

Exploring academic capital with narrative inquiry

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Introduction

This paper addresses an important question related to tertiary-level education in Japan. How does academic capital (i.e., family background, previous educational experiences, attitudes to learning and goals) impact educational outcomes of young Japanese? The interview data discussed below is extracted from a subset of participants in a larger, mixed-methods, QUAN+qual study. First, in the following sections, I briefly describe important trends that have impacted Japan, young Japanese and higher education, and subsequently, I discuss ramifications of these trends.

Japanese society in the past half century has been affected by several important mega-trends: globalization, shifting demographics and education credentialism. Despite the ubiquitous usage of the term *globalization* (Richard, 2013b), researchers have argued that its definition remains opaque (Agbaria, 2011; Zadjia, 2005). In brief, globalization might include: (a) mass changes in production and consumption; (b) shifts in government policy (e.g., deregulation, rationalization); (c) increased worker mobility with fewer employment benefits, less job security and greater polarization among skilled and non-skilled, tenured and non-tenured workers; and (d) the development and strengthening of interconnected social networks, knowledge and culture distribution and sharing. Globalization has negatively affected Japan in several ways. For example, there has been a general eroding of manufacturing work as

Japanese producers move factories off-shore where labor costs are cheaper leading to a loss of potential employment for young Japanese. One example of deregulation is the increased number of universities and colleges; and consequently, the increased the number of seats available for young people in tertiary-level education. This has led to a situation where lower-ranked universities admit students who might have few motivations to study. A second example of deregulation is the increase in the number of part-time and temporary workers at the loss of long-term and permanent employment, which has forced many young people to delay marriage and childbirth until later, if at all.

The second trend refers to family size that has been in a near steady decline since the end of the high economic growth period in the early 1970s. Japanese society is aging as couples marry later, women delay pregnancies and have fewer children. Simultaneously, there is limited immigration. One immediate consequence is the decline in the population of young people; for example, the population of 18-year olds (i.e., high school graduates/first-year university students) has fallen from 2.05 million to 1.51 million since 1992 (Amano, 2014). This, combined with the increase in the number of tertiary-level institutions results, as I discussed above, in little competition to enter lower-ranked universities. Thus, except for elite and other top-ranked universities, tertiary-level education has become an extension of high school (Amano, 2014), except at significantly greater costs.

The final trend refers to mass higher education and certificate inflation. In the 1950s, approximately 10% of high school graduates continued to higher education, by the early 1970s, this figure was still less than 30%, yet today more than 75% of high school graduates enter either four-year universities (50%) or two-year colleges and technical schools (25%) (Amano, 2014; Kariya, 2012a). The high school diploma of two or three generations ago is now the equivalent of a university degree except for the enormous expenditures

which have been shifted to the individual (Nakazawa, 2009).

Contemporaneous with these mega-trends, there were additional transformations happening in Japanese society: changes in educational philosophies and increasing university stratification. Previous to 1951, less than 70% of the children in sales, clerical or service households had a high school diploma; however, by the early 1970s, over 90% of children in all households had one (Kariya, 2012b). This expansion of high school certification to the children of workers across all socioeconomic stratum was rooted in the notion that children in Japan should be offered equal educational learning opportunities (Kariya, 2010). This philosophical model of equality of educational learning opportunities, known as the J-mode credential educational model, was paramount between the 1950s and the early 1980s (Kariya, 2010). According to the J-mode model, learners who made the greatest efforts entered Japan's elite universities, then received deserved golden job offers (Borovoy, 2010). In contrast, the dominant educational philosophy in Japan today is based on neoliberal principles of self-responsibility and self-reliance (Kariya, 2010). In their submissions to the Office of the Prime Minister, both the Strategic Economic Council (SEC) and the Commission on Japan's Goals in the 21st Century called for young individuals to be self-reliant and to build a self-responsible society (as reported in Kariya, 2012b).

Throughout the past several decades, there has also been an increasing rigid stratification of Japanese higher educational institutions with a small number of elite, primarily public, science- and research-based universities in prominent position, and which are recognized globally for their international competitiveness (Amano, 2014). This stratification leads to greater inequalities among institutions of higher learning (Amano, 2014). Several researchers (Borovoy, 2010; Kariya, 2004, 2010; Ono, 2007, 2008; Slater, 2010) have previously noted that most graduates from these top-tiered higher educational in-

stitutions are able to choose from among the best and most successful career trajectories available in Japan—for example, half of all CEOs of Japanese companies are graduate of just five universities (Tokyo, Keio, Waseda, Kyoto and Hitotsubashi) (Ono, 2007). Graduates from lower-ranked tertiary-level institutions and those who did not enter higher education are left to scramble for whatever jobs that remain (Borovoy, 2010; Slater, 2010). Thus, we have moved from a *gakureki* society to a *gakkoureki* one; that is, it is no longer sufficient that you have university credentials, but rather that you have credentials from the right schools (Amano, 2011).

Studies in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) have helped to inform our understanding of social (im)mobility. Building on cultural capital theories, researchers have identified important factors leading to positive academic outcomes in children: parental educational background and income (McCrorry Calarco, 2011; Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010), child-rearing practices (Lareau, 2003), and available resources, including educational trips, books, extracurricular activities (Greenman, Bodovski, and Reed, 2011). Building on theories of cultural capital, Kariya (2004) developed learning capital, which he argued is comprised of skills or competencies and attitudes, such as taking responsibility for one's own learning. Kariya (2004, 2010) found that learning capital was unequally distributed across groups; students from higher status groups were found to have more learning capital, and this was significantly related to higher scores in both mathematics and Japanese. Barone (2006) argued that ambition (i.e., distal goals) fostered through parental skills and family resources is an "important determinant of achievement." Lastly, Bodovski and Farkas (2008) underscored the importance of effort at school, also strongly associated with parental skills and family resources. Ono (2008) asserted that those who benefit most from Japan's rigid stratification of its universities are the children of elites as they have more resources and more (aca-

demic) capital available to gain entrance to the highest-ranked universities in Japan.

Richard (2013a, 2014) described the ongoing development of a survey to gather data related to academic capital¹. The survey included sections pertaining to family background, previous academic and non-academic experiences, attitudes to learning and goals. Through the use of interview inquiry, this paper investigates the impact of academic capital on the educational outcomes of three young Japanese. I propose that there is a positive co-relation between differences in academic capital of the participants, their current tertiary-level educational institutions and their future careers.

Methodology

Participants and Setting

The three participants in this study, Hana, Jun, and Masaki (all participant names are pseudonyms), are drawn from a larger, QUAN+qual study in which 16 university students were each interviewed twice, once in June, 2013 and again in February, 2014. Briefly, the 16 participants in the larger study were chosen for interviews in the following way. First, faculty at 12 disparate tertiary-level academic institutions (3 national, 3 large and 2 mid-sized private, 4 female-only) in the Kantō and Chūbu regions distributed documents to their students (N=1200). The rankings of these 12 institutions range from low (t-score=approximately 40) to mid-low (t-score=45), average (t-score=50), mid-high (t-score=55), high (t-score=60–65) and very high (70+). Second, students completed a consent form, a vocabulary size test, and the academic capital survey by early May, 2013, and this information was input into a data file. The consent form had two sections, the second of which described sign up procedures for the interviews, the interview process and compensation. Third, I wrote on individual pieces of paper the names of the 12 institutions from which students were participating, and these papers were folded

and placed in a hat. An assistant then drew four different pieces of paper representing four tertiary-level academic institutions: one national, two large private, and one female-only. Fourth, I randomly sorted the participants from these chosen four universities, and selected the first five students per chosen university; 20 students in all. Fifth, these 20 participants were sent an individual email at the same time which listed available times for five interviews the following week. A total of 16 students (80%) replied to the email, five each from two universities and three each from two universities and these 16 took part in round one of the interviews. From these 16 participants, three participants representing three distinct institutions were randomly selected for this current study by drawing names from a hat.

In this paragraph, I briefly describe the three institutions. Industrial Sciences University (Industrial; all university names are pseudonyms), very high-ranked, based in the Kantō region, is one of Japan's highest ranked national universities. Students at Industrial are enrolled in one of four non-science based faculties. Kantō University (Kantō), average ranked, is a large private university in the Kantō area of Japan. Students at Kantō are enrolled in one of seven faculties on several campuses within one prefecture in the Kantō area. Saint Catherine's Junior College (Catherine's), mid-low ranked, is a small, private, female liberal arts junior college in the Kantō region. Total enrollment at Catherine's is approximately 1200 students, and these students are enrolled in two departments.

As described above, the participants in the larger project completed a vocabulary size test (VST) (Nation, 2001; Nation & Beglar, 2007) in May, 2013. For the larger sample ($N=1200$), the mean vocabulary size was 3795 known word families ($SD=812.68$; maximum possible score=6800). The estimated known word families for the three participants are as follows: Hana=3,440; Masaki=4,480; and Genki=5,000. This suggests that Hana's vocabulary size

is approximately 0.44 standard deviations below average, while Masaki and Genki are approximately 0.85 and 1.40 standard deviations above average, respectively.

The interviews

The interviews were conducted in Japanese, the L1 of all participants, and were led by a young, Japanese, female, linguistics' master's graduate. Having an in-group, or close to in-group, member (i.e., near similar age, same L1, recent university graduate) conducting the interviews, I believed would facilitate the interviews. The interviews with Genki took place at a coffee shop near his university campus; with Hana, the interviews took place at a casual restaurant one block from her campus; and with, Masaki, the interviews took place in an empty classroom at his campus. All interviews were recorded with an IC recorder as the primary record of the interviews, and also with the microphone function of a smart phone as a secondary record. The total lengths of the interviews for each participant ranged between 15 and 25 minutes. At each interview, the participants and the interviewer met for the first time, and made small talk while having a coffee together before the interview began.

The interviewer asked the participants to talk about five themes: 1) family background and experiences growing up; 2) previous educational experiences; 3) current university life; 4) English experiences 5) and future goals (See Appendix). Although all prompts and questions were prepared in advance, it was neither feasible nor the goal of the interview to ask every question in the limited time the interviewee and the interviewer spent together. The interview was designed to be semi-structured. In some cases, the interviewees offered long, in-depth responses, and other times short answers. Following each interview, the interviewer took notes; and following all interviews, the interviewer gave me the audio recordings and notes. These audio recordings were transcribed and translated by research assistants.

Analyses

In the following section, I describe how I analyzed the data collected from the semi-structured small-life history interviews. I used narrative analysis, which refers to “talk organized around consequential events” (Riessman, 2003, p. 3), as a research tool when analyzing the interview data. Narrative analysis was chosen over various forms of data coding because narrative analysis seemed to best represent the participant data as a whole with the least amount of researcher interpretation. At the same time, I recognize that I play a role in the construction of this narrative, and thus I also use the term narrative knowledging, which refers to “meaning making, learning, and knowledge construction that takes place at all stages of a narrative research project” (Barkhuisen, 2011, 395). With narrative analysis and narrative knowledging, I hope to create a narrative for each individual, separate from the others; and after this, I plan to analyze the three narratives together. I listened to and read the interviews several times in Japanese, and I also read the English translations, and while doing this, I noted background information and relevant experiences. After this, I wrote narratives in English telling the story of each participant. As noted, each first interview lasted 15–25 minutes which is both insufficient and perhaps inappropriate for narrative analysis. To supplement the interview data, I checked the participants responses on the academic capital survey which was completed in May, 2013, approximately one month before the interviews took place. In the following pages, I narrate the stories of the three participants in this short paper, beginning with Hana. Direct quotes from the interviews are shown with the following coding: “(Int, MM, DD, YEAR, turn No.)”, where “Int”=interview, “MM, DD, YEAR”=date of the interview, and “turn No.”=numbered line in the English transcriptions. Following the three narratives I summarize and discuss salient features of each of the three participants’ narratives.

Results

Hana's Story

Hana, an 18-year old college student at Saint Catherine's Junior College, was born and grew up in one of Tokyo's bed-towns where she lived with her mother and father. When she was in grade five of elementary school she moved with her family to another of Tokyo's bed-towns. Her mother is a graduate of a two-year college and is a dental hygienist, and her father, is a university graduate who is an architect for a construction company. Growing up, Hana had a sense that her father was always busy. Despite her father being busy, the family usually ate dinner together. Both her parents worked since when she was little and she was taken care of during the day by her father's mother. She had a close relationship with her grandmother, and then later when Hana was studying for university entrance examinations, her grandmother suddenly passed away. The death of her grandmother was a shock to Hana and it affected her ability to concentrate on her examination preparations. Growing up, when the family had time, they would go together on short excursions, such as a day shopping trip to Costco or other large super shopping centers. Every summer, she visited her mother's mother in Kyushu. Hana said that even though her parents do not speak English, both her parents enjoy traveling abroad, and the three of them traveled to Hawaii on a short vacation while she was in elementary school.

Hana went to a public elementary school, where there were no regular English classes taught at the school, but from when she was in kindergarten she started to attend an English conversation school (*eikaiwa*). At the *eikaiwa*, students did various speaking activities and once a year they staged a play in English. When she first started attending the *eikaiwa* she always cried when her mother dropped her off because she did not want to be apart from her mother. In the end, Hana met a teacher at the *eikaiwa* that she liked, and

she continued attending this eikaiwa for 6 years. At elementary school, once a month or so, an ALT would visit and the students would play games. It was fun, and the teachers were friendly. For Hana, school was a place for friendships, and in the fifth grade, Hana and her family moved, which left her confused and without friends for a time.

At the junior high school Hana entered, students came from several elementary schools and again Hana had few friends. Later, at the junior high school, she joined the tea ceremony club which was an important space for her: “My best junior high school memories are in the tea ceremony club” (Int, June 28, 2013, turn 81). For Hana, the tea ceremony club, especially its tatami room, was a place to relax. In fact, before entering the junior high school, Hana had wanted to join an English-speaking club, but such a club did not exist, and since, she wanted to join something, she decided to join the tea ceremony club. Around this time, Hana realized she was not good at math or science and so she wanted to enter a high school that had a special focus on English. Also, although she did not hate studying, she had little interest in comparing her grades with her classmates. Hana’s parents offered her little direction about high school; they said: “Go where you like” (Int, June 28, 2013, turn 101), but they added “having good grades is an advantage so keep studying” (Int, June 28, 2013, turn 103). In the end, the senior high school she entered, which focused specifically on English, had a recommendation system; however, the criteria for entering were quite low. Applicants needed a minimum of Eiken 3rd grade, the MEXT benchmark for junior high school graduates in Japan, which is the equivalent of understanding and using familiar, everyday topics (e.g., likes and dislikes, basic personal and family information) (also equivalent to the lowest level, A1, on CEFR) (<http://stepeiken.org/grades>). Furthermore, it was not necessary for applicants to report grades in other subjects and this was an advantage to her because she was poor in

other subjects, especially math and science.

The senior high school Hana entered was far from home, a 90-minute commute, but she was determined to go there because the school put an emphasis on English. Once enrolled, however, her motivation to study English was lost for a while. The school population was composed of approximately one-third returnees and their high level of English caused Hana to wonder if she had made the wrong school choice, but by the second grade, she was having fun again. She again joined the tea ceremony club and made friends there. As part of the club, she received a grade one certificate in tea ceremony. She also took part in a two-week homestay in the United States. During the homestay, Hana had much anxiety about her English because she could not respond quickly to native English speakers, and she feared her responses were always too simplistic. As a result, she wondered if the native speakers could understand what she wanted to say. Returning to the high school, especially in the third grade, students at the high school mostly studied English. Other courses, such as mathematics and science were finished by the end of the second grade. This was just as well for Hana because English was her best and favourite subject. When asked why she likes English, Hana responded by saying that she loved all those English games and picture books at the eikaiwa. While at senior high school, Hana's most common after-school activities were studying, playing with friends and tea ceremony club.

Hana only began cramming for university entrance examinations in the third year of university, which she now realizes was late. One reason for her slow start was that she could not decide between nursing school or early childhood education; however, since she had not studied science and math she gave up on becoming a nurse. While cramming for entrance examinations, her mother paid for a private tutor for three months who encouraged Hana to try to enter a female-only university. The tutor and her mother de-

cided for Hana to take as many exams as she could. She failed examinations to three higher-ranked schools she had wanted to enter, leaving her demotivated, and both Hana and her parents were disappointed that she would be unable to enter a higher-ranked university. In the end, Hana entered Catherine's. Catherine's, though, also has a focus on English, so Hana is glad she can put her previous studies to work in English classes with a native English speaker. This is a benefit for Hana, and she tries to use English with this teacher.

Hana's goals for English is to attain 700 in TOEIC before she graduates. She asked one English teacher how to do this and the teacher recommended a book which she bought. Now, she wants to take the TOEIC again. It should be noted that Hana describes English as her best subject yet her receptive English vocabulary size is the smallest of the three participants in this current study, and it is nearly 0.5 standard deviations below the average in the larger (N=1200) study from which these three participants were drawn from. Hana is once again thinking about her future career. English is her strong subject, and she is studying early childhood education. One of her set goals is to acquire various certificates and licenses for future job hunting (e.g., TOEIC, Eiken, certified childcare worker) but also, once again, even though she has no concrete plans she is thinking about becoming a nurse. In terms of studying, Hana would be pleased if she could find the time to do five minutes of review after each lesson.

Genki's Story

Genki, 19 years old, was born and grew up in a small town in the western part of Honshu. His father is an engineer and manager for a major electric power corporation and his mother, when he was younger, worked nights, at first doing irregular part-time work, and then later, after he entered university, she began regular full-time work at a post office. Because she worked part-

time and at nights, Genki had the feeling growing up that she was always at home: she was there when he woke in the morning, when he came home from school, and when he went to bed at night. He has one older brother, 24, who was always considered the bright one (and the good-looking one) in the family, and Genki was expected to emulate his success. Recently his brother graduated with a master's degree from Japan's top-most ranked national university. Despite differences in age, abilities and looks, Genki describes his relationship with his sibling and with his parents as being very close, but now that Genki is away at university, he admits he has not contacted his family in a while. Growing up, Genki and his family often traveled together on weekends and holidays on short excursions in Japan, and once a year the family went abroad, for example to southeast Asia, Europe and North America. These trips abroad left a big impression on Genki as he discovered new worlds, new cultures and new languages.

Genki went to a local public elementary school. At that time, his parents forced him to take piano lessons but his heart was in playing baseball. He went to piano lessons reluctantly for three years but after that he was able to escape piano. The elementary school he describes as normal, but the students and teachers were cheerful. In the lower grades, Genki was able to perform well with little effort but by the higher grades of elementary school, he began to compare himself with his classmates and he began to make efforts to study more. In fact, he joined a cram school while still an elementary school student so that he could remain ahead of his classmates. Genki's brother had entered the highest-ranked private six-year secondary school in his prefecture, and his parents wanted him to attend the same school. He said he parents were not forceful about studying but they valued the importance of study: "they didn't say 'study, you should study' but they definitely wanted me to enter a good high school, so I think they are education minded" (I, June 24,

2013, turn 108). However, he could not pass the entrance exam, he entered his second choice secondary school, and his motivation to study decreased.

Genki described this school as one where students spent much time by themselves preparing for the entrance exams of high-ranked universities. At this school, there was also much pressure to join a club from the teachers, but he said he resisted doing so. Instead, he just spent his days hanging out with some friends, and goofing around. Then by the second year of high school Genki suddenly realized he was one of the lowest ranked students in his grade. Something clicked then, he is not sure what, but he decided he wanted to enter Industrial, but he knew his grades were not good enough. Fortunately, his homeroom teacher was very emotionally supportive. Genki said: “Where I come from, students who go to this university are rare, so when I said I wanted to come here, he was like, Genki-kun, that’s a great thing to say, don’t give up, keep working hard” (I, June 24, 2013, turn 62). Also, Genki’s parents would regularly talk to him about his future and give him advice. On his first attempt to enter Industrial, he failed; however, his parents supported him and they offered him a chance to be ronin for a year and to pay for a year’s tuition at a major *yobiko* (cram schools for entering high-ranked universities). He took his parents offer, buckled down, and was successful in his second attempt.

Genki’s English was always below average. In fact, while at *yobiko* one area where he put a major focus of study was on English. His current goals for learning English are to be able to speak English and to use it for business, although he is not studying hard. He is going to get a Skype partner with a foreigner somehow, and practice speaking. This idea of finding a Skype partner came to him recently. At the moment, he has several English classes at university and for some of those classes “he’s just killing time” (I, June 24, 2013, turn 178), although others are interesting. In one of them, his professor is al-

ways saying “bonus points, bonus points” (I, June 24, 2013, turn 180) and Genki finds that class easy to follow and interesting. In that lesson, he says, he’s trying pretty hard, because he says that lessons should be interesting to motivate him. Despite his past efforts to learn English, especially at yobiko, he claims that English is his worst subject and that still he is probably the lowest in his current class. It should be noted that of the three participants in this current study, Genki has the largest receptive English vocabulary, and his vocabulary was 1.5 standard deviations above the average in the larger study (N=1200) from which these three participants have been excerpted.

Concretely, Genki has not fully developed his future plans for life after university, in fact he describes his goals as still yet unclear: “I have some vague ideas but nothing is concrete yet” (I, June 24, 2013, turn 214) and “I don’t have all the points, but it’s still just some vague idea” (I, June 24, 2013, turn 228); however, he wants to complete at least a master’s degree and then work in management or be president of a company someday. In fact, when he was in senior high school, in senior 1 or 2, he cannot remember exactly, he came upon this dream and that is why he said he chose to study at Industrial: “I wanted to go to a university which is good in the field of management so I researched it” (I, June 24, 2013, turn 212). Ono (2008), points out that among CEOs and executives of Japanese small, medium-sized and large companies, graduates of Industrial make up one of the largest percentages.

Masaki’s Story

Masaki, a first-generation university student, is a second-year English major at Kantō. He is from an area in northern Japan that remains evacuated, and his family continue to live in temporary shelter for evacuees, as a result of the March 11, 2011 *Tōhoku-chihō Taiheiyō Oki Jishin* (Great Earthquake off the Pacific Coast of Tohoku). He was finishing second year in high school when the earthquake and tsunami struck.

Masaki is from a family of five, his parents and his two younger sisters and himself. Both of Masaki's parents are high school graduates. His father worked for a subcontractor at a nuclear power plant until the March 11, 2011 earthquake, and since then he works at home repairing electronic appliances; and his mother worked part-time cleaning a local office from 9–10 pm during the week when he was younger. Masaki believes his mother was not so busy as she always seemed to be at home when he was there except for the short-time she was working in the evenings. He has a good relationship with his sisters, one of whom is now a high school student and the other is in elementary school, but as they remain in Tohoku, since he has been a student at Kantō he does not see them often. When he visits his hometown, he always spends time with his sisters. Masaki's father likes the outdoors, so during summer holidays, growing up, Masaki and his family would go camping, and sometimes other relatives would join. On weekends, the family often went shopping together. His parents were not strict about studying and Masaki did as he wanted because he knew his high school entrance examination would be easy. Then, following the earthquake, Kantō offered several places to students from Masaki's high school, and he could pass the *suisen* (recommendation) examination into Kantō easily. His parents and many members in the local community were supportive of his cohort following the earthquake; and his parents were glad when they found out that he was chosen to attend Kantō, although Kantō was neither his, nor his parents first choice university. Masaki noted: "I think it is thanks to the people in my hometown who helped us after the disaster that I can enter this university" (Int, June 28, 2013, turn 213).

For both primary and secondary school, Masaki went to public schools. His schools were unique in that they emphasized international events, foreign language study, and overseas homestay programs. In junior high school, Ma-

saki participated in a one-month homestay program in Australia. On the trip, he was anxious at first, but the guide and the local students were kind and supportive, and this experience was a good opportunity for him. Also, Masaki participated in badminton club from junior high school through high school. While in junior high school, Masaki began to compare his grades with his classmates. At this point, he realized he was in the middle or slightly above average. He wanted higher scores but this did not pressure Masaki to study more. He was busy with club activity at this time and he was able to maintain his current level of grades. Also, the high school he intended to enter had a close relationship with his junior high school, so he took an exam which was easier than a general entrance examination.

The public senior high school that Masaki attended was a below-average ranked school and it offered foreign language courses in several subjects. Students chose at least two foreign languages and Masaki chose his two favorite foreign languages, English and French. Masaki and his classmates visited a local community center for a two-day intensive English training courses. He described the event as a festival but it has not been held since the earthquake. While at high school, Masaki was on the steering committee for a national youth event which was held in his home prefecture. He had wanted to participate in the organization of this event, so when he was selected to be a member he was pleased. The committee met for one and a half years before the event began and this kept Masaki busy.

Masaki's future goals for learning English are to be good enough not to have trouble when living abroad, although he has no concrete plans to live abroad, or when dealing with foreigners in Japan at his future job. Now, in his free time, he watches TV programs in English to improve his listening; and his listening is good enough that he can watch without any trouble. He also is currently taking five English classes at university, and he uses these classes to

improve his speaking ability. In fact, his favorite class is an English conversation class because he enjoys talking in English with classmates and the teacher. Masaki's receptive vocabulary size is approximately 0.85 standard deviations above the average of the 1200 participants in the larger study. After graduation, Masaki wants his future job to be connected to automobiles in the service industry. One reason is that for his part-time job now, he works at a national car rental shop in a popular area of the Tokyo region, and many foreigners often use the shop. He enjoys having the opportunities to use English with these foreigners at work. He is thinking either to work for this national automobile company, either as a car salesman or in their rental shops; or working at a driving school where foreigners go to acquire driving licences in Japan. A second reason he wants to work in the service industry is because he believes it would be easy to receive *naitei* (an unofficial job offer) early during the job hunting process. "Since this year I was aware of the fact that I want to work in the service industry. I think that I can get an unofficial decision more easily than other industries, so I decided that" (Int, June 28, 2013, turns 255).

Summary and Discussion

Family Background

The parents of the three participants differ in their education levels and careers. Masaki's parents, both high school graduates, have the least amount of education and Masaki is a first generation university student. Hana's parents are fairly well-educated; her father is a university graduate and her mother graduated from a dental hygienist college. Both of Genki's parents graduated from university. Also noteworthy is that Genki's oldest brother graduated with a master's degree in science from the highest-ranked national university. Growing up, both Genki and Masaki's mothers only worked part-time, while Hana's mother worked full-time. Genki's father, an engineer and

manager in a large Japanese company, and Hana's father, an architect for a Japanese construction company, have the most prestigious careers. Masaki's father, on the other hand, is a lower-occupation manual worker (Office of National Statistics, 2010). Regarding family activities, Genki's family frequently travelled together in Japan and abroad suggesting a greater amount of financial ease while Hana and Masaki went on shopping excursions with their families, and family-oriented travel within Japan. McCrory Calarco (2011) and Yamamoto and Brinton (2010) have shown that educational background of parents and family income level have a positive relationship with academic outcomes of children. Thus, based on family background, Genki and Hana appear to have the most academic capital.

Previous Educational Experiences

All three participants took part in few in-school and out-of-school club activities, especially in elementary school: piano and baseball (Genki); badminton and steering committee (Masaki); and tea ceremony (Hana). Genki was unable to enter his first-choice school and attended the second-highest ranked secondary school instead. At this school, teachers encouraged Genki to join a club but he just hung out with friends instead. Genki began going to a cram school from elementary school, then again in high school, and finally yobiko at great expense for one year. After being roninsei for one year, Genki passed his first-choice university, one of the highest-ranked national universities in Japan. According to Ono (2007), lifetime earnings are improved by being a roninsei for one to two years. Furthermore, the costs of attending a national university are on average, nearly one-third the cost of attending a private university. It is likely that the children of families with the socioeconomic ease to afford extracurricular educational opportunities gain the most from tertiary-level education.

The schools Masaki attended put an emphasis on international exchange

and foreign languages, and in junior high school he did a one-month home-stay in Australia. His high school, which he was recommended into, was below averaged-rank, and Masaki did not take part in extracurricular study. Masaki was also recommended into his university. Hana joined an eikaiwa from a young age and stayed with that eikaiwa for six years. The private senior high school she entered had a large number of returnees and focused on English. Hana, on three occasions, described problems at school that were directly unrelated to academics: (a) moving in grade 5 and (b) then joining a new school in junior high school, and both times left her trying to find new friends; and (c) in high school, she had anxiety about joining the wrong school because her classmates spoke better English than she did. Hana studied for two weeks in the United States when she was in high school and she had a tutor for a few months in the last year in high school. Hana failed three exams before she entered her university.

Looking at academic capital from the aspect of previous educational experiences, Genki was enrolled in a high-level school; however, he made few efforts during most of his time there. He did, however, have the opportunity to go to cram schools, and his parents paid for a year at yobiko. Both Masaki and Hana had overseas English study experience, and both entered lower-ranked high schools by way of recommendation. Nakamura (2011) showed evidence that recommended students are lower-ranked and do less homework in high school compared to higher-ranked peers; and lower-ranked universities accept nearly two-thirds of all students who apply for recommendation, suggesting that the recommendation system is non-competitive. Lastly, in terms of English receptive reading vocabulary, as measured by a vocabulary size test, Hana was below average, while Masaki and Genki were above. Thus, with regards to previous educational experiences (i.e., schooling, extracurricular study, English ability, entrance to next stage education) suggest

that Genki has the most academic capital; whereas both Hana and Masaki have less.

Attitudes towards Learning

Genki's parents are education-minded, wanted him to enter the highest-ranked secondary school in his area, and often talked with him about his future to offer advice, and in that regard they valued education. Genki was aware from a young age that he was a good student, but he lost his motivation to study after failing to enter his first-choice secondary school. For many years, he just goofed around after school, and he realized late (in the second year of high school) that he was far behind. From then, he made great efforts to pass a high-level university's entrance examination, including being roninsei for one year. Masaki's parents did not push him to study more. Masaki was aware that he was about in the middle or slightly above average. He wanted higher scores but he was busy, and it was easy to enter his high school and university. Hana's parents told her good grades are an advantage but she should go where she wants. Hana did not hate studying but she had little interest in comparing herself academically with classmates. Instead, Hana focused on finding friends, particularly after starting a new school in grade 5, then again two years later at junior high school, then again in high school. Kariya (2004) argued that taking responsibility for one's own learning is an important factor in academic success. Thus, with regards to parental attitudes and his own self-awareness and self-responsibility, it might be that Genki has more academic capital. Meanwhile, Masaki's parents did not push him to study, and while he was aware of his own ability he took no further action; Hana's parents allowed her to do as she wanted, and she was not interested in comparing her grades with others.

Goals

All three participants have goals to improve their English abilities. Hana wants a higher TOEIC score. She bought a book and is trying to study for the

TOEIC test again. Both Masaki and Genki want to improve their general English ability and speaking ability to be able to live abroad and also to have English skills for work. While the details have not been concretized, Genki wants a job related to management or be a company president. Masaki wants a job in the service industry because he believes he can get an unofficial offer early. Hana has not made up her mind but she wants to get licenses to help with job hunting, and even though she is in a program for young teachers and she is not good at sciences, she is still thinking about becoming a nurse. Barone (2006) argued that ambition represents “an important determinant of achievement” and ambition may be fostered by parental skills. In that regard, Genki might be seen to have the highest ambition. Meanwhile, Hana is without clear ideas about her future, and this may be related to her parents *laissez-faire* approach to her future; and Masaki seems to have taken a similar approach to job hunting as he has done to entrance to high school and university—whatever is easiest.

Conclusion

To sum up, I have defined academic capital as: (a) family background and family experience, (b) past educational experiences, (c) attitudes toward learning and (d) goals. On all four sub-measures of academic capital, Genki can be seen as having the most academic capital. Masaki and Hana have less academic capital, although both have experienced homestays or overseas study. Masaki’s parents did not push him, he made little-to-no efforts to improve his scores at school, and he has little effort for job hunting. Hana’s parents let her do as she wanted, she did not compare herself with others, and she only had a tutor for a few months in high school. She failed three entrance examinations before finally entering her below-average junior college.

This paper investigated the impact of academic capital on the educational outcomes of three young Japanese. I proposed that there is a positive co-rela-

tion between differences in academic capital, tertiary-level educational institutions that the participants are enrolled at and their future careers. That is, those with higher academic capital will be in higher ranked universities and will be aiming for more prestigious careers and those with less academic capital, will be in lower-ranked universities and will be aiming for less prestigious careers. The results from this study support in part my general proposal, that is the student in the highest-ranked university, Genki, appeared to have the most academic capital; and that this student is likely to benefit most from this academic capital through access to better career opportunities that are available to graduates of higher-ranked universities. In short, the student who had access to the most resources has the greatest future career prospects. Academic capital might be useful to understand membership in elite tertiary-level institutions; however, it is not clear if academic capital can also be used to separate learners in lower-ranked universities.

This current paper has several important problems. First, this paper primarily describes the results from only one set of interviews. Follow-up interviews were undertaken but they have not yet been analyzed. Second, this paper only describes the experiences of three participants, hardly enough to make bold claims about the impact of academic capital on academic outcomes. One important caveat is that Masaki might represent a special case—three years after the Tōhoku-chihō Taiheiyō Oki Jishin his family continue to live in temporary shelter for evacuees, and Masaki and his peers were offered places at university because of the hardships related to the earthquake. Although the participants in the larger QUAN+qual project who were interviewed were selected randomly, and for this project as well, it may well be that there are other, more significant reasons that are not discussed in this paper which explain better the antecedents of academic success and future orientations. Finally, two important populations of young Japanese were not in-

interviewed for this project: (a) young people who did not (do not/will not) enter tertiary-level education; and (b) recent university graduates. Interviewing the former would perhaps allow for greater insight into academic capital of young people from lower socioeconomic groups, and interviewing the latter would allow for a greater understanding of the impact of academic capital and academic outcomes on current career orientations.

Notes.

1. Previously, I have labelled this concept as *learner* capital but due to the confusion of the term with Kariya's *learning* capital, I now propose the term *academic* capital.

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Keywords

academic capital, family background, previous educational experiences, attitudes to learning, goals

Appendix

Interview Prompts and Questions

1. Talk about your family growing up.
 - Do you have siblings? Are they older or younger? How is your relationship with them?
 - Talk about your parents, their jobs, their education, their hobbies.
 - What did you do with your family on weekends and during holidays?
 - How did your parents support your education and learning?
2. Talk about school life in elementary, junior high school and high school.
 - What kind of schools (e.g., public/private, co-educational/same gender) did you attend?
 - What academic and non-academic experiences did you have at school and after school?
 - Did you compare or were you compared against classmates?
 - Did you have any pressures to study from classmates, teachers, family or others?
 - Describe your relationships with your teachers and classmates?
3. Talk about this university.
 - When did you decide you wanted to study at this university?
 - What are you studying and why did you decide to study this?
 - How did you prepare for the entrance requirements for this (and other universities)?
 - How did others (e.g., family, teachers) help you prepare for this?
 - How did you and others (e.g., family, teachers) feel when you got accepted?
4. Talk about learning English.
 - How is your English ability compared with others (e.g., classmates, friends, family)?
 - What experiences have you had? (*juku*, *eikaiwa*, travel, homestay, etc.)
 - How did your family support you studying English?
 - What are your goals for English in classes and outside classes?
 - What efforts do you make for learning English?
5. Talk about your goals for after you finish university.
 - What are your plans for after you finish university?
 - What do you do to reach your goals after you finish university?