

Correlates of Quietness: Swedish and American Perspectives

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This study examined the means of and correlations between perceptions of willingness to communicate, communication apprehension, communication competence, and introversion of college students in the United States and Sweden. Comparisons indicated differences in the perceptions reported by students from the two cultures. Swedish students report themselves to be more competent and introverted but less willing to communicate than American students. Reports of communication apprehension were not significantly different. The results are interpreted as limiting generalizability of the monocultural research conducted in this area in the U.S.

KEY CONCEPTS Intercultural communication, communication apprehension, willingness to communicate, communication competence, introversion, PRCA

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The development of human communication theory in the United States has been based in large part on empirical research involving subjects representing the mainstream U.S. culture, mostly undergraduate college students. This threat to the external validity of such research and theorizing has been recognized by many researchers, but the proposed solution to the problem frequently has consisted only of recommendations to examine other samples of the population to test generalizability. The fact such samples would still reflect the basic culture of the U.S. has only infrequently been acknowledged.

While the development of communication theory which would only generalize to the U.S. population would still be of value, the tendency to assume what is true of people in the U.S. is true of people in other parts of the world is representative of the general ethnocentricity of Americans. Unfortunately, this fault does not characterize only citizens of the U.S. Most humans are ethnocentric, whatever their national origin.

With the advent of the "cybercultural revolution" (Harris & Moran, 1979) the potential for negative impact from such ethnocentrism has expanded geometrically. In only a few decades more scientific and technological advances have been forthcoming than in all of the previous centuries of recorded history. With radio and television

signals being beamed around the world via satellite, instant contact between cultures is now possible. With telephonic and fax technology becoming widely available and at reduced cost, personal intercultural contact is now a daily fact of life for literally millions of people. The forecast "global village" (Barnlund, 1975) is contemporary reality. We are rapidly learning that not all "villagers" are alike. As Myung-Seok Park noted in his keynote address to the World Communication Association Convention in 1983,

"every new reduction in physical distance has made us more painfully aware of the psychic distance that divides people. Real or imagined differences become aggravated with the increased contact, making it imperative for us to attempt a more concentrated effort to get along with and understand people whose beliefs and backgrounds may be vastly different than our own" (cited in Klopff, 1987, p. i).

Hall (1959) notes that many of our intercultural communication difficulties stem from the fact that so little is known about how to communicate with people in other countries. Obtaining knowledge about the communicative styles and orientations of persons in other cultures will help us to recognize and control behaviors and orientations considered appropriate in our own culture which may be offensive to a person from another culture. It can also help to avoid misinterpreting the communication behaviors and orientations of people from other cultures. It is important, therefore, that we examine interculturally those factors which have been found to have significant influence on communication behavior in our own culture.

One of these, communication apprehension (CA) and its related constructs of shyness, predisposition towards communication, reticence, and unwillingness to communicate, have received considerable attention during the past two decades. Payne and Richmond (1984) compiled a bibliography of almost 1000 publications and convention papers, suggesting that these are constructs of primary research interest.

While much of the research in this area has centered on college student populations, sufficient research has involved other subgroups in the U.S. culture to indicate substantial generalizability of the conclusions drawn in this body of work. Although the focus has been principally on the mainland USA, CA research is available on Hawaii, Micronesia, Korea, Australia, Germany, England, Peoples' Republic of China, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Israel, India, the Philippines, Finland, and Taiwan (e.g. Barrclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988; Klopff, 1984; McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida, 1985), much of which reports that there are significant differences in communication apprehension between cultures. For example, Japanese students are more apprehensive than their American counterparts (Klopff, Cambra, & Ishii, 1983), and Puerto Ricans are less apprehensive about communicating than Mainland USA students (Fayer, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1984).

The research reported here is concerned with one of the constructs related to communication apprehension, that is, willingness to communicate, specifically across two cultures, Swedish and American. Significant correlations between subject's willingness to communicate and their level of apprehension have been observed (e.g. McCroskey & Baer, 1985), but the correlations have not been so large as to suggest these two constructs are the same thing. Indeed, people in culture "A" may be more apprehensive than people in culture "B," but that does not necessarily indicate the presence of similar differences in terms of willingness to communicate. A person may be less willing to communicate than others but not be apprehensive about communi-

cation. Introverts, for example, typically are less willing to communicate than are extroverts, but not all introverts are apprehensive about communication. Differences related to willingness to communicate among cultural groups may also exist as a function of introversion/extroversion, or some other factor, without the existence of comparable differences between the cultures on communication apprehension.

The present investigation focused on the willingness to communicate of Swedes, a cultural group which has been described as being introverted (Daun, 1985, 1987). The ethnology of Swedes is that they are "usually silent and uncommunicative people" (Daun, 1985). Watson, Monroe and Atterstrom (1984, 1989) found that Swedish children report they experience more communication apprehension overall than American children. Also, older children (ages 9-11) indicated a greater degree of apprehension than younger subjects (ages 5-8). The authors suggested that at least with Swedish children, communication apprehension increases with age. However, a pilot for the present investigation (conducted by Daun & McCroskey in 1986), in which 325 Swedish university students responded to the PRCA-20 (McCroskey, 1970), indicated no significant differences between college age Swedish students and American students.

The monocultural research in the United States consistently has pointed to a substantial correlation between apprehension and both the dispositional orientation of willingness to communicate and actual quantity of communication behavior. Causation has been assumed, such that the higher the observed apprehension level, the less observable communication behavior would be expected (Daly & Stafford, 1984). Hence, it is curious that the levels of communication apprehension between two cultures such as those of Sweden (an introverted culture) and the United States (an extroverted culture) should be observed to be so similar.

McCroskey and Richmond (1987) argue that communication apprehension is but one of several potential factors influencing an individual's willingness to communicate. Other factors, they note, include culture, introversion, self-esteem, and communication competence. Of particular concern here is their suggestion that culture may be a factor. Hence, the finding that college-age Swedes are neither more nor less apprehensive than Americans may not be unusual. That is, it may be that communication apprehension is more or less predictive of willingness to communicate as it interacts with different cultures.

This study sought to determine whether the pilot sample of Swedish students in the Daun & McCroskey study was an unusual group or whether Swedes are indeed quieter than Americans even though they are not more apprehensive. In this study willingness to communicate, introversion, and communication apprehension were measured. In addition, because the Self-Report of Communication Competence has been found to be highly predictive of willingness to communicate in American students and older American adults (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986 b,c), it was also used to determine whether that also is the case in Sweden.

The Variables Under Investigation

Before we consider the specific methodology of this research, we need to explain the nature of the variables being investigated.

Willingness to Communicate. Whether a person is willing to communicate with another person in a given interpersonal encounter is affected by the situational constraints of that encounter. Many situational variables can have an impact. How the person feels that day, what communication the person has had with others recently,

who the other person is, what the person looks like, what might be gained or lost through communicating, and what other demands on the person's time are present can all have a major impact, as can a wide variety of other elements not mentioned here.

Willingness to communicate, then, is to a major degree situationally dependent. Nevertheless, individuals exhibit regular willingness to communicate tendencies across situations. Consistent behavioral tendencies with regard to frequency and amount of talk have been noted in the research literature for decades (Borgatta & Bales, 1953; Chapple & Arensberg, 1940; Goldman-Eisler, 1951). Such regularity in communication behaviors across communication contexts suggest the existence of a personality orientation of the individual that transcends, yet interacts with, situational constraints. It is this personality orientation which explains why one person will *initiate* communication and another will not under identical or virtually identical situational constraints.

The present willingness to communicate construct (McCroskey & Richmond, 1985) has evolved directly from the earlier work of Burgoon (1976) on *unwillingness* to communicate; that of Mortensen, Arntson, and Lustig (1977) on predispositions toward verbal behavior; and that of McCroskey and Richmond (1982) on shyness. Since these works have been summarized and subjected to critical analysis elsewhere (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), we will not duplicate that effort here.

At present, the willingness to communicate construct includes both a predisposing personality trait and a situational precursor of communication behavior. The measure of the trait orientation, the Willingness to Communicate Scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) permits generation of subscores for types of communication (public speaking, meetings, small groups and dyads) and types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, and friends) as well as a total trait score.

While the scores generated by this scale have been found to be predictive of actual communication behavior (Chan & McCroskey, 1987; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1986), such is not the primary function of the instrument. Rather, the scores are intended to be predictive of an individual's willingness to communicate across a variety of communication situations, such situational willingness (a measure not available at the time of this writing) should be directly predictive of actual communication behavior. It should be noted that the current WTC measure relates to *initiation* of communication, rather than communication in response to either situational predispositions or actual communication behavior which comes as a response to communication of others.

Communication Competence. If a person believes he/she is not competent to perform a given behavior, it is likely the person will be less willing to attempt that behavior. This general proposition presumably applies to a broad range of human behaviors, including talking to other people. Phillips reports (1977, 1981, 1984) that the primary reason people give for being reticent or unwilling to communicate is that they are incompetent or unskilled in communication. It should be noted that these self-reported judgements are drawn from interviews with the reticent students, not from direct observations of the students' communication behaviors over a variety of contexts.

Whether actual incompetence or a person's self-perception of her/his own incompetence is the cause of reticence is not certain, but the person's self-perception seems critical. For example, Kelly (1983) found in an observational study that trained

observers could not distinguish behaviorally between subjects identified as reticent or non-reticent. However, in McCroskey and McCroskey's (1986 b,c) studies self-perceived competence was positively correlated with willingness to communicate. That is, generally the more competent people *perceive* themselves to be, at least in the American culture, the more willing they are to communicate, whether they actually *are* more competent or not. Our concern, here, then is with *self-perceptions* of communication competence, not external evaluations of communication behavior.

Communication Apprehension. Communication apprehension is "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1977, 1984). Numerous research studies have indicated that people who experience high levels of fear or anxiety about communication tend to avoid and withdraw from communication (Daly & Stafford, 1984; McCroskey, 1977). These findings were reinforced in research reported by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986 a,b) in which they found that communication apprehension was negatively related to willingness to communicate. At least in the American culture, then, people who are more apprehensive tend to be less willing to communicate.

Introversion. The construct of extroversion-introversion has received considerable attention from scholars in psychology for several decades (Eysenck, 1970, 1971). The constructs postulate a continuum between extreme extroversion and extreme introversion. The closer an individual is to the extroversion extreme, the more "people oriented" the person is likely to be. The more introverted the individual, the less need the individual feels for communication and the less value the person places on communicating. Introverts tend to be inner-directed and introspective. They tend to be less sociable and less dependent on others' evaluation than more extroverted people (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986 a).

Introverts are often categorized as quiet, timid, and shy. Other things being equal, they prefer to withdraw from communication. This may stem in part from anxiety about communication, since most measures of this construct include items indexing anxiety. However, the relationship between introversion and communication apprehension is modest ($r = .33$; Huntley, 1969). Numerous studies have indicated a relationship between introversion and communication behavior characteristic of people presumed to have a low willingness to communicate. McCroskey and McCroskey (1986) found introversion (with no anxiety items included) was negatively correlated ($r = -.29$) with willingness to communicate. That is, if a person's degree of introversion increases, at least in the American culture, her/his willingness to communicate decreases.

Introversion was considered especially important to consider in this investigation because it was the only related variable which the researchers had justification for predicting directional differences between the Swedish and American samples studied based on the differing ethnology of the two cultures. As noted previously, the Swedish culture is considered to be introverted while the American culture is considered to be extroverted. Hence, this research was guided by a general research question, inquiring as to whether there are any differences between subjects from the two cultures with regard to willingness to communicate, communication apprehension, and/or self-perceived communication competence, and an hypothesis that the Swedish subjects would report themselves as being more introverted than the American subjects.

Method

A total of 239 students enrolled in undergraduate classes at Stockholm University completed the instruments used in this study. The instruments were translated from English to Swedish and back-translated to insure accuracy. While it is never possible to be completely certain that translated instruments are culturally equivalent in both languages, the research team included people from both cultures. After extensive discussions between members of the team, no cultural differences in interpreting the items could be isolated. The instruments were administered at the beginning of the course to avoid any possible contamination from content in the course. Instruments were completed with no personal identification to insure anonymity and to increase the probability of honest responses. Data for the American sample were drawn from earlier reports of U.S. research. Preliminary analyses indicated gender was not meaningfully associated with any measure, thus it will not be considered further in this report.

Measures

All of the measures employed in this study were self-report scales. The measures employed are noted below:

Willingness to Communicate. The WTC Scale (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) was used as the operationalization of willingness to communicate. This is a 20-item instrument with 12 items composing the measure and eight filler items. Scores on the instrument have a potential range of 0 to 100. In a previous study (McCroskey & Baer, 1985), the internal (alpha) reliability reported for the total scale was .92. Reliabilities for the subscores for communication context ranged from .65 to .76. Reliabilities for the subscores for the types of receivers ranged from .74 to .82. In the present study, the reliability for the total scale was .91. Reliabilities for context subscores ranged from .60 to .72 while those for receiver subscores ranged from .74 to .82.

Self-Perceived Communication Competence. The SPCC Scale, developed by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986 c, 1988), was used as the operationalization of self-perceived communication competence. The SPCC scale consists of 12 items. Scores on the instrument have a potential range of 0 to 100. The items were selected to reflect four communication contexts (public speaking, talking in large meetings, talking in small groups, and talking in dyads) and three types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, and friends). The internal (alpha) reliability of the total scale in the earlier research (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988) was .92. The reliability of the scale in this investigation was .93. This scale has high face validity as a measure of self-perceived communication competence, since it involves asking subjects to directly estimate their own communication competence across a variety of contexts. It is *not* presumed, however, to be a valid measure of competence in actual communication behavior (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1988).

Communication Apprehension. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24, McCroskey, 1982) was used as the operationalization of communication apprehension. Four contexts included public speaking, speaking in large meetings, speaking in small groups, and speaking in dyads. Previous internal (alpha) reliability estimates reported for the total score have ranged from .91 to .96. In the present study the internal reliability estimate for the scale was .96.

Introversion. The measure used for introversion/extroversion was drawn from the work of Eysenck (1970, 1971). A total of eighteen items appeared on the instrument, 12 measuring introversion/extroversion and six neurotism items serving as fillers. The

same items were used as were included in the earlier study reported by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986 a). All items were selected from the pool of items by Eysenck. However, items which had a direct reference to anxiety about communication were excluded to avoid overlap with communication apprehension. The internal (alpha) reliability of the scale reported in the earlier research was .77. In the present study it was .78.

Data Analyses

The focus of the present investigation was on differences between data generated from subjects in the United States and Sweden. The data from earlier reports of research in the U.S. (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986 a,b,c) were used in these comparisons. Means for the current data were computed for each instrument. Similarly, correlations among total scores were computed for each instrument. Differences between means of U.S. and Sweden samples were tested for significance with t-tests. For differences between correlations, z-tests were computed. The criterion for significance was set at alpha .05.

Results

Table 1 reports the mean and standard deviation for each score on the WTC, SPCC, PRCA-24, and Introversion instruments for both the present sample (Sweden) and for comparable groups in previous U.S. studies. Also reported are the mean differences between the two cultural groups and the t-test for each difference. Since the t-test for the difference on the total PRCA-24 scores was not significant, the subscores on that instrument were disregarded in subsequent analyses.

As reflected in Table 1, the Swedish students were significantly less willing to

TABLE I Mean, Standard Deviation, and Mean Comparisons for Subscores and Total Scores on Measures

Measures	(U.S.) Mean	(U.S.) S.D.	(Sweden) Mean	(Sweden) S.D.	(U.S. X- (Sweden X)	t
WTC	63.1a	14.9	58.1	19.2	5.0	3.13*
Public	52.2	20.4	53.3	28.5	-1.1	.64
Meeting	59.3	18.6	52.2	24.3	7.1	3.80*
Group	68.1	16.4	63.3	22.3	4.8	2.90*
Dyad	72.9	15.8	63.3	20.1	9.6	6.16*
Stranger	35.6	21.3	37.4	22.9	-1.8	.97
Acquaintance	69.9	18.5	62.8	22.7	7.1	2.25*
Friend	83.9	14.0	73.8	21.0	10.1	6.52*
SPCC	73.7a	13.8	79.0	17.1	-5.3	3.66*
Public	68.8	17.8	70.4	24.1	-1.6	.90
Meeting	68.8	17.1	70.4	23.5	-1.6	.91
Group	76.1	14.6	83.0	18.6	-6.9	4.01*
Dyad	81.1	12.4	91.8	13.3	-10.7	9.81*
Stranger	55.5	23.6	66.9	23.2	-11.4	5.77*
Acquaintance	77.4	15.3	82.0	18.3	-4.6	6.05*
Friend	88.2	11.3	87.8	16.7	.4	.31
Introversion	19.0b	4.7	24.5	4.8	-5.5	12.23*
PRCA24	65.6c	15.3	63.4	17.6	2.2	1.43

*p < .05

a) n = 344

b) n = 216

c) normative U.S. data (McCroskey, Fayer, & Richmond, 1985).

communicate than the American students. They were also more introverted (as hypothesized) and saw themselves as more communicatively competent. The two groups did not, however, differ with regard to communication apprehension.

On the subscores for the WTC measure, Swedes were found to be less willing to communicate than the Americans in the contexts of meetings, groups, and dyads, as well as with receivers who were acquaintances or friends. The Swedes scored slightly higher than the Americans on the public speaking context and on talking with strangers, but the differences observed were not significant.

With regard to the SPCC, the Swedes reported perceiving themselves as significantly more communicatively competent than the Americans on the group and dyad context subscores as well as when talking to strangers and acquaintances. The differences between the groups were not significant for the other subscores.

Table 2 reports the observed correlations among the measures for the samples from the two cultures and the z-tests for significance of the differences between the correlations between cultures. All of the correlations for both cultural groups were

TABLE 2 Correlations Among Communication Measures

Measure	U.S. <i>r</i>	U.S. <i>n</i>	Sweden <i>r</i>	<i>z</i>
WTC/PRCA24	-.52	428	-.44	1.28
WTC/SPCC	.59	344	.44	2.44*
WTC/Introversion	-.29	242	-.43	1.76
PRCA24/SPCC	-.63	216	-.52	1.75
PRCA24/Introversion	.33	216	.40	.86
SPCC/Introversion	-.37	216	-.26	1.29

* $p < .05$

statistically significant. The correlation between introversion and WTC was somewhat higher for the Swedish group than the American, while the correlations of both communication apprehension and communication competence with WTC were higher for the American group than the Swedish group. Only the SPCC/WTC correlations were significantly different, however.

Discussion

The results of this investigation indicate the findings of the pilot study were not an aberration. Employing the most widely used version of the PRCA (PRCA-24) rather than the older version (PRCA-20), did not alter the findings with regard to communication apprehension. Apparently Swedish and American college students do not differ in the degree of fear or anxiety they characteristically feel about communication. This of course raises the question of how is it that Swedish children report to be more apprehensive than American children, as Watson et al. (1984, 1989) found. Are there cultural expectations for Swedish children that disappear once they reach adulthood that could influence the degree of fear experienced? Further research is needed on patterns of communication apprehension from childhood into adulthood.

It does appear, however, that adult Swedes and Americans hold substantially different orientations about communication. Although they see themselves as more competent as communicators than the Americans, the Swedes report they are less prone to initiate communication. It may be important to consider the fact that communication competence seems to be valued much more highly in mainstream

American culture than is the case in the Swedish culture. This is reflected in the stress which is placed on verbal performance in American schools and colleges, and that such an ability in most colleges even influences the formal grading of students. Such emphasis is unheard of in Sweden. Another indication, is the large quantity of research that has been conducted on speech anxiety and related constructs in the U.S., whereas very little interest in this area has been expressed in Sweden, where quietness and reticence are generally looked at as being more individual differences rather than problems (Daun, 1987).

This difference between the two cultures may paradoxically explain why Swedes reported perceiving themselves significantly more communicatively competent than did Americans. Perhaps, in the U.S., students perceive pressure from the cultural expectations of higher communication competence, which may make more Americans feel incompetent than is the case in Sweden, where students need to worry much less about this matter. Therefore, the very large difference in reported introversion appears to be the critical factor in this comparison between the two cultures. It appears the level of introversion within a culture can mediate the relationship of communication apprehension and/or perceived communication competence with willingness to communicate.

The present research, of course, was limited to two distinct cultures, ones which differ from each other in many ways in addition to those examined. Much research involving a wide variety of cultures is needed before firm conclusions may be drawn with confidence.

Given the above, it is critical to take care when generalizing about the relationships between willingness to communicate and other communication orientations. The present results suggest such relationships may be extremely culture-bound and non-generalizable from one culture to another.

The current results also suggest data concerning communication apprehension in a given culture may provide relatively little information about communication behavior of people in general in that culture without information about the culture's general orientation toward communication. Fear or anxiety is something a person experiences as an individual in a society, and may indeed impact that person's behavioral choices. The degree of quietness endorsed by a culture, however, may have an overpowering impact on the behavior of most people in that culture. The degree to which these orientations might impact communication behavior differentially among cultures remains to be determined. The present study focused on orientations toward communication, not actual behaviors. The study of willingness to communicate in various cultures may provide considerable insight into the cultural milieu within which actual behavioral choices with regard to communication must be made. Once such parameters are established it will be important to conduct controlled research on communication behavior in order to test culturally based theoretical predictions.

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