An Analysis of Foreign Language Speaking Test Anxiety in Japanese EFL University Classes

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日本人 EFL 学習者の外国語スピーキングテストにおける不安分析

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to understand the degree to which different factors contribute to student anxiety in the English conversation classroom in regards to speaking tests in English. Japanese university EFL students ($N = 187$) were asked to complete a 19-item questionnaire measured on a five-point Likert scale. It found that students have anxieties regarding their own abilities and making mistakes in front of others (dubbed as "the intrapersonal factor") as well as how they are being evaluated by their instructors (dubbed as "the interpersonal factor"). The study found that the intrapersonal factor is higher than the interpersonal factors independent of evaluators. It is plausible that the learners' main concern is their internal matters. Furthermore, the intrapersonal factor does not show a significant difference between evaluators, arising regardless of their identity of the evaluator. On the other hand, the interpersonal factor is higher in the case of Japanese evaluators than in the case of native English speaking evaluators. That means when a Japanese English teacher is an evaluator, learners' anxiety of the evaluators' evaluation for their speaking gets higher.

Key words: anxiety, intrapersonal factor, interpersonal factor, evaluators

1. Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that anxiety plays a major affective role in L2 acquisition. While certain anxieties can yield positive results for the learners, it may also create a debilitating effect on the L2 learner (Brown, 1994). In the language classroom, this anxiety may be amplified by the learner's perception of how they are being evaluated by the instructor and other students as well as how they are being compared to each other (Eharman, 1996). The effects of such anxiety include such impediments as increased heart rate and stuttering. Such effects have been shown to lead to a negative correlation between anxiety and achievement (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Furthermore, students who are experiencing anxiety develop what Krashen (1982) has called an "affective filter," limiting the comprehensible input that the learner is open to, thus hindering their progress.

In order to create a classroom environment which reduces anxiety, it is important for educators to understand the basis of such anxiety and accommodate accordingly. This is particularly important in English conversation

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classes as the primary language skills for the course, listening and speaking, are typically the most anxiety-inducing skills to L2 learners (Horwitz et al., 1986).   Attempting to understand what anxieties students experienced, Price (1991) interviewed students about their experience. He found that students experienced anxiety from having to perform in front of peers, opening themselves up to making mistakes in front of others. Horwitz et al.,(1986) found three components of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension arises when learners don't have enough ability to express mature thoughts and ideas. Fear of negative evaluation occurs when learners need to make a positive social impression on others. Finally, test anxiety equals to apprehension over academic evaluation.

As for Japanese EFL learners' anxiety, Koba, Ogawa and Wilkinson (2000) conducted a survey to determine what anxiety factors were distinctive of Japanese language learners. They found that, while both Japanese and non-Japanese language learners experienced anxieties, the Japanese learners were most likely to become anxious when confronted with speaking and group work, though they reported low levels of anxiety in taking written tests and studying grammar when compared to non-Japanese students. Based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxeity Scale (FLCAS), a frequently used anxiety scale, Shigesako, Yoshida and Miura (2008) analyzed anxiety of speaking at a private university where the present researchers work. They identified anxieties regarding the English classroom, test, losing English credit, about English learning itself and that students' own evaluation may be lower than their friends'.

The aim of this study was to understand the degree to which different factors contribute to student anxiety in the English conversation classroom in regards to speaking evaluations. In addition, it sought to determine if there is a notable difference in these anxiety levels in regards to if the evaluator is Japanese or a native English-speaker. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What factors play a role in anxiety?
2. Do anxieties differ depending on the evaluator?
3. What factors are within the control of the educators?

2. Method

(1) Participants

The participants were 187 Japanese university EFL students. They were students from a private university, where the present researchers work, with diverse majors: engineering, economics and pharmacy. Classes were divided by major rather than ability or previous English education. All participants were taking an English class by the present researcher (a native English-speaking instructor) and have to take speaking tests.

(2) Questionnaire Items

The questionnaire was developed by the present researchers, based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwiz et al. (1986). The researchers deleted and added some items and changed the wordings from the FLCAS in order to focus on the participants' speaking anxiety regarding the speaking test. The questions were composed of 19 items and a Japanese translation of the questionnaire was adopted (see Appendix 1). A five-point Likert scale was adopted for the questionnaire. The participants were asked to choose a number from 5 to 1 (5 for greatly, 4 for fairly, 3 for more or less, 2 for hardly, and 1 for never).

(3) Procedure

The participants' speaking anxiety in speaking tests was investigated by questionnaires by the present researchers. The participants were asked to fill out the anonymous questionnaire. This questionnaire study was conducted in November 2014 by the present researchers. Two copies of the questionnaire were given: one for

the native English-speaking evaluators and one for the Japanese evaluators. The participants were asked to indicate their speaking test anxiety using the five-point Likert scale. The questionnaires were distributed before the participants took the speaking test. The participation was completely voluntary and the participants were told that the results would be treated anonymously. Eight students were excluded from the data analysis because their markings were outliers, resulting in at total of 179 students in the analysis.

3. Results

(1) The Result of the Explore Analysis

In order to find out the factor structure in the data, exploratory factor analysis (most likelihood method, promax rotation) were performed with the data obtained from the questionnaire study to detect constituents of speaking anxiety in the speaking test. As a result of analysis of the screen plot, two factors were extracted based on more than .500 factor loadings (Table 1). Reading through the items with primary loadings on Factor 1, Factor 1 is mainly about learners' internal influences, or how they felt about their own ability and preparation for the exam, including lack of self-confidence, communication anxiety and lack of English proficiency. Therefore, Factor 1 is as defined as "intrapersonal factor." On the other hand, Factor 2 is related to the learners' perceptions of how they were being evaluated by the evaluators. Therefore, Factor 2 is defined as "interpersonal factor." The correlation between the factors is .62.

Table 1
Factor Patterns of Factor 1 and Factor 2

Variable	Factor1 (α= .92)	Factor2 (α= .86)	Communality
Q1 Before a speaking test, I get worried.	**0.90**	-0.14	0.67
Q4 During the test, I lose confidence in my English ability.	**0.88**	-0.05	0.73
Q2 I feel the pressure to speak well.	**0.88**	-0.03	0.74
Q9 I am afraid that I cannot understand what the teacher says.	**0.77**	-0.02	0.57
Q5 I get so nervous that I don't understand what I am saying.	**0.70**	0.00	0.48
Q10 I feel confused because I don't know some of the words or grammar I want to use during the test.	**0.69**	0.00	0.48
Q8 I am afraid that I cannot make myself understood to the teacher in English.	**0.68**	0.06	0.52
Q19 During the speaking test, speaking in front of students increases my anxiety.	**0.67**	0.08	0.52
Q3 I feel embarrassed speaking English in front of the teacher.	**0.65**	-0.02	0.41
Q6 I am afraid that I should not make mistakes in English.	**0.57**	0.23	0.55
Q15 The teacher focuses only on my result, not my efforts.	-0.19	**0.95**	0.69
Q16 The teacher's evaluation is strict.	-0.05	**0.90**	0.75
Q17 The teacher deducts pauses and hesitation from the score.	0.13	**0.67**	0.58
Q12 I am afraid that the teacher will not give any responses.	-0.01	**0.64**	0.39
Q14 The teacher will focus primarily on the accuracy of my English.	0.29	**0.57**	0.62

(2) The Result of the Two Way ANOVA and the Simple Main Effect Test

In order to analyze how the speaking test anxieties are influenced by the evaluators, a two way analysis of

variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The within-subject independent variable was Factors (F1 and F2) and Evaluators of the speaking test (the Japanese English teachers and the native English teachers). Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the data.

Table 2
Descriptive Statisitics

Evaluators	Factors	n	M	SD
Native	F1	179	3.58	0.93
Native	F2	179	3.04	0.99
Japanese	F1	179	3.50	0.88
Japanese	F2	179	3.26	0.82

As the result of ANOVA, the main effect of Evaluators was not significant, $F(1, 178) = 0.66$, $p = .42$. On the other hand, the main effect of Factors was significant, $F(1, 178) = 76.55$, $p < .001$. The interaction of these two factors (Factors and Evaluators) was significant, $F(1, 178) = 11.42$, $p < .001$.

As the interaction was significant, the simple main effect test was conducted (Table 3). The result of the simple main effect test revealed a significant difference in Evaluators (the native English-speaking evaluators and the Japanese evaluators) at F2 ($p < .05$) while a significant difference was not found in Evaluators at F1 ($p > .05$). On the other hand, the significant differences were found in Factors (F1 and F2) for native English-speaking evaluators ($p < .001$) and Factors (F1 and F2) for Japanese evaluators ($p < .001$). The result is visualized in Figure 1 in order to make the result easier to understand.

The data plots in the chart above and the result of the simple main effect test suggest the intrapersonal factor is higher than the interpersonal factors independent of evaluators. It is plausible that the learners' main concern is their internal matters. Furthermore, the intrapersonal factor does not show a significant difference between evaluators, arising regardless of their identity of the evaluator. On the other hand, the interpersonal factor is higher in the case of Japanese evaluators than in the case of native English speaking evaluators. Therefore, when a Japanese English teacher is an evaluator, learners' anxiety of the evaluators' evaluation for their speaking gets higher.

Table 3
The Result of the Simple Main Effect Test

Source of variance	SS	df	MS	F
A at b1	0.57	1	0.57	0.68
s×A at b1	150.08	178	0.84	
A at b2	4.16	1	4.16	5.52*
s×A at b2	134.09	178	0.75	
B at a1	25.37	1	25.37	68.72***
s×B at a1	65.71	178	0.37	
B at a2	5.02	1	5.02	15.74***
s×B at a2	56.78	178	0.32	

A = Evaluators, B = Factors, a1 = Native, a2 = Japanese, b1 = F1, b2 = F2
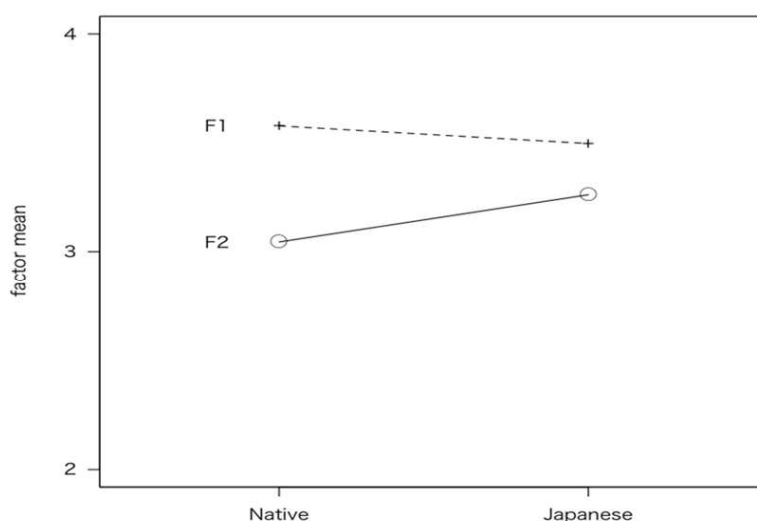* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 1. The data plot of the Factors and the Evaluators

4. Discussion

The questionnaire revealed 19 items, divided into interpersonal and intrapersonal factors, which contributed significantly to student anxiety. The interpersonal factors were related to students' perceptions of how they were being evaluated while the intrapersonal factors were related to how the students felt about their own ability and preparation for the exam. These results are reflective of Williams and Andrade (2008), who found that the two highest-rating factors for anxiety in their subjects were their instructors (51%) and psychological or internal factors (14%).

Regarding intrapersonal factors, students responded strongly that they felt worried before a speaking test (Q1), they felt pressure to speak well (Q2), and that they lose confidence in their English ability during a test (Q4). This is congruent with Horwitz et al. (1986), who found that even students that performed well in drills and prepared activities were overcome by their anxieties during open speaking activities and tests. The findings of Koba et al. (2000) also agree with these results as their survey showed that Japanese students were afraid of taking risks, increasing their anxiety of testing their linguistic ability in front of others.

The results of our questionnaire showed no significant difference in the level of anxiety regarding intrapersonal factors between native English-speaking and Japanese evaluators. This implies that this level of anxiety may not have a significant relationship with the evaluator, but does not inform us about how other environmental factors such as classmates, classroom structure or test format affect intrapersonal sources of anxiety.

These intrapersonal factors appear to have a strong relation with students' perceptions about their own abilities. Without confidence in their progress in learning the L2, students experience anxiety in testing situations which require them to perform verbally (Burden 2004). While Koba et al. (2000) remarked that Japanese learners are more likely to be adverse to risks than non-Japanese learners as well as having high anxiety regarding speaking a foreign language in front of others, Burden (2004) found that, when well-prepared, 43.6% of students did not report feeling anxiety about English. Therefore, in order to reduce these intrapersonal anxieties, it would be beneficial to encourage students to practice and use their L2 skills more thoroughly before a testing situation arises; however, in order to receive feedback, students traditionally must perform in front of an instructor or their peers, thus creating an impediment toward developing their skills.

While a system of drills, practice in front of peers and testing in front of an instructor is a common pattern in

the classroom, this may not work for students who are experiencing intrapersonal anxieties. In order to give students the practice and feedback they need in order to improve and become confident in the language, technology may be a helpful tool to enhance drills and practice in front of peers. Students could use computer applications to drill the structure of the target skills, receiving automated feedback. Instructors can also monitor and give feedback as needed and ask students to either use the application for a set amount of time or until they achieve a set proficiency. In this way, students who need more time can use the application more and students that achieve proficiency sooner can move onto other tasks.

When students have progressed past drilling, they can practice verbally what they have learned. In order to maintain a low level of anxiety, students could also use technology to record themselves practicing the target skills. These recordings can be shared with instructors and peers for feedback. Students who feel anxiety speaking in front of their peers can benefit from such a modification as they can record multiple files, submitting what they feel is their best work, rather than having a single chance in front of their peers in which their anxieties may hinder their performance. By utilizing technology as a barrier, students can practice and receive feedback in a low-anxiety environment, improve their skills and gain confidence for their speaking tests.

Regarding interpersonal factors, students reported feeling particularly stressed about how they were being evaluated by their evaluators. They felt as though the evaluator was only focusing on their results rather than their efforts (Q15) and that the evaluation would be strict (Q16). In addition to a strict evaluation, students felt strongly as though their pauses and hesitations during the speaking tests were detrimental to their scores (Q17). These factors were rated higher for Japanese evaluators than native English-speaking evaluators. These stressors perhaps contribute to Burden's (2004) findings that 59.1% of the students he surveyed expressed feeling unsure of themselves when speaking English. Students who feel as though they are being evaluated strictly feel pressured for perfection. If a student feels as though their accuracy and results are more important than their efforts and what they have been able to communicate, it may increase their anxieties. Williams and Andrade's (2008) findings also provide additional insight to our results. In their study, they found that common sources of discomfort for their students included "not being able to express what one wanted to say, having to use simple or broken English, making grammatical mistakes, and concern about incorrect pronunciation" (Williams and Andrade, 2008, p. 186).

While students ranked their interpersonal anxieties higher with Japanese evaluators than with native English-speaking evaluators, Inage, Lawn, & Lawn (2007) found that Japanese evaluators and native English-speaking evaluators' evaluations have a high level of correlation; however, they found that Japanese evaluators were, in fact, stricter about accuracy than native English-speaking evaluators. This strictness regarding accuracy may color Japanese students' perceptions of how they are being rated overall by their Japanese evaluators. It is also possible that students' images of schools and teachers from abroad, as compared to their own experience, affects how they view their evaluation by a native English-speaker.

As students reported their highest interpersonal anxieties were in regards to the strictness of their evaluation, teaching strategies should shift away from concentrating on mistakes and focus, instead, on the skills being taught. Burden warns that students who are preoccupied with mistakes may lead them to be "concerned about the potential for failure and the consequences of failure instead of concentrating on the task itself" (2004, p. 11). In order to step away from a classroom environment that creates this kind of anxiety, instructors might use Price's (1991) suggestion that instructors should communicate to the students that the classroom is for learning and communication, not necessarily for perfection. Encouraging of mistakes, showing how mistakes help us learn and reducing instances of correction for pronunciation and small errors can help develop a relationship between the student and instructor as partners in the language learning process (Price, 1991).

5. Conclusion

This research study sought to identify sources of anxiety in Japanese university EFL students regarding speaking tests in English. It found that students have anxieties regarding their own abilities and making mistakes in front of others as well how they are being evaluated by their instructors. Students also reported that they feel more anxiety about their evaluations when the evaluators are Japanese rather than native English speakers. While instructors may not be able to eradicate all sources of anxiety from their students, there are some steps they can take to reduce them. The findings suggest that instructors should find methods to improve student's abilities in low-anxiety environments in order to build their skills and confidence. They also suggest that students who feel pressured for perfection experience higher levels of anxiety, so instructors should create an environment where mistakes are not only allowed, but encouraged.

As this study only focused upon identifying the factors contributing to anxiety, more research is needed on the utilization of the suggestions for reducing anxiety. Also, more research on how exactly students' perception of Japanese evaluators as compared to native English-speaking evaluators differ could deepen our understanding on why they feel more anxiety toward Japanese evaluators, thus informing us of steps we can take to reduce anxieties related to Japanese evaluators. In addition, as the study was conducted in only one university, a wider study is needed to confirm the data regarding student anxieties.

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Appendices

Appendix 1.　A Sample of the Questionnaire in Japanese

スピーキングテスト（インタビュー形式）に関するアンケート（日本人の教師の場合用）

スピーキングテスト（インタビュー形式）の採点者が日本人の先生であった場合を想定して、当てはまる数字の番号に〇を付けてください。それぞれの数字は以下を表しています。
5　強くそう思う　　4　そう思う　　3　どちらでもない　2　そう思わない　1　まったくそう思わない

1. テストを受ける前、とても心配になります。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

2. うまく話さなくてはとプレッシャーを感じます。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

3. 先生の前で英語を話すと照れくさく感じます。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

4. テスト中自信がなくなります。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

5. 緊張しすぎて何を言っているかわからない時があります。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

6. 英語を間違って話してはいけないと思ってしまいます。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

7. 難しい語彙や文法を使わなくてはいけないと思ってしまいます。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

8. 私の英語が通じないのではないかと不安になります。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

9. 先生の英語を聞き取れないのではないかと思います。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

10. 使うべき単語や文法がわからず混乱します。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

11. 先生が私の英語を聞き取ってくれないのではないかと不安になります。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

12. 相づちや同意をしてくれないのではないかと思います。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

13. テスト中、先生と目を合わすのが難しく思えます。

　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　5　−　4　−　3　−　2　−　1

14. 先生が私の文法的正確さを細かくチェックするのではないかと不安になります。

$$5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1$$

15. 先生が私の努力を認めてくれず、結果だけを重視するのではないかと思います。

$$5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1$$

16. 評価が厳しくなるのではないかと思います。

$$5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1$$

17. 間をあけたり、詰まったりすると先生が減点するのではないかと思います。

$$5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1$$

18. 他の生徒が私より上手に英語を話すのではないかと心配になります。

$$5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1$$

19. 他の生徒の前で話すことは、私の不安を増加させます。

$$5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1$$

Appendix 2.　A Sample of the Questionnaire in English

1. Before a speaking test, I get worried.
2. I feel pressure to speak well.
3. I feel embarrassed speaking English in front of the teacher.
4. During the test, I lose confidence in my English ability.
5. I get so nervous that I don't understand what I am saying.
6. I am afraid I should not make mistakes in English.
7. I feel I have to use difficult words and grammar as much as possible.
8. I am afraid I cannot make myself understood to the teacher in English.
9. I am afraid that I cannot understand what the teacher says.
10. I feel confused because I don't know some of the words or grammar I want to use during the test.
11. I am worried that the teacher may not understand my English.
12. I am afraid that the teacher will not give any responses.
13. I find it hard to look the teacher in the eye while speaking English.
14. The teacher will focus primarily on the accuracy of my English.
15. The teacher will focus on only my result, not my efforts.
16. The teacher's evaluation is stricter.
17. The teacher deducts pauses and hesitation from the score.
18. I feel that the other students speak English better than I do.
19. During the speaking test, speaking in front of students increases my anxiety.