

Gerald M. Phillips
James C. McCroskey

POSTSCRIPT

On Friday, February 7, 1982, two great adversaries met in plenary session, speaking to the Tri-State Speech Association, at Villanova University. Gerald M. Phillips and James McCroskey presented their views on the "state of the art" in re: communication apprehension, shyness, reticence, etc. Their agreement was total. The following premises are offered as a summary.

1. There are people who are apprehensive about speaking in general or in particular situations. Some of those people are effective speakers yet are prevented from being effective by their apprehension. Others are ineffective speakers, removal of whose apprehension will not improve their speaking.
2. There are people who lack particular speaking skills and who are, therefore, ineffective at speaking in general or in particular situations. Some of these people are interested in acquiring more skill. Others do not care whether or not they are ineffective.
3. There are generally apprehensive people, whose concern about speaking is part of a total personality involvement.
4. Desensitization will release skills of speakers whose apprehension impedes effectiveness. Desensitization helps those apprehensive and ineffective, interested in improvement become more amenable to instruction. In any case, people who are not skillful require both skills training and (sometimes) cognitive restructuring to bring about general and specific improvement. Those uninterested in improvement tend not to benefit from special treatment but may be motivated by effective teaching.
5. It is neither profitable nor appropriate for the university to devote its efforts and facilities to the remediation of a population (apprehensives or ineffectives). It is the proper mission of the university to discover effective techniques of application of desensitization, skills training, cognitive restructuring, or any other methodologies that appear promising and to disseminate those techniques to teachers on all grade levels as well as to teachers involved with basic performance courses on the college and university level.
6. Effectiveness at this sort of research requires examination of premises of instruction heretofore taken on faith (i.e. the values of extempore mode vs. manuscript reading, eye contact, etc.) as well as cooperative efforts involving researchers and classroom teachers.

The most important aspect of these agreements is the demonstration that an old line of empirical research has now matured to the point where it can spawn a practical technology, and that an adversarial relationship between researchers serves to sharpen both methodology and analysis resulting in insights that not only permit agreement on basic premises but on subsequent lines of investigation as well.

Professors McCroskey and Phillips will no doubt disagree again. Both find their personalities and thought processes stimulated by the activity. But McCroskey and Phillips also agree that their goal in subsequent conflict will be the same, to stimulate research and improve the state of the art through the constructive clash of ideas.

FORUM

In the January, 1982, *Communication Education*, an Editor's Call was issued for responses to the lead article, "Communication Competence and Performance: A Research and Pedagogical Perspective," by James C. McCroskey. McCroskey's abstract of the position taken in his essay is as follows:

Current conceptualizations of the construct of "communication competence" are examined and found to be problematic. It is argued that "communication competence" must be distinguished from "communication performance." Neither is seen as a reliable predictor of the other. It is suggested that both research and pedagogy must make clear distinctions among cognitive, affective, and psychomotor elements if they are to lead to improvements in either competence or performance.

The following responses have been received, and others are to follow. Your attention is also called to the EDITOR'S CALL for responses to the symposium, "Coming of Age in the Academy," edited by Gerald M. Phillips and included in this issue of *Communication Education*.

D.H.E.

Marvin D. Jensen
University of Northern Iowa

James C. McCroskey makes a valid and important distinction between communication competence and communication skill. The implication is that an educated person should be both competent and skillful. However, a further point needs to be made: the competent, skilled communicator may sometimes choose to behave in an unexpected way, and should not be misinterpreted as either unknowing or unable.

Aristotle's definition of discovering "the available means" surely includes means which most of the community may deem inappropriate. Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, and Saul Alinsky frequently used rhetorical strategies which the majority of their contemporaries considered ill chosen. Yet they knew what they were doing and intentionally risked adverse consequences. The abilities and actions which they exemplify should not be mislabeled as lacking in competence or skill.

Appearing in the same issue of *Communication Education* with McCroskey's essay is a review of *Voices From Silence, The Trappists Speak*. For religious, cultural, or personal reasons—some highly competent, skillful communicators choose not to reveal their competence or display their skills. Deliberate silence as response to a particular situation or as a chosen style of living may be unusual behavior, but it does not prove lack of learning. Communication reticence is too frequently labeled a problem because it conflicts with the norms of the majority, including communication teachers. In fact, reticence may be a thoughtful rejection of such norms.

McCroskey particularly suggests that communication instruction may not be adequate in producing interpersonal behavior changes. However, some affective learning involves insights rather than skills—and one of the insights is that socially approved skills can be superficial and manipulative. A person who understands human interaction may well reject some of these skills. Hugh Prather in *Notes on Love and Courage* quotes a friend:

I never speak to anyone in public. All that happens is you ask oily, nimble-footed questions about each other's imaginary lives. And you know the most you're going to get is a weather report. It tires me out because I'm no good at social skills. I've told everyone I'm nearsighted.

McCroskey is right in drawing the distinction between competence and skill, and rightly calls for communication research and instruction to address both. But an additional distinction needs to be made between knowing-doing and knowing-but-declining-to-do. Communication education should acknowledge the validity of the latter choice. The classical rhetoricians recognized this by honoring Socrates—who was both competent and skillful, but did not always choose to please his peers and superiors.

Frank E. X. Dance
University of Denver

The distinction between Wiemann's definition of competence and the definition of Larson et al. is one of degree, not of kind. I applaud McCroskey's effort to clear the confusion in this area but I suggest that since both definitions assess degrees of "appropriateness" that neither definition is one of competence but are definitions of varying degrees of performative appropriateness. Whether or not a particular communicative act is "appropriate" to the communicative setting, the performance of that act bespeaks an underlying competence. This is, I suggest, an important distinction.

In what may be somewhat of another matter it also seems to me that actual spoken language performance can reach back and can alter the parameters of the underlying competence. In other words, performance can shape competence at some stages and in some instances. I am uncertain whether or not such a belief is heretical to the original Chomskian perspective—I think not, but I confess to being uncertain. Regardless, the reciprocal relationship between competence and performance and between performance and competence in the practice of spoken language has manifest implications of the most profound weight for the discipline of speech communication.

Robert L. Duran
University of Hartford

McCroskey appears to be battling windmills with his criticism of the conceptual approaches to the study of communicative competence. He contends communicative competence researchers have unduly burdened themselves by attempting to incorporate both competence and performance into a single construct. McCroskey refers to the education literature to demonstrate differences between the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of learning. He provides examples of children and adults who know what to do but not how to do it (one need only to spend some time in a singles bar to witness this).

This line of reasoning, although academically interesting, provides little heuristic potential. Because the domains of learning can be conceptually separated does not mean they are independent components; they are inextricably related. While it may be more parsimonious to distinguish communication competence and communication skills, the two are necessary components for the attainment of communication effectiveness.

The issue appears to be the label we attach to what most people refer to as a "good socializer." Ultimately as competence researchers, we want to be able to explain the process of attaining communicative competence, isolate and eventually teach critical behaviors. To reach this goal we cannot dichotomize the study of knowledge and skill. In short, McCroskey does not provide a strong rationale for treating knowledge and performance as separate entities. He makes a stronger case for researching the relationships among the cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains of communicative competence.

One factor that has impeded the progress of competence research and communication research in general is the lack of integration among different approaches. Conceptually differentiating competence as performance or knowledge serves to further factionalize research in this area. Rather, different questions should be raised which may serve to unite those pursuing cognitive explanations of competence with those attempting to identify behaviors.

Those researching the relationship between cognitive complexity and communication effectiveness¹ are studying the cognitive differences between competent and incompetent communicators. As McCroskey states "... behavior, then, is our goal."² A cognitive approach alone will not lead to predictions of these behaviors. Research investigating the relationships among those communication behaviors identified as effective and cognitive complexity would provide knowledge of the interface between the cognitive and psychomotor processes of communicative competence.

Another important research area is the process by which children become competent communicators. Children encounter more diverse and a greater number of situational demands on their communicative abilities than adults. Adults generally have more freedom to choose their communication encounters than children. Yet some children are able to effectively adapt to the different communicative requirements throughout adolescence and adulthood. These behaviors are constantly changing, therefore, identifying all the behaviors that are perceived as competent in different contexts would provide little useful information. What is needed is research into the process by which children recognize socio-interpersonal requirements, choose, and perform the appropriate behaviors. Dichotomizing skills and knowledge will not provide insight into this process.

NOTES

¹See, for example, Claudia L. Hale, "Cognitive Complexity-Simplicity as a Determinant of Communication Effectiveness," *Communication Monographs*, 47 (1980), 304-311; Claudia L. Hale and Jesse G. Delia, "Cognitive Complexity and Social Perspective Taking," *Communication Monographs*, 43 (1976), 195-203.

²James C. McCroskey, "Communication Competence and Performance: A Research and Pedagogical Perspective," *Communication Education*, 31 (1982), 1-7.

Donald J. Cegala
The Ohio State University

Overall, I believe McCroskey's¹ essay on the distinction between competence and performance serves a useful purpose for researchers in the field.² It seems that any time researchers can agree on the meaning of important terms, their work has been advanced. For that reason I hope the field adopts the basic distinction that McCroskey proposes. However, I do not think the community should accept McCroskey's definitions for competence and performance (i.e., skill) unless he can reconcile an apparent inconsistency in his argument for divorcing the concept of effectiveness from these terms. We are told early on in his essay that effectiveness is "excess baggage" that leads only to confusion and error. Yet, McCroskey ultimately seems to define competence and skill in terms of effectiveness.

Following Larson, Backlund, Redmond and Barbour,³ he defines competence as "the ability of an individual to demonstrate knowledge of the appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation"; and he defines skills as, "the ability of an individual to perform appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation." However, in footnote 7 we are told that "communication behavior is 'appropriate' if it is the most likely (or one of the most likely) behavioral choice (sic) to lead to a positive outcome." What is a "positive outcome" if not an effect? True, McCroskey did not say "results" in a positive outcome, but rather leads to one. Still, he seems to be skirting the issue—we still must ultimately address the question of effectiveness in some way. Even McCroskey toward the end of his essay identifies effectiveness as the ultimate goal of communication instruction.

It seems to me as researchers and teachers we cannot entirely separate the concept of effectiveness from our concern about competence and performance, however difficult the problems posed by the concept of effectiveness. I suggest that we accept McCroskey's argument for a basic distinction between competence and performance and set about the business of seeking an understanding of how these dimensions of communication behavior relate to individuals and situations. Certainly communicative competence and/or performance may not *always* result in effectiveness, but it seems reasonable to expect such knowledge and skill to increase the chances of reasonably consistent effectiveness.⁴ This viewpoint of effectiveness (i.e., as probability) allows us to learn from the accurate predictions of our theories, but we must also seek understanding of why our predictions fail.

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¹James C. McCroskey, "Communication Competence and Performance: A Research and Pedagogical Perspective," *Communication Education*, 31 (1982), 1-7.

²Also see Lynne Kelly, "A Rose By Any Other Name Is Still A Rose: A Comparative Analysis of Reticence, Communication Apprehension, Unwillingness to Communicate and Shyness," *Human Communication Research*, 8 (1982), 99-113.

³Carl E. Larson, Philip M. Backlund, Mark K. Redmond and Alton Barbour, *Assessing Communicative Competence* (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association and ERIC, 1978).

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