

# The Role of Stay Abroad in Perception of Oral Proficiency and Willingness to Communicate

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J. J. Strossmayer University of Osijek

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Study Programme: Double Major MA Study Programme in English language  
and

Literature – Teaching English as a Foreign Language and Pedagogy

Mia Leko

**The Role of Stay Abroad in Willingness to Communicate and  
Perceived Oral Proficiency**

Master's Thesis

Supervisor: prof. dr. sc. Višnja Pavičić Takač

Osijek, 2020

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## Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
2. On Oral Proficiency and Willingness to Communicate .....	3
2.1. Development of Willingness to Communicate .....	4
2.2. The Role of Oral Proficiency in Willingness to Communicate .....	10
2.3. Review of relevant studies .....	11
3. The Role of Stay Abroad in Willingness to Communicate and Perceived Oral Proficiency: study report .....	17
3.1. Methodology .....	18
3.1.1. Aim.....	18
3.1.2. Sample .....	18
3.1.3. Instruments .....	19
3.1.4. Data collection and analysis procedure .....	20
3.1.5. Results .....	20
4. Discussion .....	22
5. Implications.....	28
6. Conclusion.....	30
7. Bibliography.....	32
8. Appendix .....	37

## **Summary**

This master's thesis investigated the effects of an international student exchange program "Work and Travel" (W&T) on students' perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English. Three groups of respondents were chosen: students of the English language and literature who did not participate in the program, and two groups of students of other faculties, non-language majors, – one that participated in the program and one that did not. Statistically significant differences among the groups suggest that the W&T program benefited students' oral proficiency development and their willingness to engage in communication in English. Correlations between the variables were also examined. A medium strength positive correlation between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate was found for the whole sample as well as for students of the English language and for non-language majors who participated in the W&T program. A large strength positive correlation between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate was found for non-language majors who did not participate in the W&T program.

**Key Words:** Work and Travel, oral proficiency, willingness to communicate

## **Sažetak**

U ovom diplomskom radu istraženi su učinci međunarodnog studentskog programa razmjene „Work and Travel“ (W&T) na studentsku percepciju vlastite vještine govora i spremnost na komunikaciju na engleskom jeziku. Odabrane su tri skupine ispitanika: studenti engleskog jezika koji nisu sudjelovali u programu i dvije skupine studenata drugih, nejezičnih, fakulteta, od kojih je jedna grupa sudjelovala u programu, dok druga nije. Statistički značajne razlike među skupinama ukazuju na to da je W&T program doprinio razvoju vještine govora ispitanika i njihovoj spremnosti za komunikaciju na engleskom jeziku. Ispitane su i korelacije između varijabli. Utvrđena je pozitivna korelacija srednje snage između percepcije vještine govora u engleskom i spremnosti na komunikaciju na engleskom jeziku za cijeli uzorak, kao i za studente engleskog jezika i za studente nejezičnih fakulteta koji su sudjelovali u W&T programu. Utvrđena je snažna pozitivna povezanost između percepcije vještine govora engleskog i spremnosti na komunikaciju na engleskom jeziku za studente nejezičnih fakulteta koji nisu sudjelovali u W&T programu.

**Ključne riječi:** Work and Travel, vještina govora, spremnost na komunikaciju



## 1. Introduction

Willingness to communicate refers to the variability in people's readiness to engage in communication (McCroskey and Baer, 1985). When it comes to one's second language (L2), it is the main predictor of actual L2 use and, therefore, the development of students' willingness to communicate should be the main goal of L2 teaching (MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels, 1998). There are many variables that can affect a person's decision whether or not to communicate. However, the main two determinants of willingness to communicate in L2 are perceived competence and L2 anxiety. Higher levels of perceived competence and lower levels of L2 anxiety will lead to higher levels of willingness to communicate in L2 (MacIntyre and Charos, 1996).

In recent years, student exchange programs have gained a lot of popularity (Schrier 2011, as cited in Dewey, Bown, Baker, Martinsen, Gold, and Eggett, 2014) as they represent a unique opportunity for students to develop different skills, both in an academic and a personal sense (Moisă, 2010). Previous research done on study abroad programs highlight the improvement in students' second language oral abilities (Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg, 1993; Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey, 2004; Hernandez, 2010; Lindseth, 2010; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004; Watson, Siska, and Wolfel, 2013; Berg, Connor-Linton, and Paige, 2009) and an increase in their willingness to engage in second language communication (Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide, 2008; Kang, 2014; D'Amico, 2012) as some of the main benefits of participating in such programs.

This master's thesis investigates the effects of an international student cultural exchange program Work and Travel in the United States of America on the respondents' perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English. Students who participate in the Work and Travel program spend three to four months working seasonal jobs in The United States and get to experience the American culture and way of life, as well as learn and improve their English language knowledge and skills (<http://www.vikingtravel.hr/en/what-is-work-and-travel>). This program differs from the more researched student study abroad programs in that the context of L2 use has shifted from an academic one to a professional one. The benefits of it have not been previously investigated.

Perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate levels will be measured for three groups of participants: English language majors who did not previously participate in the Work and Travel program, students of other faculties who participated in the Work and Travel

program, and students of other faculties who did not participate in the Work and Travel program. These three groups of respondents are chosen in order to gain insight into the extent to which the experience of staying abroad can influence students' oral proficiency and willingness to communicate as students of the English language use English significantly more frequently than other students. The relationship between the two variables, perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English, will also be investigated.

## 2. On Oral Proficiency and Willingness to Communicate

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) defines language proficiency as one's functional language ability (<https://www.actfl.org/publications/guidelines-and-manuals/actfl-proficiency-guidelines-2012/glossary>). Second language proficiency used to be perceived as mostly relating to grammar and lexis. However, over time, it became apparent that there is more to language proficiency than just the knowledge of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The awareness of the importance of developing students' sociolinguistic and discourse competences started to grow (Adebile and Alabi, 2005) and the emphasis shifted from grammatical aspects of language to one's ability to appropriately use the language in different contexts, that is, it shifted from language knowledge to language function (Adebile and Alabi, 2005). Function is seen as the crucial element in language proficiency assessment because the speaker's performance of communicative tasks reflects his knowledge of grammar and vocabulary (Galloway, 1987, as cited in Isabelli, 2003). Speaking can be challenging for English language learners, as it occurs spontaneously and in real time (Wang, 2007 as cited in Wang, 2014). It is also influenced by cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors (Wang, 2014). Still, it is "the most desirable manifestation of knowing a language among people" and "when somebody claims that s/he knows a language, people usually expect him/her to be able to speak that language rather than read, write or listen to it" (Soozandehfar, 2010:106).

Oral proficiency refers to the ability to use verbal language in order to communicate with others in a functional and accurate way in L2. To have a high oral proficiency level means that the person is able to apply their linguistic knowledge to new contexts and situations (Omaggio, 1986). According to Yang (2007), the development of oral language proficiency and the oral language skill is of major importance for language learners because it is the skill that eventually becomes the most frequently used one, as oral interactions make up most of our everyday communications. Oral proficiency includes both "the ability to comprehend spoken input and the ability to produce language that appropriately responds to the input by negotiating meaning, taking turns, and so on" (Ockey, 2018: 2).

Ockey and Li (2015) divided oral proficiency into interactional competence, phonology, grammar and vocabulary, and fluency. They defined interactional competence as one's ability to formulate appropriate responses in specific situations in real time. Phonology refers to the

effective use of segmental and prosodic features of language, including pronunciation, stress, and intonation. When it comes to grammar and vocabulary, one's competence can be measured by determining how many words or grammatical structures one knows and can effectively use. Lastly, fluency refers to the naturalness of one's speech – the rate of speech, pausing, repetition, and language repair (Ockey and Li, 2015). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (2001) similarly describes the speaking skill as consisting of five aspects, which are range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence. Range refers to one's ability to reformulate ideas using different linguistic forms in order to convey shades of meaning. Speaking accuracy represents grammatical control (CEFR, 2001) and includes the correct use of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Fluency refers to one's ability to produce utterances in the foreign language without hesitation and long and frequent pauses (Skehan, 1996) and includes spontaneity, natural flow, and tempo of speaking (CEFR, 2001), while interaction refers to the easiness or difficulty a person experiences during communication as well as the sense of natural turntaking and intonational cues. Lastly, coherence represents the suitable use of organizational patterns and connectors (CEFR, 2001).

In a study conducted by Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008), a group of L2 students enrolled in a communication-focused course was compared to a group enrolled in a grammar-focused course. The results showed that learners enrolled in the communication-focused course had higher proficiency levels than the other group and they were more likely to initiate communication in the L2. These results indicate that increased communication in the L2 will lead to a better proficiency, which will in turn lead to an increased likelihood of further engagement in communication in the L2 (Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). Still, not everybody is prepared to engage in interpersonal communication at the same level. There are people who love to talk and would speak with almost anyone they encounter, while, on the other hand, there are some who speak very little or speak only when spoken to. This variability in people's communication was identified as willingness to communicate (McCroskey and Baer, 1985). This notion has developed greatly over time and a brief overview of its development will be given in the next subchapter.

## 2.1. On Willingness to Communicate

The term willingness to communicate was first introduced in literature by McCroskey and Baer (1985). Their concept of willingness to communicate was built on the earlier notions of

*unwillingness to communicate* by Burgoon (1976, as cited in McCroskey and Baer, 1985), *predisposition toward verbal behavior* by Mortensen, Arntson, and Lustig (1977, as cited in McCroskey and Baer, 1985), and *shyness* by McCroskey and Richmond (1982, as cited in McCroskey and Baer, 1985). The term unwillingness to communicate was described as an overall inclination to avoid oral communication (Burgoon, 1976, as cited in McCroskey and Baer, 1985). Predisposition toward verbal behavior was defined as an individual's consistency across situations when it comes to global features of speech (Mortensen, Arntson, and Lustig, 1977, as cited in McCroskey and Baer, 1985), while the term shyness was used to characterize a person's tendency to be reserved and avoid communication (McCroskey and Richmond, 1982 as cited in McCroskey and Baer, 1985). McCroskey and Baer (1985) defined their concept of willingness to communicate as one's intention to initiate communication when given the opportunity. They observed the construct in relation to people's first language and therefore identified the concept as being a "personality-based, trait-like predisposition which is relatively consistent across a variety of communication contexts and types of receivers" (McCroskey and Baer, 1985: 6). To examine whether willingness to communicate can actually be considered as a personality trait, McCroskey and Baer (1985) developed a willingness to communicate scale and tested 428 college students' willingness to communicate. The scale encompasses four contexts, which are public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, and talking in dyads, and three types of receivers, which are strangers, acquaintances, and friends. The study showed that the individual's willingness to communicate in one context or with one type of receiver highly correlates with their willingness to communicate in other contexts and with other receivers. Therefore, since one's level of willingness to communicate in one context is correlated with their willingness to communicate in another context and one's willingness to communicate with one type of receiver is correlated with their willingness to communicate with another type of receiver, the researchers concluded that an individual's willingness to communicate must be a relatively stable personality trait. However, this does not mean that people are equally willing to communicate in all contexts and with all types of receivers, but that their willingness to communicate in different contexts and with different types of receivers is correlated. In other words, it means that a person who is more willing to communicate in one context or with one type of receiver than another will be more willing to communicate in a different context or with a different type of receiver as well. It was also found that the larger the number of receivers is, and the more distant the relationship between the individual and the receivers, the less the individual is willing to communicate (McCroskey and Baer, 1985).

Although there are individuals who seem to enjoy and engage in communication more than others and one's willingness to communicate therefore may be seen as a consistent personality characteristic, it is also affected by numerous situational variables (McCroskey and Baer, 1985). McCoskey and Baer (1985) themselves identified multiple variables that could potentially affect one's decision to engage in communication. How a person feels, their previous communication with the other person, what they can gain through communication, who the other person is, or even how they look like, etc. all have an effect on whether or not a person will decide to communicate. This indicates that willingness to communicate is rather situationally dependent as well (McCoskey and Baer, 1985). Some authors consider conceptualizing willingness to communicate as an individual's personality characteristic limiting. MacIntyre, et al. (1998) argue that there are many variables that can potentially change one's willingness to communicate, such as the degree of acquaintance between communicators, number of people present, formality of the situation, topic of discussion, etc. But the one thing they point out that can have the biggest effect on a person's level of willingness to communicate is the language in which the communication takes place. By changing the language of communication from the interlocutors' first language to a foreign language, all variables that influence one's willingness to communicate will be affected at some extent and may cause the willingness to communicate level to fluctuate. Therefore, although willingness to communicate in one's first language may be considered as a fairly stable personality trait, it is improbable that willingness to communicate in the L2 will be the same as the willingness to communicate in the first language. Since L2 competence ranges from almost no competence to full L2 competence, there are certainly differences that occur in one's willingness to communicate in the L2 as compared to the first language (MacIntyre et al., 1998). To adapt the concept of willingness to communicate to include the specifics of L2 communication, MacIntyre et al. (1998) proposed a pyramid model (Figure 1) designed to account for the differences that influence the decision making process of whether to initiate communication in the L2. The pyramid consists of twelve psychological, linguistic, and communicative variables, personality traits, and parameters of the social situation, which are all divided into six layers. The variables are used to try to describe, explain, and predict L2 communication. The variables in the model are divided based on whether they represent enduring or situational influences on one's willingness to communicate. The top three layers of the pyramid represent transient influences. They vary from situation to situation and have a direct influence on second language willingness to communicate, while the remaining three layers represent stable, enduring influences with indirect effects on willingness to communicate

in the L2. Transient influences depend on the context of the situation, while the enduring influences can be applied to almost any situation as they are stable, long-term characteristics of the individual (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

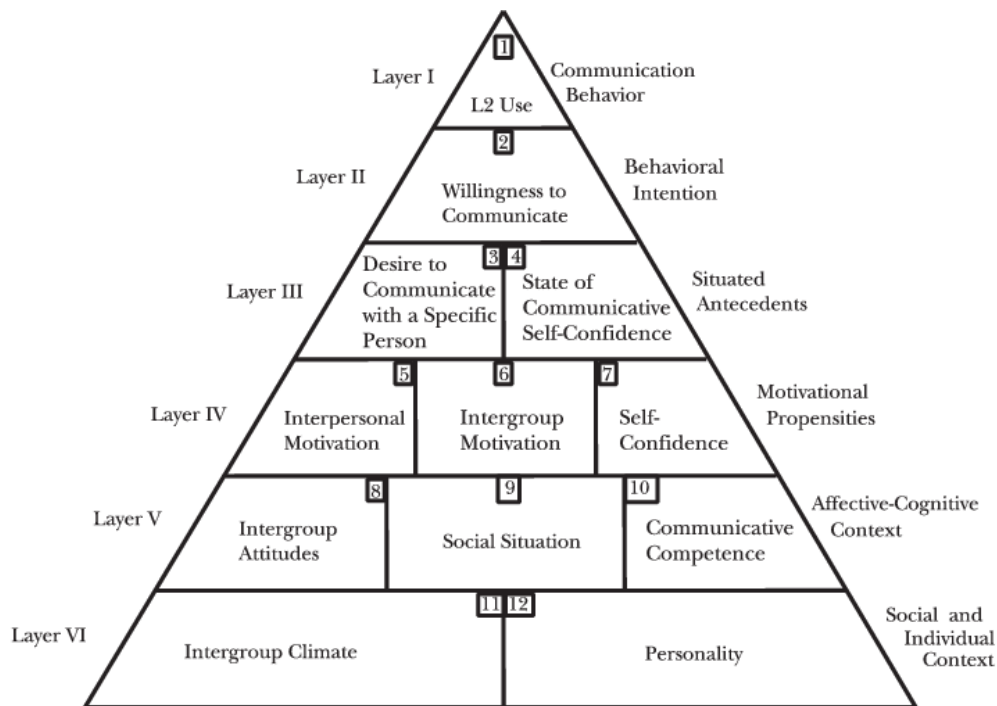


Figure 1. Heuristic Model of Variables Influencing Willingness to Communicate by MacIntyre et al. (1998: 547).

The first, top layer of the pyramid is one regarding communication behavior. Communication behavior is explained by the authors as consisting of a broad array of activities in which one can use the L2 for communication of any kind. This includes speaking, as well as writing, reading, and listening. Communication behavior can consist of a number of activities, like reading the newspaper, watching television in L2, using L2 on the job, or speaking in the L2 in class. This top layer is a result of the complex system of interrelated variables in the lower layers. The authors maintain that the ultimate goal of L2 education should be to develop students' willingness to communicate in a L2 as it is the biggest predictor of their communication behavior. Therefore, willingness to communicate is found as the second layer of the pyramid. The authors define willingness to communicate as “a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using a L2” (MacIntyre et al.,

1998: 547). Thus, it is not necessary to actually engage in communication, but to be willing to do so. An example of this is a situation in which a teacher poses a question in class. More than one student will express their willingness to communicate by raising their hand, even though only one will actually be able to answer the question. The willingness to answer the teacher's question may stem from the students' self-confidence, which may be a result of their language knowledge and therefore lack of language anxiety, from previous pleasant L2 experiences, their personality characteristics, or perceived behavioral control, i.e., that they can successfully perform an action that will result in desirable consequences. The authors describe two immediate precursors of willingness to communicate, which are the desire to communicate with a specific person, and the state communicative self-confidence. The desire to speak to a specific person refers to initiating communication with persons who are nearby, who we encounter often, who we find physically attractive, or if there is some sort of purpose for communication, for example, if we need somebody's assistance, cooperation, or services. The state communicative self-confidence refers to the level of self-confidence a person will have in a specific situation. It is a temporary feeling of confidence in a particular situation. These two factors show a high correlation with the level of willingness to communicate and represent the cumulative influence of the enduring factors, which make up the remaining three layers of the pyramid (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

Interpersonal communication, intergroup communication and L2 self-confidence are the three variables that make up the fourth layer of the pyramid. There are two motives that influence interpersonal communication, control and affiliation. Motives of control are found in hierarchical and task-related situations and usually emanate from the individual with more power. On the other hand, affiliation motives come into play when an individual is interested in establishing a relationship with the interlocutor because of some of their characteristics, such as attractiveness, similarity, proximity, etc. When it comes to intergroup communication, the motivation stems from the individual's belonging to a particular group. Intergroup climate and intergroup attitudes are what impacts one's motivation for communication. Therefore, friendships with L2 speakers would facilitate communication in the L2. The last variable of the fourth layer of the pyramid, L2 self-confidence, differs from the aforementioned state self-confidence as it represents the individual's overall perception of their ability to communicate in the L2 in an effective way. There are two components of L2 self-confidence – the cognitive component, which refers to the self-evaluation of L2 skills, and the affective component, which refers to language anxiety, i.e. the feeling of discomfort experienced when using the L2. What



determines one's level of L2 self-confidence are their communicative competence, communication experience, and also their personality traits. The first variable of the fifth layer of the pyramid is intergroup attitudes, which includes integrativeness, fear of assimilation, and the motivation to learn the L2. Integrativeness is related to one's adaptation to a different cultural group (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Knowing a L2 is an important factor in identifying with the members of the L2 community. Integrativeness also includes a positive attitude towards the L2 community and the desire to affiliate with the community, without the desire to identify with them (Gardner, 1985 as cited in MacIntyre et al., 1998). Fear of assimilation refers to the fear one might have of losing his identification with the first language community. This can be considered as the opposite of integrativeness. The more dominant one of the two will either facilitate or obstruct L2 communication. As for motivation to learn a L2, it is usually higher when the learner feels enjoyment and satisfaction when learning and using the language. The next variable is the social situation in which the participants, the setting, the purpose, the topic, and the channel of communication represent the five most relevant components. Variations of these five components determine the communication situation. Since these situations differ, each situation bears a specific set of behavioral standards. This means that a person's communicative experience in one type of situation will not be transferred to another automatically, thus generating different willingness to communicate levels in different social situations. The third box found in the fifth layer of the pyramid is communicative competence, which refers to the individual's L2 proficiency (MacIntyre et al., 1998). This variable consists of five different constituent competences which are linguistic competence, discourse competence, actional competence, sociocultural competence, and strategic competence (Celce-Murcia, Dorneyi, and Thurell, 1995). However, it is how the individual perceives this competence that will have an effect on their willingness to communicate, not their actual level of competence, i.e., proficiency (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990a). The final layer of the pyramid is the societal and individual context. The societal context refers to the intergroup climate in which communication takes place and a positive one will facilitate communication. The individual context refers to different personality traits of individuals and how they can affect communication. Some personality traits and patterns have been shown to facilitate language learning and communication (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The prevalent taxonomy of personality traits that facilitate L2 learning and willingness to communicate is the big five taxonomy which includes extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to new experiences (Goldberg, 1992)

## 2.2. The Role of Oral Proficiency in Willingness to Communicate

Early research on willingness to communicate was in relation to communication in the first language. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) were one of the first ones to investigate the concept in regards to the L2 context. Their study, with a sample of 92 Anglophone adults learning French, showed that higher levels of perceived competence and lower levels of L2 anxiety are directly related to higher levels of L2 willingness to communicate. Moreover, anxiety had a negative impact on perceived competence and integrativeness (MacIntyre and Charos, 1996), which is a term used to refer to the desire to learn a L2 in order to communicate with members of the L2 community (Denies, 2015). The researchers identified two key variables – anxiety about communication and the perception of communicative competence, which together form one's L2 self-confidence. This L2 confidence defines the learners' motivation for L2 learning and communication (MacIntyre and Charos, 1996). MacIntyre (1994) proposed that anxiety influences one's perception of competence. To prove that, MacIntyre and Noels (1994) conducted a research and found that anxious language learners tended to underestimate, while relaxed students tended to overestimate their ability to speak and comprehend the L2, therefore proving the influence of anxiety on perceived competence and their combined influence on willingness to communicate. In a study conducted by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément and Donovan (2003) on 59 university students, 27 of whom had experience with intensive language learning programs, increased levels of willingness to communicate and more frequent communication in the L2 among immersion students are reported. Similarly, Baker and MacIntyre (2000) investigated the differences between immersion and non-immersion contexts and reported on the same results as MacIntyre et al. (2003). The researchers also found that anxiety had a larger effect on the willingness to communicate of immersion students, while non-immersion students' perceived competence was the predictor with the stronger impact. The authors' explanation for these findings was that immersion students have opportunities to use the L2 in real situations and therefore experience more pressure to communicate effectively thus increasing their anxiety levels, therefore making it the dominant predictor for immersion students (Baker and MacIntyre, 2000). In the study conducted by Denies (2015) on 1117 respondents, perceived competence was the main predictor of willingness to communicate within the classroom, while outside the classroom, the role of anxiety increased to a level roughly equal to the level of perceived competence. The author therefore argues that perceived competence is one of the main determinants of willingness to communicate as it is the only one that remains stable, whether it is inside or outside the classrooms (Denies, 2015). However, it is

important to note that even though one's actual competence could influence their communication behavior, their perception of their L2 competence will ultimately determine whether or not they will choose to communicate in L2 (Clément, Baker, and MacIntyre, 2003). This is because even though an individual may be a very capable communicator, they might not perceive themselves that way (MacIntyre, Babin, and Clément, 1999, as cited in Denies, 2015).

### 2.3. Review of Relevant Studies

Research has shown that immersing students into the target culture is valuable to their L2 development (Brecht, et al. 1993; Freed, et al. 2004; Hernandez, 2010; Lindseth, 2010; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004; Watson, et al. 2013; Berg, et al. 2009) Moreover, contact with native speakers can be quite beneficial for the development of one's speaking skill (Soozandehfar, 2010). This immersion and contact with native speakers can be achieved by spending time abroad in countries where the target language is spoken. Today, students have a lot of opportunities to spend time abroad in their target language speaking country by applying for different student exchange programs like Erasmus, Work and Travel, etc. Most studies that examine the influence of staying abroad in a target language speaking country focus on study abroad programs for students.

Traditionally, studying abroad is considered as positively influencing students' linguistic and cultural skills (Byram and Feng, 2006, as cited in Dewey, et al. 2014). Some perceived benefits include improved accent, more frequent use of idioms, improved accuracy and fluency, improved listening comprehension, oral and written communication, etc. (Freed, 1995). As a result of globalization processes and the increasing need for cross-cultural communication skills, studying abroad has become an increasing trend among students as universities highlight the importance of living and studying in the target language country (Schrier 2011, as cited in Dewey, et al. 2014). It is believed that studying abroad creates a beneficial environment for language acquisition and the development of different language skills and abilities, particularly the speaking skill (Di Silvio, 2016), and that students who participate in study abroad programs in the target language speaking countries will engage in frequent and meaningful interactions with native speakers, as well as deepen their knowledge on the target language culture, resulting in both a better cultural understanding and a linguistic improvement (Dewey, et al. 2014).

Most language learning theories emphasize two aspects that are considered to be the most important in language acquisition and those are input and interaction (Dewey, et al. 2014). Krashen (1985, as cited in Dewey, et al. 2014) believed that being exposed to sufficient input would definitely lead to language acquisition. However, other scholars argued that without adequate interaction, input alone is not enough for language acquisition (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler, 1989; Swain, 1985, as cited in Dewey, et al. 2014). Study abroad is considered to offer L2 students plenty exposure to both L2 input and interaction in the L2, making it a great environment for L2 acquisition (Dewey, et al. 2014). A number of studies provide evidence that spending time in the target language speaking country and engaging in interaction with native speakers will improve students' language proficiency and oral production ability (Brecht, et al. 1993; Freed, et al. 2004; Hernandez, 2010; Lindseth, 2010; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004; Watson, et al. 2013; Berg, et al. 2009), as well as their intercultural competence, vocabulary, reading, sociolinguistic and sociocultural knowledge, narrative abilities, and pronunciation (Martinsen, 2011; Dewey, 2004, 2008; Milton and Meara, 1995, Marriott, 1995; Regan, 1995; Regan, Lemée and Howard, 2009; Collentine, 2004; Díaz-Campos, 2004, as cited in Dewey, et al. 2014).

The most comprehensive study on study abroad benefits was conducted by Berg, et al. (2009) on 1297 students of seven different languages. The study reported that study abroad students' oral proficiency improved, on average, one ACTFL sublevel, which was significantly higher than the control students' average. The students from the control group, who were studying the languages at their home universities, improved their oral proficiency about half as much. Most of the students in the study had reached an oral proficiency plateau before the study was conducted and were between an intermediate mid and an intermediate high oral proficiency level. They were not able to improve past that point, regardless of the number of semesters they had spent studying the target language. The students from the control group did not manage to advance beyond this plateau. On the other side, study abroad students successfully overcame it, reaching, on average, nearly an advanced low level of oral proficiency. The study also showed that the experience of studying abroad benefited participants' oral proficiency development regardless of the number of semesters previously spent learning the target language as there was no minimum threshold of pre-departure competence recorded that was needed for the students to be able to increase their oral proficiency more rapidly than the students who had not reached the same threshold. The research did report that study abroad students whose proficiency levels ranged from advanced low through superior prior to the program did not

make as much progress as students at lower proficiency levels. The researchers gave possible explanations for this finding by stating that lower proficiency levels include a more narrow scope of language knowledge and skills, which learners are expected to overcome quickly, thus transitioning from one lower proficiency sublevel to another faster than students who are at a higher proficiency level. They also argue that the students may be progressing in fluency or pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence, which may not be measurable by the Guidelines. Other aspects of study abroad programs that have shown to have had an impact on students' oral proficiency gains were the length of the program, attendance of a pre-departure orientation, enrollment in courses taught in the L2, and frequent interaction in the L2 with the students' host families. This indicates that the design of the program and the amount of time spent interacting with native speakers have an impact on students' language gains. Although the study identifies problems and suggests program interventions for both study abroad programs and programs at home that would facilitate students' learning, the students enrolled in study abroad programs show greater gains in oral proficiency, as well as intercultural competence, than students studying target languages at home institutions (Berg, et al. 2009). Another study, which examined oral proficiency gains of 20 French students who participated in a study abroad program, reported that students grew more confident in their ability to speak French after a semester abroad and that 60% of them improved their speaking proficiency as measured on the OPI, with 6 students even reaching the Advanced level (Magnan and Back, 2007). Watson, et al. (2013) also report an increase in study abroad students' oral proficiency. They investigated the outcomes of study abroad experiences of 498 students of seven different second languages who participated in study abroad programs in 14 different countries. When examining students' oral proficiency, the researchers found that 88% of the students improved one sublevel in the ACTFL proficiency scale, with 49% crossing a level threshold (Watson, et al. 2013). In a study conducted by Hernandez (2010), students' speaking performance was examined before and after participating in a semester-long study abroad program in Spain. It was reported that all 20 participants of the program either maintained or improved their L2 oral proficiency after the program. The researcher also measured the amount of student interaction with the target language culture, which was identified as a significant factor that influenced students' language improvement (Hernandez, 2010). Similarly, in a research done by Lindseth (2010), which was administered on 38 students who spent a semester abroad in Germany, improvements in students' oral proficiency were measured and analyzed. It was measured through interviews which were conducted with participants before and after the program. 80% of the students improved their proficiency upon the completion of the program. Even though

very few reached the Advanced level, the students whose oral proficiency measured at Intermediate Mid were much closer to the Advanced level rating (Lindseth, 2010). Segalowitz and Freed (2004) also investigated how the learning context can affect language gains. The researchers compared an at-home group of Spanish learners, who studied the language in the formal classroom setting, and a study abroad group of learners, who spent a semester abroad in Spain. The results of this study suggest that the context in which language is learned has a great impact on language acquisition because, compared to the at-home group of learners, study abroad students improved their oral performance significantly on two general oral performance variables and on three oral fluency measures (Segalowitz and Freed, 2004). Furthermore, in a very comprehensive study on over 600 undergraduate and graduate students of Russian who spent one semester in Russia, about 65% of the students improved their oral proficiency, with 21% of them by more than one proficiency category (Brecht, et al. 1993).

As for willingness to communicate, Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu's study (2004) was the first study to research the concept and its effect on the participants' frequency of communication in a study abroad context. The results showed that the frequency of communication was relatively low for learners who did not participate in a study abroad program since they rarely engaged in communication in the L2 outside of the classroom. However, students with a higher level of willingness to communicate engaged more in communication, both in class and outside of class. Also, having a higher level of perceived competence was shown to lead to an increase in the students' levels of willingness to communicate. Similarly, a higher level of willingness to communicate resulted in a higher frequency of communication among study abroad group of students as well (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, and Shimizu, 2004). In another research done on the relationship between L2 proficiency and willingness to communicate, Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide (2008) compared one study abroad group and two groups of at-home students, one enrolled in a communication-focused course, and another in a grammar-focused course. The results revealed significantly higher levels of willingness to communicate among study abroad students when compared to both groups of at-home students. The results also suggested that students' willingness to communicate level could determine the likelihood that students will choose to go abroad and to what extent they will choose to participate in communication-based courses. As for the students' proficiency, study abroad learners reached a higher proficiency level than both at-home groups. The students had improved their language proficiency significantly during their time abroad. When comparing the two groups of at-home learners, both willingness to

communicate and proficiency levels were higher for the students enrolled in the communication-focused group. These findings support the idea that communication leads to acquisition and suggests that learners who are more willing to communicate will create more opportunities for interaction in the L2 and by doing so improve their proficiency and linguistic abilities (Yashima and Zenuk-Nishide, 2008). Another research on the effects of study abroad experiences was conducted by Kang (2014) on 60 Korean university students who participated in study abroad programs for eight weeks during their summer vacation in an English speaking country. Willingness to communicate, speaking abilities, and participation in interaction in classes taught by native English-speaking teachers in their home country were examined, and all of which developed significantly as a result of studying abroad in English speaking countries. The participants reported on the change they experienced from their passive avoidance of communication during at-home English classes to making an active effort to interact with their instructors and other native speakers during their stay abroad. Being surrounded by English speakers did not lead to frustration, but it prompted the participants to initiate communication. The researcher reports on a cyclic influence between willingness to communicate and speaking abilities during the study abroad program. The increase in willingness to communicate at the beginning of the program increased the students' involvement in interactions with native speakers and improved their speaking abilities, which in turn then further increased their willingness to communicate and the frequency and quality of the interactions with native speakers (Kang, 2014).

D'Amico (2012) investigated the relationship between studying abroad, students' oral fluency, and their willingness to communicate, and compared the results of the study abroad group to the results of an at-home group of learners. The results positively favor the study abroad context, as those students improved their oral fluency significantly more than at-home learners. An increase in speech rate, average length of fluent runs, and self-repairs was reported for study abroad students. The first two measures indicate an increase in fluency. The researcher gives a possible explanation for this and suggests that the pressure required by real life interaction may have actually assisted the learners who were then able to produce more words at a faster rate of speech in order to meet the demand of responding to native speakers. The study abroad group of students also decreased their unfilled pauses and clusters of dysfluencies significantly more than at-home learners. Similarly, their willingness to communicate levels increased during their time abroad, while no increase in willingness to communicate levels of at-home students was reported. Even though the rise in willingness to communicate levels was

not high, this finding indicates that the learning context has an impact on students' willingness to communicate. This means that the more time learners spend interacting with native speakers, the more willing they will become to communicate in the L2. However, the researcher reports no correlation between willingness to communicate and oral fluency (D'Amico, 2012).

As mentioned above, being able to speak a foreign language is considered to be the most desirable manifestation of knowing a language (Soozandehfar, 2010) and therefore, developing students' willingness to engage in communication in the L2 should be the ultimate goal of L2 education as that is the biggest predictor of their L2 use (MacIntyre et al., 1998). All of the studies elaborated above have contributed to the understanding of linguistic benefits of studying abroad and all positively favor study abroad experiences as beneficial to second language learner's development, in both linguistic and non-linguistic areas. Language educators and program administrators agree that studying abroad may not only be beneficial, but essential, for students who want to improve their oral proficiency in a foreign language (Lindseth, 2010).



### 3. The Role of Stay Abroad in Willingness to Communicate and Perceived Oral Proficiency: study report

This study examines the effects of participating in an international student cultural exchange program Work & Travel (W&T) in the United States of America on the respondents' perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English. The students who participate in the W&T program spend between three and four months working seasonal jobs in The United States during the summer period, with opportunities to travel around the country during their stay. The program is presented by the US Government as a cultural exchange program aimed at students from other countries to get familiar with the American culture and way of life. This program is also considered educational because it allows foreign students to learn and improve their English (<http://www.vikingtravel.hr/en/what-is-work-and-travel>). Students report “gaining work experience in a different cultural environment, improving a foreign language, establishing contacts with people from all over the world, visiting other places than the places at home, the opportunity to behave freely and have fun with other young people, and the opportunity to earn an important amount of money” as the main advantages gained after participating in the W&T program (Moisă, 2010: 580). This is a one of a kind program that offers students direct communication with native speakers of English for a longer period of time in a professional, working environment.

Even though the W&T program has been gaining a lot of popularity in recent years, no research has been done on the benefits of the program. This program slightly differs from the more researched study abroad programs in that the participants do not attend any L2 classes during their stay. The communication context has shifted from an academic one to a working one. However, given the fact that this program is considered to have similar, if not the same, benefits as study abroad programs, an overview of relevant research on different study abroad program benefits and their effects on language acquisition was presented earlier. All of the studies done on the topic of studying abroad have been conducted on L2 learners who had been enrolled in L2 learning courses at the time when the data was being collected. In the Croatian education system, learning a L2 is mandatory. Students start learning a foreign language in elementary school and go on to study it until the end of high school. Moreover, most students have some sort of foreign language course at their universities relating to their particular field

of study. In Croatia, English, alongside German, is the most popular L2 and all of the students sampled have attended English language courses at some point during their education.

### 3.1. Methodology

#### 3.1.1. Aim

The aim of the research was to determine if there was a difference in perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English between students of the English language who did not participate in the W&T program, students of other faculties who participated in the W&T program, and students of other faculties who did not participate in the W&T program. The research questions were:

1. Is there a difference in the estimation of their oral proficiency between students of English, students of other faculties who participated in the W&T program, and students of other faculties who did not participate in the W&T program?
2. Are students who participated in the W&T program more willing to communicate in English than both groups of students who did not participate in the W&T program?
3. Is there a correlation between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English in the whole sample and in each subgroup of participants?

#### 3.1.2. Sample

The study's participants were 153 Croatian university students. There were 121 (79%) female and 32 (21%) male participants. Out of the total number of students, 48 of them were students of English (English majors) (31%), 52 were students of other faculties who participated in the W&T program (W&T students) (34%), and 53 were students of other faculties who did not participate in the W&T program (students of other faculties) (35%). All of the students had attended English language courses during their education. The average number of years each subgroup of participants spent learning English can be seen in Table 1.

*Table 1. The average number of years spent learning English for each subgroup of participants.*

	English majors	W&T students	Students of other faculties
Number of students	48	52	53
Average number of years spent learning English	13.76	10.46	10.23

### 3.1.3. Instruments

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) that was given to the participants to fill out has three parts. The first part of the questionnaire is the demographic part eliciting some general information. The second part is the Willingness to Communicate scale, constructed by McCroskey and Richmond and translated into Croatian by Mihaljević-Djigunović (2002). The scale consists of twelve scored items and eight filler items. This means that only twelve of the statements the respondents rated were scored. The respondents attributed ratings from 0 to 100 to 20 statements depending on whether they would choose to communicate or not in the given hypothetical situation. The scored items can be grouped into four communication contexts – public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, and talking in dyads – and three types of receivers – strangers, acquaintances and friends. Therefore, seven subscores can be calculated – for each communication context and type of receiver, in addition to the overall willingness to communicate score. The third part of the questionnaire is the Percieved Oral Proficiency Questionnaire (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.94$ ) which was designed for this research. This part measured the participants' self-assessment of their oral proficiency and was constructed using the descriptions of CEFR (2001) proficiency levels and the Interagency Language Roundtable Self-Assessment of Speaking Ability questionnaire (<https://www.govtilr.org/Skills/speakingassessmnet.pdf>). It consists of 36 items to be scored on the Likert scale from 1 to 5 depending on the respondents’ perception of their L2 oral proficiency. The statements in the questionnaire were not grouped according to proficiency levels. The participants were not divided into groups based on their proficiency scores. The mean value of the students’ scores was used as an indicator of their perceived oral proficiency.

### 3.1.4. Data collection and analysis procedure

The research was conducted during December 2018. Questionnaires were partly administered as pen-and-paper: 17 questionnaires were distributed to students of English during their regular university class. The aim and nature of the study were explained to the students and afterwards they filled in the questionnaires. It took them around 15 minutes on average to complete the questionnaires. The rest of the questionnaires were administered through an online survey which was distributed in a Facebook group for Croatian students who had already participated or plan on participating in the Work and Travel program, as well as in some other student Facebook groups. The SPSS program was used to analyze the collected data. One-way ANOVA and correlation tests were conducted.

### 3.1.5. Results

For the first and second research questions, which were to determine whether there is a difference in the estimation of their oral proficiency between students of English, students of other faculties who participated in the Work & Travel program, and students of other faculties who did not participate in the Work & Travel program, and to determine whether students who participated in the Work & Travel program are more willing to communicate in English than the other two groups of students who did not participate in the Work & Travel program, one-way ANOVA test was used.

*Table 2. Differences in perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate variables (ANOVA)*

Variable		English majors	W&T students	Students of other faculties	F	Sig.
Perceived oral proficiency	n	48	52	53		
	Mean	4.57	4.36	4.00	21.71	<.001***
	SD	0.24	0.40	0.60		
Willingness to communicate	n	48	50	52		
	Mean	65.26	78.56	60.38	10.11	<.001***
	SD	22.33	18.12	22.40		

\*\*\*p<.001

Table 2 shows that there was a statistically significant difference between the groups of participants in both their willingness to communicate and their perceived oral proficiency ( $p<.001$ ). The Tukey HSD post-hoc test was used in order to determine between which groups statistically significant differences exist.

English majors' estimation of their oral proficiency is significantly higher than the self-assessed oral proficiency of W&T students ( $p<.05$ ) and of students of other faculties ( $p<.001$ ). The test also shows a statistically significant difference between the perceived oral proficiency of W&T students and students of other faculties ( $p<.001$ ).

In regard to the willingness to communicate variable, the Tukey HSD post-hoc test shows that W&T students' willingness to communicate is significantly higher than the willingness to communicate of English language students ( $p<.001$ ) and of students of other faculties ( $p<.001$ ). The post-hoc test didn't show a statistically significant difference between the other two groups of participants.

For the third research question, which was to determine whether or not there is a correlation between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English in the whole sample and in each subgroup of participants, the Pearson correlation test was conducted.

*Table 3. Correlation between willingness to communicate and perceived oral proficiency for each sub-group of participants and total number of participants.*

	Willingness to communicate			
	English majors (n=48)	W&T students (n=50)	Students of other faculties (n=52)	Total (N=150)
Perceived oral proficiency	.48**	.37**	.65**	.49**

\*\* $p<.01$

There is a statistically significant correlation between willingness to communicate and perceived oral proficiency for each sub-group of participants and the total number of participants. There is a medium strength positive correlation ( $r=.49$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate for all participants ( $N=150$ ) as well as for English majors ( $n=48$ ) ( $r=.48$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and for W&T students ( $n=50$ ) ( $r=.37$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Furthermore, a large strength positive correlation ( $r=.65$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) was found between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate for students of other faculties who did not participate in the W&T program ( $n=52$ ).

## 4. Discussion

The general aim of this research was to determine if there were differences in perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate in English between students of English who did not participate in the W&T program, students of other faculties who participated in the W&T program, and students of other faculties who did not participate in the W&T program. These three groups of respondents were chosen in order to investigate to which extent the experience of participating in a student exchange program, like the W&T program, and spending a significant amount of time in a L2 speaking country can affect students' perception of their oral proficiency and their willingness to communicate in the L2.

The results show that English majors' perceived oral proficiency levels were significantly higher than the perceived oral proficiency levels of the other two subgroups of respondents, with an average perceived oral proficiency score of 4.57. This may have been expected as most of the students from the English majors' subgroup of respondents were in their fourth and fifth year of study during the time the data was being collected. Additionally, the average number of years spent learning English for this group was 13.76 years. Therefore, it was likely that they would perceive themselves to have a high oral proficiency in English. However, when comparing the other two groups of students, those who had participated in the W&T program perceived themselves to be significantly more orally proficient, with an average score of 4.36, than those students who had not participated in the program, whose average oral proficiency was 4.00. This data is interesting because there is almost no difference in the average number of years spent learning English between these two groups. W&T students spent, on average, 10.46 years learning English, while students of other faculties spent 10.23 years. A possible explanation for why W&T students perceived their oral proficiency to be higher could be because maybe students who know English well are more likely to participate in the program than their peers or because those students who spent time abroad in the USA had the opportunity to practice their speaking skill in authentic situations by communicating with native speakers and other international students who were participating in the same program, therefore improving their English language proficiency. They used their English language knowledge and skills in real life situations, not just in a classroom setting, which may have impacted their perception of their oral skills as there was no scoring, grading, or error correction done by the teacher. Another possible explanation is that maybe they were

unconsciously comparing their perception of their own speaking skills to the speaking skills of other students who they met on the program, concluding that their oral proficiency is rather high. However, most likely is that they have indeed improved their oral proficiency while on the program. This is in line with many studies on the effects of studying abroad which report on the significant improvements in students' L2 proficiency (Berg et al., 2009; Hernandez, 2010; Lindseth, 2010; Segalowitz and Freed, 2004; Brecht, et al. 1993; Watson, et al. 2013).

When looking at the participants' willingness to communicate scores, W&T students appear to be the group most willing to communicate in English. Their score of 78.56 is significantly higher than the scores of the other two groups, which are 65.26 for English majors and 60.38 for students of other faculties. This finding is interesting as there is no significant difference in the levels of willingness to communicate between the two subgroups with the biggest difference in perceived oral proficiency levels. Every subgroup of respondents is exposed to English to some extent as it is a global language and the predominant language on the Internet and social media. Still, English language majors are exposed to it more than other students and they use English on a daily basis. In addition to exposure to English through different media, they use English to communicate with their peers and teachers in class, to complete different university tasks and projects, to read and study different books and textbooks in English, etc. It is safe to say that they are sufficiently exposed to the language and have a high proficiency in it. Yet, even though they use it on a daily basis as it is their object of study, their willingness to communicate score is just negligibly higher than the score of the group of respondents who did not participate in the W&T program and who have the lowest perceived oral proficiency score, and significantly lower than the group of students who participated in the W&T program, even though both groups have used the L2 frequently. A possible explanation for the different willingness to communicate levels between the subgroups is that it could be that the students who apply for these kinds of exchange programs are more extroverted and generally more open and willing to communicate as they enjoy socializing and meeting new people. However, in a research conducted by D'Amico (2012), in which study abroad and at-home learners' oral proficiency and willingness to communicate was measured before and after participating in the program, both groups initially had comparably equal high levels of willingness to communicate. This suggests that, even though the study-abroad group is naturally self-selected, there was no indication that they are naturally more willing to communicate in the L2 than at-home learners (D'Amico, 2012). Another possible explanation for the difference in willingness to communicate levels between the three subgroups of participants is the different cultural

environment in which the Work and Travel students envisioned themselves in while completing the questionnaire. Communication norms are highly culturally dependent and when individuals find themselves in an environment in which their own culture is considered a minority culture, they tend to adapt to the communication norms of the larger culture in order to communicate effectively (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990b). Therefore, one's willingness to communicate may change depending not only on the language they use, but where they use it as well. Compared to the other two groups of students who mostly use English in L2 classes, the students who had spent a significant amount of time in the USA might have envisioned the situations in the questionnaires in the context of the American culture as there is where they most used English to communicate. It would require further research to investigate the differences between the American culture and Croatian culture regarding communication norms and habits and the readiness to engage in communication to see if this is a variable affecting students' willingness to communicate. What also may have contributed to the high willingness to communicate levels of W&T students is that their stay abroad in the L2 speaking country offered them the opportunity to use the language in real life situations with native, as well as foreign, speakers of English. The context of their English language use on the program differs from the mostly in-classroom environment in which English majors use the language and could be the reason for the higher willingness to communicate scores of W&T students. As with their perceived oral proficiency scores, the W&T students' willingness to communicate levels may have been influenced by the lack of error correction usually done by teachers in class, which combined with frequent communication in the L2 led to a decrease their L2 communication anxiety. Especially if they perceived the communication in the L2 as a positive experience, were successful in communicating, and managed to get their point across without much trouble. Clément (1980) described this in his social context model in which he explored the interrelations between L2 confidence, competence, and identity and interethnic contact. The model suggests that frequent and pleasant contact with the second language group will eventually lead to changes in L2 confidence. Clément et al. (2003) combined the social context model and the willingness to communicate model and illustrated how frequency and quality of L2 communication with the second language group will lead to an increase in L2 confidence, which will in turn lead to an increase in one's identification with the second language group and their willingness to communicate. The level of identification and willingness to communicate will determine the L2 use (Clément et al., 2003). As some scholars argue that developing students' willingness to communicate should be the ultimate goal of L2 teaching, this finding is rather interesting because it may indicate that spending time in a L2 speaking



country and communication with native speakers could be essential for developing one's willingness to communicate. A high perception of L2 proficiency and a lack of communicative apprehension, i.e., communication anxiety are the main predictors of willingness to communicate (MacIntyre and Charos, 1996). The group with the lowest perceived oral proficiency had the lowest willingness to communicate levels. This is consistent with the idea of perceived oral proficiency being a crucial predictor of willingness to communicate (Denies, 2015). However, the students who participated in the W&T program had significantly higher levels of willingness to communicate in English when compared to the English language majors' subgroup who, because of their field of study, use English regularly and frequently. When comparing perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate levels of these two subgroups, English majors had a significantly higher level of perceived oral proficiency, yet the students who spent time abroad in the L2 speaking country were the ones with the highest willingness to communicate levels. This finding may indicate that spending time abroad in a target language speaking country may also be one of the main determinants of willingness to communicate development in L2 or that it could be a factor highly related to students' L2 confidence or integrativeness and therefore may affect their perception of their L2 proficiency and communication anxiety and that this variable might be missing in MacIntyre's et al. (1998) pyramid model.

As for the relationship between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate, a statistically significant medium strength positive correlation between them was found for the whole sample and for two subsamples: English majors and W&T students. A statistically significant large strength positive correlation was found for students of other faculties. Some previous studies have shown that anxiety and perceived competence have varying roles in shaping the willingness to communicate depending on the learning situation. Yashima (2012) reports that in contexts in which the L2 is used relatively rarely perceived competence has a stronger influence than anxiety, while anxiety becomes the stronger predictor in contexts where there are more opportunities for using the L2. Similarly, MacIntyre, et al. (2003) report that the willingness to communicate of students who had participated in immersion programs and other intensive language programs is predicted by communication apprehension, but not by perceived competence, while the opposite is true for the at-home group of L2 learners, i.e., their willingness to communicate is predicted by their perception of their competence. This may explain why a medium strength positive correlation between perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate was found for English language students and Work and Travel

students, as they have had more opportunities to use the language, thus reducing the anxiety that occurs when communicating in the L2, and why the correlation was higher for the group of students who did not use English as often.

It is, however, also important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. The participants' levels of perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate were not tested and compared before and after participating in the Work and Travel program. The conclusions of the research were made based on the comparison of the results of two subgroups with similar demographic information and previous English language learning background. Another limitation is that the other main predictor of willingness to communicate, communication anxiety, was not tested. It is possible that Work and Travel students' stay abroad significantly lowered their L2 communication anxiety, which is why they had such high willingness to communicate levels. This would mean that English majors' subgroup has fairly high levels of anxiety when speaking in English, even though they use it regularly. However, the sample tested in the research was random and it would be useful to conduct a larger-scale study with a sample of participants that would be more representative of the population.

Future research is needed to further investigate students' oral proficiency, communication anxiety, and willingness to communicate levels before and after the program in order to determine exactly to which extent participation in the W&T program can facilitate students' L2 development. It would be useful gain insight into whether spending time abroad in the target language speaking country is in fact a variable significantly affecting their willingness to communicate, L2 confidence, or integrativeness. It would also be beneficial to examine additional variables that could potentially affect English majors' lower willingness to communicate levels, such as overthinking about the correct grammatical structures or pronunciation, some personality traits like introversion, a lack of L2 confidence, etc. As mentioned before, one's willingness to communicate may also depend on the culture in which they are using the L2 as communication norms of certain cultures might dictate an increased use of the language among minority groups who tend to conform to those norms. Because of this, it would be useful to find out if the cultural setting of L2 use might have an impact on stay abroad students' high willingness to communicate levels. Additionally, it would be useful to find out if students who apply for exchange programs might do so because they have higher integrativeness levels to begin with and are therefore more open towards the L2 culture or they identify more with them, which is why their willingness to communicate levels are higher than

the other two groups. And finally, it would be most valuable to have the possibility of comparing the Croatian context of the study to other international studies.

## 5. Implications

Because this study deals with the concept of willingness to communicate, development of which some authors argue should be the ultimate goal of L2 teaching and learning (MacIntyre et al. 1998), a number of implications can be drawn from the results that might be useful for L2 teachers, learners, and second language teaching institutions.

The overall findings of this research are in accordance with the idea that communication plays a vital role in L2 development and support the idea of MacIntyre et al. (1998) that willingness to communicate should be the ultimate goal of second language teaching as it determines L2 use. Developing students' willingness to communicate will contribute to more frequent communication in L2, which will ultimately lead to the development of their L2 proficiency. An implication relating to teaching English as a foreign language is that teachers should focus on creating more communication based tasks for students and encourage them to communicate in the L2 as often possible inside, as well as outside, of the classroom. Also, they might find useful practicing roleplaying situations with students, without much error correction during these exercises, as this mimics real life situations best and might positively affect students' L2 confidence.

As for students, they should become more aware of the importance that communicating in their target language can have on the development of their L2. A lot of students prefer doing tasks that require reading, writing, or listening skills, and shy away from speaking in class. This is why it is important for teachers to introduce more tasks in which students would have the opportunity to practice their speaking skills, but also why students need to push themselves more out of their comfort zone when it comes to speaking in L2.

Another important implication is that students, especially foreign language majors, should be encouraged to participate in different stay abroad programs as that could significantly contribute to their L2 development. Faculties that offer foreign language studies should become more aware of the different benefits of student exchange programs and work together with other international faculties in order to create more opportunities for student mobility. Moreover, faculties should aim to educate students more on the different exchange programs that the faculty or university offers and assist them in the process of applying, as many students might get discouraged from it because of lack of information or the difficulties they might face

during the application process. Ideally, all students should have the option of participating in some type of stay abroad program in their target language speaking country.

## 6. Conclusion

Growing globalization processes have had an impact on foreign language learning in that students now have the opportunity to spend time abroad in their target language speaking country and experience the culture and way of life of the second language group by participating in different exchange programs. This master's thesis investigated the effects of the W&T program on the participants' perceived oral proficiency and willingness to communicate and it provides an insight into the second language benefits of participating in the program, as the W&T program has not been previously investigated. Previous studies mainly focused on study abroad experiences of L2 learners. Participants of this program spend three to four months in the US working summer seasonal jobs. Although the W&T program can be considered rather similar to study abroad programs, students who go on to participate in this program do not have any L2 classes during their time abroad which is why all improvements in the L2 can be attributed only to the increased usage of the L2 and communication with native speakers.

Three groups of participants were chosen - students of English who did not participate in the program, students of other faculties who participated in the program, and students of other faculties who did not participate in the program. The results showed that students who participated in this program have the highest willingness to communicate levels. When comparing students' perceived oral proficiency, English language students had the highest perceived oral proficiency levels. Students who participated in the program have assessed their oral proficiency to be significantly higher than did the group of participants who did not participate in the program, even though the two groups had similar previous English learning background. These in accordance with previous research on study abroad benefits and suggest that participating in the Work and Travel program can result in a higher oral proficiency and willingness to communicate.

As all findings are statistically significant, and the students who participated in the program show a higher level in both measured variables than the group of students who did not participate in the program, the conclusion of the study is that participating in the program can be beneficial for improving students' oral ability as well as for increasing their willingness to engage in communication in the L2. However, because of the lack of research done on the benefits of this specific program, it would be useful for future researchers to investigate the

effects of the Work and Travel program in international contexts and to further examine the variables affecting students' willingness to communicate as the results of this study suggest that spending time abroad in a L2 speaking country might contribute to the increase in students' willingness to communicate.

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## 8. Appendix

Upitnik o samoprocjeni razine vještine govora u engleskom kao stranom jeziku i spremnosti na komunikaciju na engleskom jeziku

Ovim se upitnikom nastoji ispitati kako procjenjujete svoju razinu vještine govora u engleskom kao stranom jeziku. Sudjelovanje je dobrovoljno, a svi su podaci anonimni i povjerljivi. Hvala Vam na sudjelovanju. Molimo Vas da pažljivo pročitate sva pitanja i odgovorite na njih!

PRVI DIO:

1. SPOL (zaokružite):        M     Ž

2. Sveučilište (nadopišite):

---

3. Fakultet (nadopišite):

---

4. Studij (nadopišite):

---

5. Godina studija (nadopišite):

---

6. Jeste li ikada sudjelovali na Work & Travel programu (zaokružite)?    DA    NE

7. Ukoliko ste na pitanje 6 odgovorili sa DA, koje godine/kojih godina ste sudjelovali na programu (nadopišite)?

---

8. Jeste li ikada učili engleski jezik u školi (zaokružite)? DA NE

9. Jeste li ikada učili engleski jezik u školi stranih jezika ili privatno izvan škole (zaokružite)?  
DA    NE

10. Ukoliko ste na pitanje 8 ili 9 odgovorili sa DA, koliko godina ste učili engleski jezik (nadopišite)?

---

11. Jeste li ikada proveli duže vrijeme (duže od mjesec dana) u nekoj od zemalja engleskog govornog područja (zaokružite)?    DA    NE

12. Ukoliko ste na prethodno pitanje odgovorili s DA, koliko vremena ste proveli tamo i u kojoj državi (nadopišite)?

DRUGI DIO:

Pozorno pročitajte sljedeće izjave te zaokružite broj koji se odnosi na Vas. Sva se pitanja odnose na upotrebu engleskog jezika.

1. uopće se ne odnosi na mene
2. uglavnom se ne odnosi na mene
3. niti se odnosi niti se ne odnosi na mene
4. većinom se odnosi na mene
5. u potpunosti se odnosi na mene

1. Znam kako upotrijebiti izraze za pozdrave prilikom dolaska ili odlaska.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Znam postavljati i odgovarati na jednostavna pitanja o datumu i mjestu rođenja, nacionalnosti, bračnom statusu, zanimanju, itd.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Znam kako razgovarati o nekom svakodnevnom događaju koji se dogodio u nedavnoj prošlosti ili će se uskoro dogoditi.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Mogu se fleksibilno i učinkovito koristiti engleskim jezikom u društvenim, neformalnim situacijama.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Znam ispričati priču ili prepričati sadržaj knjige ili filma te opisati svoje reakcije.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Često ne mogu dovršiti rečenicu zbog jezičnih ograničenja (gramatike ili vokabulara).	1	2	3	4	5
7. Znam kako dati/zamoliti za upute kako doći do obližnjeg hotela, restorana ili pošte.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Znam kako voditi jednostavan razgovor uz uvjet da je sugovornik spreman sporije ponoviti ili preformulirati svoje rečenice te da mi je spreman pomoći da izrazim ono što želim reći.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Smatram kako se mogu snaći u većini situacija koje se mogu pojaviti tijekom putovanja koristeći se engleskim jezikom.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Znam naručiti obrok u restoranu.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Znam kako upotrebljavati jednostavne fraze i rečenice da bih opisao gdje živim i/ili osobe koje poznajem.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Znam prepričati što sam nedavno vidio/la na televizijskim vijestima ili čitao/la u novinama.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Znam kako i kada u razgovoru ili raspravi upotrebljavati fraze i kolokvijalne izraze	1	2	3	4	5
14. U govoru pravim gramatičke pogreške.	1	2	3	4	5

15. Znam kupiti što mi je potrebno poput autobusne ili željezničke karte, namirnice ili odjeće.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Znam kako obrazložiti i objasniti svoja stajališta i planove.	1	2	3	4	5

1. uopće se ne odnosi na mene
2. uglavnom se ne odnosi na mene
3. niti se odnosi niti se ne odnosi na mene
4. većinom se odnosi na mene
5. u potpunosti se odnosi na mene

17. Znam postavljati i odgovarati na jednostavna pitanja kako bih zadovoljio/la svoje neposredne potrebe.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Mogu se bez pripreme uključiti u razgovor o temama koje su mi poznate, koje su od osobnog interesa ili se odnose na svakodnevni život (npr. na obitelj, hobi, posao, putovanja i tekuće događaje).	1	2	3	4	5
19. Znam kako u razgovoru braniti osobna mišljenja o društvenim i kulturnim temama.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Mogu jasno i detaljno govoriti o mnogim temama vezanim uz područje vlastitoga interesa.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Znam kako međusobno upoznati osobe.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Smatram da lako mogu pratiti i uključiti se u razgovor između izvornih govornika.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Mogu sudjelovati u razgovorima o poznatim temama.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Mogu objasniti svoja stajališta o nekoj aktualnoj temi navodeći prednosti i nedostatke raznih pristupa.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Znam rezervirati hotelsku sobu ili vožnju taksijem.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Moja vještina govora u engleskom jeziku može se usporediti s obrazovanim izvornim govornikom engleskog jezika.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Imam opsežan i precizan vokabular u engleskom koji mi dopušta da dosljedno i detaljno prenesem složene ideje.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Mogu se svojim doprinosom spretno uključiti u raspravu drugih govornika na engleskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Mogu tečno i precizno izražavati i finije nijanse značenja.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Mogu s lakoćom pratiti i pridonijeti složenim razgovorima između trećih strana u grupnoj raspravi čak i o apstraktnim, složenim ili nepoznatim temama.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Mogu se tečno i spontano izražavati bez većih problema.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Mogu precizno izraziti svoje ideje i mišljenja na engleskom jeziku.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Znam detaljno opisati osobu/mjesto koje mi je jako poznato.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Mogu tečno predstaviti tuđe gledište.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Moj izgovor je obično u skladu s izgovorn dobro	1	2	3	4	5

## TREĆI DIO:

Dolje je navedeno 20 situacija u kojima osoba može odlučiti da komunicira ili ne komunicira na engleskom jeziku. Pretpostavite da imate potpuno slobodan izbor! Odredite u postocima koliko biste puta izabrali da započnete komunikaciju u svakoj navedenoj situaciji. S lijeve strane upišite postotak u kojem biste se odlučili komunicirati. Izaberite bilo koju vrijednost između 0 i 100.

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| _____ | 1. Razgovor s radnikom na benzinskoj stanici        |
| _____ | 2. Razgovor s liječnikom                            |
| _____ | 3. Držanje govora grupi nepoznatih ljudi            |
| _____ | 4. Razgovor s poznanikom dok čekate u redu          |
| _____ | 5. Razgovor s prodavačem u trgovini                 |
| _____ | 6. Govor na većem sastanku s prijateljima           |
| _____ | 7. Razgovor s policajcem                            |
| _____ | 8. Razgovor u maloj grupi nepoznatih ljudi          |
| _____ | 9. Razgovor s prijateljem dok čekate u redu         |
| _____ | 10. Razgovor s konobarom u restoranu                |
| _____ | 11. Razgovor na većem sastanku s poznanicima        |
| _____ | 12. Razgovor s nepoznatom osobom dok čekate u redu  |
| _____ | 13. Razgovor s tajnicom                             |
| _____ | 14. Držanje govora grupi prijatelja                 |
| _____ | 15. Razgovor u manjoj grupi poznanika               |
| _____ | 16. Razgovor sa smetlarom                           |
| _____ | 17. Razgovor na većem sastanku s nepoznatim ljudima |
| _____ | 18. Razgovor sa suprugom (ili momkom ili djevojkom) |
| _____ | 19. Razgovor u maloj grupi prijatelja               |
| _____ | 20. Držanje govora grupi poznanika                  |