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ABSTRACT

A study examined the extent to which existing data on communication apprehension (CA) can be employed to accurately reflect the cultural differences observed. The impact of those findings on the understanding of the nature of CA as it occurs in multiple cultures was also examined. Ten research reports that contained quantitative information that would allow for comparison between data sets were examined. Results were consistent with the growing body of cross-cultural CA research that supports the claim that some cultures have CA norms similar to the United States while others have CA norms which differ substantially--Lithuanians, Finns, Swedes, and the English are more apprehensive than Americans, while Australians, Chinese, Micronesians, Puerto Ricans, Filipinos, Costa Ricans, and Koreans are less apprehensive than Americans. Future research needs to identify and quantify the specific consequences and make a greater effort to address the validity of the measures employed to assess CA and its related constructs in other cultures. (Contains 3 tables of data and 29 references.) (RS)

A Comparison of and Commentary on Cross-Cultural Communication Apprehension Research: A Preliminary Assessment

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A Comparison of and Commentary on Cross-Cultural Communication Apprehension Research: A Preliminary Assessment

Communication apprehension (CA) is one of the most pervasive communication problems affecting more than 20% of the United States population (McCroskey, 1977). "For over fifty years, communication avoidance, anxiety, and fear have constituted a major concern of social scientists studying communication. In fact, this area represents the oldest continuing research effort in the field of communication" (McCroskey, 1984, p. 1). Daly and Stafford (1984) comment that "the amount and variety of scholarship on the topic of social-communication anxiety is immense" (p. 125). The debilitating effects of high levels of CA in educational, social, and organizational contexts in the United States is pervasive, significant, and well-documented in over 1000 studies (Payne & Richmond, 1984).

Although a great deal is known about the etiology and consequences of CA in the United States, by comparison, relatively little is known about CA in other cultures (Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1991). To date, the vast majority of CA studies have been conducted in the mainland United States, where oral communication is highly valued and associated with a host of positive social evaluations (Richmond & McCroskey, 1992; Daly & McCroskey, 1984).

More recently, scholars have begun to examine CA and its related constructs as potential cross-cultural and intercultural phenomena. This interest is based, in part, upon ". . . research from a number of disciplines (e.g., anthropology and sociology) [which] clearly demonstrates that the norms for verbal behavior, as well as the consequent perceptions associated with these norms, vary to an extraordinary degree from one culture to the next" (Elliot, Jensen, Scott, & McDonough, 1982, p. 592). Researchers have examined CA in a variety of different cultures for the purpose of developing normative data for making reliable cultural comparisons. CA has been examined in such diverse cultures as Australia (McDowell, McEwan, & Ross-Smith, 1991), Costa Rica (Pucel, Van Buren, & Porter, 1991), Finland (Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1991), Guam (Klopf, 1980), Japan (McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida, 1985; Klopf & Cambra, 1979), Lithuania (Andersen & Butler, 1991), Micronesia

(Klopf, 1984), the People's Republic of China (Klopf & Cambra. 1979), the Phillipines (Klopf & Cambra, 1980), Puerto Rico (McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985), and Sweden (Watson, Monroe, Fayer & Aloise, 1984, 1989). Richmond and Andriate's (1984) summary of this body of work is as true today as it was in 1984:

> While the data are sparse, and the representativeness of some of the samples is questionable, it would appear that the incidence of CA in English-speaking cultures differs little from the incidence in the U.S. However, it appears that while some cultures that are not English-speaking have CA norms similar to those in the U.S., others may differ substantially. (p. 2)

The rationale for the present study is twofold. First, the most common justification offered in support of cross-cultural CA research is to gradually build a body of data which permits cultural comparisons (Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1991). From this perspective, cross-cultural CA research is an attempt to develop grounded theory based upon numerous data sets examining CA in diverse cultures. It is appropriate to periodically compare and assess these data sets as the body of cross-cultural CA literature expands for the purpose of framing tentative theoretical explanations as well as guiding additional research. This is consistent with McCroskey and Richmond's (1990) recommendation that "As more data sets become available . . . meta-analyses need to be conducted to draw more formal conclusions" (p. 75). Second, if the comparative data are available, they could be used to draw inferences about what might happen when the individuals of these cultures attempt interaction. ". . .Some basic understanding of the processes of intracultural communication is a necessary prerequisite to developing, testing, and refining any exploratory hypotheses about various intercultural communication processes" (Saral, 1977, p. 394). This study examines the extent to which the collected results can be employed to inform about the state of the body of data, the degree to which the results accurately reflect the cultural differences observed, the impact of those findings on our understanding of the nature of CA as it occurs in multiple cultures, and to propose some direction for future research which will sharpen our ability to

extend comparative research in this area.

Method

Literature Search

Literature examining communication apprehension as a cross-cultural construct was collected. A computer search was conducted of *ERIC*, *Psychological Abstracts*, and *Sociological Abstracts*; a manual search was conducted of the *Education Index*, the *Index of Journals in Communication Studies*, Payne and Richmond's (1984) bibliography, and copies of the Speech Communication Association's convention programs for the past five years. All obtained reports had the reference sections searched for additional materials to be included for analysis. To be included in the analysis, a research report had to meet the following two criteria: (1) the manuscript had to contain quantitative information measuring CA and its related constructs that would allow for comparisons between data sets and (2) the manuscript had to be accessible to the authors.[1] Only data on CA and its related constructs was used for comparative purposes.

Insert Table 1 about here

Statistical Analyses

Since the purpose of the investigation was to compare how different individuals from different cultures compared on the same concept, the data for each culture was compared to every other culture. The decision was made to treat the United States data as normative because the bulk of data has been collected in the United States; the larger sample sizes available in the U.S. yield more accurate U.S. mean scores for comparative purposes; and the instrumentation was designed for English speaking individuals.

[1] Despite several written requests, a number of unpublished manuscripts were not made available to the authors. We are grateful to those individuals who contributed copies of their unpublished manuscripts for inclusion in this study. Several published manuscripts were not available in the authors' home libraries and are currently on order. Additional manuscripts will be added to the present data set as they become available.

The mean for the U.S. sample on any instrument was treated as the baseline for other cultures. This was necessary because studies did not all use the same instruments. Comparison to a common baseline permits a Z-score transformation of the data which can be compared directly.

This assumption is justified because the scales used (e.g., PRCA, PRCA-24, State, Trait, and WTC) all attempt to measure a common conceptual framework about the anxiety a person experiences toward communication with others. If an individual scores highly apprehensive on the PRCA-24 they would be expected to score on the WTC in a manner that reflects his/her willingness to communicate. Similarly, a mean for a culture indicating a high mean level of apprehension should generate a low willingness to communicate score. The use of Z-scores on a baseline permits a comparison between data sets that do not share a common instrument. The only assumption is that scores share enough common conceptual domain that a comparison is meaningful.

Results

The results of this statistical comparison are consistent with the growing body of cross-cultural CA research which supports the claim that some cultures have CA norms similar to the United States while others have CA norms which differ substantially. Using the United States as a baseline for comparison,

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Insert table 2 about here

Lithuanians, Finns, Swedes, and the English are more apprehensive than Americans. Australians, Chinese, Micronesians, Puerto Ricans, Phillipinos, Costa Ricans, and Koreans are less apprehensive than

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Insert table 3 about here

Americans. The Japanese and New Zealanders do not differ significantly from Americans in their levels of CA. Lithuanians appear to be the most apprehensive of the cultures studied to date while Koreans tend to

be the least apprehensive

Commentary

Given the unique set of challenges that are associated with cross-cultural research in general and the methodological choices being made by scholars examining cross-cultural CA in particular, it seems appropriate to ask whether or not the differences observed are meaningful? It is our position that this body of work taken as a whole should be viewed with some degree of caution.

Cross-cultural and monocultural research, although sharing some fundamental similarities, are distinctly different processes (Saral, 1977). Research in cultures other than the United States must acknowledge the deterministic role that culture plays in the development of communication norms as well as its effect on the appropriateness of methodological choices made by researchers. Numerous unique challenges face scholars engaged in cross-cultural research that are not present in monocultural research (see Gudykunst & Kim, 1984, for a thorough discussion of this position). Some of these unique challenges include: relying upon convenience sampling rather than a scientific selection of subjects; continuing in other cultures the thoroughly criticized trend in the United States to rely almost exclusively upon student populations; the reliance upon measures developed in the U.S., whose items may be meaningful to subjects in the United States, but strange, meaningless, or even frightening to subjects in other cultures; different societal variables from those being measured on questionnaire responses; and the inherent difficulties of linguistically translating instruments developed in one culture into other cultures (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984; Klopf, 1984). In general, cross-cultural CA researchers have meaningfully addressed only the latter challenge (see Klopf, 1984 and Watson, Monroe, and Atterstrom, 1989 for particularly effective discussions and applications of translations in their research designs).

These unique challenges are consistently acknowledged by cross-cultural CA researchers. For example, McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, and Richmond (1990) note that "The current results [of our study] also suggest data concerning communication apprehension in a given culture may provide little information about communication behavior of people in general in that culture without information about

the culture's general orientation toward communication" (p. 135). As recently as 1991, Sullinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, and Richmond pointedly raise the issue.

> Only recently has potential generalizability of such research been strongly criticized for similar distortions as a function of gender and ethnicity. Even then, the possibility that humans living on another continent or island might differ meaningfully from those in the researcher's immediate environment generally has been ignored. . ..While some attention may be paid to ethnicity within the United States, real cultural differences usually receive no attention at all. (p. 56)

Although it is common for researchers to acknowledge the unique challenges inherent in cross-cultural CA research in their literature reviews and discussion sections, the methodological choices being made do not reflect any meaningful attempt to address them. For example, given the statement by Sullinen-Kuparinen *et. al.* (1991) noted above, it is surprising that these concerns were not reflected in the methodological choices made by the researchers. This is evidenced in the preamble to the researchers' methods section where they write:

> Despite the theoretical and methodological problems raised when instruments designed in one culture are administered in another, the methods in this study were essentially similar to those employed in the previous studies introduced above. . ..All of the measures were self-report scales which were translated from English to Finnish and back-translated to insure accuracy. (p. 58)

In the conclusion to their comparative study of willingness to communicate in Sweden, Australia, Micronesia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S., McCroskey and Richmond (1991) write:

> Generating pancultural theoretical propositions at this time appears unwarranted. There is a major need to generate data from additional cultural groups in order to widen our base of comparisons. Only then may we begin to see groupings of countries which appear to share communication orientations and develop theoretical explanations for these different

> groups. When (if) that is accomplished, we may be in a much better position to make recommendations for improving interaction between cultures with different, as well as similar, communication orientations. (p. 76)

We agree, in principal, with this recommendation. However, the recommendation is only useful to the extent that additional cross-cultural CA research produces results which are valid indicators of CA and its related constructs in other cultures. To this end, future cross-cultural CA research must make a greater effort to meaningfully address two issues.

First, future research needs to make a greater effort to address the validity of the measure(s) employed to assess CA and its related constructs in other cultures. In evaluating the degree to which CA results accurately reflect the differences observed, it is important to note that while comparative research is both desirable and possible it becomes increasingly harder to achieve when the values of one society (often a dominant one) become the standards used to measure another (Tehranian, 1991). It is comparatively easy for ethnocentric biases to prevent researchers from understanding the deep structures of the studied society unless appropriate measures are employed. Excellent translation of instruments helps assure that the measures are understandable and linguistically comparable but do not necessarily reflect empathy for the studied culture's values and practices (Tehranian, 1991; Prince & Mombour, 1967).

Very little evidence suggests that instruments designed to assess CA and its related constructs in the United States are equally valid measures in other cultures. To what extent can a measure of CA developed and tested in a culture which places a high value on oral communication be an equally valid measure of the same construct in a culture like Japan, where cultural norms value reticence and not talkativeness (McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida, 1985)? To what extent are the communicative contexts of interpersonal, group, meeting, and public speaking which underlie instruments developed in the United States appropriate/relevant communicative contexts in other cultures? To what extent are the specific items used to operationalize these contexts in the United States valid operationalizations in the same contexts in other cultures? These are a few of the questions that must be addressed in future research.

Brislin (1986) recommends that users of existing tests who wish to tap additional aspects of a phenomenon should consider adding emic items to the etic core indicated by the original test. Brislin defines the etic as a phenomenon, or aspects of a phenomenon which have a common meaning across cultures. The emic of any given culture would account for unique expressions of a phenomenon like CA or would identify conditions or variables which produce the described state. Emic aspects are thus different in compared cultures but are related to the shared core etic. In this case, the features of CA forming the etic may be well-defined by the general descriptions of self-assessed discomfort in the subjects while the emic would provide a framework for interpretation of the significance placed on the phenomenon by the culture under study. Absent this emic sensitivity, results are subject to criticism on the basis of validity and generalizability.

Second, future research needs to identify and quantify the specific consequences associated with communication apprehension and its related constructs in other cultures. In a culture such as the United States, which places a high value on oral communication, the consequences of being communicatively apprehensive can be quite debilitating. However, relatively little is known about the consequences of being communicatively apprehensive in cultures other than our own. We agree with Sallinen-Kuparinen *et.al.* (1991) when they conclude that "In verbal cultures, remaining silent presents a problem; in cultures with a high tolerance for silence, the same overt behavior is more socially acceptable and the perceptions of a person's competence are not predominantly based on his or her verbal behavior" (p. 62). It would be the height of ethnocentrism to assume that the well documented effects of CA in the United States are equally applicable to individuals in other cultures.

For example, the results of the present study suggest that Lithuanians are the most communicatively apprehensive of the populations studied to date. However, what are the consequences, if any, of being communicatively apprehensive in Lithuania? This question is impossible to answer without a thorough understanding of communication norms in Lithuania as well as valid measures of the consequences of apprehension uniqiue to that culture. This is particularly important because CA is one of

the few communication constructs that has been linked to pervasive and significant negative consequences in the United States. In the United States, these consequences have provided a very persuasive and pragmatic rationale for systematic study of the phenomena. Research establishing similar linkages in other cultures would strengthen the rationale in support of cross-cultural CA research and provide a pragmatic orientation that is currently missing.

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TABLE 1

Manuscripts Used in the Analysis

AUTHORS	CULTURE	N	M	SD[1]	SCALE	SUBJECTS	AGE
Andersen & Butler	Lithuania	203	71	16	PRCA-24[2]	Teachers	
Klopf	Australia	219	60	13	PRCA-24	Students	
	China	184	62	08	PRCA-24	Students	
	Japan	504	66	11	PRCA-24	Students	
	Korea	073	53	11	PRCA-24	Students	
	Micronesia	153	61	13	PRCA-24	Students	
	Phillipines	312	58	11	PRCA-24	Students	
McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, & Richmond	Sweden	216	58.1	19.2	WTC[3]		
	United States[4]	344	63.1	14.9	WTC		
McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond	Puerto Rico	341	59		PRCA-24	Students	
McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida	Japan/Japanese	209	37.7		PRCA		
	Japan/English	209	38.5		PRCA		
McDowell, McEwan, & Smith	Australia	075	48		TRAIT[6]	Students	
	England	109	47		TRAIT	Students	
	United States	107	47		TRAIT	Students	
	Australia	075	48		STATE[7]	Students	
	England	109	49		STATE	Students	
	United States	107	49		STATE	Students	
Pucel, Van Buren, & Porter	Costa Rica	029	55		PRCA-24	Business	
Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, & Richmond	Finland	249	54.6		WTC		
	Finland	249	65.8		PRCA-24		
Watson, Monroe, Fayer, & Alouse	Puerto Rico	124	36	08	PRCF[8]	Children	5 - 08
	Puerto Rico	249	35	07	PRCF	Children	9 - 11
Watson, Monroe, & Atterstrom	Sweden	203	34	09	PRCF	Children	5 - 08
	Sweden	203	36	07	PRCF	Children	9 - 11
	United States	195	31	08	PRCF	Children	5 - 08
	United States	173	33	08	PRCF	Children	9 - 11

[1] Standard deviations were included in this table if they were reported in the original studies.

[2] Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24)

[3] Willingness to Communicate (WTC)

[4] United States data were included in this table if it was collected as part of the original data set.

[5] Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC)

[6] Trait Form (Trait)

[7] State Form (State)

[8] Personal Report of Communication Fear (PRCF)

TABLE 2

Comparison of Mean Scores Between Countries in Standard Units

	L	F	S	E	US	J	NZ	A	C	M	PR	F	K
Lithuania													
Finland	.05												
Sweden	.06	.01											
England	.08	.03	.02										
United States	.33	.28	.27	.25									
Japan	.33	.28	.27	.25	.00								
New Zealand	.33	.28	.27	.25	.00	.00							
Australia	.53	.48	.47	.45	.20	.20	.20						
China	.60	.55	.54	.52	.27	.27	.27	.07					
Micronesia	.67	.62	.61	.59	.34	.34	.34	.14	.07				
Puerto Rico	.80	.75	.74	.72	.47	.47	.47	.27	.20	.13			
Phillipines	.87	.82	.81	.79	.54	.54	.54	.34	.27	.20	.07		
Costa Rica	1.07	1.02	1.01	.99	.74	.74	.74	.54	.47	.40	.27	.20	
Korea	1.20	1.15	1.14	1.12	.87	.87	.87	.67	.60	.53	.40	.33	.13

TABLE 3

A Cross-Cultural Comparison of CA

COUNTRY[1]	% OF POPULATION SCORING 1 SD < U.S. MEAN LOW APPREHENSIVES	% OF POPULATION SCORING 1 SD > U.S. MEAN HIGH APPREHENSIVES
Lithuania	09	26
Finland	10	24
Sweden	10	23
England	10	22
United States[2]	16	16
Japan	16	16
New Zealand	16	16
Australia	21	12
China	23	10
Micronesia	25	09
Puerto Rico	30	07
Phillipines	32	06
Costa Rica	41	04
Korea	45	03

[1] Countires are listed in the table from most apprehensive compared to the U.S. baseline mean at the top (Lithuania) to least apprehensive compared to the U.S. baseline mean at the bottom (Korea).

[2] The United States baseline mean for CA is drawn from the extensive data sets generated in this country consisting of over 25,000 subjects (see Adersen & Butler, 1991).