and the situational factors related to the classroom environment.

Research questions that the present study aims to address are the following:

1. How willing are the students to communicate orally in English?
2. 2.1 Is there a difference between WTC of those who have done the optional oral skills course and those who have not done it?

- 2.2 What are the students' perceptions on the effect of the oral skills course on their willingness to communicate?
3. What is the effect of the classroom context on WTC?
  - 3.1. How do the students perceive different classroom contexts' influence on their willingness to communicate?
  - 3.2. In the students' opinion, does the classroom context have an effect on their willingness to communication compared to communication contexts outside the classroom?

When beginning to explore factors that might influence students' willingness to communicate, it seemed necessary to first take a look at how willing the students are, in general, to communicate orally in English. Thus, the first research question was set to find out about the students' self-perceived level of WTC. This includes the communication in different situations in classroom, and also in situations outside classroom.

The second research question addresses the optional oral skills course that the upper secondary schools offer. Although the students should have an opportunity to practice all the aspects of language, i.e. reading, writing, listening and speaking, on every upper secondary school language course (National core curriculum for upper secondary schools 2003: 103), the written skills are often emphasized in foreign language teaching (Huuskonen and Kähkönen 2006), and students might not have enough opportunities to practice speaking (Hauta-Aho 2013), and thus, to gain confidence to use the foreign language. In 2009, the National Board of Education made an attempt to increase the possibilities to practice the oral skills by taking an optional oral skills course into the core curriculum. Research question 2.1 was set to find out whether or not there is a difference in WTC between those who have done the course and those who have not. Moreover, the aim with research question 2.2 is to see how those students who have done the optional oral skills course perceive the course has affected their willingness to communicate.



Research question 3 includes both the different classroom contexts and the comparison between communication in classroom and outside classroom. In the classroom context, the interest is on the influence of contexts “whole group”, “small group”, “working in pairs”, as well as the presence of the teacher and interpersonal motivation. The idea is to take into account those variables that can change or can be changed in communication situations in classroom, such as how many people are involved in the communication situation, and whether the teacher is nearby, listening to what the students speak. In other words, such variables that are fairly stable and that a teacher cannot influence are not taken into account in the present study. These variables that are excluded from the study are, for instance, personality or the attitudes towards the foreign language, as well as the speaker’s proficiency in English.

### **3.2 Data collection**

The data collection took place in January 2015. The data was collected with questionnaire sheets (see Appendix) in an upper secondary school in Southern Finland. Before the actual data collection, the questionnaire was piloted with four people, two females and two males, who were asked then to comment and evaluate the questionnaire.

Another option for the data collection would have been to interview students. Interviews would have given the participants a chance to give more thorough answers and to explain their thoughts further when necessary. However, interviewing a relatively large number of students and analyzing their answers would not have been possible in the frames of the present study. The aim with this data collection, after all, was to collect data for a quantitative data analysis, that is, to ask a large number of questions from a large number of respondents in a short time, and questionnaire data suits this purpose particularly well (Dörnyei 2010:9; Hirsjärvi et al. 1997: 195).

On the other hand, as in a questionnaire the questions or statements are in written form and the participants are filling it on their own, there is a risk that some question or statement is left unclear or there are some misunderstandings (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997: 195). An attempt was made, however, to take this into account, as the participants were

told before starting to fill in the questionnaire that they can and should ask if there are any problems with understanding what is meant with some question or statement. Moreover, the entire questionnaire was in Finnish, so that the limitations with language skills would not influence the answering or understanding.

The questionnaire consisted of 27 items divided into four sections. 26 of the 27 questions were answered by choosing an alternative on one of the two different scales from 1 to 5: one scale was for questions 1-10, and another scale for the rest of the questions, 11-26. At the end of the questionnaire there was also an open-ended question. In the very beginning of the questionnaire there were a few questions about respondents' background information, such as gender and age.

### *Questionnaire section I*

The first 10 items, section I, had a purpose of finding out how willing the respondents are to use English for oral communication in different situations both in the classroom context as well as outside classroom. In order to get a picture of the respondents' willingness to communicate, this section included questions about how the respondents would act in different communication situations in classroom and outside classroom.

This section was designed on the loose basis of the Willingness to Communicate Scale (McCroskey and Richmond 1987:135-136), which was a scale developed to measure WTC in L1. These questions, in somewhat the same fashion as the WTC Scale by McCroskey and Richmond, included different situations where the respondent was to estimate how often, or how likely, he or she would communicate in the given situations. Whereas in McCroskey and Richmond's WTC Scale respondents answered by writing down a percentage how often they think they would speak in the given situations, in the questions in this questionnaire, the respondent was to choose an alternative that best describes how often the respondent would speak, or be willing to speak, in the given situation. The alternatives were on a scale from 1 to 5, where the alternatives were: never (1), rarely (2), sometimes (3), often (4), always (5). The statements measured respondents' WTC in classroom situations including the whole group, small group discussions, working in pairs, and communication situations outside language classroom.

The reason why the respondents were to choose an option, not to write down a percentage, was to make the answering more simple and easier for the respondents. Starting to think about the frequency of their acting in percentages might have made the answering slower and also made the questionnaire feel too difficult and laborious.

### ***Questionnaire section II***

The next 14 items, items 11-24, which was section II, were to find out what kind of factors the respondents feel to influence their willingness to speak English. These items, like the ones in the previous section, were Likert scale statements, and answered by choosing an alternative that best suits the respondent's opinion on a scale from 1 to 5. In this section, the alternatives now carried the meaning: strongly disagree (1), somewhat disagree (2), somewhat disagree, somewhat agree (3), somewhat agree (4), strongly agree (5). The option "no opinion" was not included, although it could be argued to improve the reliability in case the respondent does not have an opinion (Hirsjärvi 1997: 203) or lacks the knowledge or experience that is needed to make an opinion (Kalaja et al. 2011: 150). On the other hand, however, the questions were supposed to be such that all the respondents should be able to express their opinion on them, as they all have experience in speaking English in classroom, and most likely, also outside the classroom.

The different variables that were included in the section II were the different classroom contexts (the amount of interlocutors), the presence of the teacher and the active participation of the interlocutors.

### ***Questionnaire section III***

The next section, section III with items 25 and 26, concerned the optional oral skills course in the upper secondary school, and its influence on willingness to speak English. This section was instructed to be skipped over in the case that the respondent had not been to that course. The items in this section III were answered in the same scale as items in section II. The two questions measured whether the respondents who have done

the optional oral skills course perceive that the course has improved their willingness or confidence to speak English.

### *Questionnaire section IV*

The final section, section IV, included only one item, which was an open-ended question. An open-ended question were included in the questionnaire with the purpose of having an opportunity to receive more depth with the answers than a completely quantitative data, and also offering the respondents to bring up issues that were not included in the statements or were not anticipated (Dörnyei 2010:36). The open-ended questions were made the final section at the end of the questionnaire to prevent some potential negative consequences, e.g. that those who find that kind of questions too laborious do not lose interest in the questionnaire at once, or that some spend too much time with them and do not move on to the other items (Dörnyei 2010: 48).

## **3.3 Participants**

The participants of the present study were upper secondary school second- and third-year-students, which means that they were from 17 to 19 years old. The reason why it was this age group that was chosen to be the subjects of this study is first of all that most of them had studied English for approximately eight or nine years, so they should already have rather good language skills, and thus a reason for them not wanting to communicate in English should not be due to not knowing the language enough for communication. Moreover, a 17 or 18-year-old is supposedly already mature enough to reflect his or her behavior, and consider the reasons for it. Also, considering the objectives of the Finnish national core curriculum, a second- or third-year-upper secondary school student is expected to have achieved, or be close to having achieved the language proficiency level B2, where the speaker is capable of communicating effectively and even with native speakers of the FL. An option would have been to have secondary school pupils (13-15-year-olds) or adult learners as subjects of the present study, but the upper secondary school students, in the end, seemed most suitable for the study.

The number of the respondents was 73, of whom the majority, n=56 (77%) were female and n=17 (23%) male students. The respondents' ages varied from 17 to 19, but the majority, 63 % of the subjects, were 18-year-olds.

### 3.4 The methods of analysis

The questionnaire was answered and treated anonymously. As the questionnaire consisted, for the major part, of Likert scale-type questions, the data was also analyzed quantitatively apart from the one open-ended question. All the quantitative data on the questionnaire sheets was entered into SPSS, which is a computer software program for statistical analysis and processing of data, and analyzed using different functions of the SPSS.

As the first ten questions (questions 1-10) were to measure the respondents' willingness to communicate in different contexts, these questions were formed into groups, and means were counted of each respondent's answers to the questions in the groups. The groups are as presented in the table below:

**Table 1. Questions 1-10 grouped for the data analysis**

The WTC groups for the data analysis:	questions:
<b>Total WTC</b>	1 to 10
<b>WTC in classroom</b>	1 to 7
<b>WTC in situations involving the whole group</b>	1 to 3
<b>WTC in small group</b>	4 to 5
<b>WTC in working in pairs</b>	6 to 7
<b>WTC outside class</b>	8 to 10

To explain this briefly, the total WTC was counted by counting the mean of everyone's answers to questions 1-10. WTC in classroom was counted by counting the mean of everyone's answers to questions 1-7, which all referred to different communication situations in classroom. WTC in situations involving the whole group was counted by counting the mean of everyone's answers to questions 1-3, which were the questions that asked about communicating when the whole class is listening. WTC in small group, in working in pairs and outside class were counted in the same manner: the means of everyone's answers to those questions which had to do with this certain communication situation. This mean of each of the questions or each of the groups, was the average WTC in the given situation.

The WTC means of female and male respondents were compared with each other using the independent t-test function in SPSS, which in addition to the mean values, gave also the standard deviation and the value of the significance of the difference between the means. To compare the differences of all respondents' answers between the contexts, paired-samples t-test was also used. In both functions, if the p value for the significance was smaller than 0.05 the difference was considered significant.

In questions 11-26, the answers to each of the questions were analyzed using the crosstabulation function in SPSS, to see not only how the respondents in general had answered, but to also see if there is a difference between male and female respondents. The crosstabulation gave the frequency of the answer 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 to the question, and what this frequency means as a percentage. In these questions 11-26, also the independent t-test function in SPSS was used to calculate the mean of males and females. It also calculated whether there is any significant difference between them. If the p value for the significance was smaller than 0.05 the difference was considered significant.

The last question, which was an open-ended question, was analyzed qualitatively. The answers from the questionnaire sheets were written down on computer, which made it easier to compare and group them. The data was searched for similarities between these answers as well as with the results to the questions 1-26.

#### **4 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ON THEIR WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH**

In this section, the results of the data collected with the questionnaire will be presented. The results will be presented in the same order as the research questions were set. In the following chapter, the findings will be discussed in more detail in relation to the research questions of the present study, as well as with respect to literature and previous studies.

#### 4.1 The students' willingness to communicate in English

The first research question of this study (RQ 1) was “How willing are the students to communicate orally in English?”, which seemed like a natural beginning in exploring the factors influencing the students' WTC. The first section in the questionnaire examined how likely, or how often, a respondent would speak English in the given situations. The mean was counted of each respondent's answers to all the questions in the section I (questions 1-10), and this mean became the respondent's total WTC, 1.00 being the lowest possible and 5.00 the highest possible WTC.

In addition to the mean of total WTC, what was also counted was the means of WTC in classroom in general (questions 1-7 in the questionnaire), in whole group context (questions 1-3), in working in small group (questions 4-5), in working in pairs (questions 6-7) and, finally, WTC outside the classroom (questions 8-10). In table 2, there are presented the female and male respondents' WTC in different situations. Table 2 also shows the standard deviation of the answers, and the value of the significance between the means of females and males. There was no significant difference between the means of female and male respondents, as the p-value should have been less than .05 to be considered statistically significant.

**Table 2. Female and male respondents' mean WTC in different contexts.**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total WTC	female	56	3.44	.839	.762
	male	17	3.51	.636	
Classroom WTC	female	56	3.48	.805	.411
	male	17	3.66	.565	
Whole group WTC	female	56	2.69	1.086	.264
	male	17	2.94	.690	
Small group WTC	female	56	3.99	.855	.284
	male	17	4.24	.664	
Pair work WTC	female	56	4.16	.701	.943
	male	17	4.15	.632	
Outside class WTC	female	56	3.36	1.103	.559
	male	17	3.18	1.143	

As the total WTC of female respondents was 3.44 and of male respondents 3.51, and the scale was from 1 to 5, this suggest that the students are somewhat willing to communicate in general. In average, both males and females were most willing to communicate in situations which do not involve a great amount of people. The highest mean of WTC was WTC in working in small groups for males (4.24), and working in pairs for females (4.16). Reciprocally, the second highest mean WTC for males was working in pairs (4.15) and small groups for females (3.99). The lowest mean of WTC was for both females and males the communication situations that involve the whole group. This mean for females was 2.69, and for males 2.94.

Males' mean WTC was slightly higher in all contexts, except the outside class WTC, where the mean WTC of females was higher. However, there were no statistically significant differences between the means of WTC of male and female respondents in any context.

It could also be pointed out that the female respondents' standard deviation was higher in all contexts except the last one, which was the communication outside classroom. This means that as males had a higher mean WTC in most of the contexts, they were also more consistently willing to communicate. The context of speaking outside classroom, however, seems to have broken this consistency among male respondents, as in this case the standard deviation was suddenly so high.

Looking at the willingness to communicate of all respondents, there were some statistically significant differences between the different contexts. The differences between WTC in whole group and small group, as well as between whole group and pair work, were statistically very significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), and also the difference between willingness to communicate in classroom and outside classroom was significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$ . The difference between WTC in small group and pair work was not significant. These results are presented in table 3 below.



**Table 3 The differences in WTC in different contexts**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Whole group	73	2.75	1.009	.000***
Small group		4.05	.817	
Whole group	73	2.75	1.009	.000***
Pair work		4.16	.681	
Small group	73	4.05	.817	.084
Pair work		4.16	.681	
Classroom	73	3.52	.756	.032*
Outside classroom		3.32	1.107	

\*statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$

\*\*\*statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.001$

## 4.2 The optional oral skills course and willingness to communicate

The next research questions of the present study, RQ 2.1 and 2.2, were “What kind of difference is there between the WTC of those who have done the optional oral skills course in upper secondary school, and those who have not?” (RQ 2.1), and “What are the students’ perceptions on the effect of the oral skills course on their WTC?” (RQ 2.2). The question appeared to be perhaps not as relevant as originally thought, as only 17 (23.3%) of the 73 respondents had finished the course, and five respondents (6.8%) were doing the course in the ongoing period, which was just about to end in a week. All except one of those five who were doing the course at that period still answered the questions related to the oral skills course.

Because those who were doing the course in the ongoing period were so close to finishing the course, as they had only two or three lessons left, it was decided to treat them as having finished the course. This means that when comparing the WTC of those who had done the optional oral skills course and those who had not, 22 respondents (~30%) were counted as having done the course, and 51 (~70%) having not done the course.

The mean WTC in the different contexts of those who had done the course compared to those who had not done it is presented in the Table 4. Those who had done the course had a higher mean WTC in all the contexts. In addition, in all of the contexts except the outside class context, the difference in the mean WTC was also statistically significant.

**Table 4. The mean WTC of those who had done the oral skills course vs. those who had not**

	Oral skills course	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total WTC	yes	22	3.75	.601	.039*
	no	51	3.34	.837	
Classroom WTC	yes	22	3.86	.553	.010*
	no	51	3.38	.788	
Whole group WTC	yes	22	3.15	.930	.024*
	no	51	2.58	1.000	
Small group WTC	yes	22	4.41	.503	.002**
	no	51	3.89	.879	
Pair work WTC	yes	22	4.39	.376	.016*
	no	51	4.06	.759	
Outside class WTC	yes	22	3.48	.952	.393
	no	51	3.24	1.168	

\* statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$

\*\* statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.01$

The difference between those who had done the course and those who had not, was the most significant in small group context ( $p < 0.01$ ). The differences in total WTC, classroom WTC, whole group WTC and pair work WTC were significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$ .

In the questionnaire, questions 25 and 26 were related to the optional oral skills course, and were instructed to be skipped over if the respondent had not done the course. As mentioned already above, all except one of those who had the course still in progress, still answered the questions concerning the course. That gave altogether 21 responses to questions 25 and 26. Table 5 below presents the deviation of the answers to these questions concerning the oral skills course, along with the mean of all answers to the questions.

47.6% of the respondents somewhat or totally agreed with “I feel that the optional oral skills course has given me confidence to speak English” and 19% somewhat or totally disagreed. However, in the next question, “After the oral skills course I am more willing to speak English”, it was now only 33.4% who agreed somewhat or totally, and the amount of those who disagreed somewhat or totally was now 28.5%. There were two respondents in both questions who disagreed totally. The mean of question 25 was 3.29 and of question 26 3.00.

**Table 5. Deviation of the answers to questions 25 and 26.**

	N (%)					Total	Mean of all answers
	totally disagree	somewhat disagree	somewhat disagree, somewhat agree	somewhat agree	totally agree		
<b>25. I feel that the optional oral skills course has given me confidence to speak English.</b>	2 (9.5%)	2 (9.5%)	7 (33.3%)	8 (38.1%)	2 (9.5%)	21	3.29
<b>26. After the oral skills course I am more willing to speak English.</b>	2 (9.5%)	4 (19.0%)	8 (38.1%)	6 (28.6%)	1 (4.8%)	21	3.00

### **4.3 The classroom context and willingness to communicate**

The research questions 3.1 and 3.2 were related to willingness to communicate in classroom context: RQ 3.1 was “How do the students perceive different classroom contexts’ influence on their willingness to communicate?” and RQ 3.2 “In the students’ opinion, does the classroom context have an effect on their willingness to communication compared to communication contexts outside the classroom?” The first part of the research questions includes the different contexts of the communication in classroom, that is, communication with the whole group, in small group and in pairs,

but also the possible influence of the presence of the teacher and the influence of the interlocutors. The second part investigates the students' perceptions on differences in their willingness to speak in classroom and outside classroom, and what kinds of issues influence that.

### 4.3.1 The different classroom contexts

Questions 11, 19, 12 and 17 asked, whether the students feel willing to speak in different classroom contexts. The deviations of the answers to these questions are presented in table 6 below. The majority of the respondents somewhat or totally agreed with being willing to speak in classroom (65.7%), in small group (65.7%) and in pairs (79.4%). Speaking in front of the whole class, however, received quite the opposite opinions: 60.2% of the respondents either somewhat or totally disagreed with this statement. Speaking in pairs was considered the most positive context for speaking: the mean was 4.10, and none of the respondents had chosen the option "totally disagree".

**Table 6. Deviation of the answers to questions 11, 19, 12 and 17.**

	N (%)					Total	Mean
	totally disagree	somewhat disagree	somewhat disagree, somewhat agree	somewhat agree	totally agree		
11. I speak willingly English in classroom.	2 (2.7%)	7 (9.6%)	16 (21.9%)	25 (34.2%)	23 (31.5%)	73	3.82
19. I speak willingly English in front of the whole class.	25 (34.2%)	19 (26.0%)	14 (19.2%)	10 (13.7%)	5 (6.8%)	73	2.33
12. I take willingly part in small group discussions.	2 (2.7%)	7 (9.6%)	16 (21.9%)	29 (39.7%)	19 (26.0%)	73	3.77
17. I take willingly part in discussions in pairs.	0 (0.0%)	4 (5.5%)	11 (15.1%)	32 (43.8%)	26 (35.6%)	73	4.10

As these results suggest that the students perceived that they are the more willing to speak the less there are people participating/listening, and also in the WTC results in section 4.1 the small group and pair work had the highest mean WTC, the effect of the amount of interlocutors ought to be considered. The influence of other people listening to one's speaking in classroom was also brought up in a few of the answers to the open-ended questions. The students worried about what others think about their speaking, and also others evaluating or judging their pronunciation or language skills in general, as in the extracts of the students' answers below:

(1) Olen halukkaampi puhumaan englantia oppituntien ulkopuolella, sillä pelkään, että muut oppilaat arvostelevat ääntämistäni ja en halua kuulostaa hölmöltä tuttujen seurassa.

(1) I'm more willing to speak English outside the classroom, because I fear that other students assess my pronunciation and I don't want to sound like a fool among familiar people. (Student 31)

(2) Ulkopuolella on rennompi ja kivempi puhua, sillä ei tarvitse miettiä, mitä muut ajattelevat.

(2) Outside [the classroom] it is more relaxed and nice to speak, as you don't need to think what others are thinking. (Student 59)

However, it is important to take into consideration that the lower willingness to communicate when there are more interlocutors does not necessarily depend on the language of the communication, but also personality can have a major role as a basis to all the other variables, like MacIntyre et al. (1998) point in their model (see page 14). In the answers to the open-ended question, two participants brought up this influence of personality:

(3) Minulla on paljon kavereita ulkomailla joiden takia käytän englantia päivittäin.

Puhuminen luokan ulkopuolella on helpompaa koska olen ujo ja ahdistaa kun kaikki kuuntelee → sama vaikka olisikin suomen kielellä.

(3) I have a lot of friends abroad with whom I use English every day. Speaking outside the classroom is easier, because I'm shy and I feel anxious when everyone is listening → the same if it were in Finnish. (Student 11)

(4) Asia ei juurikaan vaikuta, koska jo suomea puhuessani olen ujo ja hiljainen, puhumattakaan englannista, jota osaa hyvin kirjallisesti mutta en puhetilanteessa, koska en osaa lausua englantia.

(4) It doesn't make much difference [whether the situation is in class or outside class], because even when speaking Finnish I'm shy and quiet, not even talking about English, which I'm good at in written form, but not in speaking situations, because I can't pronounce English. (Student 49)

### *Differences between male and female respondents*

There were no statistically significant differences between female and male respondents' answers to questions 11, 12, 17 and 19 (table 7). However, it could be pointed out that whereas females' mean was slightly higher to questions 11 (classroom), 12 (small group) and 17 (pair work), it was male respondents' mean that was higher in 19 "I speak willingly English in front of the whole class". The male respondents' whole group WTC mean was also higher in section 4.1, so this suggests that males feel a bit more willing to speak when the whole group is listening, yet this also divides opinions amongst males, as their standard deviation in question 19 was the highest of these four questions.

**Table 7. The difference between male and female respondents' answers to 11, 19, 12 and 17.**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
11. I speak willingly English in classroom.	female	56	3.84	1.108	.804
	male	17	3.76	.970	
19. I speak willingly English in front of the whole class.	female	56	2.30	1.320	.761
	male	17	2.41	1.121	
12. I take willingly part in small group discussions in English.	female	56	3.79	1.057	.783
	male	17	3.71	.985	
17. I take willingly part in discussions in pairs in English.	female	56	4.16	.848	.241
	male	17	3.88	.857	

### 4.3.2 The presence of the teacher

Included in the research question of the classroom context's effect on students' WTC, one point of interest was the teacher's presence in the situation where the interaction takes place. This variable was measured with three questions in the questionnaire: question 16 "I feel nervous about speaking English in class, because the teacher listens to what I say and evaluates it", question 20 "I don't speak English willingly if the teacher is next to me listening to what I say", and question 24 "On the lessons, I speak English more actively when the teacher is not listening to me speaking." The deviation of the answers to these questions 16, 20 and 24 are presented in table 8, where there are also the means of the answers to each of the questions.

**Table 8. Deviation of the answers to questions 16, 20 and 24.**

	N (%)					Total	Mean
	totally disagree	somewhat disagree	somewhat disagree, somewhat agree	somewhat agree	totally agree		
<b>16. I feel nervous about speaking English in class, because the teacher listens to what I say and evaluates it.</b>	<i>20 (27.4%)</i>	<i>19 (26.0%)</i>	<i>14 (19.2%)</i>	<i>15 (20.5%)</i>	<i>5 (6.8%)</i>	73	2.53
<b>20. I don't speak English willingly if the teacher is next to me listening to what I say.</b>	<i>20 (27.4%)</i>	<i>28 (38.4%)</i>	<i>9 (12.3%)</i>	<i>13 (17.8%)</i>	<i>3 (4.1%)</i>	73	2.33
<b>24. On the lesson, I speak English more actively when the teacher is not listening to what I say.</b>	<i>12 (16.4%)</i>	<i>13 (17.8%)</i>	<i>20 (27.4%)</i>	<i>21 (28.8%)</i>	<i>7 (9.6%)</i>	73	2.97

The answers to question 16 “I feel nervous about speaking English in class, because the teacher listens to what I say and evaluates it” were divided quite evenly, apart from the option “totally agree”, which only 6.8% of the respondents had chosen. The majority of the respondents either totally disagreed (27.4%) or somewhat disagreed (26.0%). The answers to question 20: “I don’t speak English willingly if the teacher is next to me listening to what I say” followed the same line with the answers to questions 16. Here as well, a majority either totally disagreed (27.4%) or somewhat disagreed (38.4%) with the statement.

Whereas the answers to the questions 16 and 20 showed quite a strong consistency, a slight difference is seen in the answers to the question 24: “On the lessons, I speak English more actively when the teacher is not listening to what I say”. Only 34.2% somewhat or totally disagreed with this statement, whereas this percentage was more than 50 in questions 16 and 20. Approximately the same amount of respondents who totally or somewhat disagreed, also either totally or somewhat agreed that they are more active to speak English when the teacher is not listening (38.4%).

In the answers to the open-ended question, eight respondents (11%), mentioned the evaluation of the teacher as a reason to why they are more willing to speak outside the classroom. Most of these answers were quite similar, and the evaluation was mentioned in general as a reason to be less willing to speak in the classroom, without further explanations. Below there are two students’ thoughts about evaluation’s influence on their willingness to speak:

(5) Ulkopuolella englannin kielen taitoa ei arvostella, ja on rohkeampi puhumaan, kun tietää, ettei ulkopuolinen numeroa anna.

(5) Outside [the classroom] the English skills are not being evaluated, and you are more courageous to speak when you know that an outsider doesn’t give a grade. (Student 23)

(6) On helpompi puhua englantia kun kukaan ei arvioi sitä.

(6) It’s easier to speak English when no one evaluates it. (Student 18)

On the other hand, two respondents also mentioned the evaluation and the possible feedback and help that follow it, as a positive thing, as in the extracts below:



(7) Oppitunnilla puhuessani opettaja pystyy korjaamaan ja neuvomaan, miten äännän, joten se on hyvä asia. Toisaalta tieto siitä, että minua arvioidaan jännittää. Joten tunteukseni ovat hieman ristiriitaisia.

(7) When speaking in classroom, the teacher can correct and help my pronunciation, so it's a good thing. On the other hand, knowing that I'm being evaluated makes me nervous. So what I feel is a bit contradictory. (Student 67)

In the answers to the open-ended question, apart from the eight respondents' mention of the evaluation of the teacher as a reason to be less willing to speak in the classroom, one mentioned in her answer that the presence of the teacher affects, but did not give any further explanations to, for instance, why or how it affects.

All in all, the respondents in general did not seem to perceive that the presence of the teacher would greatly influence their speaking, as the mean in all the questions related to the teacher's presence was below 3. This means that, in general, they more disagreed than agreed that the teacher's presence would have a negative influence on their speaking.

To summarize the influence of the presence of the teacher on students' WTC and also to look if there are some differences between male and female respondents, a mean was counted of the answers to questions 16, 20 and 24. The bigger the mean, the less willing the students would be to speak when the teacher is present. The means of female and male respondents and the differences between them are presented below, in the table 9. These results show that, in general, female students' willingness to communicate might be more affected by the teacher's presence, although there is no statistically significant difference between females and males. The mean of female respondents was 2.73 and males 2.22. Related to this difference between females and males, it could be mentioned that in all of these questions related to the influence of the presence of the teacher, none of the male respondents totally agreed with any of the statements, whereas 5.4-12.5% of the females did in each question.

**Table 9. Female and male respondents' means of questions 16, 20 and 24.**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
More unwilling to speak English if the teacher is listening.	female	56	2.73	1.05872	.075
	male	17	2.22	.92752	

### 4.3.3 Interlocutors' influence on WTC in classroom

Besides the amount of participants in the communication situation, there are also other factors related to the interlocutors that might have an influence on WTC in classroom. In the present study, these factors are the participation of the interlocutors, the familiarity with the interlocutors and the L2 proficiency level of the interlocutor.

The results suggest that interlocutors' active participation boosts the WTC for many of the respondents, yet the respondents do not perceive that the passiveness of interlocutors would influence their willingness to communicate that strongly. The results presented in table 10 show that a majority of the respondents (52.1%) totally agreed with "I am more willing to speak English when my interlocutor(s) is/are actively participating in the discussion", and the amount of those who either somewhat agreed or totally agreed was over 80%. The answers to "I don't feel like taking part in group discussion if the others in my group are not participating either" divided the opinions, and only 43.8% of respondents somewhat or totally agreed, and 20.5% either totally or somewhat disagreed.

**Table 10. Deviation of the answers to questions 14 and 21.**

	N (%)					Total	Mean
	totally disagree	somewhat disagree	somewhat disagree, somewhat agree	somewhat agree	totally agree		
21. I am more willing to speak English when my interlocutor(s) is/are actively participating in the discussion	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)	11 (15.1%)	23 (31.5%)	38 (52.1%)	73	4.43
14. I don't feel like taking part in group discussions if the others in my group are not participating either.	5 (6.8%)	10 (13.7%)	26 (35.6%)	23 (31.5%)	9 (12.3%)	73	3.29

In the answers to the open-ended question, speaking with someone who is a familiar person was mentioned as a reason to be more willing to speak, both in classroom and outside the classroom. The answers considering speaking outside the classroom are discussed in the next sub-chapter. Two respondents also perceived that a familiar interlocutor increases their willingness to communicate in classroom:

(8) Minulle ei oikeastaan ole väliä, onko tilanne oppitunnilla vai sen ulkopuolella. Puhun mielelläni, jos tunnen osaavani aihealueen sanat ja mikäli keskustelukumppani on tuttu ennestään.

(8) It doesn't really matter to me whether the situation is in classroom or outside the classroom. I am willing to speak if I feel that I know the vocabulary of the topic, and if the interlocutor is already familiar. (Student 50)

(9) Tuttujen kanssa luokassa on helpompi puhua.

(9) It's easier to speak with familiar people in class. (Student 41)

Another issue that came up in the answers to the open-ended question is also the L2 proficiency level of the interlocutor compared to one's own self-perceived L2 proficiency. Some respondents felt that it is difficult to speak in classroom with someone whose English proficiency is higher than their own self-perceived proficiency, and that it is easier to speak with people who also make errors:

(10) Tunnilla on vaikea puhua parin kanssa, joka osaa ääntää paremmin.

(10) In class it is difficult to speak with a partner who can pronounce better. (Student 3)

(11) Halukkaampi puhumaan englantia oppituntien ulkopuolella, koska yleensä muutkin lukion ulkopuolella ovat ainakin ehkä yhtä huonoja kun itse olen, niin ei hävetä niin paljon.

(11) [I am] more willing to speak English outside the classroom, because often also others outside the upper secondary school are maybe at least as bad as I'm myself, so I don't feel so embarrassed. (Student 12)

(12) Koska jos ei osaa sanoa oikein kukaan ei arvostele ja todennäköisemmin sanovat kanssa väärin ja on helpompi jutella sellaisten ihmisten kanssa.

(12) Because if you can't say something correct, no one evaluates/criticizes and more likely they also say incorrectly, and it's easier to speak with that kind of people. (Student 42)

#### 4.3.4 Communication in classroom and outside classroom

As the mean WTC in classroom was 3.48 for females and 3.66 for males, these means in communication outside the classroom were 3.36 for females and 3.18 for males (see table 2 in section 4.1). This suggests that both male and female students are more willing to communicate in classroom. For females there is not such a great difference between WTC in classroom and outside classroom, whereas for males the difference is quite clear. Table 3 in section 4.1 also showed that the mean WTC of all respondents in classroom was 3.52 and outside classroom 3.32, and this difference is also statistically significant.

In addition to the difference between WTC in and outside the classroom that were counted from the questions in section I, the question 22 also asked directly whether the respondent feels to be more willing to speak English in communication situations outside class than in lessons. The means of females' and males' answers to the question are presented in table 11. Although the means of WTC in different contexts suggested that both females and males are more willing to speak in classroom than outside classroom, in question 22 the means of both females and males show that they more agree than disagree with perceiving to be more willing to speak English outside class than in lessons.

**Table 11. Female and male respondents' means to question 22.**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-tailed)
22. I am more willing to speak English in communication situations outside class than in lessons.	female	56	3.64	1.017	.623
	male	16	3.50	1.033	

In the answers to the open-ended questions, a reason that was mentioned in a way or another by 10% of the respondents (n=7) for why the respondent is more willing to speak English outside classroom than in classroom was that outside classroom the speaking is more natural and the conversation is genuine and meaningful. Many respondents felt that the conversations in classroom are sometimes artificial and forced; some people take part in the conversation only because they have to. Related to the

artificial conversation, the respondents also brought up as a problem that the topics they are expected to speak about in class are given by the teacher, and those topics are often such that one does not know much about it, have a real opinion about it, and in general, does not have anything to say about the topic. Likewise, it was mentioned several times that outside the classroom the topics of conversation are more meaningful, important and interesting. Topic's influence on one's willingness to speak was mentioned altogether by 15 respondents (21%). Below there are examples of the respondents' views on the topic's influence on their willingness to communicate.

(13) Tuntien ulkopuolella puhuminen tuntuu luontevammalta ja se on tarkoituksen omaavaa. Aito keskustelu esim. ulkomaalaisen kanssa on mukavampaa kuin tunneilla väkisin.

(13) Speaking outside the classroom feels more natural and it is more meaningful. Genuine conversation with, for instance, a foreign exchange student is nicer than [speaking] involuntarily in class. (Student 10)

(14) Oppitunneilla keskustelut ovat vaativampia ja ne rajoittuvat usein johonkin, mistä ei ole joko kiinnostunut tai omaa mielipidettä tai tiedä aiheen sanastoa. Ulkopuolella keskustelut eivät ole niin teennäisiä tai rajattuja.

(14) In classroom the conversations are more demanding and they are often limited to something that you are not interested or don't have an opinion or know the vocabulary of the topic. Outside [the classroom] the conversations are not so artificial or limited. (Student 14)

(15) Oppituntien ulkopuolella keskustelu on vapaampaa eikä kukaan osallistu keskusteluun tavallaan vain pakosta, kuten oppitunneilla.

(15) Outside the classroom the conversation is freer and no one is taking part in the conversation because you have to, as in the classroom. (Student 15)

In classroom communication, many seemed to feel the pressure that they need to be good, and that affects their willingness to speak in classroom. Over 20% (n=16) of the respondents mentioned in their answer this kind of pressure being a reason why they are more willing to speak outside the classroom. This pressure was expressed and described in different ways, which could be divided into four groups that are presented below, each followed by an example of the answer where this pressure was expressed:

1. The speaking in class feels like performing.

Two respondents mentioned in their answers that speaking English in the classroom is more like performing than speaking. They did not give any further explanations on their view of this “performing”, but on the basis of other respondents’ answers, they probably mean that when speaking in class, they feel that the focus is on building correct sentences, using some specific vocabulary and grammar, and pronouncing correctly, instead of conveying messages.

(16) Ulkopuolisissa tilanteissa englanti ei tunnu niin paljon suorittamiselta kuin oppitunnilla.

(16) In situations outside [the classroom], English doesn’t feel so much like performing as in classroom. (Student 47)

## 2. A need to think too much and to try to be good or perfect.

Students felt that there is a pressure of trying to pronounce correctly, build correct sentences and to be good in general. Four respondents contrasted speaking in class and speaking outside class, and reported that outside class, one does not need to think so much what one says, or to be good. They thought that outside the classroom, it is enough that one becomes understood. In classroom, however, one needs to think more what to say and how to say that; conveying a message and becoming understood seemed not to be enough in many respondents’ opinions.

(17) Puhun mielelläni englantia oppituntien ulkopuolella, kun itse oppitunnilla. Koen että tunneilla puhumiseen liittyy aina tietty paine ja täydellisyyden tavoittelu.

(17) I speak English more willingly outside the classroom, than in the classroom. I feel that when speaking in class, there is always a certain kind of pressure and pursuit for perfection. (Student 70)

## 3. The feeling of not being as good as the conversation partner.

The pressure to be as good as the interlocutor when speaking in class came up in several of the answers. Some respondents found it difficult or embarrassing to speak with someone who can pronounce English better than themselves, or who has better language proficiency in general. Respondents also expressed concern on what their peers think of their speaking, or being judged by the others if not being good enough.

(18) Halukkaampi puhumaan englantia oppituntien ulkopuolella, koska yleensä muutkin lukion ulkopuolella ovat ainakin ehkä yhtä huonoja kun itse olen, niin ei hävetä niin paljon.

(18) [I am] more willing to speak English outside the classroom, because often also others outside the upper secondary school are maybe at least as bad as I'm myself, so I don't feel so embarrassed. (Student 12)

#### 4. The pressure of not making errors.

Several of the respondents mentioned in their answers to the open-ended question that when speaking in class, one should not or does not want to make errors. They felt that in class, other students and the teacher pay attention to their errors, whereas outside class, no one cares for the errors that one makes. Also, the respondents' opinion was that for the speakers themselves, it does not feel so terrible to make errors outside class.

(19) Puhun mielelläni englantia oppituntien ulkopuolella, koska silloin en murehdi jos lause ei menekään täydellisesti oikein. Oppitunneilla taas yrittää ja miettii liikaa, että lause on täydellinen. Tunneilla ei haluaisi tehdä virheitä.

(19) I am willing to speak English outside the classroom, because then I don't worry if I don't get a sentence perfectly correct. In class, you try and think too much to get a sentence perfect. In class you don't want to make errors. (Student 43)

In addition to the need to be perfect or the fear of making errors in class being a reason to be more willing to speak outside the classroom, it was also mentioned that outside the classroom the errors do not matter. Respondents felt that outside the classroom people do not pay attention to errors, other people outside the classroom make errors as well, and even that one does not need "to use grammar" outside the classroom. A common opinion was that correct grammar and pronunciation are important when speaking in class, whereas outside the classroom it is enough that one becomes understood. The importance of grammar and correctness in classroom and/or that those do not matter outside the classroom were mentioned as factors influencing WTC by 12% of the respondents (n=9), as in the examples below.

(20) Koska ei tarvitse käyttää hienoja sanoja josta ei ole varma tai kielioppia. Kiva näyttää muillekin että osaa puhua ja käyttää englantia arkielämässä.

(20) [I'm more willing to speak outside the class] because you don't need to use fancy words which you are not sure about, or the grammar. It's nice to show to others as well that you can speak and use English in the everyday life. (Student 7)

(21) Oppitunneilla kielen tulee olla kieliopillisesti oikea ja minulle se on hankalaa. Koulun ulkopuolella puhuttu englanti on vapaampaa ja rennompaa ja sen takia olen halukkaampi puhumaan sitä mieluiten silloin.

(21) In the class, the language should be grammatically correct and it's difficult to me. The English spoken outside school is more free and relaxed, and that's why I'm more willing to speak it then. (Student 51)

(22) Koulun ulkopuolella lauseiden oikeellisuus ei ole niin tärkeää ja englantia saa puhua vapaammin. Tärkeintä on, että keskustelukumppani ymmärtää mitä sanon.

(22) Outside school the correctness of the sentences is not that important and you can speak English more freely. The most important is that my interlocutor understands what I say. (Student 65)

As a contradiction to those who reported to be more willing to speak outside classroom because the speaking then is more free and errors do not matter, one respondent also admitted to be more willing to speak in the classroom, because the speaking is often more structured and guided.

(23) Oppitunneilla puhuminen on ehkä vähän kivempaa jos on tehtävämalli jonka mukaan keskustelee niin tulee vähemmän virheitä.

(23) Speaking in class is maybe a bit nicer if there is an exercise model which guides the discussion so I don't make so many errors. (Student 4)

Several respondents also mentioned the influence of the atmosphere (n=4/5%) and who they are speaking with (n=11/15%) as important for their willingness to speak, and in most cases, these were reasons to be more willing to speak outside the classroom. The respondents considered it important that they can decide who they are speaking with, or that the interlocutors are familiar. In one answer the familiarity with the interlocutor was connected to the atmosphere of the context, and the atmosphere was also mentioned in many other answers. In each answer where atmosphere was mentioned, it was also considered to be important for the willingness to speak that the atmosphere is relaxed. Below there are three examples of the respondents' views on the influence of who the interlocutor is, and of the atmosphere.



(24) Oppituntien ulkopuolella saa valita itse keskusteluseuransa, eikä ole niin kamalaa jos mokaa.

(24) Outside class you can choose your speaking company, and it's not so terrible if you make errors. (Student 15)

(25) Tykkään puhua englantia mieluummin tutussa porukassa kuin oppitunneilla kaikkien kuunnellessa. Tietenkin on helpompaa kun puhuu tuttujen kanssa kun tunnelma on rento.

(25) I prefer speaking English in familiar group of people than in class when everyone listens. Of course it's easier when you speak with familiar people, as the atmosphere is relaxed. (Student 28)

(26) Olen ihan yhtä halukas puhumaan englantia oppitunneilla kuin muualla, koska oppitunneilla on rento fiilis ja muualla tulee ymmärretyksi (yleensä) englanniksikin.

(26) I am just as willing to speak English in class as elsewhere, because in class the atmosphere is relaxed and elsewhere I become understood (usually) also in English. (Student 20)

In addition to the familiarity with the interlocutors or the importance of to be able to choose who to speak with, five respondents also reported to be more willing to speak English when the interlocutor is a foreign person. One also mentioned to be more willing to speak when speaking with a native speaker of English. Below there are extracts of respondents' answers where the interlocutor being a foreign person is considered important.

(27) Tuntien ulkopuolella puhuminen tuntuu luontevammalta ja se on tarkoituksen omaavaa. Aito keskustelu esim. ulkomaalaisen kanssa on mukavampaa kuin tunneilla väkisin (puhuminen).

(27) Speaking outside the classroom feels more natural and it is more meaningful. Genuine conversation with, for instance, a foreign exchange student is nicer than [speaking] involuntarily in class. (Student 10)

(28) Jos puhun jonkun ulkomaalaisen kanssa jonka äidinkieli ei ole englanti, puhuminen on helpompaa, koska hän ei välttämättä kiinnitä niin paljoa huomiota virheisiin.

(28) If I speak with some foreign person whose first language is not English, speaking is easier, because he does not necessarily pay so much attention to errors. (Student 3)

(29) Halukkaampi puhumaan englantia koulun ulkopuolella oikeasti englantia äidinkielenään puhuvien kanssa. Mielenkiintoisempaa puhua englantia ulkomaalaisten kanssa, oikeassa elämässä.

(29) More willing to speak English outside the school with people who actual native speakers of English. It's more interesting to speak English with foreigners, in the real life.  
(Student 19)

### *Summarizing the WTC in classroom vs. outside classroom*

The respondents' mean answer to whether they are more willing to speak outside classroom than in classroom was closer to agreement than disagreement, yet their WTC in classroom measured by the questions in section I was higher than their WTC outside classroom. In the answers to the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire, the respondents gave arguments to why they feel more willing to speak in classroom or outside classroom. The arguments to both were varied, yet there were certain consistency in some of the answers.

Despite the variation among the answers, some issues were mentioned by many respondents. Common opinions among the respondents were that their willingness to communicate is higher when the conversation and topic are real, meaningful and interesting, the speaking is free, one does not need to focus on grammar and the correctness of language, one can choose with whom to speak, and the atmosphere or situation is relaxed. On the other hand, many perceived their lower WTC in classroom to be due to that the speaking in classroom is artificial and structured, and the topics often such that one does not have anything to say about them. A common opinion influencing the willingness to speak in classroom was also that in classroom the correct use of grammar is important, whereas outside the classroom it is important that one becomes understood. In addition, many felt pressure of speaking in class, which they expressed and described in different words.

All in all, the most frequently mentioned factors that the respondents perceived to affect their willingness to communicate in or outside classroom were the pressure to be good (n=16), the influence of the topic (n=15), who the interlocutor is (n=11), evaluation and presence of the teacher (n=8) and the atmosphere (n=8). Also, the concern of peers listening and possibly evaluating one's speaking in classroom was mentioned rather frequently (n=7), as well as the interlocutors proficiency in English (n=3).

## 5 DISCUSSION

The first goal of this study was to find out how willing the students are to speak English. As could be expected, there were differences between the students' willingness: there were students who are very willing to use English whenever possible, but also some who are very reluctant to speak. It could be concluded that the students are still somewhat willing to speak English in general, as the female respondents' mean WTC was 3.44 and male respondents' 3.51. Also in the answers to the open-ended questions, many expressed positive attitudes towards speaking English, although in some cases they reported it to be highly dependent on the context and what they are speaking about. These results are similar to the results of previous studies where, for instance, Mäkelä (2005) and Ahola-Houtsonen (2013) found that upper secondary school students like practicing oral skills and consider that important.

This positive attitude to practicing the oral skills and speaking English is definitely highly important considering the foreign language teaching. Oral language skills are a crucial part of language proficiency, and thus it is good that Finnish children learn to appreciate the speaking skills and find it important to learn to communicate also orally. As the present study suggest that upper secondary school students are willing to speak English, and some previous studies have showed that they feel that they do not get enough practice on them, the situation ought to be taken into consideration in foreign language teaching in Finnish upper secondary schools. It is understandable that the foreign language courses are packed with textual skills, grammar, essay writing, listening comprehension etc., which needs to be covered during the upper secondary school, even if the skills needed in the matriculation examination particularly were not overly emphasized. Yet, the students are willing to speak English and they also want to learn speaking skills, so it is a shame if they still need to feel that they do not get enough practice on speaking.

### *Optional oral skills course*

The second goal was to look at the differences in WTC of those who have done the optional oral skills course in upper secondary school and those who have not, and also

to see if the students perceive that the oral skills course has had influence on their WTC. The mean WTC of those who had done the oral skills course was higher in all contexts, and the difference between the two groups was significant in all contexts except the outside class context. However, the students in general did not agree that after the course they would have been more willing to speak in English, yet they did not disagree with it either ( $M=3.00$ ). The opinions were slightly more positive in whether the course had given the students confidence to speak English, as the mean to that was above 3 ( $M=3.29$ ). With these results, it cannot be claimed that the difference in WTC between those who had done the oral skills course and those who had not, would be due to taking the course. The course most likely provides opportunities to speak English more than other courses in upper secondary school, and thus it might, as the results suggest, give some confidence and also further willingness to use English. However, a possible explanation for the differences between the two groups can also be that those who enjoy speaking English and have positive attitudes to it take the course, and thus they are already before the course more willing to speak English. Respectively, many of those who are very reluctant to speak English do not want to take the course, because it would only cause them more anxiety and discomfort.

To have more certain results of the actual influence of the oral skills course on students' willingness to communicate, another study ought to be conducted. Students could be asked to fill in a willingness to communicate scale before they take the oral skills course and once more after they have finished it. The results would show whether the (self-perceived) willingness to communicate has increased during the course. Another option would be to observe some students and their communication behavior in the classroom context before they take the course and after it.

### *Different classroom contexts*

An important aim of the present study was also to see what the influence of the classroom context is on WTC: how do the different classroom contexts affect students' WTC, and whether there is a difference in WTC in classroom context compared to outside classroom context. In classroom contexts, students appeared to be more willing to communicate in situations where there are fewer interlocutors. The whole group context had a clearly lower mean WTC compared to small group and pair work

contexts, and the difference in willingness to communicate in small group or pair work was statistically significant compared to willingness to communicate in situations where the whole group is involved. Also, a majority of the students agreed that they felt they were more willing to speak in pair work and small groups, whereas a majority also disagreed with being willing to speak in front of the whole class. The same kind of tendency has been found also in previous research (e.g. Cao and Philip 2006, Yashima et al. 2004), and in Kang's study (2005), the increased WTC when the number of interlocutors decreased was related to both the sense of security, as well as the sense of responsibility. It has also been studied that having a presentation in front of the class is the most communication apprehension provoking classroom context (Lahtinen 2013: 45), which might also explain why the students are not willing to speak in front of a bigger group of people. What is slightly alarming, however, is that the teachers in Huuskonen and Kähkönen's study (2006) reported that oral presentations were the most common means of evaluating the oral skills of the students in upper secondary school. If, thus, the teachers actually do collect a great amount of their material for the assessment of students' oral skills in situations where the students need to give an oral presentation, the assessment hardly is reliable, as many students will not be able to show their actual skills in such an apprehension provoking situation.

In addition to the amount of interlocutors, the presence of the teacher seems to have some influence on students' willingness to communicate. According to the students' opinions, the students in general are not nervous to speak, or more unwilling to speak when the teacher is nearby listening, but they still speak more actively when the teacher is not listening. This could be due to the feeling of being evaluated and thus the pressure to say everything correctly, which then restricts the speaking. In the answers to the open-ended questions, several respondents mentioned that they are more willing to speak English outside the classroom, because there no one evaluates what they say. Many also mentioned that when speaking in classroom, grammar and correctness of language are important, and the students might think this to be even more important when the teacher is listening. This possibly reflects the still current situation of the foreign language teaching in upper secondary schools in general, as the teaching often aims at the matriculation examination, which also for many teachers 'serve as a hidden curriculum' (Huuskonen and Kähkönen 2006: 87). The upcoming examination and the teachers' attitudes on what is important to teach and learn can thus influence how the

students feel they are expected to use the foreign language in the classroom, and eventually even to whether they are willing to speak in class or not.

The results of the present study suggest also that interlocutors' active participation in the communication boosts the willingness to communicate of the students. Cao and Philip made a similar finding in their study (2006), as some of the respondents in their study reported to appreciate interlocutors who participate actively in conversations. Also, similarly to Cao and Philip's study, some respondents of the present study mentioned the familiarity of interlocutors to increase their willingness to communicate. As foreign language learning, and certainly also using it, is emotionally highly loaded (Dörnyei 2009: 181), it is not a wonder if especially those who have less confidence in their language skills feel more secure when practicing the language with familiar people.

Another interlocutor-related issue that came up in the present study was the interlocutors' proficiency in the target language compared to one's own proficiency. The question of proficiency and what kinds of learners ought to work with each other in class is a challenging issue for language teachers. The debate often is whether the weaker students should work with each other, or should the weakest be put to work with the most proficient learners so that they would, hopefully, benefit from the other one's proficiency. In the open-ended questions, several respondents mentioned that it affects their WTC negatively when they need to speak with someone more proficient learner. This came up also in Kang's study (2005), where all the participants reported to feel less secure and reluctant to speak English when the interlocutor was more proficient. Similarly to the influence of the teacher's presence, also this could be related to the feeling of being evaluated. According to MacIntyre's study (1999), particularly anxious learners are concerned about speaking in front of their peers and what the peers think of their performance. Similarly to MacIntyre's study, also in the data of the present study some respondents expressed concern about sounding foolish among their peers, or being judged by them. As the sense of security is one of the key factors in increasing the students' willingness to communicate (e.g. Cao and Philip 2006, Kang 2005), it would be important that teachers would make their best in creating a safe and supporting environment for the students to practice their possibly limited oral language skills. An essential part of this might be to get used to speaking with learners with different

language proficiency without the feeling of inferiority or the need to be embarrassed for errors.

### ***WTC in the classroom and outside the classroom***

As for the difference in WTC in classroom and outside classroom contexts, the results were slightly contradictory. The WTC measured with the first 10 questions gave for both male and female respondents a higher mean WTC in classroom (M=3.48/3.66) than outside classroom (M=3.36/3.18). Particularly the difference was quite visible in the male respondents' WTC. Moreover, the difference between all respondents' WTC in classroom and outside classroom was statistically significant. However, the students also more agreed than disagreed to be more willing to speak English in communication situations outside classroom than in classroom, which thus contradicts the results of the first ten questions. Moreover, in the answers to the open-ended question, the majority of the respondents reported to be more willing to speak outside the classroom. In a previous study by Ahola-Houtsonen (2013) the results suggested that the upper secondary school students who participated in her study had more courage to speak English outside school than in classroom. These results, as well as the possible lower willingness to communicate in classroom in the present study, might be due to the students' impression, which also came up in the data of the present study that in all the language skills practicing in upper secondary school, grammar and correctness is highly important. This impression could affect not only the students' willingness to speak, but also their courage to use their language skills in an environment where they most likely become evaluated.

When considering the contradiction of the results about willingness to communicate in classroom and outside classroom, there are two possible explanations to this contradiction: limitations in the questionnaire, or the students answering how they would like to behave instead of how they actually do behave. Firstly, the willingness to communicate scale, which means the first ten questions in the questionnaire, was rather narrow compared to some other WTC scales. For instance, the original WTC scale by McCroskey and his associates contains 20 questions in regard to all kinds of everyday communication situations. In the questionnaire for the present study, however, each of the communication contexts were measured with only two or three questions, and in

regard for speaking outside the classroom, there were only three questions, yet they were thought to cover all kinds of situations where the respondents could have a chance to speak English outside school. Secondly, as already mentioned, the respondents might have answered as they think they behave or would like to behave. This means that even though they mark lower scores in questions related to speaking outside the classroom, they still think that they must be more willing to speak outside the classroom when the conversation is not restricted and they can choose their own interlocutors, as many of the respondents expressed it. So they feel they are more willing to speak outside the classroom than in classroom, but do not necessarily take advantage of the communication situations that they face.

The answers to the open-ended question offered arguments for and against why the respondents feel they are more willing to speak English in classroom than outside classroom. In these answers, many of the respondents mentioned the topics of conversation as a reason to why they are more willing to communicate outside classroom. The influence of the topic was also discussed in Kang's study (2005), where it was related to psychological conditions of security, excitement and responsibility. Two of these three conditions could be thought to hold true with the opinions in the present study. The respondents argued that in classroom conversations, topics that are unfamiliar to them, which they have no opinion about, or which they have nothing to say about make them more unwilling to speak. This has to do with both security and excitement: the students are more unwilling to speak as they do not feel secure speaking about topics which they know nothing about, and they are also less willing to speak as they do not feel any excitement when speaking about something that is not important or interesting to them.

One central variable that the model by MacIntyre et al. (1998) does not take into account is the topic because of which the interaction takes place. Still 21% of the students in the present study brought it up in their answers to the open-ended questions that one major reason to why they are more willing to speak outside the classroom is the topic of the conversation. Of course, MacIntyre et al. created the model thinking about the *second language learning* context, which here might be necessary to separate from the *foreign language learning* context. In a second language context, the language is spoken in the surrounding community, and the language is thus used for real-life



communication and the topics of the conversations are probably in most cases meaningful. The Finnish context of learning English as a foreign language is different, because the language is not spoken in the surrounding community, and thus most of the learning and interaction related to that learning takes place in a classroom. For this reason, it is most important that teachers would take into consideration this influence of the topic. If teachers give conversation tasks to students only because they are suggested in the text books and because they are related to the current theme in the book, many opportunities for practicing speaking might be wasted, as most of the students do not know enough about organ transplants or mortgage loans to discuss them. It would be important to give the students such topics to discuss which they find important and interesting, and which thus improve their willingness to engage into the conversation.

In addition to the topic, several respondents also mentioned as a reason to why they are more willing to speak outside classroom that one can choose who they speak with when in communication situations outside classroom. This opinion is understandable as in classroom one usually has to speak with whoever is sitting nearby, yet it still appears quite interesting, as it cannot be expected that in the 'real world' one could always choose with whom to talk. Still, also the model by MacIntyre et al. (1998) presents the desire to communicate with a specific person as one of the most immediate variables to willingness to communicate.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

The study can be considered successful in regard to both reliability and validity. In most of the cases, the questionnaire measured a variable or issue with more than one question, for instance, the willingness to communicate items at the beginning of the questionnaire included two or three questions about each of the communication contexts. Moreover, some of the variables were asked with questions in both positive and negative way, for instance, questions 14 and 21 (see appendix). The study was also valid, as the questionnaire measured what it was intended to measure. The participants were a random cohort of students in a normal upper secondary school, so they can be considered to represent the upper secondary school students in Finland. On the other

hand, of course, the number of participants was too small to make any broader generalizations, and in order to do that it would be good to include also more than one upper secondary school in the study. Still, the amount of participants was large enough to produce statistically reliable results with t-test functions (Kalaja et al. 2011: 211) in SPSS software. All the participants also filled in the questionnaire under similar conditions: they were instructed what the questionnaire is about and how they are supposed to answer it, they were encouraged to ask if they had problems with understanding the questions, and they all also answered the questionnaire at the beginning of their lesson, in order to reduce the possibility that they might try to be quick and get out of the class earlier, and thus not consider the questions and their answers carefully.

As an improvement for the reliability of the results of the study, the answering scale in questionnaire for questions 11 to 26 could have included the alternative “no opinion”, as there were a couple of cases where a respondent had left one question unanswered. There is, after all, always the possibility that a respondent does not have an opinion about what is being asked, and one might answer anyways (Hirsjärvi 1997: 203). Having this option “no opinion”, might improve the reliability, because if a respondent really does not have an opinion, he or she would not feel the need to choose some random alternative. However, the questions in the questionnaire for the present study were such that the respondents could be expected to have opinions on them.

A possible limitation in the present study could be said to be using a questionnaire as means to collect data about the behavior of the respondents. The problem in this might be that the respondents do not succeed in answering how they actually behave, but they answer how they would like to behave, or most likely, how they perceive that they behave. Because of this possible limitation, there might be need for some further study on how the classroom contexts affect the students’ willingness to communicate. A suitable, yet a much more time-consuming, method might be to observe the students in classroom, and how they behave and engage into conversation in different situations and contexts.

Another suggestion for further study is to look into the willingness to communicate of different age groups in Finland. Although the language proficiency of younger learners

is usually not as good as of the upper secondary school students, they might not have the same pressures of being perfect and not making mistakes, which the upcoming matriculation examination and teachers' attitudes might cause in upper secondary school language classrooms.

On the basis of the findings of the present study, some implications for teaching could be suggested. Everything cannot be modified to please the students, for instance, they cannot always work in pairs or choose who to speak with, because they need to learn to manage different situations with different people. Some things, however, can be taken into account. First of all, in the present study, many students emphasized the importance and influence of the topic. The topic can be, and also ought to be taken into consideration when planning speaking exercises for students. In many upper secondary school English textbooks, some of the speaking exercises might be such that they are closely related to the theme of the textbook chapter, but this textbook chapter might be all that the students know about the topic and it might not be meaningful for a 17-year-old. By evaluating the meaningfulness of the speaking exercises from the students' point of view, and possibly with some modification to the exercise or using a whole new exercise, many students' willingness to speak in class could be improved. When the students are interested in and excited about the topics they are expected to speak about, they are more willing to speak and they probably also speak more, which then gives them essential practice and confidence in using English.

In addition to the topic, also the atmosphere can influence many students' willingness to communicate, and teachers can influence the atmosphere. In the present study, many students expressed concern on making errors and being evaluated or judged by their peers because of not being good enough. Particularly in upper secondary school language lessons, where the upcoming matriculation examination often make it necessary to stress the grammar and the correctness of language, students should be encouraged to absorb the idea that when they practice speaking, they should concentrate on conveying the message, instead making sure to say everything 100% correctly. In addition to the results of the present study, also in previous studies (e.g. Kang 2005) the sense of security has been found to be an important variable for increasing willingness to communicate. Thus, it is essential for teachers to create a safe and supportive atmosphere for practicing speaking in a language that some of the students still have

limited proficiency in, and might not feel too confident in speaking it. Moreover, it ought to be emphasized for the students that when they speak in classroom, they do not need to be any more afraid of making errors than they are when speaking outside the class. It is important that students learn to tolerate errors made not only by themselves, but also by their peers, so there is no need to judge or worry about being judged by one's peers. Thus, the students would get positive experiences in practicing speaking, and having those positive experiences in speaking English has then a positive influence on their further willingness to speak English both in classroom and outside classroom.

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## I.

Lue seuraavat väittämät ja vastaa ympäröimällä vaihtoehto sen mukaan, miten näissä eri tilanteissa koet toimivasi. **Huomioi, että kaikissa tilanteissa kieli jota käyttäisit on englantia.**

Vastausvaihtoehtojen selitykset:	1= en koskaan, 2= harvoin, 3= toisinaan, 4= usein, 5= aina
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- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Viittaan osoittaakseni haluavani vastata, kun opettaja esittää englanniksi kysymyksen, johon osaan vastata.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Esitän mielipiteitäni ja ajatuksiani koko luokan keskustellessa yhteisesti jostakin mielenkiintoisesta aiheesta.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Osallistun mielelläni koko luokan yhteisiin keskusteluihin.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Osallistun aktiivisesti pienryhmäkeskusteluun, vaikka en tuntisikaan keskustelukumppaneitani.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Esitän aktiivisesti mielipiteitäni ja ajatuksiani pienryhmäharjoituksissa, kun ryhmäni jäsenet ovat kavereitani/minulle tuttuja.                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Teen aktiivisesti keskusteluharjoituksia, kun parinani on kaveri/tuttu ihminen.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Olen aktiivisesti mukana parikeskusteluissa/ keskusteluharjoituksissa, vaikka en tuntisikaan pariani.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Keskustelen tilaisuuden tullen ulkomaalaisten vaihto-oppilaiden kanssa englanniksi englannin tuntien ulkopuolella.                               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Puhun mielelläni englantia, jos minulla on tilaisuus keskustella jonkun ulkomaalaisen ihmisen kanssa koulussa tai vapaa-ajalla.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Puhun mielelläni englantia matkustellessani ulkomailla, kun minulla on tilaisuus jutella jonkun paikallisen ihmisen tai toisen turistin kanssa. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

## II.

Lue seuraavat väittämät ja vastaa ympäröimällä mielipidettäsi parhaiten vastaava vaihtoehto:

1= täysin eri mieltä, 2= jokseenkin eri mieltä, 3= jokseenkin eri mieltä, jokseenkin samaa mieltä, 4= jokseenkin samaa mieltä, 5= täysin samaa mieltä.

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11. Puhun mielelläni englantia oppitunneilla.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Otan mielelläni osaa pienryhmäkeskusteluihin englanniksi  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Jätän joskus osallistumatta keskusteluun oppitunnilla, koska en ole varma osaanko sanoa oikein sitä mitä haluaisin. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Minun ei tee mieli ottaa aktiivisesti osaa ryhmäkeskusteluun, jos muutkaan ryhmässä eivät puhu.                     | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Otan mielelläni osaa keskusteluihin englanniksi, koska mielestäni osaan englantia tarpeeksi hyvin.                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Jännitän puhua tunneilla englantia, koska opettaja kuuntelee ja arvioi mitä sanon.                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Otan mielelläni osaa parikeskusteluun englanniksi.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. En mielellään puhu englantia, koska en luota omaan kielitaitooni.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Puhun mielelläni englantia koko luokan edessä.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. En mielelläni puhu englantia, jos opettaja kuuntelee vieressä.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Olen itsekin halukkaampi puhumaan englantia, kun puhekumppanini osallistuu/osallistuvat aktiivisesti keskusteluun.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Olen halukkaampi puhumaan/puhun mieluummin englantia koulun ulkopuolisissa tilanteissa kuin oppitunneilla.          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. En puhu mielelläni englantia, koska en mielestäni osaa ääntää englantia tarpeeksi hyvin.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Puhun aktiivisemmin englantia tunneilla silloin, kun opettaja ei ole kuuntelemassa puhettani.                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

**III.**

(Tämän osion kysymykset koskevat lukion valinnaista suullisen kielitaidon kurssia. Jos et ole ko. kurssia suorittanut, voit siirtyä suoraan osioon IV.)

Lue seuraavat väittämät ja vastaa ympyröimällä mielipidettäsi parhaiten vastaava vaihtoehto:

1= täysin eri mieltä, 2= jokseenkin eri mieltä, 3= jokseenkin eri mieltä, jokseenkin samaa mieltä, 4= jokseenkin samaa mieltä, 5= täysin samaa mieltä.

25. Koen, että lukion valinnainen suullisen kielitaidon kurssi on antanut minulle varmuutta puhua englanniksi. 1 2 3 4 5
26. Valinnaisen suullisen kielitaidon kurssin jälkeen olen halukkaampi puhumaan englantia. 1 2 3 4 5

**IV.**

27. Olet aiemmissä kysymyksissä vastannut kysymykseen siitä, oletko halukkaampi puhumaan englantia oppituntien ulkopuolella kuin oppitunneilla. Kerro miksi olet/miksi et ole?

**Kiitos vastauksistasi!**