Effects of Public Speaking Anxiety on Preferred Speech Behavior: The Japanese Case

by

Shinji KONDO

Abstract

This study investigates how public speaking anxiety (PSA) affects people's preferences in the choice of speech behavior. Using a Japanese population, it focuses on the importance attached to efficiency and social appropriateness in public speaking. Results indicate that people lower in PSA attributed greater importance to efficiency. On the other hand, PSA was uncorrelated with the perceived importance of social appropriateness. Theoretical implications are discussed.

Research into public speaking anxiety (PSA) has been extensive. Fremouw and Breitenstein (1990) define PSA as "maladaptive cognitive and physiological reactions to environmental events that result in ineffective public speaking behaviors" (p. 455). The considerable amount of interest in PSA is probably due to its prevalence and the availability of subjects. PSA is one of the more commonly reported fears of adults (Bruskin Associates, 1973) and is a central topic in many basic speech courses (Daly, Vangelisti, Neel, & Cavanaugh, 1989). The major

streams of research on PSA focus on its different theoretical explanations (Cahn, 1983; Daly & Buss, 1983, 1984), assessment (Paul, 1966; Glass, Merluzzi, Biever, & Larsen, 1982; Mulac & Sherman, 1974), and treatments (Allen, Hunter, & Donohue, 1989; Ayres & Hopf, 1993).

Missing in current research is a concern for how PSA affects people's preferences in the choice of communicative behavior in public speaking settings. Communication in any setting is regulated by situational and relational factors which constrain people's communicative behavior in that context (Kellermann, 1992). In other words, these constraints are fundamental concerns influencing the choice of communicative behavior (Kim, 1994; Kim & Wilson, 1994). Consequently, in public speaking situations, people's perceived importance of such constraints should function as a general motivating force in the selection of speech behavior. One goal of this study is to explore the relationship between PSA and the perceived importance of these constraints, with an eye toward using this information to help understand the ways PSA affects people's communicative behavior in public speaking settings. Coming to understand these processes will clarify some of the reasons why people with high PSA may not do as well in speaking performances as their counterparts low in PSA.

Several authors suggest that two different types of constraints affect the general character of communication. Kellermann (1992) posits that efficiency and social appropriateness are two global and often conflicting constraints that communicative behavior is responsive to and regulated by. Her perspective envisions communicators' behavior as being constrained by the joint concerns of the efficiency and appropriateness expected in particular situations; that is, speakers balance the want to be efficient and the want to maintain the hearer's face. These two concerns have also been labeled as "be clear" and "be polite" (Lakoff, 1977), "concern for clarity" and "concern for support" (Greene & Lindsey, 1989), and "task orientation" and "relational orientation" (Kim, 1994).

Despite the absence of direct empirical work that examines the relationship between PSA and people's perceived importance of these

constraints, extant research suggests that high PSA may be associated with preferences for social appropriateness and low PSA with emphasis on efficiency. People high in social anxiety are generally motivated to avoid social disapproval (Arkin, Lake, & Baumgardner, 1986), tend to use conformity as an impression management strategy (Santee & Maslach, 1982), and are more likely to behave in ways that indicate interest in and agreement with what others are saying (Leary, 1983). On the other hand, social anxiety is inversely related to dominance (Mortensen, Arntson, Paul, & Lustig, 1977), argumentativeness (Infante & Rancer, 1982), and assertiveness (Jones & Russell, 1982). These findings lead us to expect that people with high PSA would tend to place high importance on social appropriateness in a public speaking situation. Their higher level of concern for others should make them more sensitive to the audience's feelings. Conversely, people low in PSA would prefer clear and efficient communicative behavior. They are perceived to make more use of discourse competency in interacting with others, and so should be more likely to speak their minds freely, using direct utterances in their speech.

The preceding discussion can be summarized in the two research hypotheses undertaken in the study.

> H1: PSA will be positively related to preferences for social appropriateness in a public speaking situation.
> H2: PSA will be negatively related to preferences for efficiency in a public speaking situation.

With a few exceptions, research efforts regarding PSA have been focused on the American population while the needs of other populations have been less frequently explored (Martini, Behnke, & King, 1992). Martini et al. (1992) note that Asians and other foreign people, who are going abroad in increasing numbers for educational and business purposes, are worthy of further study. Because extant research has not done sufficient justice to understanding people from other cultures, a second goal of this study is to extend PSA research to a setting in another culture. Specifically, the relationship between PSA and the

relative importance attached to efficiency and social appropriateness is examined in a Japanese setting.

METHOD

Participants were 191 undergraduate students enrolled in English courses at two universities in Central Japan. Participation was voluntary and all responses were gathered during regular class meetings.

Initially, participants completed the measure of PSA, Leary's Audience Anxiousness Scale (AAS; Leary, 1983). A Japanese version of the scale developed by Seiwa (Leary, 1990) was used in this investigation. The scale consists of twelve Likert-type items assessing self-reported social anxiousness in a public speaking setting. Examples of the items include "I usually get nervous when I speak in front of a group," "I enjoy speaking in public," and "When I speak in front of others, I worry about making a fool of myself." This scale has demonstrated internal reliability around .90, and eight-week test-retest reliability of .80 (Leary, 1983). For the present study, the alpha coefficient was .88.

One week after completing the AAS, the respondents were given a questionnaire containing one of four public speaking situations at random and were asked to rate the perceived importance of efficiency and social appropriateness in that situation. The four situations were constructed to increase generalizability. The specific purposes of the four speeches were (a) to inform the audience what to look for when buying a computer, (b) to inform the audience how to write an effective job resume, (c) to persuade the audience that smoking should be prohibited in all campus buildings, and (d) to persuade the audience that the rate of the sales tax should be raised to help reduce the national budget deficit. Items used to assess participants' perceived importance of efficiency and social appropriateness were drawn from Greene and Lindsey (1989) and Kim (1994). Responses were measured on four 5-point scales for each constraint (1 = strongly disagree, 5 =

strongly agree). Table 1 presents the items and reliabilities of the measures.

Table 1
*Perceived Importance of Efficiency and Social Appropriateness:
Scale Items and Reliabilities*

Efficiency (Reliability = .78)
1. In this situation, it is very important to minimize any ambiguity concerning my point.
2. In this situation, it is very important to be as direct as possible while conveying my message.
3. In this situation, it is very important to make my massage as clear as possible.
4. In this situation, it is very important to make sure my message is understood.

Social Appropriateness (Reliability = .75)
1. In this situation, it is very important to be sensitive to the audience's feelings.
2. In this situation, it is very important to minimize any bad feelings on the part of the audience.
3. In this situation, it is very important not to intrude my opinion upon the audience.
4. In this situation, it is very important that the audience do not see me in a negative light.

RESULTS

The mean AAS score in the present sample was 42.91, and the standard deviation was 8.68.

To investigate the relationship between PSA and the relative importance attached to efficiency and social appropriateness, Pearson correlations were computed between AAS scores and the importance ratings of each of these two constraints. The use of correlations was chosen for analysis since PSA was measured as a continuous variable in this study. As expected, PSA was negatively correlated with the perceived importance of efficiency ($r = -.24$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .06$). However, AAS scores were uncorrelated with the importance ratings of social appropriateness ($r = .05$, n.s., $\eta^2 = .003$).

DISCUSSION

This study investigates how PSA affects people's preferences in the choice of communicative behavior in public speaking settings. Specifically, high PSA was postulated to be associated with emphasis on social appropriateness, and low PSA with preferences for efficiency. The data indicated that people with lower PSA tended to attribute greater importance to efficiency. On the other hand, PSA was not associated with the importance ratings of social appropriateness.

One plausible explanation as to why our first hypothesis was not supported could be that people, irrespective of their PSA level, are equally concerned about social appropriateness in public speaking situations. Such situations have a series of contextual characteristics that may directly affect the degree of people's appropriateness concerns. For example, public speaking usually calls for more formality than everyday conversations, which implies higher standards for socially correct behavior (Buss, 1980). In addition, speakers addressing an audience tend to become acutely aware of themselves as a social

object (Buss, 1980), and so may narrow their range of acceptable behavior for fear of failure. Moreover, giving a speech is a novel experience for most people; uncertainty about how to act may heighten their concerns for appropriateness even further.

Another plausible explanation is that a strong emphasis on interpersonal harmony in the Japanese society may systematically affect the importance of relational concerns in public speaking. Japan has been described as a collectivist culture (Hofstede, 1980), where people are more willing to sacrifice personal interests for the attainment of harmony and collective interests (Kim, 1994). When a person's sense of identity is established in interdependent relations with others, he or she tends to be very concerned about others' feelings (Kim, 1994). It may be that Japanese people are equally concerned about social appropriateness regardless of their PSA level. Further research is necessary to clarify this point.

The main implication of this research is that, while both high and low anxious people are equally concerned about appropriateness, they may differ in the degree to which efficient concerns are allowed to supersede appropriateness concerns. Low anxious people are expected to allow their preference for clear and effective communication to override their relational concerns in most situations. On the other hand, it may be more difficult for high anxious people to overlook the negative interpersonal consequences of direct speech behavior. For example, communicating sincere disapproval of the position held by the audience may be less problematic for people with low PSA than for those high in PSA. To confirm this speculation, a post hoc analysis was performed. We compared the mean importance ratings of efficiency and social appropriateness for those respondents whose AAS scores fell one standard deviation above or below the mean response. As expected, people with low PSA ($N = 33$) attributed greater importance to efficiency ($M = 17.70$) than to appropriateness ($M = 12.15$; $t[32] = 6.82$; $p = .00$; $\eta^2 = .59$). For people high in PSA ($N = 31$), the difference in importance between efficiency ($M = 15.61$) and appropriateness ($M = 14.00$) was not significant ($t[30] = 2.00$; $p > .05$; $\eta^2 = .12$).

Before concluding, several limitations of the present study are indicated. First, the current evidence focuses on people's perceived importance of communication constraints rather than on their actual speech behavior. However, lack of volitional control over the choice of communicative behavior (e.g., lack of verbal fluency, lack of behavior repertory, etc.) can prevent a person from acting in accordance with his or her own perception of the importance of constraints (Kim, 1994). Additional studies should be conducted to test how perceptions of the constraints affect actual communication performance.

Second, characteristics of the audience are not taken into account. Such factors as the size of the audience, its status relative to the speaker, and the degree to which the speaker differs from the audience may be likely to affect people's perceptions of communication constraints.

Finally, the reliabilities of the measures for the perceived importance of communication constraints were moderate. To arrive at more confident conclusions, refinement of the measures would seem necessary. Despite these limitations, however, this study suggests quite clearly the ways in which PSA affect people's speech behavior by linking PSA to differing perceptions of communication constraints.

REFERENCES

Allen, M., Hunter, J., & Donohue, W. A. (1989). Meta-analysis of self-report data on the effectiveness of public speaking anxiety treatment techniques. *Communication Education, 38,* 54–76.

Arkin, R. M., Lake, E. A., & Baumgardner, A. H. (1986). Shyness and self-presentation. In W. H. Jones, J. M. Cheek, & S. R. Briggs (Eds.), *Shyness: Perspectives on research and treatment* (pp. 189–203). New York: Plenum.

Ayres, J., & Hopf, T. (1993). *Coping with speech anxiety.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Bruskin Associates (1973, July). *What are Americans afraid of?* The Bruskin Report, #53.

Buss, A. H. (1980). *Self-consciousness and social anxiety.* San Francisco: Freeman.

Cahn, D. D. (1983). Toward an understanding of the emotional nature of state communication apprehension (stagefright). *Communication, 12*, 91–103.

Daly, J. A., & Buss, A. (1983). Audience anxiety. *Communication, 12*, 27–36.

Daly, J. A., & Buss, A. (1984). The transitory causes of audience anxiety. In J. A. Daly & J. C. McCroskey (Eds.), *Avoiding communication: Shyness, reticence, and communication apprehension* (pp. 67–79). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Daly, J. A., Vangelisti, A. L., Neel, H. L., & Cavanaugh, P. D. (1989). Pre-performance concerns associated with public speaking anxiety. *Communication Quarterly, 37*, 39–53.

Fremouw, W. J., & Breitenstein, J. L. (1990). Speech anxiety. In H. Leitenberg (Ed.), *Handbook of social and evaluation anxiety* (pp. 455–474). New York: Plenum.

Glass, C. R., Merluzzi, T. V., Biever, J. L., & Larsen, K. H. (1982). Cognitive assessment of social anxiety: Development and validation of a self-statement questionnaire. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 6*, 37–55.

Grrene, J. O., & Lindsey, A. E. (1989). Encoding processes in the production of multiple-goal messages. *Human Communication Research, 16*, 120–140.

Hofstede, G. (1980). Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Infante, D. A., & Rancer, A. S. (1982). A conceptualization and measure of argumentativeness. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 46*, 72–80.

Jones, W. H., & Russell, D. W. (1982). The Social Reticence Scale: An objective measure of shyness. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 46*, 629–631.

Kellermann, K. (1992). Communication: Inherently strategic and primarily automatic. *Communication Monographs, 59*, 288–300.

Kim, M.-S. (1994). Cross-cultural comparisons of the perceived importance of conversational constraints. *Human Communication Research, 21*, 128–151.

Kim, M.-S., & Wilson, S. R. (1994). A cross-cultural comparison of implicit theories of requesting. *Communication Monographs, 61*, 210–235.

Lakoff, R. T. (1977). What you can do with words: Politeness, pragmatics and performatives. In A. Rogers, B. Wall, & J. Murphy (Eds.), *Proceedings of the Texas conference on performatives, presuppositions and implicatures* (pp. 79–105). Arlington, VA: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Leary, M. R. (1983). Understanding social anxiety: Social, personality, and clinical perspectives. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Leary, M. R. (1990). *Taijin fuan* [Understanding social anxiety: Social, personality, and clinical perspective] (H. Seiwa, Trans.). Kyoto: Kitaoji Shobo. (Original work published 1983).

Martini, M., Behnke, R. R., & King, P. E. (1992). The communication of public speaking anxiety: Perceptions of Asian and American speakers. *Communication Quarterly, 40*, 279–288.

Mortensen, D. C., Arntson, P. H., Paul, H., & Lustig, M. (1977). The measurement

of verbal predispositions: Scale development and application. *Human Communication Research, 3,* 146–158.

Mulac, A., & Sherman, A. R. (1974). Behavioral assessment of speech anxiety. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 60,* 134–143.

Paul, G. L. (1966). *Insight versus desensitization in psychotherapy.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Santee, R. T., & Maslach, C. (1982). To agree or not to agree: Personal dissent amid social pressure to conform. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 42,* 690–700.