

Correlates of Communication: An Exploratory Study among Young Adults

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Abstract: *Communication is an inseparable, indispensable part of human life, hence, over the years a lot of research has been dedicated to understanding the various factors affecting the complex process of communication. Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and Interpersonal Communication Competence (ICC) are two such important correlates that were initially constructed to understand general communication behavior. But most of the recent research has been in the context of classroom learning and new language acquisition. This study, conducted on 65 males and females in the age group of 18-25 years (young adults), was an attempt to see how Willingness to communicate and Interpersonal Communication Competence are related in the context of general communication. It was found that the groups scoring high and low on WTC had a significant difference in their levels of ICC but no such significant difference was found in the levels of WTC when the groups were divided on the basis of high and low ICC, indicating that people differing in their levels of WTC also differ in their levels of ICC but people with differing levels of ICC need not differ in their levels of WTC.*

Keywords: *Willingness to Communicate, Interpersonal Communication Competence, young adults*

1. Introduction

As social beings, Communication is a basic need among humans and hence a basic predisposition to communicate is only natural. McCroskey (1992) gave the concept of Willingness to Communicate (WTC) describing it as the personality based predisposition of an individual towards wanting to approach or avoid initiating conversation in a given situation. Willingness to communicate is the most basic orientation toward communication. Almost anyone is likely to respond to a direct question, but many will not continue or initiate interaction. WTC refers to a person's willingness to initiate communication. (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987).

Interpersonal Communication Competence (ICC) is seen as the perception or evaluation of one's ability to communicate, hence is subjective in nature (Purhonen, 2007). Interpersonal communication competence is the evaluation attributed to the evaluation of behaviours such as skills, abilities and techniques. As Spitzberg (2006) stresses, competence lies in the social evaluation of the behaviour rather than in an ability or set of skills or behaviours per se. In communication literature, effectiveness and appropriateness are identified as two main evaluation criteria for interpersonal communication competence within different contexts. Effectiveness in interpersonal communication has been defined as 'the extent to which a communicator achieves objectives' (Spitzberg, 2000). According to Spitzberg (2000) appropriateness should be conceived as 'the perceived fitness or legitimacy of a communicator's behaviour in a given context rather than conformity to the previous intact rule structure of the context'.

Interpersonal Communication Competence is believed to comprise of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. The cognitive dimension refers to knowledge and metacognitive skills. Affective dimension can be understood as motivation for interaction and behavioural dimension as interpersonal communication skills. Interpersonal communication competence requires knowledge of communication processes, strategies and context, and metacognitive skills to perceive and analyze communication. These three dimensions are interrelated and are included in interpersonal communication competence, in equal strength. Cognitive and affective dimension are needed to produce and display the behavioural dimension, interpersonal communication skills. Skills are the only one of these dimensions that is directly observable to conversational partners and third-parties of interaction.

WTC, to begin with, was proposed to be stable and predictable across situations much like a personality trait. It was used to describe whether or not a person will initiate conversation in a given

situation. Its application was mostly with reference to general day-to-day situations in which, it is assumed, that people participate using their preferred language, which, in most cases, is their first language (mother tongue). The concept of WTC was based on Burgoon's (1976) conceptualization of Unwillingness to Communicate, he defined unwillingness-to-communicate as "a chronic tendency to avoid and/or devalue oral communication and to view the communication situation as relatively unrewarding". Past research has shown that the construct of unwillingness-to-communicate is associated with alienation, introversion, low self-esteem, and high communication apprehension (Burgoon, 1976). Like WTC, unwillingness was also seen as an individual difference that remained stable across situations.

Application of WTC was soon extended from first language communication to studies of communication in L2 (second language learning and acquisition). It was then that WTC was seen to be influenced by the situational factors as well. Macintyre et al. (1998) proposed a theoretical model for WTC in L2 context, in which social and individual context, affective cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, and behavioral intention were interrelated in influencing WTC in L2 and in L2 use. Macintyre's studies on the use of L2 suggested that motivation to learn a language leads to greater willingness to communicate using that language. It was also found that language anxiety strongly influenced perceived competence which in turn affected the willingness to communicate in L2 (Macintyre & Charos, 1996). In a study to understand correlates of WTC in Japanese foreign language learners, Yashima (2002) also found that lower levels of anxiety and higher levels of perceived competence in L2 were directly related to higher WTC. Many other studies have found Willingness to be related to perceived communication competence along with factors such as communication apprehension, anxiety, self-esteem, introversion etc. (McCroskey & Richmond, 1990). More research highlighted the role of situational factors in willingness and hence the scales measuring WTC also incorporated these factors. Further research revealed that though situational variables affect WTC in L2 use, willingness tendencies similar to communication in L1 are still displayed by individuals.

A review of the available literature makes it clear that that Interpersonal Communication Competence and Willingness to Communicate seem to be directly related to each other. But most of the evidence regarding this relationship comes from the researches in the field of second language

acquisition, classroom learning and use of L2. Though some similarities exist in the L1 and L2 situations, there are still quite a few differences that prevent generalisation of findings from one condition to another. Moreover, a large number of these studies have focused on acquisition of English as the second language by the native speakers of Chinese, Turkish, and Japanese etc. (Mahmoodi, 2014; Yashima, 2002; Xie, 2011 etc.). This research is an attempt to study the relationship, if any, between Willingness to Communicate and Interpersonal Communication Competence among Indian young adults. A noteworthy characteristic about today's youth is that though their first languages vary, most of them still use English to communicate amongst themselves. Indian youth provide a whole new area of research for Willingness and Competence in Communication. This research focuses on general communication tendencies irrespective of the chosen language for communication since most of Indian population is multilingual and has sufficient opportunities to communicate in more than one language. Here the area of study is the intent to communicate and not which language is chosen to communicate. It is common knowledge to think that individuals who are willing to communicate would also consider themselves competent in the process of interpersonal communication competence. Similarly, people who believe in themselves as competent communicators should also be highly willing to communicate. The purpose of this paper was to explore whether these common sense assumptions hold true for today's Indian youth population.

2. Methodology

2.1. Procedure

The present research was conducted with the support of randomly selected 65 young adults, men and women, in the age group of 18-25 years, who agreed to participate on the study. With their consent, measures of the level of Willingness to Communicate and Interpersonal Communication Competence were collected using Willingness to Communicate Scale (McCroskey, 1990) and Interpersonal Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1974). Reliability of the scales were established using Cronbach's Alpha and was found to be high (Table - 2). Descriptive statistics was applied (Table -1). On the basis of the obtained scores the participants were divided into high and low scoring groups for both the variables. T-test was then applied on both the groups to see if the high and low scoring groups on one variable differ significantly in terms of the other variable. The

results are summarized in the result table (Table-3 & 4).

2.2. Tools

2.2.1. Willingness to Communicate Scale (McCroskey, 1990). The WTC scale is a 20-item, probability-estimate scale. Eight of the items are fillers and 12 are scored as part of the scale. When scored as indicated in the manual, it yields a total score, three sub-scores based on types of receivers (strangers, acquaintances, friends), and four sub-scores based on types of communication contexts (public, meeting, group, dyad).

The scale was designed as a direct measure of the respondent's predisposition toward approaching or avoiding the initiation of communication. This is in contrast to methods which might seek to tap into feelings of introversion, apprehension, alienation, self-concept or other such orientations which are believed to be associated with approaching or avoiding communication. The indirect approach was not successful in generating an appropriate scale in earlier research efforts.

2.2.2. Interpersonal Communication Inventory (Bienvenu, 1974). The Interpersonal Communication Inventory (ICI) is applicable generally to social interaction in a wide variety of situations. It attempts to measure general tendencies in interpersonal communication and it may be used as a counseling tool, as a teaching device, as a supplement to an interview, by management, or by further research. A 54-item scale measures the process of communication as an element of social interaction; it is not intended to measure content but to identify patterns, characteristics, and styles of communications. The items included were drawn from a review of the literature in the field and from the author's counseling experience and his work on related communications scales.

The instrument is best suited for individuals of high school age or older. It can be adapted to either gender or any marital status. Items in the ICI are designed to sample the dimensions of self-concept, listening, clarity of expression, difficulties in coping with angry feelings, and self-disclosure. The ICI offers an opportunity to make an objective study of the degree and patterns of communication in interpersonal relationships.

3. Results

The descriptive statistics for the scores obtained on Willingness to Communicate Scale and

Interpersonal Communication Competence Inventory are summarized in Table-1. As evident from the table, for a sample of 65 young participants, the mean score obtained on the Willingness to Communicate Scale is 59.28 with a standard deviation of 13.92. For Interpersonal Communication Competence Inventory, mean was found to be 73.95 with a standard deviation of 13.77. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability obtained for the measures are summarized in Table-2. The Cronbach's Alpha for Willingness to Communicate Scale was 0.82 and for Interpersonal Communication Competence it was 0.75 which indicates a high level of internal reliability for both these measures.

When the scores of Interpersonal Communication Competence were compared among the high and low scoring groups of Willingness to communicate, as summarized in table-3, the t-value was not found to be significant, indicating that people who are willing/unwilling to communicate do not necessarily differ in their levels of perceived competence. On applying t-test on the scores of Willingness to Communicate among the high and low scoring groups of Interpersonal Communication Competence significant t-value was obtained. As summarized in table-4, the t-value was found significant at 0.05 level. Based on the obtained results it can be said that people's perception of competence affects their willingness to communicate as well, since it was found that there is a significant difference in the levels of Willingness to Communicate among the high and low scoring groups of Interpersonal Communication Competence.

S.No.	Test	N	Mean	SD
1	Willingness to Communicate	65	59.28	13.92
2	Interpersonal Communication Competence	65	73.95	13.77

Table-1: Descriptive statistics for the two measures

Table-2: Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of reliability

S.No.	Test	No. of items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Willingness to Communicate	20	0.82
2	Interpersonal Communication Competence	40	0.75

Table-3: t-test (WTC groups, ICC scores)

Groups	SD	SE _M	SE _D	d	t-value	Significance level
High	12.4 14	2.2 29	3.4 02	6 3	1.4 2	Not significant
Low	14.5 49	2.5 72				

Table-4: t-test (ICC groups, WTC scores)

Groups	SD	SE _M	SE _D	d	t-value	Significance level
High	14.2 86	2.5 24	3.2 9	6 3	2.28 3	Significant*
Low	11.8 1	2.1 2				

*Significant at 0.05 level.

4. Discussion

Communication as a process is not only necessary and unavoidable, it is also very complex. There are a lot of correlates of communication that determine whether or not the process occurs. The factors such as communication anxiety, communication apprehension, language proficiency, willingness to communicate, perceived competence and other situational factors affect the process of communication. Willingness to Communicate and Interpersonal Communication Competence were the two correlates under study for the present paper. While Willingness to Communicate refers to the general predisposition to initiate and engage in communication, Interpersonal Communication Competence is the effectiveness and appropriateness with which an individual carries out the process of communication. It consists of an affective, cognitive and a behavioural component. It makes sense to think that people who are willing to communicate must automatically be competent enough to do so. On the same lines it can also be said that people who believe that they are competent in communication would also have high levels of willingness to communicate. This research was an attempt to explore whether these statements hold true when subjected to empirical research.

As mentioned in result table-3, the obtained t-test results indicate that there is no statistically significant difference in the levels of perceived communication competence of the groups differing in their levels of willingness to communicate. Based on these results it can be said that the degree of willingness to communicate does not influence the level of communication competence. Whether an individual is willing or unwilling to

communicate cannot be used to predict if he/she perceives him/herself as competent in communication.

On the other hand, it can be inferred from table-4 that there is a statistically significant difference in the degree of willingness among individuals with high and low levels of perceived interpersonal communication competence. This implies that people with high level of perceived ICC differ significantly as compared to the people with low level of perceived ICC. The statistically significant t-value obtained through this research suggests that Interpersonal communication competence can be used to make a calculated guess about an individual's level of willingness. It will be safe to assume that those with high levels of competence will be more willing to communicate as compared to those with low levels of competence.

The obtained results are also supported by many second language acquisition studies which found that students who perceived themselves to be proficient and competent in L2 were more likely and more willing to communicate using L2 (Xie (2011), Hashimoto (2002), etc.). The studies have suggested that there is a direct relationship between an individual's perceived competence and proficiency in a language and willingness to communicate using it, and there seems to be an inverse relationship between communication anxiety and apprehension and willingness to communicate in that situation.

The findings of the study has important implications not only in the area of second language acquisition, but also in the day to day communication situations. In the Indian context, it can be deduced that to increase willingness to communicate an individual's perceived competence in that communication context should be enhanced. Individuals who feel confident about their communication skills, irrespective of the language used, will be more willing to initiate and participate in communication. Since most Indian's are multilingual, the language used per se, may not be as important a predictor of willingness to communicate as the individual's perceived level of interpersonal communication competence.

This study also opens avenues for further research in multilingual societies where in general communication situations the language used in itself is not that important. Further research is needed to better understand the relationship between ICC and WTC, with special reference to multilingual societies.

5. Conclusion

Communication is a basic human need and yet individual differences are found in people's levels of willingness to engage in communication. Over the years a lot of factors have been identified that affect the process of communication and people's participation in it. While many studies have targeted the L2 acquisition and use, not many researches have specifically targeted populations that are inherently multilingual. The factors affecting these populations may not work the same way as they do in case of L1 and L2. This study found that individuals who perceive themselves as competent or incompetent also significantly differ in terms of their degree of willingness to communicate. It can be concluded that competent people will tend to be more willing to initiate communication. But the same cannot be said for people who are high on willingness to communicate, they may or may not perceive themselves to be competent in interpersonal communication.

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