

Language Anxiety as a Predictor for English Proficiency and its Change

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A plethora of researches are presented on the relationship between language anxiety and second language proficiency. Japan is no exception to this. The present study investigated the relationships between language anxiety and English proficiency in the case of Japanese university students of English and considers two questions: Can we regard language anxiety as a predictor for English proficiency, and is the language anxiety a stable factor? The material for measuring language anxiety is a questionnaire and the material for measuring English proficiency a dictation. This research found the mutability of language anxiety but failed to find the relationship between the anxiety and the proficiency.

1. Introduction

The relationship between language anxiety and second language proficiency has been investigated in many studies (See MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Several studies (Gardner, 1985; Gardner et. al, 1997; Clement, 1997) found high correlation between the anxiety and the proficiency. Reviewing articles, MacIntyre & Gardner (ibid) mentioned ‘anxiety is one of the best predictors of success in the second language’. The study done in Japan (Koizumi, 2002), however, failed to find the anxiety as the predictor. In MacIntyre & Gardner (ibid) reviewed the anxiety of adult learners differently than that of children and concluded that language proficiency of adults is more subject to be influenced by the anxiety than children. In Koizumi’s study the participants were junior-high school students. This study, on the other hand, investigates the relationship in university students.

The other purpose of this study is to investigate the mutability of language anxiety. MacIntyre & Gardner (ibid) maintain ‘research into reducing the effect of anxiety to be done. In so doing, it is necessary to investigate the property of language anxiety in second language (L2) learning. However, few studies report on the mutability of affective factors in L2 learning. This study, therefore, investigates the mutability of language anxiety.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study included 60 Japanese learners of English. They were freshmen at school of education at Waseda University from the ages of 18 to 21. They took an obligatory subject,

'English I'. They studied English for at least six years in school. Although there were originally 75 students, 15 students who did not answer the questionnaire or the dictation test properly were omitted.

2.2 Measures

2.2.1 Questionnaire

This study adopted 6-Likert scale item (1 = strongly disagree and 6 = strongly agree) in the questionnaire to investigate the anxieties and adapted the items in French Class Anxiety (Gardner, 1985) and French Use Anxiety (Gardner, et. al. 1997) for Japanese. In the preliminary study which was done in another class, the items were selected based on average, standard deviation, and Cronbach's coefficient Alpha.

2.2.2 Dictation

Dictation as a testing device has been confirmed to be a valid test: some researches (Saegusa, 1998 and Kaga, 1991) found a high correlation between dictation and other language tests. This study used a partial dictation of Voice of America special English news which is confirmed a valid language test by Saegusa (ibid) to measure English proficiency. The scoring procedure based on Kaga (1991) is as follows:

1. Exact-word. A word is considered as a test item. If a word is written in the exact spelling and in the correct order, the item is assigned one point.
2. Garbling. An answer is given, not in the exact spelling. This is assigned no point.
3. Losing. An answer is not given and there's no space for the word. This is assigned no point.
4. Failing. An answer is not given and there's the blank for the word. This is assigned no point.

2.3 Procedure

The participants took the dictation test and answered the questionnaire in the beginning of the semester. Three months after they took the same test and answered the same questionnaire. They were informed that these were not related to their course evaluation.

2.4 Analyses

For the test and the questionnaire, the internal consistency reliability estimates were calculated. In the examination of questionnaire, factor analysis was used in order to confirm one-dimensional nature of each construct. For English Use Anxiety and English Class Anxiety, the factor scores were used as the indices of the two anxieties. The two indices of the first questionnaire were compared with those of the second questionnaire by paired t-test in order to examine the mutability of the

anxieties. To investigate the relationship between the proficiency and the anxiety, the correlation coefficient of the row score of the dictation test and the index of the anxiety was calculated.

3. Results

3.1 Language Anxiety

After examining the items based on the average, the standard deviation, and Cronbach's alpha, the explanatory factor analysis factored out one factor for each construct. The two factors were named English Use Anxiety and English Class Anxiety (See Appendix for each item). Table 1 and 2 shows the results of the factor analysis

Table 1.

English Use Anxiety

Factor loadings	
Alpha = .84	
1	.81
6	.77
3	.71
2	.65
7	.52
9	.45

Table 2.

English Class Anxiety

Factor loadings	
Alpha = .85	
3	.81
1	.70
2	.68
8	.64
9	.63
4	.61
6	.50

3.2 Mutability of Anxiety

The row scores of English Use Anxiety and English Class Anxiety in the two questionnaires were examined by paired t-test, and this study found the significant differences between the first questionnaire and the second questionnaire ($p < .05$). It was found that the two anxieties were reduced in three months.

3.3 English Proficiency

Table 3 shows the result of the dictation test.

Table 3

Result of dictation test

Mean	29.13
S.D.	6.87
Minimum	8
Maximum	44
Alpha	.81
Item	50

3.4 Correlation

To investigate the relationship between the anxiety and the proficiency, the correlation coefficient of the row score of the dictation test and the indices of English Use Anxiety and English Class Anxiety was calculated. This study found that the anxiety and the proficiency did not co-vary.

4. Conclusion

This study found the mutability of language anxiety. Future research can identify the factors reducing language anxiety. The relationship between the anxiety and the proficiency, however, was not found. The participants did not possess the anxiety during the dictation test, because they were informed that the test was not related to their course evaluation. This can be explained because the evaluation is one of the factors increasing anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

References

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Appendix

The translated version of these items was used in the questionnaire of this study.

English Use Anxiety

1. I would get nervous if I had to speak English to someone in a store.
2. When called upon to use my English, I feel very much at ease.
3. I feel anxious if someone asks me something in English.
6. I would feel uncomfortable speaking English under any circumstances.
7. I would feel quite relaxed if I had to ask street directions in English.
9. It would bother me if I had to speak English on the telephone.

English Class Anxiety

1. I don't usually get anxious when I have to respond to a question in my English class.
2. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.
3. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.
4. I feel confident when asked to participate in my English class.
6. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in our English class.
8. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in our English class.
9. I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.