

A Comparison of Language Anxiety¹ in English and Mandarin² Learning in Hong Kong

Jackie Xiu Yan

City University of Hong Kong

ctjackie@cityu.edu.hk

Champa Detaramani

City University of Hong Kong

enchampa@cityu.edu.hk

Abstract

Hong Kong has a long bilingual tradition. After Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the Government announced the language policy of "biliteracy and trilingualism." As a result, the Cantonese speaking students are required to learn to speak Mandarin in addition to English. Reticence and anxiety are reported in language classes. This study investigated and compared the sources and impact of anxiety in university English and Mandarin classes in Hong Kong. The participants were 401 university students who took both English and Mandarin Communication Skills classes. The investigation used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The findings indicated that the anxiety level was related to both real and perceived English and Mandarin achievement. The factor of language distance between the native language (Cantonese) and the target languages (English and Mandarin) did not have significant influence on anxiety levels or the correlation between anxiety and language learning. The time spent on learning had a significant impact only on Mandarin anxiety. It was also found that students' anxiety level was related to their perception of the status and function of the two languages, to parental influence, and to the language environment.

Key Words: language anxiety, individual difference, language learning

¹ Language anxiety refers to foreign or second language classroom anxiety.

² Mandarin is referred to as Putonghua in Hong Kong.

INTRODUCTION

When I speak Mandarin to the native speakers of Mandarin and they can't understand me, I would switch to English... I feel that English can help me. (Subject 4 of Group 1)

English has always been the international language; you use it to communicate with people who are not Hong Kongers. Mandarin, however, will be very important in the society. I feel that we now need to learn both languages. (Subject 1 of Group 1)

Mandarin is harder (than English), because English and Cantonese belong to different systems, they won't influence each other. But Cantonese will influence Mandarin, that is when you are speaking Mandarin, your pronunciation is influenced by Cantonese, the pronunciation becomes funny. (Subject 3 of Group 1)

These are statements made by students from a university in Hong Kong, expressing how they feel about using and learning English and Mandarin. Hong Kong's long bilingual tradition can be traced back to the British rule which started in 1842. English was used as the "high language" compared to the local Cantonese dialect. English remained the sole official language until 1974, when Chinese was made a co-official language. In recent years, Hong Kong's proximity to Mainland China and the latter's opening to the outside world have accelerated the use of Mandarin in all aspects. Under the Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region) Government's language policy of "biliteracy and trilingualism," announced after Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, students in Hong Kong are required to be able to read and write in Chinese and English, and speak in Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. English as a second language has long been a subject of study in schools in Hong Kong, whereas Mandarin has become a popular language subject only

recently. According to Yan and Wang (2001), Mandarin, the national language in China, shares its writing system with Cantonese, and thus should not be considered as a second language to Hong Kong students. Wong (1995) found that the similarity rate between the written Mandarin and Cantonese vocabulary is 55.9%, and that between the spoken Mandarin and Cantonese vocabulary is 53.8%; while the similarity rate of Mandarin and Cantonese grammar is extremely high: the similarity rate of written Mandarin and Cantonese grammar is 99.9% and that between the spoken Mandarin and Cantonese grammar is 99.5%. These findings confirm the observation made by Wang (1986), who thought that the main differences between local dialects of Chinese and Mandarin lie in pronunciation rather than vocabulary or grammar. Therefore, Mandarin can only be considered as a “half second language” to speakers of dialects, including Cantonese.

In many university programs in Hong Kong, both English and Mandarin have become compulsory courses. There have been reports of students’ reticence and anxiety in classes of English (Tsui, 1996) and Mandarin (Yan & Wang, 2001) respectively, but there have been few studies, if any, comparing the sources of language anxiety and its effects on students who are learning both English and Mandarin at the same time. Besides, little is known about how the factor of language distance affects language anxiety, or how local dialect and culture within a great national tradition affect students’ anxiety in learning the *lingua franca*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the past four decades, the role of anxiety in language learning has become a central concern for second language researchers. Reviews of early studies (e.g., Backman, 1976; Chastain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977; Swain & Burnaby, 1976; Tuck, Hamayan, & Genesee, 1976) find conflicting results and ambiguities (e.g., MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Scovel, 1978). Advances in measurement and theory in the mid 1980s (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1988) have resulted in great developments in the research into foreign language anxiety. Foreign language anxiety is considered a type of situation specific anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) were the first to treat foreign language anxiety as a separate and distinct phenomenon particular to language learning (Young, 1991). They developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure the anxiety, and identified three related anxieties in the conceptualization of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The FLCAS has become the “most widely used foreign language classroom anxiety scale” (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005, p. 174). A large number of studies have been conducted based on Horwitz and associates’ theory, and consistent inverse correlations between language anxiety and achievement have been identified (e.g., Aida, 1994; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991b; Philips, 1992; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Yan, 1998). These inverse correlations indicate the detrimental influence anxiety has on language learning, and researchers have

considered language anxiety as an important predictor of success in language class (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

As research into foreign language anxiety has developed, the learning of a variety of target languages has been investigated, for example, French or Spanish (Bailey, Daley, & Onwuegbuzie, 1999; Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a; Philips, 1992; Young, 1990), English (Cheng et al., 1999; Kondo & Yang, 2004; Sánchez-Herrero & Sánchez, 1992; Yan, 1998), Japanese (Aida, 1994; Kitano, 2001; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Samimy & Tabuse, 1992), Arabic (Elkhafai, 2005), Mandarin Chinese or Putonghua (Yan & Wang, 2001).

More and more studies have been focused on “the relationship of anxiety to various second language proficiencies” (Horwitz, 2001, p. 120). For example, studies have been conducted on anxiety and second language reading (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; Oh, 1992; Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000), writing (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; Cheng et al., 1999), and listening (Elkhafai, 2005; Kim, 2000).

The relationship between language anxiety and other learning variables has also been examined by researchers, e.g., anxiety and learning style (Bailey et al., 1999), anxiety and self-efficacy (Mills, Pajares, & Herron, 2006), anxiety and a number of variables (Cheng, 2002; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2002; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, Daley, 1999). Researchers (Cheng, 2002; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999) have found that some variables, for example, confidence in one’s language ability, perceived scholastic competence, and

prior history of visiting foreign countries, contribute significantly to the prediction of foreign language anxiety. In an investigation of beginning-level French students, Gardner et al. (1997) studied variables such as language attitude, anxiety, self-confidence, and learning strategies simultaneously. They identified substantial interaction among these affective measures.

Sources of, and factors associated with language anxiety have been sought by a number of scholars. Young (1991), for example, summarized six potential sources of language anxiety: (1) personal and interpersonal anxieties, (2) learner beliefs about language learning, (3) instructor beliefs about language teaching, (4) instructor-learner interactions, (5) classroom procedures and (6) language testing. In a study of learners of English in China, Yan and Horwitz (2008) examined the variables affecting students' language achievement, including language anxiety, using a grounded theory approach. Eleven such variables and a sequential order of influence have been identified among them. These studies suggest that anxiety does not work alone in language learning, but that there is a need to examine how anxiety interacts with other learning factors in influencing language achievement.

Most of the research studies on language anxiety only look at students' learning of one language. This study investigated and compared the impact of language anxiety on students' learning of English and Mandarin, and explored the sources and factors associated with language anxiety in English and Mandarin classes. It is believed that comparing English and Mandarin learning can produce a much clearer picture on the impact and sources of anxiety

than investigating the learning of each language separately. It is also believed that only through comparison can distinctions in cultural characteristics related to language learning and anxiety stand out conspicuously. Besides, since many students in Hong Kong are required to take both English and Mandarin courses, this comparative study can facilitate our understanding of various aspects of language anxiety in real life situations.

The research questions were:

1. What is the relationship between anxiety and Hong Kong students' learning of English and Mandarin?
2. Is there any difference between English and Mandarin learning anxiety?
3. How would factors such as gender, length of learning, parental elements and motivation affect English and Mandarin learning anxiety?
4. What are the sources of language anxiety in English and Mandarin classrooms? What other factors are associated with language anxiety?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 401 first-year business majors (approximately 80% of the first-year business majors enrolled) at a university in Hong Kong. The students were all Cantonese speakers who were enrolled in both Mandarin Communication Skills and

English Communication Skills classes. Of the 401 students, 24 (11 males and 13 females) were randomly selected for participation in one of the five focus group interviews.

Instruments and Procedure

The quantitative study. The questionnaire (see Appendix A) used for the quantitative study consisted of the following components: (1) An adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) used to measure students' anxiety levels in English and Mandarin learning; (2) questions on students' motivation levels; (3) a background information questionnaire.

Firstly, the original 33-item FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was adapted by Yan (1998), who added six culturally oriented items for Chinese students. The adapted FLCAS makes use of a 5-point Likert scale. Responses ranged from 1 point (strongly disagree) to 5 points (strongly agree), and all negatively worded items were reverse scored. An English Classroom Anxiety Scale (ECAS) and Putonghua (Mandarin) Classroom Anxiety Scale (PCAS), two versions of the adapted FLCAS, were formed by replacing the term "Foreign Language" with "English" and "Putonghua" respectively. The internal consistency of the two adapted instruments computed by the Cronbach's alpha was very high: 0.91 for the ECAS and 0.94 for the PCAS.

Secondly, questions on students' motivation levels were designed specifically for this study, and were based on previous studies (Dörnyei, 1998, 2001; Dörnyei & Schmidt, 2001; Gardner, 1985; Lin & Detaramani, 1997).

Thirdly, the background information questionnaire consisted of

two types of questions: demographic information and some 5-point Likert scale questions to elicit students' opinions on several issues, including parents' skills in English and Mandarin; students' perceptions of parents' expectations towards their academic achievement; the importance of parents' expectations as rated by the students; students' perceptions of their ability in English and Mandarin in general; and students' perceptions of their ability in each of the four skills in English and Mandarin: speaking, listening, reading and writing.

Teachers administered the questionnaires in classes, and after the students had agreed to take part in the research, they were given twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire. Participants were ensured that the data would only be used for research purposes.

Course examination scores were obtained from the course instructors and used as achievement measures.

The qualitative study. An interview guide (See Appendix B) was used to elicit detailed information on students' English and Mandarin learning and possible explanations for their affective responses towards the learning of the two languages.

Five focus group interviews were conducted by the authors and their research assistants. The number of participants in each group varied slightly: 6 participants (3 males and 3 females) in Group 1, 5 (3 males and 2 females) in Group 2, 5 (2 males and 3 females) in Group 3, 4 (2 males and 2 females) in Group 4, and 4 (1 male and 3 females) in Group 5.³ Again, students were ensured that the data would only be used for research purposes.

³ The reason why "the number of people in each group varied" was because there were practical difficulties to get an equal number of students in each group. For example, some students agreed to participate, but they did not show up because of various reasons.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS RESULTS

The Effect of Anxiety on Real and Perceived Achievement

To investigate if there is any relationship between anxiety and the learning of the two languages, Pearson product-moment correlations between anxiety and achievement in both English and Mandarin were computed and significant correlations were identified. As shown in Table 1, the correlation between anxiety and Mandarin achievement appeared to be slightly higher than that between anxiety and English achievement.

Table 1
Correlation Between Anxiety and English and Mandarin Achievement

	English Achievement	Mandarin Achievement
Anxiety	-.295** ($N = 157$)	-.352** ($N = 281$)

Note: ** significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

The perceived achievement was broken down into five measures: perceived general ability, perceived speaking ability, perceived listening ability, perceived reading ability, and perceived writing ability. The correlation of anxiety with each of the perceived abilities was examined. As shown in Table 2, the findings indicated significant correlations between anxiety and perceived language abilities.

Table 2
Correlation of Anxiety in Learning English and Mandarin
With Perceived Language Ability

Learning Anxiety	Perceived English Ability				
	General	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
English	-.457**	-.518**	-.467**	-.380**	-.314**
	<i>N</i> = 317	<i>N</i> = 317	<i>N</i> = 317	<i>N</i> = 317	<i>N</i> = 317
Learning Anxiety	Perceived Mandarin Ability				
	General	Speaking	Listening	Reading	Writing
Mandarin	-.636**	-.528**	-.405**	-.240**	-.132**
	<i>N</i> = 276	<i>N</i> = 276	<i>N</i> = 274	<i>N</i> = 234	<i>N</i> = 234

Note: ** significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed); * significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

As shown in Table 2, except for Chinese reading and writing abilities, all the correlations between anxiety and perceived language abilities were higher than those between anxiety and actual achievement scores. The correlations between Anxiety and Perceived General Ability, and Anxiety and Perceived Speaking Ability in Mandarin were higher than those in English.

The Difference Between English and Mandarin Anxiety

It was further investigated whether students feel more anxious in the learning of one language than the other. The English Classroom Anxiety Scale (39 items) and Putonghua Classroom Anxiety Scale (39 items) were used to measure students' English and Mandarin anxiety levels respectively (See Appendix A). As shown in Table 3, it was

found that the anxiety score for Mandarin was higher than that for English. However, a *t-test* showed no significant difference between the two scores.

Table 3
Differences Between English and Mandarin Anxiety Scores

Paired Samples Test

	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mandarin Anxiety Score	114.71	233	19.87	
English Anxiety Score	113.97	233	16.37	
Mandarin Anxiety Score - English Anxiety Score	.74		19.72	.57

Differences in Gender and Length⁴ of Time Learning the Languages

A series of 4 *t-tests* were performed comparing male and female students' anxiety levels and achievement scores. The results showed that there were no significant differences between male and female subjects' anxiety levels in either English or Mandarin. However, as shown in Table 4, females performed significantly better in Mandarin than males.

⁴ The starting time of English or Putonghua learning varies according to different school policies.

Table 4
Differences Between Male and Female Students’
Mandarin Achievement Scores

Independent Samples Test

	<i>M</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>SD</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
Male Students’ Mandarin Score	72.885	146	7.2607	
Female Students’ Mandarin Score	75.963	182	7.6876	
Male Students’ Mandarin Score - Female Students’ Mandarin Score	-3.078**			.000

Note: ** significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

The length of time students had spent learning the two languages was divided into 4 spans⁵: 0-50 hours, 50-100 hours, 100-150 hours, and above 150 hours. ANOVA was used to examine whether there were significant differences in language anxiety among the students falling into these groupings.

Results of ANOVA for the English classes showed significant differences between groups (although only at $p < .05$). The results are displayed in Table 5.

⁵ The investigators estimated that the students spent a maximum of 50 hours taking a one semester university language course in Hong Kong.

Table 5
ANOVA of English Anxiety Scores by Length of Time

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2103.931	3	701.310	2.640	.050
Within Groups	83929.619	316	265.600		
Total	86033.550	319			

Note: $F(3, 316) = 2.640, p < .050$

One post hoc analysis, Tukey's honestly significant difference (HSD) test, was performed. The results showed that these differences were not significant. Table 6 shows the HSD analysis results for group differences in English anxiety scores.

Table 6
English Anxiety Score Differences: Tukey's Honestly Significant
Difference (HSD)

Dependent Variable: English Anxiety

(I) Length of time	(J) Length of time	Mean		Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		Difference (I-J)	Std. Error		Upper Bound	Lower Bound
0-50 hrs	50-100 hrs	2.89	2.884	.748	-4.56	10.34
	100-150 hrs	3.16	3.475	.799	-5.81	12.14
	above 150 hrs	7.17	2.842	.058	-.17	14.51
50-100 hrs	0-50 hrs	-2.89	2.884	.748	-10.34	4.56
	100-150 hrs	.27	2.931	1.000	-7.30	7.84
	above 150 hrs	4.28	2.143	.191	-1.25	9.81
100-150 hrs	0-50 hrs	-3.16	3.475	.799	-12.14	5.81
	50-100 hrs	-.27	2.931	1.000	-7.84	7.30
	above 150 hrs	4.01	2.890	.509	-3.46	11.47
above 150 hrs	0-50 hrs	-7.17	2.842	.058	-14.51	.17
	50-100 hrs	-4.28	2.143	.191	-9.81	1.25
	100-150 hrs	-4.01	2.890	.509	-11.47	3.46

Note: * The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

ANOVA did show a significant difference between the groups for the Mandarin learning. The results of this analysis are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7
ANOVA of Mandarin Anxiety Scores by Length of Time

Mandarin Anxiety Scores

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9751.942	3	3250.647	9.033	.000
Within Groups	101124.886	281	359.875		
Total	110876.828	284			

Note: $F(3, 281) = 9.033, p < .000$

Post hoc analysis found significant differences between the following groups: 100-150 hours vs. 0-50 hours, above 150 hours vs. 0-50 hours, and above 150 hours vs. 50-100 hours. The results therefore indicated a decline in anxiety levels when students' contact hours in Mandarin increased. Table 8 shows the HSD analysis results for group differences in Mandarin anxiety.

Table 8
Mandarin Anxiety Score Differences: Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD)

Dependent Variable: QAVE

(I) Q49	(J) Q49	Mean Difference		Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
		(I-J)	Std. Error		Lower Bound	Upper Bound
0-50 hrs	50-100 hrs	2.78	2.708	.735	-4.22	9.77
	100-150 hrs	13.19(*)	4.961	.041	.37	26.01
	above 150 hrs	17.81(*)	3.757	.000	8.10	27.52
50-100 hrs	0-50 hrs	-2.78	2.708	.735	-9.77	4.22
	100-150 hrs	10.41	5.264	.199	-3.19	24.02
	above 150 hrs	15.04(*)	4.149	.002	4.31	25.76
100-150 hrs	0-50 hrs	-13.19(*)	4.961	.041	-26.01	-.37
	50-100 hrs	-10.41	5.264	.199	-24.02	3.19
	above 150 hrs	4.63	5.873	.860	-10.55	19.80
above 150 hrs	0-50 hrs	-17.81(*)	3.757	.000	-27.52	-8.10
	50-100 hrs	-15.04(*)	4.149	.002	-25.76	-4.31
	100-150 hrs	-4.63	5.873	.860	-19.80	10.55

Note: * The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Parental Influence

Most students rated their parent's skills in Mandarin as poor, with 65.7% rating their father's and 70% their mother's as poor. The students' rating of their parent's skill level in English was higher, with only 37% rating their father's and 38.4% their mother's English as poor.

As shown in Table 9, a mild but significant negative correlation was found between parents' language skills (as rated by the students) and students' anxiety levels for both English and Mandarin.

Table 9
Correlation Between Parental Language Levels and Students' Anxiety Levels

Anxiety Level	Parental Language Level	
	Fathers	Mothers
English ($N = 328$)	-.136*	-.113*
Mandarin ($N = 287$)	-.120*	-.221**

Note: ** significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed); * significant at $p < .05$ (2-tailed)

Table 10
Correlation Between Parents' Expectations of Academic Performance and Students' Anxiety Levels

Anxiety Level	Importance of Parents' Expectations
English	.161** ($N = 317$)
Mandarin	.160** ($N = 276$)

Note: ** significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

A mild but significant positive correlation was found between the importance of parents' expectations of students' academic performance (as valued by the students) and students' anxiety levels (Table 10).

Correlation Between Motivation and Anxiety

The investigators designed 6 questions to measure students' motivation levels in learning English and Mandarin (see Appendix A, Question 40 to 45). The findings showed that the internal consistency of the two sets of questions computed by the Cronbach's alpha was not high enough: 0.6705 for the English motivation questions and 0.5517 for the Mandarin motivation questions. Therefore it was not appropriate to group these questions together as a scale measuring students' motivation levels. The questions were investigated separately. Among the 6 questions, only two (Question 40 and 41) showed significant and negative correlation with anxiety scores. Question 40 was labelled as "self-perceived motivation," Question 41 was labelled as "enjoyment of learning." Table 11 showed the correlation between these variables.

Table 11
Correlation Between Self-perceived Motivation and Enjoyment and Language Anxiety

Anxiety Level	Self-perceived Motivation Level	Enjoyment Level
English ($N = 331$)	-.215**	-.159**
Mandarin ($N = 287$)	-.197**	-.168**

Note. ** significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

Three recurring themes were derived from the focus group interview data, namely, length of time spent on learning the two languages, affective response towards the two languages, and influence of society and family.

Length of Time Spent on Learning the Two Languages

The length of time the participants had been learning English was quite similar, all having started learning it in kindergarten. The students felt that although they had learned English for a very long time, they had not had many chances to practice English after class. Cantonese was used at home, and while there were English TV channels available, family members usually watched Cantonese programs. One subject in Group 1 reported, “We have studied English for many years, since an early age” and another student in Group 5 said, “We started learning English from kindergarten.”

I know about the various methods to improve my English such as listening more, speaking more, writing more... practicing more. We all know about these methods. Some evenings I have had a sudden desire to watch English TV programs, but my parents always want to watch the Jade Channel (local Cantonese channel). So I switch back to the Jade Channel, as they are following a soap opera! It's difficult. This is the kind of environment we have in Hong Kong.... (Subject 4 of Group 5)

As for Mandarin learning, the length of time spent by the students prior to university varied. The teaching of Mandarin in Hong Kong has not been very systematic to date. Students generally started

to learn Mandarin later than English. The participants reported “I have never learned Mandarin before” (Subject 3 of Group 5), “I studied Mandarin from Grade 4 until Grade 6 in primary school” (Subject 5 of Group 1), “I have studied Mandarin since secondary school” (Subject 4 of Group 3), and “I studied Mandarin in primary school” (Subject 4 of Group 1).

Affective Response to English and Mandarin Classes

As students have been learning English for a long time but with only marginal improvement, this has resulted in some students having a negative affective response towards the language. They were quite frustrated that they were not able to master English after studying it for such a long time. In respect to Mandarin, however, they still felt fresh and hopeful since they had only been learning it for a short time. One subject in Group 5 replied, “I am so sick of learning English, so tired of it! No matter how long I have been working on it, I still can’t master it!” Another participant from Group 4 reported, “I have been pushed to learn English since kindergarten. This is why my English is so poor.”

Right! We have studied it for more than 20 years, but we still haven’t been able to learn it well. What a shame! But Mandarin on the contrary, it seems that since I have just started learning it, I am still ambitious. (Subject 1 of Group 5)

The students reported that they felt bored in English classes. Even though their English teachers have tried to make their classes interesting, the students felt that “the nature of the class was boring” and “The most difficult part in an English class? Boredom!”

The teacher has tried to make the lesson interesting by playing language games. We enjoy the games. But it is the nature of the class. Even though the teacher has tried to make it less boring, but because of the nature of the class, you can at most add some varieties to it. (Subject 3 of Group 5)

The so called “nature” of the English class which bored the students was later found to be the English language itself. They did not feel like reading in English. In the Mandarin class, on the other hand, they felt they were more active in using the language, partly because it is Chinese in the first place. The participants’ response included, “Once you see the long English script: You ask yourself if it is possible not to read it”, “Mandarin is a variety of Chinese, just like Cantonese any way. You feel very familiar with it,” and “You will be happier (when you see the familiar Chinese words)!”

The Mandarin classes are not boring...Teachers are good, this is one element. But in fact, it is Chinese that you are using. At least you can begin talking, actively, voluntarily. In English lessons, the whole class just sit there silently. The teacher talks by himself; there is no response, no interaction. In Mandarin classes we interact quite a lot because we are more willing to speak up. (Subject 3 of Group 5)

The students reported that they could not concentrate in English classes. They prefer Mandarin courses to English courses and said, “Nobody can concentrate very well in English classes.” Another participant reported, “To tell you the truth, in English classes I am not listening most of the time.” When requested their attitudes toward Mandarin courses, participants gave many positive answers, such as “I do [like the courses]”, “A lot of fun”, “I would rather have more hours of Mandarin courses, and I will be happy not to have

English classes,” and “I have never been absent in Mandarin class. Other classes? Yes!” They spent more time using Mandarin outside class. They would even “create” opportunities to practice Mandarin. For instance, one participant replied, “The two languages are both required, you need to learn them both. But generally speaking, we are more active in Mandarin classes.”

Only in Mandarin classes not in English, I would voluntarily make some effort to get acquainted with other students as it is a good opportunity to practice speaking Mandarin with them when I have time. In fact, I am the one who will benefit the most.
(Subject 2 of Group 1)

Influence of Society and Family

The students were all aware of the importance of the two languages. English has long been a subject for study at school, but Mandarin is now high on the students’ list of priorities, with parental influence definitely a decisive element in this. Parents encouraging their children to learn Mandarin is not only driven by instrumental concerns. Hong Kong’s return to China and the feeling of being Chinese have both contributed to positive feelings towards Mandarin. Representative responses included “Both English and Mandarin are important! English has always been an international language, when communicating with people other than Hong Kongers, you mostly use English. Mandarin will be as important in the future!” and “My mom always says how come being Chinese, but you can’t speak Mandarin? She always asks me, ‘Do you know how to sing National Anthem?’ But my mom doesn’t know Mandarin herself.”

Why do I learn Mandarin? Why do I learn English? Firstly, for sure I have been forced from an early age to learn English. Secondly, the two languages are really useful. It is impossible not to use English or Mandarin. So when you feel that it is useful, you will naturally choose to learn it. (Subject 4 of Group 2)

Now that the market in Mainland China is so big, you must learn Mandarin. You will probably go to work in Mainland and everybody knows English there. In Mainland, you must know Mandarin, I think. If not, you can't communicate well with people there. (Subject 1 of Group 1)

At my home, learning Mandarin is not decided by business concerns. Why do they push me to learn Mandarin? My parents said that if two Chinese need to talk in English, it is national shame! So they said that I must master Mandarin. Because my mother runs a store, she always says that some Japanese, Filipino maids... can speak fluent Mandarin. But as I can't speak Mandarin well, she asked if I felt ashamed? (Subject 4 of Group 1)

DISCUSSION

Mandarin and Cantonese are closer than English and Cantonese, therefore Mandarin might be assumed to be easier to learn than English for Hong Kong students. But the correlation between anxiety and Mandarin achievement (-.352) is higher than the correlation between anxiety and English achievement (-.295). The correlation between anxiety in learning Mandarin and Perceived General Mandarin Ability (-.636), and between anxiety in learning Mandarin and Perceived Mandarin Speaking Ability (-.528) is also higher than the correlation between anxiety in learning English and Perceived General English Ability (-.457), and between the anxiety in learning English and Perceived English Speaking Ability (-.518). Besides, the

students' Mandarin anxiety level (114.71) is also higher than their English anxiety level (113.97), although the *t*-test shows that the difference is not significant. These results suggest that the impact of anxiety on learning a language which is very distant from the learner's mother tongue (i.e., English) is not necessarily greater than that on learning a language that is closer to the learner's mother tongue (i.e., Mandarin).

Mandarin and the students' mother tongue, Cantonese, share the same writing system, and therefore the students' reading and writing ability in Chinese actually equals their ability in their first language. This might explain why the influence of English Learning Anxiety was stronger on their perceived English reading and writing ability than that of Mandarin Learning Anxiety on their perceived Chinese reading and writing ability. Also because the two dialects of Chinese share a writing system, the students can usually guess the meaning of what they hear in Mandarin, even as beginners. Therefore they seldom have a problem understanding what is said in Mandarin. This finding echoes an earlier study on Mandarin learning anxiety by Yan and Wang (2001).

The correlations between anxiety and perceived language ability in both languages were higher than the correlations between anxiety and actual achievement scores. These findings are consistent with previous studies (e.g., Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1994; Clément & Kruidenier, 1985; Yan, 1998).

Several studies have indicated that learners' feelings of anxiety decline as their proficiency increases (e.g. Chapelle & Roberts, 1986; Gardner, Smythe & Brunet, 1977; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Yan, 1998). This study found that students with more hours learning

Mandarin felt less anxious. The fact that there is no significant influence of the time English has been learned on anxiety might be due to the fact that these students had been learning English for quite an equal period of time.

The students had spent a much longer time studying English than Mandarin. The qualitative data suggest that as a result of studying English for many years but not being able to master the language, the students seem to have come to terms with the fact that they might not make much improvement in English. With regards to Mandarin, on the other hand, they appear more concerned and thus the feeling of anxiety seems to be more acute towards the learning of Mandarin.

In both language classes, mild but significant negative correlations were found between self-perceived motivation and anxiety and between enjoyment in learning English and Mandarin and anxiety. This finding echoes previous findings that motivation and anxiety are correlated and are interactive factors in language learning (e.g., Ely, 1986; Lalonde & Gardner, 1984; Philips, 1992; Samimy & Rardin, 1994; Yan, 1998). However, since the internal consistency of the 6 questions intended to measure students' motivation levels was not high enough, further investigation is needed on the validity and reliability of these questions in the future.

Females were found to perform significantly better than males in Mandarin but not in English. This inconsistency actually reflects the findings of previous studies. Aida (1994) found that female students scored higher in Japanese than males. Yan (1998) found significant gender differences on several achievement measures of English, with females performing better than males. Yan and Wang

(2001) found no significant gender difference in students' Mandarin achievement. Consistent with most studies of university students, there were no significant gender differences (e.g., Aida, 1994; Chang, 1996; Yan, 1998) in language classroom anxiety levels.

Parental influences were identified in both the quantitative and qualitative data. A significant negative correlation was found between students' anxiety levels and their parents' levels of communication skills in English and Mandarin. The qualitative data showed that some students suggested that even though their parents were not good in English or Mandarin, they had high expectations of their sons or daughters, which could of course exert pressure on the students. The findings indicated a significant positive correlation between parents' expectations of students' academic performance and students' anxiety levels. The qualitative data also revealed that many Hong Kong parents, who are well known for the enthusiasm with which they drive their children to learn English, are now pushing them to learn Mandarin. In addition to the fact that Mainland China is now one of the biggest markets for international business, the importance of Mandarin (China's national language) to students as well as their parents in Hong Kong has been enhanced by the sense of being Chinese since Hong Kong's return to Chinese sovereignty.

CONCLUSION

The findings of our study showed that anxiety had influence on the learning of both English and Mandarin. It was expected that Mandarin, which shares its writing system with the students' first

language (Cantonese), would be easier to learn and therefore less anxiety inducing. However, the findings indicated that both the anxiety levels and the correlations between anxiety and achievement for learning Mandarin were similar to those for learning English. Different findings related to the length of time the language had been learned and to the impact of this on anxiety were identified in the learning of the two languages, which helped to explain the complex and seemingly contradictory fact that students experienced higher anxiety in learning Mandarin (according to the quantitative data), but appeared to be more willing to attend Mandarin than English classes (according to the qualitative data). It was also found that students' anxiety was related to their perception of the status and function of the two languages, to parental influence, and to the language environment in Hong Kong.

This study has led to some new findings related to the sources of anxiety in language learning. However, before any conclusions can be drawn, it would be advisable to replicate this research in other parts of the world. Findings from such studies could help researchers gauge the effect of parental influence on language learning anxiety. It would also be interesting to investigate the effect of having learned English for a long time, without much improvement in the level of proficiency achieved, on anxiety levels. In parts of the world where students learn another language similar to their mother tongue, it would be interesting to compare their anxiety levels in learning this language with that in learning a foreign language that is more distant linguistically.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Jackie Xiu Yan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Chinese, Translation and Linguistics at City University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include affective factors in language learning, interpreter training, and translation studies.

Mrs. Champa Detaramani is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of English at City University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include attitudes and motivation towards learning English, independent language learning, self-access language learning centers, medium of instruction and issues related to the teaching of EAP and ESP.

APPENDIX A

英語/普通話課堂焦慮調查表

問題	非常不同意	不同意	既非同意也非不同意	同意	非常同意
1. 在英語/普通話課上說話的時候，我總是沒把握。	1	2	3	4	5
2. 上英語/普通話課的時候，我不擔心犯錯。	1	2	3	4	5
3. 在英語/普通話課上，我知道老師要叫我時，我就發起抖來。	1	2	3	4	5
4. 我不明白老師用英語/普通話說的是什麼的時候，我感到很害怕。	1	2	3	4	5
5. 我一點都不在乎多上一些英語/普通話課。	1	2	3	4	5
6. 在英語/普通話課上，我發現自己想一些跟課堂內容無關的事。	1	2	3	4	5
7. 我總覺得別的同学語言能力比我強。	1	2	3	4	5
8. 英語/普通話課上我通常覺得很自在。	1	2	3	4	5
9. 在英語/普通話課上，我沒經準備就得發言的時候，我就慌張起來。	1	2	3	4	5
10. 我對英語/普通話不及格的後果感到很擔憂。	1	2	3	4	5
11. 我不懂為什麼有的人對英語/普通話課這麼不安。	1	2	3	4	5
12. 在英語/普通話課上，我會緊張得連知道的東西都忘了。	1	2	3	4	5
13. 英語/普通話課上我不好意思主動回答問題。	1	2	3	4	5

14. 跟外國人說英語/普通話我不會緊張。	1	2	3	4	5
15. 我不懂老師糾正的錯誤是什麼的時候，我很不安。	1	2	3	4	5
16. 即使我英語/普通話課準備得很好，我還是很不安。	1	2	3	4	5
17. 我常想不去上英語/普通話課。	1	2	3	4	5
18. 我在英語/普通話課上發言的時候，很有自信。	1	2	3	4	5
19. 我很害怕我的英語/普通話老師動不動糾正我犯的每一個錯誤。	1	2	3	4	5
20. 英語/普通話課上我快要被叫到的時候，我可以感覺到我的心跳快了起來。	1	2	3	4	5
21. 英語/普通話考試前我越復習越糊塗。	1	2	3	4	5
22. 我不覺得迫切需要為英語/普通話作充足的準備。	1	2	3	4	5
23. 我總覺得別的同學說英語/普通話說得比我好。	1	2	3	4	5
24. 在別的同學面前說英語/普通話我覺得忸怩不安。	1	2	3	4	5
25. 英語/普通話課的進度太快了，我擔心會落後。	1	2	3	4	5
26. 我上英語/普通話課比別的課緊張。	1	2	3	4	5
27. 我在英語/普通話課發言的時候既緊張頭腦又不清楚。	1	2	3	4	5
28. 我去上英語/普通話課的路上，覺得很有信心，很放鬆。	1	2	3	4	5
29. 我沒弄懂英語/普通話老師說的每一個字的時候，我很緊張。	1	2	3	4	5
30. 學說英語/普通話要掌握的規則實在太多了，我覺得吃不消。	1	2	3	4	5
31. 我說英語/普通話的時候，害怕其他同學會	1	2	3	4	5

50.目前所在年級:	1) 大一 2) 大二 3) 大三 4) 大四				
51.父親英語/普通話程度:	1) 不好 2) 好 3) 很好				
52.母親英語/普通話程度:	1) 不好 2) 好 3) 很好				
	非常不同意	不同意	既不 也不 不同意	同意	非常同意
53.我父母對我的學習成績期望很高。	1	2	3	4	5
54.我非常在意我父母對我(學業成績)的期望。	1	2	3	4	5
55.你認為自己的英語/普通話總體程度如何?	1	2	3	4	5
56. 你認為自己的	非常差	差	一般	好	非常好
英語/普通話會話程度如何:	1	2	3	4	5
英語/普通話聽力程度如何:	1	2	3	4	5
英語/中文閱讀程度如何:	1	2	3	4	5
英語/中文寫作程度如何:	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

Interview guide

(This is only intended to be a general guide: For each interview, the order of the questions can be altered. Depending on the flow of responses, some questions can be omitted, new questions can be added.)

1. How long have you been learning English/Putonghua?
2. What is your biggest difficulty in your English/Putonghua ? Why?
3. In regard to English/ Putonghua, what makes you feel nervous/anxious? Why?
4. Do you like to learn English/Putonghua? Why?
5. In English/Putonghua courses, do you often volunteer to talk? Why?
6. Do you use English/Putonghua outside class? Why?
7. Which language do you feel is more difficult, English/Putonghua? Why?
8. Why are you learning English/Putonghua?
9. Do your parents encourage you to learn English/Putonghua?
10. Do you think your motivation to learn English/Putonghua is high?

香港學生英語與國語之學習焦慮比較

摘要

本研究旨在探討並比較大學英語及國語課上語言焦慮的來源及影響。共 401 名同時修讀英語及國語傳意技巧課程的大學生參加了本研究。通過量化及質化的分析，研究發現語言焦慮程度與真實及學生自我評估的英文、普通話成績均相關；母語與目標語的距離因素對焦慮程度以及焦慮與語言成績相關程度沒有顯著影響；學習語言的時間長短僅對國語焦慮有影響；焦慮程度與學生心目中兩種語言各自的地位及作用、父母以及語言環境的因素有關。

關鍵詞：語言焦慮 個體差異 語言學習