

COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION AMONG JAPANESE STUDENTS IN NATIVE AND SECOND LANGUAGE

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Previous research has indicated that in some cultures communication apprehension concerning speaking in a second language is much higher than speaking in the native language. It has been suggested that such high levels of communication apprehension may impede learning of a second language and/or being willing to communicate in that language. The present study examined levels of communication apprehension among Japanese students in speaking Japanese and English. The results indicate extremely high communication apprehension in native Japanese students in both languages. Implications for second language instruction are drawn.

Communication Apprehension (CA) and related constructs such as reticence, unwillingness to communicate, shyness, and predisposition to communicate, have received extensive research and theoretical attention over the past two decades by scholars in communication and psychology. A recent bibliography of publications and papers in this area (Payne and Richmond, 1984) lists almost 1000 entries. Many other studies, particularly those reported since 1983, are not included.

The number of scholarly efforts directed toward CA and related constructs suggests this is one of the areas in communication which has been of prime concern in recent years. While most of the research has been conducted by scholars trained in the communication field and has focused on CA in the general U.S. culture, much CA research and writing has appeared in other academic

fields (such as clinical psychology, social psychology, counseling psychology, pharmacy, business, education, nursing, English, linguistics, medicine, and foreign languages). Research has been conducted in many areas outside the U.S. mainland, including Hawaii, Japan, Micronesia, Korea, Australia, Sweden, Germany, England, China, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Israel, India, the Philippines and Finland.

CA is currently defined as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977; 1984). Of particular importance to this research, such communication may occur in a person's native language or in a second language.

Recently, some attention has been directed toward CA in second language communication (Fayer, McCroskey & Richmond, 1984) and in second language instruction (Lucas, 1984; McCroskey, Fayer & Richmond, 1985). This attention has been prompted by the speculation that since CA has clearly been established as a primary

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reason for communication avoidance and communication disruption in a first language, it may be even more important in preventing people from communicating in a second language and disrupting their communication when they do. In addition, it is suspected that CA may serve to inhibit the learning of a second language because the apprehensive individual may be unwilling to engage in the practice in the language necessary to its mastery. As Lucas (1984) puts it

"...if international students are apprehensive about speaking their own language, their fear of communicating in English must be magnified tenfold. In addition, even those international students who are not apprehensive about speaking in their own language can become apprehensive about speaking in English. As a matter of fact, although foreign students often claim that one of their main goals is to get to know and establish friendships with Americans, in actuality, they secure emotional stability and find support by associating with their own countrymen." (p. 594)

Research conducted in Puerto Rico strongly supports the speculation advanced by Lucas (Fayer, et al., 1984; McCroskey, et al., 1985). In this research it was found that while only approximately 11 percent of the Puerto Rican students surveyed reported experiencing high CA when speaking Spanish (their first language), approximately 43 percent reported high CA when speaking in English, their second language. This difference appears in spite of the fact that English is a universal requirement at every grade level in the schools of Puerto Rico.

The present study. The research conducted in Puerto Rico, as noted above, indicated dramatic differences in CA levels between speaking in a native language and speaking in a second language. The generalizability of this finding to other cultures, however, may be very limited due to the observed level of CA in the first language in the Puerto Rican culture. Of all the cultures from which data have been drawn to date, these results indicate the lowest CA in a first language. Whether such differences can be observed in cultures in which more

CA generally is experienced in a first language is questionable. It is highly probable that CA in a first language establishes a baseline for CA in any other language. That is, few people are likely to be less apprehensive in their second language than they are in their first language.

In order to examine this question we obtained data from subjects native to a culture in which previous research has indicated higher CA levels are the norm--Japan. Research has indicated that Japanese college students report the highest levels of CA of any group in the Pacific Basin (Klopf, 1984) and substantially higher than levels on the U.S. mainland. It should be noted that the students in the research cited by Klopf were drawn primarily from Japanese universities where the study of English is encouraged, so the levels reported by those subjects might actually be even lower than the typical Japanese college student, much less the average Japanese non-student. For our purposes, then, Japanese college students provide an ideal subject population. They represent the opposite end of the continuum from the students studied in Puerto Rico. If results for this group should be similar to the results obtained in Puerto Rico, we could generalize to other cultures with much more confidence than we can with the Puerto Rican results alone. Divergent results, on the other hand, would indicate the need for much more cautious generalization.

Our specific research question was "Do Japanese college students report higher communication apprehension about speaking in English than they do about speaking in Japanese?"

Method. The subjects in this study were 209 Japanese students attending Nihon University. The students all had extensive instruction in English as a second language. The data were collected as a part of a broader investigation. The measure was included with a number of other instruments so as not to call specific attention to it.

The measure of communication apprehension was the PRCA-Short Form

(McCroskey, 1978). It was presented in Japanese to avoid any possible contamination as a function of differing English reading skills. The PRCA has been successfully employed in translated form previously (Klopf, 1984) and has been found to have good reliability and validity (McCroskey, 1978). Approximately half of the subjects were asked to complete the instrument with regard to how they feel when speaking in Japanese ($n = 105$) and the other half with regard to how they feel when speaking in English ($n = 104$). Instructions were presented in writing so that subjects were unaware that others might be responding to the instrument differently. In all other respects, the research instrument was identical for the two groups.

RESULTS

The obtained results indicated a mean score of 37.7 for the students when speaking in Japanese and a mean score of 38.5 when speaking in English. Although the English mean is slightly higher than the Japanese mean, the difference is far from statistical significance ($t = .97, p > .30$). The a priori power of this test with the available sample size was above .99 for both moderate and large effect size. The standard deviation for both conditions was approximately 6.3 which is virtually identical to that obtained in a sample of approximately 10,000 subjects from the U.S. mainland. The mean for the U.S. mainland subjects speaking English (no second language data were obtained) was approximately 27.6. Thus the Japanese students in this sample reported extremely higher CA than their American counterparts. The 10 point difference represents a full scale unit of difference (10 items, 5-point Likert-type scale).

The magnitude of the differences observed in the present data compared to other groups studied is illustrated in Table 1. This table reports the percentage of subjects classified as low, moderate, and high communication apprehensives, based on U.S. mainland norms, for the present sample, a Puerto Rican sample ($N = 661$), and

sample from West Virginia University ($N = 12,418$), a mainland U.S. sample of students enrolled in schools of Pharmacy in 52 universities ($N = 10,233$), and a sample of Oriental students drawn from the larger Pharmacy group ($N = 467$).

TABLE 1

Percentage of Subjects Reporting High, Moderate, and Low CA in Japan and Comparison Samples

Sample	CA LEVEL		
	High	Moderate	Low
Japan			
Japanese	72.6	27.4	0.0
English	74.5	25.5	0.0
Puerto Rico			
Spanish (sample 1)	10.5	57.1	32.4
Spanish (sample 2)	11.8	60.3	27.9
English (sample 1)	42.9	44.6	12.5
English (sample 2)	43.2	46.2	10.6
Pharmacy			
Total Group	19.6	60.5	19.9
Oriental Subjects	30.4	68.0	16.0
WVU	16.0	68.0	16.0

DISCUSSION

The obtained results indicate that Japanese students have dramatically higher levels of CA than any other group studied, including Oriental students in the mainland U.S. The fact that there is no significant difference for these students speaking in Japanese and in English may be interpreted in two ways.

We could interpret these results as indicating the students' second language instruction has been as effective as might be considered possible in terms of apprehension about speaking a second language. If our assumption is correct that CA in a first language sets a baseline for CA in a second language, we could hardly expect a more positive result than the no significant difference we observed. English as a Second Language (ESL) programs are based on the

grammar-translation method of teaching and testing. They, therefore, tend to be ineffective in accomplishing their major goal—producing individuals who can communicate effectively in English.

It may be that this is not due to the method of teaching in the Japanese ESL programs but rather it may be due to the culture of Japan itself, as suggested by Lucas (1984). The desire to maintain a positive cultural identity also may play a role. Hildebrandt and Giles (1980) point out that “the prevailing attitudes toward speaking English in Japan would tend to discourage confidence and encourage the feeling of ‘shyness’ professed by Japanese in foreign language interactions. This lack of confidence would further enhance the need for differentiation from the outgroup (native English speakers) to increase a positive cultural identity” (p. 78); for example, by being reticent.

The fact remains that approximately three fourths of the students in this sample are classified as high communication apprehensives in both Japanese and English. The scores for Japanese speaking English may have been slightly lower if the PRCA had been administered in English. Subjects tend to assume that questionnaires in Japanese will be read by a Japanese and questionnaires in English will be read by a native English speaker. Research suggests that subjects converge to some degree toward their perceptions of the researcher’s expectations when harmonious relations exist and diverge from the researcher when relations are hostile (Bord & Cheung, 1984). With respect to communication apprehension, this suggests Japanese would report less apprehension about speaking English when the instrument is in English than when it is in Japanese. Previous research using the PRCA in English tends to support this interpretation (i.e., data summarized by Klopff, 1984). In either case, the level of apprehension reported is higher than any other group studied to date.

While such a high level of CA may indeed not be a handicap for people living in Japan with its positive cultural value for reticence,

it may be devastating for the individual who wishes to study or do business in English abroad. The solution to this potential problem for the ESL teacher seems to be in helping the Japanese student reduce their CA, not only in English, but also in Japanese. It would appear that CA in English cannot be reduced substantially more than it is being reduced now, since it rests on the Japanese CA baseline. Simply making the Japanese student more comfortable in the ESL class, as recommended by Lucas (1984), while not harmful, simply will not accomplish the objective.

A note of caution, however, is essential. Programs to reduce CA in Japanese students must take care not to conflict with the cultural norms of the nation. These norms do not value talkativeness. They do value reticence. Students must learn that to be less apprehensive does not mean to greatly increase verbal output. It simply means that the individual will be less fearful and inhibited to communicate when it is appropriate to communicate. Such an approach will help the student to adapt to the different communicative demands of Japanese and English speaking cultures.

Finally, it is clear that the results of the earlier research in Puerto Rico cannot be generalized universally across cultures. Speaking in a second language does not necessarily significantly increase an individual’s level of CA. Rather it would appear that CA in one’s native language may be the primary determinate of the minimal level of CA that person will experience in a second language. Efforts to reduce CA in a second language and hence improve an individual’s level of effectiveness in that language must take the individual’s level of CA in her or his first language into account. If the level of CA in the first language is high, it must be reduced before the individual can be expected to become effective in the second language.

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