Communication Apprehension in L1 and L2 among First-Year Students of a Graduate Program for Executives in a Public University

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Abstract

Executives in the private and government sectors are alike in that they place a major emphasis on communication skills. However, there has never been any research done to investigate communication apprehension (CA) among Thai executives, especially to compare their CA when using Thai (L1) and English (L2). As a result, this study investigated the traitlike CA of 31 adult students in a master's degree program for executives in the political science faculty of a prestigious public university in Bangkok, Thailand, and administered *t*-tests to compare their CA in L1 and L2. The results indicated no difference in total traitlike CA among the students of this program when they communicate in L1 or in L2. However, the findings suggested that their CA in the category of interpersonal conversations in L1 was higher than that in L2. The findings are expected to enhance the English language teachers' understanding of the students in this executive program, which may improve the teaching and learning process.

Keywords: L1, L2, MA program for executives, Communication Apprehension (CA), adult students

Introduction
Background
For at least two decades, the PRCA-24 has been widely used by researchers to measure communication apprehension in the United States of America and in many other countries. Findings have shown that those with a high traitlike CA level are usually considered unattractive (McCroskey et al., 1975) and are seen as possessing lower communication competence (McCroskey & Beatty, 1998).

In Thailand, the official language is Thai, and the English language is considered the official second language. In daily life, Thai people use Thai most of the time and rarely have the chance to use English unless they are forced to as part of their occupational responsibilities. Nowadays, Thais have become more aware of the importance of the English language, as the country is part of the ASEAN community and English is used as the medium of communication among the peoples of the ten member nations.

The elite members of society and executives of organizations are expected to be able to adapt to the changing landscape and lead their organizations toward a better future. Moreover, according to research, leaders tend to have the ability to communicate effectively, especially in terms of speaking. However, those with anxiety or fear regarding speaking have great difficulty learning and practicing a second language. The researcher chose the students of a master's degree program for executives at a public university in Bangkok as the sample for the present study since most of them were middle-level executives who were motivated to become higher level executives in the near future. For practical reasons, like most master's degree programs at this public university, incoming graduate students have to take two English preparatory courses.

At the time the present study was conducted, the participants were just starting the graduate program and were required to take English Course One as a compulsory course for their major of public administration. All subjects are conducted in Thai, including the English preparatory course.

Review of Literature
In many studies, communication apprehension (CA) has been measured by the Personal Report on Communication Apprehension, which contains 24 items; as a result, it is called PRCA-24. The PRCA-24 seeks to measure traitlike CA, which has been found to be caused by a multitude of factors and have a variety of effects on individuals. The literature review section in this paper will cover the following areas: (1) Traitlike CA; (2) Causes of traitlike CA; (3) Effects of traitlike CA; (4) the PRCA-24; and (5) CA in L1 and L2.

Communication Apprehension
CA is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1970, 1976, 1977, 1984). According to McCroskey and Beatty (1998), CA is divided into four types: (1) traitlike CA; (2) context-based CA; (3) audience-based CA; and (4) situational CA. In this research study, traitlike CA was the focus.

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Traitlike CA

Traitlike CA is an individual's orientation toward communication across varied contexts and situations. McCroskey and Beatty (1998) suggest that traitlike CA is rather enduring. Those with traitlike communication apprehension have a tendency to be anxious toward oral communication in all kinds of situations. Traitlike CA is a summary of the level of CA in four varied contexts and situations, which are group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking.

Causes of Traitlike CA

Scholars are not in complete agreement on the causes of traitlike CA (Russ, 2013). Self-esteem has been found to be one factor leading to traitlike CA (McCroskey et al, 1977). Individual and social factors have also been identified as causes of CA, with Alley-Young (2005) having posited that CA levels in people vary due to individual differences, such as sex, age, income, and socio-economic status. Some researchers have found that heredity plays a greater role in traitlike CA (Beatty et al., 1998; Opt and Loffredo, 2000, Beatty & McCroskey, 2001).

Effects of Traitlike CA

A vast number of research studies have revealed that various negative effects are detected among people with high CA. Among those negative impacts are poor interpersonal relationships (Baker and Ayres, 1994), low self-respect (McCroskey, Richmond, Daly, and Falcione, 1977), low academic achievement (McCroskey, 1984), and poor learning outcomes (Frymier, 2005). Allen, Richmond, and McCroskey (1984) found that individuals with high CA tend to have lower incomes. Moreover, high CA has been determined to negatively affect image perceptions by others around them. Those with high CA are perceived as lacking leadership skills and are seen as less efficient (Cole and McCroskey, 2003). They also have fewer opportunities to get promotions (McCroskey and Richmond, 1979; Allen, Richmond and McCroskey, 1984).

PRCA-24

The instrument used to measure traitlike CA is called the PRCA-24 (McCroskey, 1982, 2001), which stands for the Personal Report on Communication Apprehension. It contains twenty-four statements for people to respond to using a Likert-type five-point scale ranging from (1) strongly agree to (5) strongly disagree. The PRCA-24 measures CA in four dimensions: Group Discussions (items 1 to 6); Meetings (items 7 to 12); Interpersonal Conversations (items 13 to 18); and Public Speaking (items 19 to 24).

The formulas used for determining the values for CA in each dimension are as follows: (1) Group Discussions = 18+ [(sum score of Q2, Q4 and Q6) – (sum score of Q1, Q3, and Q5)]; (2) Meetings = 18+[(sum score of Q8, Q9 and Q12) – (sum score of Q7, Q10, and Q11)]; (3) Interpersonal Conversations = 18+[(sum score of Q14, Q16 and Q17) – (sum score of Q13, Q15, and Q18)]; and (4) Public Speaking = 18+[(sum score of Q19, Q21 and Q23) – (sum score of Q20, Q22, and Q24)].

The total traitlike score for the PRCA-24 is computed by adding the scores of the four dimensions together. The scores should range between 24 and 120. If a score is below 24 or above 120, it is assumed a computational error was made. A CA score higher than 80 is considered high, and lower than 51 is considered low.

For the Group Discussions dimension, any score higher than 20 is considered high and any score lower than 11 is considered low; for the Meetings dimension, any score higher than 20 is considered high and any score lower than 13 is considered low; for the Interpersonal Conversations dimension, any score higher than 18 is considered high and lower than 11 is low; for the Interpersonal Conversations dimension, any score higher than 18 is considered high and lower than 11 is low; finally, for the Public Speaking dimension, any score higher than 24 is considered high and lower than 14 is low.

In the present study, the CA scores of the sample were measured when they use L1 (Thai) and English (L2) by the PRCA-24, which was translated into Thai; it was then translated back into English and revised with the help of a bilingual professor at a public university. Moreover, this version of the PRCA-24 that was translated into Thai has previously been proven to have construct validity when used with Thai people (Rimkeeratikul, 2008).

CA in L1 and L2

Most previous studies on communication apprehension have found that CA in L2 is usually higher than CA in L1. McCroskey et al. (1983) and Richmond et al. (2008) determined that students' levels of CA in L1 were significantly lower than their levels of CA in L2. Moreover, according to McCroskey, Gundykunst, and Nishida (1985), the CA level in the first language must be reduced beforehand in order to increase the chance for success in a second language.

Not much research has been done in Thailand comparing CA in L1 and CA in L2 among Thai students or Thai people. However, one recent study revealed that CA in L2 (English) among first-year engineering students in a public university in Thailand was lower than CA in L1 (Thai) for the dimension of meetings (Rimkeeratikul, 2015). Rimkeeratikul (2015) concluded that the students in this study may have felt comfortable in the English classroom. Moreover, they knew that the situations they were asked about in the PRCA-24 were merely hypothetical; consequently, there were no real punishments or rewards.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were as follows:
1. Is there any difference between the traitlike CA in L1 (Thai) and L2 (English) among adult students in a master's degree program for executives in the political science faculty of a public university in Bangkok?
2. Is there any difference between the traitlike CA in L1 (Thai) and L2 (English) across the four subcategories among adult students in a master's degree program for executives in the political science faculty of a public university in Bangkok?

Research Design

This quantitative research was undertaken with adult students in a master's degree program for executives in the Faculty of Political Science at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand. The participants in the study were first-year students who were taking a compulsory English course for graduate students. The content of the subject was English emphasizing reading skill enhancement. However, the language used in the classroom was Thai.

This target group was chosen for two reasons. First, it is a course with special attributes, as it is designed for executives with various educational backgrounds before coming to study in the graduate program in political science. Most of them had been working in the government sector. Their educational backgrounds vary because anyone holding at least a bachelor's degree in any field is eligible to apply for the program. Second, the executives all had at least five years of experience in their field.

The instrument employed was a questionnaire containing three parts: (1) demographic data; (2) the PRCA-24 when the subjects use L1; and (3) the PRCA-24 when the subjects use L2. In this study, the reliability of the PRCA-24 when the participants use L1 was 0.91 and the reliability of the PRCA-24 when the participants use L2 was 0.96.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before the end of the first semester, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to her class and also asked the lecturer teaching the same subject to the other class to distribute the questionnaires to the students. The total number of first-year students that semester for this program was 40 students divided into two groups. The total number of questionnaires returned from the first group was 13 and 18 were returned from the second group. Thus, the total number of returned questionnaires from both groups was 31; this equates to 77.5%, which is considered a good rate of return.

Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviation, and percentage were calculated for the general background of the respondents. In addition, the total CA scores and average CA scores in each dimension of the adult students in the executive program when they use the English language and when they use the Thai language were calculated from the PRCA-24 in order to determine their communication apprehension in total and in each dimension, which included group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking.

Then, the mean scores of the total CA and the CA in each dimension when the adult students communicate using the Thai language (L1) and the mean scores of the total CA and the CA in each dimension when the adult students communicate using the English language (L2) were compared using t-test analyses. In this study, the significance level was set at *p<.05.*

Results

Table 1 indicates that the overall mean score of total CA when the students in the executive program use the Thai language was 73.2, which is the moderate apprehension level. McCroskey (1982) has previously stated that any total CA score above 80 indicates that an individual is more apprehensive about communication than the average.

Regarding the CA score for each dimension when the students communicate in Thai, it was found at the moderate level, except for their CA in interpersonal conversations. According to McCroskey (1982), for interpersonal conversations, any CA score higher than 18 is considered high.

Table 1. CA in L1

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	CA Level
Group Discussions	30	14.00	23.00	17.10	2.22	Moderate
Meetings	31	14.00	30.00	18.94	3.23	Moderate
Interpersonal Conversations	31	13.00	22.00	18.58	2.08	High
Public Speaking	31	12.00	24.00	18.48	2.80	Moderate
Total CA	30	53.00	86.00	73.17	7.06	Moderate

Table 2 reveals the mean scores of CA across dimensions when the graduate students in this program for executives use the English language. The mean score of the total CA of the participants was 70.8, indicating that the respondents' overall level of CA was moderate. By the same token, for the four categories of CA, the respondents' CA scores were found to be at the moderate level, as none of the scores were higher than 18.

Table 2. CA in L2

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	CA Level
Group Discussions	31	13.00	21.00	17.13	1.86	Moderate
Meetings	31	14.00	22.00	17.94	2.53	Moderate
Interpersonal Conversations	31	13.00	22.00	17.84	1.77	Moderate
Public Speaking	31	13.00	24.00	17.94	2.35	Moderate
Total CA	31	57.00	83.00	70.84	5.91	Moderate

As indicated in Table 3, the paired sample t-test exhibited that CA in L1 and CA in L2 in the dimension of interpersonal conversations among the adult students of this MA program for executives were different with a statistical significance.

Table 3. Paired Sample t-tests of CA in L1 and L2 in All Dimensions

| | Pair Differences | | | | | | | |
| | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1: Group Discussions	.00	2.33	.43	-.87	.87	.00	29	1.00
Pair 2: Meetings	1.00	3.23	.58	-.19	2.19	1.721	30	.10
Pair 3: Interpersonal Conversations	.74	1.93	.35	.03	1.45	2.139	30	.04*

	Pair Differences							
				95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 4: Public Speaking	.55	3.93	.71	-.89	1.99	.78	30	.44
Pair 5: Total CA	2.40	6.93	1.27	-.19	4.99	1.898	29	.07

p<.05

As shown in Table 4, the paired sample statistics revealed that among students in this executive program, the average CA in interpersonal conversations when the students in this program use Thai (L1) was higher than the average CA when they use English (L2).

Table 4. Paired Sample Statistics of CA in L1 and L2 in Interpersonal Conversations

	Paired Sample Statistics		
	Mean	N	SD
CA when using Thai	18.58	31	2.08
CA when using English	17.84	31	1.77

Discussion

The results of this research revealed that CA in L1 in interpersonal conversations was lower than CA in the same dimension in L2 among students of this graduate program for executives. It may be concluded that the graduate students in this executive program were relaxed in the English classroom, as it is a course that places an emphasis on English reading skills and not on speaking. The examinations in this English course do not include speaking skills in any dimension, e.g. public speaking or group discussions. Moreover, students are not given letter grades, but instead receive either a 'Pass' or 'Fail'; therefore, this may limit the stress they feel when imagining the use of English in interpersonal conversations.

On the contrary, the students' interpersonal conversations in Thai, either with their classmates or the lecturers in this English course or in other courses, may have greater consequences for them; for example, as it was the participants' first semester, they may have been especially sensitive with regard to interactions with classmates and teachers, as they could play a part in determining the students' success or failure in the program. The fact that the students communicated in Thai (L1) in all activities, not in the English language (L2), may explain why their communication apprehension (CA) in Thai (L1) for the dimension of interpersonal conversations was higher than that in English (L2) in the same dimension.

Summary and Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate whether there is any difference in participants' total communication apprehension (CA) or in any dimension across the CA when using L1

compared to L2. In this study, no differences were found with respect to the total CA scores or scores across the four dimensions, except for CA in interpersonal conversations. In this dimension, the CA when using L1 (Thai) was higher than the CA in the same category when the students of this program used L2 (English).

Recommendations for Further Research

The recommendations for further research are as follows:

1. Future studies may investigate CA in L1 and L2 of students in another graduate program where English is the language used in the classroom.
2. Future studies may include more related variables such as intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) in order to obtain more insight into students who are studying English in the era of ASEAN where the English language and intercultural communication are essential for career advancement.

About the Authors

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