1989

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Educators and researchers in communication have been keenly interested in the discovery of methods for improving the quality of teaching and learning in their courses. Recently, attention has been paid to certain predispositions or personality traits of students and how they affect performance in the basic course. For example, communication apprehension and its effects on students in the basic course has been studied (see, for example McCroskey 1981). Also, based on studies and speculation by Rogers and Shoemaker (1971), McCroskey and Wheeless (1976), and Kozma, Belle, and Williams (1979), it has been hypothesized that when learning styles of students and instructors are matched, more and better learning should take place (see Seiler 1986). However, Phelps and Smilowitz (1986) and Morlan and Wallace (1986) have presented evidence which suggests that the learning style of students has little relationship to performance or evaluation in class, but that styles of the instructor seem to affect student evaluations. Even so, there is reason to believe that there are some personality characteristics of students and instructors which affect students' performances in the basic communication course. One such personality characteristic could well be communication competence. The purpose of this study is to examine the notion that students with high levels of communication competence will perform better in class and subsequently be more satisfied with the basic course than their counterparts with low levels of competence.

Competence and Communication Behavior

McCroskey (1982) and others have traced concern about competence as far back as Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. While no particular theory has ever emerged as *the* explanation, and there has been no universal definition of communication competence (see McCroskey 1982; Spitzberg 1983), many scholars appear to endorse a view of competence consistent with the following definition offered by Wiemann (1977):

> . . . the ability of an interactant to choose among available communicative behaviors in order that he may successfully accomplish his own interpersonal goals during an encounter while maintaining the face and line of his fellow interactants within the constraints of the situation (198).

Taking this definition as representative, it is clear that there is a close connection between competence and successful communication. Indeed, the parallel between Wiemann's definition of communication competence and Aristotle's definition of rhetoric is obvious.

There appear to be at least two major points of similarity between current views of competence and successful communication. It is true that scholars treat communication behavior as goal oriented (see Cegala 1984a). It is also true that most scholars view communication competence as goal oriented. Second, rhetorical and communication scholars have historically emphasized the need to adapt to one's audience. Even discussions of coersive rhetoric point out the transactional nature of the persuasion process (Burgess 1972). As evident in Wiemann's (1977) definition, competence is also concerned with audience adaptation. In particular, it is expressed in terms of Goffman's (1967) work on the concept of face and the rules of social order that guides one's conduct in interpersonal society. There appears to be considerable overlap between views of communication competence and successful communication. Also, there is a mutual concern for how traits contribute to individual differences with respect to competence and related communication behavior. The concept of trait and communication competence is briefly examined below.

Among the topics of controversy in the interpersonal communication literature is how best to view competence (see Spitzberg & Hecht 1984; Wiemann & Backlund 1980). Some researchers emphasize competence as a trait of individuals, while others treat competence as a situationally determined phenomenon. Most likely, both approaches are correct. Cegala (1984b) suggests that competence is likely a function of dispositional tendencies of individuals, situational parameters such as norms and rules, and unique interaction among individuals. However, given the present state of research in communication, it is difficult to examine all of these components simultaneously. Even so, some researchers are attempting to investigate selected communication traits in various situations to determine the role of these traits in human communication. One research program has focused on the trait of interaction involvement. Following is a brief description of interaction involvement and its relationship to communication behavior.

The Concept of Interaction Involvement

Interaction involvement is a construct that has been developed and investigated by Cegala and others (Cegala 1981, 1984b; Cegala, Savage, Brunner, & Conrad 1982). Fundamentally, it is the extent to which individuals participate in communication (see Cegala 1981). When high in involvement, individuals typically integrate their feelings, thoughts, and conscious attention with the ongoing interaction. "Their consciousness is directed toward the evolving reality of self, other, and topic of conversation" (Cegala, et al. 1982, 229). Conversely, low-involved individuals are characteristically not so "tuned in" to social interactions. They are removed psychologically and communicatively from the ongoing interaction.

The Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS) is an operational definition of the construct (Cegala 1981; Cegala, et al. 1982). The IIS is a self-report questionnaire consisting of eighteen items which cluster into three related factors. The first factor, "responsiveness," is an index of an individual's

certainty about how to act in certain social situations. The second factor, "perceptiveness," is a person's sensitivity to (1) what meanings ought to be applied to other's behavior, and (2) what meanings ought to be applied to one's own behavior. The third factor, "attentiveness," is the extent to which one is cognizant of and alert to the cues in the immediate social environment, especially one's interlocutor.

The research undertaken in an effort to establish the construct validity of the IIS has, to date, gone in three directions. First, a substantial amount of work has been done relating interaction involvement to other trait-like measures (see Cegala, et al. 1982a). Second, cognitive and affective responses to two communication situations have been examined (see Cegala 1984b). Finally, effort has been made to discover the overt behavioral manifestations of interaction involvement (Cegala 1981; Cegala, et al. 1982; Redmon, Eifert, & Gordon 1983; Villaume 1984; Wallace 1985; Wallace & Skill 1986, 1987).

Interaction Involvement and Successful Communication

It can be seen that successful, goal oriented communication involves three related activities: formulation of goals, analysis of situation, and formulation of appropriate strategies. In order to explicate the relationship between successful communication and interaction involvement, it is necessary to examine these activities from the interaction involvement perspective.

The goal, directs the communicative effort and the behavior of the communicator is based on it. Cegala (1984b) suggests that high-involved people should have a clearer sense of their own as well as others' goals during interaction. As a result, they are more highly motivated to engage in communication than low-involved persons.

The second activity, the analysis of situation, includes gathering information about the audience, the situation, and other goal-relevant items. This notion has been taught in the basic course for decades. In either situation, possession of

this goal relevant information involves a constant reassessment of the other or audience such that the communicator would be able to make the appropriate adjustments in strategy to compensate for unanticipated responses. Whatever the setting, gathering this information, means being both attentive and perceptive. By definition, low-involved individuals are low in attentiveness and perceptiveness and will not be as successful at gathering goal-relevant information as high-involved individuals.

The final activity is the formulation of appropriate strategies to be used in the communication effort. This is a collection of behaviors that may be employed at any time by the communicator as a response to the requirements of the situation (based on information gathered during the analysis of situation). The low-involved individual would be lacking in several areas in this case. First, low involvement has been negatively correlated to behavioral flexibility (Cegala, et al. 1982), so even if the low-involved individual was "in tune" with the situation, available behavioral alternative would be limited. Second, choosing an appropriate behavior to exhibit is based on the communicator's analysis of the situation. Since the low-involved person is less likely to make an accurate assessment of the situation, the appropriate behavioral choice is less likely to be made. The low-involved person is often, therefore, "unsure how to respond." Responsiveness is defined as the ability to react to one's social circumstance and adapt (with some appropriate behavior). Since low-involved individuals are low in responsiveness, they should be less successful at achieving goals in public or interpersonal communication.

In summary, the more attentive, perceptive, and responsive individuals are, the more likely they are to be able to interpret accurately the behavior of the audience or interaction partner, formulate effective strategies for goal attainment, and successfully exhibit the appropriate behaviors to achieve desired goals. Since one goal of students is usually to get a good grade in the class, the high-involved student should be able to use the related talents to perform well in most basic courses. One result should be more positive

evaluations of the student by the instructor. Since the high-involved individuals are more attentive, perceptive, and responsive than low-involved individuals, it appears that the high-involved should be better students, receiving higher grades and getting more satisfaction from the class activities than low-involved students. Specifically, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: Students who are high-involved will receive higher grades than students who are low involved.

H2: Students who are high-involved will evaluate the course and instructor more positively than students who are low-involved.

It is also suggested in this study that the level of involvement of the instructor should affect the instructor's performance in the classroom. An instructor who is high in perceptiveness, responsiveness, and attentiveness should be good at assessing student needs and exhibiting the appropriate behavior to adapt to the situation. As such, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H3: Instructors who are high-involved will receive more positive evaluations of self and course than instructors who are low-involved.

H4: Instructors who are high-involved will receive higher ratings on the dimensions of credibility than instructors who are low-involved.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were students and instructors in a multiple section, basic speech course at a medium sized midwestern university. The course had twenty-six sections (n = 655) and all students were asked to participate. Because it is required by the University for all graduates as a basic skill, students are attracted to the course from a wide variety of majors.

Subjects were defined as high-involved if all three of their factor scores on the Interaction Involvement Scale (IIS)

were +.5 standard deviations above the mean. Similarly, subjects were defined as low-involved if all three of their factor scores on the IIS were -.5 standard deviations below the mean.

Procedures

The data gathering was divided into three phases. Phase 1 involved the entire population (including instructors) of the twenty-six sections completing the Interaction Involvement Scale (Cegala 1981). Phase 1 was completed during the sixth week of the term.

Phase 2 involved the entire population of the course completing McCroskey's (1966) credibility scale and answering various questions evaluating the course. This phase of data gathering took place during the final week of the term. Because of absences on the day of the second round of data gathering and failures to correctly complete both questionnaires, the final number of subjects was significantly reduced (n = 413).

The final phase involved the acquisition of final grades for the course.

Dependent Variables

As directed by the hypotheses, three dependent variables were operationalized for this study: student grade, student course evaluation, and student rating of instructor credibility.

Student grades were obtained from the instructors at the end of the semester. Grades were reported on the traditional four-point scale (A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0).

Student rating of instructor credibility was operationally defined as scores on McCroskey's (1966) scales for the measurement of ethos.

Student evaluation of the course and instructor was operationally defined as the answers to forty selected questions form standard student evaluation of teaching

forms. Responses were measured on a five-point scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree."

Responses were subjected to principal components analysis in an effort to reduce the data to a more manageable form. Minimum eigenvalue acceptable was 1.0. The analysis indicated a five factor solution. The factors were: teaching competence; value of course content; teaching style; relational aspects of instructor; and textbook. A complete description of the factors can be found in Figure 1.

There were two questions in the student evaluation that are not contained in the five factors. The final two items in the evaluation portion of the questionnaire were:

#1. Everything considered, how would you rate this course?

#2. Everything considered, how would you rate this instructor?

Respondents used a Likert-type scale for these items: 5 = excellent, 4 = above average, 3 = average, 2 = below average, 1 = poor.

Results

The first hypothesis predicts that students who are high-involved will receive higher grades. Results indicate no support for H1 ($F = 0.458$; df = 1/110; $p<.50$).

The second hypothesis predicts that students who are high-involved will evaluate the course and instructor more positively than students who are low-involved. Evaluations were broken down into five components. The results indicate no significant differences for any of the five components. As such, H2 was not supported.

The final two items on the evaluation questionnaire were: #1 "All things condidered, how would you rate this course?" and #2 "All things considered, how would you rate this instructor?" Results indicate no significant differences in rating for item #1 ($F = 0.72$; df = 1/110; $p<.38$), or item #2 ($F = 1.06$; df = 1/110; $p<.30$).

The first component was "teaching competence." The following are representative questions that make up this component:

>   The instructor was well prepared for class.
>   The instructor communicated the subject matter well.
>   The instructor's explanations were clear and concise.
>   The course was well coordinated and well organized.

The second component identifed by the analysis was "value of course content." The following questions are representative of this component:

>   I learned a great deal from this instructor.
>   Course helped develop my creative capacity.
>   Course was useful for me.
>   Course was adequate in meeting my personal goals.

The third component identifed by the analysis was "teaching style." The following questions are representative of this component:

>   Instructor was boring.
>   Instructor put material across in an interesting way.
>   Instructor held class attention.
>   Instructor stimulated interest in the course.

The fourth component was "relational aspects of instructor." The following questions represent this component:

>   Instructor is one of the best teachers I have ever known.
>   I would be pleased to have another course with this instructor.
>   Instructor was willing to help students having difficulty.
>   Instructor respected students as persons.

The final component was "textbook." The following questions represent this component:

>   Reading the textbook was useful.
>   Assigned reading was interesting and of high quality.

Figure 1. Description of Evaluation Factors

Hypothesis 3 predicted that instructors who are high-involved will receive more positive evaluations of self and course than instructors who are low involved. Results indicate partial support for this hypothesis. For analysis, the evaluations were divided into the same five components mentioned before. The results for each component will be discussed separately below.

Results indicate that differences for the first component, "teaching competence," were not quite significant ($F = 3.83$; $df = 1/116$; $p<.053$). Results also indicate no significant differences in rating for the second component, "value of course content" ($F = 0.20$; $df = 1/116$; $p<.65$).

Results indicate a significant difference in rating for the third component, "teaching style" ($F = 8.26$; $df = 1/116$; $p<.005$). Cell means are reported in Table 1. Examination of cell means reveals that high-involved instructors were rated significantly higher on teaching style than low-involved instructors.

There was also a significant difference in rating for the fourth component, "relational aspects of instructor" ($F = 11.57$; $df = 1/116$; $p<.001$). Cell means indicate that the textbook was rated higher for low-involved instructors than high-involved instructors.

Table 1
Cell Means for Student Evaluation of Instructor by Instructor Involvement

Evaluation Component	Involvement Level of Instructor	
	High	Low
#3	18.54	16.43
#4	23.51	18.98
#5	10.33	12.87
Item #2	3.96	3.43

With regard to the two final items (i.e., single ratings for course and instructor), one significant difference was found. There was no difference in rating for item #1 (rating of course) ($F = 0.02$; df = $1/116$; p<.87). There was, however, a significant difference in rating on item #2, rating of instructor ($F = 9.92$; df = $1/116$; p<.003). Cell means are reported below. Examination of cell means reveals that high-involved instructors were rated higher on item #2 than low-involved instructors.

In summary, high-involved instructors were rated higher in teaching style, relational aspects, and the overall evaluation than low-involved instructors. Low-involved instructors were rated higher in student evaluation of the textbook than high-involved instructors.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that high-involved will be rated higher on dimensions of credibility than low-involved instructors. The results for each dimension will be discussed separately below.

Three dimensions of credibility used for this study, competence, dynamism, and composure, produced no significant differences. There were, however, significant differences found on two dimensions. The first is character ($F = 11.65$; df = $1/116$; p<.001). Cell means are reported in Table 2 below. Examination of cell means indictes that high-involved instructors were rated higher in the character

Table 2
Instructor Ratings on Credibility Dimensions
by Instructor Involvement

Dimension of Credibility	Instructor Involvement Level	
	High	Low
Character	29.49	26.74
Sociability	30.57	26.26

dimension than low-involved instructors. The second significant difference was found in the sociability dimension ($F = 23.62$; $df = 1/116$; $p < .000$). Cell means reveal that high-involved instructors were rated higher on the sociability dimension than low-involved instructors.

In summary, there were no significant differences found on three dimensions of credibility. However, there were significant differences found on two: character and sociability. In both cases, high-involved instructors were rated higher than low-involved instructors.

Discussion

The original purpose of this study was to discover if different levels of communication competence resulted in differences in the performances of students and instructors in the basic course in communication. The results of this analysis suggest that the level of interaction involvement of students has little influence on how the instructor evaluates their performance or how the student evaluates the instructor. However, the results indicate that the level of interaction involvement of the instructor has a significant effect on student evaluations of instructors.

There are many possible explanations for the lack of effects when examining the involvement level of students. While there is some reason to expect high-involved students to out-perform low-involved students based on an ability to adapt to situations, having the ability is not the same as using the ability. It could be that these high-involved students just didn't make the effort to respond appropriately. A possible explanation for this is peer pressure. The high-involved student is "tuned in" to the student social situation in the class. If that social situation has norms that inhibit some students from out-performing others, then that pressure to conform is responsible for a somewhat homogeneous response from all studetns in the class. The peer pressure could be more powerful than the desire to achieve high grades. The high-involved student should be very aware of this kind of situation.

Regarding involvement levels of instructors, those who were high-involved were rated higher than those low-involved in teaching style, relational aspects, overall evaluation of instructor, and on the character and sociability dimensions of credibility. These could all be considered affective categories. As such, the results suggest that students liked and were satisfied with the high-involved instructor more than the low-involved instructors.

Since high-involvement implies a strong ability to adapt to social situations, it could be that students were better able to relate to the high-involved instructors because they were better able to relate to the students. This high level of affect between student and instructor would serve as a motivator for higher student satisfaction and improved student performance. The affect level of the instructor could influence the social norms of the class and, in effect, raise the performance standards, making it "OK" to do a good job in class. This study supplies some evidence to support this notion. It was found that high-involved instructors gave significantly higher grades than low-involved instructors (F = 24.62; df = 1/116; p<.000; 17.6% variance; cell means: H = 3.47, L = 2.83). Of course, it could be that the high-involved instructors gave better grades because they are "nice guys" or because they are engaged in strategies to maintain or save the "face" of students.

Low-involved instructors received higher ratings for the textbook evaluation category. It is not hard to imagine that, if a student wanted to perform well in a course but the instructor was difficult to approach for help (in or outside of class), the student could rely on the textbook for information. If the instructor were very open and/or approachable, perhaps the students would not need the textbook quite so much. One implication of this finding is that low-involved instructors had better choose quality textbooks and supporting materials as part of the course.

The results of this study support past research (see Morlan & Wallace 1986; Phelps & Smilowitz 1986) which suggests that teaching, cognitive, or personal styles of instructors do influence student performance and satisfaction with courses. This notion seems to be especially

important in a performance oriented class such as the basic course in communication. It appears that the high-involved instructors might be more desirable in this case to relax and motivate students.

If a goal of all who teach the basic course in communication is to continually improve it, then perhaps more research into style or personality characteristics of both students and instructors is needed. If the right teaching/learning strategies can be discovered for instructors and students, the basic course will become a more useful experience for all involved.

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