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Older adults' willingness to communicate and emotions in the EFL classroom context: Results of a pilot study

The main objective of this paper is to examine the relationships among older adults' in-class willingness to communicate (WTC) in English, enjoyment, and anxiety. The instrument was a questionnaire that comprised biodata items and three adapted scales, namely the WTC in English Scale (Peng, Woodrow, 2010), the Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) Scale (Dewaele, MacIntyre, 2014), and the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) Scale (Horwitz et. al., 1986). The statistical analysis revealed that the participants' WTC (51 members of the University of the Third Age) was relatively high and there was a moderate, positive relationship between WTC and FLE, as well as a weak, negative correlation between WTC in meaning-focused tasks and FLCA. Also, FLE was very high, which essentially suggested that the respondents' individual, positive emotions were facilitated in the classroom setting, and positive bonds created in class could be a source of their statistically high social aspect of FLE.

Keywords: older adults, English, willingness to communicate, emotions

Słowa kluczowe: starsi dorośli, język angielski, gotowość komunikacyjna, emocje

1. Introduction

Willingness to communicate (WTC) in a FL has been widely studied among different age groups (e.g., Mystkowska-Wiertelak, Pawlak, 2017; Peng, 2014; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2014), however, little is known about older adults' in-class communication in a FL. Previous studies have evidenced that learners' main motivation to attend FL courses in late adulthood is independent communication abroad with foreigners, friends, families, and grandchildren, who are often unable to speak their heritage language(s) (e.g., Grotek, 2018; Oxford, 2018; Pawlak et al., 2018). Likewise, the imperative of effective and successful FL geragogy is an encouraging classroom atmosphere, teacher support, social bonds with peers, as well as age-advanced learners' personal well-being (cf. Jaroszewska, 2013; Pfenninger, Polz, 2018). Hence, there is an urgent need to determine how older students' communicative behaviours in class are shaped by the emotions that appear to determine their involvement in the process of FL learning (cf. Derenowski, 2021).

Therefore, the present paper seeks to explore older adults' in-class WTC in English, and its relationships with enjoyment and anxiety. As a pilot study, it intends to make a small step towards understanding the complex nature of WTC in relation to the emotions that are an inevitable part of FL education (e.g., Deweale et al., 2024).

2. Literature review

2.1. WTC in a FL

The concept of L2 WTC originates mainly from L1 WTC, viewed as a "trait-like predisposition which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers" (McCroskey, Baer, 1985: 6). Using path analysis, MacIntyre (1994) argued that the L1 WTC is directly influenced by self-perceived competence and communication apprehension, and that anxious individuals feel less competent which, in consequence, hampers WTC. MacIntyre and Charos (1996: 17) acknowledged that L2 WTC is a stable tendency that is basically shaped "by a combination of the student's perception of his or her second language proficiency, the opportunity to use the language, and a lack of apprehension about speaking". This initial approach to L2 WTC has been overruled by MacIntyre (1998) and his associates who advanced the heuristic model formulated as a pyramid-shaped framework that illustrates both state (Layer IV, V, VI) and situation-based (Layer I, II, III) influences. The authors defined L2 WTC as "a readiness to enter into dis-

course at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2" and recognised the notion as the interplay of both transient (e.g., state communicative self-confidence) and enduring (e.g., motivation, personality) variables (MacIntyre et al., 1998: 547). Such a conceptualisation of L2 WTC has gradually flourished in educational settings indicating antecedents and determinants of actual communication in a FL (e.g., Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2021; Peng, Woodrow, 2010; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2014).

The early questionnaire studies into L2 WTC made no distinction between FL in-class and out-of-class contexts and as such, they failed to examine typical classroom situations (e.g., Asher, 1998). The tools advanced by MacIntyre et al. (2001) and Weaver (2005) examined language skills, however, they made no reference to certain people (i.e., the teacher and peers), and thus, the scales turned out to be very generic. It was Peng and Woodrow (2010) who proposed an interesting tool that intended to gauge learners' WTC in form- and meaning-focused tasks between three types of interlocutors (i.e., the teacher, the peer, and a group of peers). The more recent data collection instruments (e.g., interviews, observations, self-rating grids) seek to capture the more situational nature of WTC (e.g., MacIntyre, Wang, 2021). This dynamic turn into WTC research has managed to explore a large body of diverse variables (e.g., task types, topic, interlocutors, interactional patterns, teacher-related factors) that have either a beneficial or debilitating effect on L2 WTC (e.g., Cao, 2011; Kang, 2005; Peng, 2014; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, Pawlak, 2017).

Significantly, research on WTC in a FL has principally involved such age groups as postgraduate students (e.g., Zarrinabadi, 2014), younger adults (e.g., Cao, Philp, 2006; Pawlak, Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015), and secondary school students (e.g., Baran-Łucarz, 2015; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2021). In the case of older adults, previous studies have indicated that learners in later life, on the one hand, perceive speaking as the most essential skill to practise in class, but on the other hand, this skill appears to be the key source of discomfort, mostly owing to age-related deficiencies (i.e., reduced working memory capacity, longer retrieval time), as well as decreased self-esteem and confidence (cf. Derenowski, 2021; Singleton, 2018; Stuart-Hamilton, 2012). Although older respondents find speaking the most challenging, they tend to eagerly participate in communicative tasks in English in the classroom, and additionally, their in-class WTC may be enhanced by interactions with the teacher and in dyads (Borkowska, 2023). In essence, pair work gives students a sense of security, provides greater opportunities to talk, and encourages active involvement (e.g., Kang, 2005; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2016). Teacher-related factors (personality: empathy, friendliness; learning style, instructional and relational immediacy: professionalism,

reinforcement) play a powerful role in fostering one's WTC (e.g., Cao, 2011; Gałajda, 2017; Peng, 2014). In a similar vein, teacher support and a positive classroom climate are fundamental to older adult FL education as they might affect generation of positive emotions and foster a high WTC level (cf. Grotek, 2018; Oxford, 2018). It is noteworthy that emotions (i.e., negativity and positivity) are of utmost importance in shaping readiness to speak in a FL, and as aptly stated by Deweale et al. (2024: 2) "the ever changing combination of emotions they [learners] experience in the classroom" may be a decisive factor that pushes or deters an individual's communication at any particular moment in time.

2.2. FL learner emotions: FL enjoyment and FL classroom anxiety

Positive emotions (e.g., creativity, pride, fun, enjoyment), were introduced to the field of applied linguistics by MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012), through the concept of positive psychology. The authors mentioned the "broaden-and-build" theory of positive emotions by Fredricson (2004: 1367) who poses that positive emotions broaden an individual's momentary state of mind and "promote discovery of novel and creative actions, ideas and social bonds, which in turn build that individual's resources; ranging from physical and intellectual resources; to social and psychological resources". In classroom settings, students who experience a positive emotional state are more capable of absorbing a FL and the "effects of positive emotions go beyond pleasant feelings since they enhance their awareness of language input" (Deweale, Deweale, 2020: 48). Deweale and MacIntyre (2014: 257) advanced the Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) Scale and interpreted FLE as "the match between the challenge of the activity and the skill of the learner". The scholars pointed out that activities that gave students a degree of autonomy boosted FLE and a friendly, humorous and supportive teacher played a key role in fostering students' good mood. Therefore, Deweale (2015: 13) posits that "success depends in large part on learners' affective fuel levels, and that as teachers we have to keep the affective tank full". It is worthwhile to note at this point that positive psychology does not deny the existence of negative emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, anxiety). It argues that they are likely to "narrow a person's field of attention" while positive ones are to create "tendencies toward play and exploration, yielding a broadened field of attention and building resources for future action" (MacIntyre, Mercer, 2014: 162). In brief, positive emotional states undo the effects of negative emotional arousal and generate productive reactions to stressful situations (MacIntyre, Gregersen, 2012).

The affective impact of negative emotions, particularly anxiety, has been intensively studied in the context of FL learning and teaching (e.g., Deweale et al., 2017; Deweale et al., 2022; Piechurska-Kuciel, 2011). It has been well-established that FL anxiety is one of the strongest predictors of WTC (Elahi Shirvan et al. 2019). Initially, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986: 128) perceived FL anxiety "as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". The researchers developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) Scale that includes test anxiety, communication apprehension, and a fear of negative evaluation. In her recent work, Horwitz (2017: 42) admits that FL anxiety "emanates from the discomfort some language learners have when they must interact in the language but are unable to present themselves authentically when doing so". An individual's anxiety is said to be context-dependent and it is related to triggers that emerge in the micro-context (e.g., a specific exercise), in the meso-context (e.g., anxiety about interactions with the teacher or peers), and in the macro-context (e.g., historical context linked to a certain FL community) (Deweale, Deweale, 2020).

Research on the relationship between WTC and FLCA has demonstrated that anxiety is an inhibitor towards the creation of WTC in a FL as speaking is one of the key causes of anxiety (e.g., Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre et al., 1998). Multiple meta-analysis has confirmed that FLCA negatively impacts FL performance and hinders WTC (Botes et al., 2020). Speaking with the teacher is the major source of anxiety and reluctance as they give feedback which may cause student insecurity (e.g., Gałajda, 2017). Khajavy et el. (2017) found out that there was a stronger relationship between FLE and WTC than between FLCA and WTC, and as a result, enjoyable learning experiences tend to encourage students to grasp a communication opportunity when it occurs. Also, the amount of FL use by the teacher is likely to correspond with a high level of WTC (Deweale, Deweale, 2018). Deweale and MacIntyre (2014), who investigated FLCA and the nature of newly conceptualised FLE, indicated a weak correlation between FLCA and FLE, suggesting that these were not opposing notions on one dimension, but rather two independent dimensions. The researchers emphasised that it is advisable to maintain a constructive balance which "is tipped in favour of enjoyment, with some anxiety present as part of the emotional mix" (Deweale, MacIntyre, 2014: 262). Khajavy (2021: 186) and his associates conclude that anxiety may be present but "manageable, and recede into the background" when the classroom conditions boost enjoyment of the FL learning process.

The present study is a preliminary attempt to scrutinise the relationship among older adults' in-class WTC in English, FLE, and FLCA. As evidenced

in previous research studies (e.g., Gabryś-Barker, 2020; Niżegorodcew, 2018), age-advanced students are likely to be actively involved in classes and their learning is truly elevated when in a relaxed atmosphere with supportive relationships in an FL educational setting. This fact is strongly linked to Carstensen's (2006: 1913) socioemotional selectivity theory which "maintains that constraints on time horizons shift motivational priorities in such a way that the regulation of emotional states becomes more important than other types of goals". In consequence, older adults have a preference for social activities that generate positivity, and FL education in later life is viewed as a source of "the intense pleasure that the learning experiences of an additional language bring to their everyday lives" (Singleton, Záborská, 2020: 117). It may be hypothesised that as senior learners pay due attention to maintaining positive bonds and personal well-being, they might experience low levels of anxiety in class, and positive emotions should facilitate their WTC. Hence, the starting point for the present paper was the assumption that there is a positive correlation between WTC and FLE, while the existence and role of FLCA in relation to WTC and FLE is to be explored and analysed.

3. STUDY

3.1. Aims and questions

The study intended to investigate the older learners' WTC, FLE, and FLCA and examine whether WTC in meaning-focused tasks (M-WTC) and WTC in form-focused activities (F-WTC) differ significantly. As age-advanced students wish to enhance their abilities to communicate in English in the educational context in order to use their pragmatic skills out of class, it might be speculated that M-WTC should be substantially higher than F-WTC. Similarly, to find empirical evidence as to which facet of enjoyment might play a more powerful role in learning English in late adulthood, the purpose was to check the discrepancy between FLE regarding its private aspect (P-FLE) and its social aspect (S-FLE). Also, the study sought to scrutinise the correlations among WTC, FLE, and FLCA. More precisely, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What is the level of older adults' WTC in English, FLE, and FLCA?
2. What is the relationship between WTC, FLE, FLCA and selected sociodemographic factors?
3. What is the relationship among the participants' WTC, FLE, and FLCA?

3.2. Participants

The subjects were 51 members of two branches of the University of the Third Age (U3A) located in two towns in Poland. The participants had been regularly attending English for older adults organised by their U3A. The biodata are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The participants' personal data (*N* = 51)

Gender		Age			Place of residence		Education	
male	female	*Max.*	*M*	*Min.*	village	town up to 50,000 residents	tertiary	secondary
6	45	78	71	60	8	43	31	20

The average duration of learning English during their life was 9 years (*max*. = 25, *min*. = 5; *SD* = 4.85) and 5 years (*max*. = 10, *min*. = 1; *SD* = 2.55) during English courses for seniors. As regards the knowledge of FLs, ten participants reported a lack of knowledge of other than English FL(s), whereas 41 claimed knowledge of at least one (Russian – 29, German – 19, Italian – 2, French – 1). It is worth mentioning that eight students were learning languages other than English at the time of study, mainly German and Russian.

3.3. Instrumentation

The instrument was a questionnaire and its first part was devoted to biodata items (*gender, age, place of residence, education*), questions about English and FL learning experience (*How long have you been learning English throughout your life?, How long have you been learning English only during English courses for seniors?, Do you know any other FL(s)?, Are you currently learning any other than English FL(s)?*). The second part included three adapted tools designed as a 6-point Likert scale (1 – I strongly disagree to 6 – I strongly agree). The first one was the WTC in English scale (Peng, Woodrow, 2010) that intended to measure students' WTC both in meaning-focused (e.g., "I am willing to do a role play standing in front of the class in English, e.g., ordering food in a restaurant") and form-focused tasks (e.g., "I am willing to ask my groupmates in English the meaning of the word I do not know"). In the present study, seven out of ten original statements were used. One item concerning translation was modified and Chinese was replaced by Polish (i.e., "I am willing to translate a spoken utterance from Polish into English in my group"). In addition, two statements were paraphrased

("I am willing to give a short self-introduction without notes in English to the class" and "I am willing to give a short speech in English to the class about my family without notes") with a view of adopting to older learners' specific needs. The second scale was the FLE Scale (Deweale, MacIntyre, 2014) which sought to explore the older learners' private aspects of enjoyment (P-FLE) (i.e., creativity, pride, fun), as well as social facets of FLE (S-FLE) that included teacher-student bonds and classroom dynamics. Seven original items were used (e.g., "In class, I feel proud of my accomplishments") and six were paraphrased (e.g., "I've learnt and I'm learning interesting things during English classes"). As in the case of older adults, learning English is frequently linked to a hobby, one item regarding a private aspect of enjoyment was constructed ("Learning English is my hobby"). The last scale was the FLCA Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986). Its goal was to assess the older students' level of anxiety during English classes. Ten out of 33 original statements were utilised in the study (e.g., "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class"). Two items (i.e., "I don't worry about making mistakes in English classes", "I feel confident when I speak during English class") were key-reversed since they reflected positive emotions and a high level on the scale was aimed to represent a high anxiety level.

3.4. Procedure and data analysis

All the items were first translated into Polish and consulted with the present researcher's colleague who gave valuable feedback and suggestions. The pen-and-paper questionnaires were conducted during regular English courses. Participants signed a written consent form before the questionnaires were administered. They were both guaranteed anonymity and informed that the data would be analysed only for scientific purposes. The questionnaire study lasted approximately 15 minutes.

Once the research was completed, the questionnaires were gathered and coded. The statistical analysis[1] was conducted with use of the IBM SPSS Statistics 29 package. Cronbach's alpha was used to calculate the internal consistency of the scales. Basic descriptive statistics were produced, with the Shapiro-Wilk test, Pearson's *r* correlation (for variables with distributions close to normal), Student's *t* test for independent samples, Student's *t* test for dependent samples, and Spearman's *rho* correlation. Also, the Mann-Whitney test, and the Wilcoxon test (for variables with distributions that deviate from normal) were performed. The significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$. Table 2 illustrates normality tests for WTC, FLE and FLCA and

[1] The statistical interpretation was based on Hornowska (2001).

Table 2. Normality tests for WTC, FLE, FLCA and Cronbach's alpha coefficients (*N* = 51)

Variable	W	p	α
WTC	0.98	0.673	0.84
M-WTC	0.97	0.336	0.83
F-WTC	0.96	0.094	0.80
FLE	0.72	<0.001	0.89
P-FLE	0.75	<0.001	0.83
S-FLE	0.51	<0.001	0.90
FLCA	0.94	0.012	0.88

Note. *W* – Shapiro-Wilk test*; p* – statistical significance*; α* – Cronbach's alpha.

Source: own study.

Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The analysis indicated a good internal consistency reliability for all three scales.

The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test for FLE, P-FLE, S-FLE and FLCA proved to be statistically significant, which means that their distributions significantly deviated from the normal distribution. Therefore, it was reasonable to carry out the analysis based on parametric tests only for the WTC, M-WTC and F-WTC variables while non-parametric tests were used to analyse FLE, P-FLE, S-FLE and FLCA.

Additionally, in order to assess the validity of the theoretical model, confirmatory factor analysis[2] (CFA) was performed. Owing to the small sample size and the data presented in a Likert scale, the analysis was conducted by means of a DWLS estimation used when a dataset that has various distributions and comprises the factors that may have different numbers of possible values (Hu, Bentler, 1999). The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. The results of CFA for WTC, FLE, FLCA (*N* = 51)

Model	χ^2	*df*	*p*	CMIN/*df*	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
WTC	28.83	34	0.719	0.84	1.00	0.96	<0.01
FLE	32.91	76	1.000	0.43	1.00	0.93	<0.01
FLCA	9.90	35	1.000	0.28	1.00	0.98	<0.01

Note. χ^2 – chi-square*; df* – degrees of freedom*; p* – statistical significance*;* CMIN – chi-square minimum; CFI – comparative fit index; GFI – goodness-of-fit-index; RMSEA – root mean square error of approximation.

Source: own study.

[2] The confirmation factor analysis and interpretation were based on Hu and Bentler (1999).

The analysis showed that all the models were found to fit the data very well as there was a statistically non-significant chi-square test ($p > 0.050$), a good ratio of test statistic to the degrees of freedom (CMIN/df < 2.00), a goodness-of-fit index (GFI > 0.90), a comparative fit index (CFI > 0.90) and a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA < 0.08). The results allowed the inclusion of the indicators in the further analyses.

3.5. Study findings

3.5.1. Q 1: The older adults' WTC, FLE, and FLCA

As presented in Table 4, the overall mean of WTC was 4.61 and the standard deviation 0.65.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for WTC, FLE, and FLCA (*N* = 51)

Variable	M	Me	SD	Sk.	Kurt.	Min.	Max.
WTC	4.61	4.60	0.65	–0.19	0.37	2.70	6.00
M-WTC	4.64	4.67	0.70	–0.24	–0.25	2.83	6.00
F-WTC	4.57	4.75	0.87	–0.51	–0.22	2.50	6.00
FLE	5.75	5.93	0.37	–1.60	1.55	4.64	6.00
P-FLE	5.64	5.86	0.50	–1.38	0.87	4.29	6.00
S-FLE	5.86	6.00	0.32	–2.51	5.90	4.57	6.00
FLCA	3.85	4.10	0.85	–0.89	0.83	1.50	5.20

Source: own study.

The further statistical analysis revealed that M-WTC and F-WTC were not significantly different ($p = 0.581$), which essentially means that the respondents were characterised by similar levels of WTC regardless of the task type. When it comes to M-WTC, the item "I am willing to ask the teacher in English to repeat what he/she just said in English because I didn't understand" was reported to obtain the highest mean ($M = 4.90$) and the highest standard deviation ($SD = 1.10$) whereas the statement "I am willing to ask my peer sitting next to me in English the meaning of an English word" had the highest mean ($M = 4.78$) and a high standard deviation ($SD = 1.01$) in F-WTC.

As regards FLE, the mean was very high (M = 5.75) and the standard deviation was very low (SD = 0.37) which indicated the homogeneity of the participants' answers. It may also be deduced that English learning generated positive emotions in later life.

Table 5. Comparison between P-FLE and S-FLE (*N* = 51)

Variable		*M*	*SD*	*t/Z*	*p*	Cohen's *d/r*
FLE	P-FLE	5.64	0.50	-3.73	**<0.001**	0.37
	S-FLE	5.86	0.32			

Note. *t/Z* – value of test statistics; *p* – statistical significance; *d* Cohen's *d*/*r* – effect size coefficient.

Source: own study.

The data illustrated in Table 5 showed a significant disparity between private and social facet of FLE. It transpires that the older learners were characterized by a significantly higher level of FLE in the social dimension, and a significantly lower level of FLE in the private aspect. It is worth noting that the recorded effect proved to be moderately strong, namely 0.37 (0.30 < *r* < 0.50). Although all the items in the FLE Scale obtained very high means, the highest in the P-FLE was for the statement, "I don't get bored during English classes" (*M* = 5.92) with a very low standard deviation *(SD* = 0.27), whereas the analysis of S-FLE revealed two items with the same mean and standard deviation (*M* = 5.92, *SD* = 0.27), namely, "The teacher encourages students to learn English" and "The teacher is supportive".

As depicted in Table 4, the overall mean of FLCA seemed relatively low (*M* = 3.85) and the standard deviation of 0.85 indicated rather diverse responses. In a general sense, the older adults represented low levels of FCLA. However, the highest mean turned out to be quite different from the overall mean, namely 4.82 in the statement, "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class". The standard deviation for the same item was high (*SD* = 1.07). Also, the responders admitted to feeling frightened when they could not understand what the teacher was saying *(M* = 4.12). Yet again, the answers to that statement were very heterogeneous (*SD* = 1.35).

3.5.2. Q 2: WTC, FLE, FCLA, and selected sociodemographic factors

To whether the level of education influenced WTC, FLE, and FLCA, the Student's *t* test for independent samples (for variables with a near-normal distribution – WTC) and the Mann-Whitney test (for variables with a non-normal distribution – FLE, FLCA) were used. The data showed no statistically significant differences in WTC (*p* = 0.922), FLE (*p* = 0.409) or FLCA (*p* = 0.170) between the students representing tertiary and secondary levels of education. Hence, regardless of the seniors' education, the WTC, FLE,

and FLCA remained statistically similar. Interestingly, there were no significant correlations in the levels of the three variables and language-related factors, namely the respondents who reported the knowledge of languages other than English, and those who knew only English (WTC: p = 0.576, FLE: p = 0.334; FLCA: p = 0.208). Likewise, the data revealed that learning a language other than English in late adulthood had no effect on the three dependent factors (WTC: p = 0.099, FLE: p = 0.924, FLCA: p = 0.795).

To examine the correlations between WTC, FLE, FLCA, and the participants' age, Pearson's r (for variables with a near-normal distribution – WTC) and Spearman's *rho* (for variables with a non-normal distribution – FLE, FLCA) correlation analyses were used (Table 6).

Table 6. Correlation with three variables and age (*N* = 51)

Variable	Age
WTC	–0.28*
FLE	0.07
FLCA	0.11

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

Source: own study.

Interestingly, the data revealed one significant negative correlation between the participants' age and WTC. Thus, the older the adult, the more WTC was negatively impacted. However, it should be mentioned that the recorded effect was found to be small ($r < 0.30$).

3.5.3. Q 3: Relationship among WTC, FLE, and FLCA

Spearman's rho correlation analysis was performed to investigate the relationship among the three variables (Table 7).

Table 7. Relationship among M-WTC, F-WTC, P-FLE, S-FLE, and FLCA (*N* = 51)

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. M-WTC	–	–	**0.51*** **	0.27	**–0.40****
2. F-WTC		–	**0.48*** **	0.28*	0.16
3. P-FLE			–	–	–0.24
4. S-FLE				–	–0.17
5. FLCA					–

Note. *** – $p < 0.001$; ** – $p < 0.01$; * – $p < 0.05$.

Source: own study.

The analysis indicated that P-FLE impacted both M-WTC and F-WTC suggesting a moderate positive correlation. By contrast, FLCA had a moderate negative relationship with M-WTC which could indicate that anxiety might have a detrimental effect on the level of readiness to speak in meaningful communication in classroom settings.

4. Discussion

The data gathered in the pilot study presented in this paper shed some light on the relationship among the older learners' WTC, FLE, and FCLA. Basically, WTC was relatively high in meaning-focused and form-focused tasks which seems to be in line with Niżegorodcew's (2018) study who emphasised that observations indicated seniors' general eagerness to speak and involvement during English classes. The data also revealed that the older adults felt willing to talk with the teacher and with a peer in dyads, which confirmed the findings that these two interactional patterns could principally boost the respondents' WTC (cf. Borkowska, 2023). In the case of this cohort group, teacher-centred exercises were characteristic of the grammar translation method which was used when these age-advanced learners were learning a FL during their formal education (cf. Derenowski, 2021). Thus, it may be presumed that the participants felt accustomed to perceiving the teacher as the authority in the classroom and his or her experience and skills were of vital relevance. In a similar vein, pair work gave them a sense of security and provided a room for socialising and creating bonds between classmates that might have resulted in good classroom dynamics (Gałajda, 2017; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, Pawlak, 2017).

When it comes to the positive emotion, the very high mean of FLE clearly shows that the respondents found English learning enjoyable in both social and private aspects. This finding corresponds with Deweale and Gregersen's (2012) study which postulates that the broadening power of positive emotions is strongly linked to internal motivation and effective learning. It is noteworthy that the social aspect was found to be statistically higher than the private aspect. One corollary for this situation is that older adults generally view FL learning as a pastime that is of great help in reducing isolation, enhancing integration, and extending their knowledge (e.g., Gabryś- Barker, 2020). Owing to limited time, they tend to place great value on their personal well-being, confirming Carstensen et al.'s (2003: 105) assertion that the "optimalization of emotional experiences is prioritized in later life". Pfenninger and Polz's (2018) study determined that English courses improved older participants' social lives by gaining new language skills that led to a drastic

increase in their self-confidence. It is certain that the relationships among learners, peers, and the teacher constitute the core of seniors' FL learning, since they provide a sense of belonging to a social group with a specified goal, which has a potent effect on fostering the quality of life (Jaroszewska, 2013; Oxford, 2018). In this respect, it should come as no surprise that the level of FLCA was low. The respondents' answers, however, were relatively heterogeneous which may suggest that individual learners might have experienced some levels of FLCA. Even subtle changes in the classroom context may evoke emotional reactions and engender FLCA and an unwillingness to communicate (Khajavy et al., 2021). In the case of older learners, it is perhaps reasonable to mention that due to age-related cognitive deterioration, memory delays and failures, older adults judge their own FL performance more harshly and they frequently express self-deprecating views (cf. Singleton, 2018). The individual FLCA may be the result of low self-esteem and the self-stereotyping process associated with ageism (Oxford, 2018). Also, Baran-Łucarz and Słowik-Krogulec (2023) found that older adults who compared themselves to other classmates revealed low self-perceptions about their FL learning self-efficacy and felt more apprehensive during classes.

As regards the correlations with sociodemographic factors, only one weak negative relationship between WTC and the participants' age was found. As age increased, the older learners were less willing to communicate in-class which might indicate that speaking which requires immediate reaction could become more challenging. Older people are aware of potential cognitive decline and as they age may struggle more when learning a FL because of reduced working memory capacity which plays a crucial role in the process of learning (Singleton, 2018). It is well-established that reaction time, understood as "the time taken to respond to a stimulus" is longer in late adulthood (Stuart-Hamilton, 2012: 74). Therefore, it is justifiable to give older learners time to prepare their answers, so as to let them gain the time and confidence that will motivate them to communicate (cf. Zarrinabadi, 2014).

What the data also showed is the moderate positive correlation between M-WTC, F-WTC and P-FLE, and the weak negative relationships between M-WTC and FLCA. These findings appear to echo the study by Khajavy et al. (2017) who acknowledged that the positive role of FLE was more beneficial in promoting WTC, than was the negative role of FLCA in inhibiting WTC. The weak negative correlation between FLCA and M-WTC might be associated with the older adults' prior FL learning experience, as they might have been more familiar with grammar-focused techniques than meaningful communication in English, which could be more of a challenge (cf. Peng, Woodrow, 2010). It may also be surmised that the weak negative effect of

FLCA on M-WTC seems to demonstrate that "the straightforward approaches to teacher support and an encouraging environment will remain the best options" (Horwitz, 2017: 42) in lowering individual learners' apprehension. In a similar vein, the fact that WTC had a more significant influence on P-FLE is in accordance with the positive ageing which is recognised as an extension of positive psychology, and which serves such purposes as providing positive mental states, promoting active participation in mental tasks, as well as maintaining supportive relationships (Gergen, Gergen, 2001). It is fairly evident that the positive relationship between WTC and FLE confirms the fact that the respondents felt secure, psychologically comfortable, and that the classroom atmosphere created by the teacher and peers facilitated WTC (cf. Kirkpatrick et al. 2024). This finding mirrors the words by Oxford (2018: 10) who underscores that older adults "must be surrounded by a supportive community that believes that have the capability to learn and are desirable, purposeful, interesting and agentic".

Although the preliminary data provided valuable insights into the nature of the older adults' WTC, FLE, and FLCA it has some limitations. Firstly, the study was based on a small sample of participants which might have resulted in the inability to identify statistically significant correlations with a variety of biodata items (i.e., gender, education, FL language-related factors). Secondly, the piloting procedure concentrated on the quantitative data that indicated the generalised assessment of three variables. Finally, the findings could not determine situation-based factors that would foster or hamper WTC and emotion. Therefore, in future research studies, further modifications of the scales are planned, mainly concerning FLCA. The questionnaire will be administered both in towns and cities, and the quantitative data will be supplemented by qualitative data, namely from action research and interviews. This mixed-method approach will offer a more comprehensive picture of positive and negative emotions in the context of FL learning, as well as older learners' in-class experiences and communicative behaviours in a more meticulous manner.

5. Conclusions

The present study has gone some way towards fostering the understanding of older adults' WTC, FLE, and FLCA. What is clear is that older adults' readiness to communicate hinges on their personal well-being and relationships with the teacher and peers. In classroom settings, they report high levels of enjoyment that suggest positive group dynamics, teacher support, and a welcoming atmosphere. Enhancing positive emotions appears to over-

shadow negative self-perceptions towards FL learning and allows a focus on gaining the new pragmatic skills necessary to complete communicative goals. One of the more substantial findings to emerge from this study is the fact that learning English in late adulthood has undoubtedly more than one dimension and it should be considered as a strategy for positive ageing, as it is associated not only with developing language skills, but also with promoting positive emotional and psychological states. WTC was found to have a positive impact on the private aspect of FLE, and as such, in-class communicative behaviours have the potential to facilitate older adults' overall quality of life. In this regard, the principal implication is that FL teachers should design a large number of speaking exercises and provide room for student talking time. Empathy, patience, and understanding are needed, as these features in the educator promote willingness to speak, especially among older adults who are prone not to believe in their own abilities. Such an approach will unquestionably contribute to elevating in-class social bonds, psychological well-being, and positivity in later life.

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