AN INVESTIGATION OF SELF-PERCEIVED COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND PERSONALITY ORIENTATIONS

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On the basis of previous research the validity of self-reports of communication competence is questioned. Results of two studies indicate that self-perceptions of communication competence are strongly related to communication apprehension and have moderate relationships with self-esteem, introversion, and sociability. Implications for future research are suggested and results are also interpreted with regard to pedagogical implications.

THE purpose of this investigation was to examine the relationships among self-perceived communication competence and personality-type variables previously found to be associated with communication behavior. This research was designed as a follow-up to the work of McCroskey and McCroskey (1988). Their research indicated that self-perceived communication competence is substantially associated with an individual's willingness to communicate and, hence, is suspected to be a significant casual factor in individual's behavioral choices with regard to communication. Therefore, this study is an extension of the examination of relationships between self-perceived communication competence and other personality-type variables.

This research was designed to explore the degree to which several personality-type variables previously found to be associated with communication behavior are related to self-perceived communication competence. The investigation was also designed to replicate the work of McCroskey and McCroskey (1986a) which found that self-perceived communication competence was substantially related to an individual's willingness to communicate.

The research questions posed for this investigation were:

RQ_1 To what extent are individual personality-type orientations predictive of self-perceived communication competence?

RQ_2 To what extent are personality-type orientations collectively predictive of self-perceived communication competence?

METHOD

This investigation was divided into two studies. The first study involved 216 undergraduate college students (112 female, 104 male) enrolled in freshman level courses in interpersonal communication at West Virginia University. Data were collected on the first day of class before any instruction in communication was undertaken. The second study involved 130 students (97 female, 33 male; age range 22-63, mean age of 37.2) enrolled in graduate classes in instructional communication at West Virginia University. Data were collected on the first day of class before any instruction was undertaken. The main difference

between the two studies, other than the samples involved, was the number of measures which were taken. Since the class periods were longer in the second study, more measures could be taken. In both studies the subjects were simply asked to complete the self-report instruments anonymously. All instructions were included on the instruments themselves. Measures were distributed in random order.

Measures

Self-Perceived Communication Competence. In both studies the Self-Perceived Communication Competence (SPCC) scale developed by McCroskey and McCroskey (1986c; 1988) was used as the operationalization of self-perceived communication competence. In previous research the total score on this scale has yielded reliability estimates above .90. It has high face validity in that it directly asks the subjects to estimate their own communication competence in 12 contexts on a scale of 0-100. The 12 contexts are generated by crossing four types of communication settings (public speaking, talking in meetings, talking in small groups, talking to one other person) with three types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, friends).

Willingness to Communicate. The Willingness To Communicate (WTC) scale (McCroskey & Baer, 1985; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986b; McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986d; McCroskey & Richmond, 1987) was administered in both studies. This instrument was included to replicate the earlier research reported by McCroskey & McCroskey (1986a) which indicated that self-reported communication competence was highly predictive of willingness to communicate. In previous research the total score on this scale has yielded reliability estimates above .90.

Communication Apprehension. Communication apprehension has been found to be negatively correlated with self-perceived communication competence in previous research, hence it was presumed the variables would be similarly related in the present investigation. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24B; McCroskey, 1986) was employed to measure communication apprehension. In previous research it has yielded reliability estimates above .90.

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem is the label given to a person's evaluation of him/her self. It was assumed that people with high self-esteem in general would also perceive themselves as more competent communicators. The measure of self-esteem developed by Berger (1952) was employed in this investigation. It normally yields reliability estimates above .90.

Anomie and Alienation. Anomie refers to a state of an individual in which normative standards are severely reduced or lost. Anomics are normless, they have failed to internalize society's norms and values, including a value for communication. Alienation, an extreme manifestation of anomie, is a feeling of estrangement, of being apart and separate from other human beings and from society in general. Anomie and alienation have been found to be associated with negative attitudes toward communication and reduced interaction with peers, parents, teachers, and administrators (Heston & Andersen, 1972). It was believed that people who are high in anomie or are alienated might feel they are less capable than others of communicating effectively with other people. The measures of these variables employed in this investigation were the Srole (1956) anomie scale and the Dean (1961) alienation scale. The reliability estimates for the anomie scale normally are around .70 and those for the alienation scale around .80.

Introversion and Neuroticism. The work of Eysenck (1970, 1971) suggests that people's communication behavior may be substantially impacted by their levels of introversion and neuroticism. It was speculated that people who are highly introverted and/or neurotic would be likely to have lower evaluations of their communication competence. A 12-item introversion scale and an eight-item neuroticism scale

from the pool of items recommended by Eysenck (1970, 1971) was employed. The reliability estimates for the introversion and neuroticism measures were .77 and .72 respectively.

All of the above instruments were administered in both studies in this investigation. The second study also included the measures outlined below.

Communication Apprehension. As noted above, communication apprehension has been found to be substantially associated with self-perceived communication competence. In order to determine whether such a relationship was measure-specific, additional measures related to communication apprehension were included. Those included were the PRCA-24 (McCroskey, 1982a), the PRCA-25 (McCroskey, 1978), the McCroskey Shyness Scale (also known as the Verbal Activity Scale; McCroskey, Andersen, Richmond, & Wheeless, 1981), the Audience Anxiety Scale and the Shyness Scale developed by Buss and associates (Buss, 1980), the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA; McCroskey, 1970), the Personal Report of Communication Fear (PRCF; McCroskey, Andersen, Richmond, & Wheeless, 1981), and the approach-avoidance and reward dimensions of the Unwillingness to Communicate scale (UTC-A/A, UTC-Reward; Burgoon, 1976). Each of these measures has been employed in numerous reported studies and have generated high estimates of reliability.

Argumentativeness. Argumentativeness relates to an individual's tendencies to approach or avoid argument with others. Since arguing may involve a person in greater risk than many other forms of communication, it appears probable that one's predisposition toward arguing would be associated with their perception of their communication competence. Additionally, Infante (1981) has found that argumentativeness is positively related to the way others perceive the quality of an individual's communication (receiver-perceived competence). The measure of this variable employed in this investigation was the Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982). This measure has consistently generated reliability estimates in the neighborhood of .90.

Sociability. Sociability relates to a person's desire to interact with others. It was speculated that sociable people might perceive themselves as more competent communicators. The scale employed to measure this variable was the scale developed by Buss (1980) which he found to be factorally independent of shyness. In previous research this instrument has generated reliability estimates near .75.

Data Analyses

In order to generate results bearing on our first research question, Pearson correlations were computed between scores on the SPCC and scores on the other measures for both studies. In order to generate results bearing on our second research question, multiple regression analyses were performed on the data from the first study. The criterion variables were the total score and the subscores on the SPCC. Scores on the remaining measures (with the exception of the WTC scale) served as predictors. Multiple regression analyses also were performed on data from the second study. All of the variables included in the analyses from the first study were included. In addition, four measures which were found not to be extremely redundant with the PRCA-24B measure of communication apprehension were included. These were the measures of sociability, argumentativeness, shyness (verbal activity measure), and the reward dimension of the Unwillingness to Communicate scale.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and internal reliability estimates for each measure for both studies are reported in Table 1. The means and reliabilities obtained in these two studies are generally sim-

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics and Reliabilities of Measures

Measure	Study	Mean	S.D.	Neutral*	Reliability
Total Competence	1	73.3	13.9	50	.93
	2	75.0	17.3		.96
Competence Subscores:					
Public	1	68.2	17.7	50	.72
	2				.89
Meeting	1	68.3	17.2	50	.69
	2				.88
Group	1	75.6	14.6	50	.69
	2				.84
Dyad	1	80.9	12.3	50	.43
	2				.68
Stranger	1	54.9	23.5	50	.87
	2				.89
Acquaintance	1	76.8	15.7	50	.84
	2				.86
Friend	1	88.1	11.1	50	.79
	2				.77
PRCA-24B	1	63.7	11.7	72	.92
	2	62.8	13.2		.97
Self-Esteem	1	132.3	21.3	108	.91
	2	141.1	22.2		.94
Anomie	1	14.1	3.7	15	.69
	2	13.1	3.0		.63
Alienation	1	70.4	9.7	72	.79
	2	77.1	10.3		.83
Introversion	1	19.0	4.7	24	.77
	2	22.8	6.5		.86
Neuroticism	1	10.4	3.3	12	.77
	2	12.3	3.7		.78
PRCA-24	2	70.3	16.0	72	.95
PRCA-25	2	77.3	18.0	75	.95
McCroskey Shyness	2	42.4	12.5	42	.93
Audience Anxiety	2	17.8	4.0	15	.82
Buss Shyness	2	25.2	6.9	27	.88
PRPSA	2	116.7	25.8	102	.98
PRCF	2	39.1	8.5	42	.90
UTC-A/A	2	27.9	6.6	30	.87
UTC-Reward	2	21.3	3.9	30	.79
Argumentativeness	2	-3.1	12.6	0	.90
Sociability	2	18.5	3.7	15	.82
Willingness to Communicate	1	62.3	14.9	50	.92
	2	62.7	19.5		.93

* The score the subject would receive if he/she marked the midpoint on every item in the given scale. The competence and willingness to communicate measures request responses on a 0-100 scale. The introversion and neuroticism measures request responses on a 1-3 scale. All of the rest of the measures request responses on a 1-5 scale.

TABLE 2
Correlations Between Predictor Variables and Self-Perceived Communication Competence

Predictor Measure	Study	Competence Score Total	Public	Meeting	Group	Dyad	Stranger	Acquaintance	Friend
PRCA-24B	1	-.57	-.48	-.53	-.54	-.48	-.45	-.53	-.42
	2	-.66	-.60	-.64	-.58	-.47	-.61	-.63	-.59
Self-Esteem	1	.27	.21	.28	.25	.24	.21	.25	.24
	2	.49	.37	.51	.48	.37	.43	.45	.50
Anomie	1	-.14	-.14	-.18	-.11*	-.03*	-.13	-.08*	-.11*
	2	-.31	-.28	-.34	-.28	-.15*	-.33	-.25	-.27
Alienation	1	-.23	-.21	-.25	-.18	-.19	-.23	-.15	-.19
	2	-.44	-.39	-.44	-.41	-.29	-.44	-.37	-.42
Introversion	1	-.37	-.26	-.37	-.34	-.37	-.30	-.29	-.34
	2	-.44	-.31	-.43	-.48	-.35	-.43	-.4	-.36
Neuroticism	1	-.15	-.18	-.14	-.12*	-.07*	-.13	-.11*	-.12*
	2	-.23	-.13*	-.26	-.26	-.17	-.24	-.17	-.23
PRCA-24	2	-.63	-.58	-.63	-.55	-.42	-.61	-.57	-.57
PRCA-25	2	-.71	-.70	-.68	-.58	-.47	-.67	-.65	-.63
McCroskey Shyness	2	-.40	-.32	-.40	-.40	-.30	-.38	-.37	-.36
Audience Anxiety	2	-.56	-.61	-.55	-.41	-.28	-.52	-.50	-.53
Buss Shyness	2	-.57	-.41	-.61	-.53	-.46	-.55	-.52	-.48
PRPSA	2	-.60	-.68	-.56	-.46	-.29	-.58	-.53	-.55
PRCF	2	-.70	-.64	-.67	-.62	-.49	-.67	-.63	-.63
UTC-A/A	2	-.56	-.46	-.55	-.55	-.42	-.52	-.52	-.51
UTC-Reward	2	-.29	-.22	-.30	-.33	-.17	-.25	-.24	-.34
Argumentativeness	2	.27	.24	.28	.25	.17	.25	.24	.26
Sociability	2	.38	.23	.33	.44	.42	.39	.36	.28

* Not statistically significant, $p > .05$.

ilar to those reported in earlier research. The reliability of the dyad subscore on the competence measure was low (.43) in the first study. The scores on one item (the item concerning talking with a friend) were extremely skewed which resulted in lower reliability for this subscore. This problem has also been observed in previous research (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986c). However, the responses in the second study were less skewed and the reliability for this subscore was substantially improved.

The correlations between self-perceived communication competence and willingness to communicate in the first and second studies were .63 and .74, respectively. These are somewhat higher than the .59 correlation observed in earlier research (McCroskey & McCroskey, 1986a). These results reinforce the conclusion drawn in that research suggesting that self-perceived communication competence is a strong predictor of willingness to communicate.

Table 2 reports the simple correlations between each of the predictor variables and the total score on the SPCC as well as each subscore on that measure. All of the predictors were significantly correlated with the total SPCC score in both studies. The association was highest for SPCC and the various measures related to communication apprehension (the three forms of the PRCA, Buss's audience anxiety and shyness scales, the PRPSA, the PRCF, and the approach-avoidance dimension of the unwillingness to communicate scale). The correlations of these measures with the SPCC ranged from .56 to .71. These results indicate a strong relationship between communication apprehension and self-perceived communication competence, but not so strong that it can be argued they are simply manifestations of the same thing.

The weakest correlations observed were those involving anomie and neuroticism. The correlations with some of the SPCC subscores were not even significant. While the results indicate that anomic and/or neurotic individuals may see themselves as less communicatively competent, these dysfunctional orientations clearly need not be present for negative self-perceptions of communication competence to exist. The fact that a person feels communicatively incompetent, therefore, is not a reliable sign that they are either neurotic or anomic.

Correlations between the total SPCC scores and the remainder of the predictor variables were moderate, ranging from .23 to .49. These correlations indicate a meaningful association with self-perceived communication competence but not a strong association. The question of whether these variables make unique contributions to the prediction of self-perceived competence or are redundant with communication apprehension was considered in our analyses related to our second research question.

Table 3 reports results related to our second research question. That table includes the multiple correlations generated by multiple regressions for each criterion variable and the variance accounted for (R squared) for the regressions including all predictor variables. Since the PRCA-24B was the strongest predictor variable in every analysis, and the overall models indicated little or no unique variance being predicted by the remaining variables thus suggesting high colinearity, stepwise analyses were conducted to determine which, if any, of the remaining variables could make meaningful contributions to the prediction of self-perceived communication competence beyond that accounted for by communication apprehension. Table 3 also indicates the variables which significantly contributed to the predictive stepwise models (alpha = .05) and the variance attributable to them.

The results of the regression analyses indicate, as expected based on the simple correlational analyses discussed above, that communication apprehension is by far the best single predictor of self-perceived communication competence. However, the analyses also indicate introversion, self-esteem, and sociability are also important predictors. Thus, self-

TABLE 3
Results of Regression Analyses

	Multiple		Stepwise Predictors — R^2					
Criterion	R	R^2	1	R^2	2	R^2	3	R^2
Study 1*								
Total Competence	.61	.37	PRCA-24B	.32	Introversion	.04	.....	
Public	.52	.27	PRCA-24B	.23	Anomia	.02	.....	
Meeting	.58	.34	PRCA-24B	.28	Introversion	.04	.....	
Group	.58	.33	PRCA-24B	.29	Introversion	.03	.....	
Dyad	.55	.30	PRCA-24B	.23	Introversion	.05	.....	
Stranger	.51	.26	PRCA-24B	.21	Introversion	.03	.....	
Acquaintance	.54	.30	PRCA-24B	.28	Introversion	.01	.....	
Friend	.47	.22	PRCA-24B	.17	Introversion	.05	.....	
Study 2*								
Total Competence	.71	.50	PRCA-24B	.44	Self-Esteem	.03	.....	
Public	.64	.41	PRCA-24B	.36	Alienation	.02	Neuroticism	.02
Meeting	.70	.49	PRCA-24B	.41	Self-Esteem	.05	.....	
Group	.65	.43	PRCA-24B	.34	Introversion	.05	Self-Esteem	.03
Dyad	.51	.26	PRCA-24B	.22	Self-Esteem	.02	.....	
Stranger	.66	.44	PRCA-24B	.37	Alienation	.04	.....	
Acquaintance	.67	.45	PRCA-24B	.40	Self-Esteem	.02	.....	
Friend	.65	.42	PRCA-24B	.35	Self-Esteem	.06	.....	
Study 2**								
Total Competence	.72	.52	PRCA-24B	.44	Self-Esteem	.04	Sociability	.02
Public	.64	.41	PRCA-24B	.36	Alienation	.02	Neuroticism	.02
Meeting	.71	.50	PRCA-24B	.42	Self-Esteem	.05	.....	
Group	.68	.46	PRCA-24B	.34	Sociability	.06	Self-Esteem	.04
Dyad	.59	.34	PRCA-24B	.22	Sociability	.08	.....	
Stranger	.68	.46	PRCA-24B	.40	Alienation	.04	Sociability	.03
Acquaintance	.69	.47	PRCA-24B	.40	Self-Esteem	.02	Sociability	.02
Friend	.66	.43	PRCA-24B	.34	Self-Esteem	.06	.....	

* Predictors included: PRCA-24B, Self-Esteem, Introversion, Neuroticism, Anomia, and Alienation.
** Additional predictors included: Sociability, UTC-Reward, Argumentativeness, and Shyness (verbal activity).

perceived communication competence is associated in a meaningful way with a variety of personal orientations toward self and relationships with others.

DISCUSSION

The results of this investigation indicate that self-perceived communication competence is substantially related to a variety of personality-type orientations which have previously been found to be associated with communication behavior. It clearly is not an orientation totally independent of other aspects of personality. The results relating to the association between self-perceived communication competence and willingness to communicate also reinforce the strong association between these variables noted in previous research.

Since this investigation was centered on correlational relationships, it is important to exercise caution in suggesting any direct causal links among the variables studied. Assumptions of reciprocal or external causality of these relationships are much more appropriate. An important implication of this is that future research which examines relationships between self-perceived communication competence and observable communication behavior should be undertaken with caution. While significant correlations may be observed in such studies, a causal interpretation of such findings should be withheld unless other personality-type-orientations, particularly communication apprehension, can be discounted. It is quite possible, for example, that fear or anxiety could cause a person to both feel less competent and to behave in a less competent manner. In such an instance, self-perceived communication competence would be correlated with observed communication competence but would not be the causal agent.

Although the results of this study confirm a strong personality involvement in the self-perception of communication competence, the results do not deny the possiblity that it is at least partially a reflection of a person's actual communication behavior and the competence of that behavior. Unfortunately, in the past a strong relationship between self-perceptions and behavioral competence has been assumed. Even though that assumption has not been confirmed in a number of studies, pedagogy in the field continues to emphasize skills training as the way to increase the quantity and quality of communication behavior. Although skills training may indeed provide individuals with increased skills, it is an unproven assumption that these skills will be performed in later-life contexts unless the individuals' orientations toward communication are also altered.

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