

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION

ABSTRACT

While communication exists in all cultures and subcultures, communication norms and exceptions may be vastly diverse due to the differences in culture. Communication is an ongoing process that involves constant changes within the people involved and their environment. The focus of this paper is on intercultural communication apprehension as a construct and on how it affects the behavior and lifestyle of an individual.

The research was carried out on freshmen students at the Department of Economics and Tourism. They were interviewed twice, first at the beginning of the semester and second at the end of the semester, during which they communicated with students from various cultures, who studied at our Department. The fact that foreign students joined the class for the whole semester as well as the gained knowledge referring to the exposure with foreign people or different cultures probably both contributed to the positive results.

Keywords: *intercultural communication, apprehension, Business English students*

INTRODUCTION

Regarding the worldwide development in almost all areas such as politics, economy, technology, culture, socio-culture, etc in the recent decades, Marshall McLuhan's (1977) vision of a global village no longer seems to be a totally unrealistic dream which will never come true. Aside from personal support or opposition to the idea of the European Union for example, at least the fundamental idea of a common Europe where different people and cultures live together in peace is beyond question.

The fact that markets more and more meld together as one global market forces us to interact with people having different languages, life styles, opinions and interpretations of what life should be in an international setting. According to Lim and Firkola (2000.) the challenge nowadays is to develop and improve our personal communication skills. The technological development of course made it much easier and faster to interact over long distances but despite that, people sometimes have fear, shyness or other internal barriers while communicating with strangers. That is the reason why the importance of intercultural communication has grown enormously in the past and will steadily grow in the future.

The ability to behave appropriately, to use the right vocabulary and to send accurate signals at the right time is of course given by nature and can difficultly be trained but at least the will and readiness to do it correctly as well as the respectful treatment of your interlocutor is the base of a successful relation between business partners. Studying and gaining information about the background of your communication partner or eventually to learn some words or

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sentences in his language always helps to overcome the initial barrier and will be appreciated by your vis-à-vis (Nickerson, 2000; Gilardoni, 2001; Charles & Marschan-Piekkari, 2002; Louhiala-Salminen, 2002; Samovar and Porter, 2004).

Success in business life doesn't only depend on professional knowledge, which is of course important and fundamental for a successful career, but also on the ability to interpret gestures, body language and behavior and to react adequately. Young (2005) believes that people with a well-developed sensitivity in communicating with foreigners definitely have a big advantage and will probably succeed in business life.

The aim of this study was to determine whether the intercultural communication apprehension varied in the interventional period, during which our students were exposed to different cultures.

METHODS

A longitudinal study was carried out on a total of 75 freshmen students (48 females and 27 males) at the Department of Economics and Tourism in Pula. The research was carried out in order to show their personal intercultural communication apprehension. They were interviewed twice, first at the beginning of the semester and second at the end of the semester, during which they communicated with students from various cultures (Austrian, Italian, Bosnian, and Slovenian) who studied at our department.

Business English is an obligatory subject for 6 hours per week. This was the first class that they took in Business English, although almost all students studied English as a foreign language in high school. During the lessons, students learnt to apply communicational skills with students from other cultures, through role play, pair work, and discussion.

Participation in the questionnaire was voluntary and took place during regular class time. Instruments were completed with no personal identification (except sex and code) to insure anonymity and increase the probability of honest responses.

The measure was a self-report scale that was translated from English to Croatian and back-translated to insure accuracy.

Measures

The measure of communication competence employed was the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA) developed by Neuliep, J. W. and McCroskey, J. C. (1997). The PRICA consists of 14 statements, which comments frequently are made by people with regards to communication with people from other cultures. Internal (alpha) reliability estimates is above .90. Scores can range from 14 to 70. Scores below 32 indicate low intercultural communication apprehension. Scores above 52 indicate high intercultural communication apprehension. Scores ranging between 32 and 52 indicate a moderate level of intercultural communication apprehension. Subjects were asked to indicate how much they agree with statements by marking a number representing their response to each statement using the following choices: strongly disagree = 1; disagree = 2; are neutral = 3; agree = 4; strongly agree = 5.

The reliability of the scale in this investigation is .86.

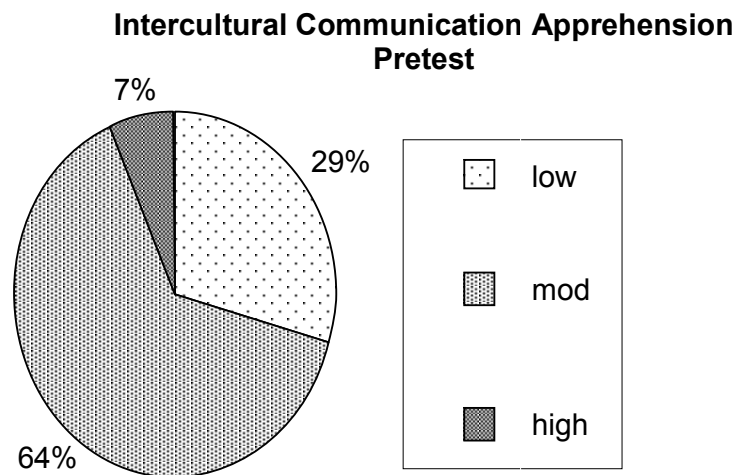
Data analysis

The results from the questionnaires were processed using SPSS for Windows (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). The difference between communication competences among the years was investigated by paired t-tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Intercultural communication apprehension (ICA) is defined as the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people of different groups, especially different cultural groups. Our intention was to determine the degree of intercultural communication apprehension.

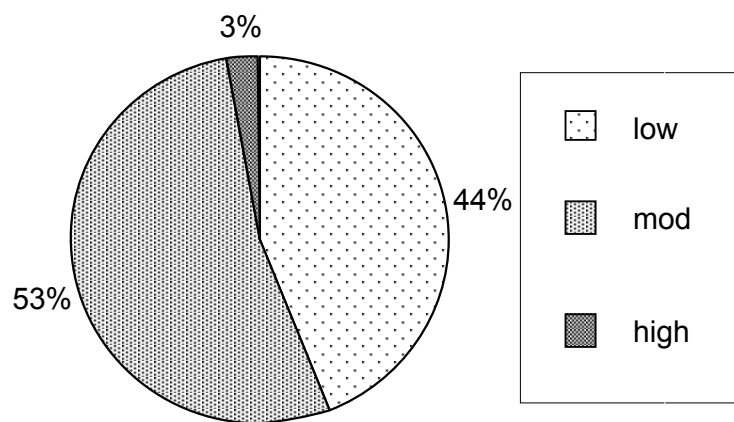
Graph 1.



The result of the pretest concerning Intercultural Communication Apprehension was that around 2/3 of all interviewed persons judged their ICA as moderate, while around 30% stated to have no or little fear of communicating with people from different countries and/or cultures. Only a minority of 7% quoted to have a high communication apprehension level regarding multicultural conversation.

Graph 2.

**Intercultural Communication Apprehension
Posttest**



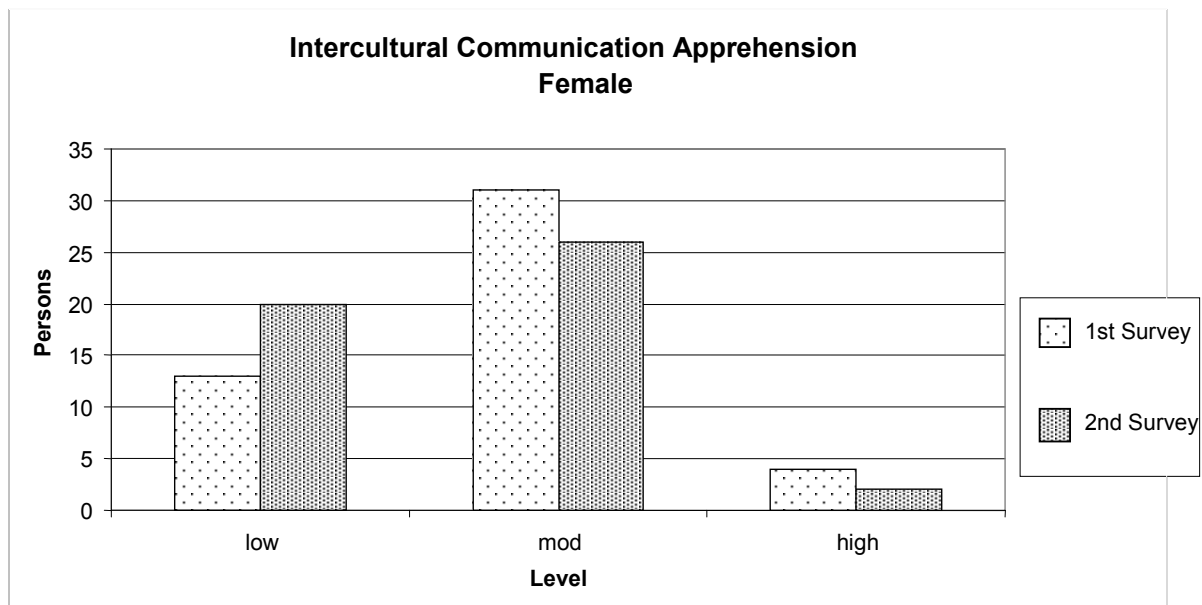
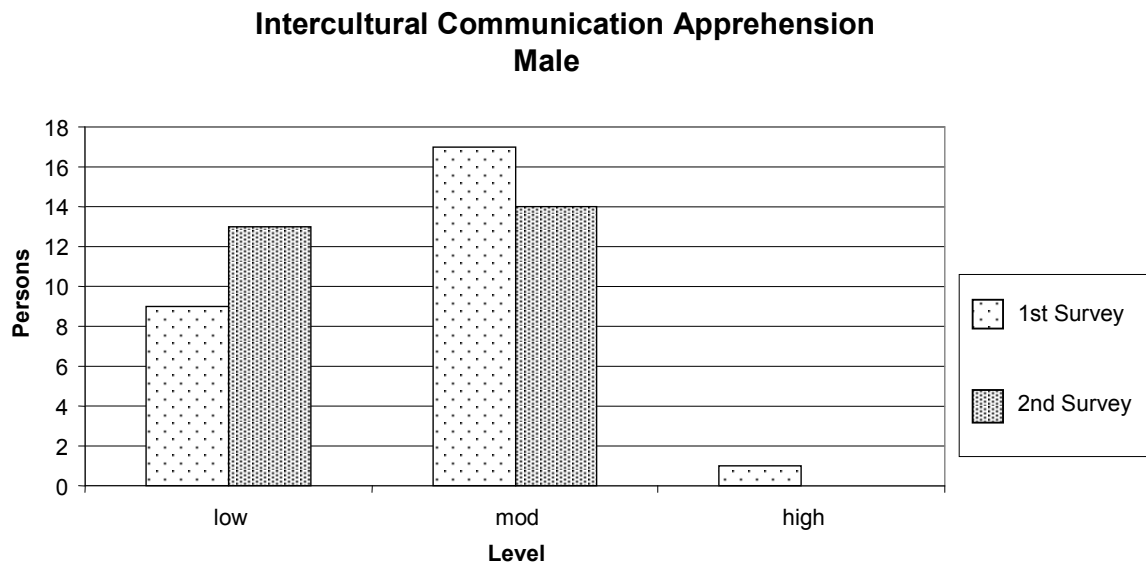
According to the result of the posttest, an over-all improvement took place during the semester (Graph 2). The paired samples t-test indicated that there is a statistically significant difference between the two tests, in favour of the posttest: $t_{(75)} = 4,856$; $p < .001$.

The second test shows that only 3% of respondents still have the feeling of fear or uncomfortableness while communicating with foreign people. About the half of all interviewees belong to the neutral group whilst the group, of people with a low fear level increased to 44% from 29%.

Differences between female and male interviewees

In this research we also wanted to determine whether there is a difference between male and female communicational apprehense levels and that's why we used a paired t-test.

Graph 3.



difference between the male and female students:

- pretest: $t_{(75)} = 1,008$; $p < .542$
- posttest: $t_{(75)} = 0,610$; $p < .545$

However, there was a statically significant difference between the pretest and posttest concerning the male students ($t_{(27)} = 2,095$; $p < .046$) and female students ($t_{(48)} = 4,692$; $p < .001$).

As the charts show, the male interviewees' result is a little better than the result for the female respondents. For example, the first survey presents that four women but only one man had a

high level of Intercultural Communication Apprehension while the second survey stated that two females judge their relation to multicultural communication still as disordered whilst the group of men with a high communication apprehension level disappeared completely. In relation to the amount of polled people the graphs also show that there are relatively more men with a low intercultural communication fear than women. The alteration between the first and the second poll is almost like the same for both, female and male participants, as the charts above obviously demonstrate.

CONCLUSIONS

In order to function effectively in today's society, people must communicate with one another. However, for some individuals, communication experiences are so unrewarding that they either consciously or unconsciously avoid situations where communication is required (McCroskey & Richmond, 1979).

When communicating with others, individuals are influenced and affected by many variables and communication apprehension may be the result of any number of different causes. The degree of communication apprehension that an individual experiences can vary depending on their personality and the context of situation. Nonetheless, the notion that high levels of communication apprehension negatively affect an individual's success both academically and socially appears to be supported by study.

According to the results of our research, we may conclude that the level of apprehension improved in all respondents. The students were exposed to different cultures, which may have led to the positive findings. Such research can contribute valuable material toward understanding international education and the role of cultural understanding in it.

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INTEKULTURALNA KOMUNIKACIJA

SAŽETAK

Iako komunikacija postoji u svim kulturama i supkulturama, komunikacijske norme i očekivanja mogu se znatno diferencirati zbog razlika u kulturama. Komunikacija je kontinuirani proces koji uključuje konstantne promjene kod osoba koje u njoj sudjeluju, te promjene unutar njihovog okruženja. Cilj ovog rada je prikaz interkulturalnog komunikacijskog razumijevanja i njegov utjecaj na ponašanje i životni stil pojedinca.

Istraživanje je provedeno među studentima prve godine na Odjelu ekonomije i turizma. Oni su bili ispitani dva puta, prvi puta na početku, te drugi puta na kraju semestra. Tijekom predavanja komunicirali su sa studentima iz različitih kulturnih sredina, koji su studirali na našem Odjelu. Pretpostavljamo da je interakcija sa studenata iz različitih kulturnih okružja, doprinijela boljem interkulturalnom komunikacijskom razumijevanju među ispitanicima.

Ključne riječi: interkulturalna komunikacija, razumijevanje, studenti poslovnog engleskog jezika