

Language learning beliefs of Thai university students: Change of the beliefs through learning a new foreign language*

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Fujiwara, Takayoshi. 2018. Language learning beliefs of Thai university students: Change of the beliefs through learning a new foreign language. *Linguistic Research* 35(Special Edition), 1-22. Learners' beliefs about language learning are considered very important because of their contributions to the language learning processes, yet their developmental nature still remains mostly unexplored. The purpose of the study was to examine how Thai university students changed their beliefs about language learning at the dimensional levels after having learned Japanese. Undergraduate students ($N = 68$) in a Thai university taking elementary Japanese language courses completed a modified version of 35-item Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1987) at two different occasions: at the beginning of the first-level course (Time 1) and at the beginning of the second-level course (Time 2). In the first step of analysis, a six-factor structure was empirically identified from principal component analysis. Through comparisons of the factor mean scores, subsequent paired-samples *t*-tests identified a significant increase in only one of the six empirically identified belief factors. A significant increase was also identified at single-item levels in two of seven items grouped together in this dimension. Additionally, in terms of five items empirically grouped together into other factors, a statistically increase was also identified. The findings suggested that the language learning beliefs changed at the dimensional levels. Judging from the item statements, the students' experience of studying Japanese was more related to the changes of their beliefs about learning Japanese than those about foreign languages and languages in general. The former seems to be modifiable and developed through learning experiences, while the latter appears to remain stable. (Mahidol University International College)

Keywords language learning beliefs, developmental nature, dimensional structure, Japanese language, language learning

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1. Introduction

The importance of the learner characteristics, or the individual differences as referred in the studies of second and foreign language acquisition, has been widely recognised by researchers in language learning as well as language instructors, because of their crucial contributions to the language learning processes (Dörnyei 2005; Dörnyei and Ryan 2015). Learners' beliefs about language learning are one of these important learner characteristics. As Hsiao and Chiang (2010) noted, considering that people make their decisions in many aspects of life based on their beliefs (Bandura et al. 2001), the way how individuals learn languages is likely to be influenced by what they believe about learning in general and about learning languages in particular.

Because of the potential influence of the beliefs, this psychological construct has been attracting many researchers' interest, and in spite of the difficulty of its operationalisation, it has been extensively investigated over the past three decades (for a review see Bernat and Gvozdenko 2005; Hsiao and Chiang 2010; Wesely 2012). This situation is reflected by numerous studies including those recently published (e.g., Hama 2016; Hismanoglu 2016; Jee 2017). Although our understanding about the beliefs has been enhanced by the past studies, the stability or modifiability of the beliefs still remains mostly unexplored (Fujiwara 2014, 2015).

According to Fujiwara (2015), this lack of research is highly related to another underexplored aspect of the beliefs: the dimensional structure of the beliefs. This scarcity, though it was pointed by Kuntz (1996) two decades ago, still remains almost the same even today, as recently argued by Hsiao and Chiang (2010). They claimed that the five-factor structure theorised by Horwitz's (1987) Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) has not been empirically examined. It is thus unknown if the items grouped together within the same themes or subcategories of the BALLI scale actually measure what they intend to measure.

2. Literature review

The stability or modifiability of the beliefs about language learning has been

examined by a very few longitudinal studies, as reviewed by Bernat and Gvozdenko (2005) and Fujiwara (2014, 2015). Furthermore, inconsistent findings were obtained from the studies, as summarised by Wong (2010) and Fujiwara (2014, 2015). A significant belief change over a time was identified in three studies (Kern 1995; Riley 2009; Wong 2010), while Peacock (2001) identified no such change in his participants' beliefs. Thus, this nature of the belief stability still remains unclear. In addition, from the methodological point of view, Fujiwara (2014, 2015) indicated two critical issues in the above-mentioned four studies. These issues additionally endorse the need for the further investigations of the stability of the beliefs. First of all, and most importantly, no statistical inferential testing was performed in all the four analyses except Riley (2009). Second, all the analyses remained only at each single-item levels. Sage (2011) argued that the validity in the BALLI studies is uncertain due to this problematic practice of analyses. Fujiwara (2014) speculated that this situation might be structurally rooted in the BALLI instrument itself as multiple-item scales were not offered by Horwitz (1987).

The situation is very similar for the dimensional structure of the beliefs. This factorial structure is represented by the items divided into different themes or subcategories. The insufficiency of the studies empirically examining the dimensionality pointed by Kuntz (1996) still remains unchanged even today, at least as far as the BALLI model is concerned. According to Fujiwara (2018), only a few studies (Fujiwara 2011; Nikitina and Furuoka 2006; Park 1995; Truitt 1995a; Yang 1992) examined this aspect of the model. The studies which empirically examined the dimensional structure of the beliefs and the groupings of the BALLI items are summarised below in the next sections.

It was Yang's doctoral research (1992) at the University of Texas at Austin that used factor analysis for the first time to empirically investigate the dimensional structure of the beliefs, according to Kuntz (1996). Yang (1992, 1999) examined Taiwanese EFL students with the BALLI questionnaire. Through factor analysis, Yang (1992, 1999) identified four components. This pioneering study was then followed by two doctoral studies at the same university (Park 1995; Truitt 1995a). The two researchers both investigated Korean EFL students, and analysed the participants' responses to the BALLI. Through factor analysis, Park (1995) identified a four-factor model, while Truitt (1995a) identified a five-factor

model. The dimensional model of the beliefs empirically identified by the three doctoral studies described above was all considerably different from Horwitz's (1987) original theoretical model. The items grouped together within each factor were also different among the three factor analytic studies. However, there was very little discussion about this issue in the three dissertations. This was because the dimensional structure of the BALLI model was not their principal focus of the study.

Nearly two decades later, Nikitina and Furuoka (2006) next addressed this issue of the dimensionality of the beliefs about language learning directly, and it was followed by Fujiwara (2011). This issue was their primary purpose of the study in the two investigations. The two studies both compared the item groupings empirically identified from their factor analyses with the BALLI's original item groupings theoretically proposed by Horwitz (1987). Nikitina and Furuoka examined Malaysian students learning Russian, and identified a four-factor structure with 10 BALLI items. They claimed that the dimensional structure theorised by Horwitz was empirically supported in their study, although they could not replicate the Horwitz's model.

Fujiwara (2011) on the other hand examined the beliefs of Thai EFL university students, and identified a five-factor model with 35 BALLI items through factor analysis. Based on his careful comparisons of his findings with those from Yang (1999) and Horwitz's model (1987), he concluded that Horwitz's model was only partially supported. A noticeable contribution by Fujiwara's study was his identification of 17 BALLI items which were commonly classified theoretically by Horwitz and empirically by Yang's and his own study.

Meanwhile Hsiao and Chiang (2010) extensively examined this dimensional structure of the BALLI model, using samples of approximately 750 Taiwanese university EFL learners. Their study was very unique and distinguishable from the above-mentioned five studies in terms of its methodology. Hsiao and Chiang made remarkable contributions to the field. Horwitz's (1987) theoretical model was partially supported by confirmatory factor analysis for the first time, while a four-factor model with 12 BALLI items was identified as the most appropriate from both the theoretical and empirical perspectives. Hsiao and Chiang also noted that their findings suggested that the BALLI is likely to measure two additional subcategories of the beliefs about language learning, which are not

covered by the five BALLI themes or subcategories.

It was Fujiwara (2014) that addressed the issue of the stability of the language learning beliefs at the dimensional levels through statistical inferential testing for the first time. This endeavour was followed by his subsequent study (Fujiwara 2015), where this nature of the stability was investigated at the dimensional levels conceptually proposed by the scale developer. In Fujiwara (2014) a statistically significant increase was observed only in terms of one of the five factors empirically identified in his study. Fujiwara (2015) had a similar finding. A statistically significant change was identified only in terms of one of the five conceptual BALLI factors.

In the same year, Jee (2014) also investigated the change of the language learning beliefs at the dimensional levels through statistical inferential testing. She examined 12 university students learning Korean as a foreign language and compared their beliefs measured at two different occasions over one year at the categorical levels theoretically proposed in the BALLI model, as did Fujiwara (2015). Yet, she identified no significant difference between the two measurements.

This current study was another endeavour to examine this underexplored aspect of the language learning beliefs: the stability or modifiability of the language learning beliefs at the dimensional levels. In this study, the beliefs were measured twice as in the two studies by Fujiwara (2014, 2015): one before the first-level course (Time 1), and another before the second-level course (Time 2). With a four-week break (i.e., holiday) between the trimesters, the two measurements were approximately 16 weeks apart. The first measurement made it possible for us to evaluate what the students believed about learning Japanese with no experience of learning the language, and to examine how they changed or developed their beliefs through their learning Japanese over a period of time. Another important characteristic of this study was the identification of the dimensional structure from the participants' responses to the BALLI as a first step of the analyses. This empirical analysis also performed by Fujiwara (2014) increased the validity of the findings.

This current study shared the objectives with the two studies by Fujiwara (2014, 2015), and thus many parts of the methodology as well as the participants were similar among the three. Yet, in spite of this nature, this research was

distinguishable from the other two in terms of its research design. It was expected to make another contribution to the field, by examining the issue from different perspectives, as well as overcoming the shortcomings of the other studies. Moreover, the stability of the language learning beliefs at the dimensional levels still remains underexplored and thus mostly unknown, as only very few studies (i.e., Fujiwara 2014, 2015; Jee 2014) addressed this issue.

First of all, the level of comparison (or the unit of comparison) to examine the nature of the beliefs was different. In this study and Fujiwara (2014), the dimensional structure of the beliefs was empirically identified in the first step of the investigation. The participants' beliefs were then compared at these empirically identified dimensional levels. In Fujiwara (2015), however, this comparison was made at the dimensional levels conceptually theorised in the BALLI model by Horwitz (1987). Second, this study and Fujiwara (2015), the participants' beliefs were measured before they began to learn Japanese, while in Fujiwara (2014), the students responded to the questionnaire survey at the end of the trimester (after they completed a 12-week Japanese course).

The purpose of this study was to examine how Thai university students changed their beliefs about language learning after learning Japanese for the first time in an elementary-level course for 12 weeks. The research questions were as follows.

1. What was the dimensional structure of the beliefs about language learning held by Thai university students learning the Japanese language as a foreign language?
2. Did the beliefs about language learning change after learning Japanese as a foreign language for the first time for one trimester?

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants ($N = 68$) were undergraduate students who completed two sequential elementary-level Japanese language courses (i.e., level-one and

level-two courses) at a large research-oriented university in the Bangkok metropolitan area in Thailand. The students learned Japanese as a foreign language.

The first course was designed for so-called “zero” beginners, that is, students who had never learned Japanese before. Thus, no knowledge about Japanese was required to take this level-one course. By the end of the course, the students should have been able to request, give and understand basic information, read simple short texts written in the *Hiragana* and *Katakana* characters, and write at a simple sentence level using the *Hiragana* and *Katakana* characters in Japanese. In this level-one course, the students also learned how to write and read two types of the Japanese characters: *Hiragana* and *Katakana*. The starting level of this first course was below “novice low” and the exit level was “novice low” outlined in ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL] 2012).

The second course was the continuation of the first one. Thus, the students had to have knowledge and skills acquired in the level-one course before taking this level-two course. The students were required to take this second course in the subsequent trimester immediately after the first one. By the end of the course, the students should have acquired necessary knowledge and skills to have communication more advanced than the level-one course in Japanese, that is, to hold simple short conversations on common topics and situations, express opinions in a simple form, read short texts, and write at a short paragraph level in Japanese, using the Japanese characters. In the level-two course, the students also learned approximately 50 *Kanji* characters, that is, the third and most complicated type of the Japanese characters. The starting level of this second course was “novice mid” and the exit level was “novice high” based on ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines 2012 (ACTFL 2012).

Both courses had two-hour sessions twice per week for one trimester of 12 weeks, making a total of 48 hours of teaching sessions. The students were evaluated by quizzes, a midterm examination, and a final examination for both of the two courses. The midterm and final examinations were composed of a listening comprehension test and a written test. The participants took one of the four sections for each of the two courses (i.e., level-one and level-two courses) taught by one of the two instructors, who were both native Japanese speakers.

The students were free to take the section of their choice as long as a seat is available when they registered for the course. Thus, some students had the same instructor for the two level courses, while other students had two different instructors for the two courses. Nevertheless, the instructors coordinated very carefully in order to keep all the sections identical in all the aspects. The same midterm and final examinations were given on the same date at the same time for all the sections.

English was used as the language of instruction and of classroom in all the classes including the Japanese courses in the undergraduate degree programmes where the participants were enrolled. Only Thai native speakers and students of Thai nationality were included as the participants of this study. All the participants completed the BALLI survey at two different occasions: the first one at the beginning of the level-one course (Time 1), and the second at the beginning of the level-two course (Time 2).

The mean of the age of the participants when they took the survey for the first time (Time 1) was 18.68 years ($SD = 0.984$).¹ The largest age group was the 19-year old (38.2%), followed by the 18-year old (30.9%). The female students (63.2%) outnumbered the male students. Majority of the participants (75.0%) were business administration majors. Table 1 below displays the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of participants ($N = 68$)

Category	Level	<i>n</i>	%
Age	17 years old	8	11.8
	18 years old	21	30.9
	19 years old	26	38.2
	20 years old	11	16.2
	21 years old	2	2.9
Gender	Male	25	36.8
	Female	43	63.2
Subject major	Business administration	51	75.0
	Science	9	13.2
	Other	8	11.8

¹ The same participants ($N = 68$) took the measurement instrument twice: one before the level-one course, another before the level-two course.

It is important to note that all the participants had a high level of English language proficiency as non-native speakers of English. In order to be accepted to the undergraduate degree programmes, the students had to have an iBT-TOEFL score of at least 79 with a score of at least 25 in writing, or an IELTS score 6.0 or above with writing 6.0 or above.

Many participants ($n = 29$; 42.6%) had some previous learning experiences of foreign/ second languages other than English and Japanese. Chinese was the most popular and learned most widely ($n = 18$; 26.5%), followed by Spanish ($n = 10$; 14.7%) and Korean ($n = 7$; 26.5%). Four students learned two languages, and one student learned three languages.

We did not measure the participants' past experiences of travelling to other countries, and this aspect of the participants is unknown. Yet, judging from the socio-economic characteristics of the students in the programmes where the participants were enrolled, it is very likely that the majority had this kind of travelling experiences.

3.2 Materials

A modified version of the 35-item Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI) developed by Horwitz (1987) was used to measure the participants' beliefs for this study. The original BALLI had 34 items, but one item (item 35) was added later by Horwitz, according to Yang (1999). The 35 items of the BALLI were divided into the five conceptual subcategories or themes as follows: (a) Foreign Language Aptitude (items 1, 2, 6, 10, 11, 16, 19, 30, and 33); (b) Difficulty of Language Learning (items 3, 4, 5, 15, 25, and 34); (c) Nature of Language Learning (items 8, 12, 17, 23, 27, 28, and 35); (d) Learning and Communication Strategies (items 7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, and 26); and (e) Motivations and Expectations (items 20, 24, 29, 31, and 32).

The participants were asked to rate how they agreed or disagreed with the statements regarding language learning on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly agree (5)" to "strongly disagree (1)" in 33 items. The two other items (i.e., items 4, and 15) had different response options because of the nature of their statements: Item 4 measured the respondents' perceived level of difficulty of learning Japanese, and item 15 examined their idea regarding the necessary

period of time to learn a new language.

In this modified version the item statement wording was kept the same as the original BALLI except for the following cases. The word “English” was replaced by “Japanese”, “Americans” by “Japanese people”, “American friends” by “Japanese friends”, and so on. Furthermore, the expression “cassette or tapes” was replaced by “audio-visual materials (such as CDs and DVDs)” to accommodate the change made by the technological innovation.

3.3 Procedure

The measurement instrument was administered twice by the instructors teaching the Japanese language to their students in their classes: (1) at the beginning of the first session of the first-level elementary Japanese language course at the beginning of the trimester (Time 1), and (2) at the beginning of the first session of the second-level course at the beginning of the trimester (Time 2). The students were given enough time to complete the questionnaire in class before the questionnaires were collected by the instructors.

4. Results

4.1 Dimensional structure

In the first-step, the participants’ responses to the BALLI from the two administrations of the survey were analysed by principal component analysis to identify the underlying dimensional structure of the language learning beliefs. We used the combined data from the two surveys in this step of analysis. The data was suitable for the factor analysis judging from the following assessment. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was .621, and it was larger than the recommended value of .6. The Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity result was significant, $p < .0005$. Several correlation coefficients above .3 were noticeable in the correlation matrix.

Six factors were extracted through explanatory principal component analysis with Direct Oblimin rotation. The six factors explained 42.67% of the total

variance. Each of the six factors explained 12.96%, 7.90%, 6.03%, 5.51%, 5.17%, and 5.10%, respectively. The number of the factors was identified considering the screen plot, the number of the component with an eigenvalue larger than one, the results of parallel analysis, and the interpretability of the factors. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for each factor was .671, .646, .531, .511, .635, and .545, respectively. Appendix displays the six identified factors with the items constituting each factor. The numbers in the table indicate the factor loadings of the items.

As observed in other empirical studies (e.g., Fujiwara 2011; Nikitina and Furuoka 2006; Park 1995; Truitt 1995a, 1995b; Yang 1992, 1999), the identified dimensional structure of the beliefs was complicated and not clear-cut, making it difficult to interpret the results. The items conceptually divided into the different themes or subcategories by Horwitz (1987) were empirically grouped together within the same dimension. At the same time, the items from the same conceptual subcategories were empirically divided into different dimensions. In spite of this complex nature, the six identified factors were named as follows, considering what was actually measured by the items: (a) Factor 1, Foreign Language Aptitude (FLA, 5 items); (b) Factor 2, Difficulty and Strategies of Language Learning (DSL, 8 items); (c) Factor 3, Nature of Language Learning (NLL, 4 items); (d) Factor 4, Strategies of Language Learning (SLL, 7 items); (e) Factor 5, Expectations and Strategies of Language Learning (ESL, 6 items); and (f) Factor 6, Value and Nature of Language Learning (VNL, 5 items). The abbreviated factor label and the number of items grouped together in each factor are indicated in the parentheses following the label of each of the factors.

4.2 Belief change at dimensional levels

A series of paired-samples *t*-tests were performed to examine the impact of learning Japanese on the participants' beliefs about language learning. First, the factor mean scores were calculated after the scores of the two items with a negative factor loading (i.e., item 4 for Factor 2, and item 6 for Factor 4) were reversed (by replacing 1 by 5, 2 by 4, etc.). Then the mean scores of the six empirically identified factors were calculated for the two different times (i.e., Time 1 and Time 2), and then the mean scores were compared between Time 1

and Time 2.

A statistically significant increase was identified only in Factor 4 (SLL), $t(66) = -2.740$, $p = .008$ (two-tailed). The effect size was small ($d = .287$). In Factor 4, the students scored significantly higher at Time 2 ($M = 3.655$, $SD = 0.390$) than Time 1 ($M = 3.539$, $SD = 0.417$). It indicated a higher level of agreement to the language learning beliefs described in the items with a positive factor loading grouped under this dimension (i.e., items 12, 8, 24, 22, 26, and 14) in Time 2 than Time 1. It exhibited an opposite tendency for the item with a negative factor loading (i.e., item 6): a lower level of agreement in Time 2 than Time 1. Table 2 below summarises the results of the paired-samples t -tests together with the mean scores and standard deviations of the six belief factors.

Table 2. Beliefs change at dimensional levels

Factors	Time 1		Time 2		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Factor 1: FLA	3.812	0.442	3.888	0.482	67	-1.594	.116	.164
Factor 2: DSL	2.821	0.391	2.942	0.418	38	-1.963	.057	.299
Factor 3: NLL	3.776	0.515	3.842	0.534	67	-1.212	.230	.126
Factor 4: SLL	3.539	0.417	3.655	0.390	66	-2.740	.008	.287
Factor 5: ESL	4.400	0.346	4.392	0.376	62	0.183	.855	.022
Factor 6: VNL	3.547	0.454	3.635	0.465	67	-1.740	.086	.191

Note. FLA: Foreign Language Aptitude; DSL: Difficulty and Strategies of Language Learning; NLL: Nature of Language Learning; SLL: Strategies of Language Learning; ESL: Expectations and Strategies of Language Learning; VNL: Value and Nature of Language Learning; *M*: mean; *SD*: standard deviation; *df*: degrees of freedom; *t*: the sample value of the t -test statistic; *p*: probability.

Additionally, through a series of paired-samples t -tests at single-item levels a significant increase was also identified in terms of two of the seven items (i.e., items 12 and 26) grouped together in Factor 4 (SLL). In terms of item 12, the students scored significantly higher at Time 2 ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.935$) than Time 1 ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.996$), $t(67) = -3.759$, $p < .0005$ (two-tailed). The effect size was medium ($d = .455$). In a similar manner, in terms of item 26, the learners also scored significantly higher at Time 2 ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.653$) than Time 1 ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.837$), $t(67) = -3.330$, $p = .001$ (two-tailed). The effect size was also medium ($d = .506$). Furthermore, among the items empirically grouped together under the factors other than Factor 4 (SLL), a statistically significant increase was

also identified for five items at the single-item levels: items 5, 15, 9, 27, and 20.

5. Discussion

This study examined Thai university students' language learning beliefs and empirically identified a six-factor structure from the participants' responses to Horwitz's (1987) BALLI. The number of the identified factors was six, and it was different from the past empirical studies, which identified four or five dimensions. The finding was also different from Horwitz's theoretical five-factor model. Moreover, we faced another issue as did all the past studies. The empirically identified factors included items theoretically divided into the different conceptual subcategories of the BALLI model by Horwitz. As far as the second research question is concerned, only in terms of one of the six factors empirically uncovered in this study, Factor 4 (SLL), a statistically significant increase was identified. In addition, at the single-item levels, a significant increase was also identified in terms of two of the seven items empirically grouped together in Factor 4. Furthermore, at the single-item levels, in terms of five items empirically categorised under the dimensions other than Factor 4, a significant increase was also uncovered.

The findings related to the first research question do not support what was uncovered by the past studies regarding the dimensionality of the beliefs. The past factor analytic studies empirically identified four or five factors, but six factors were identified in this study. Yet it suggests that at least the beliefs about language learning have subcategories or themes which can be distinguishable from each other and empirically identifiable. This inconsistency in terms of the identified number of the factors might be partially due to the varieties of the participants' cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as to the different target language that the participants were learning at the time of the measurement.

Judging from the findings regarding the belief change at the dimensional levels, it seems at least at a glance that another empirical support was obtained following the two studies by Fujiwara (2014, 2015): The language learning beliefs changed at the dimensional levels, either conceptually developed or empirically identified, after having learned Japanese for the first time.

Yet, the items constituting the dimension where a change was identified are different among the three studies. The situation is still the same when only the two studies using the empirically identified factors as a unit of analysis, that is, this current research and Fujiwara (2014), are compared. Factor 4 (Strategies of Language Learning: SLL) in this study has seven items (i.e., items 12, 8, 24, 22, 26, 14, and 6), while Factor 5 (Difficulty of Language Learning) in Fujiwara (2014) has five items (i.e., items 15, 16, 4, 12, and 9). They have only one item in common (i.e., item 12). The conceptual BALLI factor of Motivation and Expectations where an increase was uncovered in Fujiwara (2015) has five items (i.e., items 20, 24, 29, 31, and 32), and only one item (i.e., item 24) was included in Factor 4 of this current study.

In fact, as Hsiao and Chiang (2010) noted, and as also noted above, the empirically identified dimensional structure of the beliefs about language learning is different from study to study in terms of the number of the factors and the items constituting each factor. Through comparisons of three factor analytic studies (Amuzie and Winke 2009; Cotterall 1995; Tanaka and Ellis 2003), Hsiao and Chiang observed more differences than similarities regarding the dimensional structure. This situation could be attributable to different measurement instruments used in the studies. Yet, the inconsistency of item groupings is still noticeable even among the belief dimensions empirically identified from the BALLI items (Fujiwara 2011; Nikitina and Furuoka 2006; Truitt 1995a, 1995b; Park 1995; Yang 1992, 1999). According to Hsiao and Chiang, this could possibly reflect a rich diversity of the beliefs that would not be assessed by a single study. They additionally noted that the new measurement instruments developed after Horwitz's (1987) BALLI imply the situation where the BALLI does not cover a representative subcategories of the beliefs about language learning.

This diversity of the dimensional structure might reflect the three conceptually different kinds of beliefs measured by the 35 BALLI items. The measurement instrument covers three different areas: (a) learning languages in general; (b) learning foreign languages; and (c) learning a particular foreign language (i.e., the Japanese language for this current research). Hsiao and Chiang (2010) noted that the items describing the same type of beliefs tend to be empirically grouped together. They observed that three of the four items (i.e.,

items 4, 5, and 21) categorised together under one factor were all related to learning English. The target language of the participants was English in Hsiao and Chiang's study.

Considering this aspect of the items, it seems that the students changed their beliefs about learning Japanese after having studied it for the first time for one trimester. In all except two items (i.e., items 26 and 6) grouped together in Factor 4 in this study the statements concern the beliefs about learning Japanese.

The participants appear to have changed their beliefs in the following manner. After studying Japanese, it seems that they became to endorse more strongly the idea that it is best to learn Japanese in Japan (item 12), and to appreciate more the need of knowing about Japanese cultures (item 8). It is likely that their wish to get to know the Japanese people better became stronger (item 24), and that they became to support more strongly the idea that it will be difficult to speak Japanese in a correct manner at a later stage if the elementary-level learners are allowed to make mistakes (item 22). It seems that the students became to value more the importance of practicing with audio-visual aids (item 26), and to find it more acceptable to guess when you don't know a word in Japanese (item 14). On the other hand, it is likely that they became to doubt more the idea that Thai people are good at learning foreign languages (item 6). The results from the single-item level analyses give a further endorsement for the items 12 and 26, as a statistically significant change was also identified at the single-item levels for the two items.

The results from the single-item level analyses exhibit this tendency as well: Out of the five items where a statistical increase was identified, three items (i.e., items 5, 9, and 20) refer to the beliefs about learning Japanese. The findings suggest that the students became to have a stronger belief in their ability to become fluent in Japanese (item 5), and to have a more realistic idea regarding the period required to master a new language (item 15). It is likely that they became to support more the idea that you should not say anything in Japanese until you can say it correctly (item 9), and to recognise more the difference between learning foreign languages and other academic subjects (item 27). It seems that they also became to agree more strongly with the idea that Thai people value the importance of speaking Japanese (item 20).

It is very likely that the belief changes identified in this study both at the

dimensional levels and single-item levels are caused by the participants' experience of learning the Japanese language for the first time at the university. It is possible that the students recognised the advantageous environment of being in a country where the target language is spoken because they faced the difficulty of learning the Japanese language in Thailand, where the chance to use it outside classroom is rather limited. Additionally, it might be due to this learning environment the students possibly became to realise the value of practicing with audio-visuals aids, as a way to increase the chances to use the language. In the Japanese courses, cultural aspects were discussed frequently in relation to the language components. This nature of the course might have made an impact on the student beliefs, as they became to recognise that the culture is an essential part of learning the language. The explanations of the belief change in this section remain speculations, however. Qualitative data from interviews with the language learners would be helpful to empirically identify the variables related to the change of the language learning beliefs, as addressed by Li and Ruan (2015) in their longitudinal study.

To summarise, the findings suggest that Thai university students' beliefs about language learning have some dimensions or subcategories which can be distinguished from each other and empirically identifiable, yet they are complicated. They also suggest the nature of the stability of the beliefs about language learning: Some are modifiable and changeable through learning a new foreign language both at the dimensional and single-item levels, while others remain stable and unchangeable. Precisely, they imply that the students' experience of learning Japanese as a foreign language for the first time produced greater changes for the beliefs about learning Japanese than those about learning foreign languages or languages in general.

5.1 Limitations

This current investigation examined the stability or modifiability of the beliefs about language learning at the empirically identified dimensional levels. The findings exhibited an important nature of the beliefs of being modifiable through learning a new foreign language. Still some limitations need to be

acknowledged, indicating future research directions.

First, the period between the two measurements of the participants' beliefs was only 16 weeks apart. It is undoubtedly necessary to examine this complex nature of the belief stability over a longer period of time to obtain reliable findings. As Fujiwara (2014, 2015) noted, one of the possible sources of the inconsistent findings about the stability of the beliefs at the single-item levels from the studies described earlier (Kern 1995; Peacock 2001; Riley 2009; Wong 2010) is likely to be the varying length of period of time between the two measurements. Second, the small sample size was certainly another constraint. A larger sample is needed to have reliable results from factorial analytic investigations.

Although a caution is needed to generalise the findings from this study to conclude the nature of stability of the beliefs about language learning at the dimensional levels, this investigation made an important step forward following two studies by Fujiwara (2014, 2015). The findings also serve as a guide to language teachers to make their students learning more successful, highlighting the essential nature of beliefs about language learning.

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Appendix

Dimensional structure of Thai students' beliefs about language learning

	Items	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
<i>Factor 1 – Foreign Language Aptitude (FLA) (5 items; $\alpha = .671$)</i>							
30.	People who speaks more than one language are very intelligent.	.643	.108	.115	-.143	.056	-.066
16.	I have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	.633	-.130	-.164	.288	-.124	.231

29.	If I learn Japanese very well, I will have better opportunities for a good job.	.567	-.220	.158	-.207	.043	.200
2.	Some people have a special ability for learning foreign languages.	.553	.076	.152	.144	-.024	-.062
5.	I believe that I will learn to speak Japanese very well.	.518	.035	-.133	.074	.355	-.111
<i>Factor 2 – Difficulty and Strategies of Language Learning (DSL) (8 items; $\alpha = .646$)</i>							
15.	If someone spent one hour a day learning a language, how long would it take them to speak the language very well: (1) less than a year; (2) 1-2 years; (3) 3-5 years; (4) 6-10 years; (5) you can't learn a language in one hour a day.	-.207	.642	.069	.082	.156	-.205
9.	You shouldn't say anything in Japanese until you can say it correctly.	.144	.619	.154	.082	-.177	-.029
21.	I feel timid speaking Japanese with other people.	-.326	.618	.028	-.106	.098	.089
19.	Women are better than men at learning foreign languages.	.113	.488	-.383	.085	-.143	.373
4.	Japanese is: (1) a very difficult language; (2) a difficult language; (3) a language of medium difficulty; (4) an easy language; (5) a very easy language.	-.013	-.475	-.040	-.134	.109	.056
34.	It is easier to read and write Japanese than to speak and understand it.	.202	.395	-.042	-.124	.101	.087
11.	People who are good at mathematics or sciences are not good at learning foreign languages.	.343	.375	-.148	.221	.014	.078
25.	It is easier to speak than understand a foreign language.	.297	.371	-.003	.032	.242	-.020
<i>Factor 3 – Nature of Language Learning (NLL) (4 items; $\alpha = .531$)</i>							
23.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning the grammar.	.080	.152	.702	-.033	-.151	.091

7.	It is important to speak Japanese with an excellent pronunciation.	.203	.210	.582	.092	.101	.032
3.	Some languages are easier to learn than others.	.126	-.236	.516	-.056	.204	.008
27.	Learning a foreign language is different than learning other academic subjects.	-.254	.015	.446	.125	.135	.275
<i>Factor 4 – Strategies of Language Learning (SLL) (7 items; $\alpha = .511$)</i>							
12.	It is best to learn Japanese in Japan.	-.113	.107	-.226	.659	.020	.257
8.	It is necessary to know about Japanese cultures in order to speak Japanese.	.283	.101	.118	.560	.168	-.167
24.	I would like to learn Japanese so that I can get to know the Japanese people better.	.284	-.103	.282	.470	.125	-.192
22.	If beginning students are permitted to make errors in Japanese, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.	.019	.108	.212	.437	.016	.030
26.	It is important to practice with audio-visual aids (such as CDs and DVDs).	-.028	.060	-.042	.427	-.025	.052
14.	It is OK to guess if you don't know a word in Japanese.	-.010	-.318	-.341	.369	.190	.059
6.	People from my country are good at learning foreign languages.	.143	.196	-.175	-.338	.285	.213
<i>Factor 5 – Expectations and Strategies of Language Learning (ESL) (6 items; $\alpha = .635$)</i>							
31.	I want to learn to speak Japanese well.	.062	.021	.025	.019	.685	-.154
18.	It is important to repeat and practice a lot.	-.137	.003	.023	.075	.673	.064
33.	Everyone can learn to speak a foreign language.	.037	-.018	.012	-.301	.602	.148
32.	I would like to have Japanese friends.	.258	-.152	.007	.104	.485	-.087
13.	I enjoy practicing Japanese with the Japanese people I meet.	.206	-.074	-.173	.396	.447	-.009
35.	Language learning involves a lot of memorization.	-.116	.108	.130	.035	.443	.117

<i>Factor 6 – Value and Nature of Language Learning (VNL) (5 items; $\alpha = .545$)</i>							
20.	People in my country feel that it is important to speak Japanese.	-.071	-.078	-.048	-.031	.002	.632
10.	It is easier for someone who already speaks a foreign language to learn another one.	.234	-.106	.028	.185	.196	.545
28.	The most important part of learning Japanese is learning how to translate from my native language.	.378	.206	.108	-.140	-.198	.481
17.	The most important part of learning a foreign language is learning vocabulary words.	-.105	-.038	.227	.053	.209	.473
1.	It is easier for children than adults to learn a foreign language.	-.017	-.004	.260	.369	-.104	.469
Eigenvalue		4.536	2.767	2.112	1.929	1.808	1.784
Percentage of variance		12.961	7.904	6.033	5.511	5.165	5.097
Cumulative percentage		12.961	20.866	26.899	32.410	37.575	42.672

Note. F1: Factor 1; F2: Factor 2; F3: Factor 3; F4: Factor 4; F5: Factor 5; F6: Factor 6.

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