

Willingness to Communicate, Communication Apprehension, Introversion, and Self-Reported Communication Competence: Finnish and American Comparisons

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The purpose of this research was to make comparisons between Finnish persons and persons from other populations, particularly those from the United States, on a variety of common measures of communication orientations. The results of the study indicated that differences between Finnish and United States samples do exist, but the differences are primarily restricted to willingness to communicate and introversion. Data relating to communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence for the two cultures are remarkably similar. However, these two variables appear to be much less predictive of willingness to communicate for Finns than they are for Americans.

Central to the generation of human communication theory is the recognition that there are many varieties of humans. All of these various types of humans have one thing in common--they are basically ethnocentric. Their experience centers on interactions with other humans very much like themselves. They seek to understand the nature of humanity by observing the available humans in their immediate environment. The embodiment of such study is the resulting culture. It could be argued that the development of culture itself is the reflection of the interaction of similar human beings.

Much effort currently is being exerted, particularly in the United States and other Western democracies, in attempts to generate what has been called *human communication theory*. These efforts are driven socially by the assumption dating back to ancient rhetoric and articulated already in classical communication theories that effective communication is critical to the development and survival of democratic forms of government. The usually unspoken assumption is that through the study of the behavior of people who happen to reside in the immediate vicinity of the researcher it will be possible

to gain a solid understanding of how people interact and, hence, develop valid theories of human communication.

The above ontological assumption knows no methodological boundaries. Those conducting quantitative research, those conducting qualitative research, and those engaged in critical scholarship all appear to be driven by this underlying view. We may translate this assumption into a simpler form: "Humans are all alike, situations control behavior, so I can study the humans who happen to be available and what I learn will generalize to other humans."

The operation of this assumption in the United States long has been recognized in one particular form, the social scientist's dependence on college freshmen and sophomores as research subjects. Such research has been challenged because of its threat to external validity (e.g., Applbaum, 1985; McCroskey & Richmond, 1979; Miller, 1979; Zakahi & McCroskey, 1989). Only recently has potential generalizability of such research been strongly criticized for similar distortions as a function of gender or 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. Hence, the *human* communication theory generated by these scholars would better be described as the *caucasian Iowa* communication theory (you may substitute any other U. S. state for Iowa).

As an increasing number of non-U. S. scholars have become interested in some of the same research topics, awareness of the need for intercultural explorations has increased. That is not to say that most of the mainline communication scholars in the U. S. have integrated cultural concerns into their mainstream scholarship. They definitely have not. While some attention may be paid to ethnicity within the U. S., real cultural differences usually receive no attention at all.

Research in the areas of communication apprehension (CA), communication anxiety, communication competence, and other communication orientations has not escaped these ethnocentric biases. In the communication apprehension arena, there has been a longstanding bias toward Anglo-American culture. The overwhelming majority of studies has been conducted in the United States, where oral communication is highly appreciated with positive social evaluation as concomitant (McCroskey, 1982; McCroskey & Richmond, 1979; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987; Okabe, 1983). Consequently, remaining silent is considered a problem and silent cultures are interpreted as representing a high prevalence of communication apprehension.

With the notable exception of the early work by Klopff (1984) and his associates, it has been only recently that even a few researchers in these areas have taken culture into consideration (Lehtonen, 1984; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986). In addition to the mainland USA, CA research is available for Hawaii, Micronesia, Korea, Australia, Peoples' Republic of China, Puerto Rico, South Africa, Israel, India, the Philippines, and Taiwan (e.g., Barraclough, Christophel & McCroskey, 1988; Klopff, 1984).

Europeans' willingness to communicate or their likelihood to avoid oral interaction are less well known. Apart from single tests given in England, Germany, and Israel; only the prevalence of communication apprehension experienced by the Swedes (McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun & Richmond, 1990)

and communication reticence reported by the Finns (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986) and the Estonians (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1990) have been assessed thus far.

Where data have been obtained from multiple cultures, substantial differences attributable to culture have been observed. These differences have not, however, pointed to clear theoretical directions. Hence, it has been noted that additional research must be conducted in a variety of cultures to provide a data base from which initial culture-sensitive theoretical projections as to communication orientations can be generated. The present research was conducted as one step in the direction of providing that needed data base.

The culture chosen for this study was that of Finland. According to widely held stereotypes, the Finns are perceived as silent, timid, taciturn, shy, and introverted (Lehtonen & Sajavaara, 1985; Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986; 1988). Empirical evidence suggests that Finns persistently maintain these negatively loaded portraits and hold a low communicator image of themselves (Lehtonen, 1980; Sallinen-Kuparinen, Asikainen, Gerlander, Kukkola & Sihto, 1987).

In accordance with the above stereotypes, Finns are asserted to appreciate and tolerate silence (Lehtonen & Sajavaara, 1985; Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986; 1988). Contrary to these stereotypes, the prevalence of self-reported communicating reticence, conceptualized as a negative dispositional or situational affective response toward oral communication likely to restrict or inhibit one's interactive functions, fits the normal distribution. Compared to Estonians, the Finns report slightly but not significantly more communication reticence (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1990).

However, studies concerning communication-elicited arousal, operationalized by heart rate in public speaking contexts, suggest higher physiological arousal for Finns than for Americans (Sallinen-Kuparinen & Porhola, 1986; Porhola, 1991). Providing indirect insight into Finnish communication orientations, the Finns self-reported significantly higher trait argumentativeness than the Americans (Klopf, Thompson & Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1991), perceived themselves significantly more immediate than the Japanese (Ishii, Sallinen-Kuparinen, Klopf, Thompson, 1991), but as immediate as the Americans (Thompson, Klopf & Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1991). Characteristic of the Finns' social style, they perceive themselves as significantly less assertive and responsive than the Americans (Sallinen-Kuparinen, Thompson & Klopf, 1991), resembling the Japanese in their social style (Sallinen-Kuparinen, Thompson, Ishii, Park & Klopf, 1991).

Due to the heterogeneous nature of previous evidence as to Finns' communication orientations and different conceptualizations and operationalizations of communication apprehension employed, no direct hypotheses are offered in the present study. This study sought to determine whether Finns perceived themselves as quieter than Americans even though they might not be more apprehensive. The present study contributes to developing applied intercultural communication concepts and testing the validity of cross-cultural measurement techniques of communication orientations and replicability of previous studies concerning Finnish communication reticence.

METHODS

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. Thus, their use in this study provides the opportunity for comparisons among cultures. All of the measures were self-report scales which were translated from English to Finnish and back-translated to insure accuracy.

Measures

The four communication orientations chosen for consideration in this study were Willingness to Communicate (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987), Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1970; 1984), Self-Perceived Communication Competence (J. C. McCroskey & L. L. McCroskey, 1988b), and Introversion (Eysenck, 1970; 1971).

In monocultural studies in the United States it has been found, for instance, that communication apprehension is negatively related to willingness to communicate and that self-perceived competence is positively correlated with willingness to communicate (e.g., J. C. McCroskey & L. L. McCroskey, 1986a). Furthermore, studies have indicated that the relationship between introversion and communication is modest (Huntley, 1969) and that introversion is negatively correlated with willingness to communicate (J. C. McCroskey & L. L. McCroskey, 1986a). In sum, the results suggest a complex interrelatedness among various communication orientations.

Underlying the willingness to communicate construct is the assumption that it is a personality-based, trait-like predisposition which is relatively consistent across a wide variety of communication contexts and types of receivers (Richmond & McCroskey, 1992). To tap context-based and receiver-based predispositions, 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) are included in the measure. As a whole, the WTC Scale is a 20-item instrument with 12 items composing the measure and 8 filler items. The WTC measure generally has yielded internal (alpha) reliability estimates of .91 or above (McCroskey, 1992).

The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) taps four communication contexts (public speaking, speaking in large meetings, speaking in small groups, and speaking in dyads). Internal (alpha) reliability estimates have ranged from .91 to .96 (McCroskey et al., 1990).

The measure of communication competence employed was the Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scale (SPCC: J. C. McCroskey & L. L. McCroskey, 1988b). The SPCC consists of 12 items. Similar to the WTC, the items 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). In earlier studies, internal (alpha) reliability estimates of .92 (J. C. McCroskey & L. L. McCroskey, 1988b) and .93 (McCroskey et al., 1990) have been observed.

The measure of Introversion was a 12-item scale drawn from items recommended by Eysenck (1970; 1971) which was first employed by McCroskey

and Baer (1985). The reliability estimates of this measure have ranged between .69 and .79.

Subjects

The specific targets of study were college students at the University of Jyväskylä. Of the 249 participants, 75 (30.1%) were females and 174 (69.9%) males. No statistically significant differences attributable to gender were observed on any measure employed. Hence, results will be reported here only for the total sample.

RESULTS

The mean total score on each of the instruments, and subscores where appropriate, are reported in Table 1. Similar scores are reported for the U. S., Sweden, Australia, and Micronesia drawn from previous research reports (Australia: Barraclough, et al., 1988; Micronesia: Burroughs & Marie, 1990; Sweden: McCroskey, et al, 1990; U. S.: J. C. McCroskey & L. L. McCroskey, 1986a).

With regard to WTC scores, the Finnish students indicated they were less willing to communicate than all of the other groups except the Micronesians. They were substantially less willing to communicate with friends than any other group and less willing to interact with strangers and acquaintances than Americans, Swedes, and Australians.

In contrast, the Finnish students saw themselves as more communicatively competent than any other group, except the Swedes. In all cultures, the subjects perceived themselves as least competent in communicating with strangers and in performing publicly. Compared to Americans and Swedes, Finns considered themselves less competent in meetings and in public speaking encounters.

The Finnish mean on the PRCA was in the middle of the groups, with Australians and Micronesians reporting higher communication apprehension, while Swedes and Americans reported lower--although the Finnish and American scores were almost identical. The subscores revealed a series of differences. The incidence of communication apprehension in dyads was lower in Finland and Sweden than in Australia, Micronesia, and the United States. In contrast, Finns reported more communication apprehension engendered in meetings and small groups than all other groups except the Micronesians, but less communication apprehension in public speaking than any other group. Finally, only the Americans reported lower introversion scores than the Finns.

Overall mean comparisons indicate that the Finns are not particularly similar to any of the other groups. Rather, they are similar to various other groups on different measures. They are closest to Australians on willingness to communicate, to Micronesians on introversion, and to Americans on communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence.

TABLE 1
Mean Scores by Country

MEASURE	RANGE	FINLAND	USA	SWEDEN	AUSTRALIA	MICRONESIA
WTC	0-100	54.6	63.1	58.1	56.6	47.3
Public	0-100	51.8	52.2	53.3	46.0	47.0
Meeting	0-100	49.4	59.3	52.2	53.1	37.4
Group	0-100	59.8	68.1	63.3	63.3	55.2
Dyad	0-100	57.4	72.9	63.3	63.8	49.6
Stranger	0-100	35.1	35.6	37.4	38.8	22.9
Acquaintance	0-100	60.7	69.9	62.8	61.0	44.4
Friend	0-100	68.1	83.9	73.8	75.9	74.5
SPCC	0-100	74.9	73.7	79.0	67.3	49.0
Public	0-100	65.7	68.8	70.4	60.7	35.8
Meeting	0-100	68.0	68.8	70.4	61.9	39.4
Group	0-100	78.8	76.1	83.0	71.3	53.8
Dyad	0-100	86.9	81.1	91.8	75.4	57.3
Stranger	0-100	59.3	55.5	66.9	52.1	25.4
Acquaintance	0-100	80.5	77.4	82.0	68.2	43.7
Friend	0-100	84.8	88.2	87.8	81.7	77.8
Introversion	12-36	21.3	19.0	24.5	NA	21.8
PRCA-24	24-120	65.8	65.6	63.4	66.9	76.6
Public	6-30	18.1	19.9	19.5	19.7	21.7
Meeting	6-30	17.4	16.3	15.8	17.2	18.9
Group	6-30	16.7	15.3	15.0	15.5	17.3
Dyad	6-30	13.6	14.1	13.0	14.4	18.8

Correlations between total scores on the instruments are reported for the various groups in Table 2. The correlations for the Finns for the WTC and PRCA and for the WTC and SPCC were the lowest for any group yet studied. Overall, the pattern of correlations between the instruments for the Finns was more similar to those of the Swedes than for any other group.

TABLE 2
Correlations Among Measures by Country

MEASURES	FINLAND	USA	SWEDEN	AUSTRALIA	MICRONESIA
WTC/PRCA	-.39	-.52	-.44	-.49	-.52
WTC/SPCC	.41	.59	.44	.57	.80
WTC/Introversion	-.39	-.29	-.43	NA	-.40
PRCA/SPCC	-.59	-.63	-.52	-.64	-.49
PRCA/Introversion	.53	.33	.40	NA	.37
SPCC/Introversion	-.38	-.37	-.26	NA	-.36

DISCUSSION

As suggested in the review, characteristic descriptions of Finns typically include such terms as *reserved*, *quiet*, and *introverted* (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986). The results of the data obtained in this study are consistent with this picture. The scores obtained indicate that Finns are indeed less willing to communicate than people from most other cultures which have been studied. Bearing out indirectly an earlier speculation by Wiio (1979), while Finns do not score particularly high with regard to introversion, they are more introverted than people in the general North American culture.

It is particularly important to note that the average scores for Finns are very similar to the average scores from the U. S. on both communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence. With regards to the incidence of communication apprehension, although conceptualized and operationalized differently, the results are consistent with previous reports of communication reticence in a large and heterogeneous sample ($N = 1094$) comprising Finnish adults of the same age as in the present study (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986). Contrary to this, the results concerning self-perceived communication competence are not in accordance with a low communicator image internalized by Finns, thus raising a question about the relationship between self-perceived competence and communicator image meritorious of future research.

The PRCA scores or the SPCC scores predict only about 16 percent of the variance in the Finn's WTC scores. This compares to prediction potential for the PRCA and SPCC of 26 and 35 percent respectively for the WTC of the U. S. sample.

Earlier theoretical speculations, based solely on U. S. data, pointed strongly to communication apprehension and self-perceived combination competence as powerful predictors of willingness to communicate (J. C. McCroskey & L. L. McCroskey, 1986a). Clearly, some aspects of culture provide a strong mediational impact on such a relationship. The results lend support to Sallinen-Kuparinen's (1986) hypothesis that in the Finnish culture, not being willing to communicate is not so much accounted for by communication apprehension as by other sociocultural variables, such as the role of talk in

society and values placed on communication. In verbal cultures, remaining silent presents a problem; in cultures with a high tolerance of silence, the same overt behavior is socially more acceptable and the perceptions of a person's competence are not predominantly based on his or her verbal behavior.

One of the most striking results was that the Finns were less prone to initiate communication with friends than any other group. At first glance this seems to contradict previous results suggesting that Finns are most talkative when communicating in informal encounters with persons they know (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986). However, given the notation that Finns appreciate ties of friendship more than do people in the other Nordic countries, are to a great extent dependent on what others think of them (see Daun, Mattlar & Alanen, 1989), and report, concomitantly, a high incidence of socio-affective concerns (Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1986), one might hypothesize that the importance of communication between friends raises a person's threshold for engaging in interaction.

The result that the level of communication apprehension in meetings and small groups is higher for the Finns than for the Americans can be interpreted as illustrating socio-affective concerns. Because meetings are highly valued as a decision making form in Finland and because behavior in meetings is guided by scripts, concerns about following formal procedures are likely to engender communication apprehension.

Additional research is needed to assess the validity of communication orientation measures when employed cross-culturally. It is critical that additional data sets, similar to the present one but drawn from highly variable cultures, be collected in order to establish the validity of the constructs and measures being used. First, additional research is needed to isolate those cultural factors which impact the relationships analyzed in the present study.

Communication is recognized as central to the development of human relationships. Most likely this assumption is a pancultural truism. However, the specific communication demands and expectations are a function of the culture in which one is raised. What are recognized as "individual differences" within a given culture are impacted by culture itself, and the valence of evaluation of these differences are a function of the culture in which one lives or visits. As a person approached a culture other than her/his own, the way she/he evaluates *individual difference* variables in that culture will be based on the individual's own culture unless differences between cultures can be isolated and taught to such intercultural communicators. In the absence of such research and instruction intercultural miscommunication will continue as the norm for most people.

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