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An Exploration of the Relationship among Rhetorical Sensitivity, Communication Apprehension, and Nonverbal Decoding Ability

Mary Aileen Palanca
Western Michigan University

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG
RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY, COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION,
AND NONVERBAL DECODING ABILITY

by

Mary Aileen Palanca

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
Department of Communication Arts and Sciences

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August 1982
AN EXPLORATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG
RHETORICAL SENSITIVITY, COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION,
AND NONVERBAL DECODING ABILITY

Mary Aileen Palanca, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1982

This study explored the potential relationship which
might exist among rhetorical sensitivity, communication
apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability. Three
measuring instruments, the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale,
the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, and the
Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity, were administered to 109
participants, 68 females and 41 males. Gender and age were
examined to see what effect they might have on the potential
relationship. No relationship was found among rhetorical
sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal
decoding ability. In addition, no relationship was found
between gender and the three variables or between age and
the three variables. However, it is important to note that
these findings support previous research which has indicated
lack of correlation between personality variables and
nonverbal decoding ability.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis committee, chairperson Dr. George Robeck and members Dr. Steven Rhodes and Dr. Ruth Heinig, for their patience and invaluable assistance in the preparation and completion of this manuscript. I would also like to thank the faculty of the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences who so graciously allowed me the use of their class time in which to conduct this study and who gave me encouragement when I needed it.

Additional acknowledgement must be made to the students who participated in the study and to those students who aided in the scoring of measuring instruments: Wes Garman, Mike Stenner, Dan Rhodes, Joni Stephens, Sue Dickerson, and Erin Smith.

I would also like to thank Lorraine Karau for her patient and careful typing of this manuscript.

Mary Aileen Palanca
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Each person is a unique, multi-faceted, complex and essentially social being. Communication is the basic and intricate process through which we interact with others, both verbally and nonverbally, form relationships, and assert and reaffirm our fundamental sense of self. It is because of the complexity and uniqueness of each human being that each of us develops a distinctive style of interaction. Our communicative behavior is reflective of our perception of the world, our individual method of processing internal and external stimuli, and of the reactions generated by the conditions of each situation we encounter.

Although every person maintains unique communicative characteristics in interaction, it is possible to recognize similarities in communicative predispositions among people. In order to facilitate individual growth and to provide insight necessary for effective and satisfying social interaction, concentrated study of the similarities and differences of communicative styles or tendencies is warranted.

The study of the ability to transmit and decode nonverbal cues has received much research historically in a variety of different disciplines. Although the focus of some research dictates the separate examination of verbal and nonverbal modes of expression, it is important to emphasize that the two are not entirely different elements of the total communication
process. Our communication styles are developed in relation to the combination of verbal and nonverbal input and expression. Given the inseparable role of verbal and nonverbal modes of expression in the communication process, it is desirable to examine the extent of the relationship nonverbal decoding ability has with verbal styles of communicative behavior.

Verbal communicative styles are many and varied. For example, rhetorical communication is concerned with the style of verbalization and the effect of that style on others. Sensitivity to a rhetorical or instrumental style of communication generates strategic and purposive interaction. Communication apprehension is a different style of interaction which reflects the level of fear or anxiety an individual associates with actual or anticipated interaction. Each of these communicative predispositions is different from the other. Each has been studied extensively, but separately, in association with verbal styles of communicative behavior.

The purpose of this study is to explore the inter-relationship among rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension, two verbal communicator styles, and nonverbal decoding ability in an effort to understand each concept better and to determine verbal and nonverbal relationships inherent in specific styles of communicative behavior.

Rhetorical Sensitivity

Approaches to communication can be situated into two general, but different, styles. In the expressive style,
a person's motivation to communicate stems from a desire to achieve gratification by putting his/her strongest feelings into words in order to find a verbal release (Rosenberg, Verba, and Converse, 1970, p. 40). The instrumental style of communication, on the other hand, is strategic and purposive. Hart and Burks (1972) have re-labeled instrumental communication as rhetorical sensitivity, distinguishing that communicative style as being concerned with the effect one's words may have on one's listeners. They argue that a rhetorically sensitive approach to interaction can facilitate human understanding and social cohesion more effectively than an expressive style. The rhetorically sensitive person can be positioned theoretically and better understood when contrasted to the two rival personalities, the Noble Self and the Rhetorical Reflector, developed by Darnell and Brockreide (1976, pp. 178-179).

Rhetorically sensitive persons differ from the unitary Noble Self and the pluralistic Rhetorical Reflector in that they accept role-taking as a necessary part of interaction. The person sensitive to an instrumental approach to communication has no commitment to a rigid, singular self; he/she chooses which role or self is appropriate to a given situation. Unlike the Rhetorical Reflector, rhetorically sensitive people have an active involvement in interpersonal exchanges with genuine choices to make concerning which role is most appropriate to the situation. The growth that rhetorically sensitive people experience in one transaction
provides them with the potential for growth in future interaction (Darnell and Brockreide, 1976, pp. 179-182).

To emphasize the validity and the necessity for an instrumental style of social interaction, Hart and Burks (1972) have outlined five characteristics of people who exhibit a rhetorically sensitive approach to communication. The first characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity stems from a general semantics perspective which views people as complex, social beings, who are, necessarily, many things to many people. Human complexity implies that a person's life is made of many parts. Social conditions variously call forth the display of one or more roles. Rhetorical invention, the process of choosing ideas appropriate to the subject, audience, and occasion, is an important technique used by the rhetorically sensitive communicator (Hart and Burks, 1972).

In defining the second characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity, Hart and Burks (1972, p. 79) theorize that if a person continually chooses the same role without regard to the situation or the context and does not deal with social interaction on an ad hoc basis, he/she will be rhetorically unproductive and interpersonally naive. The sensitive person is continually anticipatory and ready to change to meet the needs of diverse social conditions in order to maintain effectiveness. Every interpersonal exchange is fragile, a situation in which the guiding principle is discretion. This should be supported by a concern for the other's complexity that allows no unilateral application of any purely verbal
premise (Hart and Burks, 1972, p. 82).

The third characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity deals with situational adaptation. Because people are different, because the potential for thought and action varies, and because people respond to social forces with varying amounts of selectivity and intensity, effective communication demands modification of expressive behavior in order to deal better with the behavior of others (Hart and Burks, 1972, pp. 82-85).

The fourth characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity is a dual premise. At times, rhetorical sensitivity demands that a person say nothing at all in a given social encounter. The second part of the premise indicates that some ideas are situationally bereft of rhetorical impact no matter how they are placed. Any communicative disclosure must be designed to deal with potentials that lie in oneself and the other at the moment of interaction. One of the most basic decisions of communication refers to the amount or absence of disclosure in an interaction. As long as individual differences continue to be a primary aspect of interpersonal encounters, the first thought or the initial reaction cannot be considered an effective or desirable vehicle for all interaction.

The fifth characteristic of rhetorical sensitivity, which deals with communicative channels, indicates that rhetorical invention involves two basic procedures: determination of which ideas are to be considered for disclosure and consideration of how information is to be presented (Hart and
Burks, 1972, p. 88). The rhetorically sensitive person realizes that an individual is complex and differences call for patience and interpersonal sensitivity in deciding the best way for an idea to be expressed. Rhetorical sensitivity utilizes consideration of all verbal and nonverbal alternatives, the attempt to process and choose among all the possible verbal statements and nonverbal expressions before disclosing an idea.

A person with a rhetorically sensitive communicative style exhibits the ability to assume appropriate roles during an interaction, avoids stylized verbal behavior, is adaptable to the conditions of a given encounter, selectively discloses information, and understands that an idea can be expressed in many different ways. The display of these characteristics indicates that the sensitive communicator fosters an active attitude toward communication. Although this condition is not entirely unique to rhetorical sensitivity, it is important to note that not all communicators display a dynamic interest in their interaction.

Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension is defined as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with persons (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78). This results in a communicator style that is much different from rhetorical sensitivity. Communication apprehension can be conceptualized as a trait of the individual which has much
impact on a person's daily life. Spielberger (1966) and Lamb (1973) have distinguished between two different forms of apprehension. Trait communication apprehension is characterized by levels of fear or anxiety in regard to many different types of encounters. State apprehension is specifically experienced during a given encounter, such as delivering a speech or interviewing for a job. The focus of this study will be on trait communication apprehension.

Three general theoretical propositions dealing with high levels of trait apprehension have received support from available research:

1. People who experience a high level of communication apprehension will withdraw from and seek to avoid communication whenever possible.

2. As a result of their withdrawal and avoidance behaviors, people who experience a high level of communication apprehension will be perceived less positively than people who experience lower levels of communication apprehension by others in their environment.

3. As a result of their withdrawal and avoidance behaviors, and in conjunction with the negative perceptions fostered by those behaviors, people who experience a high level of communication apprehension will be negatively impacted in terms of their economic, political, and social lives (McCroskey, 1977, p. 85).

Most of the research dealing with communication apprehension has been focused on the negative effects of high level communication apprehension because the behaviors associated are more apparent and seem to be more easily measured. It is possible to create a composite profile of a person with high level communication apprehension based on
different focuses of various research.

A valid starting point in developing the communication apprehension profile would be to emphasize that people with high levels of communication apprehension will characteristically avoid and/or withdraw from communication. The behavior which results from this passive-attitude interaction generates negative perceptions by others of people with a high level of apprehension. This situation is supported by much of the available research. For example, McCroskey (1977) reported that Knutson and Lashbrook found that people with high communication apprehension are perceived as low in both assertiveness and responsiveness. McCroskey, Hamilton, and Weiner (1974) reported that people who exhibit high tension in their communication behaviors in a small group are perceived to be less socially attractive and less interpersonally similar. Mulac and Sherman (1975) observed a significant relationship between perceived anxiety in male public speakers and perceptions of their competence and trustworthiness. In various other studies, people exhibiting high communication apprehension have been found to be perceived as less socially attractive, less task attractive, less competent, less sexually attractive, less attractive as a communication partner, less composed, and less extroverted but of a slightly higher character as compared to people with low communication apprehension (McCroskey, Daly, Richmond, and Cox, 1975; McCroskey, 1977).

Much of the research dealing with communication
apprehension has been focused on elementary teachers and students and high school students in an effort to understand how this predisposition may develop and how it may be reinforced in the academic environment. McCroskey and Daly (1975) found that teachers exposed to brief descriptions of an elementary school child with high apprehension, as compared to teachers exposed to similar descriptions of a student with low apprehension, indicated that expectations of the highly apprehensive child would include a lower overall academic average, less satisfactory relationships with other students, and lower probability of success in future education. High school students with high communication apprehension, as compared with students with lower levels of apprehension, have been found to have lower overall grade point averages (McCroskey and Anderson, 1976) and to show lower achievement on standardized tests administered at the completion of high school (McCroskey and Anderson, 1976; McCroskey, 1977). These effects were found to occur even though no meaningful relationship has been found between communication apprehension and intelligence (McCroskey, 1977).

Other research supports the theoretical proposition cited earlier that suggests that people with high communication apprehension will be negatively impacted in terms of their economic and political lives. For example, McCroskey (1977) reported that the highly apprehensive job applicant was perceived as less competent and projected to be less satisfied on the job, to require more training, to be less successful on
the job, and to have more difficulty in establishing good relationships with co-workers. McCroskey (1977) reported that people with high communication apprehension were less likely to register and vote than people with lower levels of communication apprehension.

The highly communicatively apprehensive person fosters a passive attitude toward interaction which suggests that the apprehensive communicative style is quite different from the rhetorical style. It seems that the communicatively apprehensive person chooses not to acknowledge the impact that verbal expressions or nonverbal cues have on interaction in order to develop a rationale for avoiding communication whenever possible.

**Nonverbal Cues Decoding Ability**

In identifying communicator styles, it is important to consider the level of acuity to the interpretation of nonverbal cues an individual exhibits as well as his/her verbal predisposition. In our verbal-oriented society, the importance of the inseparable role that nonverbal communication plays in the total communication process is often overlooked. Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1967) advanced a fundamental axiom of communication that is basic to the understanding of the intricate status of the nonverbal in our daily lives: One cannot not communicate. Verbal messages are always transmitted in a nonverbal context. Consequently, messages are impossible to decode without the consideration of nonverbal cues.
categories is the personality-oriented approach. Its primary focus is on individual differences in nonverbal behavior, and it looks specifically at a person's nonverbal skill or style (Rosenthal, Hall, DiMatteo, Rogers, and Archer, 1979). Despite the range of decoding research designs, some generalizations about the interpretability of emotion from nonverbal behavior can be made: (1) some emotions can be accurately decoded from the nonverbal behavior of the face, body, and voice, (2) these nonverbal channels probably differ in decodability, (3) emotions differ in decodability, and, (4) people definitely differ in their ability to decode emotions from nonverbal behavior (Zuckerman, Lipts, Koivumaki, and Rosenthal, 1975).

Mehrabian (1972, p. 187) postulates that nonverbal behavior is more important or basic than verbal behavior. Individual differences among people in their use of nonverbal cues can be conceptualized in three ways: (1) in terms of consistent individual differences in the expression of positive feelings and differences in the expression of dominance and responsiveness; (2) in terms of a person's tendency to nonverbal, rather than verbal, channels to express emotion; and, (3) as an aspect of social skills—the appropriate communication of attitude and status through nonverbal cues (Mehrabian, 1972, pp. 189-190).

People also differ in their ability to understand messages which are expressed nonverbally. Many studies have been conducted which identify individual differences in
nonverbal decoding ability. For example, Beldoch (1964) designed a study which examined interrelationships among abilities to identify emotional messages in different modes of nonverbal communication. He reported that significant intercorrelations were obtained among the abilities to identify the expression of feeling in three different nonverbal modes: specific emotions expressed by voice tone; abstract artistic representations of the same emotions; and, musical compositions of the same emotions. Davitz and Mattis (1964) report a similar relationship between the ability to identify an emotional meaning by voice tone and by facial expression. In other words, these studies suggest that a person who correctly decodes an emotional expression in one nonverbal mode is likely to be able to decode the same emotional expression in another nonverbal mode. Similarly, a person who incorrectly decodes an emotional expression in one nonverbal mode is likely to make the same decoding error when the same emotional message is expressed in a different nonverbal mode. In addition, these studies support the idea that a person who accurately decodes the emotional meanings of vocal expressions also tends to accurately decode facial, graphic, and musical expressions. This study will explore the possibility that the ability to decode nonverbal cues is related to rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension.

Statement Of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to explore what relationships might exist among rhetorical sensitivity, communication
apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability. The following represent the types of questions of interest:

1. Is there a relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension?

2. Is there a relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and nonverbal decoding ability?

3. Is there a relationship between communication apprehension and nonverbal decoding ability?

4. Are any of these relationships affected by age or gender?

Summary

This chapter detailed characteristics of two communicator styles, rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability. Each of the verbal communicator styles and nonverbal decoding ability has been studied extensively, but separately. It was established that the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability.

Chapter Two provides a discussion of the procedures of the study. The results of the study are reported in Chapter Three, and Chapter Four contains a discussion of the results and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The focus of this study is to explore the potential relationships among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability. Subjects were obtained from students enrolled in courses in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at Western Michigan University during the 1982 Winter Semester. The subjects completed two self-report questionnaires and a response sheet used in conjunction with viewing a film. The scores from the questionnaires and the response sheet provided the raw data used for explaining potential relationships among the three variables. The following sections detail the selection of subjects, the validity of the measuring instruments, procedures, and methods of analysis.

Selection of Subjects

The subjects were recruited by faculty permission from Communication Arts and Sciences (CAS) courses at Western Michigan University during the 1982 Winter Semester. One hundred and twenty-five students enrolled in three different sections of CAS 170 (Interpersonal Communication), one section of CAS 570 (Family Communication), one section of CAS 572 (Nonverbal Communication), and one section of CAS 670 (Seminar in Organizational Communication) participated. Although students were recruited from courses in the
Communication Arts and Sciences Department, the students enrolled in those classes are from a variety of disciplines. For example, CAS 170 is an undergraduate course required for all Communication majors and minors. In addition, a student may enroll in the course to gain credit for a general education elective. Five hundred level courses are open to upper level undergraduate and graduate students in Communication, Social Work, Counseling and Personnel, Occupational Therapy, and Educational Leadership. The 600 level courses are open to graduate students in the Communication Department.

In some class sections, it was necessary to conduct the instrument administration during different class meetings. For example, on one day the two self-report questionnaires were administered and on another day the subjects completed response sheets while viewing a film. For that reason, although 125 students participated in the study, attrition reduced the final number of subjects to 109. Of that number, there were 68 female subjects and 41 male subjects. The ages of the subjects ranged from 18 to 54 years of age.

Measuring Instruments

Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980) developed the Rhetorical Sensitivity scale (hereafter RHETSEN). The RHETSEN scale is in the form of a personal inventory questionnaire which consists of 40 Likert-type options which are weighted differentially. Twenty-eight rhetorical sensitivity items
and 12 dummy items are included in the scale. An individual's score on the RHETSEN can range from a low of 0 to a high of 56, with two points maximum for each of the 28 rhetorical sensitivity items.

Hart, Carlson, and Eadie (1980, p. 12) reported that "the developmental work with the RHETSEN scale indicated that we had developed a sufficiently valid and reliable instrument". In the development of the initial RHETSEN instrument, three separate procedures were used to assess its criterion-related validity.

Undergraduate students were asked to complete RHETSEN and their instructors were asked to assess the rhetorical sensitivity of their students. Students designated as highly sensitive by RHETSEN scores were also rated as more sensitive by their instructors. The second procedure involved asking a group of sorority women to record names of their sorority sisters who were most likely, Rhetorical Reflector, and least likely, Noble Self, to change their communicative patterns to please other people. RHETSEN scores correlated negatively with the number of times subjects were reported as being either Noble Self or Rhetorical Reflector. The third procedure involved administering the RHETSEN to persons concerned with interpersonal communication on a professional basis. Pastoral counselors who took RHETSEN scored significantly higher than did graduate students in a comparison group who were attitudinally similar but who were not trained counselors (Hart, Carlson, and Eadie, 1980).
McCroskey (1970) developed a self-report questionnaire which measures communication apprehension and is called the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (hereafter PRCA). The PRCA consists of 25 choice Likert-type items yielding scores from 25 to 125. It has yielded reliability estimates above .90 in over fifty studies. A summary of research employing the PRCA through 1975 provided a comprehensive argument in support of its validity (McCroskey, 1978).

The Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (hereafter PONS), developed by Rosenthal, Hall, Archer, DiMatteo, and Rogers (1979), is a comprehensive and scientifically validated measurement of sensitivity to nonverbal communication. The full PONS test is a 47-minute, black-and-white 16 mm film and soundtrack composed of 220 numbered auditory and visual segments. The 220 segments are a randomized presentation of 20 short scenes portrayed by a young woman, each scene represented in 11 different modes or channels of nonverbal communication. The 11 channels fall into two categories. The first five channels are "pure": (1) face alone, (2) body from neck to knees, no voice, (3) face and body down to thighs, no voice, (4) electronically filtered voice, no picture, and, (5) randomized spliced voice, no picture. The remaining six channels are "mixed" in that they combine the pure channels: (6) face plus random-spliced voice, (7) face plus electronically filtered voice, (8) body plus random-spliced voice, (9) body plus electronically filtered voice, (10) face
plus body plus random-spliced voice, and, (11) face plus body
plus electronically filtered voice (Rosenthal, Hall, Archer,
DiMatteo, and Rogers, 1979b, p. 7).

The respondent's task is to view the film and circle the
label on the response sheet that accurately describes the scene
being portrayed. The full PONS test has been administered to
over 7,000 people in samples that included university students,
children and teenagers, teachers and teachers-in-training,
physicians and therapists, businessmen, mental patients,
actors, and married couples. The basic reliability of the
full PONS test reached the level obtained by standardized
group-administered tests of intelligence. For the high
school norm group (N=492), the internal consistency
reliability was .92. In six studies of retest reliability,
the median r was .69 (Rosenthal, Hall, Archer, DiMatteo, and
Rogers, 1979b, p. 18).

Procedures

On January 18 of the 1982 Winter Semester, a letter was
distributed to all Communication Arts and Sciences faculty at
Western Michigan University (see Appendix A). The letter
briefly described the nature and purpose of the research
study and requested permission to enlist students enrolled in
communication courses to act as participants. An information
sheet was attached to the letter which included a short
definition of each of the variables, a brief description of
each of the three measuring instruments and a list of
references (see Appendix B). Because of the amount of time needed to administer all three measuring instruments, responses were specifically requested from those instructors teaching classes that met for longer than fifty minutes and/or who could devote two class periods to participation in the study.

All participants completed the RHETSEN questionnaire (see Appendix C), the PRCA questionnaire (see Appendix D), and the PONS test during regular class time. Instructions were provided for all three of the instruments (see Appendix E). For four of the sections from which subjects were recruited, the RHETSEN and the PRCA questionnaires were administered during one class period and the full PONS test was administered during another class period on a different day. For the other two sections, all three measuring instruments were administered during the same class period. The difference in these procedures was dictated by the amount of class time available for student involvement in the study.

The subjects signed a consent form (see Appendix F) before any of the measuring instruments were administered. These forms were kept in a file separate from the questionnaires and the response sheets in order to insure subject anonymity. Each subject was asked to write his/her social security number, age, and gender on the top of the questionnaires and the response sheet. This information was requested for a number of reasons. First, social security numbers provided a system for arranging the scores from the measuring instruments in a coherent manner as it was necessary to conduct administration
on two different days in some instances. Second, the subjects were able to request their scores after data collection was completed and still preserve their anonymity since only social security numbers were used for identification. Age and gender information provided additional ways to view the data.

Methods of Data Analysis

A number of procedures was implemented to arrange data in a form acceptable for statistical analysis. First, the measuring instruments were hand-scored. The information obtained was transferred to a grid which included the following categories: (1) social security numbers, (2) subject number, (3) age, (4) gender, (5) RHETSEN score, (6) PRCA score, and, (7) PONS score. The data from this grid were then stored in a computer bank file. Finally, the data were subjected to simple analysis using Western Michigan University's STAT PAK program.

Summary

This chapter covered the methods used for the selection of subjects, the validity of the measuring instruments, procedures, and methods of data analysis.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore the potential relationship among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability. The procedures and methods used to conduct the study were presented in Chapter Two. The results of the statistical analysis of the data will be presented in this chapter.

Raw scores from the three measuring instruments used in the study were transferred from a grid to a computer file. All data were left in the raw form for analysis. Analysis consisted of examining relationships by using correlation coefficients and using means and standard deviations to describe the data.

Results

As stated previously, the questions of interest to the study are: (1) is there a relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension?, (2) is there a relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and nonverbal decoding ability?, (3) is there a relationship between communication apprehension and nonverbal decoding ability?, and, (4) are any of these relationships affected by age or gender?

The Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the first three questions. For question one,
no relationship was found between rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension. The correlation coefficient was 0.0928 (N=109, p>.05), (See Table 1). For question two, the correlation coefficient was -0.0592 (N=109, p>.05) for rhetorical sensitivity and nonverbal decoding ability, which indicates no relationship (see Table 1). No relationship was found between communication apprehension and nonverbal decoding ability (question three). The correlation coefficient was -0.1868 (N=109, p>.05), (see Table 1).

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{Rhetorical Sensitivity} & \text{Communication Apprehension} & \text{Nonverbal Decoding Ability} \\
1.000 & 0.0928 & 1.000 \\
0.0928 & -0.0592 & -0.1868 \\
-0.0592 & -0.1868 & 1.000 \\
N=109 & p>.05 & \\
\end{array}
\]

Since there were no relationships among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability and because variables such as age and
gender can often affect the data, a breakdown of the data is justified. This is the concern of question four. The Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was also used to examine the nature of the relationship between age and the three variables.

No relationships were found between age and rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, or nonverbal decoding ability. The correlation coefficient was 0.1426 (N=109, p>.05) for age and rhetorical sensitivity, -0.0353 (N=109, p>.05) for age and communication apprehension, and 0.1548 (N=109, p>.05) for age and nonverbal decoding ability (see Table 2).

**TABLE 2**

Correlation Matrix of Age and Rhetorical Sensitivity, Communication Apprehension, and Nonverbal Decoding Ability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Rhetorical Sensitivity</th>
<th>Communication Apprehension</th>
<th>Nonverbal Decoding Ability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Sensitivity</td>
<td>0.1426</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Apprehension</td>
<td>-0.0353</td>
<td>0.0928</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal Decoding Ability</td>
<td>0.1548</td>
<td>-0.0592</td>
<td>-0.1868</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=109, p .05
Because gender is a dichotomous variable, a Point Biserial Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the nature of the relationship between gender and the three variables. The point biserial correlation coefficient between rhetorical sensitivity and gender was 0.0699 (N=109, p>.05), -0.1227 (N=109, p>.05) between gender and communication apprehension, and 0.0184 (N=109, p>.05) between gender and nonverbal decoding ability. No relationships were found among gender, rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability.

Of the 109 subjects, there were 68 females and 41 males. The mean score for rhetorical sensitivity was 31.691 for the female group (N=68) and 32.732 for the male group (N=41). The female group's communication apprehension mean score was 68.618 (N=68) and the male group's was 64.805 (N=41). The mean score for nonverbal decoding ability was 167.13 (N=68) for the female group and 167.13 (N=41) for the male group. The t value for rhetorical sensitivity and gender was 0.7286 which is not significant (df=107, p>.468). The t value for gender and communication apprehension was -1.285 indicating no significance (df=107, p>.202). For gender and nonverbal decoding ability, the t value was 0.1914 which is not significant.

Summary

To examine the nature of the relationship among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and
nonverbal decoding ability, the Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. No relationship was found between rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension; no relationship was found between rhetorical sensitivity and nonverbal decoding ability; and, no relationship was found between communication apprehension and nonverbal decoding ability. Because variables such as age and gender can often affect data, the data were broken down and examined according to age and gender. The Pearson-Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was also used to examine the nature of the relationship of age and the three variables. No relationships were indicated between age and any of the three variables. Since gender is a dichotomous variable, a Point Biserial Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the nature of the relationship of gender to the three variables. No relationship were found between gender and any of the three variables. There was no significant difference in the mean scores between males and females, and the t values reported were not significant.
CHAPTER IV
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the possible existence of relationships among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability. The following types of questions were addressed: (1) is there a relationship between communication apprehension and rhetorical sensitivity?; (2) is there a relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and nonverbal decoding ability?; (3) is there a relationship between communication apprehension and nonverbal decoding ability? In addition, the study examined the possibility of age and gender affecting any of the relationships.

Participants were obtained by instructor permission from courses in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences at Western Michigan University during the 1982 Winter Semester. The sample consisted of 68 female participants and 41 male participants. Each completed two self-report questionnaires, the Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale and the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension, and a response sheet used with the Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity test.

No relationships were found among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability. Additionally, there were no relationships found between age and the three variables or between gender and the three variables.
Discussion

Each of the three measures, RHETSEN, PRCA, and the PONS test has received extensive, but separate, study. The present study examined the three variables in relation to each other. The purpose of that examination was to explore the possible verbal and nonverbal relationships inherent in specific styles of communicative behavior.

Verbal communicative styles are many and varied. The measure of rhetorical sensitivity is concerned with the effect of the verbalization of a message on others. There are five characteristics of rhetorical sensitivity according to Hart and Burks (1972). As discussed previously, a person with a rhetorically sensitive communicative style exhibits the ability to assume appropriate roles during an interaction, avoids stylized verbal behavior, is adaptable to the conditions of a given encounter, selectively discloses information, and understands that an idea can be expressed in many ways.

Communication apprehension is a communicative style which is characterized by a reticence to become involved in interaction and is based on an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. Communication apprehension can be conceptualized as a trait of an individual which has much impact on the person's daily life (McCroskey, 1977, p. 78).

As discussed in Chapter One, a person whose communicative style is based on communication apprehension will characteristically exhibit avoidance and withdrawal behavior
concerning interaction. As a result of his/her avoidance behavior, research in this area suggests that the person who experiences a high level of communication apprehension will be perceived less positively by others than the person who experiences a lower level of communication apprehension. Research in this area also suggests that the person who exhibits a high level of communication apprehension will be more likely to experience problems in terms of his/her economic, academic, political, and social lives as a result of apprehensive behaviors and in conjunction with the negative perceptions fostered by others because of those behaviors.

Although different, rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension are both communicative styles or traits which may be said to be inherent in an individual's personality. Because communicator styles deal with consistent ways of behaving, the present study parallels a previous study conducted by Davitz (1964) which was concerned with possible correlates between personality measures and the ability to identify vocal expressions of emotional meaning. In the Davitz study, a total of 33 personality variables in six personality tests (included were the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey, the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values, the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule, and the Psychaesthenia and Hysteria scales of the MMPI) were investigated. The correlation of each was computed with the measure of emotional sensitivity
(a tape recording of vocal expressions developed by Beldoch, 1964). Of the 33 variables, only three (heterosexuality, aggression, and general activity) were reliably correlated with the measure of emotional sensitivity; however, Davitz reported that the results could be accounted for by chance and, upon cross validation, none of the correlations involving the three personality variables achieved statistical significance (Davitz, 1964, p. 59).

The Davitz study used a vocal measure of nonverbal decoding ability developed by Beldoch, 1964. The Beldoch instrument is comprised of a tape-recorded recitation of the same three-sentence paragraph by male and female speakers while attempting to communicate 12 different emotions: admiration; affection; amusement; anger; boredom; despair; disgust; fear; impatience; joy; love; and, worship. The paragraph, chosen for neutrality of emotional content, is as follows: "I am going out now. I won't be back all afternoon. If anyone calls, just tell them I'm not here." (Beldoch, 1964, p.32.) The present study used the PONS test which measures nonverbal decoding ability in 11 different modes: (1) face; (2) body; (3) face and body; (4) random-spliced speech; (5) content-filtered speech; (6) face and random-spliced speech; (7) face, body, and random-spliced speech; (8) face and content-filtered speech; (9) face, body, and content-filtered speech; (10) body and content-filtered speech; and, (11) body and random-spliced speech. Although the vocal measure used in the Davitz study is a subset of
the PONS test, both instruments are comparable in that both are attempts to measure effective communication.

It is important to note that a study conducted by Rosenthal (1979) using the PONS test provided findings similar to those of the Davitz study. In the Rosenthal study, he related the PONS test to the Personality Research Form, which contains 440 items that form 22 scales measuring various traits on bipolar dimensions. Both tests were administered to clinical psychology graduate students (N=14), United States teachers (N=39), and internal medicine interns and residents (N=38). Rosenthal reported that few systematic trends appeared in the data from the three samples, although among physicians one of the scales, Nurturance, was found to have a significant positive correlation with total PONS score (Rosenthal, Hall, Archer, Di Matteo, and Rogers, 1979, p. 254).

The present study, which found no relationships among rhetorical sensitivity, communication apprehension, and nonverbal decoding ability, supports the findings of the Davitz study and of the Rosenthal study. In other words, if rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension can be considered personality variables, the findings reported here support those of the Davitz study and the Rosenthal study: personality measures do not correlate with nonverbal decoding ability.

Davitz (1964) reported that in all the studies he conducted dealing with nonverbal decoding ability, in samples
consisting of people with some college education, there was no
difference in ability between males and females. He also
reported that age did not make a difference in samples
consisting of adults. The fact that no relationship was
found in the present study between gender or between age and
the three variables supports the Davitz study, as the sample
of this study was comprised of adult college students.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings of the present study, the potential
for future research is indicated. It would be valuable to
replicate the procedures of the present study using a larger
sample size with more equity among gender groups and with a
greater age range. In addition, other demographic variables
could be explored; for example, occupation, education, and
socio-economic status.

Another area for future research stems from the nature of
the measure of nonverbal decoding ability used in this study.
The PONS test measures nonverbal decoding ability in 11
different modes as well as providing a total profile score of
nonverbal sensitivity. The PONS test makes it possible to
compute a separate score for each of the 11 modes of nonverbal
communication represented. Because of the exploratory focus
of the present study, only the profile or combination score
was used for statistical analysis. Examining each of the 11
nonverbal modes represented in the PONS test in relation to
rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension would
create a more specific focus for research.
The fact that the measure used for rhetorical sensitivity (RHETSEN) can also be used to measure the two other communicator styles discussed in Chapter One, the Noble Self and the Rhetorical Reflector, generates another avenue for future research. Given the findings of this study that there is no relationship between rhetorical sensitivity and nonverbal decoding ability, it might be valuable to examine the potential relationships between the Noble Self communicator style and nonverbal decoding ability as well as between the Rhetorical Reflector communicator style and nonverbal decoding ability.

Further research to explore all the possibilities of an interrelationship between a person's communicator style and his/her nonverbal decoding ability would be valuable. Based on the procedures and findings of the present study, no correlations can be predicted.
REFERENCES


McCroskey, J.C., & Daly, J.A. Teachers' expectations of the communicatively apprehensive child in the elementary school. Human Communication Research, 1976, 3, 90-95.


LETTER TO CAS FACULTY

January 18, 1982

Dear CAS Faculty Member,

I am a communication graduate student currently working on a master's thesis. My project is comprised of a research study designed to explore the interrelationship among the ability to interpret nonverbal cues (PONS), rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension. Each of these variables has been studied extensively, but separately, by communication researchers. The prospect of becoming involved in this type of project is exciting and challenging for me; and, I believe that the study of nonverbal decoding ability, rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension has merit for any student in communication. To obtain data for the study, I am asking for your help in enlisting students enrolled in your classes (sections meeting longer than 50 minutes, i.e., Tuesday/Thursday, 4:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m., 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. classes) to act as participants.

It will be necessary to administer three measurement instruments to respondents. Nonverbal decoding ability will be measured by the responses to nonverbal scenes portrayed in a 45-minute film (the PONS test). Rhetorical sensitivity and communication apprehension will be measured by self-report questionnaires. Each of the questionnaires can be completed within fifteen to twenty minutes. Therefore, I am requesting your permission to administer the questionnaires during one
class period (approximate time needed: 35 minutes). All information will be confidential and participants will be able to receive their scores on all three tests after data collection is completed. If you desire, I would be willing to conduct a brief follow-up discussion to explain the scoring procedure and to answer any questions that students may have.

Administration of the tests will begin January 25 and should be completed by February 12. If you would be willing to help me by having any of your classes participate in the study, please complete the form at the bottom of this letter and return it by January 20. Completed forms can be placed in the Communication Resource Center mailbox or left for me at the desk in the Resource Center, 2nd floor, Brown Hall.

For additional information about the variables and the tests, please see the attached information sheet.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

M.A. Palanca

________________________________________
Course # ________________  Instructor ________________
First Session--Questionnaire (35 minutes)
Date ____________
Time ____________
Classroom _________
Second Session--The PONS test (55 minutes)
Date ____________
Nonverbal Decoding Ability

The Profile of Nonverbal Sensitivity (the PONS test) is a 45-minute black-and-white 16 mm film and soundtrack composed of 220 numbered auditory and visual segments. The PONS test is the newest and most extensively developed test of nonverbal sensitivity. The PONS test, which has been administered to over 7,000 people, is the most comprehensive and the first major scientifically validated measurement of nonverbal sensitivity.


Rhetorical Sensitivity

Rhetorical sensitivity is a strategic, purposive, decision-making, goal-oriented style of communicative behavior.


The Rhetorical Sensitivity scale (RHETSEN) is a personal inventory questionnaire consisting of 40 Likert-type items which are weighted differentially. Twenty-eight rhetorical sensitivity items and 12 dummy items are included in the scale. An individual's score on the RHETSEN could range from
a low of 0 to a high of 56 (two points maximum for each of the 29 items).


**Communication Apprehension**

Communication apprehension is defined as an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.


The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) consists of 25 Likert-type items yielding scores from 20 to 100. Studies using the PRCA have provided reliability estimates above .90.

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These consist of pages:

P.41-44 Rhetorical Sensitivity Scale

P. 45-47 Personal Report of Communication Apprehension

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APPENDIX E
INSTRUCTIONS FOR MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

RHETSEN

"Directions: Listed below are a number of statements to which we would like your reactions. Please respond to each statement individually. There are no absolutely right or wrong answers. For each statement, indicate your opinion by choosing one of the following: A, B, C, D, or E."

PRCA

"Directions: This questionnaire is composed of 25 statements concerning feelings about communicating with other people. Please indicate the degree to which each statement applies to you by circling whether you (1) strongly agree, (2) agree, (3) are undecided, (4) disagree, or (5) strongly disagree with each statement. There are no right or wrong answers. Work quickly, just record your first impression."

The Full PONS

Instructions to Test Takers

The film and sound track you are about to witness was designed so that we may learn how well people can match facial expressions, body movements, and tone of voice to the actual situation in which the expressions, movements, and tones originally occurred.

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You will see and hear a series of audio and video segments, and for each one you are to judge which of two real-life situations is represented by the segment you have just seen or heard. After each segment you will have a short period of time in which to record your judgement.

Some of the visual segments will have no sound track. Some of the visual segments will have a sound track, but you will not be able to understand the words. Instead, you will hear speech that has been changed in various ways, so that you will be able to judge only the tone of voice in which something was said. Some of the segments will be made up of only these speech-altered portions of the sound track, and for these there will be no film to watch at all. In fact, the very first segment is like this.

Each segment you will see and/or hear has been numbered on the screen, and this number corresponds to a number on your answer sheet. Your answer sheet lists two brief descriptions of everyday life situations for each segment. One of these descriptions correctly describes the actual situation you will see and/or hear, while the other description does not describe the situation accurately. For each numbered segment, please circle the letter A or B next to the situation you believe to correspond to the segment you have just seen and/or heard.

When you see a number appear on the screen, please find the corresponding number on your answer sheet and place your finger just in front of the number, to keep your place.
Watch and/or listen to the segment that follows the number, and as soon as the segment ends, circle the letter A or B corresponding to the situation you believe the segment to have been based upon. Then look to the screen again promptly to find the next number flashed on the screen.

Many of the choices will be difficult, but you should choose one of the descriptions even though you may feel quite uncertain about the correct answer. Choose the more likely description for each segment even if you feel you might be guessing. Your guesses may be much more accurate than you imagine. In fact, we request that you do not change any answers once you have made a choice. For every segment, then, do the best you can to judge accurately the situation upon which each segment is based. Your answer sheet contains a sample answer, which you should look at now.

All ready to start? Now we will begin.
APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM

As a participant in this project I hereby consent to take part in a two-part study that will involve responding to three questionnaires.

I understand that I am not required to take part in this study. I also understand that I will not be penalized should I elect not to participate in this project.

I further understand that my responses to the three questionnaires will not be identified with me personally and that the data generated by this project will remain confidential with regard to my individual participation. If interested, I can have access to my scores and to information concerning the meaning of my scores.

Name ___________________________  Date ___________
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McCroskey, J.C., & Daly, J.A. Teachers' expectations of the communicatively apprehensive child in the elementary school. Human Communication Research, 1976, 2, 90-95.

McCroskey, J.C., Daly, J.A., Richmond, V.P., & Cox, B.G. The effects of communication on interpersonal attraction. Human Communication Research, 1975, 2, 72-79.


