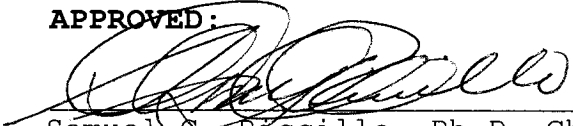


PREVIEW


**THE RELATIONSHIP OF LANGUAGE PREFERENCE
TO SPEAKING AND WRITING APPREHENSION
STACIE VENICE WILSON**

Department of Communication


APPROVED:



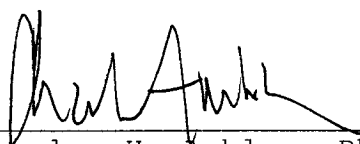
Samuel G. Riccillo, Ph.D, Chair



Eduardo Barrera, Ph.D



Angela Petit, Ph.D



Charles H. Ambler, Ph.D
Dean of the Graduate School

**THE RELATIONSHIP OF LANGUAGE PREFERENCE
TO SPEAKING AND WRITING APPREHENSION**

BY

STACIE VENICE WILSON, B. A.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Communication

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December, 2001

UMI Number: ep05565

PREVIEW

UMI[®]

UMI Microform ep05565

Copyright 2003 by ProQuest information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against
unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was the task of a lifetime. I must first thank God for giving me the strength and endurance to finish. I extend heartfelt gratitude to all those who unfaithfully supported me. To my special friends and loved ones who cheered me on endlessly and sacrificed because of the time I needed to devote to working on this project, thank you. Mom, thank you so much for always being there. I'll never forget the way you helped me. Shauna, I could not have done it without you. I admire your talent. Dad, thank you for instilling in me the great value of education, even if you did tease me mercilessly about this thesis. Mom Rodriguez, your love and prayers were always so important to me. Dr. Samuel C. Riccillo, your patience and belief in me was always noted. Thank you Dr. Barrera for agreeing to sit on my committee despite your belief that I should study theory. Dr. Angela Petit, your moral support and advice were my mainstay throughout this project. Thank you for joining my committee.

This thesis was submitted to the Supervising Committee on November 13, 2001.

ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between oral apprehension and language preference, and writing apprehension and language preference. One hundred ninety-nine (199) students from beginning required English Composition courses at the University of Texas at El Paso were surveyed to determine their apprehension in speaking and writing contexts, as well as their personal preferences for language use in each context. Two instruments were used, one for public speaking apprehension and one for writing apprehension: McCroskey's Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) and the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (WAT). The Personal Report of Language Preference (PRLP) was expanded and used as an indicator of language preference. Twelve questions were added to the original nine, totaling 21 different questions, designed to determine language preference in the areas of both speaking and writing. The study revealed that the preferred language spoken in almost all speaking contexts is English. The preferred language in which to write in almost all instances is also English. Data results revealed

significant differences in only three of the independent variables measured. Females are more apprehensive than males when speaking. There was a significant difference in apprehension with regard to language choice at work. Almost 83 percent of respondents prefer to speak English at work. Their apprehension scores were higher than those who prefer to speak Spanish at work. Those who prefer to write in Spanish have higher apprehension scores than those who prefer to write in English. Results showed a significant difference with regard to that context. The relationships that were not statistically significant still reveal notable comparisons that would be good places to start additional research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| List of Tables | vii |
| Chapter One: Introduction | 1 |
| Chapter Two: Review of Literature | 12 |
| Chapter Three: Methodology and Results | 35 |
| Chapter Four: Discussion and Conclusions | 52 |
| References | 61 |
| Appendix A: Informed Consent | 70 |
| Appendix B: Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety | 72 |
| Appendix C: Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test | 74 |
| Appendix D: Personal Report of Language Preference | 77 |
| Curriculum Vitae | 81 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Scores with Demographic Profiles on PRPSA & WAT | 40 |
| Table 2: Language Preference in Speaking Contexts . . . | 44 |
| Table 3: Language Preference in Writing Contexts | 47 |

Chapter 1

Introduction

A human language is a systemized set of signs and symbols. It is a code, generally acquired acoustically by the human organism. Human beings are the only living organisms with a spoken language. The spoken language is available to the human organism through the evolution of various anatomical structures, auditory features and neurosystems that allow for language acquisition. The length and shape of the adult vocal tract is a significant structure in the ability to speak. "The eventual state of these structures in the adult vocal tract enables the human adult organism to produce acoustic frequencies in the range of common speech" (Riccillo, 1994, p. 45). "Vocal tract length and shape had been modified through some evolutionary change that allowed the human organism to phonate and articulate, to make sound in a fashion unlike previous related species" (Riccillo, 1994, p. 46). Since people acquire language acoustically, the functional role of the auditory system in human speech is another factor because "...the auditory receptive mechanism for humans is

well prepared for both continuous and categorical perception of discrete signals from the environment" (Riccillo, 1994, p. 47). The anatomical structures necessary for the production of speech require neurological systems in order to be realized. "It is through the brain that innervation for the functional movement of the vocal tract is accomplished. It is also through the brain that the transformation of acoustic signals is accomplished" (Riccillo, 1994, p. 48). The speech centers in the brain—Brocha's and Wernicke's areas—are responsible for this speech production and reception (Riccillo, 1984). The human organism is the only living organism with speech centers in the brain.

During the progression of this language acquisition, a person goes through a series of processes that involve internalizing the external world, to include societal constructs and culture, and then reproducing it in the form of speech or writing. Vygotsky (1978) refers to part of this process as the development of egocentric speech and then inner speech, in which a person is able think through what is being internalized from the outside world. A person, then, is making sense of the world by understanding

language and its communicative function. It is an essential awareness that develops through the acquisition of a language. The ability to be aware of being aware is a concept developed by Edelman (1995) called higher order consciousness. Edelman's (1995) model for reentrant mapping demonstrates how human beings accomplish higher order consciousness. With the acquisition of language, made possible in part by the speech centers in the human brain, a new kind of memory is acquired, causing a conceptual explosion. "Semantic bootstrapping" connects concepts of the past, the future and the self to primary consciousness, which is the basic capability to distinguish between the self and nonself. Consequently, according to Edelman (1995), "consciousness of consciousness" becomes possible.

Language remained oral until the invention of the alphabet created a new technology commonly known as writing. It is an extension of speech and a form of communication that is virtually taken for granted by society as a whole. Although it is a common form of communication in most societies, not all speakers of a written language are literate. Literacy is the ability to

write a language. The issue of literacy is a prominent area of concern in American society. Literacy programs have sprouted in response to rampant illiteracy of the English language. On the southern border of the United States, the two most common languages are English and Spanish. Societies on this border function in a cultural paradigm of mingled languages in which some individuals speak one or both languages and some speak and write in one or more languages. Bilingualism is the ability to speak in two languages. Bilinguals, then, have two codes. However, being bilingual does not necessarily mean being biliterate. An important research area may be to find out what happens when bilinguals code switch back and forth between languages, whether in speaking or writing situations.

Language, in its oral or written form, can produce something called Communication Apprehension (CA). CA is the "fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons," (McCroskey, 1976, p. 78). If CA exists when speaking and writing in a monolingual person, is CA affected even more in a bilingual person? Researchers in the field have long been interested in CA and its effects. A component of that research

includes the study of how CA is affected, if at all, by first and second languages. At The University of Texas at El Paso, there are students who speak two languages and students who write in two languages. There are also students who speak two languages, but write in only one, as well as students who speak and write in only one language. Therefore: Does apprehension when speaking or when writing help researchers understand the source of the apprehension? This is a good place to discover what kind of apprehension exists. Furthermore, does apprehension exist because there is a relationship between language preference and that apprehension? What can be described to help understand whether apprehension is affected by language choice?

McCroskey and Richmond (1988) organized CA into four categories: traitlike CA, context-based CA, audience-based CA and situational CA. This thesis will deal specifically with traitlike apprehension. Two of the instruments used in this thesis study measure apprehension in terms of trait anxiety. This study will focus on two types of CA: public speaking apprehension and writing apprehension.

"Public speaking anxiety is the fear and uneasiness caused by the potentially threatening situation of speaking

before a group of individuals," (McIntyre & Thivierge, 1995, p. 457). Speaking in front of groups is a fear that grips a large number of people in the United States. This fear can range from mildly uncomfortable to terrifying and physically debilitating. Feelings of anxiety and discomfort can be present for many people even in dyadic interactions with others. The reasons behind these feelings of anxiety have provided a basis for study for a number of researchers in the communication field. Researchers have delineated visible characteristics of people engaged in speaking activities that display apprehension and have made statements about possible reasons for this apprehension.

The ability to communicate orally will always be a necessity in any academic setting, as well as many workplace settings. If a person cannot articulate thoughts because anxiety is so debilitating, then the consequences can extend to unsuccessful job interviews, loss of employment, and inability to participate successfully in required meetings at work. Burk's (2001) study on communication apprehension among MBA students revealed that MBA students do have noticeable apprehension levels and are

taking that apprehension into the workplace. The workplace environment increases their CA and they must learn new ways to cope with it. Discovering sources of apprehension may help researchers develop methods to reduce apprehension at the academic level.

Similar anxiety can also be associated with writing. Though not as visible and overt, people may experience various levels of anxiety when they know others will scrutinize their writing. Writing apprehension is "anxiety associated with writing situations, a tendency to avoid such situations, frustration, and low productivity while writing," (Scott & Rockwell, 1977, p. 47).

Writing is something that people must continue to do beyond the academic realm. Work-related writing continues to be prevalent and perhaps lacking in expression, content and basic grammar. The quality of writing skills acquired in school at all levels can be affected by a person's anxiety toward writing.

Since writing represents speech, similar reactions occur when it is necessary to write, as when it is necessary to speak. To utter a word is to disclose something about the self. That very element can be

frightening to people. When put into the technology called writing, that disclosure becomes an artifact, subject to scrutiny by others. This scrutiny is critical in a business setting when it is used to assess the quality of a person's ability to do his or her job. As with oral apprehension, taking writing apprehension into the workplace can be detrimental. Furthermore, Daly (1976) suggests that writing apprehension is predictive of occupational choice.

This thesis is concerned with the general concept of communication apprehension, specifically, the relationship of apprehension in the oral context in terms of public speaking anxiety and the relationship of apprehension in the context of writing. It is also concerned with the context in which apprehension occurs. There is also a cultural paradigm that could influence the presence or absence of apprehension, particularly language preference.

Given the body of research identifying communication apprehension as prevalent, specifically in the areas of public speaking and writing for the consumption of others, the following general question needs to be addressed: Do people who speak and/or write in more than one language

tend to experience greater apprehension than people who speak and/or write in only one language? The quest for that answer can be found in a careful study on speaking and writing apprehension at The University of Texas at El Paso. The study measures high, medium and low apprehension scores in both the speaking and writing contexts and explores the relationship between apprehension scores in the two areas and respondents' language preference.

Ad hoc assumptions about the potential results of this thesis study came from two communication apprehension studies that included a language component. McCroskey, Fayer and Richmond (1985) conducted a communication apprehension study at a university in Puerto Rico. The results determined that students from primarily Spanish speaking backgrounds experience increased anxiety when asked to speak in English. Harlow's (1999) study on communication apprehension among students at the University of Texas at El Paso also found differences in apprehension between Spanish speakers and English speakers. The results of these two studies lead to the assumption that a similar study at The University of Texas at El Paso would yield comparable results. Also contributing to the ad hoc

assumption that there is a relationship between language preference and apprehension, are other specific studies that explored language preference, language choice and the affects of first and second languages on apprehension. Those included: Phinney's (1991) study, which examined changes in college student's writing apprehension patterns among first and second language writers in first-year composition courses that use computers; Stacks and Boozer's (1988) study on communication apprehension and language choice in a business setting; and Young, Arroyo and Brown's (1994) study of the effects of first language on writing apprehension in bilingual classrooms.

Chapter 2 will provide a review of literature in the general area of communication apprehension, public speaking apprehension and writing apprehension. The current research presented will provide a framework and foundation for this study.

Additionally, a look at the roots of speech and of writing will provide a framework that suggests the inner voice becomes a writing partner in the process of learning to read and write. The review of literature will also explore the evolution and acquisition of speech, and the