

Fuji-Williams Video Conferencing in 2004-2007* Prospects and Applications

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Abstract

This joint project explores the use of video conferencing in two different college courses. One is in the teacher training course in the Department of Early Childhood Care and Education at Fuji Women's University in Japan, and the other is the Japanese language program at Williams College in the United States. The interactive nature of the video conferencing helps to promote student awareness of different communication styles that are valuable in both teacher training and Japanese language learning.

From twelve sessions of video conferences conducted over the period 2004-2007 emerged four possibilities: 1) video conferencing as a research environment for individual student projects or research papers; 2) video conferencing as a forum for discussion; 3) video conferencing to present projects and papers or some aspect of culture; and 4) video conferencing to learn and practice communication strategies. Students' observations of their own verbal and non-verbal performances reveal that video conferencing in cross-cultural contexts allows opportunities for students living in their own countries to experience issues that they would otherwise be unaware of.

Introduction

Video conferencing for real-time interaction with students from other cultures makes it possible to expose students to otherwise inaccessible cultural distinctions and motivate them to learn. The series of sessions between Fuji Women's University and Williams College raised matters that deserve analysis and development, since they seem to offer considerable opportunities for language learners. Students' observations of their own performance and that of others also shed light on the development of self-awareness. Marking the first stage of our project, this paper discusses the sessions with students' key observations. The purpose of this paper is threefold: 1) to summarize the twelve video conferencing sessions that were carried out between Fuji and Williams; 2) to outline prospective uses that would be beneficial to students in both institutions; and 3) to outline shortcomings and make suggestions for future development and applications.

Rationale: Why Video Conferencing?

The participants in this project are Japanese language students in upper level classes at

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Williams College and students in teacher training courses in the Department of Early Childhood Care and Education at Fuji Women's University. Video conferencing is appropriate for these college students for three reasons. First, the students are already familiar with video conferencing and its related technology, and they are curious and ready to have sessions with students in other countries. Second, video conferencing is interactive and occurs in real time. It is both casual and formal, so that the students are required to have some communicative competence to maintain the finesse of politeness, which they must acquire as advanced language students or as future kindergarten teachers in Japan. Third, due to differences in their cultural backgrounds, both groups are bound to face 'disagreement,' 'different cultural values' or 'different communication styles'. These uneasy moments establish a learning environment within the conversation, where the students can practice adjusting and negotiating their positions and deepen their understanding of their own and other cultures. This project's researchers therefore consider video conferencing to be a cross-cultural learning environment where students can develop their communication skills naturally with some guidance.

In the following sections the interactions between the Williams students and the Fuji students are analyzed based on the students' own observations and those of the researchers.

Video Conferencing

A. Preliminary Explorations

A total of 10 sessions were conducted from April 2004-June 2006 with 28 student participants, 14 from Williams and 14 from Fuji. All the conversations were in Japanese with no use of English. For the Williams students, all of whom had studied Japanese for a few years, the 10 sessions were actual interactions in which they tried out what they had learned and practiced in the classroom. The Williams and Fuji sides took turns being the lead group for each session, and when leading used the project to pursue their individual goals. Williams led the first 6 sessions. Of these three were introductions in which they discussed their majors and student life; the other 3 became forums that allowed students to make verbal presentations. Fuji participated in these 6 sessions mainly by listening to what the Williams students had to say and asking them questions about their statements. At this stage they experienced and explored what they could do with video conferencing.

Table 1 Ten Video Conferences between Fuji and Williams

	Date	Contents	Leading Group
1	April 27 '04	Introduction	Williams
2	May 18	Ohanami, Origami	Williams
3	Oct. 14	On Research	Williams
4	April 8 '05	Dates, Fast Food	Williams
5	April 13	Research Paper Presentation	Williams
6	May 5	Speech Presentation	Williams
7	April 12 '06	Introduction	Fuji
8	April 21	On Research #1	Fuji
9	May 12	On Research #2	Fuji
10	June 16	Self-Introduction, Major	Fuji

In 2006, Fuji took a more active role and led 4 sessions in April, May and June. They talked about their majors, introduced their own thesis topics and asked questions on related matters. They kept journals on their own verbal performances. They quickly noticed that the Williams students spoke far better than they had expected. Also, they did not realize that their Japanese was 'strange' until Williams pointed it out - they spoke slowly in an unconscious effort to accommodate the American students, and in some cases they spoke in ways they would never use when talking to other Japanese.

Table 2 Excerpts from Fuji Students' Journals

	Feedback
Video Conference	It was fun. It was a great experience. I would like to do it again.
Williams Students	Williams Students speak Japanese well. Their Japanese is natural and smooth. They speak Japanese skillfully. They even injected some jokes.
Own Speech	Not enough vocabulary Not enough expressions I spoke too slowly. I want to (learn about communication and) practice. Next time with preparation I want to make it more enjoyable. I want to prepare well and try to communicate not only with words but also in others ways, such as pictures.

The common problem they faced during the sessions was that they could not overcome some dead moments. Many became conscious that they lacked the basic communication skills to facilitate conversation even though the language used was their native tongue. With these key realizations of the Fuji students' own verbal performance, Fuji and Williams were ready to have a session with a common goal, achieving and maintaining the flow of communication.

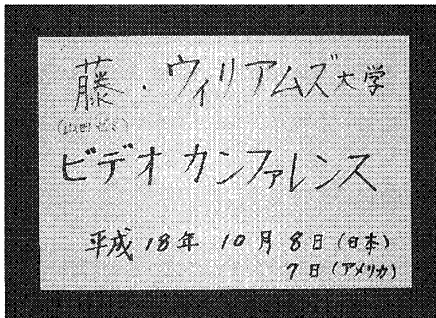
Our Environment!



B. Session with Goal: October 8th, 2006 (October 7th, 2006 in the U.S.)

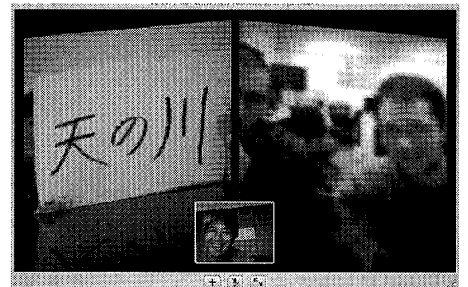
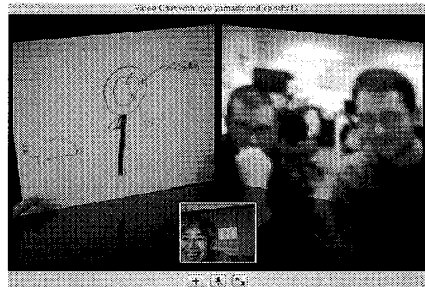
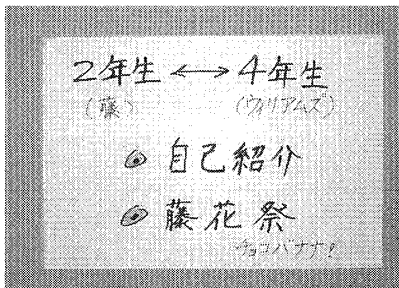
The Day!

Goal: Maintain the Flow of Communication
Fuji Students and Williams Seniors



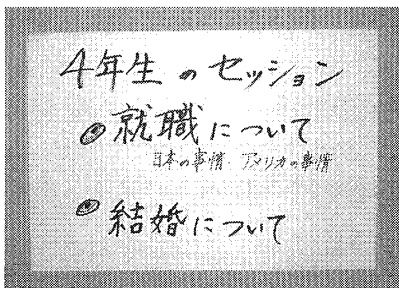
9:00-10:00am

“Japanese College Festivals”
Fuji Sophomores and Williams Seniors



10:00-11:00am

“Japanese Women: marriage and jobs”
Fuji Seniors and Williams Seniors



Problems [Silence]
[Lack of Confirmation]
[Sudden Change of Topic]

Gap Communication Breakdown
Lack of Interactive Confirmation

On October 8th, 2006 (October 7th, 2006 in U.S.) two programs were scheduled. One focused on an explanation of a Japanese college festival, and the other on a discussion of Japanese women: marriage and jobs.

A preliminary analysis of the October session reveals some fundamental problem that hindered the Japanese students' speech. Communication breakdowns of various sorts happened several times. When there was a difference between their view and the view of the Williams students, the

Fuji students: 1) said nothing, 2) simply accepted the different view without confirming, or 3) suddenly changed the topic. Not only did the Japanese students tend to “freeze” when presented with conflicting or confronting views, the Williams students also failed to help smooth the breach gracefully — although obviously this takes both a diplomatic instinct and a high level of linguistic competence.

C. Final Session: January 19th, 2007 (January 18th, 2007 in the U.S.)

To wrap up the first phase of the video conferencing project the 12th session was planned and scheduled on the last day of Fuji’s classes in January. This final session was intended to give the five Fuji seniors an opportunity to present their senior papers publicly. Their topics varied, but all within the field of Early Childhood Care and Education.¹ The Williams participants were two third-year Japanese students and a second-year Japanese Language Fellow. Each presentation was about 5 minutes long followed by questions. After all 5 presentations were finished, the Williams students gave impressionistic feedback. The session ended with brief critiques and comments on research and methods by the researchers. Immediately after the session, each group met for reflection and discussion about their experiences.

Presentations by Five Fuji Seniors



Presentations with Visuals



Question and Answer



The Fuji students wrote in their journals about their experiences in the final presentation session as well as their thoughts on the overall practice of the Fuji-Williams conferences.² They also e-mailed the researchers to express their appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences on a very personal level. They all realized that successful communication is a difficult task, and that they had to work on their communication styles. Though struggling in their search for words and expressions, they had joy and satisfaction that they would otherwise never experience. Video conferencing can be a powerful tool for students in facing their shortcomings. In fact, the Fuji students valued video conferencing for its non-compromising reality. They recog-

¹ Individual paper topics are listed in appendix 1.

² Excerpts from Fuji students’ journals appear in appendix 2 with permission.

nized it as a tool that reflect a part of themselves which was not being developed within their own culture. In the end, Fuji's realization helped grow them beyond our expectations.

The insights from both the Fuji students' journals and the personal communications with Fuji and Williams students are reflected in the suggested applications for future development.

Prospective Applications of Video Conferencing

The four application types described below summarize prospects drawn from the twelve video conferencing sessions. Each sketches shortcomings found in the sessions and suggests future development.

- 1) Video conferencing as a research environment for individual student projects or research papers: The 3rd (Williams), the 8th and the 9th (Fuji) sessions were held to explain the student's individual projects or the thesis topics. Among the difficulties experienced, often either the student's topics of interest were not narrowed enough to succinctly address the issues, or the student did not know how to present to people outside of her field. These difficulties could be addressed with more thorough preparation, and video conferencing offers several practical research applications for students. For instance, considering her counterpart as an informant, the student could conduct face-to-face interviews to collect information on her research topic. Another application would be for the students to carry out a joint survey project.
- 2) Video conferencing as a forum for discussion: The 4th and the 11th sessions opened a forum for discussion. It could be either informal (which was the case of the 4th session without a set agenda), or formal (as was the case of the 11th with a set topic). The former with an easy atmosphere and with no goals to achieve was pure entertainment. The latter on the other hand was much more challenging, mainly due to lack of experience and organization. We believe this type of forum, which demands serious coordination and preparation will be more valuable in academic settings. Debate, for example, is an obvious variation of this type, and video conferencing can be utilized for forums as well as for preparatory meetings for appointed facilitators from each group.
- 3) Video conferencing to present complete research projects or aspects of culture: The 2nd (both), the 5th, the 6th (Williams) and the 12th (Fuji) were of this type. A problem arose when the five Fuji students presented their senior papers. Not one student from the Fuji group asked questions. For some reason they seemed to assume that the presentations were only addressed to the Williams students. Perhaps, video conferencing technology itself could solve this problem by one designated station for the exclusive use of the presenter. Then both groups would develop the sense of their role as an active rather than passive audience.
- 4) Video conferencing to learn and practice communication strategies: Throughout the 12 sessions, video conferencing was used to assess the students' communication skills and their sensitivity in cross-cultural contexts. Especially during the 11th session, while explaining Japanese college festivals and discussing issues of Japanese women, communication breakdowns of various kinds occurred. In such uncomfortable moments both Fuji and Williams students failed to cope with

the situation. This represents by far the most difficult and yet crucial exercise in their training. It requires not only a range of linguistic competences, but also the development of intercultural sensitivity. Video conferencing offers the chance to experience, review, and remediate these difficulties.

Conclusions and Future Plans

The interactive nature of video conferencing successfully compelled students to be aware of different cultural communication styles, as well as how difficult it is to maintain a natural flow of conversation in the face of cultural distinctions. The observations in this study indicate that even as native speakers the Fuji students needed to recognize patterns in their own speech and become more aware of discourse structure; language is something they are not used to analyzing. This should guide them in expressing their thoughts about controversial subjects. Our plan is to investigate and explore a pedagogical solution, which can be implemented later into a curriculum.

The Fuji students' feedback states that the Williams students' Japanese language skills are practical and work in real situations. It further validates that the on-line learning material *Japanese Society*³, in which the Williams students study how to express their opinions on some commonly discussed topic, appropriately prepares them for discussions and for the student's individual research projects. This study will give a basis for further investigation as to how technology is able to assist our students. Within the larger context of Japanese language learning and pedagogy, we will pursue how video conferencing should be used in concord with the Williams' Japanese teaching philosophy.

Video conferencing allows an opportunity for students living in their own countries to experience issues that they would otherwise be unaware of or encounter only in sociolinguistic texts. This in turn motivates students to address their shortcomings in ways tapes or videos never would, and alerts instructors to the students' needs. We will continue our work with an eye to enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural contexts.

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³ *Japanese Society* is the on-line learning material for the upper level students developed by the Japanese Program. The six sections of opinion exchange in *Japanese Society* have been revised with on-line exercises as part of the Haverford CET project in 2005-2006.

Acknowledgments

We thank Michael Richardson and Rod Beaton of the Office of Instructional Technology (Williams College) and Tomohiro Kasai of Chuo Computer Service and Takahisa Shimoda (Fuji Women's University) for their technical supports. We also thank the Williams College Japanese Language Fellows for their assistance. This project was partially funded by the Center for Technology in the Arts and Humanities and Faculty Center for Media Technologies (Williams College) in 2004-2006 and The Haverford Center for Educational Technology Workshop in 2006.

*This paper is a revision of the poster entitled "Prospects of Video Conferencing in a Cross-Cultural Educational Environment," which was presented at the 5th Annual Hawaii International Conference on Arts & Humanities in Honolulu, Hawaii, January 12-15, 2007. http://anfiles.williams.edu/~ryamada/FCMT_Yamada/

Appendix 1 卒業研究テーマ

学生1	遊びにおける環境分析 砂場遊びに見る遊び方の違い
学生2	幼児期における数量概念の発達 長さの比較について
学生3	幼稚園のトイレ環境について
学生4	保育における「食」の位置づけについて
学生5	映画「となりのトトロ」の分析

Appendix 2 ビデオ会議関連の記録 学生のジャーナルより抜粋

<4年生> 2007年1月19日「第12回ビデオ会議：卒業研究発表を振り返って」

- 自分の考えたことが言えたか。どうしてそう思ったのか。
- 相手の様子に対応できたか。
- 自分以外のメンバーから学んだこと。自分と違う考えはあったか。
- 次回はどうするのか。(感想も含む)

学生A

- 自分が準備してきたことをそのまま発表しました。しかし、不安がある中の発表だったので、先生に相談すれば良かったと、先生に言われ気づきました。自分の中では精一杯の発表でしたが、学生さんはよくわからなかったようだったので、申し訳なかったです。
- 今回の学生さんは、話を聞きながらうなずいてくれる様子が多く、話しやすかったです。「家庭」の言葉の意味を問われたときは、自分でもわかってるようで表現しづらかったです。でも、理解をしてくれたようなので、良かったです。
- Sさんの発表を聞いて、「教え込むのではなく、自然と保育の中に……」という考えが共通してるなと感じました。違う方向から考えていった上で、子どもたちの中に自然と入っていく保育は大切だと改めて思いました。
- 今回で、ビデオカンファレンスは終わりですが、とてもよい経験となりました。自分に欠けているものが何なのか。わかってはいたけれど、改めてきちんと考えなくてはいけない問題で、避けては通れないなと感じました。その壁を乗り越えれば、また違う自分が発見できて、自分に少しでも自身がつくのかなと思います。社会人になる前にその壁を乗り越えたかったなと思います。
全体の感想……(略)……ビデオカンファレンスは、自分にとってもっとも必要だったかなと思います。もっと回数を重ねるにつれて、自分の苦手な部分をすこしでも克服できたかもしれないと思いました。でも、とても自分自身のことを考えさせられる経験だったので、忘れずにプラスにしていきたいです。そして、日本語の難しさを改めて感じました。日常何気なく使っている日本語を学生さんに伝わるように話すのは本当に難しかったです。しかし、学生さんから学んだことは、伝えようとする気持ちが大切だなと感じました。伝えようと頑張れば伝わるなと……(略)……。

学生B

- 事前の準備段階であまり深く考えていなかったこともあり、難しい表現が多くなってしまい、言いたかったことがあまり伝わらなかったと感じました。質問にも答えましたが、後から考えてみると質問の主旨とは違う答えになっていたような気がして、もっとよい答え方があったのではないかと反省しています。相手の主旨に的確に答えるようにするためには、相手の言いたいことをきちんと理解することが必要でさらに、それに対してどう答えれば自分の言いたいことが伝わるのかも考えなければならず、その過程をきちんとこなすためには、普段の生活の中からもっと練習しなければならないということを再確認させられました。
- 今回は卒論の発表ということもあり、伝えなければならないという思いが先行し、相手のことまで頭が回っていなかったため、相手の様子をかながえていませんでした。
- わかりづらい言葉は、紙に書いて説明するなどの配慮を考えて、事前に準備していたため、相手につたわりやすかったのではないかと思います。
- 全体を通して回を重ねるごとに自分の課題が見え、そして、自分には課題がたくさんあることを認識させられました。しかし、その課題というのは自分が積極的に取り組まなければ克服することができないと気づいているにもかかわらず、あまり、積極的に取り組むことができなかったように思います。このことから、自分なりに成長をしたとは考えづらく、もっと根本的なところから変えていかなければいけないような気がします。ですが、このようなことに気づくことができたことに対しては、一歩前進したのではないかと思います、これから人間関係を作るうえで参考にできればと考えています。

学生C

- a. 今回は4年生の最後のゼミで、一人ずつ卒業研究の発表をし、相手からの質問に答えるという形式で行いました。反省点は、やはり準備不足でした。3分と設定されているからこそ、事前に話す練習をする必要があったと思います。しかし直前になるまで準備をせず、ほとんどぶっつけ本番で発表してしまいました。これは相手の学生にも失礼であったと思います。やってみると5分以上になっていたもので、3分で自分の研究の主旨をいかにわかりやすく伝えるかというのはどれだけ大変かがわかりました。紐を紙に貼り付けたり、主要となる言葉をペンで書いて示したのは正解だったと思います。電話で話しているわけではないので、映像も有効に使えば相手にとってもわかりやすいうえに自分がうまく言葉で言い表せなくなったときに役立ちました。
- b. アメリカの学生はこちらが話しているときにうなずいてくれたり、終始真剣ながらもなごやかな雰囲気の中でPCに向かっていて、その楽しさがこちらにも伝わってきました。こちら側は人数が多いということもあったけれど、全員の顔が画面に映っていなかったり、ゼミ生同士で「こうだよ、あだよ」と言い合うことも少なかったため、相手を不安にさせてしまったかもしれません。
- c. d. 計5回のビデオ・カンファレンスを通して、毎回同じような反省点を残してしまった気がしますが、回を追うごとに自信につながり、確実にコミュニケーションスキルが身についてきたと感じています。自分に欠けている部分も発見できて、ビデオカンファレンスをやって良かったと思います。

〈2年生〉2007年1月23日「2年山田ゼミを振り返って」

学生D この一年間ゼミで行ってきたことの中で、特に対人コミュニケーションについて行うことが多かったのではないかと思います。私たちは何かを調べて発表するというよりも、その場で考えて意見を述べることをたくさん行ってきました。ビデオカンファレンスのような異文化とのコミュニケーションもその中に含まれると思いますし、何かを行ったあるいは見た感想の意見交換などもそうだと思います。その場で話すということは何かを調べて発表することよりも練って話すことはできませんが、こういった即時に自分の意見を言うということはあらゆる場で必要になってくるのではないかと感じました。

学生E 後期もウィリアムズ大学の学生とビデオカンファレンスをしました。一度体験しているのだからわからないことはありませんでしたが、相手が納得するような展開ができなかったです。しかし、異文化の人と交流を持つことは滅多にあることではないし、新鮮な体験ができました。

学生F 学祭で行ったビデオカンファレンスでは前回に比べて事前の準備はあまりしていませんでしたが、その場で文字や絵を書いて説明するなどして、いろんな話ができ、楽しく会話することができました。会話の中では、私たちはアメリカの学生さんに日本のことを説明しますが、説明するためには私たち自身がちゃんと日本について知っていなければいけないと思いました。