

Abstract

North African and Russian immigrants in France were recruited (334) to complete a survey investigating the relationships between communication apprehension (CA) and linguistic fluency. Correlation analysis demonstrated fluency in the dominant language is negatively correlated with communication apprehension, meaning individuals who are fluent in the dominant language are less apprehensive. Moreover, independent samples *t*-tests revealed Russian immigrants score higher on communication apprehension. Theoretical implications regarding the importance of studying Islam and dialect are presented.

Keywords: Communication Apprehension, Language, France

An Analysis of the Relationship between Communication Apprehension and Linguistic Fluency:

An Analysis of North African and Russian Immigrants to France

Communication apprehension (CA) is related to an individual's ability to communicate effectively in the language of the dominant culture (Richmond, J. McCroskey, L. McCroskey, & Fayer, 2008). When individuals feel more comfortable communicating linguistically, they are less likely to feel apprehension. Furthermore, Croucher (2008) argued individuals who immigrate to a new culture are more likely to feel apprehension, isolation, and less confidence in their communication skills when they immigrate to a nation/culture in which they are an ethnic and/or linguistic minority. A plethora of research has examined CA in various nations such as Australia, Canada, China, Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, Sweden, Thailand, and Russia (Burroughs, Marie, & McCroskey, 2003; Christophel, 1996; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2003; MacIntyre, Noels, & Clement, 1997; Matsuoka & Evans, 2005; McCroskey, Gudykunst, & Nishida, 1985; Yung & McCroskey, 2004).

While research has explored CA, and limited research has looked into the relationship between CA and language, no research has examined the CA of immigrants. Immigrants can face a multitude of challenges when adapting to a new culture, one of which can be language and general communicative fear (Croucher, 2008a, 2009; Heller, 2003; Tollefson, 1991). Many immigrants move to a new nation speaking the same language as the dominant culture, many speak a different dialect, and others speak an entirely different language. The potential relationship between communication apprehension levels and immigrant language warrants attention. Understanding this relationship will shed more light on the immigrant experience and enhance our understanding of the relationship between CA and linguistic understanding. Therefore, this study explores the relationship between CA and language. Specifically, the study

explores this relationship between two immigrant groups in France, French-speaking North Africans and Russian-speaking immigrants to France.

Immigration to France

The immigrant population is rapidly growing to between 10-20% of the French population (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2011). The majority of immigrants to from North Africa come from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco (the Maghreb). These immigrants often speak French and/or Arabic, but many do not speak Parisian French. Most of these immigrants speak a dialect that most native-born French consider second-class (Croucher, 2008a). The Maghreb makes up roughly 27% of all immigration to France (Institut National de la statistique et des études économiques (INSEE), 2008). Immigrants from the former Soviet Union makes up far less than the Maghreb, 2%. These immigrants typically do not speak French as one of their primary languages, but Russian, or another language of the former Soviet Union. Thus, the linguistic differences between many of these immigrants and the dominant linguistic culture offer a clear point for analysis. Also the majority of research on CA has been conducted on American college students or in East Asian cultures, research in France offers a chance to broaden understanding of CA.

Communication Apprehension

"Communication apprehension is a broad-based fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons" (McCroskey, 1976, p. 1).

McCroskey (1982) explained how CA is a trait that occurs in four types of communication contexts: dyadic, meetings, public, and small groups. Researchers have been keen to point out that CA is a trait (Beatty, Andriate, & Payne, 1985). Allen and Bourhis (1996) asserted individuals who experience high levels of CA are less likely to communicate satisfactorily and

skillfully with others. McCroskey (1997) explained three effects of high CA as communication disruption, communication withdrawal, and communication avoidance.

Linguistic Fluency and Communication Apprehension

McCroskey, Fayer, and Richmond (1985) found individuals are more apprehensive when communicating in a second language than when communicating in their first language. These results have been replicated in subsequent research (e.g., Matsuoka & Evans, 2005; Richmond, et al., 2008). Overall, individuals who are more fluent in a language are less apprehensive. While many immigrants to France speak French, these immigrants speak with what can be considered an “African” accent (Croucher, 2008a). Moreover, many speak a North African dialect and not Parisian French, which can lead to anxiety in communication events (Croucher, 2008a). Similarly, most Russian immigrants do not typically speak French when they immigrate to France. Thus, they are at a linguistic disadvantage when it comes to communicating in public, within, and with the dominant culture. Moreover, Croucher (2008a) found the ability to speak, or the perceived ability to speak the correct dialect of French is a determinant of membership in French culture and the inability to do so can lead to exclusion from French culture by the dominant culture. Thus, many immigrants do not want and/or have direct or public communication with members of the dominant culture, as to avoid potentially outing themselves as others (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2011). Therefore, the first hypothesis is posed:

H1: There is a negative correlation between communication apprehension and perceived linguistic fluency.

Christophel (1996) in a comparison of Russian communication traits with Australians, Finns, Micronesians, Puerto Ricans, Swedes, and Americans found, Russians typically have lower levels of self-perceived communication competence, and lower levels of willingness to

communicate than all groups, and similar levels of CA to most groups when communicating in their native language. Russians were described as more judicious and reluctant to initiate communication. So, when adding the variable of communicating with individuals in French, or with the threat of communicating around French individuals as the dominant culture, it is possible that levels of CA may increase. In this case, the levels of CA for Russian immigrants to France might be higher than the North African immigrants, who speak a dialect of French that is closer to Parisien French. Thus, the following research question is put forth to explore potential difference in CA levels between these two groups:

RQ: To what extent will levels of CA differ between Russian and North African immigrants in France?

Method

Participants and Recruitment

The total sample for this study was 334 individuals. These participants ranged in age from 18 to 70 years ($M = 27.17$, $SD = 6.09$). Of the participants, 208 (62.3%) were men and 126 (37.7%) were women. When asked to identify their nation of birth, 189 (48.6%) identified Algeria, 115 (34.4%) Tunisia, 67 (20.1%) Libya, 12 (3.6%), Morocco 5 (1.5%), Russia 106 (31.7%), and Ukraine 29 (8.7%).

After Human Subjects approval, surveys were distributed in Bordeaux, Brest, Dijon, Lille, Lyon, Marseille, Paris (and the suburbs), Strasbourg, and Tours between 2007 and 2009. Each city was chosen because the researcher has personal contacts in each city and because each city has a varied number of immigrants, with cities such as Brest and Strasbourg having fewer per capita immigrants than Marseille and Paris. Surveys were distributed to individuals outside of religious centers (churches, mosques, etc...), community centers, transportation centers (bus

and train), and at immigrant outreach/support centers/groups in various cities. Permission was granted by these centers/groups before survey distribution. In many cases, the Researcher sat outside data collection sites or in various public places and asked random individuals if they would like to take surveys. Participants were verbally told and in the consent document that the surveys were part of a university approved project on language and argument. Surveys and consent documents were prepared in French, Arabic, English, and Russian. After the instrument and consent documents were written in English, native French, Arabic, and Russian speakers translated the documents. Bilingual French-English, Arabic-English, and Russian-English speakers then back translated the documents into English. After this translation was complete, all translations were compared to insure accuracy.

Instruments

Personal report of communication apprehension (PRCA).

The PRCA is 24-items and measures trait-like communication apprehension across four contexts: dyadic, meetings, public, and small groups (McCroskey, 1982). It utilizes a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly agree* to (5) *strongly disagree*. Previous reliability coefficients for the entire scale generally range from .93 to .95, and with alphas falling slightly from .80 to .92 for the individual trait measures (Allen, Long, O'Mara, & Judd, 2008; Dwyer, 1998; McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985; McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989; McCroskey & Richmond, 1976). In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for dyadic was .88, .90 for meetings, .91 for public, and .91 for small group apprehension.

Measure of linguistic fluency.

An individual's ability to write, speak and understand French was measured using 10-items from Croucher's (2009) analysis of French immigrant cultural adaptation. These items are

measured on two 7-point Likert scales. Five items measured ability ranging from (1) *not at all* to (7) *like a native*. Five items measured frequency of interaction in French ranging from (1) *never* to (7) *very often*. Sample items included: “I speak French at work,” “I understand French television,” “I understand French radio,” and “I speak French in public.” The Cronbach alpha in the original study was .96; in this study it was .91.

Analysis and Results

Statistical Analysis

As the sample for this study had more males than females, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted on all variables to determine if males and females differed significantly on any of the behaviors/traits. Results of the *t*-tests revealed no significant differences between males and females on any of the variables: group CA ($t(331) = 1.26, p = .21$), meeting CA ($t(331) = 1.32, p = .19$), dyad CA ($t(331) = .24, p = .81$), public CA ($t(240.56) = 2.09, p = .053$), total CA ($t(331) = .26, p = .80$), and language fluency ($t(331) = -.53, p = .60$). The hypothesis was confirmed using a one-tailed Pearson product-moment correlation, and the research question was tested using an independent samples-*t*-test. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations associated with the study variables.

Insert Table 1 here

Results

The hypothesis was supported. There are significant negative correlations between linguistic fluency and each of the four contexts of communication that make up communication apprehension (CA): group ($r = -.63$), meeting ($r = -.58$), dyadic ($r = -.54$), public ($r = -.56$), and total CA ($r = -.71$). The research question sought to answer the extent to which CA levels would differ between Russian and North African immigrants. The independent samples *t*-tests reveal

significant differences between the two groups on all aspects of CA. Russian immigrants ($M = 21.36$; $SD = 3.75$) scored significantly higher on group CA than North African ($M = 17.72$; $SD = 6.98$) immigrants ($t(317.59) = -6.15$, $p < .005$). Russian immigrants ($M = 24.00$; $SD = 2.99$) scored significantly higher on meeting CA than North African ($M = 20.50$; $SD = 7.88$) immigrants ($t(273.00) = -5.68$, $p < .005$). Russian immigrants ($M = 24.38$; $SD = 1.38$) scored significantly higher on dyadic CA than North African ($M = 22.92$; $SD = 5.31$) immigrants ($t(235.73) = -5.29$, $p < .005$). Russian immigrants ($M = 21.52$; $SD = 4.18$) scored significantly higher on public CA than North African ($M = 16.75$; $SD = 10.54$) immigrants ($t(278.36) = -5.75$, $p < .005$). Finally, Russian immigrants ($M = 91.25$; $SD = 5.14$) scored significantly higher on overall CA than North African ($M = 89.99$; $SD = 23.61$) immigrants ($t(225.01) = -2.26$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationships between communication apprehension and linguistic fluency. The results of the correlation analysis revealed multiple correlations. Fluency in the dominant language was negatively correlated with communication apprehension. These results are consistent with the argument that individuals who lack linguistic skills in the dominant language are going to avoid or feel apprehensive approaching communication with individuals in the dominant language or around individuals who speak the dominant language (Buss, 1984; Croucher, 2008, 2008a; McCroskey et al., 1985).

A potential explanation for communication apprehension among immigrants in France (North African and Russian), aside from linguistics, is how immigrants perceived themselves as being treated by the dominant French culture. Croucher (2009) found many religious and ethnic groups in France after the passage of the 2004 ban on the wearing of religious symbols in French public schools have a general fear/dislike of the dominant French-Christian culture. Perhaps, this

fear/dislike manifests itself in communication apprehension. When minority groups fear the dominant political, economic, and social structures, these groups are often less likely to openly speak out against it. There has clearly been a significant amount of anti-immigrant rhetoric in France for many years (Croucher, 2008; Roy, 2004). This rhetoric was present in the 2012 French presidential elections where the National Front political party, an openly anti-immigrant party, received close to 19% of the vote in the first round of the presidential election. The incumbent president, Nicolas Sarkozy, whose policies many immigrants perceived as less than hospitable (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2011), lost the 2012 election to a Socialist challenger who promised more open policies to immigrants and was less harsh towards immigrants in his campaigning, Francois Hollande. During the election many immigrants embraced Hollande's candidacy at rallies, in the election these immigrants clearly showed less apprehension in expressing their support for one candidate over another. Future CA research should explore the potential effects of political events like elections on levels of CA.

This study contributes to research on CA in three ways. First, this study explores CA among an unexplored geographic and cultural population. An abundance of research in CA has been conducted in various nations. However, no CA research has been conducted in France, limited CA research has been conducted in Europe, and no CA research has been conducted among immigrant populations. It is imperative to better understand these populations.

Second, this research helps us better understand the relationship between language and CA when the language in question is a dialect or derivation. The research on CA considering language differences has looked at individuals who speak two entirely different languages. However, when individuals linguistically interact in the same language but a dialect or derivation is used (such as those individuals who speak North African French and not Parisien French),

such differences can also have a major impact on the interaction (Irvine & Gal, 2003). While this study was conducted in France, its results could be applied to other contexts/settings where differences in dialect and where multiple languages are used as markers of membership. Such political/cultural situations of membership, partially based on linguistics, already exist in nations and communities in Canada, Spain, Finland, the Philippines, Australia, Switzerland, and the United States (Croucher, 2009; Dickinson & Young, 2003; Heller, 2003; Hill, 2003; MacMillan, 1983; Shannon, 1999; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999; Tollefson, 1991; Urla, 2003). Thus, future research in CA and other communication traits/behaviors should consider the influence of language and dialects.

Third, this study promotes research among nonstudent samples. The majority of research on CA has been conducted on student samples. While such research has provided indepth information about CA, analyses of such traits/behaviors outside of student samples may provide for more generalizeable findings.

The primary limitation of this study could be its use of self-report instruments. Self-report instruments are regularly used in social-scientific research (Oetzel, 1998). Given the nature of the questions on the PRCA (McCroskey, 1982), individuals could have misrepresented themselves to appear more favorable. Furthermore, individuals could have under or overestimated their linguistic fluency.

This analysis explored the relationship between linguistic fluency and communication apprehension between North African and Russian immigrants to France. The results revealed fluency in the dominant language/language was negatively correlated with all aspects of CA, and that Russian immigrants had higher levels of all aspects of CA. These results help us better understand the relationship between language and CA. The results of this study also provide a

glimpse into the rapidly growing immigrant populations, which tend to be ignored by many communication scholars. Ultimately, future research should expand the study of the relationship between CA and language fluency among diverse populations.

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Table 1

Means, standard deviations and correlations associated with the study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Lang. Fluency	37.25	15.92	-					
(2) PRCA group	19.19	6.15	-.63*	-				
(3) PRCA meeting	21.92	6.60	-.58*	.76*	-			
(4) PRCA dyad	23.13	4.31	-.54*	.61*	.58*	-		
(5) PRCA public	18.68	8.86	-.56*	.70*	.75*	.59**	-	
(6) PRCA total	88.72	18.61	-.71*	.73*	.73*	.71*	.66*	-

* $p < .001$.