A Study on Classroom Shame of Japanese Learners among University Students in China

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Abstract: In the field of second language (L2) research, there is a growing recognition of the vital need to explore the diversity of emotional experiences of learning. This paper explores the problem of foreign language classroom shame (FLCS) in Japanese classes among university students in China. This study investigated China students' perspectives on L2 shame in learning Japanese. Studies have shown that shame not only affects learners' linguistic confidence, but also affects their sense of identity, self-worth and self-esteem. The data suggest that FLCS may lead learners to engage in certain negative behaviors, such as avoiding interaction and speaking activities, ruminating over failure, giving up learning L2, and to have persistent L2-related anxiety due to fear of shame in the future. This paper argues that the study of this phenomenon in the process of language learning can provide a more comprehensive grasp of the psychology of language learners, and help learners develop a more positive self-perception, promote their willingness to participate in communication activities, and ultimately may bring their language competence to an improved level of proficiency.

1. Introduction

Research has abundantly shown that the acquisition of a new language is a unique learning experience, and a highly complex, dynamic, emotional and psychological undertaking, and that learners' feelings are key predictors of their success and failure during the long and often tedious journey of learning a L2 (Dewaele, 2011; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre, 2002).

Although a rich and varied literature emanating from social, developmental and clinical psychology has made obvious the role of the self -conscious emotion of shame in a number of psychiatric syndromes as well as in a wide range of psychological disorders, psychopathologies and dysfunctioning of the self (Tangney, 1995; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007a, 2007b), shame issues in relation with foreign language learning and use have received little, if any, attention from applied linguists [1-2].

According to previous studies of shame in foreign language learning, there are tentative definition of FLSS: Foreign language classroom shame can be seen as a complex, dynamic, self-evaluative and particularly debilitating emotion arising in the specific context of the FL classroom, found at all levels of proficiency, and composed of a diversity of interrelated factors such as learner beliefs, self-perceptions, feelings, emotions, personality traits, as well as contextual variables (e.g.

teacher, peers), and leading to enduring anxious states, avoidance of, or disengagement from FL learning and use, to a persistent diminished sense of self and perception of a flawed identity(Dominique, 2017, 2018). Due to its relationships with the self (feeling of worthlessness, feeling of deficiency, devaluation, and global attribution of failure) and identity, FLCS may qualify as one of the most significant deterrents in FLL. Therefore, exploring the shame can further understand the impact of shame on students' learning motivation, and help students learn foreign languages [3-5].

2. Literature Review

2.1 Shame in the FL Learning Context

The most widely acknowledged and most salient feature of shame is blushing (Tangney, Mashek, & Stuewig, 2005). Another typical manifestation of shame is the avoidance behaviours such as lowering the head, downcasting the eyes, covering head and face, or 'burying' them in both hands. In some cases, increases in heart rate are also reported (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996).

In 1992, psychologist Michael Lewis identified the psychological characteristics of shame: an acute feeling of discomfort, and a general sense of inadequacy and defectiveness. Other studies (Brown, 2008) revealed that shame was associated with self -absorption/self-focus. Finally, the self-damaging characteristics were confirmed by a number of scholars (Parker, 1998), who found that shame was accompanied with a sense of shrinking or of 'being/feeling small' and a sense of worthlessness and powerlessness.

There is broad consensus in the field of psychology about the distinction between two categories of shame. One category of shame refers to a general tendency for an individual to feel shame a t any moment and in any situation. In this case, shame is a personality trait, a part of one's identity. It refers to a stable predisposition to feel ashamed in a diversity of situations. This shame is called trait shame, and it is a personality -related characteristic and an individual difference (ID) or trait variable. Another category of shame refers to the occurrence of shame in particular situations. In this case, the feeling of shame is a transitory, moment-to-moment psychological state, and an immediate response to a shame-eliciting situation. [6]

The aim of my study is to investigate one specific shame, i.e. the shame occurring during the language learning process and more precisely in the instructional setting of the FL classroom [7-10].

2.2 Differences between shame and anxiety

The APA's definition of anxiety is as follows:

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by physical changes such as tension, worried thoughts, and increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders have repeated intrusive thoughts or worries. They may avoid certain situations because they are worried. They may also have physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling, dizziness, or rapid heartbeat. (American Psychological Association, 2014)

This definition shows how close the two emotions of shame and anxiety are in cognitive and physical responses. But in research in the field of psychology and psychoanalysis, the interest in "anxiety" is far greater than "shame". Shame is an emotion that has been neglected for a long time, while anxiety is regarded as a basic emotion and the origin of psychotherapy. Freud (1962) regarded anxiety as the "primary emotion" and believed that shame and guilt originated from anxiety. Similarly, American anthropologist Mead (1950) described shame as a form of anxiety. In the 1970s, shame was restored as one of the most important structures in psychotherapy and was regarded as "typical human emotion" (Lewis, 1992) or "main emotion" (Scheff, 1994). In 1987,

Harder and Lewis used the Personal Feeling Questionnaire, a measure of self-report, and found that shame is related to depression, anxiety, hostility, and low self-esteem [11, 12].

The other thing to say is that there is a close relationship between these two phenomena. Wurmser (1997) explained the interweaving of shame and anxiety: "it is clear that anxiety is a cardinal part of it. Yet evidently shame is more than anxiety, and anxiety is more than shame." He further suggested "Shame anxiety", a special form of anxiety, stems from "the imminent danger of accidental exposure, humiliation, and rejection."

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ: What constitutes learners' shame over learning Japanese?

3. Methodology

3.1 Context

This research was conducted at the university where the author is undergraduate. The school has major languages including Arabic, English, French, and Japanese. The department of the university offers majors in East Asian Language and Literature, Japanese Language and Literature, Japanese Translation, and English Language and Literature. These departments provide various courses to develop students' cultural and linguistic knowledge of the target language. A large number of students have experience studying abroad, and many foreign students enter universities through language exchange programs. Therefore, according to the Proficiency Scale of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL 2012), the proficiency of language class students may vary greatly. The author selected sophomore students who are currently at the intermediate level to conduct a questionnaire survey [13, 14, 15].

3.2 Participants

Participants in this study (n = 23) were selected from stud ents who participated in the Japanese language class in September 2019. These subjects are Japanese majors, and English is a compulsory subject. They all agreed to participate in the research and complete the questionnaire. Their L1 is Chinese. 32 questionnaires were distributed, of which 71.9% (n = 23) were completed and returned to the researchers. Table 1 shows the situation of the respondents.

Table 1: Summarizes the characteristics of the participants in this study.

Learner Characteristics	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	5	21.7
	Female	18	78.3
Overseas Experience Japan	None	19	82.6
	Less than Six Months	4	17.4
Age of Acquisition	19-20 years old	20	87.0
	21-22 years old	3	13.0

3.3 Instruments

The questionnaire consists of 27 items, subdivided into demographics (5), and L2 anxiety (22). Participants were first asked to answer demographic questions about their gender, age, language test scores, target study abroad experience, and language-speaking countries. Have experience in class in the target language, preference for the target language, and proficiency in the target language. They were also asked to describe their perceptions of shame and negative emotions in the classroom. To this end, this study selected the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed

by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) to be the Foreign Language Classroom Shame Scale (FLCSS). FLCSS (shown in Table 2) includes dimensions such as Fear of Negative Evaluation/Failure, Low self-esteem/feeling of low self-worth, Fear of others' gaze, Fear of being rejected, and Fear of shame-inducing situations. FLCSS Translated from English to Chinese. Then, the author and two native Chinese speakers checked each statement [16].

Table 2: Foreign Language Classroom Shame Scale

(Six-point Likert Scale: 1-strongly disagree, 6-strongly agree)	
No	Item
1	When I speak in Japanese class, I never feel confident.
2	I am not worried about making mistakes in Japanese class.
3	When I know that I will be invited to a Japanese class, I feel nervous.
4	When I cannot understand what the teacher says in Japanese, I feel uneasy.
5	Taking more Japanese lessons will not bother me at all.
6	I always feel that other classmates' Japanese is better than mine.
7	I usually feel at ease in the Japanese class exams.
8	I felt embarrassed when I had to speak without preparation in Japanese class.
9	I am worried about the consequences of failing the Japanese class.
10	In the Japanese class, I was so nervous that I forgot what I knew.
11	I will take the initiative to answer in Japanese class.
12	I will not worry about speaking Japanese with native speakers.
13	When I don't understand what the teacher is correcting, I feel uneasy.
14	I often want to skip Japanese lessons.
15	When I speak in Japanese class, I feel very confident.
16	I am worried that my Japanese teacher will correct every mistake I make.
17	When I was asked in Japanese class, my heart beat faster.
18	I always feel that other classmates speak Japanese better than me.
19	The Japanese class started too fast, and I was worried that I would fall behind.
20	When I can't understand every word the Japanese teacher says, I feel nervous.
21	I am afraid that other classmates will laugh at me when I speak Japanese.
22	When the Japanese teacher asked me unprepared questions, I felt nervous.
Source: *Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope 1986*	

3.4 Data Analysis

SPSS Statistics 22.0 was uesd to analyze the collected data. The following three analyses are carried out continuously. The lowest level of significance for all analyses in this study was set to $p < 0.05$.

In order to check RQ, "Classroom Shame in Japanese Learning", the FLCSS factor structure was explored [17].

4. Findings

4.1 FLCSS Factor Analysis

The class shame survey of 23 participants gave an average score of 63.02(SD = 18.40) and a Cronbach α value of 0.96, showing sufficient internal consistency.

To address RQ1, the study investigated the basic structure of FLCSS to gain insight into classroom shame. For this reason, a factor analysis of the maximum rotation of the variance is carried out. This examination of class anxiety in learning Japanese resulted in five factors, which accounted for 58.9% of the total variance. Table 3 shows the factor loading and Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3: FLCSS Factor Analysis

Item		Item-total correlation	Factor loading	h2	M (SD)
	Factor 1	Cronbach's alpha = 0.93			
13	When I don't understand what the teacher is correcting, I feel uneasy.	0.78	0.65	0.73	3.45(1.12)
19	The Japanese class started too fast, and I was worried that I would fall behind.	0.84	0.65	0.86	3.05(1.06)
9	I am worried about the consequences of failing the Japanese class.	0.73	0.63	0.56	2.75(1.01)
22	When the Japanese teacher asked me unprepared questions, I felt nervous.	0.61	0.61	0.76	3.05(1.05)
2	I am not worried about making mistakes in Japanese class.	0.76	0.59	0.75	2.68(0.91)
7	I usually feel at ease in the Japanese class exams.	0.58	0.62	0.68	3.46(1.16)
	Factor 2	Cronbach's alpha =0.90			
10	In the Japanese class, I was so nervous that I forgot what I knew.	0.85	0.70	0.82	2.97(1.15)
6	I always feel that other classmates' Japanese is better than mine.	0.77	0.65	0.73	2.98(1.22)
18	I always feel that other classmates speak Japanese better than me	0.75	0.63	0.69	3.04(1.05)
15	When I speak in Japanese class, I feel very confident.	0.76	0.60	0.71	3.35(1.07)
1	When I speak in Japanese class, I never feel confident.	0.64	0.54	0.66	2.78(0.96)
	Factor 3	Cronbach's alpha =0.84			
3	When I know that I will be invited to a Japanese class, I feel nervous.	0.68	0.80	0.69	2.87(0.56)
17	When I was asked in Japanese class, my heart beat faster.	0.77	0.76	0.73	3.11(1.07)
8	I felt embarrassed when I had to speak without preparation in Japanese class.	0.76	0.71	0.82	2.79(0.86)
21	I am afraid that other classmates will laugh at me when I speak Japanese.	0.57	0.66	0.59	2.84(0.76)
	Factor 4	Cronbach's alpha =0.65			
11	I will take the initiative to answer in Japanese class	0.68	0.54	0.67	2.46(0.82)
12	I will not worry about speaking Japanese with native speakers.	0.57	0.63	0.58	2.52(1.10)
	Factor 5	Cronbach's alpha =0.76			
16	I am worried that my Japanese teacher will correct every mistake I make.	0.56	0.76	0.67	2.53(1.05)
4	When I cannot understand what the teacher says in Japanese, I feel uneasy.	0.63	0.70	0.69	2.41(0.83)
14	I often want to skip Japanese lessons.	0.85	0.74	0.78	1.24(0.53)
5	Taking more Japanese lessons will not bother me at all.	0.79	0.65	0.77	2.68(0.95)
20	When I can't understand every word the Japanese teacher says, I feel nervous.	0.68	0.72	0.80	3.01(1.14)

		a	M	SD				
					1	2	3	4
Factor 1: Fear of Negative Evaluation/Failure		0.93	3.07	0.96				
Factor 2: Low self-esteem/feeling of low self-worth		0.90	3.02	0.93	0.78**			
Factor 3: Fear of others' gaze		0.84	2.90	0.92	0.66**	0.72**		
Factor 4: Fear of being rejected		0.65	2.49	0.89	0.73**	0.61**	0.56**	
Factor 5: Fear of shame-inducing situations		0.76	2.37	0.82	0.56**	0.55**	0.52**	0.42**

Note：N=23 **p<0.01

Six items loaded onto Factor 1, "Fear of Negative Evaluation/Failure" so named because its items pertain to negative feelings related to nervousness or shame about speaking and psychological pressure from negative evaluation by other learners. Factor 2, "Low self-esteem/feeling of low self-worth" was defined by a further five items relating to shame over not being able to have self-esteem or feel of low self-worth. Factor 3, "Fear of others' gaze" comprised four items relating to eponymous issues. A further tow items loaded onto Factor 4, "Fear of being rejected" concerning shame about amount of classroom, and out classroom activities. Finally, Factor 5, "Fear of shame-inducing situations" was defined by five items [18].

5. Discussion

5.1 Japanese Learning Shame

In order to solve RQ, FLCSS factor analysis produced five factors of L2 shame. Interestingly, factor 1, "Fear of Negative Evaluation/Failure" and factor 2, "Low self-esteem/feeling of low self-worth" items are related to various situations that occur when learning Japanese, especially factor 1

is a big shame factor (M = 3.07, standard deviation = 0.96). This result means that participants tend to be more ashamed when they expect negative reviews, which is consistent with the shame factor in foreign language classrooms identified by Dominique (2018). Recently, many researchers have stated that they fear that peers' negative evaluations will hinder learners' learning (for example, Shvidko, Evans, and Hartshorn, 2015) [19].

Contrary to most previous studies, this study found that participants felt greater shame for others' negative evaluations than stage fright when they were learning Japanese, indicating that there is a relationship between peer pressure from evaluation and intrinsically motivated second language learning. The students are afraid of being judged for their mistakes and are considered incompetent, but they also seem to feel the sense of honor and loyalty to their peers when they speak Japanese. This is their common profession. This result may also be affected by the language difference between the target language and Chinese. Since Japanese belongs to the Asian language group, has similar grammar, and shares Chinese characters with Chinese, students may learn more easily than English and have confidence to do well. In this case, learners can pay more attention to the quality of their speech instead of being ashamed of the speech itself.

Factor 5. "Fear of shame-inducing situations" includes items that are more closely related to self-esteem, rather than shame about speaking or listening. Similar to the findings of MacIntyre et al. (2002) and Yashima (2002), this factor proves that self-esteem and learner's personality help to transform classroom shame from interaction with native speakers to comfort.

Listening shame was identified as another major anxiety factor in Japanese learning, combined with other items related to the underestimation of one's abilities in factor 2 "Low self-esteem/feeling of low self-worth". This result indicates that there is a potentially particularly strong correlation between the listening shame of native speakers in the classroom and the decline in confidence in language ability [20].

5.2 Limitations and future research

This study had some limitations. First, there are few participants and most participants (78.3%) are women (n = 18), so future research may wish to focus on possible gender differences. Second, the FLCSS is rated on the closed Likert scale after modification on the basis of FLCAS, and because it is self-reported, the response may be biased [21]. Finally, future research should further study the dynamic relationship between language variables and second language shame [22].

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the level of shame in the L2 classroom in a foreign language learning environment in China. The results provide insights into students' perceptions of the FL setting, which can ultimately help teachers create an atmosphere that encourages learning by successfully managing classes composed of students of varying proficiency.

The study found that when students lack confidence in the teacher's behavior, they feel frustrated and score high on average. This shows that the degree of student negativity depends to a large extent on the role of the teacher. In addition, peer's gaze was identified as an important factor in student shame.

In view of the results of this research, an effective teaching method may be to adopt classroom strategies such as companion support and group cooperation, and consider the student's personal second language learning history. Teachers can encourage students to work in pairs or groups, which can help them relax and reduce their shame levels, creating a more conducive environment.

Based on the findings of this research, the following solutions are proposed to solve the shame of learning. First of all, the fear of negative evaluation/failure expressed by most study participants can

be alleviated through appropriate intervention by teachers. Second, it is important for teachers to propose guidelines to encourage students to use positive and negative feedback. For example, when giving feedback to students' work, students should not only comment on language-related errors, but also try to find praiseworthy examples. In doing so, every student can experience negative and positive feedback.

Despite many limitations, this study identified the role of shame in L2 learning in the FL learning environment. The research question does not cover all the dynamics of L2 learning and the problems that students may encounter. However, the researched students' perceptions of class shame also provide valuable insights into the factors that may influence such perceptions.

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