True and False Beginner Japanese Language Students in the First Semester Classroom: Comparing Anxiety, Performance, and Retention

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Abstract

This study investigates how true and false beginner Japanese language students affect each other in the first-semester college classroom and whether such beginners should be placed into separate classrooms. The study was conducted over a three year period, consisted of 513 students, and involved student interviews as well as statistical analysis of data collected from the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986), final course grades, and enrollment records. While the statistical analysis showed that the true beginners experienced significantly more anxiety than the false beginners, it did not show a significant difference between the final course grades or retention rates of true and false beginners. The latter finding is at odds with previous research on Indo-European languages (Frantzen & Magnan 2005), and points to the need for further research to determine whether there are differences between Indo-European and non-Indo-European, character-based languages on this question. The study concludes that separating true and false beginner Japanese language students may not be worthwhile because there are neither clear cut benefits to separating them nor clear cut costs to keeping them together.

1. Introduction

At the postsecondary level, beginning level foreign language classrooms are often a mix of true beginners and false beginners. True beginners are students who have never studied the target language before, while false beginners have had some significant exposure to the language, but have not achieved a level of proficiency sufficient for placement in a second or third semester course. The question of whether true and false beginners should be in the same or separate sections is one

that foreign language instructors and coordinators have had to struggle with increasingly in recent years due in large part to the growth in the number of different foreign languages offered at the pre-college level. Why separate these two groups? Some researchers and instructors believe that the dynamic between them results in anxiety that has a detrimental effect on learning, course performance and retention rates, especially for true beginners. Foreign language pedagogy scholars often refer to such anxiety as foreign language anxiety (hereafter FLA).

Despite the call by some scholars to separate true and false beginners into different sections, very little research has been conducted on these two types of beginners in first semester, postsecondary courses. Moreover, no extensive, multi-year study has been conducted on first semester students of a non-Indo-European language. The present three-year study begins to fill this gap in research by investigating how true and false beginner Japanese language students affect each other in the first semester, college classroom. The study, consisting of both student interviews and statistical analysis of data collected from the *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS), addresses three research questions. First, do these distinct groups of beginners experience different levels of anxiety? Second, if they do, can the differences in anxiety be attributed to the dynamic between them? Third, do the differences in anxiety level affect course performance and retention? Based on previous FLA research, this study began with the hypothesis that true beginners would experience more anxiety and receive lower final grades than false beginners, but that the retention rate of true beginners would be higher than false beginners (Frantzen & Magnan 2005).

2. Previous Research

Since the mid-80s a large body of research on FLA has developed in response to the work of the Horowitz and her colleagues (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope 1986). In addition to research on FLA in the classroom, language skill-specific studies have been conducted on reading (Saito, Horwitz & Garza 1999, Horwitz 2001), writing

(Mochizuki 2008), speaking (Machida 2001), and listening anxiety (Elkhafaifi 2005). FLA experienced in different learning contexts, e.g., in-class, out of class, distance learning, during tests (Mochizuki 2008, Pichette 2009) and during different stages in learning have been studied (Samimy & Tabuse 1992, Saito & Samimy 1996, Kitano 2001). The relationship between learner factors, such as motivation and beliefs, and FLA has been investigated as well (Kim 2009, MacIntyre 2007).

Previous research has also shown that FLA varies across target languages. Using the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS), Saito, Horwitz & Garza (1999) determined that Japanese and French language learners have significantly higher levels of foreign language reading anxiety than Russian language learners. In their research on FLA and student performance, Saito & Samimy(1996) point out that the anxiety of Japanese language learners increases as their proficiency improves while the anxiety of Indo-European language learners decreases as their proficiency improves.

A number of previous studies have underscored the connection between anxiety and low academic achievement (Gardner & MacIntyre 1993, MacIntyre 1995, Aida 1994, Samimy & Tabuse 1992). Aida's study and Samimy & Tabuse's study showed a correlation between high levels of anxiety and low academic achievement among Japanese language learners in U.S. colleges. Both studies found that students with a high degree of anxiety received lower grades than students with a low degree of anxiety. Lange et al. showed a correlation between the number of years of study and course performance for French, Spanish, and German FL students. In light of the relationship between anxiety level, years of study, and course grades, several researchers have suggested that true and false beginners should be placed into separate sections (Baily, Onwuegbuzie & Daley 2000, Christiansen & Wu 1993)

Despite these suggestions, few studies addressing the anxiety of and the dynamic between true and false beginners in first-semester, postsecondary classrooms have been conducted. In fact, it appears that only Fukai (2000) and

Frantzen & Magnan (2005) have conducted such studies. Fukai's study consisted of two students--one true beginner and one false beginner--from an introductory level Japanese course. Both students were interviewed and completed the FLCAS. While data from FLCAS and the interviews showed the true beginner to be more anxious than the false beginner, the interviews revealed two things the FLCAS did not. First, although the true beginner stated that the presence of false beginners made her feel more anxious than she would have felt otherwise, she also felt motivated by false beginners to study harder. Second, the true beginner commented that the instructor took steps to control the class in a manner which lessened her anxiety.

Frantzen & Magnan (2005) conducted a much more extensive study consisting of 490 first-semester French and Spanish foreign language students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. They used both the FLCAS and MacIntyre & Gardner's Anxiety Subscales. Following Fukai's research methodology, they also interviewed 8 to 10 true beginners and 8 to 10 false beginners from each language course. They found that the true beginners in their study were significantly more anxious than the false beginners and that the latter received higher final grades than the former. However, neither group of beginners was extremely anxious; moreover, despite their greater anxiety and lower final grades, a significantly higher percentage of true beginners continued studying the target language the following semester than false beginners.

Fukai's and Frantzen & Magnan's studies raise critical questions about the necessity as well as the benefits of separating true and false beginners. However, because Fukai's study included only two students and spanned a single semester it is unclear whether a larger study conducted over several years would have yielded similar results. Moreover, because the subjects of Frantzen & Magnan's study were French and Spanish language learners, it is unclear whether their study's findings apply to students of non-Indo-European languages; hence, the need for a multi-year study of beginning level students of a non-Indo-European language such as Japanese.

3. The Present Study

The subjects of the present study were all students taking Japanese language classes at a large state university in the Midwest of the U.S. The undergraduate Japanese Program at this university offers first through fourth year Japanese. The first semester Japanese course meets five days a week, two meetings of which are lectures taught by a full-time faculty member and three meetings of which are drill sessions conducted by teaching assistants. During each year of the study, 12 sections of the course were offered with the same full-time faculty member teaching all 12 sections. The same textbook, supplementary teaching materials and grading criteria were used throughout the study. Twenty-five percent of students' final grades were based on attendance and participation, 15% on homework, 15% on quizzes, 10% on lesson tests, 10% on the midterm, 20% on the final exam, and 2.5% each on a skit project and speaking test.

All incoming students who wish to enroll in Japanese courses are required to take a placement exam, which consists of a grammar, reading and writing section. Students who have formally studied Japanese before but who receive scores insufficient for placement into the second semester course are placed into either the first semester or the advanced beginner course. The advanced beginner course, which is not offered every year, is different from the first semester course primarily in its focus on material normally covered after the first four weeks of the first semester course; i.e., the advanced beginner class does not cover the basic writing system or very basic grammar.

3.1 Participants

In the fall of 2010, 2011 and 2012, all students who registered for first semester Japanese were asked to participate in the study. In the fall of 2011 an advanced beginner class was offered; all students who enrolled in this class were asked to participate in the study as well. The amount of previous formal study among false beginners ranged from four years of high school Japanese to four weeks of an intensive summer language program. However, most false beginners in the study

had completed either two or three years of formal study prior to the beginning of the semester.

In the fall of 2010, 170 students enrolled in first semester Japanese 114 (67.06%) of whom were true beginners and 56 (32.94%) of whom were false beginners. In 2011, the number of false beginners in first semester Japanese decreased substantially, in part, because an advanced beginner course was offered. 162 students enrolled in first semester Japanese 120 (73.17%) of whom were true beginners and 42 (25.61%) of whom were false beginners. In the fall of 2012 the percentage of false beginners was higher than the previous year in all likelihood because an advanced beginner class was not offered. Of the 179 students who enrolled in first semester Japanese 124 (69.27%) were true beginners and 50 (27.93%) were false beginners (0 students in 2010, 2 (1.22%) students in 2011, and 5 (2.79%) students in 2012 indicated that they did not know if they were true or false beginners).

Students' demographic information with respect to gender, class standing, and previous foreign language study was similar to the students in Frantzen & Magnan's study. Throughout the three-year study, slightly more than 50% of the students were male and slightly less than 50% were female. More than 98% of the students were undergraduates among whom approximately 41% were freshman, 36% were sophomores, 11% juniors, and 10% seniors.

One notable demographic difference between the present study and Frantzen & Magnan's was the number of students who were native English speakers. While over 90% of students reported English as their primary native language in Frantzen & Magnan's study, substantially less reported English as their native language in the present study. What is more, in recent years there has been a dramatic decrease in native English speakers in the first-year Japanese course in question and, conversely, a dramatic increase in native speakers of non-Indo-European languages such as Chinese and Korean. In the fall of 2010, 2011, and 2012, 98 (57.64%), 83 (50.6%), and 80 (44.69%) students, respectively, stated that English was their native language while 65 (38.23%), 79 (48.17%), and

94 (52.5%) students stated that a language other than English was their native language. Thirty-three (19.4%) reported Chinese and 26 (15.29%) reported Korean as their native language in 2010, 59 (35.97%) reported Chinese and 14 (8.5%) reported Korean as their native language in 2011, and 66 (36.87%) reported Chinese and 16 (8.9%) reported Korean as their native language in 2012.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Questionnaire and the FLCAS Survey

On the first day of class students were asked to complete a background questionnaire consisting of questions about the students' year in school, major, native language, family members who speak Japanese, previous foreign language study (other than Japanese), previous study of Japanese (i.e., whether they had ever studied Japanese formally, and if so, where and for how long), visits to Japan, and their reasons for taking a Japanese class.

Students completed the FLCAS during the third week of the semester. The phrase "Japanese language" was substituted for the phrase "foreign language" in the survey. The FLCAS is comprised of thirty-three, five-point Likert scale items in which 1 denotes strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neither agree nor disagree, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree. Anxiety scores were derived by summing the ratings of the 33 items. Questions 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32 were reverse-scored items; thus, ratings for these items were reversed and recorded accordingly. A mean average score of 5 indicates the highest level of anxiety while an average score of 1 indicates the lowest level of anxiety. According to Horwitz (2008), "students with averages around 3 should be considered slightly anxious, while students with averages below 3 are probably not very anxious. Students who average near 4 and above are probably fairly anxious ... (p. 235)."

Enrollment in second semester Japanese was used to determine the retention rates of the two groups of beginners and final course grades were used to compare performance. A t-test, two-way ANOVA and Chi-Square were used for

the quantitative analyses. A p-value of .05 was considered necessary for claiming a statistically significant difference.

3.2.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted to provide further insight into the results of the quantitative portion of the study. Eight students were interviewed all of whom had completed first semester Japanese and were currently enrolled in fourth semester Japanese. Prior to enrolling in the first semester course, students A, B, C, and D had all been true beginners and students E, F, G, and H had all been false beginners. E and F had completed two years of formal Japanese language study, G had completed three years of formal study, and H had completed one year of formal study.

Interviewees were selected through a two-step process. First, students in second year Japanese were asked to volunteer to be interviewed about their experience in first semester Japanese. Second, volunteers were divided into two pools--one true beginner, the other false beginner--and four students from each pool were randomly selected to be interviewed. Each interview session lasted between 15 and 20 minutes. During the session, students were asked three questions: should true beginners and false beginners be in separate classrooms or the same classroom, what aspects of the course made you feel anxious or bored, and what aspects of the course made you feel less anxious or less bored? Analysis of the interviews primarily involved identifying classroom and curriculum factors that students indicated increased or decreased their anxiety.

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Anxiety

While the mean average score of the true beginners was higher than the mean average score of the false beginners during all three semesters, neither group was particularly anxious (see Table 1). For the fall of 2010, 2011, and 2012, the average scores of true and false beginners were 2.75 and 2.43, 2.78 and 2.35, and

2.61 and 2.37, respectively. T-tests did, however, show true beginners to be significantly more anxious than false beginners. The results of the t-tests for the 2010, 2011, and 2012 studies were t (167) = -3.373, $p < .001$; t (157) = -4.166, $p < .000$; and t (122) = 2.333, p < .0121.

Table 1: Anxiety Comparison

Year	TB/FB	Mean	P
2010	TB (n=108)	2.75	.001**
	FB (n=61)	2.43	
2011	TB (n=121)	2.78	.000**
	FB (n=38)	2.35	
	AB (n=22)	2.66	.032**
2012	TB (n=130)	2.61	.021**
	FB (n=44)	2.37	

**p < .05
TB=True Beginner, FB=False Beginner, AB=Students in the advanced beginner class

For the 2011 study, in addition to a t-test, which was used to compare the anxiety levels of true and false beginners in first semester Japanese, a two-way ANOVA was used to compare the anxiety levels of the students in the advanced beginner class with the anxiety levels of the true and false beginners in the first semester class. Surprisingly, the ANOVA showed that the students in the advanced beginner class had anxiety comparable to the true beginners but not the false beginners. In other words, the two-way ANOVA did not reveal a significant difference between the students in the advanced beginner class and the true beginners, but it did reveal a significant difference between the students in the advanced beginner class and the false beginners (F(2, 180) = 8.945, $p = .032$). For some reason--perhaps because they had no true beginners with whom to compare themselves--the students in the advanced beginner class, who were the most advanced of the students in question, were significantly more anxious than the false beginners in the first semester class. Once again, however, the average scores of all three groups indicated very little anxiety.

An ANOVA was also used to compare the anxiety of the true beginners in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (see Table 2). The ANOVA did not show a significant difference in anxiety between the true beginners in 2010 and 2011, but it did show

that the true beginners in 2012 were significantly less anxious than the true beginners in 2010, $F(2, 358) = 3.466$, $p = .048$, and 2011, $F(2, 358) = 8.945$, $p = .015$. Important to notice here is that there were fewer false beginners in first semester Japanese in 2011 than there were in 2010 and 2012 in large part because an advanced beginner class was offered. Moreover, because an advanced beginner class was offered the most advanced false beginners were not enrolled in first semester Japanese. Despite the fact that there were fewer false beginners and that the most advanced beginners were in another classroom, the anxiety level of true beginners was higher in 2011 than it was in both 2010 and 2012. If there were a direct correlation between true beginner anxiety and the presence of false beginners, then the anxiety of true beginners should have been lower this semester than in both 2010 and 2012. Since the opposite was the case this finding suggests that the presence of false beginners in the first semester Japanese language classroom may not be a primary cause of true beginner anxiety.

Table 2: TB Anxiety Comparison

Year	Number	Mean	P
2010	TB (n=108)	2.75	.048**
2011	TB (n=121)	2.78	.015**
2012	TB (n=130)	2.61	

**$p < .05$, TB=True Beginner

4.2 Item analysis of True and False beginners

To see the characteristics of anxiety that true and false beginners experience, I looked closely at the mean responses to each item on the FLCAS. As Table 3 shows, each year true beginners scored above a 3 on more items than false beginners. Tables 4, 5, and 6 present the mean average scores of true and false beginners for items that were ranked highly by the former.

Table 3: FLCAS items on which TB, FB, and AB scored a 3 or higher

2010		2011			2012	
TB	FB	TB	FB	AB	TB	FB
Q22	Q22	Q14	Q14	Q14	Q10	Q22
Q7	Q10	Q10	Q5	Q12	Q33	Q10
Q10	Q11	Q25	Q8	Q2	Q22	Q11
Q14	Q32	Q33	Q10	Q32	Q7	
Q25		Q22	Q28	Q9	Q9	
Q23		Q9	Q18	Q6	Q14	
Q33		Q7		Q22		
Q11		Q8		Q33		
Q9		Q15		Q11		
Q32		Q5				

TB=True Beginner, FB=False Beginner, AB=Students in Advanced Beginner Class

Table 4: Comparison of FLCAS items: Mean Score of High Ranked Items in Fall 2010

TB	FB	FLCAS Question Item
1 3.46	1 3.21	#22: I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for my language class (rs).
2 3.31	9-a 2.56	#7: I keep thinking that the other students are better at Japanese than I am.
3 3.30	2-a 3.00	#10: I worry about the consequences of failing my Japanese class.
4 3.22	3 2.92	#14: I would not be nervous speaking the Japanese language with native speakers (rs).
5 3.19	9-c 2.56	#25: Japanese class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
6-a 3.15	11 2.46	#23: I always feel that the other students speak the Japanese language better than I do.
6-b 3.15	5 2.82	#33: I get nervous when the Japanese teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.
7 3.13	2-b 3.00	#11: I don't understand why some people get so upset over Japanese classes (rs)
8 3.08	10 2.54	#9: I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Japanese class.
9 3.03	2-c 3.00	#32: I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of Japanese (rs).

(rs)=reversed scored; ▢=item below 3; ranking #-a, b, c=items have same ranking and score

Table 5: Comparison of FLCAS items: Mean Score of High Ranked Items in Fall 2011

TB	FB	AB	FLCAS Item
1 3.61	1 3.36	1 3.86	#14: I would not be nervous speaking the Japanese language with native speakers (rs).
2 3.37	3-a 3.13	12 2.68	#10: I worry about the consequences of failing my Japanese class.
3 3.28	3-b 3.13	22 2.09	#25: Japanese class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.
4 3.21	15 2.31	6-a 3.06	#33: I get nervous when the Japanese teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.
5 3.19	14 2.34	6-b 3.06	#22: I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for my language class (rs).
6 3.17	10 2.47	5 3.13	#9: : I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Japanese class.
7 3.11	11 2.44	9 2.9	#7: I keep thinking that the other students are better at Japanese than I am.
8-a 3.07	2-a 3.18	17 2.4	#8: I am usually at ease during tests in my Japanese class.
8-b 3.07	7 2.65	14 2.54	#15: I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
9 3.02	2-b 3.18	26 1.68	#5: It wouldn't bother me at all to take more Japanese language classes (rs).

(rs)=reversed scored, ▢ =item below 3; ranking #-a, b, c=items have same ranking and score

Table 6: Comparison of FLCAS items: Mean Score of High Ranked Items in Fall 2012

TB	FB	FLCAS Item
1 3.32	2 3.07	#10: I worry about the consequences of failing my Japanese class.
2-a 3.2	6-b 2.73	#33: I get nervous when the Japanese teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.
2-b 3.2	1 3.32	#22: I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for my language class (rs).
3 3.09	9 2.52	#7: I keep thinking that the other students are better at Japanese than I am.
4-a 3.04	10-b 2.43	#9: I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Japanese class.
4-b 3.04	4 2.8	#14: I would not be nervous speaking the Japanese language with native speakers (rs).
5 2.99	12 2.39	#29: I get nervous when I don't understand every word the Japanese teacher says.
6-a 2.93	13 2.63	#23: I always feel that the other students speak the Japanese language better than I do.
6-b 2.93	14 2.34	#24: I feel very self-conscious about speaking Japanese in front of other students.
7-a 2.92	11 2.41	#1: I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my Japanese class.
7-b 2.92	6-a 2.73	#25: Japanese class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

(rs)=reversed scored; ▢ =item below 3; ranking #-a, b, c=items have same ranking and score

Throughout the three year study, both true and false beginners scored above a 3 on items 22 and 10 showing that both felt some anxiety about preparing adequately for class and failing the course. However, true beginners scored above a 3 on item 14 throughout the 3 year study while FB scored above 3 on this item only during the fall 2011 term indicating that the former feel more anxiety than the latter about the prospect of speaking the language with native speakers of Japanese. Moreover, true beginners consistently scored above a 3 on item 7 ("I keep thinking that the other students are better at Japanese than I am") while false beginners consistently scored below a 3 on it. This finding is consistent with the results of Frantzen & Magnan's study, which also found that true beginners, more so than false beginners, felt that their foreign language ability was inferior to their classmates. True beginners also scored significantly higher than false beginners on items 33 and 9 indicating that the former feel much more anxious than the latter about speaking in class, especially when not well prepared.

4.3 Grades and Retention

While Frantzen & Magnan's study found that false beginners had significantly higher final grades than true beginners, the present study found no significant difference between the final grades of true and false beginners. In fact, somewhat surprisingly, throughout the three-year study the final grades of true beginners were slightly higher than the final grades of false beginners. For the fall semesters of 2010, 2011, and 2012, the mean average final grades of true and false beginners were 3.25 and 3.22, 3.27 and 3.10, and 2.97 and 2.91, respectively. The results of the t-tests for the 2010, 2011, and 2012 studies were $t(165) = -.251$, $p < .802$; $t(150) = -1.087$, $p < .279$; and $t(164) = .317$, $p < .752$ (Table 7). Once again, in 2011 even though there were fewer false beginners in first semester Japanese than in either 2010 and 2012 and the most advanced false beginners were in another classroom, there was not a significant difference between the grades of true and false beginners.

Table 7: Comparison of Final Grades

Year	TB/FB/AB	Mean	P
2010	TB (n=111)	3.25	.802
	FB (n=56)	3.22	
2011	TB (n=111)	3.27	.279
	FB (n=41)	3.10	
	AB (n=23)	2.60	.037, .002
2012	TB (n=116)	2.97	.752
	FB (n=50)	2.91	

TB=True Beginners, FB=False Beginners, AB=Students in Advanced Beginner Class

The results of the study with respect to retention also differed from the results of Frantzen & Magnan's study in that it did not find a significant difference between the retention rates of true beginners and false beginners (see Table 8). 67.5% (77) of true beginners and 75% (42) of false beginners from the fall semester of 2010 continued studying Japanese during the spring of 2011. Although a higher percentage of false beginners than true beginners continued studying, a chi-square test did not reveal a significant difference between the retention rates of the two groups, $c^2(1, N = 170) = .99$, $p = .319$. 64.2% (77) of true beginners and 69% (29) of false beginners from the fall semester of 2011 continued studying Japanese during the spring semester of 2012. Again, a chi-square test revealed no significant difference between the retention rates of the two groups, $c^2(2, N = 162) = .33$, $p = .567$, a result consistent with the results of the previous year. 55.6% (69) of true beginners and 64% (32) of false beginners from the fall semester of 2012 continued studying during the spring of 2013. A chi-square test once again did not reveal a significant difference between the retention rates of the two groups, $c^2(2, N = 179) = 3.89$, $p = .143$.

Table 8: Number and Percentage of Students Who Continued Studying the Following Semester

2010	No	Yes	Total	*P (Chi-square)*
TB	37 (32.5%)	77 (67.5%)	114 (100%)	.319
FB	14 (25.0%)	42 (75.0%)	56 (100%)	
Total	51 (23.6%)	119 (76.4%)	170 (100%)	
2011				
TB	43 (35.8%)	77 (64.2%)	120 (100%)	.567
FB	13 (31.0%)	29 (69.0%)	42 (100%)	
Total	56 (23.6%)	106 (76.4%)	162 (100%)	
2012				
TB	55 (44.4%)	69 (55.6%)	124 (100%)	.143
FB	18 (36.0%)	32 (64.0%)	50 (100%)	
Total	73 (42.0%)	101 (58.0%)	174 (100%)	

In sum, no significant difference was observed between the final grades or retention rates of true and false beginners throughout the three-year study, although the mean average final grade of true beginners was slightly higher than the mean average final grade of false beginners throughout the study. Both findings are at odds with Frantzen & Magnan's study, which found that false beginners had significantly higher final grades than true beginners and that significantly more true beginners than false beginners intended on continuing their foreign language studies.

4.4 Results and Analysis of Interviews

Table 9 lays out the students' responses to the three questions articulated in section 3.2.2. Once again, A, B, C, and D were true beginners and E, F, G, and H were false beginners.

Student A expressed a great deal of anxiety about her experience in her first semester Japanese class. She said that it was extremely stressful being in a class where many of her classmates had already studied Japanese in high school. She felt especially nervous at the beginning of the semester when she had difficulty memorizing *kana* characters. However, she said that her instructor controlled the classroom environment fairly well, which helped her to feel less anxious. By contrast, student B said that the false beginners did not bother her and actually increased her motivation to learn Japanese because she wanted to "catch

up" with them. Both students C and D stated that false beginners bothered them a little; however, student C felt that his teacher helped him to feel more at ease by creating a comfortable classroom atmosphere.

Students F and G both stated that they felt quite bored during the first four weeks of the semester during which *hiragana* and *katakana* writing and basic grammar points are introduced. Student G felt frustrated that his classmates could not read hiragana; he said, "some students slow all of us down in class." However, students E and H said they enjoyed the lessons that introduced *kana* writing; H also felt that the *kana* lessons were quite useful to him in that they helped to refresh his memory. As in Fukai's study, the interviews in the present study indicated two things: first, that while the presence of false beginners makes some true beginners anxious, it also motives some true beginners to study harder and, second, that instructors can control the classroom in ways that reduce the anxiety of true beginners.

Table 9: Interview Results

		True Beginners				False Beginners			
Student		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Should true and false beginners be in separate classrooms?		✓	×	?	?	×	✓	✓	×
What made you feel less anxious?	Atmosphere of the class	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Good instructors	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Background in the language	NA	NA	NA	NA	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Previous study of another language	×	✓	▪	▪	✓	NA	NA	NA
What made you feel anxious or bored?	*Kana* learning	✓	✓	✓	✓	×	×	×	×
	Speaking the language in class	✓	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
	Oral exams	✓	×	✓	✓	×	✓	✓	✓
	True beginners	×	×	×	×	▪	✓	✓	▪
	False beginners	✓	×	✓	✓	×	✓	×	✓

Yes=✓, No=×, Neither Yes nor No= ▪, maybe=? NA=Not applicable

5. Implications, Limitations, and Further Research

Previous studies have shown that true beginner foreign language students tend to be much more anxious than false beginner foreign language students. Data from the current three-year study of Japanese language students supports such research. Although there was no significant difference between the final grades and

retention rates of true and false beginners and although neither group of beginners was exceptionally anxious, true beginners were significantly more anxious than false beginners. One implication of this finding is that postsecondary Japanese language instructors need to be aware of what typically causes and how to reduce the anxiety of each type of beginner.

All the true beginners who were interviewed expressed how challenging it was to master *kana* writing at the beginning of the semester in a class where about a half of their classmates already knew how to write it. As Sammy (1994) has also pointed out, *kana* learning does seem to be one of the main sources of FLA for true beginner Japanese language students, and further research is needed to determine whether this is the case for beginning students of character-based foreign languages in general. Instructors can alleviate such anxiety by informing students at the beginning of the semester that they are aware of differences in their foreign language backgrounds (Bailey et al. 2000) and that once they master *kana* writing (which they will eventually) their confidence will be bolstered. With respect to false beginners, instructors should caution them about becoming complacent and developing poor study habits. Openly discussing FLA with both groups of beginners may also help to reduce anxiety among true beginners, increase sensitivity among false beginners about true beginner anxiety, and, in general, improve the classroom dynamic between the two groups.

However, another implication of the study is that there may not be an overwhelming need to separate true beginner and false beginner Japanese language students given that there was not a significant difference between the final course grades and the retention rates of the two groups of beginners, that neither experienced a high level of anxiety, that the primary cause of the higher anxiety of true beginners may not be the presence of false beginners, and that the qualitative data did not indicate a strong preference among either group to have separate sections for true and false beginners.

The study has three main limitations. First, the qualitative portion of the study (i.e., the interviews) consisted of only eight students all of whom completed

first semester Japanese during the same academic term. A larger number of students need to be interviewed to determine if the study's findings were representative of the views of true beginner and false beginner Japanese language students.

Although the study was not primarily concerned with investigating the advantages and disadvantages of advanced beginner Japanese language courses, a second limitation of the study is that data was collected from only one advanced beginner class. The students in the advanced beginner class were significantly more anxious than the false beginners in the first semester class (see Table 1). They also received lower final grades than both the true and false beginners in the first semester class (see Table 7). It is unclear why this was the case since only the most advanced of the students in question were placed into the advanced beginner course and, with the exception of the basic writing system and some very fundamental grammar, the same material was covered in both courses. Thus, additional research is needed to determine whether such beginning level Japanese language students really benefit from advanced beginner courses.

The third main limitation relates to the question of what influence cultural and linguistic background has on the retention, course performance, and anxiety level of true and false beginner Japanese language students. In particular, is there a difference on these issues among students who are native speakers of non-Indo-European, character-based languages and students who are not? Recall that Frantzen & Magan's study of French and Spanish language students not only yielded different results than the present study regarding final course grades and retention, but also consisted of a much higher percentage of native English speakers than the present study. Ninety percent of the participants in their study were native English speakers. Approximately 50% of the participants in the present study were native English speakers while close to 50% were native Chinese or Korean speakers.

With the exception of true beginner native Korean speakers in 2011, both true and false beginner native Chinese and Korean speakers had higher mean

average final grades than true and false beginner native English speakers throughout the study.[1] While this finding suggests that being a native Chinese or Korean speaker may provide an advantage with respect to performance (when compared to native English speakers) in beginning Japanese courses, additional research is needed to confirm this interpretation of the data and, if confirmed, to determine more precisely what the basis of the advantage is.

Although the study's findings indicate a correspondence between native language and final course grades, they do not indicate a correspondence between native language and retention.[2] Moreover, due to classroom time constraints and the extensiveness of the FLCAS a question asking participants to identify their native language was not included in the survey. Hence, a third limitation of the study is that it did not track the relationship between native language and anxiety level. Given that it neither tracked this relationship nor showed a relationship between native language and retention, further research is also needed to determine how linguistic and cultural background affect the anxiety levels and retention of true and false beginner Japanese language students.

Notes

1.   In 2010 the mean average final grades of true beginner native Chinese, Korean, and English speakers were 3.6, 3.22, and 3.09, respectively. For false beginners, the final grades were 3.26, 3.71, and 3.08, respectively. In 2011, the mean final grades of true beginner native Chinese, Korean, and English speakers were 3.41, 2.93, and 3.15. For false beginners, the final grades were 3.72, 3.45, and 2.92, respectively. In 2012 the mean average final grades of true beginner native Chinese, Korean, and English speakers were 3.28, 3.12, and 2.49, respectively. The final grades of the false beginners were 3.33, 3.62, and 2.73.

2.   Native Chinese speakers, both true and false beginners, had the highest retention rate in 2010 while native English speakers, both true and false beginners, had the highest retention rate in 2011. In 2012 true beginner native

Chinese speakers had a higher retention rate than true beginner native English speakers (64.4% to 51.11%), but false beginner native English speakers had a higher retention rate than false beginner native Chinese speakers (68.5% to 57.14%). Native Korean speakers had the lowest retention rate throughout the study because of the large number of Korean students who take a leave of absence each year to serve in the military.

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