Study abroad, L2 motivation and English language acquisition:

A longitudinal study of the experience of Japanese university students studying English abroad and at home

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Certifications

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that to the best of my knowledge, any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature:

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Human research ethics committee

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Abstract

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Abstract

This portfolio of individual exploratory studies reports on the English language learning experiences of a cohort of Japanese university students who studied English abroad as a group during their first year at university. The studies focus on the students' English language learning experiences in three successive environments and time periods: the pre-study abroad period in Japan during the years of schooling, the study abroad period in the United Kingdom during the students' first year at university, and finally the post-study abroad period in Japan during the students' second and third years at university. Each study explores L2 motivation from different perspectives in order to capture the dynamic trajectory of L2 motivation in Japanese university students whose program of study includes studying English abroad.

The portfolio draws on dynamic systems theory (DST) and L2 motivation theories to conceptualise the participants' learning journeys, and to identify diverse possible cognitive, social and environmental factors acting on the learning of an additional language and on motivation to learn an additional language. Applying the DST approach to the study participants' language learning has made it possible to trace their L2 journeys as

multi-dimensional experiences, non-linear in nature and sensitive to the effect of temporal factors.

The enquiry is presented as a portfolio of individual studies linked by a common introductory chapter and a final reflection chapter. It comprises three mixed-methods studies which focus on macro-level investigations of L2 motivation and culminates in one multiple-case study. The macro-level investigations are based on four questionnaires and multiple interviews, while the case study draws on interviews, pre-departure essays, observations, assessment and questionnaire responses to illustrate in more depth the students' language learning journeys and to highlight some key features of these journeys.

This portfolio contributes to practice by offering insights into a sheltered study abroad program, including formal and informal components, and opportunities to use English outside the classroom. The reality of the participants' experience abroad is compared with their sometimes unrealistic expectations prior to the program. Highlighted also is the importance of pre-departure and post-return guidance and goal setting, adjusted to suit the different learner profiles identified in the portfolio.

In summary, the portfolio of studies illustrates the fluctuating nature of L2 motivation, constantly affected by events within each individual's learning sphere, or environment, and thus emphasises the importance of exploring L2 motivation in terms of a language learner's journey over time. Furthermore, insights from the case study indicate that following study abroad, it is necessary to set new, concrete language learning goals and strategies for adapting to changes in the learning environment if students are to continue to make steady gains in English learning.

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Statement of editing and proofreading

This is to verify that in the editing and proofreading of the doctoral thesis concerning 'L2 motivation in a study abroad English program for Japanese students' by Gaby Benthien, I have made minor suggestions only as to coherence and cohesion of the material, corrected minor grammatical and lexical inconsistencies, and given advice on formatting.

Although I hold qualifications in TESOL (Grad. Cert. in Teaching EAP and CELTA), I have a practice, not a research, background in this field, and I have not contributed to the research in Ms Benthien's thesis.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Portfolio outline guide

The portfolio outline guide appears at the beginning of every chapter to situate the individual studies to indicate the three stages of university study.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Portfolio Outline Guide</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Chapters</td><td colspan="3">Timespan</td></tr>
<tr><td>Phase 1
Prior to
April 2010
Before SA (Japan)</td><td>Phase 2
April 2011 to
February 2011
During SA (UK)</td><td>Phase 3
April 2011 to
February 2013
After SA (Japan)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter1:
Portfolio Introduction</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter 2:
Pre-university study of English in Japan: Exploring L2 motivation prior to entering university (Study 1)</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter 3:
Study abroad for Japanese students: Changing motivation (Study 2)</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter 4:
Studying English in the UK and Japan: Exploring the expectations and reality of English study abroad and at home (Study 3)</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter 5:
Individual journeys:
A multiple-case study (Study 4)</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Chapter 6:
Portfolio Conclusion</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Glossary

Acronyms of key terms and Japanese terms in alphabetical order

AET/ALT Assistant English (language) teacher (mainly young NEST team-teaching with JTE or HRT in primary and secondary schools in Japan)

CEFR Common European framework of reference for languages divided into levels A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2 with A being the lowest and C the highest.

Communicative language teaching The CLT method evolved in the 1970s and early 1980s in Europe and the United States, as traditional language teaching approaches such as audio-lingualism and situational language teaching fell out of fashion (Richards, 2006, p.6). Brown (2007, pp.46-47) proposes seven characteristics of a CLT approach:

1. There is a focus on the relationship of form and function in order to engage learners in the use of language for meaningful purposes.

2. Fluency and accuracy are given preference alternatively, depending on the situation.

3. Students are active participants in the learning process.

4. The overall goals intertwine the organizational and pragmatic aspects of language

5. The teacher functions as a facilitator and guide.

6. There is a focus on promoting an increase in student autonomy and strategic involvement to raise students' awareness of their own learning styles.

7. There is a focus on real-world contexts, with the ultimate aim of using the language in unrehearsed contexts.

EIKEN *eigo kentei* or STEP test

Grammar translation(reading) method 訳読 yakudoku
The Japanese EFL equivalent of the grammar translation method

HRT Japanese home room teacher

Japan teacher exchange program (JET program)

Potential JET program candidates are university graduates who do not currently reside in Japan. They are mainly employed as ALTs to complement classes taught by JTEs in secondary schools and in homeroom-teacher based classes in elementary schools. While JET program participants come from as many as forty countries, according to JET statistical information (JET, 2013), just over half of the ALTs (53%) are from the USA. A further 10% are Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs), usually based at prefectural facilities, and a small number (seven for 2012-2013) are Sports Exchange Advisors (SEA).

JTE Japanese teacher of English

L1 First language learnt as a child/official language of a country

L2 Second, foreign or additional language

MEXT Ministry of Education Science and Technology, in some literature also referred to as *Monbu(kagaku)sho*

National Center Test for University Admissions / Daigaku Nyūshi Sentā Shiken (大学入試センター試験. A centralized test for university entrance in Japan

NEST Native English-speaking teacher

SA Study abroad

SLA Second language acquisition-this can refer to either second or foreign language acquisition but for the purpose of this portfolio it refers to the learning of a foreign language, in this case English, unless mentioned otherwise.

TEAP Test of English for Academic Purposes

TOEFL Test of English as a Foreign Language: This test is divided into 7 levels, level 5 being the lowest and 1 being the highest, with children as young as six years of age taking the lower levels. Level three tests and upwards have an interview component and pre 1 and 1 a writing component. The benchmark level for employment is level 2 or pre-1 level. and approximately equivalent to TOEIC 600. Neither TOEIC 945 (LR and SW) nor EIKEN level 1 are equivalent to CEFR level C2.

TOEIC Test of English for International Communication: This is the most common standard test used by companies in Japan for entry, promotion and bonuses and therefore universities also have to focus on this test for career preparation. It is scored from 1-990 with 600 being the benchmark score required for employment which in turn is comparable to between B1 and B2 CEFR level. There are two TOEIC tests: one focused on reading and

listening (LR) and the other on speaking and writing (SW). The latter one is new and attracts

fewer takers.

Researcher background

My journey as a language learner and teacher in three cultures

I have included this section in order to acknowledge that it is impossible to be entirely objective as a researcher in social research, whether using quantitative or qualitative inquiry methods. Consequently, the findings reported in all of the studies that make up the portfolio were interpreted through the lens of my own experiences in Germany, Australia and Japan, as a teacher and student alike, as well as being informed by research on L2 motivation, study abroad and SLA. An account of my personal experience as a language learner and language teacher is presented below.

Learning a language is an endeavour, which is undertaken for reasons that vary among individuals. I have had over thirty years of personal experience, and twenty years of professional experience, with motivation to learn a language and the acquisition of languages, experience which is responsible for sparking my interest in this research project. I was born in Germany and learnt English as a foreign language in Germany from the age of ten. I was an average language student. English was just another subject as I did not use it to communicate, and the language certainly was not an essential part of my life away from the classroom. However, when I was twelve, my family and I immigrated to Australia and I had to master English to manage everyday life and school; thus, learning English became a necessity. Although I spoke German at home (and still do), my main language of communication became English.

At various stages of my secondary and tertiary education, I also studied Japanese, Spanish, and French as foreign languages. Again, as with learning English in Germany, it was classroom-based learning, with little or no contact with speakers of those languages outside of class and again I was an average, moderately motivated language learner. My grades in Japanese language tests at high school and university were usually under eighty percent; I struggled with remembering vocabulary and the Chinese characters used in written Japanese. In retrospect, what was lacking for me was the opportunity to use the languages I was learning outside the classroom compounded at that time by a merely superficial interest in the languages themselves and the cultures they represented.

I also studied German in Year 12, after not being allowed to take it as a subject in Year 11, and then at university, in order to be qualified to teach German as a foreign language in Australian secondary schools. Of course, some aspects of studying German were very easy for me, whereas others, such as analysing German literature and phonology, were not. Even when it came to grammar exercises I was sometimes lost when there was no example given, as I did not quite know what I was expected to do. I knew German, but I had not learnt in detail how it was structured as I left Germany before this was covered at school. This is one reason why native teachers of a language in Australia are expected to have completed formal tertiary study of languages in order to teach them effectively.

Majoring in Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL), as well as in German, with minors in Japanese and physical education, I completed my Bachelor of Education and actually became a Japanese teacher in 1991, teaching the language up to

Year 12 level. However, even then I did not feel that Japanese was an essential aspect of my life, until 1996, when I worked in Japan as an English conversation teacher for one year, and had to use Japanese in order to communicate with people who did not speak a lot of English. Since 1999, I have lived permanently in Japan, initially working as an assistant language teacher (hereafter ALT) at an elementary and junior high school, before moving to tertiary education in 2005. These days, I teach mainly English language based subjects, or English language teaching methodology, at tertiary level, while using Japanese in everyday life.

This brings us to the debate, familiar to those working in the SLA field, which compares and contrasts the effectiveness of teachers of English who are native speakers with those who are non-native speakers of English. This debate raises several concerns. First, it seems to revolve mainly around teachers of English, not teachers of other foreign languages. The majority of my language teachers, for example, were not native speakers of the language they were teaching, and in fact I have taught languages of which I am not a native speaker, such as English and Japanese. Furthermore, the debate does not account for the diversity of language learning experiences. For example, having left Germany when I was twelve, should I be considered a native speaker of German, or not?

The debate about the relative effectiveness of native and non-native speakers of English as teachers of English also raises the question about whether being a native speaker overrides the educational qualifications, professional training and experience, and actual language proficiency of non-native speakers of the language? While I personally do not believe that this is the case, the answer is unfortunately 'sometimes', not only in

Japan, but also for example in Germany, as argued in an article by Anchimbe (2006, p.1), when it comes to hiring English native speakers over well qualified non-native teachers of English. Having lived in Japan for over ten years, I have seen the image of the native English teacher/speaker as the ideal language teacher being propagated by the media, by students of English, and by Japanese society in general. (See Houghton and Rivers, 2013 for an in depth view of 'native-speakerism' in Japan. However, my experience studying my own mother tongue, and my observations of the (lack of) linguistic ability of some native speakers in terms of both language usage and the ability to explain language structures, make me question whether just being a native speaker should be considered a sufficient qualification for becoming a language teacher at any educational institution, or even an ALT. Some Japanese primary and secondary schools, as well as English conversation schools, are also beginning to question whether under-qualified native speakers make better English teachers than more qualified and more proficient non-native speakers of the language.

It is also important to ask about the effect this debate, combined with the presence of native English-speaking ALTs, has on Japanese teachers of English (hereafter JTE). As long as the main aim of English education was to make sure that students had the necessary skills to pass the high school and university entrance exams, I believe the Japanese teachers of English had confidence in their own linguistic knowledge and teaching ability, but due to the shift in directives by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports , Science and Technology (MEXT) towards educating students that are able to use English for communication as part of national English policy and objectives at elementary and secondary school (MEXT, 2003; MEXT, 2008; MEXT, 2013; MEXT, 2014) some teachers possibly feel less confident about their own communicative English

skills. Team teaching with a native speaker of English, while having many benefits, can also be professionally challenging for non-native teachers of English as their English skills and proficiency can be easily compared and contrasted, and perhaps found wanting, by students in their classes.

In terms of my work experience as a semi-native speaking English teacher in Japan, I was lucky enough to obtain a position as an ALT at a junior high school, in the same town which I spent most of my time in during my 1996 stay in Japan, through a sister-city arrangement. I was able to integrate and work closely with the JTEs, possibly due to my Japanese language ability and language teaching background. I also taught English at a nearby elementary school, but I was not able to form the same close relationships as at the junior high school, as contact time with the teachers and students was limited to two afternoons a week. While being an ALT is not necessarily an upward career move for a trained teacher, I felt professionally satisfied for six years before a career driven decision propelled me into the university sector. Again, at the university I am treated as one of the staff, and I do not feel 'otherized', which is a common complaint of native speakers of English or non-Japanese in Japanese educational institutions.

In my experience, the Internet has made a substantial difference to language learning environments, certainly for Japanese students learning English, and no doubt for language learners around the world. These days, language learners in Japan, for example, have far more options available in terms of communicating with other learners or people who speak the language they are studying, using online learning portals such as 'EF Englishtown', 'SharedTalk' and 'Live Mocha', complemented by a vast number

and variety of online learning resources. It is also much easier to continue being in contact with users of the target language you have met, using email, Skype and Facebook.

Japanese students of English, however, differ from students of other foreign languages in one important respect. For example, students who study, for example, German and Japanese as an elective foreign language in formal classroom situations are also often interested in the German or Japanese culture. In contrast, the formal and elective study of English in foreign language classrooms at university level in Japan is foremost for utilitarian purposes like work or travel, rather than for learning about the culture of countries where English is traditionally spoken, such as the United Kingdom or the USA. This fact resonates with the concept of English as an International Language (hereafter EIL), meaning, in effect, that English is to some degree perceived by many learners of the language as 'cultureless'.

As my own experience illustrates, living in another culture requires a shifting of one's identity. This is because, while retaining one's own culture might remain personally important, as in my own case, there is usually an expectation that the newcomer will assimilate into the mainstream culture. There is a further distinction between being a short-term visitor and being an immigrant. When I came to Australia as an immigrant with my parents, for example, I had permanent residency status from the outset, whereas in Japan I was able to obtain residency only after having lived in the country on a working visa for over ten years. Many foreigners only spend a comparatively short period in Japan before returning to their home-countries. Consequently Japanese society does not expect, nor actually consider it possible, for people to become

'Japanese' or to integrate seamlessly into Japanese society. Furthermore, simple physical attributes such as blue eyes are always going to prevent non-Japanese from ever being considered a 'real' Japanese, no matter how long one has spent in the country. Even children born in Japan of a Japanese parent and a non-Japanese parent are termed 'half', meaning half Japanese. In actual fact, in my own case, this belief, combined with the fact that I was living in Japan by my own choice rather than because of my parents' decision, allowed me the freedom to assimilate at my own pace. In other words, I had the autonomy to integrate into Japanese culture and society at the work and social level to the extent that I wished, whereas when my family migrated to Australia, I felt there was more external pressure to assimilate as much and as quickly as possible, or to continue to face discrimination by my peers, which as a teenager in my high school days was something I certainly wanted to avoid.

My existing personal experience with my own developed hybrid identity as an Australian and German allowed me to integrate more smoothly, and to accept Japanese culture on its own terms as an adult. This in turn has helped my Japanese language skills to flourish, as I do not feel the need to surround myself with English or German speakers. Furthermore, being married to a Japanese man has drawn me further into Japanese culture, and while English remains my dominant language, Japanese has become my everyday language of communication. Thus, as illustrated by my own experience, culture and identity, which are discussed in further detail in the following chapters, also play a part in L2 acquisition.

In addition, my experience shows that the geographical environment where one is learning a foreign language is of importance. If I had stayed in Germany, I would have

had many opportunities as I grew older to travel to the U.K, France or Spain. In Australia, this was much more difficult, and in fact I did not travel outside Australia again until I was 28 years old. In Japan, unless I seek English input such as reading a book or watching television, I can easily spend an entire non-teaching day without ever uttering a word of English, and the only written English I may see is written on labels, billboards and signs.

In summary, my own motivation in terms of learning English and Japanese seems to peak when the SLA environment includes an actual need and/or opportunity to communicate and integrate with the local population, which in turn fuels my desire to study the more formal aspects of the language and to learn to speak it well.

In contrast, there are expatriates in both Australia and Japan, who do not feel a need to learn the language of the country that they are living in, nor to integrate with the local community at any but the most minimal level. This can be achieved by surrounding oneself with speakers of one's own language and choosing a working environment in which one does not need the local language. It is understandable that some elderly people may find it difficult to pick up a new language if surrounded by people from their own culture, but it is surprising that younger people sometimes do not make more of an effort to learn the local language or to attempt to experience the culture through interactions with the local population. For example, I wonder why younger English speakers living in Japan do not feel that they are missing out on gaining valuable cultural and linguistic knowledge and insights that living and adapting to a different culture may bring or whether they have had experiences in Japan which have resulted in

them losing, or never building, the motivation to engage with Japanese culture to the degree learning the language would make possible.