

How to cite the article:

Yuan, X. (2024). Of puzzles, mountains, and torii gates: International students' motivation for learning Japanese. *PanSIG Journal*, 10(1), 150–157. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPanSIGJ10.1-19>

Research Article

Of Puzzles, Mountains, and Torii Gates: International Students' Motivation for Learning Japanese

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Abstract

This study investigates the motivation of international students studying Japanese in a Japanese university, using Elicited Metaphor Analysis (EMA) to understand their underlying cognitive and emotional experiences over time. Seven students from diverse countries, aged 22 on average and with Japanese proficiency ranging from basic to pre-intermediate, participated in this research. Data were gathered through questionnaires administered twice during the academic year, complemented by individual interviews to gain deeper insights into students' motivations and perceptions regarding their language learning experiences. The analysis uncovered a variety of metaphors symbolizing the challenges, growth, and transformation associated with learning Japanese. These metaphors revealed the students' perceptions of their learning process, emphasizing both the difficulties and the developmental aspects. This study highlights the power of metaphorical language in capturing the nuanced motivations of language learners, providing valuable insights for educators and researchers.

本研究は、日本の大学で日本語を学ぶ留学生のモチベーションを調査するものであり、彼らの認知的・感情的経験を経時的に理解するためにElicited Metaphor Analysis (EMA)を用いている。参加者は平均年齢22歳で、日本語能力が初級から初中級程度のさまざまな国から来た7人の留学生である。データは、年度内に2回実施された質問紙調査によって収集され、さらに、言語学習経験に関する学生の動機や認識についてより深い洞察を得るために、個別インタビューによって補足された。分析の結果、日本語学習に伴う課題、成長、変容を象徴するさまざまなメタファーが観察された。これらのメタファーは、言語学習における困難と発展的側面の両方を強調しながら、日本語学習に対する留学生の認識を明らかにした。本研究は、言語学習者のモチベーションを捉える上でのメタファー的言語の力を浮き彫りにし、教育者や研究者に貴重な洞察を提供するものである。

Language learning motivation involves a dynamic interplay of psychological, social, and contextual factors that shape individuals' willingness and ability to engage with a second language. Decades of research have highlighted key motivational constructs, such as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, integrative and instrumental orientations, and language learning autonomy (Noels et al., 2000). These constructs provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how internal drives and external influences interact to shape language learners' attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes.

Motivation is particularly critical for second language acquisition, especially for international students studying abroad (Du & Jackson, 2021). It not only determines their engagement with the language but also influences their ability to adapt to new cultural and academic environments, overcome language barriers, and integrate into local communities. In the case of international students learning Japanese in Japan, motivation becomes both a driver and a challenge, as students navigate the unique opportunities and obstacles presented by this context (Hennings & Tanabe, 2018). Japan's rich cultural heritage, cutting-edge technology, and economic prominence attract a diverse array of international students eager to immerse themselves in its language and culture (Matsumoto, 2007). However, the significant linguistic and cultural differences between Japanese and many students' native languages and cultures often pose substantial challenges. These include the intricate Japanese writing system, differences in linguistic structure and vocabulary, and social norms that may contrast sharply with those of their home countries. Successfully navigating these hurdles requires sustained motivation, as students must not only overcome initial difficulties but also maintain their enthusiasm over time.

Understanding the motivations that drive international students' language learning endeavors is also essential for educators seeking to provide effective support and create conducive learning environments. Despite the growing interest in language learning motivation, there remains a gap in research specifically examining the motivation of international students studying Japanese in Japan. Moreover, Yu et al. (2022) highlight that many existing studies focus on either initial motivations or snapshots of motivation at a single point in time, overlooking its dynamic nature and potential evolution throughout the language-learning process. Additionally, traditional approaches to motivation

research have typically employed direct queries such as “What is your motivation to study Japanese?” (Kubanyiova, 2019), which often fail to capture the multifaceted inner dynamics and intricate layers of individual learners’ motivational journeys. As a result, there is a pressing need for research approaches that explore the dynamic and evolving nature of motivation, providing a more holistic and context-sensitive understanding of how motivation shapes language learning experiences and outcomes.

To address these gaps in understanding the dynamic and evolving nature of language learning motivation, Huang and Feng (2019) provide valuable insights through their exploration of Chinese learners of Japanese. Using Elicited Metaphor Analysis (EMA), they revealed how learners’ motivational states evolve across academic years, shifting from enthusiasm to frustration, and later to a pragmatic focus on outcomes. However, a limitation of their approach lies in its focus on Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3 students as separate groups rather than tracking individual learners’ continuous growth over time. This cross-sectional approach offers valuable comparative insights but misses the opportunity to capture the nuances of an individual’s motivational trajectory and the interplay of personal and environmental aspects throughout their language-learning journey. Building on this perspective, examining students’ metaphors in an immersive language-learning context provides a powerful tool for exploring the shifting mental and emotional landscapes they experience. This study seeks to address these gaps by investigating, first, how international students’ metaphors for learning Japanese evolve during a one-year exchange program, and second, what insights these metaphors provide into their individual motivational and cognitive experiences.

By examining the metaphors used by international students to articulate their language learning journey, the study aims to gain insights into the dynamic nature of motivation and its influence on language learning outcomes, focusing on students beyond Chinese learners studying Japanese in China. The results section addresses RQ1 by detailing the metaphors observed at different stages of the program, capturing the evolving perspectives of the students. The discussion section answers RQ2 by analyzing how these metaphors reveal the interplay of personal, cognitive, and environmental factors shaping learners’ motivational trajectories. Through this exploration, the study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on language learning motivation and inform pedagogical practices that promote successful language learning experiences for international students in Japan.

Using Elicited Metaphor Analysis to Undercover Student Motivation

Ushioda (1994) points out that much of the research on second language (L2) motivation has predominantly utilized quantitative methods (see also Yi Tsang, 2012). While studies employing quantitative approaches offer the advantage of objectively measuring motivation and systematically examining relationships between variables, Ushioda (1994) notes that they primarily demonstrate differences in degree rather than quality. Specifically, they often lack insight into the subjective and individual experiences of students and fail to capture how their motivation is influenced throughout the learning process, information that holds significant value for L2 instructors.

EMA is a qualitative research method used to explore the underlying cognitive structures and conceptualizations of individuals’ experiences, including motivation in language learning (Huang & Feng, 2019; Wan & Low, 2015). Rooted in cognitive linguistics and metaphor theory, EMA involves eliciting metaphors from participants to uncover their implicit beliefs, attitudes, and motivations. In the context of language learning, EMA offers a unique lens for understanding the subjective experiences and mental representations of learners. By prompting participants to articulate their experiences through metaphorical language instead of relying on direct questioning, researchers can access deeper layers of meaning and insight into the complexities of motivation.

To further illustrate, metaphors serve as linguistic tools that allow individuals to express abstract concepts, emotions, and perceptions in concrete terms, shedding light on their underlying cognitive processes and motivations. Studies utilizing EMA have revealed a variety of metaphors used by language learners to conceptualize their motivation (Huang & Feng, 2019). For instance, journey metaphors such as *learning Japanese is like climbing a mountain* highlight the effort, perseverance, and incremental progress required to overcome linguistic challenges. Growth metaphors like *learning Japanese is like planting a seed* emphasize the nurturing process of acquiring a language, where consistent effort and time are essential for meaningful language development.

Furthermore, these metaphors not only capture the learners’ perception of language learning as a dynamic and evolving process but also underscore emotional and cognitive dimensions, such as the satisfaction of achieving milestones and the transformation of their identity as they integrate the target language into their life. Each metaphor provides unique insights into the multifaceted nature of motivation, illuminating how learners navigate obstacles, set aspirations, and interpret their progress. By employing this qualitative approach, I aim to uncover the richness and complexity of motivation in language learning of Japanese, while complementing traditional quantitative methods and contributing to a more nuanced understanding of learners’ evolving motivational dynamics.

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

The participants in this study consisted of seven international students who enrolled in a one-year academic exchange program at Akita University. They represented a diverse demographic background, hailing from various

countries including the USA, Romania, Israel, Mongolia, Ukraine, and Germany. Among the participants, there were three male students and four female students. The mean age of the participants was 22 years old. In terms of language proficiency, all participants exhibited proficiency levels ranging from basic to pre-intermediate. Language proficiency was assessed using the Japanese Computerized Adaptive Test (J-CAT), with all participants scoring below 200 out of 400 on the placement test upon entering the program.

To facilitate the study, participants first attended a workshop on metaphor expressions, conducted by the researcher. The workshop introduced examples of metaphorical expressions, such as “learning programming is like,” accompanied by several programming-related metaphors to clarify the concept. Building on these examples, students were encouraged to create their own metaphors about Japanese language learning (see Appendix A). Data collection was conducted over two years, from 2022 to 2024, with participants completing the same questionnaire at two key points: approximately one and a half months after their arrival, once they had acclimated to their studies, and again about one and a half months before their final exams, as they approached the end of their program. Participants were instructed to use the language of their preference. However, most students opted to use English for their metaphorical expressions.

Upon completion of the final survey at the end of their study period, students were invited to participate in individual interview sessions. During these sessions, selected participants were asked to elaborate on their chosen metaphors and explain why they chose those particular expressions. The interviews provided an opportunity for students to reflect on their language learning experiences and articulate their motivations and perceptions based on their metaphor expressions.

To provide a detailed and nuanced understanding of the evolving changes in students' motivations, two participants were selected from the data pool to serve as representative cases for this study. These two participants, Students A (male) and B (female), were chosen based on their engagement with the metaphor elicitation task and their detailed responses throughout the study. By focusing on these individuals, the findings aim to provide insights into an individual's language learning, which might reflect broader experiences and attitudes common among the larger group of international students.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit (MIPVU) to identify underlying metaphors (Steen et al., 2010), as the majority of the data was in English. MIPVU is a systematic method that involves identifying metaphorical expressions by comparing the contextual meaning of a word to its more basic, concrete meaning. The target domains in this study focused on students' overall Japanese language learning, as well as specific areas such as grammar and vocabulary (see Appendix A). Each target domain was mapped to at least one source domain to capture the full range of metaphorical expressions. To ensure the reliability of the metaphor identification process, a second rater was involved. The inter-rater reliability test (Landis & Koch, 1977) yielded a score of 0.96, indicating a near-perfect agreement between the raters.

Results

The results of this study are presented in two parts, corresponding to students' perception towards learning Japanese at the beginning of the exchange study, and the end of the program.

Metaphors observed at the beginning of the study program

Regarding the first question “Learning Japanese in general is like...” Student A responded:

Learning Japanese in general is something like *getting to know a loved one for the very first time*. It's awkward, there are often misunderstandings and miscommunications, and it's a struggle, but at the end of the day, when I get to know it just a little bit better than the day before, it all feels worth it.

The metaphor compares the process of learning Japanese to the initial stages of getting to know a loved one, suggesting that the experience is both personal and emotionally engaging. For Student A, learning Japanese at the beginning involves building a relationship with the language, filled with both challenges and rewards. This personification of Japanese as a loved one suggests Student A finds interpersonal meaning and satisfaction in the process. Furthermore, describing the experience as “awkward,” with “misunderstandings and miscommunications,” highlights the inherent difficulties in learning a new language. The final part of the metaphor, “when I get to know it just a little bit better than the day before, it all feels worth it,” emphasizes the incremental progress and the satisfaction derived from each small achievement. Student A further described learning Japanese grammar as follows:

Learning Japanese grammar is kind of like *trying to solve a puzzle with a lot of pieces missing, and slowly finding them one by one at the bottom of the box*. The reason for this is that often I try to come up with a way to say something that I don't quite have the tools to yet, and discovering those tools allows me to slowly complete that puzzle.

This metaphor highlights the complex and gradual process of learning Japanese grammar. The idea of “a puzzle with a lot of pieces missing” suggests that the learner initially feels a lack of knowledge, or resources needed to fully grasp Japanese grammar. This captures the common experience of feeling overwhelmed or confused when first encountering a new grammatical system. The act of “slowly finding them one by one at the bottom of the box” reflects the slow and deliberate effort, as he reaches “the bottom of the box,” required to acquire and understand new grammatical concepts. Finally, Student A concludes with “discovering those tools allows me to slowly complete that puzzle,” indicating a sense of achievement as each new piece of grammar is gradually understood and integrated into the overall language competence. In terms of the third question, Student A responded as follows:

Learning Japanese vocabulary is, for me, a bit like learning *to paint with a lot of colors missing*. Because you can paint a picture (with limited colors), maybe even make it pretty, but until all those colors are on your palette, all those synonyms and antonyms, those terms of phrase, and metaphors and similes are at your disposal, it's never going to be quite how you imagined it in your head. But when learning new words, phrases, sayings, and euphemisms, your palette becomes more complete, and the colors become richer and more intricate, and the picture really comes to life.

This metaphor likens the process of learning Japanese vocabulary to painting with an incomplete palette. The initial image of painting “with a lot of colors missing” suggests feeling the sense of incompetence of not having enough vocabulary to fully express oneself. The learner can still create “a picture” or communicate basic ideas, but it lacks the depth and precision they desire. The metaphor progresses by explaining that as the learner acquires “new words, phrases, sayings, and euphemisms,” their “palette becomes more complete.” This suggests that each new vocabulary item enriches the learner’s linguistic toolkit, enhancing their ability to communicate more effectively. The “colors become richer and more intricate,” signifying the increasing complexity and nuance that come with a more extensive vocabulary. The final part of the metaphor, “the picture really comes to life,” conveys the satisfaction and achievement of being able to express thoughts and ideas more fully and accurately.

Despite all the anticipated difficulties, Student A maintains a constructive attitude, believing that each small improvement and deeper understanding of the language will make the effort worthwhile. Student B expressed her experiences through a distinct set of metaphors at the beginning of the study.

Learning Japanese in general is like *a quest in a forest*. You go straight on your path, and you face different challenges (new grammar constructions) or locations (different complicated kanjis). But you go through it and enjoy new impressions and reach new achievements.

Student B likens learning Japanese to embarking on a quest in a forest, an often-observed JOURNEY metaphor in learning (Komorowska, 2013), highlighting the adventurous and exploratory nature of the process. The phrase “You go straight on your path” indicates a sense of direction and purpose in the learner’s journey. It suggests that despite the complexities of the language, the learner has a clear goal and is committed to progressing along this path. The “different challenges (new grammar constructions)” and “locations (different complicated kanjis)” represent the specific difficulties encountered during the learning process. Conversely, grammar constructions are viewed as obstacles to be overcome because you have to “go through it”, while kanji are seen as landmarks within the forest that one has to pass. The idea of going through these challenges and “enjoying new impressions” implies that the learner finds joy and satisfaction in overcoming obstacles and gaining new knowledge. Finally, “reach new achievements” underscores the sense of accomplishment at the end as one “reaches,” with mastering different aspects of the language. Student B further elaborated on learning Japanese grammar, saying: “Learning Japanese grammar is like a leapfrog game because there are different particles that are similar to little frogs jumping around other words.”

This metaphor highlights the dynamic and playful nature of learning Japanese grammar. In the later interview, Student B explained that particles such as *で*, *に*, *へ*, and *を* moving around different parts of speech in a sentence are much like frogs leaping over each other. This suggests to Student B that mastering grammar involves constant adjustment and attention to the position of these small but significant elements. The game-like comparison also indicates that, despite its challenges, the process can be engaging and enjoyable. Lastly, when it comes to vocabulary, Student B responded as follows: “Learning Japanese vocabulary is like *painting a landscape*, katakana syllables are like leaves and ears, hiragana syllables are like flowers, kanji characters are like small sceneries with its own weather, buildings and nature.”

This metaphor compares the vocabulary learning process to painting a landscape. Student B elaborated on the metaphor by explaining that she views katakana syllables as leaves and ears because of their shapes. For instance, Student B pointed out that the katakana characters, such as ア, ウ, ラ, コ, ヌ, フ, and ヨ resemble ears in their forms. Similarly, the characters イ, エ, キ, and ミ look like vines in tiny leaves. Hiragana syllables look like different types of flowers that are more round and fuller. Kanji characters, described as small sceneries “with their own weather, buildings, and nature,” highlight the richness of kanjis, each carrying different parts. For example, the kanji for 窓 has a rooftop of a building, and there is water and condensation observed on the window of that building. These metaphors reveal the multi-dimensional nature of learning Japanese vocabulary to Student B, portraying it as a process that requires patience as it takes time to paint a landscape, and creativity as different types of shapes and sceneries, and where each component plays a role in creating a complete painting of the landscape.

Overall, both students displayed evaluative metaphors with positive attitudes. They also acknowledged the difficulties ahead of them with metaphors such as getting to know a loved one, solving a puzzle, or embarking on an

unknown journey, and both of them expressed a willingness to tackle these challenges.

Approaching the end of the study program

When approaching the end of the study program, Student A responded to the exact same questionnaire again. However, this time, he used a rather different set of metaphors. For the first question, he responded as follows: "Learning Japanese in general is like *Hercules task* because like the labors of Hercules, because it's very hard, and it never ends, the more you learn the more you have to learn."

In his response, Student A compares learning Japanese to the labors of Hercules, a metaphor that conveys the immense challenges and ongoing nature of the language learning process. Just as Hercules faced formidable tasks, Student A acknowledges that mastering Japanese demands persistent hard work and resilience. The phrase "the more you learn, the more you have to learn" indicates that with each advancement, new challenges emerge. This cyclical nature of learning can be daunting as each milestone reached only reveals further complexities and new areas to master. Student A described his experience of learning Japanese grammar and vocabulary as follows:

Learning Japanese grammar is like *pulling teeth* because it's difficult and becomes an unpleasant task, and learning Japanese vocabulary is like *pushing a rock up a mountain* because it seems every time I make my headway slide back to square one.

Here, Student A compares learning Japanese grammar to "pulling teeth," a metaphor that suggests the task is not only difficult but also unpleasant and painful. This imagery indicates that Student A finds the process of mastering grammar to be a strenuous and often discouraging endeavor, much like the physical discomfort associated with dental procedures. Right after finishing the survey, Student A pointed out that the heavy amount of individual grammar he had to memorize was particularly difficult. He expressed that grammatical structures with similar usages such as ようだ, そうだ, らしい, みたいだ involves tedious memorization and different conjugations rules that are challenging to retain. Student A further compares learning Japanese vocabulary to "pushing a rock up a mountain," evoking the myth of Sisyphus. This metaphor suggests that the process is laborious and seemingly futile, as progress is constantly undermined by setbacks. The imagery of making headway only to slide back to the beginning implies a sense of repetitive struggle and frustration. It reflects the learner's perception that despite putting in significant effort to memorize and recall vocabulary, there is a continual sense of starting over, due to forgetting words or struggling with retention. Together, these metaphors demonstrate Student A's language learning experience as one filled with persistent obstacles and emotional strain.

Now let's turn to Student B's responses: "Learning Japanese in general is like *going through the tori gates* because every next one gives you kind of a blessing for your next level of language." Student B employs a culturally rich metaphor (Kövecses, 2005, p. 109) to describe her experience of learning Japanese, comparing it to "going through the tori gates." This metaphor is embedded in Japanese culture, where tori gates are traditional gateways found at the entrance to Shinto shrines, symbolizing the transition from the mundane to the sacred. By comparing the process of learning Japanese to passing through tori gates, Student B suggests that each stage of her language acquisition feels like a positive experience. The metaphor further implies a transformative aspect to the learning journey as in "every next one gives you kind of a blessing". Just as passing through tori gates is often seen as a journey towards enlightenment or deeper understanding in Shinto belief, learning Japanese for Student B may be seen as a path towards cultural and linguistic enlightenment. This perspective highlights a respectful and reverent attitude towards the language and culture. Student B's responses to the next two questions are as follows:

Learning Japanese grammar still feels like *playing the leapfrog game*, because there are different particles that are similar to little frogs jumping around other words, and learning Japanese vocabulary is like *learning the martial arts* because here can be used same approach of mastering a few main moves (characters) is more important in the long distance than trying to cover all unique and rare ones from the very beginning.

In the interview, Student B explained that she is satisfied with the same metaphor they came up with last time, where particles (grammar components) are seen as "little frogs" jumping around other words. In terms of the third question, Student B compares learning Japanese vocabulary to mastering martial arts this time. This metaphor emphasizes a disciplined approach to vocabulary acquisition. In martial arts, practitioners focus on mastering fundamental moves before advancing to more complex techniques. Similarly, Student B said in learning Japanese, it is crucial to first master essential and basic characters, which serve as the foundation for future learning. It highlights a long-term perspective on language learning, where mastering core vocabulary is seen as more beneficial than attempting to learn all unique and rare words from the start.

Overall, Student A's responses to the end-of-program questionnaire reveal the immense challenges and ongoing difficulties of learning Japanese, highlighting the emotional strain and daunting complexity of mastering the language. In contrast, Student B's responses reveal a thoughtful and strategic approach, suggesting the learner is both engaged and methodical in the language learning journey. By balancing the challenges of grammar with a disciplined approach to vocabulary, Student B aims for comprehensive and long-term mastery of Japanese.

Discussion

The metaphors observed in the previous section revealed nuanced interplay between motivation and language learning. At the beginning of the program, Student A's metaphors highlighted a sense of enthusiasm, such as viewing Japanese as "getting to know a loved one" and grammar as "solving a puzzle." These metaphors illustrated a constructive and optimistic perspective toward learning, with a focus on incremental progress and the satisfaction of overcoming challenges. However, by the end of the program, Student A's metaphors took on a more negative tone, describing learning Japanese as "the labors of Hercules" and grammar as "pulling teeth." This shift likely reflects the increasing difficulty of the course material, compounded by the pressures of personal and academic commitments, such as preparing for graduate school as he revealed in the interview later. The brevity of Student A's later responses may further suggest he was overwhelmed with tasks, leaving little room for reflection or engagement with the language on a deeper level. In contrast, Student B demonstrated a consistent and strategic approach to language learning throughout the program. Her metaphors, such as "a quest in a forest" at the start and "going through the tori gates" at the end, emphasized persistence, cultural appreciation, and the transformative nature of the learning process. Student B's steady motivation appeared to stem from a long-term perspective on language acquisition. This mindset, reinforced by metaphors like "learning martial arts" for vocabulary and "playing leapfrog" for grammar, highlights an ability to balance challenges with enjoyment, sustaining motivation over time.

These findings indicate that both students exhibited personal and emotional engagement throughout the learning process, reflecting the motivational trajectory described by Huang and Feng (2019), in which motivation evolves through distinct phases of enthusiasm and challenge. However, this study complements their work by offering a longitudinal view of individual motivational trajectories in a diverse group of international students during a one-year exchange, revealing how personal and contextual factors interact over time. A recurring theme was the sense of achievement and accomplishment, with both students expressing satisfaction in their incremental progress, whether through "completing a puzzle" (Student A) or "reaching new achievements" (Student B). However, the challenges and complexities of learning Japanese were also evident as the course advanced, particularly in metaphors such as "pulling teeth" and "pushing a rock up a mountain," which reflected the frustration and sense of incompetence that can accompany the process. Note that these challenges were balanced by patience and creativity, as seen in Student B's comparison of vocabulary acquisition to "painting a landscape," where each word enriches the linguistic palette. Together, they revealed the multifaceted and evolving nature of motivation, offering insights into how personal, cognitive, and environmental factors shape learners' experiences over time.

Interestingly, the dataset did not reveal a pattern where motivation starts low and either increases or further declines. Instead, the findings from both students highlight two distinct trajectories: fluctuating motivation tied to external and internal pressures (Student A) versus stable, goal-oriented motivation maintained by strategic learning (Student B). These contrasting experiences underscore the importance of individualized approaches in supporting learners, as their motivational needs and responses to challenges vary significantly.

Lastly, the findings suggest that elicited metaphors can serve as a valuable diagnostic tool for identifying students' motivational challenges and emotional states during their learning journey. For example, metaphors like "pulling teeth" or "pushing a rock up a mountain" provide teachers with insight into the specific frustrations students encounter, such as grammatical complexity or vocabulary retention. Teachers can use these insights to design more personalized support strategies, such as gamified grammar exercises or visual aids for vocabulary retention, to sustain motivation over time. Furthermore, metaphors like "going through the tori gates" underscore the importance of integrating culturally meaningful and contextually rich materials into instruction, as such connections appear to foster both engagement and appreciation for the language and culture.

Conclusion

Overall, the results affirm the value of EMA in capturing the subjective and evolving nature of motivation. The metaphors elicited in this study not only shed light on the emotional and cognitive dimensions of language learning but also offer valuable insights into how motivation intersects with learners' personal goals, environmental conditions, and social contexts. This study also highlights that understanding students' metaphorical perceptions of their language-learning journey allows teachers to better address the psychological and emotional dimensions of learning. The ability to identify fluctuating or stable motivational patterns through metaphor can help teachers adapt their approaches to suit individual learner needs, fostering long-term motivation and better language-learning outcomes. However, one limitation of this study lies in its small sample size. Future research could build on these findings by examining larger datasets and longitudinal patterns to provide a more comprehensive understanding of motivational dynamics in language learning.

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Appendix

Metaphor Questionnaire

Instructions: Thank you for taking part in this survey. We are interested in your Japanese learning experience. Can you think of a metaphor and complete the sentence 'Learning Japanese is... ..because... ..?' You may explain why you choose specific metaphors (after 'because... ..'). There might be a follow-up interview after the questionnaire is completed. You can choose to complete the questionnaire using your first language or any languages you are comfortable with.

I. Basic Information

1. Name:
2. Gender: 1) male 2) female 3) others
3. Age:
4. Grade at your home university: 1) Year 1 2) Year 2 3) Year 4) Year 4 5) Graduate school and above
5. Email:

II. Metaphor Completion

1. Please complete the sentence:

Learning Japanese in general is
because... ..

Learning Japanese grammar is... ..
because... ..

Learning Japanese vocabulary (Katakana, Hiragana, Kanji) is
because... ..

2. If you have any difficulty coming up with a metaphor, would you please specify below.