

*A Cross-Cultural Perspective:
The Effect of Communication Competence on
Chinese University Students' Academic Performance*

跨文化研究： 交际能力对中国大学生学业成就之影响

周 刚 / 著



中国出版集团



世界图书出版公司

*A Cross-Cultural Perspective:
The Effect of Communication Competence on
Chinese University Students' Academic Performance*

跨文化研究： **交际能力对中国大学生学业成就之影响**

周 刚 / 著

中国出版集团
世界图书出版公司
广州·上海·西安·北京

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

跨文化研究：交际能力对中国大学生学业成就之影响：英文 /
周刚著. —广州：世界图书出版广东有限公司，2015.8

ISBN 978-7-5192-0153-1

I. ①跨… II. ①周… III. ①大学生—心理交往—关系—
学习成绩—研究—中国—英文 IV. ①G645.5 ②G642.47

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2015) 第208296号

跨文化研究：交际能力对中国大学生学业成就之影响

策划编辑 宋 焱

责任编辑 黄 琼

出版发行 世界图书出版广东有限公司

地 址 广州市新港西路大江冲25号

[http:// www.gdst.com.cn](http://www.gdst.com.cn)

印 刷 北京振兴源印务有限公司

规 格 880mm×1230mm 1/32

印 张 9.375

字 数 280千

版 次 2015年8月第1版 2015年8月第1次印刷

ISBN 978-7-5192-0153-1/C · 0048

定 价 30.00 元

版权所有，翻版必究

前言

自从“跨文化交际学”被引进到我国外语教学界,尤其是引入到高校英语教学中来已有30多年。在这期间,“跨文化交际学”作为一门学科在国内很多院校中得到了很大的发展,同时各高校外语教师在教学实践中也越来越给予其极大的关注与重视。国内的业内学者发表了大量的有关跨文化交际学方面的理论专著、论文等,但是以量化分析作为研究方法的论文仍显匮乏。

笔者于2002年在英国主修了三年的“语言与交际”专业,主要研究的方向是跨文化交际学方面的研究。在此期间,笔者涉猎了本研究领域的所有重要的文化研究方面的学者及专家的研究成果、论文及专著,这些研读帮助笔者比较全面地掌握了本研究领域的研究现状、系统的研究方法、本学科的前沿性研究成果及其未来发展方向。此外,笔者自从回国后除了在国内连续讲授了多年的“跨文化交际学”这门课,并于2012—2013年以美国“富布赖特住校学者”的身份在新泽西州的Bergen Community College的传媒系讲授了这门课程,一共讲授了两个学期(一学年)。因此,基于多年在海外的研究以及在国内与美国的教学经历与授课讲义,笔者才敢尝试写这本专著。

本书以笔者的博士论文为蓝本,比较全面地介绍了本研究领域的研究现状、系统的研究方法、本学科的前沿研究成果及其未来发展方向。全书共分9章,以历史、文化、宗教、语言学等维度为线索来阐述东西方文化与交际模式的差异性。

本研究通过在中英两所大学的学生中采集了两个不同文化的样本探索中国大学生对交际能力的自我认知与学业成就的自我评价之间的相关性,并从中发现他们的交际能力自我认知是否会对学业成就的自我评价产生影响,并把所有的统计数据进行了对比性研究。

通过大量的实证研究及数据分析,结果说明交际能力与大学生的学业成



绩有显著的相关性、交际能力对学业成就产生显著性影响。笔者第一次在跨文化交际学研究领域中提出了这一理论，填补了该领域的理论研究和实证研究的不足，进一步拓宽了未来跨文化交际学的研究方向。

笔者愿意与国内外同行进一步交流与学习。书中的不足之处在所难免，还望同行及读者斧正。

周 刚

2015年5月于大连

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	General Introduction	001
1.1	Introduction	001
1.2	Personal Concern and Research Importance	003
1.3	The Research Objectives	005
1.4	The Problem Defined and Research Questions(RQ)	008
1.5	Organization of the Book	008
Chapter 2	Cultural Variability and Its Influence on Communication	011
2.1	Cultural Influences on Communication	011
2.2	Basic Approaches to the Study of Culture and Communication	012
2.3	Communication: the Western Cultural Orientation vs. the Eastern Cultural Orientation	014
2.4	Dimensions of Cultural Variability	016
2.5	Application of the Dimensions of Cultural Variability	020
2.6	Individual-Level Factors that Mediate the Influence of Culture on Communication	022
2.7	Communication Styles	031
2.8	Summary	035
Chapter 3	The Socio-Cultural and Political History of China	036
3.1	Some Facets of China's History	036
3.2	Socio-Cultural Background of Multiethnic China	054



3.3 Summary	059
Chapter 4 The Chinese Cultural and Philosophical Orientation to Relationships and Communication	061
4.1 Chinese Philosophical Principles and Religion	061
4.2 Core Values of Confucianism	076
4.3 Impact of Confucianism on Behaviour	078
4.4 Summary	086
Chapter 5 Communication and Communication Competence Research in the West	088
5.1 Communication Competence from the Western Perspectives	088
5.2 Summary	102
Chapter 6 Research Design and Methodology	103
6.1 Introduction	103
6.2 Research Design and Research Strategy	103
6.3 Methodology	105
Chapter 7 A Cross-Cultural Survey of Self-Perceptions of Communicative Competence, Communication Apprehension, Interdependence and Independence, Academic Performance and Chinese Values	122
7.1 Aims of the Study	122
7.2 Participants	123
7.3 Data Analysis and Results	126
7.4 Discussion	152
Chapter 8 Administration of Classroom Observations	172
8.1 Aims of the Study	172



8.2 Participants	172
8.3 Materials and Procedures of Classroom Observations	174
8.4 Data Analysis and Results	175
8.5 Discussion	181
 Chapter 9 Conclusion	 185
9.1 Overview of the Study Findings	185
9.2 The SPCBPVQ Questionnaire	190
9.3 The Classroom Observation	200
9.4 Limitations to this Study	203
9.5 Implications for Practice	206
9.6 Implications for Future Research	208
 References	 210
Appendix 1 Self-Perception of Communication Behavior, Performance and Values Questionnaire	228
Appendix 2 VPBCS-Based Observation Form and Keys to VPBCS-Based Observation Form	236
Appendix 3 Reliability Tests of SPCBPVQ Questionnaire	240
Appendix 4 Factor Scree Plots	247
Appendix 5 Reliability Tests of Factor Analysis	250
Appendix 6 Results of Multiple Regressions	262
Appendix 7 Results of MANOVA : Chinese Sample vs. British Sample	275

Chapter 1

General Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The importance of communication competence is recognized universally by philosophers and scientists of human interaction and has been extensively researched in the West, especially in the U.S. (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989: 6). Due to the rapid development of communication technologies such as satellite communication, computer multimedia and the Internet, all of which have brought great changes to international cultural exchange. Consequently, the world is becoming smaller and smaller, and various cultures are surging ahead in this 'global village' (Guan, 1998). Due to the increasing international economic and intercultural exchanges, multicultural and multiethnic interactions, and even 'clashes' or miscommunications are unavoidable. As a result, researchers and scientists of human interaction are being motivated to develop the human aspects such as knowledge and communication skills. In other words, in order to cohabit in the 'global village', to achieve effective interpersonal communication, people have to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills (as indicators of communication competence defined by Hammer, 1989), the 'human aspects', so that they can better understand, empathize, collaborate and interact among people from within and between cultures (Miyahara, 1998).

Culture is one of the many factors that cast a great influence on communication. In current cross-cultural and intercultural communication research, some communicative constructs seem to receive more attention than others (Sugimoto,

1997). Although numerous studies have been conducted on communication both from cultural and cross-cultural perspectives, most analyses of communication, however, ignore the reciprocal relationship that 'communication and culture reciprocally influence each other' (Gudykunst, 1997: 327). He also argues that 'the culture in which individuals are socialized influences the way they communicate, and the way that individuals communicate can change the culture they share over time' (p. 327). Hall (1959: 169 cited in Gudykunst, 1997) goes one step further, he argues that 'culture is communication and communication is culture'. Thus, culture has been equated with communication, such that culture can only be manifest in communication practices. People acquire particular communication patterns in the culture, and in turn acquire their culture in the process of socialization and through communication. This is reflected in people's communication patterns and in their culture. Thus, it seems necessary that a study on communication competence in the Chinese cultural context should begin particularly with a focus on the relationship between communication and culture.

Communication competence is the ability to choose a communication behaviour that is both appropriate and effective for a given situation (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1989). Interpersonal competency allows a person to achieve his or her communication goals without causing the other party to violate culturally important aspects, such as losing face. The model most often used to describe competence is the component model (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984: 8-17), which includes three components: 1) knowledge, 2) skill, and 3) motivation. Knowledge simply means knowing what behaviour is best suited for a given situation. Skill is having the ability to apply that behaviour in the given context. Motivation is having the desire to communicate in a competent manner. The component model's three parts require that a communicator be able to 1) recognize what communication practice is appropriate (knowledge), 2) have the ability to perform that practice (skill), and 3) want to communicate in an effective and appropriate manner (motivation).

This research as a whole describes the process and analyses the substantive findings of the possible impact of the Chinese traditional values on the Mainland



Chinese university students' self-perceptions and the Western culture on the British university students' self-perceptions of communication competence, interdependent and independent self-construals. In addition, it explicates cultural variability through cross-cultural comparison. As one of the main research purposes, the study explores whether the Mainland Chinese university students' self-perceptions of communication competence are correlated with their self-rated academic performance. It also explores whether the British university students' self-perceptions of communication competence are correlated with their self-rated academic performance, and if they are different from that of the Mainland Chinese university students. Here the sample of the British university students is employed in this study, because it is out of the convenience. In addition, the study is intended to make a cultural comparison between the Chinese traditional culture and the European-American culture. The British are assumed representative of the European or Western culture in this study. Thus, a cross-cultural comparison is made possible.

1.2 Personal Concern and Research Importance

The Chinese education system is historically examination-oriented since Confucianism was introduced into the administration in the Han Dynasty during the imperial China (see Chapter 3). Passing the civil service examinations was one of the few institutionalized ways in ancient China rising above one's given station (or social position) in life (Bond, 1991). The rewards were considerable, but limited to an elite few. However, this consideration is still the fact in the modern Chinese society (Bond, 1991). According to Ho (1986), it is generally recognized that modern Chinese parents attach great importance to education and academic achievement of their children, and expect their children to pass the national entrance examinations so as to enter universities. Moreover, in school, the system of both teaching and faculty assessment and evaluation is mainly based on students' achievements in the exams held locally and nationally. According to Bond (1991), due to the limited educational resources, the struggle in Chinese societies for school success is intense. The pressure to succeed is relentless as well. As a consequence, only cognitive skills or academic intelligence are emphasized in primary schools and secondary schools, such as mathematics, Chinese, chemistry and physics. Thus,



the training of the social skills in school may be ignored. It seems that students' social needs have been left behind as secondary concerns. In fact, they are often overloaded with endless and repeated assignments to finish in school, they are fully occupied with the compulsory classes and different kinds of tutorials from Monday to Friday, even including weekends. Moreover, they often come home with lots of homework to do. Due to the heavy burden placed on them, and due to the current nearly 'closed' or 'isolated' educational paradigm, their desire and need for participation in interpersonal communication may have been neglected, perhaps even 'deprived'. Consequently, they may lack communication with their teachers, with their peers, and even with their parents. On the other hand, they have to shoulder the pressure arbitrarily exerted upon them both by their teachers and their parents, because they are always expected and encouraged to achieve better results in any exam. Combined with the Chinese traditional values and the current educational system, the problematic phenomenon of interpersonal communication competence among Chinese students may become a salient social problem in the near future if it remains to be neglected.

Since China adopted the 'only child' policy all over the country in 1982, the baby boom has been brought under control. However, it has also brought with it some social problems. In cities, there is only one child in each family. The only child has no brothers or sisters to play with, but receives great care and love from his or her parents and grandparents. The only child has become a lonely child in the family. In the process of his or her early childhood, his or her opportunities to learn and communicate with his or her peers (brothers or sisters) have been deprived. This may be sure to affect his or her healthy growth in psychology and communicative competence. Some school teachers have reported that those who were born under the 'only child' policy tend to be selfish, self-centred, lack cooperativeness, and some even do not know how to make friends with their peers. Parents have complained that their children are too dependent, and do not know how to take care of themselves properly without their parents' care.

A set of knowledge, motivations, and social skills, (i.e., communication



competence), that will help improve the quality of interpersonal communication competence among Chinese students is urgently needed. The issues mentioned above among the Mainland Chinese university students seem to have been ignored for a long time. Therefore, a study on the relationships between communication competence and academic performance in the Mainland Chinese university students seems essential. In addition, the results of the proposed study are expected to be of some use to the Chinese educators for their reference when they plan to make any further reform in either the Chinese educational system, or even the national syllabus, and may be of use especially for teachers who lecture in universities in China. The findings of cross-cultural comparisons between Chinese and European-American cultures may help better understand each other's social attributes, and consequently practical, meaningful and feasible solutions to the Mainland Chinese students' potentially ineffective communication and insufficient communication skills are suggested.

1.3 The Research Objectives

Generally it is acknowledged that people acquire their particular communication patterns in their particular cultural context, and in turn acquire their culture in the processes of their socialization and communication (Chua, 2003). Based on this, this study on communication issues both in the Chinese cultural context and in the British cultural context begins with a focus on the relationships between communication and culture as the primary research goal. The first principal aim of this dissertation is to employ the derived or imposed etic approach (Gudykunst, 1997) in order to study the reciprocal relationship between communication and culture with a focus on the doctrines of Confucianism, which have been influencing Chinese in every aspect for more than two thousand years. The primary aim of this study is to examine the possible relationships between communication competence and academic performance from a cross-cultural perspective. Specifically, the study aims to find out whether the Mainland Chinese university students' self-perceptions of communication competence may affect their self-rated academic performance. In addition, a sample of the British university students in Wales is compared to a sample of the Mainland Chinese university students, which will



provide information on or further evidence for the possible influence of culture on communication both in a Western cultural context and in a Chinese cultural context. In general, it is intended to gain an insight into cultural impact both on the Mainland Chinese university students' self-perceptions of communication competence in the traditional cultural context and on the British university students' self-perceptions of communication competence in a Western cultural context. In addition, it is intended to provide analytical and empirical materials, which can contribute to the knowledge of the cultural impact on communication from a cross-cultural perspective. Since culture influences behaviours and perceptions of behaviours, a study that examines communication behaviours, the perceptions of communication competence in the Chinese context, and especially the possible relationships between communication competence and academic performance in the Mainland Chinese university students, which is the primary object of this research, it is necessary to identify the socio-cultural values of the society.

Based on the above-mentioned problematic issues in section 1.2, the animating purpose of this research is to identify the possible correlations between communication competence and academic performance by comparing and analyzing the two samples' (Sample 1: the Mainland Chinese university students; Sample 2: the British university students) various perceptions of the two dimensions, in order to find out some evidence to support the proposition in the study (see section 1.2 in General Introduction). In other words, the Mainland Chinese university students' self-perceptions of communication competence may affect their self-rated academic performance. Moreover, the research on the possible relationships between communication competence and academic performance in the Mainland Chinese university students is chosen as the primary object of this study is based on the assumption or hypothesis that the Mainland Chinese university students' lack of interpersonal communication may affect their communication performance, and thus their communication performance may influence their academic performance.

In the extant literature review, fewer studies have focused on the relationship between student communication competence and student academic performance.



Much of the previous researches have focused on the relationships between student motivation and academic performance (see Volet & Jarvela, 2001; Lau & Chan, 2001; Locke & Latham, 1990; Meece et al., 1988; Milech & Nesdale, 1984; Bradley, 1978; Snyder et al., 1978; Zuckerman, 1979), the relationships between modes of thinking and academic performance (see Zhang, 2002; Kim & Michael, 1995; Saracho, 1993), the student personality and academic performance (see Hamilton & Freeman, 1971; Holder & Wankowski, 1980), and learning strategies and academic performance (see O'Neil, 1978; O'Neil & Spielberger, 1979; Lin & McKeachie, 1970; Nisbet & Shucksmith, 1986; Elliot et al., 1999; Nolen, 1996).

Due to the paucity of relevant theoretical studies on the relationship between student communication competence and academic performance, the main purpose of the study sets out to address issues such as whether the Mainland Chinese university students' self-perceptions of communication competence may affect their self-rated academic performance. It is intended that this research will open a much-needed debate on this subject. Moreover, the research attempts to address whether the cultural differences may affect the two samples' (the Mainland Chinese university students and the British university students) self-perceptions of communication competence and their self-rated academic performance.

Specifically, the major goals are as follows:

1. To review some of the most important communication and culture theories, focusing on the Western perspective, since most 'scientific' studies on human behaviour have been undertaken and theories and concepts have been developed in European American cultural framework (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 2000).
2. To outline China's history and the development of the Chinese traditional culture.
3. To review the characteristic features of Confucianism in China and its influence on the Chinese civilization.
4. To identify the cultural impact both on the Mainland Chinese university students' and the British university students' communication behaviours and patterns.
5. To examine the possible relationships between the Mainland Chinese university



students' self-perceptions of communication competence and their self-rated academic performance.

6. To reveal the possible characteristic differences between the Mainland Chinese university students' and the British university students' self-perceptions of communication competence, interdependent and independent self-construals, self-rated academic performance and Chinese values.

1.4 The Problem Defined and Research Questions(RQ)

Accordingly, based on the above-mentioned issues in the previous sections, this research is concerned with the following substantive questions:

- RQ1: Which is the best predictor of academic performance in the Mainland Chinese university students?
- RQ2: Are the Mainland Chinese university students' self-perceptions of communication competence, Chinese values, and interdependent and independent self-construals, and gender correlated with their self-rated academic performance?
- RQ3: What predicts academic performance in the British university students? Is it different from that of the Mainland Chinese university students?
- RQ4: What are the overall differences in self-perceptions of interdependence, independence, communicative competence, communication apprehension, Chinese values, and self-rated academic performance between the Mainland Chinese university students and the British university students?
- RQ5: Do the British university students' perceptions differ from the Mainland Chinese university students on all the dependent measures, or just some?

1.5 Organization of the Book

The book is organized into nine chapters.

Chapter 1 provides a general introduction and highlights the research problem,



the objectives of the study, its research importance, and its research questions. Chapter 2 mainly deals with the study of cultural variability in communication. The cultural approach provides a theoretical framework through which communication patterns can be examined. The chapter describes briefly the impact of culture on communication and the approaches used to study culture and communication. It focuses on the cultural variability approach, incorporating the mediating role of the individual-level factors such as self-construals and the salience of conversational constraints and individual values, and high-and-low-context communication, which account for variability in communication styles across cultures.

Because culture influences individuals' behaviours and individuals' perceptions of behaviours, it is necessary to identify the socio-cultural values of the society. Nevertheless, a discussion of the socio-cultural, political, and linguistic context necessarily precedes the discussion of the socio-cultural values in China as the historical and societal contexts in which the different ethnic groups have evolved contribute to understanding the dynamics of relationships and social communication patterns in the Chinese cultural context.

Chapter 3 mainly discusses the socio-cultural and political background of the Chinese society. Knowing China requires some knowledge of its history. The historical background demonstrates the development of this oldest continuous major world civilization with more than about 5 000 years' history, and as such is important in understanding the Chinese people's behaviours, beliefs, attitudes and values. It outlines China's history and its socio-cultural and socio-political backgrounds.

Chapter 4 briefly reviews how cultural values influence individuals' behaviour. In Chapter 3, China's historical and cultural background has been reviewed. Further understanding of relationships and communication in China is provided by the traditional cultural values of Chinese society and the underlying belief that determines those values. It identifies and describes the Chinese philosophical principles, belief system, and their impact on their cultural values. It also examines