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ABSTRACT

This study investigated: the relationship between second language (L2) students' perceptions of teacher caring and learning; the relationship between L2 students' perceptions of nonverbal immediacy (e.g., eye contact, gestures, movement within the classroom, smiling, vocal variety, and use of humor) and learning; and the relationship between L2 students' perceptions of caring and nonverbal immediacy and learning. Participants were college students enrolled in second-semester Spanish courses. Students responded to questionnaires on teacher caring, nonverbal immediacy, and cognitive learning. Data analysis indicated that there was a relationship between teacher caring and L2 learning in the Spanish classroom. There was also a relationship between teacher nonverbal immediacy and L2 learning and between teacher nonverbal immediacy and caring and L2 learning. L2 students who perceived their teacher as more nonverbally immediate and caring appeared to learn more Spanish. Overall, the results suggest that teacher caring and nonverbal immediacy play a very important role in the L2 classroom. (Contains 37 references.) (SM)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NONVERBAL IMMEDIACY, CARING AND
L2 STUDENT LEARNING (SPANISH)

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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NONVERBAL IMMEDIACY, CARING AND L2 STUDENT LEARNING (SPANISH)

It is axiomatic that teachers and students spend a large percentage of their waking hours engaged in the learning and social environment referred to as the classroom. Interactive exchanges between learners and teachers in second language (L2) classrooms do not always emphasize the cognitive domain. When teaching limits itself to cognitive development, teachers may limit their effectiveness in managing the social psychological climate in the classroom. Classrooms develop a distinct personality, a particular social dimension; the L2 classroom reflects the needs of the learner and involves information sharing and negotiations within student groups, and between instructors and students. Furthermore, the creation of the welcoming classroom environment is an important executive function of the L2 teacher and research abounds in relationships between classroom environments and learning: anxiety (Ganschow and Sparks, 1996; Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Krashen, 1982; MacIntyre, 1995; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991) Willingness to communicate MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei and Noels, 1998 motivation (Gardner, 1985; Gardner and Clément, 1990; Oxford and Shearin, 1994); behavior alteration techniques (Allen and Edwards, 1988; Burroughs, Kearney and Plax, 1989; Plax, Kearney and Downs, 1986; Richmond, McCroskey, Kearney and Plax, 1987; Wheelless, Stewart, Kearney and Plax, 1987); teacher power bases (Axelrod, 1977; French and Raven, 1960); tolerance of ambiguity (Ehrman, 1993); error gravity and feedback (Brandl, 1995; Hedgcock and Lefkowitz, 1996; Lalande, 1984; Rifkin, 1995); and scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (Anton, 1999). A productive learning environment encompasses a climate in which learners feel the pleasantness of the environment, the will to succeed, the interest in and rewards upon success (Arends, 1991).

Several studies support a relationship between teacher caring and immediacy, and learning. Wanzer and McCroskey (1998) find that responsiveness (empathy, friendliness and warmth) correlates with student perceptions of teacher proactive behaviors and positive affect toward the teacher. There is theoretical support for the notion that nonverbal immediate behaviors such as eye contact, gestures, movement, smiling, humor and vocal variety relate to positive motivation to learn and to positive effect and learning. The use of paralinguistics and kinesics in the classroom or nonverbal immediate behaviors have been investigated by several researchers (Chesebro and McCroskey, 2001; Teven, 2001; Witt and Wheelless, 2001). Also, there is extant research in the attribute "caring" in which perceived caring produces more positive affect toward the instructor and toward the course (Parish and Parish, 1991; Teven, 2001). Paradoxically, there has been little research in the field of applied linguistics relative to attributes such as nonverbal immediacy, caring and learning (Capper, 2000). Because empirical research indicates that students who are comfortable with their instructor in an environment of warmth and caring (Teven, 2001) and who perceive positive nonverbal immediate behaviors (Chesebro and McCroskey, 2001; Richmond and McCroskey, 2001; Witt and Wheelless, 2001), more research is needed to confirm and to clarify the role of paralinguistics and kinesics, caring, and learning in L2 students. The present investigation is a response to the paucity of research in this area.

Caring

Research supporting the topic of a positive and productive learning environment abound and the attribute "caring" is an integral part of the social psychological systems that operate between instructors and learners. Good relations between teachers and students in a climate of warmth,

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caring and responsiveness promote learning (Teven, 2001; Wanzer and McCroskey, 1998). The psychological model called social interactional analysis categorizes statements by teachers and students into two parts: teacher talk and student talk. Within teacher talk lies the indirect influence of accepting feelings, praise and encouragement. This affective aspect of the teaching process is documented by Flanders (1960). More contemporary researchers report the correlation between caring and learning (Teven and McCroskey, 1997). Subjects described as caring about others in communicative efforts are perceived as more immediate (Wanzer and McCroskey, 2001). Richmond and McCroskey (2000) find that students like immediate and caring teachers, learn more from them, and display more positive affect for the course.

Nonverbal Immediacy

Immediacy was originally conceptualized by Mehrabian (1961, 1971) and was defined as behaviors that enhance closeness and nonverbal interaction with others. Behaviors such as eye contact, the use of gestures, movement with the classroom environment, smiling, vocal variety and the use of humor encompass and designate nonverbal immediacy (Andersen, 1979). Research literature on nonverbal immediacy report consistently the relationship between nonverbal immediacy and student learning (Chesebro and McCroskey, 1998; Chesebro and McCroskey, 2001; Kelley and Gorham, 1988; Teven, 2001; Witt and Wheelless, 2001). Teven (2001) indicates that there may also be a relationship between teacher nonverbal immediacy and learners' perceptions of teacher caring.

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Paradoxically little is known about L2 students' perception of nonverbal immediacy, caring and learning. Questions remain about the relationship between nonverbal immediacy and learning outcomes. If language is a complex system of communication including speech, writing and paralinguistics, research is lacking in paralinguistics (Capper, 2000; Kadler, 1970).

Human communication includes such subtle expressions of emotions, gesticulation, proxemics, kinesics and facial expressions. Research in applied linguistics predominates in studies of phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic processes. This investigation which is guided by research in communication education and applied linguistics presents the following research questions:

RQ1 Is there a relationship between L2 students' (Spanish) perceptions of caring and learning?

RQ2 Is there a relationship between L2 students' (Spanish) perceptions of nonverbal immediacy and learning?

RQ3 Is there a relationship between L2 students' (Spanish) perceptions of caring and nonverbal immediacy, and learning?

Method

Subjects

Participants were selected from among students enrolled in second-semester Spanish courses

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in a small liberal arts college in the Southeast. Subjects were restricted to students who completed the first-semester course at the college or transferred a college course so that behaviors exhibited by secondary teachers would not contaminate the investigation.

From three existing sections, every third student was selected and subjects (N = 28) participated in this investigation. Subjects were informed concerning the nature of this study and they were informed that any information or data collected would be strictly confidential, and any access to data would be limited to the investigator. Participation in this investigation affected no course grades.

Target subjects were asked to respond to the questionnaires based upon the teacher they had in the first-semester Spanish course. Data was collected during regularly scheduled classes by the investigator. Administration of instruments took fifteen minutes.

Instruments

Caring. The respondents completed a six-item instrument designed to measure the degree of "caring" by the teacher. This measure emphasized the following attributes: warmth, compassion, friendliness, sensitivity, socialability and understanding. The scale was: never = 0; rarely = 1; occasionally = 2; often = 3; very often = 4; always = 5. This measure was based upon Teven (2001). Alpha reliability was .89.

Nonverbal immediacy. Subjects responded to a seven-item measure based upon Thomas, Richard and McCroskey (1994) and was designed to measure nonverbal immediate behaviors eye contact, gestures, relaxed body position, smiling, vocal variety, movement and proxemics.

A five-step response scale (never-very often) was used, and the alpha for this nonverbal immediacy measure was .81.

Learning. Cognitive learning was measured by asking subjects to report how much they perceived they learned from the teacher. This instrument was a five-step response scale (nothing- very much). The test-retest method resulted in a coefficient of stability and equivalence of .90.

Data Analysis

Research questions one and two were tested with the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r). To analyze the data from research question three, multiple regression was used with learning as the criterion variable, and nonverbal immediacy and caring as predictor variables.

Results

The first research question was: Is there a relationship between L2 students' perceptions of caring and learning? The bivariate correlation between caring and learning was .626; adjusted R-square = .368 or 37% of shared variance.

The second research question was: Is there a relationship between L2 students' perceptions of nonverbal immediacy and learning? The bivariate correlation between nonverbal immediacy and learning was .736; adjusted R-square = .524 or 52% of shared variance.

The third research question was: Is there a relationship between L2 students' perceptions of caring and nonverbal immediacy, and learning? The multiple correlation between nonverbal

immediacy and caring, and learning was .785; adjusted R-square = .586 or 59% of variance in the criterion that is accounted for, or predicted by, the combined predictors. $F(2,25) = 20.138, p. > .01$.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to determine if there was a relationship between teacher nonverbal immediacy and caring, and L2 (Spanish) learning. A substantial body of literature pointed to the role between immediacy, caring and learning (Chesebro and McCroskey, 2001; Teven, 2001; Warner and McCroskey, 1998; Witt and Wheelless, 2001). In this report subjects (N = 28) were asked to respond on three instruments: (1) caring; (2) nonverbal immediacy; and (3) learning.

The data were analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlations and multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that there was a relationship between teacher caring and L2 learning in the Spanish classroom ($r = .626$): the correlation was moderately positive. The second research question concerning the relationship between teacher nonverbal immediacy and L2 learning in the Spanish classroom was high positive ($r = .736$). The third research question investigating the relationship between teacher nonverbal immediacy and caring, and L2 learning in the Spanish classroom was also high positive (Multiple R = .785); the adjusted R-square or the index of the equation's goodness of fit to the data with the adjustment to remove the distortion of sample size was .586. The multiple regression analysis indicated a high correlation between L2 learning in the Spanish classroom (the criterion variable) and the linear combination

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of predictors (nonverbal immediacy and caring). Nonverbal immediacy appears to be a stronger predictor variable than caring. Also, L2 students in the classroom who perceived their teacher as more nonverbally immediate and caring appeared to learn more Spanish. It must be noted that there is no cause-effect relationship in correlational research.

The results of this investigation suggest that teacher caring and nonverbal immediacy play a very important role in the L2 classroom. It is not surprising that warmth, compassion, friendliness, sensitiveness, and understanding toward students create a more positive classroom where learning happens. However, the amount of variance attributed to teacher nonverbal immediacy suggests that our human inventory of facial expressions, gestures, proxemics, body postures and intonation patterns may affect how much students learn. If nonverbal immediacy is a set of behaviors, such behaviors may be the most basic to all human beings: emotions (happiness, regret, anger, fear and surprise) often communicate nonverbally; subtle nuances of an unwillingness to communicate need no words. Movement and gesture can be comforting or threatening. Facial expressions may indicate intensity, leniency, frustration, relief or embarrassment, and a gaze may suggest approval, disapproval, suspicion, mistrust or intimidation. Students tend to have negative reactions to teachers who exhibit unconscious or conscious negative nonverbal behaviors; negative affect toward the course may ensue. Exhibiting nonverbal immediacy appears to facilitate positive face-to-face communication and accommodation (Richmond and McCroskey, 2000).

The results of this investigation suggest that time and training may be needed in L2 teacher education in methods of transmitting positive nonverbal immediate behaviors. If business managers receive training in nonverbal communication and body language, and techniques

to work with and through others, so can L2 instructors (Kreitner, 1989).

Limitations of Present Study and Recommendations for Further Study

The traditional limitation of sample size may apply to this investigation, for only 28 subjects were available for participation. One can only assume that a larger sample re[resents the population of L2 learners more accurately. Thirty subjects are generally acceptable to establish the existence or nonexistence of a relationship for correlational studies; however a larger sample size would be more acceptable for multiple regression analysis.

Also, research questions 1-2 involved correlational techniques and correlation does not imply causation. On the other hand, multiple regression analysis is an equivalent inferential method to analysis of variance (ANOVA) for testing hypotheses. Therefore, the variable in this investigation may safely be said to be related and/or associated.

It is recommended that the following lines of research be pursued.

1. The role of nonverbal immediacy and L2 classroom management.
2. A study of the effects of proxemics on l2 students when taught by the L2 instructor.
3. L2 instructors (native and near-native) and their differences in verbal and nonverbal immediate behaviors.
4. Attractiveness and likeability in L2 instructors.
5. The relationship between nonverbal immediate behaviors and L2 teacher evaluations (student, peer, supervisor).

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