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# Psychological Expertise Required for Advising in Language Learning: Theories and Practical Skills for Japanese EFL Learners' Trait Anxiety and Perfectionism

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# Psychological Expertise Required for Advising in Language Learning: Theories and Practical Skills for Japanese EFL Learners' Trait Anxiety and Perfectionism

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## Abstract

This study aims to introduce the psychological expertise required for advising in language learning (ALL) both in theoretical and practical aspects, focusing on two psychological factors that could frequently cause problems in language learning (i.e., trait anxiety and perfectionism). The first section explains theoretical aspects and, based on its explanations and the results of case studies on Japanese EFL learners, the second section suggests practical skills to deal with the problems caused by those two factors. Although previous language learning studies have focused mainly on state anxiety, the theoretical aspect emphasizes the importance of trait anxiety in ALL, and three kinds of actual skills are suggested: (1) setting a clear framework, (2) applying beneficial aspects of trait anxiety, and (3) viewing trait anxiety objectively. As for perfectionism, the theoretical explanation identifies areas some ALL advisors might easily misunderstand, and two kinds of practical skills are introduced: (1) balancing positive and negative perfectionism and (2) applying the principles of cognitive behavior therapy. Lastly, but most importantly, since advisors are not necessarily trained psychological counselors, they have to be careful about how they use psychological expertise. To avoid erroneous decisions, it is important to maintain client-consultant relationships with veteran ALL advisors or certified psychological counselors.

*Keywords*: psychological expertise, advising in language learning, trait anxiety, perfectionism, Japanese EFL learner

Advising in language learning (ALL) is an approach that promotes learner autonomy and meets each individual learner's needs (Carson & Mynard, 2012). Although it is a relatively new area of applied linguistics, some basic skills and strategies required for ALL practice have been developed based on specific principles and theories (Carson & Mynard, 2012; Kato & Mynard, 2016; Kelly, 1996). Above all, as Carson and Mynard (2012) illustrate, some principles adopted from humanistic counseling are indispensable for the professional practice. The following features of ALL also reveal this importance: (1) ALL usually occurs as a face-to-face and one-on-one session between a learner and an advisor (Carson & Mynard, 2012), (2) dialogues play a central role in ALL (Mynard, 2012), and (3) an advisor sometimes gains entry deep within a learner's inner psychological world, which includes his or her motivations and emotions (Carson & Mynard, 2012; Tassinari & Ciekanski, 2013; Yamashita, 2015). Additionally, many second language acquisition (SLA)

studies have focused attention on the psychological aspects of language learners (Dörnyei, 2005; Skehan, 1989). Most recently, Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) discussed various kinds of influencing factors such as motivation, language aptitude, learning styles, learning strategies, personality, anxiety, and creativity.

As stated above, some ALL sessions run smoothly with the focus on learners' psychological aspects. This means that advisors need to develop some psychological expertise as part of their skills to deal with problems caused by psychological factors. Furthermore, the following frequently seen situations also reveal the necessity of the expertise: (1) each language learner has, to a greater or lesser degree, some kind of psychological problem as a person, (2) these problems may sometimes emerge in an ALL session as they are often inseparable from language learning, and (3) advisors should occasionally explore such problems through the session. Although some skills and strategies in ALL practice are already based on psychological findings, other invaluable expertise still remains to be adopted.

The present study suggests psychological expertise required for ALL advisors both in theoretical and practical aspects, focusing on two important psychological factors (trait anxiety and perfectionism), which might cause some problems in language learning. Hence, first, theoretical explanations are provided based on previous studies, followed by some suggestions for practical skills to handle problems caused by those two factors, putting together pertinent theories and data from case studies.

Incidentally, most advisors are not trained psychological counselors. This has two important implications. First, while expertise in learners' psychological aspects is quite useful as stated above, not all advising sessions are related to serious psychological problems. Therefore, it is not a requirement for the job. Second, advisors, as non-trained counselors, have to be careful about how they use psychological expertise, or they might find themselves in serious situations that could leave the learner with lasting psychological damage. For example, because some advisors try to use the learner's anxiety to benefit the learner (e.g., as motivation for subsequent learning processes), they may want to discuss detailed episodes of anxiety. However, this dialogue itself might be a traumatic experience to the learner if the advisors do not have the appropriate skills to handle anxiety. Thus, to avoid erroneous decisions, it is important to maintain a client-consultant relationship with veteran ALL advisors or certified psychological counselors.

**Theories**

As a part of psychological expertise, this section introduces theoretical explanations of trait anxiety and perfectionism based on previous research in psychology and language learning. The theories will also help enhance understanding about the subsequent practical skills section.

*Trait anxiety*

In psychology, the concept of anxiety has been separated into two inter-related characteristics: *state* and *trait* anxiety (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970). While the former refers to "the transient, moment-to-moment experience of anxiety as an emotional reaction to the current situation," the latter is explained as "a stable predisposition to become anxious in a cross-section of situations" (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p. 177). In other words, while state anxiety focuses on the *situation* that causes people to become anxious, trait anxiety indicates individual differences in the extent to which a *person* can be anxious.

Interestingly, most previous research in language learning has mainly focused on the situational aspects of anxiety ever since Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) suggested the concept of *foreign language anxiety*. For example, Horwitz (2001) viewed language anxiety as a relatively independent factor, displaying only low correlations with general trait anxiety, and MacIntyre (1999) defined it as "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" (p. 27). Furthermore, in Horwitz's (2010) review of research on language anxiety, there were not many studies that focused on trait anxiety. These viewpoints are indispensable as they successfully distinguish language anxiety as a situational concept that occurs in language learning from more general anxiety based on each individual's personality. However, on the other hand, there surely are some language learners who experience trait anxiety, whose influence on language learning cannot be ignored. Above all, because trait anxiety has been regarded as a personality factor (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015), it can emerge as a core identity of each language learner during ALL sessions. For example, if a learner is extremely sensitive to evaluation from others in daily life, trait anxiety will also influence his or her classroom learning with other students. It might then serve as strong motivation in language learning, when he or she tries to overcome the personality factor. On the other hand, it could also serve as a negative reason by letting him or her avoid the learning process. In order to handle these practical issues, advisors should obtain more knowledge about trait anxiety.

### *Perfectionism*

As for the second factor, perfectionism, there are some key points regarding how it is defined and conceptualized (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). The present article explains the concept based on the Almost Perfect Scale-Revised (APS-R), which is a well-developed and frequently used scale to measure perfectionism (Slaney, Rice, Mobley, Trippi, & Ashby, 2001). The APS-R includes three subcomponents: *discrepancy, high standards*, and *order* (Slaney et al., 2001). Discrepancy is defined as the subjective perspective of the non-accomplishment of personal goals and objectives, including such measurement items as, "My performance rarely measures up to my standards" and "I am hardly ever satisfied with my performance." High standards refer to a tendency toward high self-achievement and include such items as, "I try to do my best at everything I do" and "If you don't expect much out of yourself, you will never succeed." Order is defined as the tendency to prefer one's own work and includes such items as, "I am an orderly person" and "I think things should be put away in their place."[1] Based on these three subcomponents, the first half of this section introduces two points ALL advisors might misunderstand, while the second half explains why psychological expertise with regard to perfectionism is needed for ALL advisors.

The first point that ALL advisors could easily misinterpret is that perfectionism does not necessarily mean a person does things perfectly. As can be understood by the discrepancy factor, some perfectionists set unattainably high standards. For example, if learners are obsessed with having native-like abilities as a language learning goal, although they cannot attain it due to its difficulty, this obsession possibly indicates typical perfectionism in language learning. In other words, perfectionism does not only mean attainment of perfection, but also includes a psychological tendency to strive for perfection. The latter should be emphasized, particularly in language learning, as some studies have reported that such a tendency has negative influences on language performance (Fujio, 2010; Kang, 2006; Pishghadam & Akhondpoor, 2011).

The second point is that perfectionism has both positive and negative aspects. In an oft-cited early paper, perfectionism is separated into *normal* perfectionism and *neurotic* perfectionism (Hamachek, 1978). The former is defined as, "striving for reasonable and realistic standards that leads to a sense of self-satisfaction and enhanced self-esteem," while the latter is "a tendency to strive for excessively high standards and is motivated by fears of failure and concern about disappointing others" (Flett & Hewitt, 2002, p. 11). Referring to the APS-R, the two types of perfectionism are distinguished from each other based mainly on the discrepancy score (Nakano, 2009). Thus, if learners are often satisfied with their

accomplishment of personal goals they are normal perfectionists, while if they are usually frustrated with their self-perceived accomplishment in their language learning, they could be neurotic perfectionists.

The latter half of this section describes two reasons why psychological expertise for perfectionism is needed, referring to the previous studies in language learning. There is a dearth of literature on the relationships between perfectionism and language learning (Flett, Hewitt, Su, & Flett, 2016). In addition, two types of biased viewpoints have been identified in the literature. First, most of the studies have focused on the influences of perfectionism on second language (L2) performance (e.g., accuracy or fluency in L2 speech; Fujio, 2010; Kang, 2006; Pishghadam & Akhondpoor, 2011). However, there are very few studies on the relationship between perfectionism and autonomous behavior, which most ALL programs try to pursue (e.g., goal setting or learning strategy selection). Thus, some advisors might suffer from the difficulties caused by perfectionism if they do not have sufficient knowledge.

Second, previous research seems to have exclusively indicated the negative consequences of perfectionism. As stated above, perfectionism could also work as a positive force in language learning. For example, when learners set a realistic learning goal and achieve it perfectly, they can become proficient learners with high self-esteem. Therefore, in ALL practice, advisors may sometimes have to accept learners' perfectionism as part of their core character and should be knowledgeable about using its positive aspects to enhance language learning. For these two reasons, it is important to discuss the psychological expertise necessary in knowing how to handle perfectionism.

## Practical Skills: Suggestions from Case Studies

This section suggests practical skills for dealing with trait anxiety and perfectionism that could be useful in actual ALL service. It introduces two case studies, the results of which are interpreted based on the theories explained above to suggest practical skills.

### *Methodology*

**Context.** The ALL service took place at a four-year university in Japan. The university does not have official self-access learning centers that are open to all students, but some of the faculties have started their own ALL services. The ALL service in this study was developed by the researcher in a faculty that did not offer any ALL services. The researcher was an advisor, who visited some English classes and explained the ALL service in order to

recruit learners. He clearly mentioned that although the ALL service would be offered as part of a research project, it was designed to maximize the benefit to each language learner. His explanation also included the fact that while the target language was English, the ALL service would be offered in Japanese. The total number of 162 students who were interested in attending the ALL service voluntarily completed an application form. From among the 65 students who could exchange several email messages with the researcher about their motivation to voluntarily participate in the ALL service, 20 learners from diverse backgrounds with regard to their majors, gender, and grades were finally selected by the researcher. The learners were not rewarded for participating in the research because the researcher wanted to avoid motivating them to learn English just for a reward. They all provided informed consent to participate in the research project. After all the learners completed the ALL service, two learners who seemed to have the characteristics of trait anxiety and perfectionism were selected for this case study.

**Participants.** The participants comprised two learners of English and one advisor, all of whom were native speakers of Japanese. The learners were typical Japanese EFL learners. Although they had English classes in elementary school, one attended just a few times a year and the other attended twice a month. Thus, the amount of English input they had received in elementary school was quite limited, and they only started to learn English earnestly in junior high school. They had also never been abroad before participating in the ALL service.

***Learner X (indicated as X: Trait anxiety).*** X was a female first-year non-English major who was aware of her trait anxiety. Initially, she joined the ALL service saying, "*I get very nervous when I try to have oral communication in English.*" However, as the ALL session progressed, she said, "*I don't really like to communicate with others even in Japanese,*" and "*I think I am usually too sensitive to others' evaluation in various situations.*" These features can be interpreted as trait anxiety, which can be applied to more than just her English learning. According to the placement test conducted in the university,[2] her Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Listening & Reading score was equivalent to the range of 500 to 550,[3] which could be classified as A2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Colloquium on the English Four Skills Qualification Examination, 2017).

***Learner Y (indicated as Y: Perfectionism).*** Y was a male first-year non-English major who occasionally strived for high-standard achievements. He was aware of his perfectionism, which was revealed mainly in his learning goals and strategies. For example, he made the following statements: "*In listening practice I usually want to listen to audio CDs*

*thoroughly, including word by word sounds, although I know I can't follow the speed of the audio in that way,*" "*When I check model answers of a writing textbook, I usually try to remember all the paraphrased expressions introduced,*" and "*I am sometimes not satisfied unless I analyze the detailed part of grammar rules deeply.*" In addition to these features, once he started to learn English, he spent considerable time on his learning, as he tended to go through the lengthy learning processes outlined above. As a result, he sometimes took a long time to start studying, because he felt reluctant imagining the cognitive burden of his subsequent "perfect" learning process. His TOEIC Listening & Reading score was equivalent to the range of 575 to 625 as well[3] (B1 in the CEFR).

*Advisor (indicated as A).* The advisor/researcher obtained an MA in psychology and worked as a psychological counselor. After studying abroad for one year, he changed his major to applied linguistics and English education and completed another MA in education. The advisor developed and conducted the ALL service in this study after participating in advisor training programs.

**ALL service.** The ALL service in this study was conducted one-on-one in person with individual participants and the advisor, and all the advising dialogues and tasks were carried out in Japanese, the first language (L1) of both. To maintain confidentiality, it was conducted in a dedicated interview room. The service comprised seven 60–90 minute sessions and took place twice a week. In each session, the advisor wrote down main ideas raised in ongoing dialogues and tasks on a whiteboard to share them with each participant more easily. Incidentally, while there were several useful advising tools such as questionnaires, visual aids, and activity sheets (e.g., Kato & Mynard, 2016), the present study viewed a *task* as a sequence displaying the learners' engagement, introduced by a specific tool. For example, a questionnaire that investigates each learner's personality aspects is still just a tool. On the other hand, advisors may provide instructions on how to use the questionnaire, ask learners to respond to it and share their results, and encourage them to monitor and control the influences of personality on their language learning. In this study, this is when the series of learners' actions or exercises related to the questionnaire became a task.

In this ALL service, while the advisor allocated each specific task in a particular session, flexible dialogues in line with each participant's needs still played a central role. For example, although learners were usually required to share the results of the personality questionnaire in the first session, the dialogues, if necessary, could still be flexible enough to go beyond topics related to the questionnaire. Furthermore, each session was designed such

that there would be sufficient time for free dialogues that were not related to any tasks. Therefore, the ALL service can be regarded as semi-structured. Table 1 shows each task with a brief explanation of its purpose and Table 2 shows the session number during which each task was conducted. The semi-structured allocation was based on Vygotsky's (1978) idea of scaffolding and empirical data from a pilot study. The goal of the semi-structured manner was to provide learners with the maximum benefit from the limited number of sessions. For example, as shown in Table 2, in the first session, learners completed their learning goals and questionnaires, which provided them with a trigger to identify the direct or indirect factors impacting their language learning. In the second session, they thought more about the effects of indirect factors through a task called "thinking about self." In the third session, their ideas about direct and indirect factors were summarized into a meta-view called the "mapping self."

Table 1. Tasks Conducted in the ALL Service

| Task | Purpose |
|---|---|
| Learning goal | To help learners set their own long-term and short-term learning goals |
| Learning log | To let learners log their actual learning (content, time, and reflection) |
| Questionnaire | To help learners know their own metacognitive abilities, self-esteem, cognitive styles, personality, willingness to communicate (WTC), motivation, and beliefs as language learners |
| Thinking about self | To help learners think more deeply about individual factors influencing their own learning |
| Mapping self | To help learners gain a meta-view of their own learning by connecting direct factors (e.g., learning goals, learning strategies) with indirect factors (e.g., personality, environmental factors) |
| Reviewing learning strategies | To help learners use various types of language learning strategies |
| Thinking about well-being | To help learners think about their well-being through English learning |

Table 2. Tasks Allocated in Each Session in a Semi-Structured Manner

| Session | Allocated tasks |
|---|---|
| 1 | Learning goal, Learning log, Questionnaire (pre) |
| 2 | Learning goal, Learning log, Thinking about self |
| 3 | Learning goal, Learning log, Mapping self |
| 4 | Learning goal, Learning log, Reviewing learning strategies |
| 5 | Learning goal, Learning log, Thinking about well-being (the first step) |
| 6 | Learning goal, Learning log, Thinking about well-being (the second step) |
| 7 | Learning goal, Learning log, Questionnaire (post) |

**Analytic procedures (reliability and validity).** The researcher implemented four practices to ensure the reliability and validity of the results. First, he triangulated the data by using various methods of collection. The main data were the recorded dialogues of each session. Two additional data sources consisted of each learner's handwritten or typed responses to each task and the notes on the whiteboard written by the advisor during each session.

Second, to check the reliability of what the learners mentioned in the sessions, the advisor asked them to respond on a 10-point scale questionnaire after the last session (1 = *no* to 10 = *yes*). For the questions, "Could you go through the ALL processes without lying about your true feeling?" and "Could you tell the advisor what you feel and think as it really is?" both X and Y provided a rating of 8, while for the question, "Did you trust the advisor?" X provided a rating of 10 and Y provided a rating of 9. Considering that they voluntarily completed all seven sessions, it was likely that each participant had built a good rapport with the advisor. In conclusion, these responses could serve as evidence for the reliability of what each participant mentioned in the ALL sessions.

Third, the researcher created a data matrix based on each participant's raw data. Developing a matrix is generally regarded as a useful way to find patterns in raw qualitative data (Sato, 2008). Additionally, Sakurai (2005) suggests an important criterion for the validity of qualitative data stating that each participant's story or behavior at a particular point should be consistent with those at another point. In order to check the validity, the researcher created a matrix in which the columns displayed a topic that was raised during the ALL sessions (e.g., trait anxiety and perfectionism) and the rows indicated each session number (1 to 7). From this it became apparent that X's trait anxiety and Y's perfectionism were consistent topics throughout the sessions.

Fourth, the researcher discussed interpretations of the data with colleagues. Qualitative research should appropriately represent the meaning and the world in which people actually live. Therefore, interpretations should not be based only on one researcher's idea (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994). Accordingly, the researcher first developed his own interpretations and, second, asked his colleagues including a professor, English teachers, and postgraduate students who majored in applied linguistics and English education to engage in a brainstorming session about the researcher's interpretations. Based on this discussion, the researcher modified his original interpretations. The practical skills suggested in this paper are based on these modified interpretations.

*Suggested practical skills for trait anxiety*

**Setting a clear framework.** The first skill for trait anxiety is to set a framework and clearly demarcate the area in which each ALL service could work. For several reasons, ALL sessions sometimes progress beyond the scope of English learning. Some learners might heavily rely on advisors in a comfortable environment, based on the good rapport between them in a dedicated interview room. Additionally, some advisors might delve too deeply into the private lives and inner beliefs of learners while tackling problems such as trait anxiety, because these problems could occur not only in English learning but also in their daily lives. However, if learners depend excessively on advisors, it may violate the ALL goal of creating an autonomous learner. Moreover, another concern is that ALL advisors who are not trained psychologists are likely not qualified to respond to such sensitive topics beyond the scope of English learning. Therefore, it is very important to set a framework for the topic areas that can be handled within each ALL service. In other words, learners and advisors should reach a consensus about the kinds of matters that fall within the scope of ALL, and advisors should make as much effort as possible to avoid straying beyond that framework during each session.

According to the following statements, X seemed to have relatively high trait anxiety in a cross-section of situations. She did not like communicating in either English or Japanese and usually experienced a high level of fear of negative evaluation from people around her.

X: "*After all, I don't really like to communicate with others even in Japanese.*"
"*When I speak in English, the situation gets even worse.*"
X: "*I usually feel afraid of betraying someone's expectation.*"
"*I feel that type of fear more strongly when learning English, since it is my favorite subject. I think others expect me to show high performance in English.*"
X: "*When I remember my past failure, not only in English classes, the memory rushes into my mind as a flashback… my mind is filled with the embarrassing experience.*"

Her words also reveal that trait anxiety had a great impact on her English learning as well as on other situations. Therefore, the advisor tried to cover this issue in the ALL service. To avoid going beyond the scope of topics that the ALL service can handle, the advisor set a framework using the following metaphor:

A: "*Please imagine a kettle filled with boiling water. That is your feeling of anxiety. Sometimes it can be explosive when you have a flashback of a past failure. It will be the role of psychological counseling to keep the temperature down to 80 degrees Celsius. On the other hand, this ALL service can put a lid, called 'confidence', on the anxiety improving your English skills, although it cannot directly lower the temperature.*"

X accepted the framework represented in the metaphor without any complaints.

It is a very important responsibility for advisors to keep dialogues and tasks within the framework. In other words, advisors should have a better understanding about the boundary between what they should and should not do or what they can and cannot do. They should consult other professionals if they feel they are crossing the boundary into the area that they should not or cannot enter. Thus, advisors need to maintain a client-consultant relationship with other experts, such as veteran advisors and psychological counselors. As a prominent example, if advisors notice very high trait anxiety that could have a fatal impact on the learner's daily life, they would need to refer him or her to a psychological counselor.

**Applying beneficial aspects of trait anxiety.** Anxiety has both beneficial and inhibitory values (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). The second skill is to apply the beneficial aspects of trait anxiety to English learning. Among learners who show high trait anxiety, some keep focusing on the anxiety possibly because it is an important core emotion both with regard to their English learning and their entire life. Therefore, one of the important roles of advisors is to think about how to apply the core emotion in more beneficial ways.

Before suggesting practical skills, a prerequisite should be emphasized here. As trait anxiety is a core emotion, advisors should recognize their learners' experience with anxiety. In other words, advisors should respect the meaning learners are trying to explore with regard to their own anxiety and the efforts they are making to deal with the emotion. Additionally, advisors should help learners find a positive use of the core emotion and encourage them to take responsibility for this process. Considering X's case, the meaning that she found for her trait anxiety was that it was an emotion she should overcome. Thus, trait anxiety strongly motivated her to engage in actual English learning processes. The following quote she made at the beginning of the ALL service represents her determination:

> X: "*I will have to take an English oral communication class in the next semester and I know that I will surely feel anxious in that class. I really want to overcome my anxiety before the class starts.*"

The advisor tried to respect this determination as much as possible because he thought it reflected a very important meaning she had in relation to her trait anxiety. In addition, as stated above, her trait anxiety could have been strongly influenced by her relationships with others. Based on these features, the discussion below divides her English learning into two parts and suggests more effective ways to make her trait anxiety work positively.

The first refers to the learning process that X could go through alone without experiencing strong trait anxiety. In such a learning process, advisors may have to actively help her seek out more effective learning strategies that would fulfill her desire to overcome trait anxiety. Actually, in X's case, she was able to use various types of learning strategies quite actively, which included reading aloud, shadowing, and vocabulary building in a TOEIC textbook, and watching TED Talks[4] and animation movies. She learned English almost every day during her 91 days of participation in the ALL service, missing only four days. Her average learning time was 5 hours 1 minute per week, according to her learning log.

The second part was the learning process with others, on which trait anxiety had a powerful impact. While X was actively engaged in the first type of English learning, she remained hesitant to tackle oral English communication. In such a situation, advisors may have to take a different approach. With regard to the second type of learning process, this section introduces her efforts and achievement, which occurred from the fourth through the seventh session.

> The fourth session:
> X: "*I think that I have to tackle actual oral English communication if I really want to improve it. The learning processes that I currently go through are like swimming practice on land. I think I need to look for an opportunity for actual communication.*"
> "*Though I would still feel anxious, I could relax a little more when I am in one-on-one conversation.*"

As a response to X's comments above, the advisor suggested demo lessons of a one-on-one online English conversation school via Skype.

The fifth session:

X: "*I created my account for the online conversation school, but I am still hesitant to try the demo lesson.*"

The sixth session:

X: "*I booked the demo lesson once, but I canceled it immediately because I got really anxious.*"

"*So, here I want to promise you to take at least one lesson by the next ALL session.*"

The seventh session:

X took a demo lesson as promised and said,

X: "*Before taking this ALL service, I didn't even imagine that I could take a lesson for English conversation. Although I was really distressed during the lesson, I am now very happy as I successfully experienced an online conversation.*"

Unlike the first process, the advisor waited for her to raise the topic of the Skype lesson herself, because he believed that it would be a more effective approach in such a case. More specifically, he believed that X should be responsible for her own decision about the lesson and understood that she may need a long time to overcome her anxiety. When she stated in the sixth session that she promised to take at least one lesson, the advisor was deeply moved. X could finally take the demo lesson and successfully boost her self-confidence, putting "the lid" on her anxiety.

The common finding in both the first and second process is that advisors should not regard anxiety as a negative feeling that has to be removed immediately. Learners should sometimes retain their anxiety to use as a driving force for an actual learning process (the first process), and they should acknowledge their anxiety as an emotion that brings a feeling of accomplishment and progress when they successfully overcome it (the second process).

**Viewing trait anxiety objectively.** The third skill allows learners to form an objective view of their trait anxiety, which can help control them more appropriately. This

section discusses one of those skills that learners could use relatively easily, based on X's case.

One of X's problems related to her trait anxiety was that she was sometimes upset when she was called on in her English class:

> X: "*In my English class, I am obsessed with making sure that my answer is correct when I am going to be called.*"
> "*When what I didn't expect happens… for example the teacher skips the student before me, I sometimes can't say anything due to my anxiety.*"

For this, the advisor suggested an "anxiety indicator" that included a 10-point self-evaluation scale. The advisor gave her the following instruction, "*Evaluate the extent of your anxiety right before you are called in English class* (1 = *not anxious at all* to 10 = *very anxious*), *and remember that it is O.K. if you make a mistake when your anxiety is over 7.*" X kept the "anxiety indicator" in her pencil case and used it during class. She told the advisor in the sixth session:

> X: "*Thanks to the anxiety indicator, I feel less nervous and more calm than before.*"
> "*I think I can see my subjective panic more objectively while I quantify the extent of my anxiety.*"

This episode implies that a simple self-evaluation scale could be useful to keep learners' subjective psychological reactions at a distance. In X's case, she could successfully stay away from her subjective upsetting feelings and, as a result, it seemed to alleviate her strong trait anxiety.

### *Suggested practical skills for perfectionism*

**Balancing positive and negative perfectionism.** As mentioned in the theories, perfectionism has both positive and negative aspects. If learners strive toward reasonable standards for their own goal attainment they will probably be successful as well as confident, while if they have a tendency to strive for excessively high standards, neurotic perfectionism would have a negative impact on their learning processes. The situation would be much simpler if all learners easily became the positive perfectionist, but that is not the case.

Therefore, the first important skill is to help learners reach the most balanced point between both aspects.

Y recognized himself as a perfectionist, stating, "*I have very black-and-white thinking,*" and "*Maybe, I am a perfectionist.*" This section introduces two problems he demonstrated in the ALL sessions to describe the advisor's attitude toward perfectionism and suggest both direct and indirect types of skills. In the first problem, the advisor noticed that Y seemed to be affected by high, somewhat unrealistic, standards, which had a negative impact particularly on his learning goals and strategies. It would not be too far-fetched to say that he was not very good at tolerating ambiguity and stopping at the point of balance. For example, he said:

> Y: "*In listening practice I usually want to listen to audio CDs thoroughly, including word by word sounds, although I know I can't follow the speed of the audio in that way.*"
> "*I am sometimes not satisfied unless I analyze the detailed part of grammar rules deeply.*"
> "*I try to transcribe model answers in my writing textbook to memorize new words and phrases, but I am obsessed with repeatedly writing it down, even when I find just a few parts that I failed to memorize.*"

With regard to the second problem, he also had a tendency to spend too much time once he began learning English, as he usually wanted to undergo the thorough learning processes described above. He told the adviser:

> Y: "*I cannot be motivated to learn English when I don't have enough time.*"
> "*I don't think two hours are enough.*"

However, there were not many opportunities for Y to use such a large block of time. Thus, his decreased motivation did not allow him to begin his learning smoothly.

For these problems, the advisor tried to keep the following two attitudes: (1) accepting his perfectionism as part of his core identity, and (2) focusing mainly on excessively high standards that should be changed into more realistic ones. Based on these attitudes, the advisor tried to take direct and indirect actions to solve Y's problems. For

example, as for how to use the writing textbook mentioned above, the advisor directly and clearly told Y:

> Y: "*I would have to acknowledge that I know three times is enough, but I cannot help but write repeatedly when I find mistakes.*"
> "*As a result, I sometimes cannot cover other parts I have to do.*"
> A: "*That is a very important point you should consider. If you understand that you usually experience this result, I strongly recommend that you stop after three times.*"

In addition, he tended to spend a great deal of time because he usually wanted to learn thoroughly once he began the process. After some tasks in the ALL service, he became aware that "*I should quickly start what I should do using my spare time more effectively.*" Then, Y and the advisor worked together to find learning strategies that Y could use even in a small amount of spare time, and they created his schedule as concretely as possible.

Of these two attitudes, the former serves to illustrate that the learner's excessively high standards were challenged directly, while the latter indicates that the standards were redirected toward a more balanced point in an indirect manner.

Consequently, these efforts have slightly but surely changed Y's balance of perfectionism. For example, in the sixth session, he said:

> Y: "*Now, I think I can partly be realistic instead of being a perfectionist, if I try.*"
> "*I can avoid focusing too much on details when I listen to audio CDs.*"
> "*I can do my homework more quickly than I thought if I try to use my spare time.*"

On the other hand, he also told the advisor:

> Y: "*I cannot help but check unknown words. If I don't find them on my dictionary, I still get too distracted with those words.*"
> "*I still like the perfectionistic style of the learning processes, as I can become confident with my English on that way.*"

As revealed by these statements, he still had some perfectionistic tendencies, as it was one of his core identities. The advisor remembers Y's air of both confidence and self-degradation when he said, "*I think I am really meticulous.*"

**Applying the principles of cognitive behavior therapy.** The last part of the discussion introduces a principle from a psychotherapeutic method that could be useful in ALL practice, namely cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). In simple terms, CBT is based on the idea that if people change their thinking, their emotions and behavior will also change. More specifically, it is based on the "cognitive model, which hypothesizes that people's emotions, behaviors, and physiology are influenced by their perception of events" (Beck, 2011, p. 30). In other words, "[t]he way people feel emotionally and the way they behave are associated with how they interpret and think about a situation" (Beck, 2011, p. 31). One type of those perceptions, an evaluative thinking mode called *automatic thoughts* often arises rapidly and briefly, and people most likely accept these thoughts uncritically, believing that they are true (Beck, 2011). For example, after a learner develops his or her English learning plan by listing all the things to be done, he or she might conclude that "it is impossible for me to finish all of them" as an automatic thought. However, if the learner stops in the middle of the thought and becomes aware that "I will be okay if I walk through the list one by one. That is the way I have taken in the past similar situations," he or she could modify his or her perceptions of the event and offset the effects of automatic thoughts. As a result, the learner may be able to step into a more effective learning process. The basic principle of CBT works for modifying the interpretations contaminated by automatic thoughts.

As stated in early findings about language learners' beliefs, each learner has a different set of beliefs (Horwitz, 1988), which sometimes become powerful automatic thoughts. Hence, ALL advisors should provide necessary modification of each learner's interpretation if it is affected by such beliefs.

Y's comment, "*I want to become a native-like English user,*" indicated that the native-like norm stayed in his mind as a distinctive belief about his English learning.

Y's native-like norm may be influenced by the English education he received in Japan, as it views native English as the model of a good English user. However, in addition to that, Y's perfectionism drove him into an automatic thought that led him to believe blindly in native-like English. Because the norm could motivate him to study harder, the advisor had to ensure not to deny it without thinking about its advantage. However, in Y's case, as the norm

possibly interacted with his perfectionism, it seemed to work as an unrealistically high standard for his learning goal. The following statements can be regarded as evidence of this:

Y: "*I usually want to listen to audio CDs thoroughly, including word by word sounds.*"

"*When I check model answers of a writing textbook, I usually try to remember all the paraphrased expressions introduced.*"

Prompted by this, the advisor showed him another possibility to move the balance from a negative point toward a more positive one.

When Y raised the topic of native-like English in the dialogue, the advisor introduced the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). ELF is defined as a "'contact language' between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication" (Firth, 1996, p. 240). The concept of ELF indicates that native-like English does not always have to be the ultimate learning goal. In fact, as English becomes an international language, the systematicity, creativity, and legitimacy of ELF has been recognized as another important norm challenging native speakers' English (Park & Wee, 2011). The advisor tried to form an alternative perception in Y's mind by indicating, "*Native-like English is not your entire learning goal, but rather a part of it,*" which could replace his automatic thought.

Eventually, Y said:

Y: "*Since I am Japanese, my English pronunciation might not necessarily be perfect.*"

"*Probably, the most important thing is to convey what I want to say instead of being obsessed with the detail of the English language.*"

"*After I have done the ALL sessions, I now think I should be more relaxed instead of trying to reach native-like English. I am happy to feel that way.*"

Needless to say, the concept of ELF should not provide plausible reasons for giving up on making effort. Advisors should be careful of this potential negative effect, as ELF is sometimes regarded as an acceptance of lower English proficiency. Reflecting Y's case, one thing to be emphasized here is that while advisors should carefully assess whether the norm of native-like English has a negative impact, they also should be careful to not demotivate learners from working harder.

**Conclusions and Future Directions**

The present study discusses the psychological expertise required for ALL advisors, focusing on trait anxiety and perfectionism. As Carson and Mynard (2012) illustrate, principles derived from humanistic counseling are necessary for ALL professional practice, which is quite different from the traditional style of language learning. As ALL sessions include processes that can provide a deep understanding of learners, some general topics can emerge beyond the scope of language learning. Although ALL advisors should set a clear framework that can keep learners and advisors within the appropriate boundaries, advisors should have broad knowledge of a wide range of topics outside the scope of language learning. For example, they might need to have extensive knowledge about psychological group dynamics such as the family relationships of learners, social issues that concern the current young generation, and political issues such as the influence of the Japanese government's Course of Study on English education. ALL is a relatively new area that is expected to become more sophisticated. Therefore, researchers and practitioners should work together and have further discussions on the expertise that ALL advisors should develop.

**Notes**

1.   The measurement items introduced here are cited from Nakano (2009), who developed a standardized Japanese version of the APS-R, as the participants of this study were typical Japanese EFL learners.

2.   The placement test consists of four sections to evaluate English knowledge and listening ability that are frequently used in situations such as daily life, school life, and business settings. The first to fourth sections evaluate the followings: (1) knowledge of vocabulary, (2) knowledge and use of phrasal expressions, (3) listening ability to understand the main idea, and (4) listening ability to understand specific information, respectively.

3.   The TOEIC is "an English language proficiency test for people whose native language is not English. It measures the everyday English skills of people working in an international environment" (Educational Testing Service, 2013, p. 2). As the placement test measures different English performance than that assessed by the TOEIC Listening & Reading, the converted scores should still be regarded as rough indications of English proficiency.

4.   According to the official website, "TED is a nonpartisan nonprofit devoted to spreading

ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks." The website archives a large amount of movie presentations on various topics, which could be useful for learning English.

**Notes on the contributor**

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