

Self-Perceived Communication Competence in the Thai Culture

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As intercultural communication and communication competence studies continue to develop, an understanding of how different cultures value these components of human communication is of considerable importance. This study focuses on Thai culture values related to self-perceived communication competence. Several measures of Thai students' self-perceptions of their own competence in several contexts of communication were obtained—public speaking, meeting, group, dyad, stranger, acquaintance, and friendship. Responses were obtained from over 300 Thai college students. The results indicated that Thai students feel most competent when communicating with acquaintances and/or in a small group. They report feeling somewhat less competent when talking with friends or in meetings. However, they report feeling least competent when communicating in a public speaking setting or talking with strangers. Studies similar to this one, but with participants from other cultures, are needed to prepare people who are going to be called on to communicate in intercultural contexts.

Keywords: Communication Competence; SPCC; Thai Culture

The concern with “communication competence” predates even the work of Aristotle. Many rhetorical scholars in antiquity offered theories intended to explain what it would take to be a competent communicator. For many centuries virtually all of these concerns were directed toward public speaking. It was not until the middle of the 20th century that U.S. scholars began seriously to consider the nature of competence in other communication contexts.

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By the 1960s several speech and/or communication scholars became interested in communication competence. Several journal articles dealing with topics such as "persuasion," "interpersonal communication," "self-disclosure," "evidence," "empathy," "rhetorical sensitivity," and "social influence" appeared in the literature. All of these, and several others, referred to constructs dealing with being a competent communicator.

By 1980 many communication scholars were publishing articles directed toward the definition of and/or nature of communication competence (CC). There were many definitions advanced in the literature, and they were very different from each other. To this day, there is no definition accepted by a majority of communication scholars.

In reviewing this literature it is clear that different scholars are talking about different constructs. One group sees CC as a matter of whether a communicator accomplishes her/his communicative goal. Another group sees CC as a matter of whether a communicator has the knowledge of the means to be an effective communicator (Aristotle's view). A third group sees CC as a matter of whether the communicator has sufficient skills to be an effective communicator. Still another group sees CC as a matter of whether the communicator has a high score on a questionnaire created by the researcher which he/she thinks is evidence of competence. The final group prefers a measure which is designed to determine how competent the respondent thinks he/she is. (For a more detailed discussion of these orientations, see McCroskey, 1982.)

The current research is based on the latter approach. This view was advanced by McCroskey & McCroskey (1988). It was chosen because research has determined how competent a person thinks he/she is at communicating (in various contexts and with various others) is a prominent factor in determining whether that person will choose/not choose to communicate in the various communication contexts and with various people. Several studies have been reported which have determined that self-perceived communication competence is highly predictive of willingness to communicate in both the U.S. and in some other cultures (e.g. Barraclough, Christophel, & McCroskey, 1988; Burroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2002; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Sallinen-Kuparinen, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1991).

Previous research has indicated that self-reports of communication competence vary as a function of the sample tested in the U.S. (typical college students, African American students, Hispanic students, Euro-American students, at-risk students, and gifted students, see Table 1) and samples from different cultures (U.S., Finland, Sweden, Australia, Micronesia, see Table 2).

As the above listings indicate, many cultures have not been tested. No participants have been tested in South America, Africa, or the mainland of Asia, much less the various cultures within any of these continents. The goal of this program of research is to obtain data from all continents (except Antarctica, for obvious reasons) and as many cultures on the various continents as feasible. Ultimately, this data will provide information which may lead to greater understanding of how and why people in the various cultures communicate the ways they do.

Table 1 Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scores: U.S. Studies.

Study	Sample N	Average Score
J. C. & L. L. McCroskey, 1988	346	73.7
Richmond et al., 1989		
Study 1 (Freshmen)	216	73.3
Study 2 (Adult Learners)	30	75.0
*Chesebro et al., 1992		
White students	162	71.1
Black students	1331	61.8
Hispanic students	317	57.2
Comparison Group	2,441	74.2
Rosenfeld et al., 1995	212	
Gifted		78.8
At-risk		61.3

*At risk students.

Table 2 Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scores: International Studies.

Country	Sample N	Average Score
Sweden	239	79.0
Finland	249	74.9
USA	344	73.7
Thailand	346	68.4
Australia	195	67.3
Micronesia (first language)	131	60.1
Micronesia (second language)	131	48.8

Students from several schools in Thailand were chosen to participate in the current study. Thailand was chosen because its culture is dramatically different than that of the U.S., Europe, and Australia. Those three cultures represent similar orientations, whereas the Thailand culture is thought to be more similar to some other Asian cultures. Our research questions were:

- RQ1: How do overall scores on self-perceived communication competence in Thailand compare with those of other available cultures?
- RQ2: How does the ordering of the sub-scores on self-perceived communication competence in Thailand compare with those of other available cultures?

Method

Participants

Participants were 346 students (42% female, 58% male) enrolled as undergraduates in colleges in Bangkok, Thailand. All participants were Thai natives and speak their

native language. The responses from a small number of students who completed the questionnaires who did not meet the above qualifications were discarded. All but a few of the students were between 20 and 25 years of age.

Measure

We recognize there is no single measure that will be accepted by a majority of communication scholars as *the* CC measure. That is because we are dealing with very different constructs, and no instrument can serve as the single measure for all of these constructs.

The *Self-Perceived Communication Competence* (SPCC) instrument was used as the operationalization of self-perceived communication competence. This instrument was developed and reported by McCroskey and McCroskey (1988). It has 12 items that generate scores for four communication contexts (public speaking, meetings, small groups, dyads) and scores for three types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, and friends). The Alpha reliability estimate for this instrument in the current study was 0.88.

The original study involved 344 U.S. college students as participants. The Alpha reliability (.92) was observed to be very strong. This instrument has been employed in several studies in the U.S. (Alpha .85), at-risk students (Alpha .92); gifted students (Alpha .92); 130 U.S. college students (Alpha .92), and other countries, including Sweden (Alpha .91), Finland (Alpha .93), Micronesia (twice, Alpha .89, .90), and Australia (Alpha .96).

The face validity of the instrument is strong, since the relationships among the seven sub-scores of the instrument were in the exact order anticipated for U.S. citizens in all U.S. studies. The results of other studies provide more validity data (Barraclough et al., 1988; Burroughs et al., 2002; Chesebro et al., 1992; McCroskey, Burroughs, Daun, & Richmond, 1990; McCroskey & Richmond, 1990; Rosenfeld, Grant, & McCroskey, 1995; Richmond, McCroskey, & McCroskey, 1989; Sallinen-Kuparinen et al., 1991).

The SPCC measure was translated from English to Thai by two individuals who speak both Thai and English. It then was back-translated from Thai to English by two other similar individuals. The translation process was near perfect. This is consistent with the translation/back-translation method in previously reported research using the SPCC measure.

Results

Table 3 reports the means, standard deviations, and Alphas for the total SPCC scores and the sub-scores for the four communication contacts and for the three types of audience. For the purpose of comparison, the data for a large U.S. sample is paired with the Thai data for the Thai participants.

Our first research question was "How do overall scores on the SPCC in Thailand compare with those of other cultures?" The answer is that the overall SPCC scores for

Table 3 Self-Perceived Communication Competence Scores: U.S. and Thailand Comparison.

Sub scores	Alpha Reliability		Mean*		SD	
	Thai	U.S.	Thai	U.S.	Thai	U.S.
Context						
Public	0.76	0.72	63.5	68.8	16.7	17.8
Meeting	0.65	0.68	67.1	68.8	15.1	17.1
Group	0.60	0.67	69.8	76.1	14.9	14.6
Dyad	0.56	0.44	73.3	81.1	14.1	12.4
Receiver						
Stranger	0.86	0.87	50.8	55.5	24.5	23.6
Acquaintance	0.72	0.84	79.9	77.1	18.2	15.3
Friend	0.71	0.78	74.7	88.2	18.6	14.3
Total SPCC	0.88	0.92	68.4	73.3	13.0	13.8

the Thailand participants are slightly lower than those for the U.S. ($t = 3.31$, $p < 0.05$). While this difference is statistically significant, this is a small difference (about five percent) which suggests there may not be as meaningful a difference in self-perceived communication competence between these two populations as we anticipated.

Our second research question was "How do sub-scores on self-perceived communication competence in Thailand compare with those of other available cultures?" The results for the sub scores relating to the communication contexts indicated that the Thai scores were in the same order as those in the U.S. The results for the sub-scores relating to the audience, however, indicated a difference between Thai and U.S. respondents. While the Thai and U.S. participants were in the same order for communicating with strangers, they reversed the order for acquaintance and friend audiences. U.S. respondents perceived themselves as more competent when communicating with friends than acquaintances. In contrast, Thai respondents perceived themselves as more competent when talking to acquaintances than when talking to friends.

Discussion

As indicated in Table 2, the self-perceived communication competence scores for the cultures indicate a substantial range— from 79.0 for Sweden to 60.1 for Micronesia (first language). Thailand and the U.S. are in the middle of the range. These results indicate that there is about 20 points between the cultures that see themselves as the most competent communicators and the cultures that see themselves as the least competent communicators.

Previous research has indicated that self-perceived communication competence is a strong predictor of willingness to communicate. Obtained correlations between

SPCC and WTC in previous research (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990) have ranged from 0.44 (Sweden) to 0.80 (Micronesia), with the U.S. (0.59) and Australia (0.57) in between. Clearly, people in cultures which are high in SPCC are more willing to communicate and people in cultures which are lower in SPCC are less willing to communicate. Thus, at this point, we should anticipate that other cultures also would exhibit this relationship. However, confirmation of this relationship in future research is needed, because it is quite possible that this does not hold true for some other cultures.

Future research should also consider the relationship between SPCC and WTC when communicating in a language other than one's first language. While it is reasonable to anticipate that communicators would be lower in both SPCC and WTC when speaking in a second language, that assumption has only been tested in Micronesia, where it was confirmed (Burroughs & Marie, 1990; Burroughs et al., 2002). Interestingly, in that research it was found that communication apprehension scores were exactly the same for both first and second languages.

Research relating to communication traits in various cultures such as those considered here (and others) is still in its infancy. While communication trait research is expanding in the U.S., and several theories relating to the impact of traits on communication in English in the U.S. have been advanced, comparatively little research on communication traits in diverse cultures has been reported. If we are to generate truly "human" communication theories, it is incumbent on communication scholars to pay attention to the traits of humans in other cultures as well as those residing in the U.S.

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