

Age and Gender on Foreign Language Anxiety: A Case of Junior High School English Learners in Japan

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Abstract

This paper investigates foreign language anxiety from the perspective of an under-represented group, junior high school learners, in foreign language anxiety research in Japan. Language anxiety research is first summarized leading into the use of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale on young learners while looking at age and gender as the moderating variable of this study. The results of this support previous research on the topic of age and gender in relation to foreign language classroom anxiety. The learners in this study did not have higher levels of anxiety compared to participants in other studies. Partially significant results were found in relations to language anxiety differences between the male and female groups. This study highlights the ongoing research on language anxiety and calls for a need for awareness in all contexts of language classrooms.

Keywords

Foreign Language Anxiety, FLCAS, Gender, Age, Affective Factors, Junior High School

Introduction

Anxiety has been described as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986, p. 125). Anxiety in language learning developed out of the field of psychology and made its way into the field of applied linguistics in the 1970s. With the field of psychology crossing over into applied linguistics, not only was anxiety introduced, other affective factors such as motivation and confidence were also introduced.

In the initial stages of anxiety research, anxiety

was separated into two types, state and trait types of anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). Trait anxiety is related to our personalities. This type of anxiety is seen in people who are frequently anxious or show signs of anxiousness in a variety of situations (Horwitz, 2001). On the other hand, state anxiety is identified as anxiousness at one particular time, due to a response to an event that is happening at that time (Effiong, 2013). However, these are not the only two types of anxiety researchers have identified. Later in anxiety research, a new type of anxiety was identified as situation-specific anxiety. This is a multifaceted type of anxiety that is related to certain

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situations that frequently happens in the same kinds of situations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b; Zhang, 2013)

While speculation of anxiety affecting language learning was seen as early as the 1960's, it wasn't until later that research investigating these speculations took place. With these early studies, problems in methodology arose. Two major issues in early studies were that anxiety was not defined narrowly enough in many of the studies and that methods of measuring anxiety were lacking (Horwitz, 2001). Scovel stated that due to this "the research into the relationship of anxiety to foreign language learning has provided mixed and confusing results" (Scovel, 1978, p.132). This paper was influential on early studies of language anxiety because it highlighted the inconsistencies that were starting to form across different language anxiety research. Scovel commended two studies, Chastain (1975) and Kleinmann (1977), which he thought was doing research on anxiety correctly by separating types of anxiety and looking at specific kinds of anxiety closely, both debilitating and facilitating forms of anxiety. The studies at this time looked at anxiety in a broader perspective instead of focusing more on closer details that is seen commonly today.

From the time of Scovel's observations on anxiety research, various measurements were created to address his conclusion that language anxiety needs to be both clearly defined and measured independently. However, it wasn't until Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) study and development of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, FLCAS, that foreign language anxiety research started to develop and become an increasingly more important topic in applied linguistic research. One idea Horwitz et al. (1986) put forward was to examine anxiety specifically focusing on three main characteristics: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear

of negative evaluation. They developed this scale to address their idea that certain situation-specific anxiety issues with learning foreign languages start in the classroom. This scale was developed to in regards to these observations and examine these in-classroom experiences. These ideas were very influential to the direction of language anxiety research.

Though the Horwitz study was important to language anxiety, the main characteristics which they contributed to Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) were not without critics. Due to the relative fresh nature of language research and direction that was provided, researchers started to look at these ideas closely. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) found issue with the classification of test anxiety as a type of FLA. They considered test anxiety to be a general anxiety outside of language use. Additionally, Aida (1994) found similar findings when examining correlations between FLCAS questions. However, these studies did add validation to the other classifications of FLA that Horwitz et al. put forward.

Over the years, there have been various studies on the impact of foreign language anxiety on different factors of language learning. Horwitz (2001) showcased a variety of studies that were important to language anxiety studies and its effects on a variety of other language learning factors. Many of these studies offered a look at the negative effects of language anxiety on language performance (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Zhang, 2013). Results showing the negative impacts on performance can be seen among various foreign language learning contexts (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Park & Lee, 2005; Pyun et al., 2014; Saito & Samimy, 1996).

Learner Age and Language Anxiety

Recent studies by Dewaele (2007) have shown that age may be a moderating variable of language anxiety. Studies have shown that older learners reported higher levels of anxiety. However, these findings were significant in the learners' L3 and only when speaking with strangers. Other findings related to L2 and other situation-specific forms of language anxiety were nonsignificant (Dewaele 2007). On the contrary, Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008) found that communication apprehension and foreign language anxiety are correlated to learners' age. They found that older learners suffered less anxiety in situations requiring foreign language communication. On the contrary, some studies have shown no relationship between foreign language anxiety and learner age (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Saito and Samimy, 1996).

Gender and Language Anxiety

One factor observed in language learning deals with the learners and their background. In one way, gender has often been observed in relation to performance and affective factors. In relation to anxiety, inconsistent results have been observed when examining gender. Some researchers have found that gender is significantly tied to anxiety (Kitano, 2001; Koul et al., 2009; Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2013; Park & French, 2013), on the contrary, other researchers have shown that there is no relation between anxiety and gender (Aida, 1994; Kimura 2008; Matsuda & Gobel 2004). Research on this topic seems to be relatively inconclusive in regards to overall anxiety.

However, Yashima et al. (2009) found that gender was significant to anxiety only partially. The results of this study showed only a few questions having significant differences, however the overall results were insignificant. Dewaele, Petrides, &

Furnham (2008) found that female language learners only had higher levels of anxiety when they were speaking in public. In addition, Cheng and Erben (2012) suggests that some anxiety related to gender might be due to cultural context. This could be one reason why research has yielded inconsistent results (Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2013). Yan and Horwitz (2008) saw participants relating gender to language aptitude and learning strategies that may also affect anxiety in some ways. Overall, there seems to be inconclusive results regarding gender as a variable of anxiety.

Research Aims

This study aimed at observing anxiety in the context of young learners in a school setting. By comparing the results of previous popular studies on the topic of foreign language classroom anxiety, this study sets out to see if young learners have overall lower levels of anxiety. There is a debate on whether gender is a factor in language anxiety with researchers being divided on the issue. Relating to the controversy concerning gender and anxiety, another aim of this study is to look at gender as a moderating variable and to determine if gender can indeed determine anxiety in Japanese junior high school English learners.

- 1) Do junior high school aged English learners in Japan suffer from higher anxiety than participants in other studies?
- 2) How does gender factor into foreign language classroom anxiety in junior high aged learners?

Participants

The participants consisted of junior high school students (49 males and 44 female; n= 93) in their third year of junior high school in suburban/rural Japan. The school is a fairly large public junior high school in its city, having nearly 750 students

attending making it the second largest of eight schools in this city. The participants are all aged 14-15 years old. All learners have received compulsory English education for 4 years in a school setting prior to this study, two years in elementary school and two years in junior high school, in their first and second years.

The participants were from three intact classes, classes whose members do not change from day to day, who shared the same English teacher and English curriculum. Due to having the same teacher, the materials and classroom practices were similar throughout each class. The classes were observed prior to the experimental session to check for any irregular problems with classroom atmosphere that may greatly affect the results of the study. The teacher's classes were chosen due to having little variance between classroom management and instruction during English lessons. The participants of this study were chosen due to being an underrepresented demographic in anxiety studies, especially those in Japan.

Materials: Anxiety Measurement

This study implemented a modified version of the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986). The FLCAS was chosen due to its popularity in foreign language anxiety research and due to its focus on oral communication. However, due to length and concerns of the appropriateness with younger learners, a shortened version from Aida (1994) was implemented instead. One additional question was excluded from the modified FLCAS due to its similarities to another question and the need to condense the questionnaire even further to accommodate time. Due to this, the scale used was a 26 question scale.

The Japanese translation used in this study was taken from Yashima et al. (2009) and further

modified using the help from native Japanese speakers, teachers, and school administrators to increase comprehensibility for the participants. Some changes included changing "foreign language" to "English" and changing the loanword "class" to the Japanese equivalent. Regardless of the omissions and changes, the version of the FLCAS used in this study was found to be very reliable, having a Cronbach Alpha of $\alpha=0.92$. The modified Japanese version of the FLCAS was shown to be statistically highly reliable. The FLCAS used in this study showed similar reliability scores as other FLCAS questionnaires used in previous studies of English learners in Japan (Effiong, 2013; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Saito & Iida, 2015; Yashima et al., 2009).

Method

The lesson consisted of four main components: a translation activity, a repeat-after-me exercise, a reading comprehension worksheet based off the contents of the New Horizon 3 (2016) textbook, and the modified FLCAS. The first activity was a reading translation activity that was designed by the Japanese teacher. Following this, the learners did a repeat-after-me reading activity with the researcher, also an assistant English teacher. After, the learners did a reading comprehension worksheet related to the textbook pages. Finally, the learners completed the FLCAS. The learners were allowed around ten minutes to complete this survey. The tasks were designed to represent a typical lesson for the learners as to not elicit additional anxiety.

The reading translation activity was created by the Japanese English teacher using lines of text from the textbook. This activity and contents were familiar to the students from previous lessons. One learner read the Japanese text while the other translated what was said into English

(Appendix A). Next, the learners repeated after the native English teacher reading from the textbook, a common exercise in Japanese English classrooms. Then the learners completed a reading comprehension worksheet created by the Japanese English teacher which consisted of content from the textbook. Finally, the learners completed the FLCAS (Appendix B). They were allotted about ten minutes to do so which was found to be sufficient time for this version of the FLCAS. The tasks were not designed for any specific purpose outside of the regular pedagogic practices of the Japanese English teacher. This class followed a normal flow common to this specific teacher’s lessons. The researcher was present and participating during the lesson as the native English teacher. Since the learners are accustomed to the researcher, there were no obvious issues with obtrusiveness during this lesson and data collection session.

Data Collection and Analysis

Table 1 shows the overall means of this FLCAS compared to those of previous anxiety research

using a full FLCAS. As we can see in this chart, anxiety from the participants of this study were slightly less than in previous studies. In cases of American students learning Spanish and Japanese (Horwitz et al., 1986; Aida, 1994), there was less of a discrepancy to this study. However, looking at Japanese student learning English (Effiong, 2013; Saito & Iida, 2015; Yashima et al., 2009), a much more substantial difference can be seen. Comparing this study to previous studies, anxiety levels were not observed in junior high school learners.

In Table 2, overall mean and total values from the FLCAS can be seen between the two participant groups. In terms of gender as a moderating variable for this study, while female learners did exhibit a larger degree of anxiety than male learners, it was not found to be significant in this study. However, when looking at individual questions from the FLCAS, significant differences were discovered. Table 3 shows the questions in which significant findings were seen.

In this study, there were three significant findings comparing males and females on independent

Table 1. Overall Mean Scores of FLCAS Studies

Study	Country - FL	Mean FLCAS
Horwitz et al. (1986)	USA - Spanish	2.90
Aida (1994)	USA - Japanese	2.94
Yashima et al. (2009)	Japan - English	3.05
Effiong (2013)	Japan - English	3.06
Saito and Iida (2015)	Japan – English	3.05
This study	Japan – English	2.87

Table 2. Relationship Between Gender and Overall Anxiety “C-t-test

	Male			Female			Total			Sig.
	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	
MEAN	2.80	49	.682	2.95	44	.651	2.87	93	.668	.282
Total	72.78	49	17.738	76.68	44	16.937	74.62	93	17.382	.282

question results. These significant differences were found on Q4 ($p=.031$), Q7 ($p=.014$), Q11($p=.012$), Q16 ($p=.006$), and Q11 ($p=.019$) of the modified FLCAS. Male learners had higher levels of anxiety on measure Q4, while female learners had higher levels on anxiety for Q7, Q11, Q16, and Q26. As can be seen in the overall means, the significant individual measures reflect the insignificant overall higher anxiety levels of female learners.

Discussion

As can be seen in Table 1, anxiety means scores across multiple studies showed that junior high school aged Japanese English learners had a similar, if not lower, score than other participant groups, especially other studies on Japanese English

learners. These findings are in line with those from which found older learners often suffered from higher levels of anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). Due to the learners' age, they had a relatively lower anxiety score than learners in other studies. It is possible that, since beginning their foreign language study at a young age, the learners in this study had lower levels of anxiety than studies on other demographics.

In regards to the research question about gender as a moderating variable, there were no significant findings in relations to the overall FLCAS and gender in terms of foreign language classroom anxiety. These findings support the studies that found gender to have no significant relations to overall anxiety (Aida, 1994; Kimura, 2008; Matsuda & Gobel,

Table 3 Relationship Between Gender and Independent FLCAS Questions "C-t-test

		Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Q4	Between Groups	5.721	5.721	4.785	.031
	Within Groups	108.795	1.196		
	Total	114.516			
Q7	Between Groups	9.972	9.972	6.227	.014
	Within Groups	145.727	1.601		
	Total	155.699			
Q11	Between Groups	9.443	9.443	6.497	.012
	Within Groups	132.256	1.453		
	Total	141.699			
Q16	Between Groups	11.614	11.614	7.818	.006
	Within Groups	135.182	1.486		
	Total	146.796			
Q26	Between Groups	9.775	9.775	5.696	.019
	Within Groups	156.182	1.716		
	Total	165.957			

Q4: It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.

Q7: I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.

Q11: It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.

Q16: I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.

Q26: I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

2004). However, when looking closer, there were significant findings over multiple individual survey questions. The findings of this study pertaining to partially significant results support those from Yashima et al. (2008). Looking at the individual questions, the majority of these significant findings showed female learners having higher anxiety. In particular, these results using Aida's (1994) classification of FLCAS questions, the male learners reported higher anxiety when it came to the question pertaining to negative attitudes toward English classes. On the other hand, the results from female learners showed that they reported higher levels of anxiety with regards to speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. These findings give support to Dewale et al. (2008) which suggests that female learners have higher level of anxiety when speaking in public. While there were no overall significant findings, four of the five significant individual questions were significantly higher for female learners. There were much higher levels of anxiety for female learners in terms of their ability in relation to their peers.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study set out to look at the complex issues of anxiety based on gender in classrooms of younger learners. The findings show similarities to some

previous studies as well as splitting the yes and no debate of whether significant findings can be seen between male and female learners. The findings also support the notion that younger learners exhibit less anxiety in foreign language classrooms than some of the other studies. Some things to note are that the FLCAS might not be the most suitable measurement tool for younger learners. Quite a few of the FLCAS came back incomplete and could not be used during analysis. In the future, it might be necessary to create a shorter measurement tool for younger learners, even shorter than the modified FLCAS used in this study.

As affective factor continues to expand while, at the same time, broadening its scope, researchers will continue to learn more about FLA. The words of Scovel still ring true forty years later. The more we learn about language learning, the more complex identifying different variables becomes. In this way, a task of continuing to identify the many variables related to language learning, and in turn language anxiety, becomes ever more important. One thing most researchers can agree on is that lessening anxiety in the classroom is important to facilitate language learning. Educators should consider their classroom practices to minimize anxiety factors and create a classroom environment that promotes learner inclusion.

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Appendix A: Japanese – English Translation Activity

○ 3 年 英 語 ハ ッ ピ ー チ ョ ッ ク !!Happy Check!!

3 年 () 組 () 番 名 前 ()

	日 本 語	英 語	読 み 0	書 き 0	読 み 0	書 き 0	読 み 0	書 き 0	
P 7	1 この絵画は愛されています / 多くの人々によって。	This painting is loved / by many people.							
	2 奈良は訪れられています / 多くの学生達によって。	Nara is visited / by many students.							
	3 これらの本は読まれています / 世界中で。	These books are read / around the world.							
	4 風呂敷は使われています / 多くの方法で。	A furoshiki is used / in many ways.							
	5 このスポーツは行われます。 / 2チームで	This sport is played / by two teams.							
	6 選手達はふつうは使うことができません。(99対50)手を	Players usually can't use / thier hands.							
	7 これらのかわいい動物は愛されています / 多くの人に。	These cute animals are loved / by many people.							
	8 それらは見つけれず / オーストラリアで。	They are found / in Australia.							
	9 日本語は話されます。 / 日本で。	Japanese is spoken / in Japan.							
	10 英語は話されています / アメリカで。	English is spoken / in the United States.							
	11 ポルトガル語は話されています / ブラジルで。	Portuguese is spoken / in Brazil.							
	12 英語は話されています。 / インドでも。	English is spoken / also in India.							
	13 英語とフランス語の両方が / カナダで話されています。	Both English and French / are spoken in Canada.							
P 8	14 この写真は描かれたのですか / 同じ人によって。	Was this picture also painted / by the same person?							
	15 はい、そうでした (描かれました)。	Yes, it was.							
	16 いいえ、違います (描かれませんでした)。	No, it wasn't.							
	17 その城は建てられましたか / 徳川家康によって。	Was the castle built / by Tokugawa Ieyasu?							
	18 その本は書かれましたか / 宮沢賢治によって。	Was the book written / by Miyazawa Kenji?							
	19 それは描かれました / 1887年に。	It was painted / in eighteen eighty seven.							
	20 そうなんですね。(わかりました。)	I see.							
	21 その当時、 / 日本の文化は人気でした / ヨーロッパで。	At that time, / Japanese culture was popular / in Europe.							
	22 ほんとうですか?	Really?							
	23 今はどうですか。	How about now?							
	24 あなたのお気に入りの本はどうですか。	How about your favorite book?							
	25 私にあなたのお気に入りの本について教えてください。	Please tell me about your favorite book.							
	26 私はあなたのお気に入りの本について知りたいです。	I want to know about your favorite book.							
	27 どこで / このかばんは作られましたか。	Where / was this bag made?							
	28 いつ / この車は作られましたか。	When / was this car made?							
	P 10	29 日本のマンガとアニメのキャラクターは / 愛されています。多くの国々で	Japanese manga and anime characters / are loved in many countries.						
		30 ドラえもんは / ひとつのよい例	Doraemon is / one good example.						
31 2012年に、		In twenty twelve,							
32 彼は与えられました / 特別な誕生日パーティーを / 香港と台湾で		he was given / special birthday parties in Hong Kong and Taiwan.							
33 たくさんのドラえもんファンが祝いました / 彼の100年「前」の誕生日を		Many Doraemon fans celebrated / his 100-year "before" birthday.							
34 別の人気のある例は / 日本のポップカルチャーの		Another popular example / of Japanese pop culture							
35 「かわいい」という言葉です。		is the word "kawaii".							
36 「かわいい」は現在日本の外でも使われています。		"Kawaii" is also used outside Japan now.							
37 多くの人は引きつけられています / かわいい文化によって / ような / ハローキティのグッズや / 他の独特なデザイン		A lot of people are attracted / by kawaii culture such as / Hello Kitty goods and / other unique designs.							

Age and Gender on Foreign Language Anxiety

Appendix B: Japanese FLCAS by Yashima et al. 2009 and modified by the researcher

1 - とてもそう思う 2 - そう思う 3 - どちらでもない 4 - そう思わない 5 - 全くそう思わない

1	英語の授業で話すとき自信がもてない。	1	2	3	4	5
2	英語の授業で当てられると思うと体が震える。	1	2	3	4	5
3	英語の授業で先生の言っていることが理解できないととても不安だ。	1	2	3	4	5
4	もっと英語の授業があってもよいと思っている。	1	2	3	4	5
5	他の生徒の方が自分よりよくできていると思っている。	1	2	3	4	5
6	英語の授業中のテストではだいたい落ち着いている。	1	2	3	4	5
7	英語の授業で準備なしに話さないといけない時、パニックになる。	1	2	3	4	5
8	英語の授業で上手く出来なかった時、成績への影響が心配だ。	1	2	3	4	5
9	英語の授業で動揺する人の気持ちがわからない。	1	2	3	4	5
10	英語の授業では、緊張のあまり、知ってたことも忘れてしまうときがある。	1	2	3	4	5
11	英語の授業で自分からすすんで答えるのは恥ずかしい。	1	2	3	4	5
12	英語をネイティブスピーカーと話すとき緊張しない。	1	2	3	4	5
13	英語の授業の予習を十分にしているにもかかわらず心配になる。	1	2	3	4	5
14	よく英語の授業を休みたくなる。	1	2	3	4	5
15	英語の授業で話すのに自信がある。	1	2	3	4	5
16	英語の授業で当たりそうになると胸がどきどきする。	1	2	3	4	5
17	英語の授業の予習をよくしないといけないというプレッシャーは感じない。	1	2	3	4	5
18	常に他の学生の方が英語で話すのが上手だと感じている。	1	2	3	4	5
19	他の学生の前で英語を話すとき自意識がとても高くなる。	1	2	3	4	5
20	英語の授業は進むのが速いのでついていけるかどうか心配である。	1	2	3	4	5
21	他の科目よりも英語の授業の方が緊張する。	1	2	3	4	5
22	英語の授業で話すとき緊張したり混乱したりする。	1	2	3	4	5
23	先生の言うことがすべて理解できないと不安になる。	1	2	3	4	5
24	私が英語を話すとき他の学生が笑うのではないかと思う。	1	2	3	4	5
25	ネイティブスピーカーに会うときおそろりリラックスしてられると思う。	1	2	3	4	5
26	先生に前もって準備していなかった質問をされる時緊張する。	1	2	3	4	5

Modified FLCAS adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986)

1 Strongly agree 2 Agree 3 Neither agree nor disagree 4 Disagree 5 Strongly disagree

1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	1	2	3	4	5
2	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	1	2	3	4	5
3	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
4	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	1	2	3	4	5
10	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	1	2	3	4	5
11	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I often feel like not going to my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
15	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class	1	2	3	4	5
16	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	1	2	3	4	5
17	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	1	2	3	4	5
18	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	1	2	3	4	5
19	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	1	2	3	4	5
21	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	1	2	3	4	5
23	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
25	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	1	2	3	4	5