

Language Anxiety in Online Japanese Speaking Learning: Study on Beginner Level of Japanese Language Students

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Abstract

Anxiety in the language classroom is an affective filter that interferes with input from being used for language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). Moreover, Ellis (2015) stated that anxiety could cause poor learning outcomes. This study aims to investigate 1) level of language anxiety in beginner level of Japanese language students in online learning situations; 2) relation between language anxiety and self-perception; 3) relation between language anxiety and speaking-based learning outcomes; 4) relation between self-perception and speaking-based learning outcomes, and 5) the sources of language anxiety. A survey was administered to 149 Japanese language students from two state universities in Sumatra. There were 67 students in their first year and 82 in the second year. About 20 students participated in the interview. This study adopted the Japanese language anxiety scale developed by Motoda (2000) to measure anxiety level and used the self-perception scale developed by Kitano (2001) to measure students' perception of speaking ability. The study found that language anxiety in online learning situations was high. Correlation analyses showed a negative correlation between language anxiety and self-perception. If the level of anxiety rises, self-perception will decrease. Meanwhile, there was a positive correlation between self-perception and student speaking-based learning outcomes. Then, if self-perception increases, student outcomes will increase. There was no correlation between anxiety and speaking-based learning outcomes. The study identified that anxiety in online learning activities stems from personal and interpersonal anxiety, beliefs about teachers, classroom procedures, interaction activities, aspects of infrastructures, and aspects of the language test.

Keywords: *Language anxiety; online; Japanese Speaking Learning; Beginner Level*

INTRODUCTION

Language anxiety is a variety of negative emotions such as worry and fear triggered by students who have to perform in a second language (MacIntyre & Gregersen in Bosmans & Hurd, 2016). According to Krashen (1982), anxiety in foreign language learning is one of the affective filters that interfere with input used for language acquisition. Anxiety can cause poor learning outcomes (Ellis, 2015). Several studies have found that Japanese language students experienced anxiety (Saito & Samimy, 1996; Motoda, 1999). Regarding anxiety in speaking activities in the class, Saito and Samimy (1996) also argued that learners who experience anxiety tend not to take the risk of mistakes when speaking in the target language. According to Brown (2008), the characteristics of learners who experience anxiety when learning a foreign language such as feelings of awkwardness, self-doubt, and fear.

Based on the experiences and observations in the classroom while teaching, particularly at the basic level, the authors observed the characteristics of anxiety as Brown (2008) mentioned above. These indications, for instance, learners appeared less confident and hesitant when interviewing with the teacher using Japanese. Moreover, the student said he felt nervous when talking to the teacher, afraid of being wrong, and not confident in his abilities. Based on this, the authors assume that these students experienced language anxiety. Anxiety in language learners can be influenced by the learner's internal side related to the learner's cognitive domain or self-concept. Young (1991) argued that learners who perceive their abilities as weak in a second language or a foreign language are more anxious. Takenaka and Hatanaka (2017) also supported this statement that learners who perceive their abilities as lower than their classmates feel more anxious.

According to Young (1994), besides internal factors, language anxiety can also occur due to external factors such as teachers. For instance, the

teachers correct the students' mistakes excessively, get angry in front of students frequently, intimidate students, and dominate conversations in class without giving students a chance to talk during the learning activities. However, the investigation of language anxiety and learning outcomes in an online learning environment is interesting. Therefore, this study investigates the language anxiety among Japanese language students during online learning.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined language anxiety as the complex differences of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with language learning in the classroom arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. Meanwhile, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) described these feelings of tension and fear, particularly those related to second language contexts such as speaking, listening, and learning a language.

Anxiety is one of the crucial effective factors that hinder the second language learning process in the education field. Sparks et al. (2009) stated that anxiety has a debilitating effect on second language performance, which means that the higher the level of anxiety, the lower the language ability. According to Zheng (2008), five aspects are considered effects of anxiety: academically, socially, cognitively, quality of communication, and personally. The first is academic. High anxiety is associated with low achievement in a second language. The second is social. Students who experience high anxiety tend to avoid interpersonal communication compared to lower anxiety students. The third is cognitive. Anxiety can be an effective filter that blocks cognitive language processing. Fourth is in communication quality. Students who feel anxious will feel disturbed when processing information, so communication does not work as it should. The last is personally.

Experiencing anxiety in language learning can be a traumatic experience that can interfere with self-esteem and self-confidence.

Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) distinguished anxiety into two types based on its characteristics: beneficial or facilitating anxiety and inhibitory or debilitating anxiety. Beneficial or facilitative anxiety is anxiety that is considered to have a positive or beneficial impact or even improve performance. On the other hand, debilitating or inhibitory anxiety is anxiety that has a detrimental or negative impact on performance.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure language anxiety in language learners. This scale consists of 33 items representing communication fears, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluations in foreign language learning. They examined this scale and obtained an alpha coefficient score $\alpha = .93$ and reliability coefficient score $r = .83$ for test-retest that was carried out for eight weeks. This scale is general foreign language learning not specific to one language. Hence, Motoda (2000) developed the Japanese Language Anxiety Scale (JLAS) adopted the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, to measure the anxiety of the Japanese language student. The scale consists of two categories: the Japanese Language Anxiety Scale in the classroom (JLAS-IN) and the Japanese Language Anxiety Scale outside the classroom (JLAS-OUT). Motoda (2000) conducted a reliability test for this scale and obtained a Cronbach alpha of $= .94$ for JLAS-IN and JLAS-OUT.

Previous studies

Language anxiety is a subject that has recently been studied by second language teaching researchers (Umino & Qiu, 2020; Takenaka & Hatanaka, 2017; Nagano, 2015). In their study, Umino and Qiu (2020) found that online foreign language learners were less anxious than face-to-face learning. The absence of sight or staring at each other made learners feel less anxious. In

addition, the formation of a visual identity in online learning also made learners feel less anxious. Then, the absence of cooperation or the difficulty of cooperative relationships between learners during online learning was considered to make learners feel less awkward and reduce feelings of anxiety. They added that anxiety could hurt second language learning. They recommend that anxiety need to be reduced. Takenaka and Hatanaka (2017) studied the relationship between anxiety and self-esteem of exchange students in the Japanese university. They found that the overall level of student anxiety was low.

Moreover, students who have high levels of anxiety tend to have low levels of self-esteem. They argued that creating a learning environment that prioritizes peer relationships and an easy environment for learners is important. They believe this step can reduce anxiety.

Another study was conducted by Nagano (2015) on Vietnamese elementary-level Japanese students. Nagano found a negative correlation between Japanese language anxiety inside and outside the classroom and self-esteem. The higher the level of anxiety, the lower the level of self-esteem. In addition, learning outcomes had no relationship with language anxiety. Muliadi, Widiati, and Danasasmita (2021) investigated the correlation between anxiety and grammar-based learning outcomes (*bunpou*) in the Japanese language online learning context. They found that anxiety negatively correlated with grammar-based learning outcomes. They also found that female students felt more anxious than male students. They recommend that teachers pay attention to gender differences when teaching foreign languages, particularly online learning.

Present study

Several studies on language anxiety have been described previously. However, the study on language anxiety, particularly in Japanese language

online learning, is still quite limited. Therefore, the study of language anxiety in the Japanese language online learning environment is still relevant to conduct. The present study aims to investigate 1) level of language anxiety of beginner-level Japanese language students in an online learning situation; 2) relation between language anxiety and self-perception; 3) relation between language anxiety and speaking-based learning outcomes, and 4) relation between self-perception and speaking-based learning outcomes, and 5) the sources of language anxiety.

METHOD

The participants

The participants in this study were 149 (40 male students and 109 female students) beginner Japanese language students of two state universities in Sumatra. There were 67 students in their first year at universities and 82 in the second year. About 20 students participated in the interview. The Japanese language proficiency ranges from N5-N4 or below the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). About 4 students have been certified N4, 26 certified N5, and 119 do not have or never take JLPT.

The instruments and data collection

This study adopted Motoda's (2000) 23-item Japanese Language Anxiety Scale in Classroom (JLAS-IN) to examine the degree of anxiety in the online learning situation. JLAS-IN consisted of 23 items divided into three categories: tension in speech activities consisting of 9 items, anxiety about inaccuracies in understanding situations consisting of 8 items, and concern about low Japanese language skills consisting of 6 items. The word "classroom" mentioned in the question was modified to "online classroom" to adjust the purpose of this study (online learning situation). Each item is scored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 points (strongly agree) to 1 point (strongly disagree). Meanwhile, Kitano (2001) three kinds of self-

ratings of Japanese speaking ability: Self-Rating Can-Do Scale (SR-CDS), Self-Rating for Current Level of Study (SR-CL), and Self-Rating Expected Perception by The Japanese (SR-EPJ) were used to measure student perception of their Japanese ability. SR-CDS consists of 15 items originally assessed from elementary level to advanced level.

However, this study eliminated the items that pointed to the advanced level and chose 9 items to the elementary level. Each item of this 9 items scale is scored on a 3-Likert scale; 3 (quite easily), 2 (with some difficulty), and 1 (with great difficulty). The second self-rating, SR-CL, consisted of 4 items and scored from 5 points (very good), 4 (good), 3 (fairly good), 2 (relatively poor), and 1 (poor). The third self-rating, SR-EPJ, consists of 4 items and scored from 5 points (very good), 4 (good), 3 (fairly good), 2 (relatively poor), and 1 (*poor*). This study used the final examination score of Japanese speaking-based learning (*kaiwa*) to measure the correlation between anxiety and outcomes, self-perception, and speaking-based learning outcomes. The survey was administered to 149 students via google form to collect quantitative data, and the interview was conducted with 20 students to collect qualitative data. This study used the level category by Azwar (2012) to categorize the level of student anxiety. Meanwhile, the SPSS program was used to analyze the relationship between variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a preliminary step to answer the research questions, score reliability was assessed for the entire scales to investigate the consistency of the items. The consistency reliability of the items in JLAS-IN, SR-CDS, SR-CL, and SR-EPJ as measured by Cronbach's alpha was 0.94 for JLAS-IN, 0.85 for SR-CDS, 0.80 for SR-CL, and 0.88 for SR-EPJ. According to George and Mallery (2020), the reliability score of 0.80 above is good. That means the scale is reliable to use for this study.

For research question 1, as table 1 showed that 56 students (37.6%) were categorized to 'very high' level, 48 (32.2%) were categorized to 'high', 32 (21.5%) were categorized to 'moderate', 10 (6.7%) were categorized to 'low', and 3 (2%) were categorized to 'very low' level.

Table 1 The level of Japanese language students' anxiety

No	Category Level	Amount	Percentage
1	Very high	56 students	37.6 %
2	High	48 students	32.2 %
3	Moderate	32 students	21.5 %
4	Low	10 students	6.7 %
5	Very low	3 students	2 %
	Total	149 students	100 %

The average value of the anxiety level is 83.3. Based on the categorization that has been formulated ($x > 76 \leq 91 = \text{high}$), it indicates that the anxiety of beginner-level Japanese language students in online learning situations is high.

This finding is conflicting with Umino and Qiu's (2020) findings. They found that level of language anxiety in online learning situations was lower than in offline learning situations. They argued that there is no interaction between teachers and classmates in online learning, establishing visual interaction, and fewer peer relations or joint activities. Therefore, students feel more relaxed and less anxious. However, in this study, the researchers argued that visual interaction, which means less interaction among teachers and students directly, and fewer peer relations or group working in reality, spark students more anxiety, particularly for the first-year students. They never met teachers or classmates directly since they enrolled as Japanese language students at both universities. The interview revealed that they did not know each other well. This situation made them feel nervous when doing

learning activities such as speaking Japanese in front of them by video camera etc. Thus, the conditions mentioned made students feel more anxious.

The researchers also consider that high anxiety levels during online learning are related to discomfort. Indications of this discomfort were revealed through interviews where most of the respondents admitted that prolonged online learning was monotone and inconvenient. As explained in the 2009 encyclopedia Britannica book of the year that distance education is a learning activity that separates the teachers and students. Therefore, convenience is vital in distance education or online learning to promote students' achievement. When students excessively anticipate that inconvenience Simmons and Daw (1994) mentioned that anxiety arises as excessive anticipation of certain situations.

In addition to the discomfort factor that triggers high anxiety levels, poor learning design can also trigger high anxiety. As Simonson, Zvacek, and Smaldino (2015) stated, a good learning design can bridge intellectual, social, and cultural differences. In this study, the researchers argued that less supportive learning design during online learning makes students feel that intellectual, social, and cultural differences are not being met, provoking high anxiety. Students thought that the teaching materials provided were less helpful for understanding learning materials from the interviews. For instance, teachers only provided raw learning materials, and there was no explanation after being given the learning subjects. Students admitted that they prefer learning materials that use video explanations. However, they admitted that few teachers provide videos to explain learning materials.

For research question 2, correlation analyses showed a negative significance between language anxiety and self-perception. Table 2 shows that anxiety correlates negatively to all three self-perception scales. If language anxiety level rises, self-perception will decrease and vice versa.

The negative correlation between anxiety and self-perception corroborates previous studies (Takenaka & Hatanaka, 2017; Nagano, 2015).

These previous studies were conducted in the classroom, not in the online learning situation. With these findings, the learning environment did not affect students' perception of their target language ability.

Table 2 The result of correlation analyses between anxiety and self-perception (SR-CDS, SR-CL, and SR-EPJ)

		Correlations				
		Anxiety	SR-CDS	SR-CL	SR-EPJ	
Spearman's rho	Correlation	1.000	-	-.394**	-.385**	
	Coefficient		.374**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	
	N	149	149	149	149	

$P < 0.05$

The virtual identity created in the online learning situation is likely to reduce the competitiveness among students. Bailey, as cited by Young (1991), argued that anxiety arises when the feeling of competitiveness disappears. Furthermore, from the interview with 20 participants, 14 stated that their Japanese language skills were lower than their classmates. So that when they want to communicate or speak in Japanese during teaching and learning activities, they tend to be insecure and anxious about negative judgments from their classmates. Young (1991) stated that students who have low self-esteem or appreciation tend to worry about what their friends think about them. Therefore, decreasing competitiveness and feeling lower in their ability in the online classroom is related to high anxiety. The negative relationship between anxiety and the perception of self-efficacy illustrates that anxiety is a psychological factor that needs to be considered by teachers, particularly in online learning. If the perception or self-assessment is low, it can make the students' performance, such as speaking in front of people, making presentations in Japanese, and so on, will not be optimal.

For research question 3, correlation analyses showed no correlation between anxiety and speaking-based learning outcomes. Table 3 shows that sig. (2-tailed) was $0.166 > 0.05$ (not significant). Language anxiety does not associate with students' speaking-based learning outcomes.

Table 3 The result of correlation analyses between anxiety and speaking-based learning outcomes

		Correlations	
		Anxiety	Speaking-based learning outcomes
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.166
	N	149	149

$P < 0.05$

This finding contradicts our previous study (Muliadi, Widiati, & Danasasmita, 2021). In our previous study, it was found that language anxiety correlated negatively to student grammar learning outcomes. Perhaps students perceive grammar-based learning (*bunpou*) as more difficult than speaking-based learning (*kaiwa*). Hence, the anxiety that they experienced was associated with their grammar-based learning outcomes. This finding does not support Horwitz's (2010) statement that language anxiety interferes with second language learning performance. These conflicting findings of the correlation between language anxiety and student outcomes indicate that the role of anxiety in foreign language learning seems different depending on the subjects or learning model/learning environment.

For research question 4, it was found that self-perception of speaking ability significantly correlates to student speaking-based learning outcomes. Table 4 shows that the correlation is positive. If self-perception statistically rises, speaking-based learning outcomes will increase and vice versa.

Table 4 The result of correlation analyses between speaking-based learning outcomes and self-perception (SR-CDS, SR-CL, and SR-EPJ)

		Correlations				
			Speaking-based learning outcomes	SR-CDS	SR-CL	SR-EPJ
Spearm	Speaking-based learning outcomes	Correlation	1.000	.294*	.250	.274
		Coefficient		*	**	**
rho		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.002	.001
		N	149	149	149	149

P < 0.05

Nagano (2015) reported no correlation between self-esteem or self-perception and learning outcomes. This finding indicates that students who think they are good at speaking ability tend to have good outcomes. This finding argued that self-assessment or self-rating is an important affective domain in the language learning process, both offline and online learning situations.

From the results of the correlation analyses, it can be said that increasing student confidence is important to help the language learning process and help improve student learning outcomes, particularly during online learning due to certain situations or emergencies such as the current pandemic. Even though they do not meet face-to-face physically, supporting the student to be confident in Japanese speaking ability is a crucial thing that needs to be done.

For research question 5, from the interviews with 20 participants, six sources cause anxiety in online learning classes. The sources of anxiety are divided into six categories; 1) personal and interpersonal anxiety; 2) beliefs about the teachers; 3) classroom procedures; 4) classroom interactions; 5)

aspect of tool or facility; and 6) aspect of the language test. Five categories are similar to the findings of Young (1994), and there is one new category found: the aspect of infrastructures or facilities. The source of anxiety related to infrastructures facilities is a source of anxiety involving internet connectivity factors.

First, the researchers will discuss personal and interpersonal anxiety. This category refers to anxiety that arises from the student about something they experience and view of others. In this study, less confidence in language ability, such as feeling embarrassed to use Japanese as they think their abilities are still lacking, feeling worried that listeners, particularly the native-speaker teachers, do not understand their Japanese, and thinking that they are not fluent in Japanese. Furthermore, a source of language anxiety that relates to personal that we found in this study is trauma. One of the informants said she experienced trauma in learning activities when she was a junior high school student. According to Foa, as cited by Rusydi (2015), trauma will produce several possible psychological responses. One of those responses is anxiety. We argue that trauma may lead to higher language anxiety.

The second is anxiety from the assessment of the teacher or beliefs about teachers. This category refers to anxiety that arises from seeing, assessing, and assuming that the teacher has certain characteristics that make students feel anxious, afraid, and worried. One of those assessments is that the students thought the teachers were less cooperative and less informative. Less cooperative means the teachers did not respond when students asked about tasks or homework, and the teachers seem to think that the students did not listen or notice to previous explanation when students ask about something that students do not understand yet. Less informative means that the teachers sometimes give convoluted or difficult explanations about the tasks. Therefore, students felt worried whether the task they had

done was correct. The researchers argue beliefs about teachers may lead students to feel anxiety.

The third is anxiety that arises from classroom procedures. This type refers to anxiety that occurs due to class management. According to students, the online class was less comfortable. For instance, teachers gave instructions or pointed suddenly, gave assignments frequently, and instructed the students to re-explain what had been taught. Moreover, according to the informants, the teachers did not schedule learning activities properly. For instance, the teachers contacted students to test *bunpou* (grammar competence) without scheduling or notifying them. Students were not ready to follow the teacher's instruction; consequently, the students felt anxiety.

Fourth, the researchers discuss classroom interactions. This category refers to anxiety that arises from interactions between students and teachers or students and students in online learning. Classroom interaction is considered a source of anxiety such as fear of being asked, fear of being wrong in front of classmates and teachers, fear of being laughed at, and fear of being appointed. Fear of being wrong indicates that students experience anxiety. Saito and Samimy (1996) argued that student who experiences anxiety tend not to make mistakes when speaking in the target language. Fear of being laughed at is also a source of anxiety that Young (1994) and Shabani (2012) found in their study. Fear of being laughed at by other classmates is a concern about how mistakes are perceived in class.

The fifth is the aspect of infrastructure or facilities. This category refers to anxiety due to the lack of support for the tool and facility used to conduct online learning, particularly devices and internet connections. The lack of support for these facilities includes internet connectivity problems, the absence of internet packages, and errors on the device. Online learning is a learning activity that relies on the quality of internet connectivity. Unstable internet connections made it difficult for students, especially through video. Unstable connectivity arose obstacles such as unclear voices going in and out

of the room; accordingly, learning materials may not be fully conveyed properly. This situation made students feel afraid, anxious and worried that it would affect their Japanese language ability.

The last is the aspect of the language test. This category refers to anxiety related to exams before or when taking oral and written tests. According to Arnáiz and Guillén (2012), test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety that arises from fear and failure of exams. In this study, the situations that are considered to be a source of anxiety are the tasks be examined, considered not following the tasks being taught, inconsistent of using online form/application that used to test, duration of the exam that was considered too short, poor audio quality (listening test section), and procedures of examination were not clear. Using the online form or application to manage the tests is crucial in an online learning context. Inconsistent using the online form or application may spark confusion among students; consequently may inflict anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Statistically, anxiety did not correlate with speaking-based learning outcomes (*kaiwa*) yet negatively correlated with self-perception. Then, self-perception was positively correlated with speaking-based learning outcomes. Good confidence in their Japanese language skills may help improve their Japanese language skills. Increasing student self-perception or belief about their abilities is important in Japanese language learning. Although the anxiety is not correlated with speaking-based learning outcomes, the researchers argue that if the anxiety level among students can be decreased or reduced, it might make students become more confident in their language abilities and promote their score or abilities, particularly in speaking-based learning (*kaiwa*) to be better.

Finally, online Japanese language learning anxiety must be reduced or avoided to assist the second language acquisition. Umino and Qiu (2020)

recommended and considered anxiety-provoking in second language learning (Ellis, 2015; Krashen, 1982). Studying the sources of anxiety found in this study could be a good way to reduce or avoid anxiety among students. It is also considered that increasing students' self-confidence is important to help them learn Japanese more optimally.

Data collection in this study was conducted by the survey, where the collection was carried out only once. Anxiety and self-perception are affective variables that seem to fluctuate and are influenced by environmental factors and other factors. Therefore, it is necessary to take repeated data or time series so that conditions of anxiety, self-perception, and their effects could be measured more accurately on learning outcomes. In addition, there are four competencies in language learning: reading, writing, speaking and listening. The anxiety faced by students seems to differ depending on the focus of the learning competence. Therefore, it is necessary to measure language anxiety specific to one competency only and learning outcomes following that competency to obtain more specific results.

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