

# EFL 日本人英語学習者と JSL 中国人日本語学習者の 言語学習観における男女差

## Gender Differences in Language Learning Beliefs: Focus on Japanese Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Chinese Learners of Japanese as a Second Language (JSL)

中山 晃 NAKAYAMA, Akira

● 足利工業大学  
Ashikaga Institute of Technology

山下 智子 YAMASHITA, Tomoko

● 足利工業大学  
Ashikaga Institute of Technology



男女差, 言語学習観, tテスト

Gender difference, language learning beliefs, t-test

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate language learners' beliefs in both EFL (English as a foreign language) learning situation and JSL (Japanese as a second language) learning situation in terms of gender differences. The participants were 316 Japanese students who study EFL at a Japanese university and 109 Chinese Ryugakusei (international students) who study JSL at an intensive language school in Japan. For measuring instrument, BALLI (Horwitz, 1987) was used to investigate their beliefs about language learning. As a result, seven out of twenty-nine items showed statistical significance between male and female among EFL learners while eight out of twenty-nine items showed statistical significance between males and females among JSL learners.

本研究の目的はEFL（外国語としての英語）とJSL（第二言語としての日本語）の学習者の言語学習観を男女差について調査することであった。被験者は日本の大学でEFLを学ぶ316人の日本人と日本の語学学校でJSLを集中的に学ぶ109人の中国人留学生で、言語学習観を調査するためにBALLIを用いた。その結果、EFL学習者では29項目のうち、7項目で男女差に統計的に有意な値が表れ、JSL学習者では29項目のうち、8項目でそれが表れた。

## 1 Introduction

To date researchers have reported that in both second language (L2) and foreign language (FL) learning, there are possibilities of gender differences. Examples of research include Bacon and Finnemann's study on FL learning motivation and gender (Bacon and Finnemann, 1992) and Bacon's study on FL learning strategies and gender (Bacon, 1992). However, not enough attention has been paid to L2 and FL learning beliefs. This is defined as "psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (Richardson, 1996, p. 103) and could be one of the predictors of learning behaviors, including the use of learning strategies (Nakayama, Ochiai, Inada, Mori, and Kuramoto, 2004). In other words, gender differences in learning behaviors could possibly affect such beliefs on L2 and FL learning. In this sense, examining gender differences in language beliefs might help us understand the relationship between gender differences in language learning behaviors.

## 2 Review of Literature

### 2.1 Sociolinguistic Accounts

Ellis (1994) explained gender differences in SL and FL learning by introducing Labov's principles with regard to sex differentiation in native-speaker speech (see Labov 1991, p. 206 ~ 207):

- (1) In stable sociolinguistic stratification, men use a higher frequency of non-standard forms than women.
- (2) In the majority of linguistic changes women use a higher frequency of the incoming forms than men.

That is, women are more aware of "vogueish" words and phrases, including prestige forms in a certain community, and tend to apply them in their speech. Once they notice the changes in language

forms, however, they are inclined to discard them. On the other hand, men might be less aware of such new forms. However, once they start to use them, they are less likely to discard them. From this, Ellis (1994) suggests that "women might be better at L2 learning than men; they are likely to be more open to new linguistic forms in the L2 input and they will be more likely to rid themselves of interlanguage forms that deviate from target-language norms" (p. 202).

### 2.2 Gender Differences in Motivation

Though several studies (e.g., Bacon et al, 1992; Burstall, 1975; Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Spolsky 1989) have reported that females (age: adult language learners) have more positive motivation and favorable attitudes toward learning L2 than males, it is difficult to find appropriate explanations for such differences. Deducting from Labov's principle, it may be that females are more oriented toward learning a new language. However, there remains a question as to why women should be more receptive to new language forms.

### 2.3 Gender Differences in Language Learning Strategies

Studies (e.g., Bacon 1992; Bacon et al, 1992; Gass&Varnois, 1986) have reported that there might be gender differences in the use of language learning strategies. According to Bacon (1992), men (participants: university students) use more translation strategies than women, on the other hand, women used monitoring<sup>1</sup> strategies more than men. That is, women tend to monitor their understanding and comprehension during using and learning the target language. Along a similar line, Bacon et al (1992) reported that women use more "private/non-oral mode" in language learning than men. As Ellis (1994) described, this also means that women relied on their L1 to make the L2 meaningful, rehearsing in their heads before they

spoke and guessing at what might be going on. In addition, in terms of interactions, Gass and Varnois (1986) have reported that men use opportunities to interact to produce more output, while women use it to obtain more input.

## **2.4 Target Issues& Research Questions**

These previous studies partially show that women have talent or certain aptitudes for learning other languages in terms of sociolinguistic accounts, motivation, and learning strategies. However, what about learning beliefs? Can we find gender differences in beliefs? This research study investigates the questions of difference in learning beliefs according to gender.

## **3 Method**

### **3.1 Participants**

The participants were 316 Japanese students who study EFL in a Japanese university and 109 Chinese Ryugakusei (international students) who study JSL in a Japanese language school in Tokyo.

### **3.2 Instrument**

To measure each participants' beliefs about English learning, BALLI, developed and modified to EFL context by Horwitz (1987) was adopted. BALLI consists of 29 items and was developed to assess learners' beliefs about language learning in five major areas: foreign language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, and motivations and expectations.

### **3.3 Procedure**

The participants were requested to answer BALLI after class period. They were asked to rate the degree to which each item in BALLI applies to themselves on a 5 point scale; 5= "Strongly Agree" to 1 = "Strongly Disagree." The writer asked the teachers to inform the students that their participation was voluntary, that their responses, test scores, and attendance would be used for this study, and that their personal information would be kept confidential.

## **4 Results and Discussions**

### **4.1 Limitations of this study**

We should be careful about the overgeneralization of the research results, since there were methodological limitations. This study is a typical cross-sectional and quantitative study, which collects data from at least two groups on a single point and compares it using statistical procedures. Also, this study is an investigation, not an experiment, using self-report questionnaires. Conditions of participants, methodological procedures, and educational settings may set limitations on the results.

### **4.2 Analysis & Results**

The purpose of this exploratory study was to investigate whether differences in language learning beliefs can be found according to gender.

In order to examine the differences between males and females in rating the questionnaires (BALLI) in both groups, EFL learners and JSL learners, the authors adopted a two tailed t-test. It shows whether there is statistical significance between the two variables.

Table 1

*Results of t-test in EFL students (Male=168 & Female=148)*

Item Descriptions	Male	Female	Sig.
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	
	<i>SD</i>	<i>SD</i>	
3. Some languages are easier to learn than others.	3.53	3.82	*
	1.19	1.02	
8. It's o.k. to guess if you don't know a word in the foreign language.	3.73	3.97	*
	1.03	.97	
9. It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	2.83	3.07	*
	1.09	1.06	
10. It is better to learn a foreign language in the foreign country.	4.15	4.47	**
	1.08	.83	
14. I feel self-conscious speaking the foreign language in front of other people.	3.36	3.66	*
	1.19	1.12	
19. If I get to speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	3.92	4.16	*
	1.06	1.02	
21. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.	3.75	3.34	*
	1.16	1.35	

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ 

### 4.3 EFL Context

Table 1 presents only the items in BALLI which indicated statistical significances between male and female students in EFL learning context in each of the items. Female students' Mean averages (*M*) are higher than male students at a statistically significant level, except for Item No. 21.

Results of Item No. 3 showed that Japanese female students in EFL, compared to the male students, might feel that some languages are easier to learn than others. This may indicate that male students are not aware of the differences among various L2 or FL while female students are sensitive about the differences.

Item No. 8 tells us that female students, compared to male students, show more tolerance towards guessing unknown words and phrases. This result agrees with the previous research result that females are active strategy users (Eisenstein, 1982), which means that women are more likely to use different types of oral/speaking strategies,

while males use more translating strategies than females (Bacon, 1992).

Item No. 10 shows that female students may think more highly of authenticity in language learning, compared to male students. That is, female students may want to study a foreign language in the countries where the target language is spoken. In such situations, learners are requested to talk in a spontaneous way, which enable the learners to have lots of chances to use the target language in real situation. Female preferences to authentic language learning situations and materials rate higher than those of males.

Regarding Item No. 9, caution needs to be paid in reading this result. One can see that there is a statistical difference between male and female students on the questionnaire. Both male and female averages are close to 3, which imply that both male and female students do not always think that "It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one."

Item No. 14 and 21 showed that female students feel much more self-conscious speaking a foreign language in front of other people than male students, and female students might have more utilitarian purposes on foreign language learning than male students.

Concerning Item No. 21, it is notable that this is the only item that male students rated higher than female students; that is, male students may feel that "Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects."

### 4.4 JSL Context

Table 2 presents BALLI items that only indicated statistical significances between male students and female students in JSL learning context. In contrast to Table 1, male students' mean averages (*M*) in Table 2 are all higher than female students at a statistically significant level, except for Item No. 5.

Within the JSL context, Chinese male students may feel that learning a foreign language is different from other school subjects, and if they can speak them very well, they will use it much often (No. 19), and they also think that Chinese people think that “It is important to speak a foreign language (No. 26)”.

Concerning Item No. 5, both male and female Chinese students have rated high on it, but female students may think highly of excellence of pronunciation in the L2 language learning process.

Table 2

*Results of t-test in JSL students (Male=53 & Female=56)*

Item Descriptions	Male	Female	Sig.
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	
	<i>SD</i>	<i>SD</i>	
5. It's important to speak a foreign language with an excellent accent.	4.28	4.64	*
	1.04	.74	
19. If I get to speak this language very well, I will have many opportunities to use it.	4.50	4.07	*
	.84	1.10	
21. Learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects.	3.75	3.35	*
	1.14	1.25	
22. Learning another language is a matter of translating from Chinese.	3.02	2.56	*
	1.34	1.36	
25. People who are good at math and science are not good at learning foreign languages.	2.79	2.20	*
	1.34	1.15	
26. Chinese think that it is important to speak a foreign language.	4.00	3.45	*
	1.19	1.43	
27. I would like to learn this language so that I can get to know its speakers better.	3.30	2.64	*
	1.37	1.34	
28. People who speak more than one language well are very intelligent.	3.08	2.54	*
	1.34	1.33	

\* $p < .05$

In Item No. 21, male students may feel more strongly that learning a foreign language is different from learning other school subjects compared to female students, and this result agrees with the result in EFL context. It might be said that male students in general have a tendency to think

learning a foreign language is in some ways different from learning other school subjects.

Regarding Item No. 22, 27, and 28, Chinese male students believe more strongly than the female students, that learning Japanese as L2 is a matter of translating from Chinese, that learning Japanese is to know the Japanese people better, and that those who can speak more than one language are very smart.

With regard to Item No. 25, though, we can see a statistically significant difference between male and female, and both mean scores are less than 3.0. This indicates that both male and female Chinese Ryugakusei (international students) may think that those who are good at math and science are also good at learning L2.

## 5 Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary

The results in the EFL context highly supported the previous studies in showing that females have general beliefs that lead to facilitation of EFL learning. Female students have rated high on items 3, 8, and 10, indicating females' perceived proximity and accessibility towards certain foreign languages, their willingness to communicate in unknown, or guessed words, and a preference for authentic language learning.

Contrarily, results in the JSL context showed a different view among men and women towards L2. While both female and male JSL students had strong beliefs towards the Items in Table 2, male students showed more positive attitudes towards, 1) possibilities of speaking the L2 leading to more opportunities of L2 usage, 2) importance of learning L2, 3) getting to know the FL speaker better through L2, 4) general image of intelligence in multiple language speakers. This indicates positive attitudes toward L2 learning among Chinese males. Also beliefs about learning methods and the nature of

language learning are different among males and females. Males tend to see language learning as translating.

As overall results, we can see a clear gender difference in L2 and FL learning beliefs. However, more studies must be conducted as to what causes such differences. Here, a new research question emerges; "What are the direct causes of gender differences in L2 and FL learning beliefs? Does it stem from genetic or social factors? If female competence in L2 or FL acquisition is superior to that of male's, is it because it is biologically pre-determined? This question, however, faces an opposing evidence, as far as this study has been concerned, that participants among Chinese male Ryugakusei have shown to have more positive learning beliefs than females.

This leads us to come to a conclusion that language learning beliefs, which have impact on L2 and FL learners' strategies and motivations, may not originate from biological reasons, but are rather products of general social and cultural accepted norms.

## 5. 2 Further Research

As for further research, we need to look at the influence of students' cultural backgrounds on their belief construction. Investigating both male and female social roles in a certain community could help us understand the construction of beliefs towards language learning and tendencies in social expectations towards language learning with regards to gender difference.

## Endnotes

Monitoring (strategies) refers to the strategy to check one's understanding and comprehension during learning the target language (s).

## References

- Bacon, S. (1992). The relationship between gender, comprehension, processing strategies, and cognitive and affective response in second-language listening. *The Modern Language Journal*, 76, 160-178.
- Bacon, S., Finnemann, M. (1992). Sex differences in self-reported beliefs about foreign-language learning and authentic oral and written input. *Language Learning*, 42, 471-495.
- Burstall, C. (1975). Factors affecting foreign-language learning: a consideration of some relevant research findings. *Language Teaching and Linguistics Abstracts*, 8, 105-125.
- Eisenstein, M. (1982). A study of social variation in adult second language acquisition. *Language Learning*, 32, 367-392.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, R., Lambert, W. (1972). *Attitudes and Motivation in Second Language Learning*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Gass, S., Varonis, E. (1986). Sex differences in NNS/ Nns interactions. In Day, R. (ed.), *Talking to Learn: Conversation in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.
- Horwitz, E.K. (1987). Surveying students' beliefs about language learning. In Wenden, A. & Rubin, J. (Eds.), *Learner strategies in language learning*.
- Labov, W. (1991). The interaction of sex and social class in the course of linguistic change. *Language Variation and Linguistic Change*, 2, 205-251.
- Nakayama, A., Ochiai, M., Inada, K., Mori, M., & Kuramoto, K. (2004). Teacher's Beliefs in Language Teaching. *The Proceedings of the 29th Annual International Conference of the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT2003)*, p.231-240
- Richardson, V. (1996). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In Sikula, J. (ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education, Second edition*, (pp.102-119). New York: Macmillan.
- Spolsky, B. (1989). *Conditions for Second Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

## Acknowledgement

This paper is a revised version of a paper presentation made at ISLS 2005, Montréal Canada (April 19th, 2005). We would like to thank all the participants in our study.