

# The Research of James C. McCroskey:

## A Personal Remembrance

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Professor McCroskey, hereafter just “Jim” as we knew him, (I know this isn’t a very Korean way to refer to a Senior Professor) had, as we all know, a prolific research career. His publications began with article with titles such as:

- “The effect of college speech training on academic marks” in 1962, and
- “Ethical practices in debate” in 1964.

Much of Jim’s research in the early and mid 1960s focused on debate. He had a background in debate after all. Gradually, that research shifted from ethics and judging debate to the use of evidence in debate and then to the broader issue of persuasion.

In the mid-1960s articles began to appear such as:

- McCroskey (1966) Toward an understanding of the importance of "evidence" in persuasive communication in *The Pennsylvania Speech Annual*.
- McCroskey (1966) Scales for the measurement of ethos in *Speech Monographs*.
- Arnold & McCroskey (1967) The credibility of reluctant testimony in *The Central States Speech Journal*.
- McCroskey (1967) The effects of evidence in persuasive communication in *Western Speech*.

And

- McCroskey (1969) A summary of experimental research on the effects of evidence in persuasive communication in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*.

Just in case some of the audience doesn't know, ethos was Aristotle's term for what is now known as source credibility, and Jim's use of the label reflected his knowledge of classic rhetoric.

Jim's early research on evidence and source credibility, more than any other researcher, established the quantitative and experimental study of persuasion as squarely within the domain of the field of human communication. Jim is known for numerous contributions and younger scholars may not know that he did some of the most important and influential work on persuasion before his work on communication appreciation.

Those early works also demonstrated some trends that would persist throughout Jim's long and prolific career. One of these was diversity in outlets. McCroskey publications in persuasion appeared in outlets such as *The Pennsylvania Speech Annual* and *The Central States Speech Journal* but they also appeared in elite A-level journals like *Speech Monographs* and *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. In the 1960s, *Monographs* and *QJS* were the two most prestigious journals in the field. HCR did not exist yet, and when it came into being, Jim was, of course, one of its editors.

This is a style of publication that both Hee Sun and Tim continue to practice. We pride ourselves on publishing in highly regarded journals, but we publish in a variety of outlets too.

Another trend is that Jim published predominantly in-field. His research has always held multi-disciplinary appeal. In fact, in the new Microsoft Academic Search, James C. McCroskey is listed in the top 3 authors in social science across 14 social science disciplines. But, Jim published in communication journals and brought readers to our field. One of these was Tim.

In the early 1980s, 20 or so years after the publications of Jim's persuasion research, Tim was an undergraduate student majoring in Psychology at Northern Arizona University. Tim took some communication classes and ended up with a minor in speech communication. One class Tim took was persuasion, and he discovered a deep interest in the topic. Tim did what people did before the internet, he went to library and started reading persuasion research. It was at the NAU library where Tim first read Jim's research on evidence and credibility. This was a major factor in Tim's decision to pursue graduate study in Communication rather than Psychology, and his decision to further his education at West Virginia University rather than elsewhere.

During Tim's senior year at NAU, he attended a Western States Communication Association conference in Fresno, California. It was there that Tim and Jim were introduced, and it was there that Tim expressed interest in obtaining a MA in communication.

Two weeks later Tim got a phone call from Jim informing him that he was accepted into the MA program at WVU with funding. Tim accepted on the spot, and the following August, he got in his car and drove from Scottsdale, Arizona to Morgantown, West Virginia.

About a week or two after Jim's phone call, Tim got another call, this one from Judee Burgoon at University of Arizona. U of A also offered Tim a position too, but Tim declined saying he had already told McCroskey that he would attend WVU. Tim would come to see this little story as

amusing. For now, it is sufficient to know that Jim and Judee's relationship was, for years, strained, that Jim directed Judee's dissertation, and that Judee is more than a little competitive. Tim did not know it at the time, but Judee probably did not take rejection in favor of WVU well. More on Judee, Jim and Tim as the story progresses.

So, Tim attended WVU. He successfully completed his MA there. He took a class on communication apprehension from Jim and learned much from Jim both in class and out of class. Because Jim was doing Com Ap research at the time and Tim was more interested in persuasion, Buddy Wheelless directed Tim's thesis, but Jim was on his committee.

Both Buddy and Jim advised Tim to do his PhD at Michigan State University with Gerald Miller, Frank Boster, and Jack Hunter so this is what Tim did. Just about a year after driving to Morgantown, Tim was driving to beautiful East Lansing, Michigan to study persuasion and research methods there. Tim is in East Lansing at this moment, but not for long. He regrets he could not be here.

James C. McCroskey's most lasting contribution to communication research was in naming constructs and creating measures so that they could be researched. This began with the measures of Ethos previously mentioned. In the mid and late 1960s, Jim's research began to shift again toward more methodological issues. He published articles on Likert and Semantic Differential scales and scaling. In 1970 he published his first paper on the measurement of communication anxiety.

In 1979, McCroskey and Young published an essay in *HCR* on factor analysis. More than 2 decades later Hee Sun got her first, first authored, *HCR* article as a graduate student by updating McCroskey and Young.

The number of constructs and measures increased over time. In addition to ethos and communication apprehension, there were:

interpersonal attraction in 1974  
perceived homophily in 1975

and so many more... If your favorite McCroskey Construct and scale was not mentioned, my apology.

In the late 1980s Tim was doing his PhD at MSU where he took many, many methods and stats classes including classes on measurement. Tim learned CFA, hierarchical CFA, and some non-linear measure modeling from Boster and Hunter. Tim wanted to apply these to an actual scale. The best way to learn is by doing. So, Tim contacted Jim and proposed a collaboration to test various models of the PRCA-24 (the com app scale). Jim provided Tim with a data set of almost  $N = 9000$  responses to the PRCA and Tim tested unidimensional, multi-dimensional, second-order, and non-linear models on his old 8088 desktop computer (2 generations before the Pentium). Each run took more than 4 hours presuming no syntax errors. When all the results were in, it was clear that the PRCA-24 was second-order unidimensional, with 4 first-order factors comprised of the 4 intended contexts: dyadic, group, meeting, and public speaking. Tim

employed a strict criteria for fit (those of you who know Tim's research know he prefers setting a high bar). The criteria was that each individual deviation from the model's predictions could not exceed 1% of the variance. Of course in a second-order model with 24 indicators, 4 first-order factors, and a general higher-order factor, there are lots of degrees of freedom and consequently many opportunities for fit to fail. But the model fit beautifully!

Tim called Jim, told him the results, and they made plans for publication. Tim, being an ambitious graduate student at the time, wanted to try *Monographs*. Aim high right? The catch was that Judee Burgoon was the editor at the time, and Jim believed that Judee would not publish his work. Nevertheless, Jim and Tim decided to give *Monographs* a try.

The reviews were split. One reviewer recommended publication with minor revision. One reviewer though the research was competent, but questioned the contribution of proving that Jim was right. Apparently, it would have been more informative if Jim was wrong? The third review did not offer much criticism, but was unfavorable for unspecified reasons.

Judee, the editor, invited a revise and resubmit but made what might seem an unreasonable request. Recall that the original study used a nation-wide sample of  $N = 8,879$  subjects. Judee asserted that replication is the hallmark of measurement research and therefore she required that any resubmission include additional data sets and evidence that the findings held across data sets.

Multiple studies and replications are good things that Tim and Jim valued, but with such a large data set, is replication really needed? Couldn't they just split their data into 9 studies with  $N = 1,000$  each or 18 with  $N = 500$ ?

Most authors would find such a demand unreasonable, politely decline the invitation, and submit elsewhere. No doubt this is what Burgoon thought we would do. She was wrong.

Tim called Jim and got 3 additional data sets. One surveyed the entire incoming freshman class at WVU. Another was collected in Puerto Rico in both English and Spanish. Tim also collected new data at MSU.

A revision was then submitted with much more than requested replications, including replications that crossed languages and cultures. The result was:

Levine & McCroskey (1990). Measuring trait communication apprehension: A test of rival measurement models of the PRCA-24 in *Communication Monographs*.

It is likely the first-authored article in *Monographs* that got Tim his first faculty position at Indiana University in 1990. Thanks Jim!

More importantly for the current talk, it highlights two under-appreciated contributions of James C. McCroskey:

- Not only did Jim name and measure many important communication variables, his measures turn out to be valid. The PRCA-24 has, hands down and by far, the strongest,

most compelling, validity portfolio of any scale or measure in Communication science.

- Jim tested his ideas and variables across cultures. Very few researchers do this, and very few measures hold up in different cultures and different languages. This is impressive!

To sum up:

- James C. McCroskey was instrumental in making persuasion a core part of communication science. This is why Tim Levine chose communication over psychology.
- James C. McCroskey was instrumental in advancing quantitative methodology in communication. His work inspired the likes of Hee Sun Park as a graduate student.
- James C. McCroskey conceptualized and measured more communication variables than anyone. His work was incredibly diverse.
- Measures created by James C. McCroskey pass psychometric muster. Jim was a wizard with item creation and factor analysis. Tim is more grateful from learning such skills from Jim.
- James C. McCroskey was a leader in quantitative cross-cultural communication research. He did this not by importing Hostede's various dimensions but by empirically testing measurement and substantive equivalence across cultures.

Levine, Timothy and Park, Hee Sun are honored to have known Jim for virtually all of our academic lives. Jim was a friend, a mentor, and a hang-out buddy at conferences too numerous to remember. Jim is missed, but his numerous contributions are lasting.