

OVERCOMING THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY

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Speaking skills are among the key milestones in learning Japanese and, in our opinion, constitute one of the most challenging aspects of language acquisition. It is well known that students have always been prone to language anxiety. Nowadays, however, teachers also have to make efforts to alleviate general anxiety and address the unstable psycho-emotional state of students who are under constant pressure caused by the war.

The language barrier and nervousness underlie speaking anxiety, which is a rather specific reaction that occurs when communicating in a foreign language. This phenomenon has been studied and researched for a considerable period of time, and it has been demonstrated that speaking anxiety is an independent factor that can impede the effective acquisition of educational material even among students with a high level of language proficiency [1, p. 145].

The concept proposed by researchers E. Horwitz, M. Horwitz, and J. Cope currently serves as the basis for subsequent research on language anxiety among students. They identified three main components that contribute to language anxiety, namely: fear of speaking a foreign language, fear of negative evaluation by peers and the teacher, and fear of failing to receive a positive assessment during an examination or evaluation [2, p. 37].

It should also be noted that an unfavorable learning environment and insufficient confidence in one's Japanese language proficiency can also be among the causes of anxiety [3, p. 26].

There is an assumption that anxiety is connected with a particular context [4, p. 107]. Studies have shown that students experience fear when they do not understand what the teacher is saying in Japanese, when they are required to express their own opinion without prior preparation, and when they are concerned that someone else knows more than they do and compare themselves with others [3, pp. 33–35].

We agree that speaking skills can cause anxiety among participants in the educational process because they require mastery of grammatical material, the necessary vocabulary, as well as basic knowledge of linguistic and cultural norms [4, p. 106].

According to current research, among students learning Japanese, speaking anxiety is higher among those at intermediate and advanced levels of language proficiency. In contrast, anxiety among students at the beginner level of Japanese proficiency is generally not considered to be high [4, pp. 113–114].

It has been demonstrated that the unobtrusive use of digital elements can reduce anxiety levels [2, p. 37].

Thus, we have concluded that individual factors also play a significant role. Clearly, speaking anxiety is closely intertwined with psychology, language pedagogy, and the digitalization of education. The student's emotional state is of paramount importance.

N. Sobol is convinced that foreign language learning can have a positive impact on the psycho-emotional state of a student [5, p. 1146]. I. Brovarska believes that the communicative-cognitive approach to language teaching provides a means for an individual to independently formulate and freely express thoughts in a foreign language [6, p. 91].

In our opinion, it is appropriate to emphasize here that the teacher's task is to create the most comfortable learning environment possible, relieving students of pressure and finding ways to transform learning into a process that increases their motivation and engagement.

Although the fear of making mistakes, the inability to express one's own opinion in a foreign language appropriately, and, more generally, apprehension about understanding and producing foreign-language speech can cause anxiety [7, p. 945], we believe that practical communication in Japanese is an urgent necessity. If vocabulary and grammatical material are not practiced through live communication, the knowledge acquired remains at the level of theoretical knowledge, and consequently, the educational process cannot be considered fully effective. Naturally, this requires effort on the part of both teachers and students; however, the process should begin with simple Japanese that is understandable to every participant [一般財団法人海外産業人材育成協会, 2012–2026]. A reliable way to improve Japanese communication skills is through direct interaction, during which learners gradually become accustomed to the foreign language and their fear of speaking gradually diminishes.

A teacher should not only teach the language but also help students cope with anxiety and deal with situations that trigger it [9, p. 34].

Furthermore, it is important to find ways to convince students that practical application, even of the simplest language elements, contributes to gradual improvement. Moreover, speaking in context and in specific situations promotes better understanding.

Making mistakes is natural and even appropriate in the learning process. Asking for clarification and requesting repetition are important components of language learning. Speaking is the essential goal, even when mistakes are made. The challenge for a Japanese language teacher is to change students' perceptions of their own incompetence in speaking.

Teachers should take care to ensure the comfortable psycho-emotional well-being of students and give them an opportunity to feel that they are an important component of the overall communication process. Students should be encouraged to recognize that they are becoming part of a broad community of intercultural communicators. By learning such an unusual and fascinating language as Japanese, they can communicate their thoughts not only in their homeland but also with people in distant Japan.

Students should be encouraged to actively participate in online meetings with Japanese students.

The security situation remains unstable; therefore, teachers should make every effort to ensure that students can immerse themselves in the learning process during classes and temporarily distance themselves from distracting thoughts, directing all their knowledge and skills toward expressing themselves effectively in Japanese.

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