Many studies have demonstrated that individuals with social anxiety interpret ambiguous social situations negatively. It is, however, not clear whether this interpretation bias discriminatively contributes to social anxiety in comparison with depressive automatic thoughts. The present study investigated the effects of negative interpretation bias and automatic thoughts on social anxiety. The Social Intent Interpretation Questionnaire, which measures the tendency to interpret ambiguous social events as implying other’s rejective intents, the short Japanese version of the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire-Revised, and the Anthropophobic Tendency Scale were administered to 317 university students. Covariance structure analysis indicated that both rejective intent interpretation bias and negative automatic thoughts contributed to mental distress in social situations mediated by a sense of powerlessness and excessive concern about self and others in social situations. Positive automatic thoughts reduced mental distress. These results indicate the importance of interpretation bias and negative automatic thoughts in the development and maintenance of social anxiety. Implications for understanding of the cognitive features of social anxiety were discussed.

Keywords: social anxiety, interpretation bias, automatic thoughts, covariance structure analysis.