

○ PERSISTENCE IN JAPANESE LANGUAGE STUDY AND LEARNERS' CULTURAL/LINGUISTIC BACKGROUNDS

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Motivational characteristics of students learning Japanese as a foreign language at universities in Australia were investigated to find out what affecting factors are closely related to their intentions for continuing/discontinuing their study. The results showed that students' cultural/linguistic backgrounds have a significant impact on their performance in learning the language, and sustaining motivation, which is closely related to their interest in aspects of Japanese culture, is an important determinant for persistence in their study. Developing intrinsic cultural interest is an important factor for sustaining motivation, which is more likely to occur when learners have distant cultural/linguistic backgrounds from Japanese. Closer cultural/linguistic backgrounds, on the other hand, may become hazardous for having accurate self-efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

It has been widely recognised by both researchers and second language (L2) teachers that the number of students diminishes as they advance to the higher levels of study. This phenomenon seems to be universal and the Japanese language courses at university in Australia are no exception as can be seen in the Directory of Japanese studies in Australia and New Zealand (The Japan Foundation, 2004). The Japanese courses at universities in Australia have, as Drysdale (2004, p. 10) suggested, become culturally more diversified primarily due to the enrolment of a large number of overseas students; therefore, it seems meaningful to investigate the students' persistence in L2 learning from the viewpoint of their cultural/linguistic backgrounds.

Previous studies have approached persistence in L2 learning from the perspectives of learners' motivational characteristics (e.g. Bartley, 1970, Ramage, 1990), and in these studies, learners' motivation has a clear relationship with their attitudes towards aspects

of the target culture (i.e. motivated learners like the target culture; hence, they are intrinsically motivated, thus they persist in their learning). At the same time, L2 learners' cultural backgrounds have also been studied in terms of their level of success in L2 acquisition (e.g. Svanes, 1987; Chizwick and Miller 2005). However, many of the studies are in an L2 learning context, which should be regarded as different from foreign language learning in terms of various motivational perspectives in language acquisition as Dörnyei (1994a) noted. Also, these studies focus more on the end-state of L2 proficiency, and there has been little research conducted to find out how learners' cultural backgrounds influence their persistence in foreign language study. The current study situation presents an educational context where foreign language learning and third language learning coexist in the same Japanese language courses. Based on this study environment, it attempts to find out how students' different cultural (and educational) backgrounds affect their motivation to continue or discontinue their learning of Japanese as a foreign language at universities in Australia.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Early studies of motivation, primarily led by Gardner and his associates up to the 1990s, approached persistence in L2 learning as a part of their claim regarding the superiority of integrative orientation over instrumental orientation in successful L2 acquisition (see Gardner et al., 1976a; Gardner and Smythe, 1975; Gardner et al., 1976b). Besides their studies, other researchers have also paid attention to L2 learners' persistence in their study. Bartley (1970), for example, hypothesised that high school students' attitudinal predispositions towards target languages are a meaningful indicator of their dropping-out from study. She administered a questionnaire survey to the same subjects twice at the beginning and at the end of semester. The results revealed a significant drop in the strength of motivation between the two surveys among those who withdrew from the study. Ramage (1990) also investigated high school students' drop in numbers in their elective foreign language study in America. Following criticism on the superiority of integrative orientation per se in terms of successful L2 learning, she adopted an open-ended approach towards the reasons for students' learning a foreign language. The study found that both intrinsic and extrinsic orientations can work equally as positive motivators to encourage the learners to continue, while discontinuing students are more likely to be oriented by receptive reasons such as fulfilling academic requirements. She also emphasised the importance of letting the learners know the realistic effort needed to achieve a certain proficiency in a foreign language. Kennett studied Australian students learning Japanese

at university, and claimed that there is a positive effect of *investment capitalisation* on the continuation of study by successful students, who are likely to ‘determine not to *waste* the skills they have developed’ (Kennett, 2003, p. 368).

With regard to the studies on aspects of L2 learners’ culture and their motivation, Wen (1997) studied students with Asian backgrounds learning Chinese as a foreign language at universities in America. She separated motivation into two types: initial motivation which motivates students to enrol in the Chinese language study, and sustaining motivation which encourages students to persist in their study. The results revealed that discontinuing students have a large gap between what they expect to do and what is required to be done in order to acquire the language.

Svanes (1987) studied how the distance between L2 learners’ culture and that of the target language affect the learners’ level of achievement, and found that the closer the distance is, the higher the L2 proficiency they are likely to achieve. Chizwick and Miller (2005) have also investigated immigrants’ level of attained English proficiency in the US context, and found that the smaller cultural/linguistic distance positively affects the immigrants’ acquisition of English. Also, with regard to learners’ different educational backgrounds, Hoare (2005) noted that there are different views between educators from Anglo-Celtic and Confucian backgrounds about the nature of “education”. Hawkins (1998) stated that in Asian education, students’ academic performance is strongly evaluated by their diligence, rote learning, repetition and memorization, which shows a clear contrast to the approach of the Western education. Because of this difference, ‘Asian students often feel neglected or isolated in Western educational system’ (Caiger et al., 1996, p. 69). Furthermore, Rao (2002) suggested that Chinese students are less motivated to be engaged in communicative activities (p. 95), due to the different educational philosophy. That is, the language teaching method most commonly used in language courses in Australian universities may have a negative impact on the Asian students’ motivational intensity.

These previous studies support the notion that both learners’ interest in the target culture, and their appropriate and realistic expectations of the learning task and their own ability (i.e., self-efficacy) should play an important role in continuing L2 learning. Also, learners’ cultural/educational backgrounds are an important variable of their motivational predispositions. They also indicate, as Dörnyei suggests, that L2 learners’ motivation may change during the long process of learning a target language, and various factors may affect that change, which can eventually cause the learners’ decision to continue or discontinue their study. Based on the above consideration, the current study focuses on sustaining motivation which directly affects persistence in L2 learning. The

current research will also examine learners' interest in various aspects of Japanese culture as factors affecting their sustaining motivational traits. Then, learners' persistence and cultural interest are investigated from the viewpoints of their different cultural backgrounds.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study employed a questionnaire as a data collection tool which was conducted twice; at the beginning of semester (QB) and at the end of semester (QE), in order to investigate the occurrence of learners' motivational/attitudinal changes during the semester. The students for this survey were chosen from two different levels, elementary and intermediate, in order to detect any differences in the students' motivation depending on their level of study and their experience of previous language study.

Approximately 300 elementary level students and 150 intermediate level students studying at three universities in south east Queensland (University of Queensland, Griffith University on the Gold Coast, and Bond University) were given the survey questionnaire at the time of this research and from these, 46 elementary (27 East-Asian and 19 Western students) and 47 (18 East-Asian and 29 Western students) intermediate students responded to both surveys at the beginning and at the end of course¹. Because the primary research purpose is to investigate the change in students' intentions to continue the study of Japanese, only the students who responded to both surveys were chosen.

In order to study the effect of cultural/linguistic difference on persistence in Japanese language study, this study separates participating subjects into two groups: East-Asian-background students, including students from China, Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan; and Western-background students, including students from Europe, America, New Zealand and Australia. With regard to the distinction between the two groups, the following factors were considered. East-Asian students are assumed to have a smaller linguistic/cultural distance from Japanese than students from Western backgrounds, since the former group's first languages, Chinese² and Korean, have more linguistic elements in common with Japanese, including the use of Kanji characters (Chinese), and structural/grammatical similarities (Korean), and they also share cultural philosophical principles, such as Confucianism and Buddhism. Therefore, students from areas other than East-Asian-background and Western-background were excluded.

The questionnaire has three main parts:

1. Questions about the subjects' personal data, including the level of study, name³, age, gender, and first language;
2. Questions regarding the subjects' interest in aspects of Japanese language and culture; and,
3. Questions regarding their intentions for continuing or discontinuing their study in the following semester if they passed the present course.

Subjects were categorised as continuing-students or discontinuing-students on the basis of these answers. The subjects' attitudinal data for interest in the aspects of culture were collected using a five-point (0=weakest agreement to 4=strongest agreement) Likert-scale. Questions included their interest in Japanese *language*, *society* (social, political system), *culture* (arts and lifestyle), *people* (famous and/or familiar people) and *business*.

Both surveys at the beginning and at the end of the course gathered both frequency data (e.g., intentions for continuation/discontinuation) and score data (i.e., results of questions using Likert-scale). Chi-Square tests were administered on the frequency data and Wilcoxon Rank Sums tests were computed on score data. In addition, Wilcoxon Matched-Pair Signed Ranks Tests for score data were administered to determine statistical significance in repeated measures in order to identify any changes in sustaining motivation⁴ (For statistics terminology, see Hatch & Lazaraton, 1991).

The data were analysed based on three perspectives: the students' intentions to continue/discontinue their study, the level of study, and cultural/linguistic backgrounds which were examined basically in three ways: 1) intention-based intra-culture (the difference between continuing and discontinuing students within the same cultural/linguistic background groups), 2) level-based intra-culture (the difference between elementary and intermediate level within the same cultural/linguistic background groups), and 3) inter-culture comparisons (the difference between East-Asian and Western groups at each level).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CONTINUATION RATES

A general trend of higher continuation rates for the students at the higher level of study among both backgrounds was found (see Table 1 and 2 for the intra-culture comparison for the survey at the beginning and the end of the course). A higher continuation rate is also evident among Western-background students at both levels in the both surveys, although not every result is statistically significant. It was also common that continuation

rates drop after students have studied Japanese, regardless of their cultural/linguistic background, though the drop was not found to be statistically significant, which was also reported by previous studies (e.g. Bartley, 1970). Significant results were obtained for the intra-culture comparison among the East-Asian students on the survey at the end of the course (Table 2). Because elementary level East-Asian students' continuation rates reduced more sharply than other groups, from 74.1 percent in the survey at the beginning of the course (Table 1) to 55.6 percent in the course-end survey (Table 2), the difference of 33.3 percent between elementary (55.6%) and intermediate (88.9%) levels is significantly large (Fisher's Exact Test = .023, df = 1, $p < .05$). This suggests that although the negative impact of actual study on persistence may be a general phenomenon, it more severely affects the East-Asian students in the early stage of their study. No prominent drop in the continuation rate was found among the students with East-Asian backgrounds at intermediate level. That is, the negative effect of actual study may have some relationship to attitudinal or motivational aspects which particularly affect East-Asian background students, but not Western-background students. This result, thus, is quite different from the findings of the previous studies by Svanes (1987), and Chizwick and Miller (2005) which both concluded that closer cultural distance is advantageous for successful acquisition of target language.

Culture	Level		Continue	Discontinue	Total
East-Asian	Elementary	Count	20	7	27
		% within level	74.1	25.9	100
	Intermediate	Count	16	2	18
		% within level	88.9	11.1	100
	Total	Count	36	9	45
		% within level	80.0	20.0	100
Western	Elementary	Count	17	2	19
		% within level	89.5	10.5	100
	Intermediate	Count	28	1	29
		% within level	96.6	3.4	100
	Total	Count	45	3	48
		% within level	93.8	6.2	100

Table 1 Intra-culture comparison of intentions for persistence at the beginning of the course
Chi-Square Test:
East-Asian: Fisher's Exact Significance = .279, df = 1, ns,
Western: Fisher's Exact Significance = .554, df = 1, ns

Culture	Level		Continue	Discontinue	Total
East-Asian	Elementary	Count	15	12	27
		% within level	55.6	44.4	100
	Intermediate	Count	16	2	18
		% within level	88.9	11.1	100
	Total	Count	31	14	45
		% within level	68.9	31.1	100
Western	Elementary	Count	15	4	19
		% within level	78.9	21.1	100
	Intermediate	Count	27	2	29
		% within level	93.1	6.9	100
	Total	Count	42	6	48
		% within level	87.5	12.5	100

Table 2 Intra-culture comparison of intentions for persistence at the end of the course

Chi-Square Test:

East-Asian: Fisher's Exact Significance = 0.023*, df = 1, $p < .05$

Western: Fisher's Exact Significance = 0.197, df = 1, ns

This result suggests three points for discussion. First, East-Asian students may find the target language and its culture close to their own, but their learning environment, including the educational culture, may be perceived as distant by them. If they perceive the Australian educational culture as very distant from their own, and this large distance affects their motivation negatively, the possible advantages caused by the close cultural/linguistic distance from Japanese may be overtaken by the negative effect of the distant educational culture of Australian universities. East-Asian-background students at elementary level will have been experiencing Japanese language study in the Australian educational environment for the first time; and hence, they may have been negatively affected by Western classroom culture and pedagogical practices which advocate “experiential” learning and active participation in class activities, as Hoare (2005) and Rao (2002) have noted. Regarding the problem confronting Asian students, Caiger et al. (1996) have stated:

Often the Australian educational system confuses people of Japanese, Indonesian, Thai, and Chinese nationality on their arrival as foreign students. Different though their societies are, one from another, they are uniformly confronted, and often affronted, by the contemporary Western learning processes of tertiary institutions in Australia (p. 97).

Caiger et al. suggest that the East-Asian-background students may have found the current Japanese language courses less familiar, because, in general, university Japanese language courses in Australia emphasise the development of communicative competence through a variety of communicative activities which advocate students' active and spontaneous participation. This may have had a negative impact on their motivation to persist. However, East-Asian background students at the intermediate level may have adjusted to the culturally new learning environment. At least, those who participated in the surveys may have already overcome the difference in the style of learning. This may be a reason why they do not show as a large drop of continuation rate as their lower level counterparts do.

Second, East-Asian students' purposes for studying at Australian universities may need to be taken into consideration. It is assumed that in the present research context, East-Asian-Background students may be less committed to Japanese language learning than Western students. Because East-Asian students came to Australia to study at university, it is reasonable to assume that their primary area of study is not Japanese but some other subject. The current research result on the students' profile supports this assumption. It shows that among four groups of students, elementary and intermediate level students from East-Asian and Western backgrounds, the percentage of those who majored in Japanese is the lowest for elementary level East-Asian students (11.1%), while intermediate level East-Asian students have 44.4%, and Western background students at elementary and intermediate levels have 63.2% and 72.4% respectively. If East-Asian students seriously wished to acquire a high level of Japanese language fluency, it would appear more appropriate to have gone to university in Japan which would give them more learning advantages, such as more opportunities to have access to authentic Japanese language use and to encounter Japanese culture. Japan is geographically much closer to East-Asian students; nevertheless, the students came to Australia and started studying Japanese. East-Asian students at elementary level, therefore, may have taken the Japanese language course not as their primary field of study, but possibly with some expectation that they could earn a relatively easy academic credit by enrolling in a Japanese course. As a result, their perceived strength of commitment to ongoing study would be potentially weaker than other groups. The intermediate East-Asian students, however, may have developed their own intrinsic interests in learning Japanese based on their previous Japanese language study, and thus, they may have a stronger commitment compared to their lower level counterparts.

Finally, East-Asian students' familiarity with and closeness to Japanese language and culture may negatively affect their expectations of study, self-efficacy, or sustaining mo-

tivation. Self-efficacy is defined by Schunk (1984) as a ‘personal judgement of one’s capability to organise and implement behaviours in specific situations’ (p. 48). According to Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is hypothesised as influencing learner’s choice of activities, the effort that she/he expends in order to accomplish a given task, and persistence in task performance. Given this, East-Asian students may believe that the Japanese language is a relatively easy subject to study based on their expectations that they have more advantages in learning Japanese compared with other subjects because of the closeness between Japanese and their culture and/or language. This may result in an inappropriately high level of self-efficacy among East-Asian students. As a result, in their actual learning of the Japanese language for the first time at Australian tertiary institutions, they may be more likely to experience unexpected difficulties in coping with the course requirements. If their expectations of a comparative advantage in learning Japanese are high, experiences of difficulty in learning the language may impact negatively on their motivation more strongly. This conclusion is supported by Wen (1997) who stated that Chinese-background students may discontinue their study of Chinese when they discover a gap between what they expect from learning Chinese and what a formal Chinese course requires (p. 242).

The above three possible causes may be integrated into a variable “distant educational background” which negatively affects East-Asian students’ sustaining motivation. As a result, they show a larger dropout rate compared to other groups of students.

Western students, on the other hand, are assumed to be less familiar with Japanese language and culture, but have more familiarity with the culture of Australian education. They chose to study the Japanese language because they are, at least to some extent, interested in the Japanese language and/or culture, and this interest may be more directly linked to their stronger intentions to persist in their study than East-Asian students.

The above considerations lead to a conclusion that the relationship between the larger cultural and linguistic distance and successful L2 learning may not be as simple a phenomenon, but may need to be examined case by case depending on the particular relationship between learners’ background, target language/culture, and the learning environments in which the acquisition occurs. That is, students learning a foreign language need to be considered differently from the second language learning context, because, as Dörnyei (1994a) has noted, ‘the social and pragmatic dimensions of second language motivation is always dependent on *who* learns *what* languages *where*’ (p. 275, Dörnyei’s italics). That is to say, persistence in Japanese study may need to be discussed on the basis of the particular learning context, namely Japanese as a foreign language in the courses of tertiary institutions in Australia.

INTEREST IN ASPECTS OF JAPANESE CULTURE

Students’ interests in various aspects of Japanese culture and their persistence is observed and discussed in this section. Because of the small number of subjects in some categories, the areas with the number of subjects less than ten are excluded for the analysis. First, the level-based intra-culture comparison in the survey at the beginning of the course (i.e. comparing the two levels within the same cultural backgrounds and the same intentions for persistence) showed two significant results (see Table 3). Among continuing Western-background students, intermediate students have a higher mean for *culture* and *people*. For *culture*, elementary students have a mean of 3.12, while intermediate level students have 3.46 ($z = -2.077$, $N = 45$, $p < .05$), and for *people*, elementary level students have a mean of 3.12, and intermediate level students a higher mean of 3.46 ($z = -2.105$, $N = 45$, $p < .05$). This seems to indicate that the development of cultural interests in Japanese may be a more important factor for persistence especially among Western-background students. Even before the start of actual study, intermediate students with a larger cultural/linguistic distance who, according to Kennett (2003), are assumed to have a larger investment in Japanese language study seem to develop more interest in target language culture, and this may help them continue their study.

Intention In QB	Cultural Bkgd.	Level	Cultural aspects					
				Culture	Society	People	Language	Business
Continue	East-Asian	Elementary	Mean	2.85	2.48	2.70	3.40	2.35
			N	20	20	20	20	20
			S.D.	.813	1.230	1.081	.598	1.268
		Intermediate	Mean	3.06	2.56	3.13	3.44	2.88
			N	16	16	16	16	16
			S.D.	.929	1.365	.500	.629	.885
		Elementary	Mean	3.12	2.88	3.12	3.59	2.41
			N	17	17	17	17	17
			S.D.	.485	.928	.485	.618	1.326
	Intermediate	Mean	3.46	2.86	3.46	3.64	2.46	
		N	28	28	28	28	28	
		S.D.	.576	.803	.508	.488	1.201	

Table 3 Level-based intra-culture comparison of interest in cultural aspects at the beginning of the course (QB)
S.D. = Standard Deviation
Wilcoxon W: Significant results only (Discontinuing students are not computed due to the small number)
Continue/Western:
"Culture" $z = -2.077^*$, $N = 45$, $p < .05$
"People" $z = -2.105^*$, $N = 45$, $p < .05$

Intention In QB	Level	Cultural Background		Cultural aspects				
				Culture	Society	People	Language	Business
Continue	Elementary	East-Asian	Mean	2.85	2.48	2.70	3.40	2.35
			N	20	20	20	20	20
			S.D.	.813	1.230	1.081	.598	1.268
		Western	Mean	3.12	2.88	3.12	3.59	2.41
			N	17	17	17	17	17
			S.D.	.485	.928	.485	.618	1.326
	Intermediate	East-Asian	Mean	3.06	2.56	3.13	3.44	2.88
			N	16	16	16	16	16
			S.D.	.929	1.365	.500	.629	.885
		Western	Mean	3.46	2.86	3.46	3.64	2.46
			N	28	28	28	28	28
			S.D.	.576	.803	.508	.488	1.201

Table 4 Inter-culture comparison of interest in cultural aspects at the beginning of the course (QB)

S.D. = Standard Deviation

Wilcoxon W: Significant results only (Discontinue groups are not computed due to the small number)

Continue /Intermediate:

"people" $z = -1.997^*$, $N = 44$, $p < .05$

The stronger effect of the development of cultural interests on Western-background students' persistence in their study was further supported by significant results found in the inter-culture comparison (comparing the two cultural backgrounds within the same level of study) (Table 4). Although it is not statistically significant (only *people* was significantly large, East-Asian = 3.13, Western = 3.46, $z = -1.997$, $N = 44$, $p < .05$), there is an apparent trend in the means between East-Asian and Western cultural/linguistic backgrounds. Western students seem to be more likely to have stronger interests in aspects of Japanese culture. These results seem to indicate that interest in Japanese language and culture may be a less important determinant for East-Asian students persisting in their study.

East-Asian students' weaker interests may be related to their learning environment, in which Japanese language is learnt as a third language in a foreign language context in Australia. East-Asian students' primary academic interest may not be in learning Japanese as has been noted. With regard to Japanese language study, they may not feel that they need to spontaneously avail themselves of opportunities to access Japanese language and culture as strongly as Western students do, since they tend to view them-

selves as advantaged thanks to the cultural/linguistic proximity. These two dimensions, the purpose of their study in Australia not being primarily learning the Japanese language and the presupposition of knowing Japan and its culture, may again affect negatively their attitudes towards Japanese culture and language, and may cause them not to develop their interest in Japanese culture/language as strongly as Western students.

As for Western-background students, on the other hand, cultural/linguistic interests in Japanese seem to show two important dimensions. One is that developing stronger cultural/linguistic interests in Japanese while learning Japanese may have some positive relationship with their sustaining motivation. Second, as Kennett (2003) has suggested, Western-background students' development of stronger cultural interests may encourage them to further their investment in acquiring a higher level of fluency and knowledge about Japan and the Japanese language. Given this, the more time students spend on learning a language and developing a certain level of linguistic skills, the more they are motivated to 'consume the learning experience for its own sake' (Kennett 2003, p. 368). This claim seems more clearly applied to Western-background students because they become more predisposed to continue their study, as was verified in the above examination of continuation rate. Because Western-background students have limited access to and less familiarity with Japan compared to East-Asian students, Western-background students' motives for studying Japanese may be primarily based on what they learned through Japanese language study at school. Given this, once they find that the study of the language will bring them closer to the language and culture, they may continue to be motivated to further their study. This may be a positive cycle of the cause-and-effect of investment in learning Japanese, development of cultural/linguistic intrinsic motives, and persistence in study.

The above argument is further supported by the results in the survey at the end of the course. Significant result was found in the inter-culture comparison (comparing the two cultural backgrounds) (Table 5). The result shows a general tendency for continuing Western-background students to have a stronger interest in every aspect of culture tested than East-Asian-background students at intermediate level, but a significant result was found only for interest in *society* (East-Asian = 2.38, Western = 3.04; $z = -2.459$, $N = 43$, $p < .05$). After they have experienced their current Japanese course at university, the continuing Western-background students show stronger cultural/linguistic interests than East-Asian students. This may be an indication of the positive cause-and-effect relationship between investment in Japanese learning and development of culture-based intrinsic orientation which drives them to further their learning in Japanese courses at university, and this is more evidently applied to Western-background students.

Intention In QE	Level	Cultural Background	Cultural aspects						
				Culture	Society	People	Language	Business	
Continue	Elementary	East-Asian	Mean	3.20	2.33	3.07	3.27	1.33	
			N	15	15	15	15	15	
			S.D.	.561	1.345	.961	1.033	1.718	
		Western	Mean	3.33	3.00	3.20	3.33	2.53	
			N	15	15	15	15	15	
			S.D.	.488	1.000	.561	.617	1.187	
		Intermediate	East-Asian	Mean	3.06	2.38	3.00	3.25	1.81
				N	16	16	16	16	16
				S.D.	.929	1.204	.894	1.065	1.328
Western	Mean		3.37	3.04	3.26	3.30	1.89		
	N		27	27	27	27	27		
	S.D.		.839	.706	.813	.823	1.553		

Table 5 Inter-culture comparison of interest in cultural aspects at the end of the course (QE)

S.D. = Standard Deviation

Wilcoxon V: Significant results only (Discontinuing students are excluded due to the small number)

Continue/Intermediate:

"society" $z = -2.459^*$, $N = 43$, $p < .05$

CHANGES IN CULTURAL INTERESTS

Finally, results from Wilcoxon Matched-Pair Signed Ranks Tests also had statistical significance for *language* and *business*. At intermediate level, Western-background students lost interest in Japanese *language* significantly after having studied it for a semester (Table 6). The intermediate level students' mean score was reduced from 3.62 at the beginning of the course to 3.24 at the end of the course ($z = -2.500$, $N = 29$, $p < .05$). That is, the impact of the negative effect of actual study may be closely related to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and Western-background students' interest in the target language may be negatively affected by aspects of language teaching at the intermediate level.

This marked drop of interest was not found for other aspects of culture. Generally, the longer students learn Japanese, the more interested in various aspects of culture they become thanks to possibly the positive effect of investment as has been discussed above, but it seems not in the language itself. That is, study of the Japanese language for a longer period of time may weaken Western-background students' interest in the language.

Level	Cultural Background	Mean	QB N	S.D.	Mean	QE N	S.D.	z
Elementary	East-Asian	3.26	27	.712	2.89	27	1.340	-1.854
	Western	3.53	19	.697	3.16	19	.688	-1.706
Intermediate	East-Asian	3.44	18	.616	3.22	18	1.003	-.816
	Western	3.62	29	.494	3.24	29	.830	-2.500*

Table 6 Strength of interest in Japanese language at the beginning (QB) and the end (QE) of the course by cultural/linguistic background

S.D. = Standard Deviation

Z = Wilcoxon Matched-Pair Signed Ranks Test

* = $P < .05$

Japanese language study in university courses generally requires students to memorise a larger amount of Kanji characters, to learn more complex structures, and to understand more socio-culturally related forms, such as honorific/modest expressions, when they advance to a higher level. Because these linguistic factors are closely related to elements of Japanese culture, Western-background students may be more likely to be overwhelmed by them due to their larger cultural distance from Japan, compared to East-Asian students.

Level	Cultural Background	Mean	QB N	S.D.	Mean	QE N	S.D.	z
Elementary	East-Asian	2.41	27	1.248	1.56	27	1.695	-2.632**
	Western	2.32	19	1.376	2.37	19	1.212	-.108
Intermediate	East-Asian	2.94	18	.873	2.00	18	1.372	-2.565*
	Western	2.52	29	1.214	1.90	29	1.589	-2.521*

Table 7 Strength of interest in Japanese business at the beginning (QB) and the end (QE) by cultural/linguistic background

S.D. = Standard Deviation

Z = Wilcoxon Matched-Pair Signed Ranks Test

* = $P < .05$

** = $P < .01$

Another significant result for the repeated measures test was in the loss of interest in *business* (Table 7). All the students, except elementary level Western-background students, lost interest in *business*, and the loss of interest is statistically significant. Elementary East-Asian-background students went from 2.41 in the survey at the beginning to 1.56 at the end of the course ($z = -2.632$, $N = 27$, $p < .05$), and intermediate students from the same background also lowered their mean from 2.94 to 2.00 between the two surveys

($z = -2.565$, $N = 18$, $p < .05$). The interest of intermediate Western-background students also weakened from 2.52 to 1.90 ($z = -2.521$, $N = 29$, $p < .05$). All these results show that loss of interest in Japanese business after actual study may be a general phenomenon. Regardless of students' own cultural/linguistic backgrounds, their instrumental motivation for learning the Japanese language may deteriorate, and their interest may instead be redirected to the development of cultural interests, which may be a strong base for intrinsic sustaining motivation.

CONCLUSION

The above results and discussion shed light on three points of significance closely related to the students' persistence and their cultural/linguistic backgrounds. First, cultural and linguistic distance in foreign language learning can be triangular relationship for students from a third country. That is, the distances from the international students' origin (i.e. East-Asian countries) to the host culture (i.e. Australia), and to the target language and culture (i.e. Japan) need to be considered.

Second, based on the first point, East-Asian students' larger distance to the host culture is likely to affect negatively their persistence in the study of Japanese, their third language, in the current research context. In addition, East-Asian students' closer distance to Japanese language and culture also seems to affect negatively their persistence due to the likelihood of their development of inappropriately high level of self-efficacy, which is supported by the claim by Wen (1997). Because of these two reasons, East-Asian students in Australian educational context, learning the third language, Japanese, are more likely to drop out of the course especially at their early stage of study. That is, cultural/linguistic distance can be multi-dimensional, and it may not be possible to conclude that the closer distance is always more advantageous for successful L2 learning in any learning context. However, as they advance to a higher level of study, they may be able to adjust to the new educational environment, and thus, these negative effects may be weakened.

Lastly, the conventional norm of the importance of developing intrinsic orientation for successful L2 learning advocated by early researchers (e.g. Bartley, 1970; Ramage, 1990) may be more applicable to L2 learning in learners' familiar educational context. However, learning a foreign language may provide them with more difficulties as they advance to a higher level of study when the students have a larger linguistic and cultural distance. That is, Western students' persistence in the study of Japanese as a foreign language may be determined in the balance between the strength of developed intrinsic orientation and their sense of struggle with learning linguistically more complex structures

and expressions, which is caused by their larger linguistic and cultural distance to Japanese. This also signifies that the cultural and linguistic distance is not a simple factor for successful L2 learning.

As has been observed and discussed, Japanese language learners' persistence has a close relationship with their intentions for continuing/discontinuing their study in the context of Japanese as a foreign language in Australia. There is not, however, sufficient research on this issue, and further study is extremely important to find out the real nature of L2 learners' motivational characteristics which affect their persistence in learning, and eventually successful L2 acquisition.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The subjects did not include people who had already dropped out, and so they were people who have persisted in study for the whole course/semester.
- ² Chinese language has various dialects, including Mandarin, Cantonese and Taiwanese; however, students speaking these dialects are all categorised into the same cultural/linguistic group, reflecting the common written tradition in Chinese.
- ³ Subjects' names were used only to enable tracking of students on the pre and post tests.
- ⁴ The minimum significant level is set above $P < .05$.

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