

Foreign Language Anxiety among Intermediate-level University Students of Japanese

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Abstract:

This study examines the characteristics of foreign language anxiety among university students of Japanese as a Foreign Language (JFL). The study participants are 18 undergraduate students of intermediate-level JFL at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign during the fall of 2006. All study participants completed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). They also answered specific anxiety questions related to the Japanese orthographic system. Findings indicate that the anxiety level of JFL students received a mean rating of 2.70 on a five-point Likert scale, indicating that the participants considered themselves to be “not very anxious”. This result supports the findings on the relation between anxiety level and Japanese proficiency reported by Kitano (2001), and suggests a lower level of anxiety than that found by Aida (1994) and Horwitz et al. (1986). Further results indicate that differences between the English and Japanese orthographic systems did not contribute to participants’ level of foreign language anxiety, but rather that participant anxiety was primarily associated with speaking Japanese accurately in front of others. Study results will be discussed in the context of ways to reduce the level of foreign language anxiety in the JFL classroom.

Keywords: Japanese, foreign language anxiety, college students, intermediate, orthography

INTRODUCTION

Background

Most foreign language learners experience of nervousness when they speak the foreign language in front of their classmates or native speakers. Some may forget even easy words, and others may be worried about making mistakes. Horwitz (2008) stated that “some language learners become anxious when they cannot be themselves when speaking in the new language” (p. 9).

In my Japanese class, some students did not seem to have enough confidence in speaking Japanese even though they always scored high in tests. They spoke Japanese in a soft voice and responded with short answers to avoid making mistakes. I would like to examine what made them be anxious learners. As Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) stated, foreign language anxiety is fairly common among students. Understanding foreign language anxiety would give me ideas for helping my students cope with the difficulty of learning a new language.

In addition, as more studies of foreign language anxiety are done, it would be important to focus on language-specific characteristics of anxiety. Samimy (1994) argued that “unfamiliarity with these orthographic systems in Japanese can create major affective as well as cognitive barriers for learners to overcome” (p. 29). Her results might indicate that future researchers would need to pay more attention not only to general characteristics of foreign language anxiety, but also to unique anxiety reactions derived from specific language features.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language learners typically have difficulties in communicating in a target language in comparison with their native language. Price (1991) described the struggle of foreign language learners, “You feel frustrated because you’re an interesting adult and you sound like a babbling baby” (p. 105). Foreign language learners use a limited number of words and phrases to get their ideas across to others in the foreign language. They may feel uncomfortable when speaking the foreign language because they cannot perform as well as they do in their first language. Horwitz (2008) stated that language learners are often unable to display their personality in the second language. They feel uncomfortable because they present “a less positive version” (Horwitz, 2000, p. 258) of themselves to others than usual. Therefore, the “disparity between how we see ourselves and how we think others see us” (p. 258) makes learners anxious.

Price (1991) described specific emotional reactions of anxious foreign language learners. They felt nervousness, dread, hatred, and obsession. Randall (2007), after interviewing Horwitz, described other reactions. Anxious learners “may have extreme difficulty concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, tremble, have palpitations, experience sleep disturbances and exhibit avoidance behavior in the form of skipping class and putting off homework, class projects and studying.” Many researchers (e.g., Horwitz, 2000; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; McCoy, 1979; Pichette, 2009; Samimy, 1994; Vogely, 1998) argued that foreign language anxiety prevents foreign/second language learners from successful performance in the target language.

Researchers (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989) have found an inverse relationship

between foreign language anxiety and foreign language performance – the more anxious, the poorer the performance. Although some researchers (e.g., Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009) argued that foreign language anxiety keeps learner’s motivation high to perform well, many researchers considered that “anxiety may function as an affective filter, preventing a learner from achieving a high level of proficiency in a foreign language” (Aida, 1994, p. 155). Studies seem to indicate that anxiety has negative consequences in language performance.

Regarding the difference of anxiety level across languages, only a few researchers compared the anxiety level within students of different Western languages. Daley (1998) conducted a study about differences in anxiety among students enrolled in Spanish, French, and German classes at a large university in the United States. She found no difference in foreign language anxiety among them. Rodríguez and Abreu (2003) compared Spanish pre-service language teachers majoring in both English and French. They found no statistical difference between overall level of general English and French anxieties. Their results seemed to indicate that no difference in anxiety level would be found among Western languages.

Horwitz et al.’s (1986) Classification

Horwitz et al. (1986) divided foreign language anxiety into three categories: (1) communication apprehension, (2) test anxiety, and (3) fear of negative evaluation.

Communication apprehension. The first category, communication apprehension, is “a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). It includes anxiety toward speaking in public, communication with others in a foreign language, and receiving foreign language

messages. Most people experience communication apprehension when they learn a foreign language. They keep silent because they became nervous in communicating with others in the foreign language. Communication apprehension mainly affects learner's speaking and listening. Horwitz (2007) stated that "nervous, fearful learners find it very hard to tell the difference between sounds and structures in statements presented in the target language and have a lot of difficulty grasping the content of target language messages" (p. 2). Communication apprehension also transfers from a learner's first language to his/her target language. Another characteristic of communication apprehension is the "negative spiral of confusion." Anxious speakers try to understand every spoken word during communication. But, the more the learner pay attention to every word, the more confused he/she becomes in comprehending and producing messages because of limited time and of his/her slow processing speed in the target language. Horwitz et al. argued that communication apprehension results in learner having "difficulty understanding others and making oneself understood" (p. 127). Thus, even knowledgeable learners may not communicate with others well.

Test anxiety. Test anxiety is "a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127). Contemporary school systems require students to take tests to evaluate their knowledge and performance. Not only high-stakes tests, such as an entrance examination, but also term examinations or quizzes make students feel much pressure. Because of test anxiety, "even the brightest and most prepared students often make errors" (p. 128). Young (1991) did research on test anxiety using the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI), which is a kind of interview-style procedure for evaluating learner's oral

proficiency. An interesting finding in Young's study was that test anxiety affected low proficiency learners more than high proficiency learners.

Fear of negative evaluation. Fear of negative evaluation refers to "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situation, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128, as cited in Watson & Friends, 1969, pp. 448-451). It is not limited to evaluation in test situations. It is broader in scope, for example "an interview for a job or speaking in foreign language class" (p.128). Examples of extreme consequences of fear of negative evaluation include students skipping class, over-studying, or even hiding in the last row in the classroom to avoid humiliation (Randall, 2007).

These three performance anxieties (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation), under the overall notion of foreign language anxiety, do not work separately. Those anxieties overlap with one another. Each performance anxiety also has characteristics of foreign language anxiety and affects foreign language learners negatively. Horwitz et al. (1986) described characteristics of foreign language anxiety as follows.

Foreign language anxiety is not simply the combination of these fears transferred to foreign language learning. Rather, we conceive foreign language anxiety as distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language process. (p. 128)

Unlike first language acquisition, foreign language learning provokes anxiety and sometimes hinders learner's communication in the target language.

Japanese Learners' Foreign Language Anxiety

To American students, the Japanese language may be considered one of the most difficult languages to acquire. Samimy (1994) states that “unlike cognate languages such as French, Spanish, and German, noncognate languages are more demanding for American students” (p. 29). McGinnis (2003) indicates the difference of recommended learning-hours to acquire absolute language proficiency between Spanish and Japanese. Learners of Spanish need 480 hours to become advanced learners whereas learners of Japanese require 1,320 hours to reach the same level. The Foreign Service Institute of the US Department of State ranks Japanese as one of the most difficult languages to learn for English speaking learners.

For Japanese, students have to learn three different writing systems: *Hiragana*, *Katakana*, and *Kanji* or Chinese characters. *Hiragana* and *Katakana* have fifty symbols each and approximately 2,000 *Kanji* characters are needed to read and write Japanese words and phrases fluently. As Samimy (1994) stated, “Unfamiliarity with these orthographic systems in Japanese can create major affective as well as cognitive barriers to overcome” (p. 29). A non-cognate orthographic system may intimidate American students and provoke foreign language anxiety.

Aida (1994) studied foreign language anxiety among students of Japanese. Like Horwitz et al. (1986), subjects of the study were students at University of Texas at Austin (UTA). She tested whether or not Horwitz et al.'s Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was reliable for students of both Western languages and non-Western languages such as Japanese. Aida found that FLCAS worked effectively to measure anxiety of students of Japanese as a foreign language

(JFL). She concluded that “the FLCAS is a reliable tool regardless of whether the language is a European Western language” (p. 158). She also had some other interesting findings. For example, taking Japanese as an elective or required course did not affect students' anxiety level.

Samimy and Tabuse (1992) conducted research about the relation between Japanese learners' anxiety level and their performance. They found that Japanese learners' anxiety level increased as they continued to study the language. Saito and Samimy (1996) found a similar trend. Advanced students were the most anxious, intermediate students were the least anxious, and beginning students fell between the other two. They argued that “as experience and proficiency increase, anxiety declines in a fairly consistent manner is more applicable to the learners of commonly taught or cognate languages than to learners of the other less commonly taught, noncognate languages” (p. 247). In fact, Gardner, Smythe, and Brunet (1977) found that advanced students of French displayed the lowest level of anxiety. Kitano (2001) conducted research about foreign language speaking anxiety of students of JFL in two universities. She concluded that advanced learners were more anxious than elementary and intermediate levels of learners of Japanese. For Japanese learners, anxiety level appears not to decrease as proficiency improves.

Research Questions

Many studies have established the validity and effectiveness of FLCAS. In fact many researchers (Aida, 1994; Kitano, 2001; Horwitz et al., 1986) have used FLCAS to measure the level of students' foreign language anxiety. Little research, however, has been conducted to find characteristics of foreign language anxiety among intermediate students of Japanese to compare their anxiety with that of students

of Western languages.

I would like to focus on the level of foreign language anxiety among students of JFL. Then, I would like to explore the characteristics of their foreign language anxiety. I compare measures of students' anxiety with data collected by Aida (1994) and Horwitz et al. (1986). Aida conducted research about anxiety among students of JFL, and Horwitz et al. carried out a study about anxiety among students of Spanish. To American students, Spanish language is a cognate language, but Japanese is not. As Samimy (1994) stated, "As experience and proficiency increase, anxiety declines in a fairly consistent manner' is more applicable to the learners of commonly taught or cognate languages than to learners of the other less commonly taught, noncognate languages" (p. 247). It may be reasonably expected that students of Japanese would have different characteristics of foreign language anxiety from students of Spanish. Furthermore, conducting research in a different region and a different time period would be worthwhile. Both Horwitz et al. and Aida carried out research at UTA. Horwitz et al. (1986) conducted their study in 1983 and Aida, in 1992. More than 14 years have passed between Aida's study and this one.

The present study examines foreign language anxiety of students who study Japanese at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). Chicago, Illinois, has a large Japanese community. Also, UIUC has many Asian students, which would create different atmosphere for learning Japanese from that in Texas. Finally, I analyze the effect of Japanese orthographic system on students' level of anxiety.

This study addresses the following three research questions:

1. What level of anxiety do intermediate students of Japanese have?
2. What are characteristics of anxiety among students of Japanese?
3. What, if any, is the relationship between JFL anxiety and the Japanese orthographic system?

METHOD

Participants

Participants of this study were 18 undergraduate students at UIUC in intermediate Japanese. The section had 25 students (14 males and 11 females), and 18 students volunteered to participate in this study. The students had completed two semesters of Japanese and were in their third semester. The reason I chose the intermediate course was that students in the intermediate Japanese course had already studied the three Japanese writing systems in Japanese and used them in daily lessons through a variety of activities. Unlike students in the intermediate course, elementary course students do not study *Kanji*, one of the three writing systems, until the 10th week in the second semester. Without studying all the Japanese orthographies, foreign language anxiety toward Japanese orthography may not be measured adequately. Thus, I selected students in the intermediate Japanese course.

Japanese Courses in University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC)

The Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures (EALC) in UIUC offered four Japanese courses (elementary, intermediate, advanced, and the fourth-year courses) in each semester of 2006. The elementary course had six sections and the intermediate course includes four sections. The advanced course and the fourth-year course had one section each. There was no difference between sections in terms of

curriculum. Usually freshmen, sophomores and juniors take elementary courses, and sophomores, juniors and seniors take intermediate courses of Japanese. Undergraduate students who finished the intermediate course and graduate students usually take the advanced course or the fourth-year course. Students included not only EALC majors but also other majors. Most students in this study were engineering majors. Some took Japanese for personal interest, and others saw Japanese as useful in their job search.

For elementary and intermediate classes, a 50-minute lesson was provided by native or near-native speakers of Japanese from Monday to Friday every semester. Each section had from 23 to 28 students. The syllabus of Japanese courses stated, “The course focuses on your performance of spoken and written Japanese in class.” The students in the elementary course and those in the intermediate course used *Nakama 1* and *Nakama 2* as textbooks respectively. Basically, the class was taught in Japanese, and students were required to speak Japanese in class. Students had to take 10 vocabulary quizzes and 18 Kanji quizzes in addition to 4 examinations during a semester.

Instruments

FLCAS was developed by Horwitz (1983). The scale consists of 33 questions and includes specific questions about communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Examples of questions include, “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class,” “The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get,” and “I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.” The FLCAS is composed of a 5-point Likert Scale questionnaire, ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The answer “strongly agree” indicated that a student has

a high level of anxiety, and the answer “strongly disagree” indicated that a student has a low level of anxiety (Horwitz, 2008). To evaluate each student’s anxiety level, researchers need to add up each participant’s responses to all the questions and to divide them by the total number of questions which is 33. In this study, I used the average score of the FLCAS of 18 participants to evaluate their anxiety level.

The FLAS has some reverse-scored questions Q2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32. Horwitz (2008) explained, “For these items, you will need to switch your students’ response. Fives should be scored ones, fours to twos, ones to fives, and twos to fours. Of course, 3’s will not have to be switched” (p. 235).

In this study, I used the same scale as Horwitz et al. (1986) used to measure foreign language anxiety among students of JFL because I wanted to compare my results with hers. I added two specific questions to examine whether Japanese language would provoke more anxiety than Western languages, and whether the Japanese orthographic system would affect students to have language anxiety. The questions I added were, “I feel more tense and nervous when I speak Japanese than when I speak Spanish, French, or German which I studied before,” and “I feel nervous when studying Japanese because the Japanese writing system (*Hiragana*, *Katakana*, and *Kanji*) is different from English writing system.”

Procedures

The questionnaire was distributed to 25 students on the 14th week in the first semester of their intermediate Japanese course. Eighteen students voluntarily participated in this research and signed the consent form. Those students took the questionnaire home, filled out their answers, and submitted it the next day. Their answers were anonymous, and in each question

students chose one of the most proper answers to themselves among five alternatives: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the responses to all FLCAS questions. Each number on the left indicates percentages of students of Japanese in this study. The students chose each answer from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SD). All percentages shown on Table 1 were rounded to nearest while number do not always sum to 100.

Horwitz (2008) described that each answer (SA, A, N, D, and SD) represented each score (5, 4, 3, 2, and 1) respectively. As mentioned above, there were reverse-scored items in FLCAS. For those items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32), I scored 1 to SA, 4 to A, 3 to N, 4 to D, and 5 to SD. To determine the overall anxiety level of the students, I added up their responses to all the questions, and divided the total scores by the number of total questions of FLCAS, which was 33. Horwitz (2008) explained, "Students with averages around 3 should be considered slightly anxious, while students with averages below 3 are probably not very anxious. Students who average near 4 and above are probably fairly anxious" (p. 235).

Table 1
FLCAS Items with Percentages of Students Choosing Each Alternative

	SA*	A.	N.	D.	SD.
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	0	17	17	56	11
2. I <i>don't</i> worry about making mistakes in language class.	0	28	17	44	11

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in my language class.	6	6	28	28	33
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	0	44	17	33	6
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	50	22	11	17	0
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	0	44	17	22	17
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	22	17	22	33	6
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	22	56	11	11	0
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	6	44	17	17	17
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	11	22	17	22	28
11. I <i>don't</i> understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	6	33	22	39	0
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	0	39	28	22	11
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	6	6	17	50	22
14. I would <i>not</i> be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	6	6	11	67	11

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
6 39 28 22 6
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.
0 17 28 44 11
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.
0 11 11 28 50
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.
0 50 22 28 0
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.
0 6 0 83 11
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.
0 28 11 39 22
21. The more I study for language test, the more confused I get.
0 6 6 39 50
22. I *don't* feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.
0 28 0 56 17
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.
11 28 17 39 6
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.
11 28 17 44 0
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
6 28 11 44 11
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other class.
0 22 22 33 22
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.
0 17 22 50 11
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.
17 39 39 6 0
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.
0 33 28 39 0
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.
0 44 6 44 6
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.
0 17 6 56 22
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.
11 6 39 39 6
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.
6 50 17 17 11
34. I feel more tense and nervous when I speak Japanese than when I speak Spanish, French or German which I studied before.
0 6 12 41 41
35. I feel nervous when studying Japanese because the Japanese writing system (*Hiragana*, *Katakana*, and *Kanji*) is different from the English writing system.
6 11 22 39 22

*SA = strongly agree, A = agree, N = neither agree nor disagree, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree

To calculate an individual anxiety level to each item, first I multiplied a score of each

answer by its percentage. Then, I divided the calculated score by the sum of percentage. For example, for Q1, the following calculation was made:

$$\{(5 \times 0) + (4 \times 17) + (3 \times 17) + (2 \times 56) + (1 \times 11)\} \div (0 + 17 + 17 + 56 + 11) = 2.39.$$

The overall and individual anxiety scores for each item are shown in Table 2 below. In Table 2, anxiety scores from Aida (1994) and Horwitz et al. (1986) are also shown for comparison. The average FLCAS score of students in this study was 2.70, which indicated that the students did not have high anxiety. However, 9 items (2, 7, 9, 14, 15, 22, 24, 32, and 33) exceeded 3.0. On these items, students were slight anxious. Two items (14 and 22) went over 3.5, which meant that they are fairly anxious.

Q18	2.78	3.01	3.21
Q19	2.01	2.47	2.45
Q20	2.45	2.86	2.76
Q21	1.68	1.85	2.16
Q22	3.61	2.20	3.71
Q23	2.99	2.92	2.86
Q24	3.06	3.11	2.70
Q25	2.74	3.34	3.40
Q26	2.45	3.24	2.96
Q27	2.45	2.83	2.91
Q28	2.34	3.20	2.95
Q29	2.94	2.88	2.73
Q30	2.88	3.00	3.09
Q31	2.18	2.18	2.26
Q32	3.23	2.99	3.30
Q33	3.22	3.43	3.17
Avg.	2.70	2.91	2.97

Table 2
Mean Scores of Each Item Obtained from three studies

	This study (2006)	Aida (1994)	Horwitz et al. (1986)
Q1	2.39	2.98	3.51
Q2	3.38	2.54	3.32
Q3	2.25	2.75	2.59
Q4	2.99	3.27	2.91
Q5	1.95	4.18	2.61
Q6	2.99	2.32	2.91
Q7	3.16	3.22	2.97
Q8	2.11	3.05	3.17
Q9	3.05	3.20	3.25
Q10	2.66	3.35	3.06
Q11	2.94	2.82	3.18
Q12	2.95	3.13	3.27
Q13	2.24	2.53	2.22
Q14	3.70	2.64	3.59
Q15	3.16	3.17	2.90
Q16	2.51	3.09	2.91
Q17	1.76	2.22	3.18

For the two specific anxiety questions related to the characteristics of Japanese language (Q34 and Q35), the mean scores were 1.83 and 2.40 respectively. The Q34: “I feel more tense and nervous when I speak Japanese than when I speak Spanish, French or German which I studied before” asked about difference of anxiety between Japanese and cognate languages. Q:35, “I feel nervous when studying Japanese because the Japanese writing system is different from the English writing system” asked students about the affective impact of a different orthographic system. On both questions, students showed low scores, which indicated that they were not very anxious about Japanese compared to other languages or about Japanese orthography.

In comparison with two prior studies (Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986) in FLCAS, students in this study displayed lower levels of anxiety. The anxiety scores in the three studies were 2.70 (this study), 2.91 (Aida), and 2.97 (Horwitz et al.). Although anxiety scores of the three studies were below 3.0, students in this study were the least anxious among three studies. There were also 9

items (1, 5, 8, 10, 12, 17, 18, 25, and 30) on which students in this study scored below 3.0 and on which prior studies exceeded 3.0. Examples include, “Q10: I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class,” “Q17: I often feel like not going to my language class,” and “Q25: Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.” Students in this study displayed very low anxiety on two items (5 and 17).

DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Language Anxiety among Students of Japanese.

Level of anxiety. In this study, intermediate students of Japanese did not show high anxiety in FLCAS. Their anxiety level was below 3, which meant that they were not very anxious about studying Japanese. These results support prior studies. As Kitano (2001) and Saito and Samimy (1996) argued, Japanese learners’ level of anxiety increased as they gained proficiency whereas learners’ of Spanish and French anxiety decreased as their language proficiency decreased (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005). Advanced learners of Japanese were more anxious than beginners and intermediate learners. Kitano explained that advanced learners of Japanese had higher anxiety level because they sought to “develop more authentic and sophisticated communication skills” (p. 558).

All students in this study were in an intermediate Japanese course and had completed two beginning Japanese courses. Students had studied *Kanji* since their second semester. In addition, they increased their knowledge of vocabulary in their intermediate course. They seemed to get more interested in learning Japanese because they could start to read and write more authentic sentences in Japanese. Their enthusiasm for learning Japanese appeared to overcome their language anxiety in this stage of their proficiency.

Sources of anxiety. There were 9 items (2, 7, 9, 14, 15, 22, 24, 32, and 33) on which students responded that they were slightly or fairly anxious. All items reflected the language performance, especially speaking skill, for examples, “Q9: I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class”, or “Q24: I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.” Students seemed to be very careful about speaking Japanese “accurately in public.” The reason I used words “accurately in public” is that students did not show a high level of anxiety on “Q1: I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.” Thus, speaking Japanese itself did not seem to provoke anxiety among students of Japanese, as much as making mistakes in front of other students. As many researchers (e.g., Price, 1991; Williams & Andrade, 2008) stated, speaking in front of other students was a greatest source of foreign language anxiety. Williams and Andrade also mentioned that not only spontaneous use of the target language but also prepared language use in public make learners feel pressure in a classroom. As in prior studies speaking in front of others was the most anxiety provoking source in classroom.

Studies showed the highest anxiety on “Q14: I would *not* be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.” Because this question was a reverse-scored item, students chose *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree* for expressing their anxiety. Students answered that they had higher anxiety in communicating with native speakers of Japanese. For communicating with native speakers, students needed to receive information and to get their idea across in Japanese properly. Although they were not advanced learners of Japanese, they might start to be conscious of developing “more authentic and

sophisticated communication skills” (Kitano, 2001, p. 558).

Although students displayed anxiety toward speaking accurately in public, they showed less anxiety than students in Aida (1994) and Horwitz et al. (1986). To understand this result, I focused on the 9 items which scored lower than those in previous two studies. The items talked about pressure of classroom learning. The average rating of those 9 items among students in this study was 2.46. The score indicated that students considered themselves to be “not very anxious” in language class. A possible explanation is that the Japanese language class created secure atmosphere for students where they could focus on studying Japanese in a classroom without feeling much anxiety.

In language classes, many factors can possibly provoke anxiety, such as atmosphere. It, however, would be difficult to compare classroom atmosphere among the three studies because both Aida (1994) and Horwitz et al. (1986) did not refer to atmosphere of their classes. Classroom atmosphere is also associated with many variables, such as teaching method, characteristics of teacher and students, syllabus, class size, and learners’ motivation. Next, I would consider some possibilities which may have allayed their anxiety in Japanese class.

The course syllabus would be the first candidate. Students in this study were able to access detailed information about schedules of each lesson on course syllabus. The syllabus gave students information not only about a topic of each lesson but also about assignments, quizzes, *Kanji* of the day, and grammar of the day. Even if they were absent, they could easily find out what other students studied in class on the day. Because of clear and detailed information, students could prepare for lessons without much trouble. The course syllabus may have

allowed students to feel comfortable in the classroom.

A second candidate is the use of pair/group work in class. Unlike whole-class activities, pair/group work does not direct much attention to individual student. As many studies indicated, public speaking is one of the most anxiety provoking causes. Preventing public speaking situation could alleviate foreign language anxiety among students. Phillips (1999) stated that small-group and pair activities “increase the amount of time individual students spend communicating in the target language” (p. 129) under non-threatening situation. Students may have felt that they are secured and relaxed to make mistakes in those forms of activities.

The instructor’s perceptions of learners’ mistakes may be another factor to allay anxiety. Although results of three studies displayed low level of anxiety to “Q19: I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make,” 94% of students chose either *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree* in this study. To the same item, 60% of students of Aida (1994) and 55% of students of Horwitz et al. (1986) chose the negative answer. The difference indicated that students considered themselves to be less anxious to make mistakes. In fact, the Japanese instructor used more encouraging phrases, such as “Good try” or “Very close,” for giving positive comments to students when they made mistakes in class. Samimy (1994) argued that “mistakes should be viewed as a natural part of the learning process” (p. 32). Thus, the instructor might have successfully fostered students of JFL to be positive to make mistakes in class.

Influence of Japanese Orthographic System on Students

I added two specific anxiety questions related to characteristics of Japanese language to FLCAS. To both questioned,

students displayed lower levels of anxiety (1.83 and 2.40). Samimy (1994) claimed that less commonly taught languages such as Japanese gave learners more “intimidating and overwhelming” (p. 33) impressions than commonly taught languages. Similarly, Aida (1994) argued that “students may feel more anxious when learning a non-Western foreign language like Japanese than in learning commonly taught Western languages such as Spanish” (p. 158). Students in this study challenged these claims. To “Q34: I feel more tense and nervous when I speak Japanese than when I speak Spanish, French or German which I studied before,” students displayed one of the lowest levels of anxiety. Their mean rating was 1.83. Students did not feel more anxious about Japanese than cognate languages. Instead, they might think that foreign language anxiety itself was the same across languages, whether cognate or non-cognate.

In addition, the Japanese orthographic system did not contribute to their level of foreign language anxiety. In prior studies, the orthographic system had been thought as a major source of anxiety for students of Japanese. For example, Samimy (1994) stated, “Unfamiliarity with these orthographic systems in Japanese can create major affective as well as cognitive barriers to overcome” (p. 29). However, students in this study responded negatively to “Q35: I feel nervous when studying Japanese because the Japanese writing system is different from the English writing system.” One possible reason for their response is that anxiety toward orthographic system applies only to beginning students of Japanese. For students in this study, this was their third semester of Japanese. They were familiar with the three types of writing systems. They learned *Hiragana* and *Katakana* in their first semester and started to study *Kanji* in the third semester. In addition, students

took their course as an elective. If they had experienced high anxiety toward the Japanese orthographic system earlier, they would not have registered for an intermediate-level course. Students also learned new vocabulary and grammar in every lesson in their intermediate course. It would be reasonable to think that intermediate-level students focused more on actual use of Japanese language than the difference in orthographic systems between Japanese and English. Students might have already overcome anxiety toward Japanese orthographic system at the intermediate level.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to examine foreign language anxiety among intermediate students of Japanese at a large university. This study found that intermediate students of JFL were not very anxious about studying Japanese. This result supported the characteristics of anxiety about students of Japanese. Further results indicated that participant anxiety was primarily associated with speaking Japanese accurately in front of others. Public speaking was a major source of anxiety, but classroom learning did not provoke anxiety among students. Although prior studies found difference of orthographic system to be a source of foreign language anxiety, differences between the English and Japanese orthographic systems did not contribute to participants’ level of foreign language anxiety in this study. In addition, the level of anxiety between Western languages and non-Western languages was not observed. There were two limitations in this study. The first limitation was the small sample size. Eighteen students participated. Although there were four sections of intermediate Japanese courses, I was unable to include students in all sections because of the shortage of research time. I would be

able to get more detailed information about anxiety if I increased the number of participants. The second limitation was that I compared the results with previous studies. The data which were collected in a different place and at a different time period must be compared cautiously. As Daley (1998) argued, anxiety scores of among students of both Western and non-Western languages should be compared within the same study in the future.

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