Researching the Relationship of Learner Emotion to Language Learning: Issues and Challenges

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In this paper, I investigate the emotional dimension of language learning of students in a discussion class that I taught at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. The Center for English Discussion Class at Rikkyo University provides its first-year undergraduates with a weekly 90-minute English discussion course comprised of seven to nine students per class. While instructing these discussion classes, I observed that students expressed a range of emotion and reacted differently within similar classroom circumstances. This led me to become increasingly curious about how emotion interacts with the process of language learning. In particular, I wondered what we could learn about language learning and teaching by attempting to interpret learner emotion in context. From these questions I developed this study to better understand how emotion affects the processes and outcomes of language learning. This paper also examines the challenges and issues I faced when designing and interpreting a qualitative research study on emotion in the classroom. In the paper, I first review previous and current understandings of emotion in the SLA literature. Then, I document the development and process of this research project, which was primarily conducted through student written reflections on in-class language learning in a weekly 90-minute language class over the period of one semester. Finally, I present interpretations of learner emotion as it relates to the student experience of language learning in the classroom.

本稿では、立教大学英語ディスカッションクラスにおける、学生の言語学習に対する感情的側面について考察する。立教大学英語ディスカッションセンターでは、一年生を対象に一コマ90分のディスカッションクラスを週1回提供している。1クラス7〜9名で構成され、授業中、学生が様々な感情を表現し、同じクラス中でも学生一人ひとりが異なる反応を示した。筆者は、これらの反応を観察し、言語学習と感情の関連性について深く興味を持つようになった。特に、学習者の感情を理解することにより、感情がどのように言語学習の過程と結果に影響を与えるかということをより深く理解するために本研究を行った。本稿では、筆者が第二言語クラスにおける感情についての質的研究を行う際の問題点を明らかにする。まず初めに、第二言語習得における感情についての先行研究を概観し、その後で学生が一学期間毎週記録した内省をもとに行った本プロジェクトについて記す。最後に、学生が言語学習を通して抱く感情について考察する。

Keywords

learner emotion, narratives, reflexivity, qualitative research

キーワード

学習者の感情、ナラティブ、再帰性、質的研究

I t seems quite intuitive that learning a second language involves our emotional selves. Yet, until quite recently, in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), emotions have often been "the elephant in the room—poorly studied, poorly understood, seen as inferior to rational thought" (Swain, 2013, p. 205). While the role of emotional affect in language learning is becoming increasingly recognized, emotion was an underrepresented area of research in SLA in the past (Swain, 2013). At its beginnings, SLA made use of scholarship from linguistics and psychology that positioned the field in a predominantly cognitive direction, with comparatively little regard for research done in other areas (Douglas Fir Group, 2016). In recent years, SLA scholars and researchers (e.g., Zemblyas, 2005; Benesch, 2012, 2017; Swain, 2013; Douglas Fir Group, 2016) have attempted to rectify this theoretical and research gap in SLA scholarship, drawing on interdisciplinary knowledge from the social sciences, or neuroscience. Increasingly, calls are being made to further incorporate more research on emotion so

that second language learning can be better investigated across various contexts in which it takes place (e.g., Imai, 2010; Swain, 2013; Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

This case study examines how emotion may affect the processes and outcomes of language learning in the classroom. In addition, it explores the challenges that I faced when researching learner emotion in the classroom. I begin by explaining how I became interested in the topic of emotion in the language learning process, and the research questions I have chosen for this study. I then review some depictions of emotion that are characteristic of mainstream scholarly literature in SLA—depictions that have been criticized for misapprehending how emotion affects language learning (see Benesch, 2012; Swain, 2013). In addition, I outline other more recent theoretical understandings of emotion in SLA and describe how social theories of emotions can illuminate the connections between emotional experience and identity and investment in second language learning. While there remains some disagreement on theoretical approaches to emotions, research on emotion in SLA can be enriched through utilizing understandings from multiple disciplines—insights from both recent neurocognitive research, and social theories of emotions that recognize how they are discursively constructed and interact within dynamic, multi-layered social contexts. I then move on to discuss the reflective research approach that I took to investigate learner emotion in my own classroom. Finally, I examine and interpret the emotional expressions that were captured in the students' own written self-reflections, and interpret what these experiences can convey about the experiential side of language learning in the classroom. I conclude with discussing some possible limitations and review some of the study's implications and points for future research.

Thinking about Emotion in the Classroom

I became interested in the topic of learner emotion, and the classroom as a social space where emotions are expressed, withheld or repressed, through my observations of how the students in my classes each had their own personal and unique emotional reactions to a given task. At the time, I was teaching small seminars of English discussion for first-year Japanese undergraduate students in Tokyo. After several semesters of teaching this course, I had noticed that some students were better able to cope with the learning demands of the class than others, and I began to explore whether language learning outcomes of individual learners might be connected to a learner's emotional response (Gallagher, 2017). Any given individual learner's ability to handle the demands of interactive dialogue with others, and the discussion of difficult topics seemed at least partly contingent on elements such as emotional regulation and emotional awareness of others. These observations led me to want to better understand the students' perceptions of the class, and how they emotionally interpreted their own learning and involvement in the class. The study that will be described below is guided by two central concerns. First, how does emotion affect the processes and outcomes of language learning in the classroom? Second, what are the challenges and issues the researcher faced when designing and interpreting a qualitative research study on emotion in the classroom?

Emotion in SLA and the Value of Qualitative Research

Until relatively recently, emotion had been poorly represented in mainstream SLA scholarship, which was comprised of research mostly conducted with quantitative models. A classic example of this is Krashen's (1981) affective hypothesis, which only narrowly examined affect, and limited it to an appraisal of negative emotions like anxiety. Krashen's characterization of affect, and his cognitive tradition of research, arguably left a considerable legacy on how emotion was conceptualized in SLA (Swain, 2013). This can be seen in the proliferation of narrowly defined terms to deal with affective experience, which Pavlenko describes as "a

laundry list of decontextualized and oftentimes poorly defined socio-psychological constructs, such as attitudes, motivation, anxiety, self-esteem, empathy, risk-taking, and tolerance of ambiguity" (Pavlenko, 2005, p. 34). It had been pointed out by other researchers such as Imai (2010) that these limited circumscriptions of affect cannot adequately capture the richness and diversity of emotional experience, and the potential consequences this experiential dimension may have on language learning. Imai (2010) suggests that the influence of other emotions on L2 learning, such as joy, enjoyment, jealousy, surprise, pride, guilt, disgust, and sadness, have not been well-understood or explored in SLA research.

Despite this gap in research on emotion, there are few studies which describe how a range of emotional states affects language learning in the classroom (see Imai, 2010). In order to capture a wider range of emotion and its effects on the learner and learning, utilizing qualitative research methods is invaluable. Specifically, learner-focused research that utilizes a research methodology rich in description, such as narrative inquiry (see Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014), could help to remedy this gap in research on emotion, and deepen our understanding of learners. Through examining narrative accounts in context, researchers can begin to depict more accurately a richer and more complex understanding of emotion, and describe how these experiences might interact with the processes of language learning.

Understanding Language Learning Through Emotion

The Douglas Fir Group describes language learning as "an emotionally driven process at multiple levels of experience" (2016, p. 36). As classroom researchers, there are several arguments for how inquiry into emotion can help to better understand language learning. I will focus on two arguments that pertain to my study in this paper. In this section, I will first describe how researching emotion might help researchers better understand the decision-making and cognition of learners. Then I will discuss how such research can be used to explore the emotional-social space of the classroom.

Investigating emotion can inform us more intimately about learner cognition. Swain (2013) argues for a reappraisal of cognition in SLA that recognizes the centrality of emotion in all cognitive processes. Historically, emotion and cognition were deemed to be two separate, distinct processes—a legacy of Descartes, and the western philosophical traditions up through the Enlightenment (Damasio, 1994). Such traditional models of the mind that divide emotion and cognition have come to be regarded as incorrect (Swain, 2013). Swain points to recent research in neuroscience which suggests that emotions are "integral and inseparable" (2013, p. 193) aspects of cognition. This is crucially linked with research on language learning because often researched cognitive processes such as "thinking, knowing, attending, processing information, reasoning, problem-solving, and decision-making" (p. 196) are, in fact, conducted through a highly integrated emotional-cognitive brain. Swain argues for research into emotion through narratives where "the centrality of emotion and its connections to cognition becomes evident" (ibid.). In this way, narratives can illuminate the intersections of emotion, self-perception and decision-making for language learning researchers, for instance how students may make decisions situated in particular emotional states. Later in this paper, I evaluate how emotion might connect to student cognition.

Poststructuralist and social theories of emotion argue that emotion is a social phenomenon—culturally bound and constructed through language. Social perspectives on emotion can perhaps inform us about the complex dynamics in a classroom. SLA researchers (Zemblyas, 2005; Norton, 2013) have taken up poststructuralist approaches to develop emotional descriptions of the classroom and the learner's relationship to language learning and society. Poststructuralism conceives of the individual within her relationship to the social world with lan-

guage playing a central role in the social construction of an individual's identity and sense of self (Norton, 2013). Drawing on the work of feminist scholar Christine Weedon (1997), Norton describes how identities are constructed discursively: "language not only defines institutional practice but also serves to construct our sense of ourselves—our *subjectivity*" (2013, p. 4). Based on Foucauldian ideas of discourse and historical specificity, subjectivity is always "socially and historically embedded" (ibid.). In Zemblyas's (2005) work on teacher emotion, he describes how "genealogies" of emotion connect to a person's identity and these "trajectories of emotional experiences are positioned and position teachers to know and feel in certain ways" (p. 98). Zemblyas's description of teacher emotions in the classroom is useful in articulating how emotions can drive us to express or think in certain ways. In other words, behavior can be partly dictated through our social histories and emotional memories of emotion. In addition, he interprets the social space of the classroom as an emotionally interacting space, an unclear web of interactions and memories that may affect each individual differently. Finally, Zemblyas describes classrooms as being dictated by emotional rules, rules that are established by a given institution, and that affect how an individual may experience a classroom (2005). While Zemblyas's ideas about emotion in the classroom offer insight on how emotion functions between individuals, where learner and teacher emotion is located, expressed or withheld, they also suggest the value of researching emotion in order to understand the social context of the classroom. By situating emotion within its varied social context, social factors that might be influencing language learning can be better examined by researchers looking at individual classrooms.

Background and My Approach to This Study

This study is guided by two central concerns. First, how does emotion affect the processes and outcomes of language learning in the classroom? Second, what are the challenges and issues the researcher faced when designing and interpreting a qualitative research study on emotion in the classroom? I will first outline details about the research context, and then I will describe the particular approach I took in the study.

The participants in this study are eight students who I taught in one section of a year-long first-year undergraduate course at Rikkyo University in Tokyo. Each of these students had completed an average of six years of formal English training in junior and senior high schools and obtained a TOEIC score between 280 and 480 by the start of the course. In general, the undergraduate students at this level have had little experience taking English-speaking classes that require speaking in English for an extended period of time. Therefore, the university discussion course I taught would have been their first experience to participate in extended pair and group discussions. In these small 90-minute English discussion classes conducted entirely in English, all of the students are required to participate actively in English discussion. Each class is organized around a predetermined discussion topic and a functional language point or communication skill, with the course emphasizing output and interaction to encourage fluency and the development of pragmatic competence. The course has a unified curriculum, and incorporates an in-house textbook and syllabus designed within the Center for English Discussion Class at Rikkyo.

As my main interest in this study is to investigate how emotion was affecting learning in the classroom, I decided to conduct research on what my students were feeling during class. In the spirit of narrative inquiry, I wanted to investigate how students articulated their experiences in the classroom in *their own* emotional terms. I did not want to impose a discussion of emotions from the outset at the risk of framing the discussion too narrowly, or separating it from its relevant context. Considering what might be the most non-intrusive way to

learn about their emotional expression in class, I chose to use an in-class reflective writing activity. I thought that having students write reflections provides an opportunity to examine how learners were interpreting their own experiences of language learning in the classroom. I also thought that it could empower students by giving them a chance to express their own thoughts on taking the discussion class. However, one concern I had about asking students to write reflection papers was that they might withhold how they feel for various reasons like concern for their relationship to me as their teacher, or personal discomfort with expression. Ultimately, I realized that I could not predict how much students would disclose. I could only assume that some students might be more open than others and that writing reflections could be a good way to also understand how open students would be emotionally.

I have adopted a reflective approach to the evolution of the research process in an effort to remain responsive to the particular situation and needs of the learners in this study. When I started to plan this research study, it seemed necessary to be flexible and allow the design of the study to evolve as I gathered more information and experience with the class. Miyahara (2016) describes this attitude of a researcher as reflexivity, an "ongoing self-awareness" (p. 90) that results in "greater sensitivity to subjectivities of both the researcher and the participant" (p. 90). At the outset, I was not sure exactly how the students would respond to their involvement in the research or what kind of data I would be able to collect. As a result, I decided to establish an approach that would allow me to adapt the task in order to improve the richness of the data. To this end, I kept a teaching journal throughout the semester and tried to write down my observations and reflections after each class. Writing helped me to organize my thoughts, and keep track of the changes that I observed in class with the students and their development. For instance, I made notes on when would be a good time to assign the next written reflection or how I might modify the writing prompt for a given class. Here is an example from my journal:

> "The students are becoming more competent and confident in their discussion skills, so in the next class I should have them reflect on their own progress so far in the course".

This self-reflection was a tool that kept me refining and reassessing the project as it unfolded, and helped me confirm to myself what was an appropriate and fair approach to the research with the students. It became a concern of mine to ensure that the students were engaged in meaningful reflection themselves. I also found opportunities to discuss my ideas about the study with some of my peers. This also became an important part of the reflective process that I went through during the study.

The Study Design

Throughout a 14-week semester, students periodically wrote short written reflections on their experiences of conducting extended discussions in English. Narrative inquiry, whether conducted through writing or interviews, is beneficial to understanding complex phenomena, and it provides us with a window into learners' thoughts, emotions, and ideas (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). In addition, individual accounts of learner experience can illuminate how differently individual learners might experience the same class. The students would write for three minutes at the end of a given class and were provided with the option of writing in either English or Japanese. As the students were permitted to write in their L1, they had a freer range of expression and the capacity to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and strategies more fully within the time constraints of the short activity. Furthermore, the students could reflect on their own language development and performance immediately after the experience in class. Written narrative, more specifically, is an active site of development for and by the writer, it "organizes life—social relations, interpretations of the past, and plans for the future" (Daiute

& Lightfoot, 2004, p. xi). Consequently, narrative as a classroom research methodology can also be an empowering cultural practice, where learners are given the time and the personal space to reflect and interpret their own experiences. Through writing their own reflections, learners can reflect on their developing L2 identities and potentially find ways or develop strategies to become more deeply invested in their own learning. Darvin and Norton emphasize that, "it is through desire and imagination that they are able to invest in practices that can transform their lives" (2015, p. 46). In this respect, using written narratives as a class activity seemed to me to be a meaningful form of inquiry that could help both learners and teachers better understand and reflect on the emotional processes involved in language learning.

In the beginning of the semester, I observed all 13 of my class groups and chose four groups to pilot the writing activity during the third week of the course (the third time the class met). Each of these classes had low-intermediate English proficiency. At the end of the last English group discussion, the students had three minutes to reflect on the question prompt, "What are your reflections on today's class?" After reviewing the student writings of each class, I chose one class group with whom I would continue the reflective writing study. I thought that, by narrowing down the study to one class, I could focus more closely on tailoring the classroom component of the research activity more carefully to the particular circumstances of that class.

The class group that I chose had a strong rapport with one another, with a variety of personality types and a mix of genders in the class. The openness of some of the members in the group, along with the extreme shyness of one member, seemed particularly promising in terms of the diversity of ideas they might express in their reflection papers. These personalities were part of what persuaded me to choose this particular class. I was also particularly interested in how this activity could be useful for students who were using English to express their ideas in extended discussion for the first time, and so I selected lower intermediate classes to focus on. Very few students in the first-year course at the lower intermediate level have had the opportunity to discuss topics in their previous English language education in Japanese high schools, or had experiences using English outside of the classroom. I wanted to see if the reflective writing activity could be a useful tool for students to process their own thoughts and feelings about speaking English for an extended period of time for the first time, and whether it might benefit their investment in the language learning process in some way.

While the students were aware that I read their reflections, this activity arguably provided a more personal space for students to express their thoughts and feelings about their progress in class. They could explore their emotional experiences of the class in greater detail without fear of losing face in front of their peers. As classrooms are perhaps shaped by emotional rules (Zemblyas, 2005) that determine how and what students can express, a writing activity seems to be a less restrictive practice for personal expression in the classroom. While students may not feel comfortable talking about themselves personally with their teacher or their classmates, writing gives them a less confrontational means of expression. Finally, the scope of the task was relatively unstructured, providing students with the choice to write about what concerned or interested them—specific aspects on the course, their general development of English-speaking ability, or their own personal strengths, achievements, or perceived limitations. Personalization could likely serve as a catalyst for students to set their own personal goals, which are meaningful to them according to their own understandings of their needs.

As I mentioned earlier, I determined when to use the activity during the semester through a process of observing the students and making notes in my journal from week to week, as well as discussing the activity informally with several of my colleagues who teach the same

course. By applying a flexible activity schedule and modifying the activity, I tried to maximize the usefulness of the writing activity for the students, and gain a more diverse set of narrative accounts about learner emotion.

Results and Analysis

At the outset of this study, it was difficult to predict how the students would respond to the activity and whether it would become an effective learning tool for the students. Dörnyei (2007) describes the nature of qualitative research as interpretive, emergent, and iterative. In that spirit, I refrained from making decisions about how I would approach the analysis of the students' written reflections in the initial stages of the study. I also wanted to interpret the learners' emotions in a context relevant to them, so I waited until I read the data before determining a way to interpret them. In total, the students wrote their reflection responses in class six times over the 14-week semester. After reading, transcribing, and translating the students' writing from Japanese into English, I noticed that students often described the emotions they experienced when trying to speak English and participating in the discussion class. I also observed that some of the students' written responses were more reflective than others, and some individual students seemed to write more and take a more reflective approach to the activity than others. For instance, some students would describe something that happened previously in order to understand something more clearly. Through this reflection, these students may be articulating some reasons for why something occurred, imagining ways to improve themselves, or change some disagreeable state in the future.

Table 1. *Eri*[i]*'s entries)*

What are your reflections on today's class? (week 3)	Since my vocabulary is small, it was often the case that English would not come out and I would be stuck for words. To have a discussion, I have to speak in order to express my opinion so it is very difficult.	ボキャブラリーが少なく、英語もなかなか出てこなくて話が詰まってしまうことが多いです。ディスカッションは自分の意見を相手に伝わるように言わないといけないのでとても難しいです。
How do you feel about your progress so far? (week 5)	Since I know the function phrases, I was able to use them a little. However, when I was nervous, my mind would go blank so I want to be able to always use them.	会話表現を知り、少し使えるようになりました。しかし、緊張すると真っ白になるので常に使えるようにしたいです。

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1.   i   A pseudonym.

What are your reflections on today's class? (week 7)	It's very difficult to understand the unclear border between reasons and examples. As well, without thinking about my ideas beforehand, I wouldn't have been able to have a smooth discussion with this week's topic. It would be good if I could take less time to put my ideas together and was able to participate in the discussion without pause. The phrases are getting longer and the type of phrases are increasing, so I want to try my best to memorize them by heart so that I can use all of them in discussion.	理由と例の境が曖昧になってしまいとても難しかったです。また今回のトピックは事前に意見を考えておかないとスムーズにディスカッションが出来ないな。。。と思いました。意見をまとめる時間をなるべく減らして途切れずにディスカッションができるようになればいいなと思いました。フレーズも長くなり、種類も増えたので、頑張って覚えてきちんと使えるようにしたいです。
How do you feel about today's discussion test? (week 9)	Compared to the last discussion test, this one went more smoothly. The other group members helped me a lot by following along with my ideas and responding to what I said with reactions. I would like to be able to speak more fluently by using longer phrases, and stop using Japanese English.	前回のディスカッションテストよりはスムーズに出来たと思います。グループのメンバーがフォローをしたり、リアクションをとってくれたのてとても助かりました。長いフレーズでも役に立つものがあるので日本語英語ではなくもっと流暢に言えるようにしたいです。
How do you feel about your ability to have a discussion in English? (week 12)	When compared to at first, I can now give my own opinion. However, I often cannot think of the right words, or use the phrases that I had wanted to use. When I speak out, I will be careful not to forget these things.	自分の意見を言うことが初期に比べるとできるようになったと思います。しかし、単語が出てこなかったり、次に使おうとしたフレーズを使えなかったりすることがよくあります。発言する時になると忘れてしまうので気をつけたいです。
Do you feel comfortable to speak in English? How does it compare to the beginning of the semester? (week 14)	Since taking discussion class, my listening ability has improved a little. However, I have a small vocabulary, and since I cannot compose sentences in the moment, I cannot have a smooth conversation.	ディスカッションクラスを受講してから、リスニングの力が少しつきました。しかし、ボキャブラリーが少なく、文の構成が瞬時にできないことから、スムーズに会話ができるようになりません。

In Table 1, you can see an example of Eri's responses over the course of the semester, which she had written originally in Japanese and was later translated into English. While very shy in class, she was particularly reflective in her responses when compared to some of the other students and she seemed to take it as an opportunity to think about what she would like to change in the future. Sometimes she would set goals for future improvement. For instance, in week 7, she reflects on her inability to say what she wants to say in the moment, and then suggests a strategy to improve her involvement in the future:

It would be good if I could take less time to put my ideas together and was able to participate in the discussion without pause. The phrases are getting longer and the type of phrases are increasing, so I want to try my best to memorize them by heart so that I can use all of them in discussion.

On the other hand, some students would write things like "It was fun" or "It was difficult", but they did not elaborate why they felt those ways. This seemed to suggest that they were less engaged or invested in the writing activity.

Since the main aim of this study is to better understand the emotional dimension of learning for these students, below I have analyzed the emotions the students described in their written responses. Before taking a thematic approach to categorizing the data of the study, I read through all of the student responses, and isolated passages where students recalled their experiences of learning using emotionally descriptive language. I then grouped the responses into four general categories of emotion that I observed in the students' writing: (a) moments of anxiety and relief, (b) moments of dissatisfaction, (c) moments of optimism and pride, and (d) moments of enjoyment. I chose the labels based on what seemed to best encapsulate the experiences that the students described in their writing. Within these more general categories, I also chronicle some other emotions that were depicted in the students' experiences.

Moments of Anxiety and Relief

It has long been noted in SLA literature that anxiety likely influences the processes of language learning (Imai, 2010). In this study, I noticed that the participants in the study often described their anxiety as the first part of a two-phase process. They would often depict a phase of anxiety that is followed by a phase of relief. For example, one student wrote "since the number of phrases we are using has increased since the last test, I was anxious about whether I could do well, but thankfully the discussion could go smoothly with the cooperation of the others around me". In this case, it seems it was easier for the student to express her anxiety after her concerns had been alleviated, and the original situation had changed. In another case, a student reported in week 14 about his anxiety at the beginning of the course: "At first, the fact that I needed to speak English, made me very anxious, but over time, I got used to speaking English." In previous responses he had not explicitly discussed his anxiety. This suggests that he became willing to discuss the worry only after it had dissipated. This delay in acknowledging anxiety suggests that students may not always feel comfortable articulating or expressing their emotions if it could make them feel vulnerable. If students feel uncomfortable or anxious in class, they may withhold or repress this information.

Moments of Dissatisfaction

Students sometimes articulated feelings of frustration in situations where they thought they were unable to successfully participate in class discussion. At the end of the semester, one student acknowledged his dissatisfaction with the size of his vocabulary: "Certainly, it's fun to use English. However, there were many times where I felt frustrated because I did not have enough vocabulary to express myself." As this was the last class, it is impossible to interpret whether this feeling of frustration could have any effect, positive or negative, on his future learning. In another situation, perhaps such frustration could lead to demotivation, or might be a turning point to change tack for the learner, depending on how the student reflects or interprets the situation. This might suggest that coping strategies could be useful to navigate such negative emotions like frustration. For instance, one student in particular (Eri from Table 1) would often express dissatisfaction with her performance, and then respond to her

discomfort by establishing a goal or strategy to improve her performance or speaking ability in the future: "…I often cannot think of the right words, or use the phrases that I had wanted to use. When I speak out, I will be careful not to forget these things." It seems that, in some cases, isolating some negative performance could help these students make decisions about how they might improve in the future. As long as Eri remains invested in improving herself when she notices something she is dissatisfied with, it seems her negative perceptions could have some positive impact on her language learning success in the future. In other words, she used her negative self-perceptions to motivate herself to improve to what she imagined would be a better behaviour or state. In conclusion, these observations suggest that emotions can affect, and may even inspire, learners' decisions and plans for future language learning.

Moments of Optimism and Pride

In some instances, students would take pride in their improvements and reminisce positively on their achievements. One particularly outgoing student was able to talk about her successes confidently after the second speaking test in week 9. In these speaking tests, students must conduct a 16-minute discussion in small groups on a given topic question: "I was pleased that I could ask for examples, ask questions to deepen the discussion, and use reactions." As the students take three speaking tests throughout the semester (in week five, nine, and thirteen), they have an opportunity to monitor their improvement. Students are required to demonstrate their mastery of discussion skills, generally done through the use of functional language phrases in the discussion of a provided topic. From this limited data, there is no way to know how this may affect her in the future, but she may have a higher appraisal of her abilities to succeed in the class. Another student more explicitly connected his achievement in class with future goal-setting and devising a strategy to further improve his English: "Even though it is just a small improvement, I am using more vocabulary words when I try to speak English, and so I would like to improve my English speaking skills in this way." This moment of achievement might suggest that through his success, this learner developed confidence in his own ability to guide and monitor his own language learning process. These positive emotions of self-regard might lend themselves to an increased effort or dedication to the language learning process. In another case near the end of the course, a student identified how through her own efforts, she was able to overcome her fear and feelings of nervousness to speak out in class:

> Since I didn't know how to convey my ideas in the beginning, I didn't have courage to say my opinion, but when I do try to say something, I learned that others can understand me. Because of this, I could speak a number of times without feeling nervous. Not only with English, but now I can also speak to people to whom I first meet.

We can see that her positive experience of overcoming her fears had an impact on her identity. She now saw herself as someone who could take more risks and she described her emotional response as changed, as not always experiencing nervousness when meeting someone new. These emotional confrontations in class led to personal growth and transformed her fear. Where she presumably felt shy or nervous to talk with people she first met, she is now able to take more risks and speak out. It seems that through such positive learning experiences in class, the student had altered her self-image and the kind of emotions she would experience in social interactions. Similarly, at the end of the course in week 14, another student projected her classroom achievements onto a more ambitious goal of talking with people who are not Japanese (and presumably do not speak Japanese): "I feel comfortable to speak in English better than before. I have gotten a little confidence to speak with foreigners." It seems

that learners' experience of accomplishment and pride can help them expand their self-image and change their behavior, as well as affect the way they perceive their social environment.

Moments of Enjoyment

Students often described enjoying the class and the learning experience. At the beginning of the class, one of the students described how he was pleased with the class atmosphere and held high expectations for the class with his classmates:

> Even though I don't have confidence to speak well, it was very fun. Since up until now I have only studied English for the university entrance examinations and other students were my competitors, I think learning together with other people who are earnest will be good. I like the atmosphere of this class.

One student described her appreciation for and happiness with the social atmosphere created by the others in class by week 10, "Everyone is kind and I am extremely happy that everyone tries hard to try and understand my idea". Norton (2000) suggests that it is invaluable for social environments to be experienced as accessible for learners, in order for them to become more invested in a language learning experience. In the classroom, it seems that the joy that students took in communicating and interacting with their classmates could be a motivating context for this particular social context. Feelings of intimacy and closeness, or feeling a sense of community, may all be beneficial emotional states for investment in classroom language learning. These learners' accounts of happiness and gratitude for their classmates, suggest they would find it easier to invest in the language learning experience in this particular classroom context.

Discussion

Utilizing student written reflections to research the emotional landscape of language learning helped me to more intimately understand how the learners were experiencing the class. Through this process, this has had a positive effect on me as a teacher, as I have become more aware and sensitive to the diversity of learners' experiences in the class. The research itself became a catalyst for reflecting on the language learning process in the class. For example, after reading through and transcribing the student responses, I would often find myself discussing with other instructors in my department what students had described in their writings. It was a personally enriching process to reflect on the experiences that the students shared.

In this study, the learners' written accounts capture a range of different emotions: anxiety, frustration, a sense of accomplishment, hope, and enjoyment. I argue that, by noticing and reflecting on these emotions, teachers and researchers can better understand the social nature of language learning, how experiences might be shaping student identity, and how learners might be making decisions about language learning. Reflecting on my own research process, I wonder what the students would think of my interpretation of their emotions. In the future, I would like to create opportunities for participants in such research on emotion to be able to read and comment on my interpretation of their emotions as a way to validate how I interpret their experiences. As well, as some students were reflecting more actively than other students, it may be beneficial to explore what can help learners be more self-aware and reflective when using written reflection in a class.

Through the experience of using this writing activity in class, I came to better understand the benefits of creating opportunities for students to reflect on their own learning. While not

all the students seemed equally invested in the process of reflection, some students' writing demonstrated an engagement in a process of self-awareness and goal-setting. Through reflection, they were making decisions about the future, imagining how they might grow, and devising new learning strategies. On the other hand, it was also interesting to consider why some students were less reflective or less open to talking about how they were feeling. I wondered—were they simply less interested in the reflection process, or did they feel less inclined to openly share their thoughts in this way for other reasons (related to factors like disposition, culture, or gender expectations)? Indeed, it is hard to suggest a reason as the sample set of eight students is so small. While I could draw on a richer data set from the more engaged students, it was also an important insight to notice these differences in investment and emotional response among individual learners. However, if the aim is to ensure that the research process is a meaningful experience for the participants, it seems that having students volunteer as research participants would be more likely to produce results that could show the value of reflection in managing and better understanding emotional states.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study, I wanted to focus on emotion in order to better understand how emotion might be affecting learners and language learning, and what kinds of emotions might be salient in the classroom. Through the study, I could point to several categories of emotions that seemed relevant to the Japanese language learners in this classroom context. However, as the data collection was quite limited in length and scope, it is difficult to draw firmer conclusions about the outcomes of these emotional descriptions of language learning. I would strongly argue that a richer data collection set is required to better understand how different emotions might be affecting the language learning process. This might be conducted either through more extensive writing samples, or through interviews. Secondly, as Swain (2013) suggests, emotion cannot exactly be separated from cognition or the social sphere. In future studies, examining more holistically the relationships between emotion, cognition, and the social would be useful. However, as this topic is quite expansive, it might be more appropriate either to focus on particular aspects of the relationship of emotion to cognition or the social sphere, or to conduct smaller case studies that can afford to research the emotional aspects of experience in more depth. Finally, my approach to this research topic, study, and paper has involved an ongoing, and quite personal evolution. As I came from a place of not knowing what many of the answers were with regards to investigating emotion, conducting in-class research, developing a qualitative study, writing up a qualitative study, and writing the revisions for this paper, I find myself left with doubts about what I have accomplished or contributed. I ask myself whether this is enough. While I do not have the knowledge to answer that question myself, I do recognize that I am closer to understanding what might be better research approaches to learner emotion. What's more, I am now much better prepared to join discussions about doing qualitative research.

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Review Process

This paper was peer-reviewed by the following contributors to Issue 2: Leena Karlsson and Fergal Bradley. It was also blind peer-reviewed by members of the Learner Development Journal Review Network. *(Contributors have the option of open or blind review.)*

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