

**Multilingual Computer-Mediated Communication Practice  
and the Development of Symbolic Competence:  
Insider Research from a Japanese University**

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This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered  
previously for any other degree or diploma.

*I declare that the word-length conforms to the permitted maximum.*

Signature .....  .....





## **Abstract**

Amidst a rapid global proliferation of digital social media, Japanese youth have been adopting, adapting, and developing a diversity of multilingual computer mediated communication (CMC) practices on a variety of digital platforms. Previous research has pointed to commonalities in these practices with the practices of youth in other locales, but also to unique localized ways that Japanese youth communicate across digital media.

This quasi-ethnographic case study was designed to explore English language learners' multilingual CMC practices and perceptions from within a medium-sized private regional university in central Japan, and to point to pedagogical affordances that might lead to the development of symbolic competence. The project operates within a social constructivist paradigm and employs a theoretical approach largely consistent with cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), but also drawing upon other theoretical traditions. Data were collected using narrative frames and field notes gathered during long-term participant observation that constituted insider research at the research site.

The rationale for this study comes from the researcher's interest in exploring ways that new technological affordances can best be used to enhance educational outcomes in a Japanese higher education context. Beyond the design affordances and constraints of various CMC technologies, myriad local factors and cultural assumptions were seen to contribute to the 'cultures of use'

that inform students' multilingual and multimodal interactions through various media.

This research revealed that students rapidly develop new multilingual CMC practices through their interactions with their peers after entering university and returning from study abroad. A significant lack of broader media literacy, however, was seen to impede the development of symbolic competence. Pedagogical recommendations are offered to overcome this and other barriers to the development of symbolic competence.

## On Transliteration

In cases in this thesis where Japanese script is used to introduce words and concepts likely unfamiliar to English readers, these words are rendered in English transliteration according to the modified Hepburn system. These transliterations are always italicized. When first introduced, the transliterations are followed by the corresponding Japanese script in parentheses as they would naturally appear in Japanese discourse using either *Kanji* (Japan's adopted logographic Chinese characters), *Hiragana* (a standard phonetic script), or *Katakana* (a second Japanese phonetic script). Though all terms are explained in the body of this text when they are first introduced, they are also listed in Appendix Twelve for quick reference.

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## List of Abbreviations

CHAT	Cultural-Historical Activity Theory
CMC	Computer-mediated Communication
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FLSSC	Foreign Language Study Support Center (at the host university)
MEXT	Ministry of Education, Sports, Science, and Technology (Japan)
NLG	The New London Group
NLS	New Literacy Studies

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Background**

This thesis investigates university students' multilingual computer-mediated communication (CMC) practices and perceptions of these practices amidst the ongoing integration of internet and communication technologies (ICT) into Japanese foreign language education at the tertiary level. The project is designed as quasi-ethnographic insider research—a single-site higher education case study researched from within the faculty of foreign studies at a medium-sized private regional university in central Japan. “Insider research” refers to the idea of “doing research at the institution where one is employed or studying” (Trowler, 2011, Chapter 1, Section 1, para. 1), and the term “quasi-ethnographic” is used as a broad descriptor for the types of qualitative methods that the study uses: long-term participant-observation, the collection of extensive researcher field notes, and the use of narrative frames to uncover the emic perspectives of students at the university where research was conducted.

### **Research Problem and Purpose**

As a response to globalization, Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) has been promoting the integration of ICT into primary, secondary, and tertiary English education (MEXT, 2014b). As media consumers and producers, young people in Japan have themselves been simultaneously adopting and adapting ICT for their own communication and learning needs (see, e.g. Ito & Okabe, 2005; Takahashi, 2011), and CMC

practices have been rapidly evolving alongside advances in available hardware and software interfaces.

In the landscape of contemporary higher education, ICT and globalization have led to a hybridization of tacit knowledge and a destabilization and fragmentation of societal discourses. This is particularly true in a foreign language learning environment that exists within an open, internet-connected society, such as that of Japan. Despite government policies and corresponding curricular initiatives amidst popular media discussions about the efficacy of ICT in education, however, few studies exist that look at the multilingual CMC practices of young people in Japanese higher education settings.

The purpose of this thesis is thus to generate knowledge about how local practice and technological affordances shape learning outcomes related to the development of symbolic competence in a Japanese higher education foreign language learning context. Specifically, from a sociocultural perspective grounded in a neo-Vygotskian paradigm of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), I explore CMC practices and student perceptions of these practices in order to assess the development of learners' symbolic competence.

## **Research Questions**

This inquiry is organized by an investigation of the following four questions:

1. What types of computer-mediated communication CMC practices do students at the research site engage in, and how do these connect

to culturally and historically-rooted societal discourses and practices?

2. How do students at the research site perceive their native and foreign language CMC practices?
3. To what extent can students' multilingual CMC practices be seen to contribute to the formation of symbolic competence?
4. Given student CMC practices and perceptions, to what extent are pedagogical practices and affordances at the research site utilized to enhance students' critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors via CMC?

The first question this thesis will explore is descriptive. It asks what type of digital literacy practices students and teachers engage in. Ontologically, my thesis research proceeds in accordance with Kress and Selander's (2012) view that "the social is prior to the technological," and so the first question I explore looks at the social and academic arrangements and practices that informants report about their use of ICT (p.266).

The terms "discourses" and "practices," which are used in research question one, point to two overlapping research traditions in the social sciences that I discuss in much greater detail in Chapter Three. In that chapter I explore the complexity of each term in the context of respective bodies of literature. For the time being, however, working definitions for each are necessary in order to clarify what is meant in this research question. "Discourses," for the purpose of



this thesis, can be understood as the stream of cultural resources that create shared understanding among language users in a given locale. In my usage, the term refers to the currents of meaning that flow through a given society or speech community.

“Practices”—which I will show in Chapter Three to have a close relationship with many conceptions of discourses—refer to repeated “sayings and doings” by individuals and groups (Schatzki, 1996). They are recognizable, repeated actions that constitute the creation of meaning among individuals and groups in a given locale.

Using narrative inquiry methods and participant observation, I explore how students describe their multilingual practices using digital tools. This first question seeks to define the range of practices and discourses that students engage with on a regular basis, but also to see these in the historical perspective of literacy practices which are some of the oldest in the world. In Chapter Two, I explore Japanese literacy traditions in great depth, and also situate these within the relatively new tradition of Japanese higher education, within which I have a liminal position, and thus perhaps a valuable perspective for interpreting the practices I observe.

My second research question focuses on how students perceive the various foreign language media they engage with in their academic and personal lives. The global trend of increasing use of and access to ICT in higher education,

and the accompanying discourse of its efficacy, is now a prominent feature of contemporary Japanese universities. Aoki (2010), however, argues, that despite so-called "disruptive" technologies, in Japan, culturally-rooted teacher-centered pedagogies have been slow to change (p. 858). Further, Clegg, et al. (2003) note that "If we are to understand the impact of technologies on pedagogy we need to take account of [these] local conditions and the range of possible responses to particular pressures, rather than rely on over-deterministic accounts of global tendencies" (p.40). As a basis for understanding the cultural integration of ICT in the specific context under consideration, this question looks at students' perceptions of their digital literacy practices in both academic and social contexts (and situations where these lines are blurred).

The project's third question is analytical. I ask to what extent digital literacy practices can be seen to contribute to the formation of symbolic competence. "Symbolic competence" is a concept advanced by Kramsch (2006, 2008) that supersedes her earlier (1993) notion of "third place" to encapsulate a more nuanced view of intercultural learning in the global era that includes "the production of complexity, the tolerance of ambiguity, and an appreciation of form as meaning" (2006, p. 251). As I explain in more detail in Chapter Three, and Chapter Seven, I equate symbolic competence with cross-cultural media literacy practices. Specifically, in relation to Kramsch's concept of symbolic competence, I ask my data: do respondents articulate a sense that their foreign and native language digital media practices are complexly interwoven with their

identities within communities of practice? Do respondents demonstrate a sense of agency towards either dealing with foreign language ambiguity or accepting its intractability? Do respondents recognize opportunities and limitations in the various forms of digital communication and learning that bring them into dialogue with foreign and familiar "others" via language.

Finally, based upon the data collected and theoretical explorations, the fourth question this thesis examines relates to the types of pedagogical affordances that may enhance learners' critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors via CMC. Foreign interlocutors are people of differing cultural backgrounds who correspond with learners through digital media and in face-to-face contexts. The definition of "text" that I use, following Kress and Selander (2012), is that of "any semiotic entity which has a sense of (social) completeness" (p.266). In this sense, question four is also asking about the letters, characters, images, sounds, videos and any other discrete units of communication that are produced by foreign interlocutors (known or unknown) and encountered by learners at the research site. The definition also points to the importance situating the interpretation of texts within a social context. Such a definition acknowledges the fundamental connectivity between reading as meaning-making and language itself. It is a more expansive understanding of what is being read, similar to Friere & Macedo's (1987) notion about the connection between "reading the word and reading the world" (p.35). In the Japanese institutional setting in which this study is set, both the words and the worlds being "read" are foreign rather than familiar, but the new social practices

in which these texts are mediated using ICT tools represent localized practices and perceptions that relate to global technological discourses.

The term “critical engagement” is used here to signal pedagogically structured interactions with such texts. I use this term in the broad sense offered in Dockter (2010) as “a stance that combines critical distance with immersion and emotional investment” (p.418).

This final question about pedagogical practices and affordances for critical engagement is answered interpretively and reflexively: I analyze narrative data from the research site as evidence from a specific Japanese higher education social context, and I interpret this in light of my own field notes and critical incident reports. I also draw upon studies that look at practices in similar and different contexts to explore local discourses and (cultural) practices surrounding CMC and digital literacy in Japanese higher education.

## **Research Paradigm and Approach**

This project is realized within a social constructivist paradigm that is constituted by a relativist ontology. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain the reality portrayed by constructivism as follows:

Realities are apprehended in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature (although elements are often shared among many individuals

and even across cultures), and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions. (p.110 -111)

My project thus seeks to understand the emic perspective of insiders at the research site. In order to gain access to the multiple perspectives of these participants, I employ a practice-based “toolkit approach” (Nicolini, 2012, p. 214) that draws heavily upon concepts from cultural historical activity theory (CHAT) which I discuss further below. It is important to note, however, that though CHAT is integral to my thesis, it does not constitute a sole guiding theoretical tradition for all aspects of my methods, data collection, and analysis. As I will discuss further in Chapter Three, these areas are also significantly informed by the broader landscape of contemporary practice theory, the New Literacy Studies (NLS) tradition, sociological studies of Japan (Japan Studies), and media studies. My most significant departure from CHAT is my use of the concept of “practice” instead of “activity” as a primary unit of analysis. Practice, which I defined above as ‘recognizable, repeated actions that constitute the creation of meaning among individuals and groups in a given locale’, is used because it is able to bridge an understanding of what students repeatedly do in their CMC with insight into teaching and learning practices at the research site.

Still, as I explain below, the overall theoretical orientation of CHAT and several key concepts from the tradition inform much of this thesis. CHAT is a research tradition that stems from key conceptual foundations of Activity Theory as first developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 1920's. Research in this tradition recognizes

the primacy of complex systems of culturally and historically situated human activity in educational development. Neither individual nor group action is alone considered sufficient for a thorough accounting of the processes of educational development, and thus research in this tradition explores the contextual dynamics of both *intra*-mental and *inter*-mental processes (Wertsch, 1991, p. 26).

Activity theory was further advanced by Alexander Luria and Alexei Leont'ev, two of Vygotsky's disciples, before being re-theorized in its third-generation form now known as CHAT by Cole (1995, 2005) and others. According to Roth & Lee (2007), CHAT:

. . . theorizes persons continually shaping and being shaped by their social contexts that immediately problematize knowledge as something discrete or acquired by individuals. In fact, CHAT explicitly incorporates the mediation of activities by society, which means that it can be used to link concerns normally independently examined by sociologists of education and (social) psychologists. (p. 189)

In an even more concise distillation of CHAT's core principles, Cole (2005) identifies three core "interlocking assumptions" associated with the contemporary research tradition: 1) the centrality of mediation, 2) genetic (historical) analysis, and 3) grounding in culturally organized activity (p.2).

My research approach generally works within these three core assumptions, allowing for what Wertsch (1991) also refers to as an inter-disciplinary "toolkit"

for exploring relationships between contextual continuities and student identities-in-transformation.

In analyzing the data I collected at the research site, instead of using analytical models from second or third generation activity theory, I draw upon sociological concepts associated with Japan studies, and media literacy concepts in the tradition of Marshall McLuhan (1962, 1964). I chose these analytic tools in lieu of theoretical resources related to CHAT because I wish to frame contemporary CMC practice within the context of the long, distinctively Japanese cultural and literacy traditions that I explore in Chapter Two.

### **Conceptual clarity: ICT vs. CMC**

Here, it should also be noted that the aforementioned ontology informs my use of two concepts throughout this thesis. The concept of *Information and Communication Technology* (ICT) is used throughout to signal a broad range of digital communication tools and platforms. “ICT” (the English letters) was found to be the most efficient way to point to a transcultural concept that the Japanese students who participated in my study could easily recognize. The concept was thus used as an entry-point for learning more about students’ *computer mediated communication* (CMC). In contrast to ICT, “CMC” points to a more academic term that most students are unaware of. It is a key term in this thesis that is normally paired with the concept of “practice” which I further clarify within the body of this work. What is important here is that my use of the term “CMC” is meant to emphasize *communication practice* that is mediated by computer

devices, whereas ICT emphasizes the (computer) devices themselves and the technology around those devices.

## **Research Design**

This single-site quasi-ethnographic case study is designed as an exploration of CMC practice and affordances for developing symbolic competence at the research site. As insider research, the study used three main data sources: unstructured field notes, structured reflexive critical incident reports, and narrative frames completed by 20 student participants in the study. The research design and methodology used for this project is explored in significant depth in Chapter Four of this thesis.

## **Researcher Background and Training**

This project's relativist ontology demands reflexivity in order to function with robustness. Consistent with this project's social constructivist/interpretivist paradigm is the belief that perspectives and practices of individuals are informed, formed, and supported by the social, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts within which they exist. As Volpe and Bloomberg (2012) explain, "Constructivist researchers recognize and acknowledge that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they thus 'position' themselves in the research to acknowledge that their own cultural, social, and historical experiences" (p. 29).



It is significant to this project that my background as a researcher is eclectic. My Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree was from a small liberal arts college in the American Midwest. The degree was in History & Ancient Studies, and I also completed a concentration certificate in Asian Studies as part of my undergraduate career. As an undergraduate, I studied Russian language (which I had begun in high school) and also studied Latin in connection with my interest in History and Ancient Studies. I took part in a six-month term in Asia during my junior year that was a formative experience. It was led by two professors of Asian Studies, and included field-based coursework in Indonesia, British-controlled Hong Kong, mainland China, and finally Thailand for three and a half months. In this final phase, I received intensive language training in the Thai language.

This “term in Asia” had previously included Japan, but the year I attended the program Japan was eliminated as a site for field study because of the high cost of living that had resulted from the country’s bubble economy. However, because one of the program’s professors was a specialist in Japan Studies, readings and lectures about Japan were included in the course of study. This piqued a long-standing interest I had in Japan, and planted seeds for deeper inquiry.

Ten years after my undergraduate career, I enrolled in an M.A. program in Asian Studies at University of Hawaii, Manoa. There, I focused on both Southeast Asia Studies and Japan Studies, and also further developed oral fluency and

literacy in Thai and Japanese language. In addition to campus-based language classes, I was able to undertake short-term grant-funded intensive language study in Japan over the course of two summers. I began to develop advanced Japanese literacy, and fluency in spoken Japanese. I also conducted preliminary field work for a research project on war memory.

After completing my M.A. in Asian Studies, I was awarded a research grant to continue my research independently, and I moved to Japan to complete field work. At this time, I also returned to my career as an English teacher, and, when the research grant period ended, I enrolled in an M.A. program at *Teachers College Columbia University*, which at the time had a campus in Tokyo. There, I developed a strong foundation in Applied Linguistics and foreign language pedagogy. My M.A. thesis was an extensive literature review related to foreign language identity and language learning communities of practice (subsequently published as Hourdequin, 2012).

It was after completing this work on communities of practice that I grew interested in the increasingly prominent digital communication practices of students at the university where I was employed. This thesis is an exploration of these practices and perceptions about these practices in one Japanese higher education context.

## **Core Assumptions**

Just as an academic researcher in this tradition would likely internalize certain perceptions and practices inherent to Asia, I have internalized several key perceptions and practices inherent to the Western tradition within which I have been trained. In Chapter Four, as I describe the research design and methodology of this thesis, I explore my positionality as an insider researcher in greater depth, but here, in order to focus the reader's attention on this thesis' ideological orientation I discuss three core assumptions that underpin my inquiry. The three assumptions most relevant to the questions asked by my thesis, and the subsequent analysis relate to 1) the purposes of higher education, 2) the meaning of foreign language learning, and 3) the role of technology in education. Here I briefly discuss the positions I hold as a researcher vis-à-vis these three areas.

### **The purpose of higher education**

As I will further elaborate on in Chapter Two, the modern higher education system in Japan initially served as a vehicle for the creation of a cadre of elite bureaucrats and other federal officials. Many of Japan's national universities still serve this function, but overall, higher education in Japan has followed the global trend of "massification" whereby a proliferation of institutions has made access to four-year tertiary education available to steadily widening swaths of society. My own experience through various levels of American higher education included an undergraduate (bachelor's) degree from a small liberal arts institution in the American Midwest, and this experience informs my view of the purpose of an undergraduate education in Japan. The college I attended had a religious affiliation and incorporated Christian (Lutheran) values into its

mission and curriculum, but not in a zealous or heavy-handed manner. As a student raised in a progressive New England community, I nevertheless felt at home. The values embedded in the curriculum of study meshed well with the classical ideals espoused by proponents of liberal arts education: the idea of creating knowledgeable and ethical citizens through a broad array of courses culminating in more focused study in a chosen “major” that needed to be declared in the second year. Across the curriculum, along with a focus on the acquisition of knowledge, there was an emphasis on helping students develop critical thinking and literacy skills, empathy, and moral reasoning. The core idea of developing critical literacy skills within the context of a classical liberal arts education is one that informs my view towards the purpose of university education for students at the research site. In theory, this matches with the (private) institution’s stated mission, which I explore in depth in Chapter Two.

### **The meaning and purpose of foreign language literacy**

My views on the meaning and purpose of foreign language learning are shaped by my experience as an undergraduate and my experience learning and teaching languages in subsequent years. I think of language learning less in terms of its practical benefits for employment and career, and more in terms of its potential to allow for personal growth, perspective taking, and flexibility of mind in the individual vis-a-vis increasingly diverse and globalizing societies. While I recognize that national language policy, economic, political, and other factors have a significant effect on what foreign languages are offered to and studied by students, I nevertheless view language learning as a deeply personal and somatic process involving what Kramsch (2011) calls the “embodied self.”

In the process of acquiring a foreign language, the learner's subjective self is necessarily shaped by the language learned, and that learner's desire for the development of a new self—or exploration of new aspects of the self— is often as important as his or her practical “motivation” to learn the language.

In the past several decades, language education in schools and language use in Japanese society have undergone significant change due to advances in digital media technology. An assumption related to this technological reality that informs my thesis is the belief that in order to become fully literate contemporary English language users, students of English as a foreign language need to develop competencies that go beyond language. As Kramsch (2006), explains:

It is no longer appropriate to give students a tourist-like competence to exchange information with native speakers of national languages within well-defined national cultures. They need a much more sophisticated competence in the manipulation of symbolic systems. Hence the renewed attention to discourse in a range of modalities (spoken, written visual, electronic), the focus on semiotic choices, and the ability to interpret meanings from discourse features. (p. 251)

Along with the personal growth that can come with the development of new facets of one's identity through foreign language learning, it is the development of this “more sophisticated competence” that Kramsch (2006) alludes to which I see as one of the most important purposes of language learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (p. 251).

## **The role of technology in language education**

As stated above, ontologically, my thesis proceeds in accordance with Kress and Selander's (2012) view that "the social is prior to the technological," but also with the view that sociolinguistic practices are always mediated in a variety of ways (p. 266). This is consistent with what Barton and Potts (2011) term a "language-as-social practice approach" that "emphasizes how practices around texts and textual production are always for a purpose, and this emphasis provides a thread linking people's earlier practices with digitally mediated ones" (p. 816). Along with a focus on existing practices, my view also emphasizes the socio-material affordances of educational contexts because these help determine access to language, and thus the kinds of participatory practices that lead to language acquisition.

## **Rationale & Significance**

The rationale for this study comes from an interest in exploring ways that new technological affordances can best be used to enhance educational outcomes in a Japanese higher education context. Beyond the design affordances and constraints of various CMC technologies, myriad factors and cultural assumptions lead to the construction of societal and institutional 'cultures of use' that inform students' interactions with each other, with their instructors, and with foreign "others" through various media (Thorne, 2003). This study seeks to explore some of these factors and cultural assumptions in one local institutional context, making a significant contribution to knowledge about CMC practices in intercultural contexts. Also, by demonstrating a way that narrative methods can be used to uncover technological practices and perceptions, my study makes a

methodological contribution to research that explores CMC practice in higher education.

## **Organization of this Thesis**

This thesis is organized in a traditional manner: following this introductory chapter, Chapter Two provides cultural, historical, and institutional contextualization for my study. I will show how formalized contemporary Japanese higher education is a relatively young tradition based upon Western models imported to Japan during the Meiji Period (1868 - 1912), but also adapted within long Asian traditions of education embedded within societal structures and social hierarchies. Chapter Three situates the study within a body of academic literature, exploring key concepts and empirical studies that inform this thesis. Chapter Four provides an in-depth explanation of my methodological approach and research design, and here I also explore my “positionality” within the research context and examine how this positionality influenced decisions I made related to research design. In Chapter Five, using photographs, scanned documents, and verbatim quotes from researcher field notes, I outline the data that forms the basis for the study’s findings. Chapter Six presents a synthesis of the study’s main findings based on my thesis’ four main research questions. Chapter Seven provides interpretive analysis of my study’s main findings with reference to the literature presented in Chapter Three, and in light of concepts from parallel fields of study. Finally, Chapter Eight offers conclusions and pedagogical implications that can be drawn from my research.

## Chapter Two: The Research Site in its Cultural-Historical Context

This chapter explores the cultural and historical context within which this research project is set. It starts very broadly with a look at how geography and politics have influenced Japan's linguistic and cultural development. Next, I discuss the Japanese language's spoken and written forms, and offer a brief historical overview of print literacy and formal education in Japan. I then proceed to a consideration of the development of tertiary foreign language education in modern times. Finally, I situate the study within the institutional context of the one particular Japanese university setting where data was collected for this thesis.

Though the focus of this thesis is foreign language (English) CMC practice at a Japanese higher education (HE) institution amidst our contemporary digital age, I start this contextualization chapter with a focus on the historical effects of geopolitics on Japanese literacy and literacy education in the pre-modern and then modern era for two reasons. First, for the concept of *foreign* language literacy to have validity and meaning, it needs to be set against the local literacy practices that have developed over time in the *native* language in the country where this study is located. That is, if what Irvine et al. (2000) call "regimes of language," or language ideologies determine how the foreign is defined against the familiar, then it is important to observe how changes in local literacy



practices over time have come to create present-day discourses. As Irvine et al. (2000) note:

The significance of linguistic differentiation is embedded in the politics of a region and its observers. Just as having an army presupposes some outside force, some real or putative opposition to be faced, so does identifying a language presuppose a boundary or opposition to other languages with which it contrasts in some larger sociolinguistic field. (p. 35)

Historically, Japan's liminal geopolitical position—separated from Asia but also a part of it—has meant that identifying linguistic, cultural, and political boundaries has always been relevant to governing and aristocratic elites (Rubinger, 2007, p.10). A brief overview of the historical development of the various literacy practices of these elites, followed by the gradual spread of similar practices to ever larger cross-sections of society provides necessary context for understanding foreign language literacy practice in contemporary higher education generally, and at the research site specifically.

The second reason that this historical overview is necessary is that although Japan's technologically advanced society may represent a pinnacle of post-modernity in the Western imagination, the linguistic and cultural remnants of its recent history of seclusion and relative isolation cannot be underestimated. The education system that Japan began to develop at the start of the Meiji Era (1868) was conceived of and implemented as a direct response to Western

powers. That is, the development of a “modern” education system can be seen as both an exemplar of modernity as defined by the West, and also a response to it. As a white paper entitled *Japan`s Modern Education System* from Japan`s Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Technology (MEXT, n.d.) explains:

When we search for the origins of Japan's modern national education, the influence of Western education is most obvious. The speed with which the influence of Western thought penetrated into this country after the opening of the port cities and the rise of the new Civilization and Enlightenment (Bunmeikaika) sentiment in the early Meiji era was remarkable. Thus, it seemed to many that modern education developed solely as a result of Western influence and completely independent of traditional Japanese educational ideals.

Yet on closer examination, we can recognize that the content of Japan's modern education was not one and the same with that of the West. The long historical process through the Edo (or Tokugawa) period generated a distinctively Japanese style of life and thought, which was destined to have a profound influence on the development of modern educational institutions. (Education at the End of the Shogunate, last accessed 5 May 2015)

Foreign language and media literacy practices have always played a role in Japan`s response to and engagement with the West. As I will discuss below, first and foremost was the need to read, understand, and translate Western

texts, which however voluminous, were manageable by a cadre of highly educated elites. Today, however, the internet has come to enable a constant, borderless flow of multimedia foreign texts accessible by anyone with a computer. Some countries in the region seek to control this flow by way of state censorship, but Japan's deep economic and political ties to the West make this option untenable. Instead, new literacy practices are called for, and the Japanese higher education system—no longer the province of elites—is one place where these practices are set to take form.

## **Cultural-Historical Context**

### **Geography**

The narrow chain of islands that constitutes present-day Japan form a crescent-like arch at the edge of Asia. All four of the largest islands have long, rugged coastlines facing the open Pacific Ocean to the east, and the western coasts of three of these large islands face the massive Sea of Japan, which forms a natural barrier with the rest of Asia. This barrier has meant that while Japan has always received transmissions of language and culture from the Asian continent, it has also been able to maintain the relative isolation necessary to shape linguistic and cultural artifacts in its own unique ways (Mizumura, 2015, p. 117).

Throughout its history, Japan's geographic features have also combined with its seafaring and military prowess to allow it to mitigate the intrusion of linguistic and cultural influence from non-Asian nations. This was achieved, even amidst the seventeenth century Dutch Golden Age, with containment of the world's top

naval and trading power to the port island of Dejima in Nagasaki, while a “locked country” (*sakoku*, 鎖国) policy created relative isolation from other Western influences for more than two hundred years. Since 1868, when the West’s “gunboat diplomacy” brought this period to an end, Japan’s creation of a modernizing education system has opened the country’s linguistic and cultural heritage to a period of reckoning with the Western influences that it so effectively isolated itself from during *sakoku*.

The foreign and domestic policy reversals that took place at the start of the Meiji period had broad-ranging consequences for all sectors of Japanese society and laid the foundations for Japan’s “modern” system of higher education. This foundation, and the demographic, political, and economic factors that led to the current state of tertiary foreign language education will be discussed in the second part of this chapter. However, given that these conditions are themselves informed by the unique history of language and literacy in Japan, I will first offer an overview of the development of spoken and written language in the Japanese archipelago, and the network of educational institutions that grew to support the creation of a national language.

### **Spoken Japanese**

The origins of spoken Japanese dialects are still debated by linguists, but recent phylogenetic research bolsters the case for classification within a Japonic language family, signifying a group of languages that settlers brought from continental Asia and/or nearby Pacific islands around 2400 years ago (Lee & Hasegawa, 2011, p. 5). This theory supports the view that Japanese dialects

began to prevail with the arrival of agriculture in the archipelago during the Yayoi period (300 B.C. - 300 A.D.), rather than evolving primarily from the languages of the hunter-gatherers of the Jōmon period (14,500 B.C. - 300 B.C).

Linguists identify four main dialects used throughout Japan today: Eastern, Western, Northern, and Ryukyuan, with the Eastern dialect spoken in Tokyo being the standard-bearer for popular media and academic discourse. Just as Japanese dialects have developed as a result of geographic isolation, the standard Japanese language taught in schools and spread socially and through media can be said to reflect Japan's history of relative political isolation, and also the hierarchical class strata of the pre-modern era. This language features a large repertoire of polite forms that allow speakers to embellish their words and sentences with respectful and humble prefixes and suffixes that designate the interlocutors' relationships to each other.

In this manner, the Japanese language can also be seen to reflect and enforce popular moral and aesthetic values and considerations about social interaction that make the language and culture what it is, and that are inevitably lost in translation and even in interpretation. Though inadequate, Richard Howard's 1982 translation of French semiologist Roland Barthes' meditation on spoken Japanese points to some important qualities of spoken Japanese discourse:

. . . in Japanese, the proliferation of functional suffixes and the complexity of enclitics suppose that the subject advances into utterance through certain precautions, repetitions, delays, and instances whose final

volume (we can no longer speak of a simple line of words) turns the subject, precisely, into a great envelope of speech, and not that dense kernel which is supposed to direct our sentences from outside and above, so that what seems to us an excess of subjectivity (Japanese, it is said articulates impression, not affidavits) is much more a way of diluting, or hemorrhaging the subject in a fragmented, particle language diffracted to emptiness. (Barthes, 1982, p. 7)

The most common interpretation of the value that such spoken discourse is said to inscribe to Japanese culture is that of “harmony” or “*wa*” (和). Western tropes about Japanese *wa* are too common to enumerate and can often succumb to orientalism (Said, 1978, 1985). Also, *Nihonjinron*<sup>1</sup> (日本人論) literature has been shown to repurpose the “Western gaze” for a variety of uses (see, e.g. Sugimoto, 1999, Befu, 2001). This literature—which I discuss further in Chapter Three—has been criticized for enabling essentialist and nationalistic tendencies. Nevertheless, concepts such as *wa* and others from the Japanese language can offer a useful way to compare Japanese discursive practices to those of English and other languages. This type of comparison is essential for deeper, cross-cultural understanding of foreign language digital literacy practices in Japanese higher education. Gee (2012) for example, has focused on the “orality” of internet texts, but such an understanding is of course premised on a certain conception of spoken discourse in Western cultural-historical contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> Literally, “Japanese people theory,” but often translated as “theories of Japanese uniqueness.”

## Japanese writing and literacy

Social practice involving the use of text as a communication tool has a very long historical tradition in Japan, but this tradition is deeply connected to issues of class, gender, politics, and available technologies.

Japan's nationally standardized contemporary written language is realized through combinations of Chinese ideographs (*kanji*, 漢字) and two derivative phonetic scripts, *hiragana* (ひらがな) and *katakana* (カタカナ). There was no indigenous writing system in the Japanese archipelago when, in the fourth century, logographic Chinese script first began to be adopted to phonetically represent the sounds of spoken Japanese (Hadamitzky and Spahn, 1997, p.16). The literacy practices of translation and lingua-cultural localization that began at this early date foreshadowed a long and complex interplay between literacy and identity.

During the fifth and sixth centuries as the process of textual appropriation and adaptation continued, reading and writing practices were initially only taught to boys and men within Japan's civil aristocracy and Buddhist clergy (Rubinger, 2007, p. 9). Text thus served the growth of Buddhist and Confucian social ideologies while also allowing for regionally centralized political administration by educated elites.

The process of writing complicated *kanji* whereby each character represents just one syllable was (and is), however, cumbersome and slow. Developing the

ability to write these characters is a necessarily social process that requires thousands of hours of guided practice. But texts written only with *kanji* could not account for Japanese grammatical phonemes and other indigenous language not represented by Chinese ideographs. Over time, as ties to China weakened, writers of Chinese texts therefore began to interweave markings derived from the known (local) readings of certain Chinese characters, which constituted the development of indigenous phonetic syllabaries (Mizumura, 2015, p. 107).

Chinese script alone still worked fine for the domains of religious study and bureaucratic governance, but for literary endeavors a softer, less angular script was derived from a variation of a *kanji* cursive style. By the Heian period (794 - 1185), a fully functional moraic (syllabic) cursive script had been developed, and was being used by literate court ladies to produce what is still considered some of the world's most exquisite literature (Rubinger, 2007, p. 10). Because it was initially used only by women (who would not have been versed in the use of *kanji*), the script was dubbed *onna-de* (女手), meaning, literally "ladies-hand" (Hadamitzky & Spahn, p.16.). This is the precursor to modern-day *hiragana*, a moraic syllabary that is used in combination with *kanji* in Japanese prose and alone in certain poetic forms. A more angular set of markings for the same limited set of Japanese phonemes was fully developed a short-time later, and this script is what became modern-day *katakana*, a parallel moraic syllabary—this one used to designate foreign loan-words.



While literacy practices in Japan initially centered around the religious endeavors of Buddhist clergy and the aesthetic pursuits of aristocrats, reading and writing Chinese ideographs and Japanese scripts gradually came to serve broader functions, and ever-wider sections of the population. Literacy and numeracy practices allowed farmers and village leaders to develop more complex and efficient agricultural and trade systems, more administrative sophistication, and some degree of autonomy (Rubinger, 2007, p. 11). At this time, Buddhist temples began to play an educational role in the spread of literacy that reached beyond their religious functions. Rubinger (2007), summarizing a view popular with Japanese historians, writes that “these village temples, beyond representing sacred space and functioning as places of worship, celebrations, and ceremonial convocations, became educational institutions as well—they were vital links between the lettered culture of the capital and the unlettered wilderness of the hinterland” (p.11).

Further details of the development of popular literacy in the pre-modern period are not necessary background for this thesis, but sufficed to say that by the beginning of the Meiji period (1868) when new centralized systems for formal education began to take form, literacy already played a role in the lives of people from each of Japan’s five classes: merchants, artisans, farmers, samurai, and landed aristocrats (Rubinger, 2007, p. 163). Except in the case of aristocratic women, literacy education practices within pre-modern Japan’s feudal class structure were only accessible to men. However, it is still notable that such

literacy practices nevertheless developed across class structures among such a broad cross-section of society.

## **Technology**

One important factor in the spread of popular literacy in pre-modern Japan was technology. Benedict Anderson (1991, 2004) and others (e.g. McLuhan, 1964) in Western historiography and media studies have argued that movable type, and “print capitalism” had a very important role in shaping the organization of modern societies in the era of the nation-state. Specifically, Anderson (1991, 2004) argues that in Europe the printing press’s ability to mass produce vernacular language played a crucial role in the development of the ‘imagined communities’ necessary for the formation modern nations. In Japan, however, surviving wood blocks from as early as the seventh century indicate that the spread of print literacy was not limited by technology (Jansen, 164). Smith (1997), for example, points out that because wood block printing had been used effectively in Japan for so long, “movable type offered no radical technological advantage over blocks” (p. 334). Instead, widespread popular literacy supported by Japan’s long-standing print-making visual traditions can be seen as perhaps laying the groundwork for national consciousness even before the era of the nation-state began.

## **Modernization**

Modern political histories of Japan usually begin with the arrival of U.S. Admiral Matthew Perry’s black ship, and the demand that the country open itself to trade with the West. This event, which occurred in 1853 and again in 1854 signals the end of Japan’s period of self-imposed semi-isolation from the Western world

that began more than two hundred years earlier in 1635 with the issuance of Tokogawa Ieyasu's *sakoku* decree. It has been noted that Japan was not actually "locked" during *sakoku* (see, e.g. Arano, 1994, 2013). Trade with the West took place through Dutch and other intermediaries during the period. Even so, it was not until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when trade with Western countries so regular and free that large scale societal changes began to take place.

As Japan again began to trade with the West, it recognized a need to modernize all sectors of society—especially its education sector—if it were to escape colonization and maintain economic autonomy and political sovereignty. The turn to new forms of literacy and literacy education was thus imperative for survival and driven by the changing course of history outside of Japan and the threat of colonization and domination by more technologically advanced imperial powers.

According to Mizumura (2015), this point in history was also when Japan imported the "ideology of national language," through the development of a new "narrative of national literary history" (p. 111). Mizumura (2015) also notes that it was not until 1868 that an official document was issued using something akin to contemporary Japanese scripts (a mix of *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*). Previously, all official documents and even translations of books from foreign languages, had been issued in Chinese—marking Japan's tacit recognition of the superiority of Chinese cultural forms, and its place as a (peripheral) part of the Sinosphere (p.111).

## Japanese universities

According to Rubinger (2007), Japan's first "university" (Daigakuryo) was established in the seventh century, and was designed to "educate the sons of local officials" (p. 9). As in China, the curriculum was centered around *The Analects* and the *Book of Filial Piety* (Rubinger, 2007, p. 9). Reading and writing were thus for many centuries the province of elites and artisans, but the cultivation of print literacy among large sectors of the population began in the early years of the Edo Period (1603 - 1868) when temple schools called *terakoya* (寺子屋), and other educational institutions began to flourish (Jansen, 2002, p. 190).

As the Meiji era began in 1868, formal education played an important role in ending the country's long-standing isolation from the international community. Japan adopted widespread modernization and standardizations of its educational institutions, initially heavily based upon American and European models. Schools came to serve a centralizing government increasingly concerned with international affairs, avoiding colonization, and standing on equal footing with Western powers (McVeigh, 2002, p. 46). Schools thus served the purpose of cultivating a loyal citizenry of a modern nation-state in ways that had been absent in the past.

In 1877, The University of Tokyo was established as the first of five imperial universities placed throughout the nation-state to cultivate educated government diplomats, bureaucrats, and officials familiar with the ways of the

“modern” West. Ota (1994) notes that the language of instruction at these elite universities was often English or other foreign languages. Foreign professors at University of Tokyo in 1877 accounted for as much as 75% of the faculty, and as Ota (1994) explains, “it was the rule rather than an exception that Japanese professors lectured in English” (p.202). In describing the situation of foreign languages in Japanese higher education during the early Meiji Era, a MEXT white paper explains that:

The sine qua non for those students who wished to avail themselves of higher specialized education in the early Meiji era was a knowledge of foreign languages. Up till the time of the proclamation of the Education System Order practically every course offered in the Southern and Eastern Colleges was based on English, French or German texts. English was especially important. (MEXT, 2014a, “Higher Education in the Early Meiji Era)

Before long, however, there was a backlash against the consequences of such intense internationalization of higher education curricula, and concern among educated elites that Japanese students were losing grasp of their native language and culture, and more importantly the sense of national identity that needed to be constructed at this time. Ota (1994) cites an 1877 memo to the Ministry of Education from a dean at The University of Tokyo which stated “Those who boast themselves to be graduates of the University of Japan may be proficient only in English and incompetent in Japanese” (p.202). The sentiment took hold, and by 1883, Japanese became the official language of instruction at The University of Tokyo (Nagatomo, 2012, p. 12).

Though the development of ‘world-class’ universities was interrupted by the Asia-Pacific War (WWII), the discourse of higher education as a vehicle for international competitiveness has continued to today. However, as I shall show below, Japan’s higher education sector has grown from its origins as an elite national academy to a broad array of institutions that now usher more than fifty percent of the population into society.

## **Contemporary Japanese Higher Education**

The research for this thesis took place within the Faculty of Foreign Studies at a private, four-year higher education institution in central Japan. To understand the nature of this institutional setting, it is necessary to understand the broader landscape of contemporary higher education in Japan.

There are three main types of four-year universities in Japan: national, public, and private. National universities are the most selective, cheapest to attend in terms of tuition, and also the most prestigious. These universities developed from the Imperial University system that was established during the Meiji Era (as described above).

National universities now exist in all 47 of Japan’s prefectures alongside prefectural and private universities, which generally command less prestige. Prefectural and municipal universities are grouped together as “public” universities by MEXT. The remaining universities, which form the vast majority

of the higher education sector in Japan are categorized as “private.” Private universities in Japan are those higher education institutions which MEXT recognizes for their unique educational missions.

Academic years in Japanese higher education follow the Japanese fiscal year which begins on April 1<sup>st</sup> and ends on the final day of March the following calendar year. Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) conducts an annual survey known in English as the “School Basic Survey” (学校基本調査、gakkō kihon chōsa ). The most recent of these surveys is not yet available in English, but the Japanese version was published in December of 2018, and offers statistics that are current as of the 2018 academic year (MEXT, 2018). The table below summarizes the division among the three aforementioned types of four-year universities in Japan:

	National	Public	Private	TOTAL
Four-year universities	86 (11%)	93 (12%)	603 (77%)	782
Students	608,969 (21%)	155,520 (5.2%)	2,144,670 (73.8%)	2,909,159

*Table 2.1.* University types and student populations in Japan according to the 2018 School Basic Survey (MEXT, 2018)

In historical context, the university and student numbers listed above can be seen as the result of broader economic and demographic trends in the post-war period that have had a very strong impact on Japan’s higher education sector. Japan’s so-called “baby boom” generation refers to the demographic cohort

born at the end of World War II, who came of age in the 1960's. Just over fifty years ago, in 1966, the 18-year-old bracket population reached a peak of 2.49 million. Of this cohort, 1.58 million (63%) graduated from high school, and approximately 300,000 of these 18-year old high school graduates (about 19%) entered four-year universities in the same year (MEXT, 2014a, p. 4). Over the last half century though, Japan's population has begun a steep demographic decline, with a falling birth rate leading to a hallowing out of the younger generation. In 2010, the number of 18-year-olds in Japan (1.21 million) was less than half of what it was in 1966. At the same time, the percentage of 18-year-olds graduating from high school had risen to 88%, and the portion of those students who advanced to university reached 53.5%, well more than double the advancement rate fifty years ago (MEXT, 2014a, p. 5).

These changing demographic and societal trends, along with the Japanese post-war "economic miracle" which reached its pinnacle in the 1980's, have had wide-reaching impact on the higher education sector in Japan. The sector has rapidly expanded to serve a broader range of students in the past several decades. Despite the halving of the 18-year-old population over the past fifty years, the steadily increasing university advancement rate has led to greater demand for higher education and thus an increase in capacity amidst tighter competition for students. In addition to the creation of many new two and four-year colleges, Japan's economic success has allowed and required the creation of a diverse market of other post-secondary educational and pre-professional



training schools as well, and it is with these institutions that some lower level universities essentially compete for students.

### **The Host Institution for this Study**

The private, non-elite university where this study took place is situated in the type of environment described above: a national and prefectural university both have campuses within the same city which attract top students from the area, as measured by their scores on the National Center Test, and the universities' own admission tests. There are also campuses of several other private universities in the area, which constitute the university's main competitors for incoming students.

As explained above, private universities constitute 77% of the higher education sector in Japan. They are recognized by MEXT on the basis of their value in providing "unique education and research activities" based upon the "spiritual legacy" of their foundations (MEXT, 2014a, p. 6). As such these institutions receive a variety of benefits from the government in the form of monetary subsidies, preferential tax treatment, loans, and managerial support. The present institution, like many such universities in Japan, is part of a large school corporation that provides educational services at every level, with a total of 19 separate facilities that include two nursery schools, two kindergartens, one elementary school, one middle school, two high schools, a vocational school and associated rehabilitation hospital, and four university campuses with undergraduate and graduate school faculties.

The educational corporation within which this institution exists was founded in 1946, immediately after The Second World War, as a women's secondary school. The institution's "spiritual legacy" (建学の精神, *kengaku no seishin*) is tied to the founder's post-war vision for an educational facility that would serve "Japan's re-emergence from the chaos of the post-war period, and transformation into a peace-loving nation"<sup>2</sup> (*kengaku no seishin*, n.d.). In the post-war era, the educational corporation expanded rapidly and prolifically, adding new schools and campuses every few years.

The university campus where this study is set existed as an independent university within the school corporation until 2013, when upon gaining permission from MEXT, it was consolidated with the other three universities in the group to form one large, multi-campus university. The university is divided by disciplinary faculty, which are subdivided into departments. This research project was conducted within the university's department of British and American Studies, which sits within the Faculty of Foreign Studies, and is housed on the largest central campus along with two other faculties (Education, and Art & Design). The Faculty of Foreign Studies was founded in 1984 as the university's second Faculty to be developed for a new four-year university built near the corporation's two-year college that had been established 18 years prior.

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<sup>2</sup> Author's translation.

The student population at the university as a whole, and at this campus specifically, is drawn from the surrounding community in the prefecture where the university is situated. Approximately 90% of students live at home with their parents for the duration of their four-years at the university, commuting to the university five days a week.

Many of Japan's universities are clustered in and around its major metropolitan areas (particularly Tokyo and Kansai), and in addition to serving their local urban populations, these universities serve as magnets for students from throughout the country. The research site, however, is what is referred to as a regional university (*chihō no daigaku*, 地方の大学). In contrast to their urban counterparts, so-called 'regional universities' provide alternatives educational opportunities for local students who wish to live at home while completing an undergraduate degree program. In recent years, despite the pressure on local universities due to Japan's declining population of high-school graduates, the host university has thrived, with the department of British and American Studies exceeding application recruitment and admissions targets most years. Data was unavailable for an in-depth investigation of the reasons for this, but many speculate that it is because of economic factors that make attending a local private university while living at home less expensive than attending a university in another locale.

### **The campus and built environment**

Before describing the built environment of the campus where this study was set, it should be noted that in the year that this thesis was completed, the university

moved two of the three faculties that existed on the campus that constituted the research site (including the one that housed the department of British and American Studies) to a new campus that it built nearby—approximately two kilometers away. All data for this thesis, however, was collected before the move (and before the move was announced), and it is thus the socio-material affordances and constraints of the “old” campus that can be seen to have significantly shaped student life and CMC practice. In this section, I thus focus only on the built environment at the campus where data was collected. In order to point to some ways that new learning spaces and common pool resources at the new campus might be explored, however, in Chapter Eight I include some comparison between the two campuses, and observations that point to learning affordances that are manifest in the design of the new campus’ built environment.

The campus where this study was set exists within a residential neighborhood approximately seven kilometers from the city center, and 2.5 kilometers from the main train line which serves as the region’s primary public transportation artery. Students thus commuted to the campus by train, bus, motorbike, bicycle, and on foot. In many cases students used a variety of these modes of transportation to reach the campus, where they usually stayed during the daytime until their classes and/or club activities finished.

The built environment of the university campus consists of three main connected buildings on a three-hectare (7.4 acre) campus. The central campus

building is a 10-story tower which contained classrooms and offices on each floor. In addition to the main academic buildings, the campus has an outdoor sports ground and accompanying club houses, car parking for faculty, and bicycle and motorbike parking for students and faculty.

As the campus library was small and designated for silent individual study, two small, multipurpose student lounge areas (see figure 2.2 and 2.3), a large cafeteria, and the university's Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC, Figures 2.5 and 2.6, below) constituted the main gathering spots for students in the department when they were not in class. There are also very small lounge areas on most floors of the academic buildings with vending machines and bench seating (figure 2.3).



*Figure 2.2.* One of two multipurpose lounge areas at the campus where research was set. This space, located in front of a small convenience store, was frequently noisy, and crowded with students eating meals or snacks. February, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Photograph by the author.



*Figure 2.3.* A second multipurpose lounge at the research site where students gathered to eat, study, and socialize. Photograph courtesy of the university admissions office (undated, 2013). Used with permission.



*Figure 2.4.* A small gathering space on the third floor of the main academic building. February, 14<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Photograph by the author.

A free wi-fi network accessible throughout the campus allowed students to use their smartphones (and occasionally laptops or other devices) for CMC without incurring additional charges from their cell-phone carriers. The wi-fi network was password protected by a single, openly-shared password, and the network did not require students to register or log on when using it. This allowed for free wi-fi access with minimal security amidst relative anonymity. However, just as the spaces on campus quickly became noisy and crowded at lunchtime and between class periods, at such times the open wi-fi network was frequently congested and either very slow or impossible to access.

### **The Foreign Language Study Support Center**

As I will discuss further in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight, individual faculties at the university have attempted to provide various types of study spaces for their students, but have often struggled to maintain control over these resources. In the department from which student data was collected, the primary example of this type of space is the university's Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC, Figures 2.5 and 2.6), which—despite its mission to serve the entire university—was predominantly occupied and used by students from the Department of British and American Studies. The most common practice in the FLSSC, which was supported by staff and teaching assistances was English extensive reading—a practice whereby language learners read graded readers at or only slightly below their reading level to gradually improve their language comprehension. The practice is based, theoretically, upon Krashen's (1977,

1989) input hypotheses which place a high value on comprehensible language input in the process of language acquisition.

Whereas many other universities in Japan have promoted the practice of extensive reading in curricular and co-curricular initiatives using digital tools such as Moodle Reader (see, e.g. Robb and Kano, 2013 ), extensive reading in the FLSSC at the research site, and to this date at the new campus, have remained categorically analogue in nature. Indeed, a row of seven slow and outdated computers that were set against the back wall of the center were rarely used by students. Extensive reading was a much more common practice that was encouraged by the staff person at the center, by teaching assistants who helped manage a lending library of extensive readers, and by certain senior faculty members in the Department of British and American Studies. In this sense, the promotion and support of extensive reading in the FLSSC can be seen to have eclipsed other literacy practices—including those that might lead to the development of symbolic competence via CMC. The FLSSC's resources nevertheless supported the development of a community of practice around



paper-based extensive reading within the department (Hourdequin, 2011, 2013a).



*Figure 2.5. The Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC) at the research site. View from hallway entrance, September, 22, 2017. Photograph by the author.*



*Figure 2.6. A view of the dominant extensive reading and language study practices from inside the FLSSC. June, 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016. Photo courtesy of the university's Foreign Language Study Support Center. Used with permission.*

Over time, however, the university's administration began to push back against the department's control of the FLSSC, and its dominance by students engaged in practices related to English language extensive reading and (in recent years) extensive listening. Beginning in 2013 and continuing through to the Faculty of Foreign Studies' relocation to a new campus, the university began cutting staff and other resources at the FLSSC. They also created university-wide committee oversight in an effort to manage this space more centrally for the

benefit of all students. Whereas, two full-time professors and a full-time administrator had once staffed the center, the new cuts eliminated the faculty positions at the center and outsourced administration to a non-staff administrator (working on renewable 6-month contracts). The center's primary physical resources—leveled and graded readers and audiobook CDs for English learners which had been accumulated via faculty research funds for many years—were also put at risk, and ultimately management of these books and CDs was ceded to the library on the new campus.

A discussion about the role of the FLSSC on the new campus, and the affordances of new learning spaces there is included in the final chapter of this thesis. For now, however, it is important to note that at the research site, the use of the FLSSC space to support practices related to paper-based extensive reading can be seen to have inhibited the development of certain CMC practices.

### **CMC Practices at the Research Site**

As noted earlier in this chapter, the campus wi-fi network was accessible to students and faculty in the FLSSC and throughout campus, but like the spaces themselves, was frequently congested. Still, students could access the network with their smart-phones, thus avoiding significant mobile internet fees that would come with browsing the internet and engaging in CMC via their respective carriers. In various campus spaces, students could thus be observed using their mobile phones as a means for communicating with each other, accessing information online, and listening to music and watching videos (via earphones).

Such practices were also common on trains and buses during students' commutes to and from school.

Consistent with the mobile phone culture in Japan generally, and the region where the study was set in particular, voice calls in public spaces were rarely observed. One typical exception was when students needed to speak with part-time job employers, or prospective employers during the job-hunting season that lasts from the second semester of students' third year through the first semester of their fourth year. In these cases, students could occasionally be seen seeking quiet corners in hallways or other spaces to conduct their conversations. For peer to peer communication, however, the clear preference among students appeared to be the use of text messaging applications such as LINE.

Though three small computer labs existed on campus that allowed students to connect to the internet and utilize the Microsoft Office suite of applications for word processing and presentation preparation, many students I spoke to did not have external PC email addresses, and were unaware of how to access the email address given to them by the university. Several students wrote email addresses on the top of the narrative frames which I used as a data collection tool (described further in Chapter Four and Chapter Five), but in all cases the addresses given were mobile carrier email addresses. My field notes from participant-observation at the research site thus aligned with research on computer literacy and CMC habits among university students in Japan,

affirming a preference for mobile CMC, and a trend of “normalization” of mobile CMC among Japanese university students that has occurred over the past decade (see, e.g. Barrs, 2011, Mindog, 2016). I will discuss case studies that explore CMC in Japanese university settings in detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

As I discuss further in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven, field notes and narrative frame data revealed that a mobile chat application called LINE constituted the primary platform for CMC amongst students at the research site. This platform—which I discuss in detail in Chapter Seven—allows students to communicate in dyads and/or larger groups. For example, it is common practice for class groups of 25 to 30 that are established within university-year cohorts (divided by language level) in the department to establish LINE groups for communication about issues relevant to university academic and social life. LINE is also used in a similar way for communication amongst student members of clubs and circles, and for communication within teacher-led research or project groups.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has detailed the cultural and historical context within which my study of Japanese university student CMC practice and perceptions is set. The chapter has explored the history of literacy in Japan to the present, and has situated contemporary university life within a higher education landscape that has expanded from its elitist beginnings to its current form, which is

characterized by broad participation. The university where this study is set is characterized as a regional, non-elite, commuter university where students gather for their daily coursework, their club activities, and to socialize. I have pointed described the campus where research was conducted, and its situation within its surrounding environment. In Chapter Three, I will situate my study within a body of empirical and theoretical academic literature on literacy and social practice.

## Chapter Three: Literature Review

Whereas chapter two of this thesis served to situate the research setting within its cultural, historical and institutional context, this chapter explores theoretical and empirical findings from existing literature that provides important background for the interpretation and analysis of my study's data, and thus a basis for the assessment of their significance. This interpretation and analysis is rooted in the specific research questions that my thesis poses, and the terms used in these questions. These research questions are as follows:

1. What types of computer-mediated communication CMC practices do students at the research site engage in, and how do these connect to culturally and historically-rooted societal discourses and practices?
2. How do students at the research site perceive their native and foreign language CMC practices?
3. To what extent can students' multilingual CMC practices be seen to contribute to the formation of symbolic competence?
4. Given student CMC practices and perceptions, to what extent are pedagogical practices and affordances at the research site utilized to enhance students' critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors via CMC?

These four questions, in the way they have been conceived and formed, depend on theoretical understandings of several key concepts from different theoretical subfields: from a certain sub-tradition in the New Literacy Studies (NLS), I use

the term “discourse”; from cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT), I employ the notion of “mediation”; my focus on “practices” derives from readings in mainstream sociology; and finally the notion of “symbolic competence” depends on a key concept in contemporary applied linguistics. One purpose of this chapter is thus to synthesize conceptual work from these traditions in order to clarify the theoretical lens that informs my inquiry. A second task is to show a gap that exists in the literature which this study is attempting to fill. Though recent comprehensive surveys of English-language academic literature on CMC and digital literacy and have been undertaken by others, notably Thorne and Black (2007), Leander et al. (2010), Mills (2010), and Goodfellow (2011), these reviews, and my own survey of subsequent literature reveals that few studies exist that approach foreign language CMC as social practice in Japanese higher educational settings. Finally, this chapter seeks to explore what can be gleaned from existing studies in similar institutional contexts that explore related problems and questions.

Educational research focused on CMC and digital literacy draws upon a wide and diverse range of disciplines and research traditions, including those of applied and theoretical linguistics, literature studies, media studies, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Researchers in these traditions have used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to explore a variety of questions in a diversity of contexts. Further, the breadth of literature on literacy, literacies, and computer mediated communication (CMC) includes many different approaches to many different kinds of research problems that are characterized

in many different ways. This project situates itself in the borderland between literacy studies, applied linguistics, and mainstream sociology (and the subfield of Japan Studies), and seeks to bridge practice-focused sociological research with a social semiotic perspective that is gaining prominence in applied linguistics.

The chapter's first section clarifies the overall scope and academic territory of my inquiry by locating it within the context of three "turns" in intersecting academic research traditions. In the second section, I discuss some of the main theoretical and conceptual tools and tensions that inform my study: conceptions of "discourse," "mediation," "practice," and "symbolic competence." Finally, I discuss relevant studies from two categories of practice-focused research set within Asia that offer insight for the context of my own study, thus clarifying the knowledge gap this research seeks to help fill.

### **Three Turns**

In the 1980's and 1990's a "linguistic turn" in sociology was mirrored by a "social turn" in applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA) studies around the same time (Pennycook, 2010, p. 123). Applied Linguistics' "social turn," led researchers such as Swain & Deters (2007) to advocate for a participation metaphor to replace that of language acquisition. The sociocultural view implied by this shift sees language use as inseparable from social activity, and has evolved into the practice-focused research approach in applied linguistics that has come to the fore in recent years, especially in literacy studies.



It is an approach that is embodied by the work of leading scholars such as Pennycook (2002, 2010), Hamilton (2012), Barton and Potts (2013), Gee (2012), and many others, and coincides with the necessary expansions of notions of “literacy” to include everyday practices undertaken with everyday tools and materials that lead to particular ways of making meaning through language and other modes of communication.

The increased focus on practice that has taken hold in mainstream sociology and certain quarters of applied linguistics has been accompanied by similar developments in literacy studies. Beginning in the 1990’s, a group of literacy scholars began to refer to their field as New Literacy Studies (NLS), which aimed to bridge language-focused sociology research and practice-focused linguistics research in educational contexts. The shift was a move away from cognitive approaches to literacy to those that took into account social, historical, and contextual factors and the practices that these entailed. Gee (2010) aptly summarizes the break from cognitivism that defined the NLS movement that began in the 1980’s and continues today in various forms:

Traditional psychology saw readers and writers as engaged in mental processes like decoding, retrieving information, comprehension, inferencing, and so forth. The NLS saw readers and writers as engaged in social or cultural practices. Written language is used differently in different practices by different social and cultural groups. And, in these practices, written language never sits all by itself, cut off from oral language and action. Rather, within different practices, it is integrated

with different ways of using oral language; different ways of acting and interacting; different ways of knowing, valuing, and believing; and, too, often different ways of using various sorts of tools and technologies. (p.166)

Here, Gee (2010) contrasts a cognitivist conception of literacy with the sociocultural paradigm favored by the NLS. Drawing upon research in the then emerging fields of cross-cultural psychology and linguistic anthropology, the NLS re-conceived literacy as situated social practice rather than an individual cognitive skill. Foundational research in this tradition includes, for example, Scribner and Cole's (1981,1999) study of the effect of schooling on the Vai of Liberia, Rogoff's (1991) cross-cultural analyses of "apprenticeship in thinking" that takes place during child-rearing, and Brown et al.'s (1989) emphasis on "situated cognition." This research all draws heavily upon the work of Vygotsky and his successor, Leontiev, and is situated within the theoretical tradition of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT).

The NLS critique of literacy as individual competence yielded a view of literacy as social practice around texts. This broader movement, spurred by a small cadre of scholars who called themselves the New London Group (NLG) relocated the unit of analysis from that of the individual mind in a laboratory setting to the socially-constructed mind situated in a given socio-cultural-historical context. This understanding of literacy as a social practice gave birth to many ethnographic studies that explored language use as participation within specific local discourse communities. Different discourse communities were

seen as drawing upon different sets of semiotic resources. Research on the achievement of different types of literacy in varying contexts has focused on ways that socio-economic and other factors influence access to the resources seen as most valuable by society.

A final research “turn” that concerns this project is the one that has taken place in the NLS and has also taken place in sociology: the so-called “digital turn.” In an article that reviews the “digital turn” in the NLS movement through 2010, Mills (2010) characterized research in this tradition:

From a synthesis of the emerging patterns of literacy observed across multiple local sites, the following list of features is evident: The literacies are digital, pluralized, hybridized, intertextual, immediate, spontaneous, abbreviated, informal, collaborative, productive, interactive, hyperlinked, dialogic (between author and reader), and linguistically diverse. (p. 255)

Mills’ (2010) synthesis aligns well with a list of “preferred literacy practices” among further education learners in the U.K. which were reported by Satchwell, Barton, and Hamilton (2013). These authors note that participants’ preferred practices were those associated with “everyday life,” and they included the following characteristics: “Mostly multimodal . . . Mostly multimedia . . . Shared, interactive, participatory. . . . Non-linear . . . Agentic . . . Purposeful to the student . . . Generative . . . Self-determined in terms of activity, time, and place” (p.45). Satchwell et al. (2013) also note that “One of the most obvious differences that emerged from our data was the prevalence of *digital* literacy

practices in students' everyday lives, and the prevalence of *paper-based* practices on their courses" (p. 45-46).

As I will explain in chapters five and six, these results from U.K. further education in fact align with much of what I found in my study set in Japanese higher education. However, it is notable that even Mills' (2010) extensive review of NLS literature focused on digital practice only included two studies that referenced the Japanese context, and both of these studies highlighted online interactions rather than practices situated in specific societal and institutional contexts. My own review of literature on new literacies, CMC, and computer assisted language learning found a similar bias towards a focus on digital practices without adequate contextualization, and further, a paucity of studies set in Japanese institutional contexts that explore the way certain practices are mediated in situ and related to broader societal currents.

## **Conceptual Tools and Tensions**

### **Discourse**

The second part of my first research question asks how the CMC practices observed and reported at the research site connect to broader societal discourses and practices. Establishing such connections theoretically is no simple matter, and to do so my thesis borrows concepts from several academic traditions. Before discussing the term "practice" from this question, I turn to the conceptions of "discourse" present in the work of NLG researchers.

NLG scholars shared a common focus on the role of language in shaping society and culture (and vice versa), but their understandings of discourse and discursive practices varied in small but significant ways and have since diverged on different trajectories. In this section, in order to explicate my own use of the term “discourse,” I explore how discourse is viewed by three prominent New London Group scholars, and consider some implications of these theoretical positions for understanding digital literacy as social practice in my setting.

Norman Fairclough, a founder of the cross-disciplinary field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) explains in his 2001 book, *Language and Power* that he uses the term discourse “to refer to discursual action, to actual talk or writing, and the term practice . . . in a parallel way” (p. 24). For Fairclough, discourse is thus language in use (similar to what de Saussure called *parole*), and critical discourse analysis serves as a tool for understanding the ways that language in use functions to maintain and create social order and power dynamics in society. Fairclough's work explores how ‘texts’ (understood as instances of written or spoken communication) draw upon different types of discourse, and how these are situated within societal power structures.

Fairclough’s melding of a linguistic understanding of discourse with a sociological conception of practice parallels the way other NLG scholars have shifted their focus from reading as an individual cognitive process to that of reading as a social practice. Fairclough (2003) articulates a view of language as social practice which implies three propositions:

Firstly, that language is a part of society, and not somehow external to it. Secondly, that language is a social process. And thirdly, that language is a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other (non-linguistic) parts of society. (pp. 19 -20)

By this view, Fairclough (2003) conceives of discourse practices as “a network of social organization in its language aspect” (p.24).

One more important contribution from Fairclough is his understanding of discourse analysis itself as a social practice that calls upon the analyst to reflect upon the nature of his or her embeddedness within the discourse (or practice) being analyzed. From a social semiotic perspective, discourse analysis is only effective to the extent that it ties its analysis of texts to analysis of the member resources (MR) of all those involved in interpretation, including the researcher. As Fairclough (2003) explains:

But if analysts are drawing upon their own MR to explicate how those of participants operate in discourse, then it is important that they be sensitive to what resources they are themselves relying upon to do analysis. At this stage of the procedure, it is only really self-consciousness that distinguishes the analyst from the participants she is analyzing. The analyst is doing the same as the participant interpreter, but unlike the participant-interpreter, the analyst is concerned to explicate what she is doing. (p.139)

This necessity for reflexivity emphasized by Fairclough is something that I have strived to include as part of the discourse analysis provided in this thesis.

The work of James Paul Gee (1991, 2010), by contrast, distinguishes between two notions of discourse, what he terms big-D discourses and little-d discourses. Gee's unique conceptualizations of big-D and small-d discourse effectively connect a Foucauldian notion of language's historically-contingent role in shaping society with one of everyday language in use (small-d discourse) by individuals whose identities are shaped by the discursive practices they participate in and enact. This allows for methods such as conversational analysis (CA) to be used to make sense of interactions among individuals that reveal the reproduction of larger societal (big-D) Discourses at the micro level.

Finally, the work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) takes a highly constructivist perspective, and has focused upon semiosis (the process of meaning-making) as the fundamental communicative process that defines human beings. Accordingly, their definition and use of the term "discourse" is quite broad to account for the myriad contexts for making meaning that exist in the world:

Discourses are socially constructed knowledges of (some aspect of) reality. By 'socially constructed' we mean that they have been developed in specific social contexts, and in ways which are appropriate to the interests of social actors in these contexts, whether these are broad contexts ('Western Europe') or not (a particular family), explicitly institutional contexts (newspapers) or not (dinner-table conversations), and so on. (p. 4).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) also focus upon interactions as a primary unit of analysis, but their concern is more about the way communicative activity, including the creation and interpretation of texts, draws on implicit knowledge that constitutes shared semiotic resources of a group, or culture. In their hands, however, “culture” loses its broad explanatory power because culture is not seen as a system of understanding, but instead as a set of shared resources. It is the communicative resources of a community of any size. As Kress (2012) explains: “A group of two or more persons, acting in recognition and with understanding of socially made resources, in recognizably similar practices with these resources, can count as a community with ‘its’ culture” (p.371). In the article quoted here, two examples are given to illustrate semiotic analysis. One examines what might be understood from a photograph of two children at play. In the photo, one child is holding an object in his hand and showing it to the other, apparently in silence. Kress (2012) explains that even such a simple interaction can form the basis of a semiotic analysis. In the interaction, communication is understood to have taken place by sight and touch of a shared material resources. The shared communicative experience replaces what might have previously been called “culture” with the recognition that culture can only be said to exist in the minds of individuals in groups who share meaning with each other.

In summary, NLG scholars have conceptualized the important notion of “discourse” in different ways. Gee (1991, 2010) emphasizes the role of language in identity construction and maintenance and ties the everyday



speech acts (small-d discourse) to larger societal currents (big-D Discourses). Similarly, but with a greater emphasis on power structures, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis emphasizes the social conditions that afford various productions and interpretations of texts. Kress (2012), and Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) focus on the micro-level of interaction, or semiotic "work", among individuals and groups for the (re)production of meaning in society. Consistent across all NLG notions of discourse though is an increased focus on semiotic (meaning-making) *practices* and the idea that fluency in such practices can only come from something like apprenticeship in the specific human culture where these practices are valued and carried out.

As I will explain below, the concept of "practices" is mostly able to subsume any single conception of "discourse" for describing and explaining activity at my project's research site. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned conceptions of discourse inform my study and play an important role in describing the stream of cultural resources that create shared understanding among language users in a given locale.

### **Cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT)**

In addition to the increasing emphasis on contexts and discourses brought to applied linguistic and educational research by the NLS school, researchers who employed second and third generation CHAT have brought attention to the influence of tools and patterns of tool use in different sociocultural settings. This theoretical lens allows a view of the individual language user, following Wertsch (1991), as the "individual(s)-acting-with mediational-means" (p.96). It is a view

that is both developmentalist and constructivist. Mediation is a concept at the center of my study's focus on computer mediated communication. Here, I explore some important theoretical and empirical studies that have employed mediation and related concepts.

Applying a CHAT perspective to contemporary communicative contexts, Thorne and Black (2007) argue that "that qualitative shifts in communicative contexts, purposes, and genres of language use associated with new media necessitate a responsive and proactive vision of educational practice, particularly in the areas of first and additional language instruction" (pp.133 - 134). Thorne's (2003) "cultures of use" concept enables a research perspective that examines both the material designs that are "carried" by certain technological tools and spaces (or platforms) as well as the local practices around these designs that groups of people develop in social-historical-institutional contexts. Thorne (2003) thus states that:

The implication is that historical, institutional, and discursive processes (e.g., the flow of culture at a given point in time and for specific communities) largely mediate an individual's practical and symbolic activity. Artifact or tool . . . utilization necessarily implies cultural mediation and the routinized use of an artifact exhibits its temporally local as well as its historical constitution. (p. 40)

Thorne and Kramsch (2002) and Basharina (2007) provide two seminal examples of educational research exploring such 'cultures of use' (though this term is not used) and their influence on CMC practices in pedagogical settings.

Though both of these are cross-cultural tele-collaboration studies that are limited in their ability to deeply explore the societal and institutional roots of their participants' practices, both studies point to important issues related to genre conventions and inter- and intra-cultural contradictions.

Thorne and Kramsch (2002) looked at American and French students' interactions via ICT and found that varying understandings of genre conventions and corresponding practices led to significant misunderstandings between language learners from different cultures. They highlighted the way that CMC via email and internet bulletin board postings led to "genre wars" explaining that:

. . . the clash we witnessed in the data . . . is not between individuals choosing 'right' or 'wrong' styles of writing, more or less truth-based or trust-based, but between two local genres engaged in global confrontation. Because genre is bound up both with global communicative purpose (Swales, 1990) and a local understanding of social relations, genre is the mediator between the global and the local.  
(Thorne and Kramsch, 2002, p.99)

Thorne and Kramsch (2002) thus concluded that local communicative practices play a very significant role in shaping interactions with foreign 'others' via ICT. Further, the limited modality of the communication channel—the constraints of the communication tool—were shown to magnify conflict and misunderstanding. The authors noted that in face-to-face interactions “. . . the multiplicity of

semiotic channels serves to diffuse the conflict and to disambiguate the nature of the genre” (Thorne and Kramsch, 2002, p.99).

Basharina’s (2007) research was conducted within a more explicit CHAT framework, but had similar findings. The study also focused on a pedagogical context in which CMC was used for cross-cultural communication, albeit one in which all participants used English as a lingua franca. The author explored the communicative practices of Russian, Mexican, and Japanese participants who communicated via email and an electronic bulletin board system (BBS). Basharina (2007) employed Engeström’s (1987) second generation CHAT to explore “contradictions” in the collaborative use of computer technology for intercultural communication, and identified intra-cultural, intra-cultural, and technology-related contradictions which manifested themselves in various ways in on site (at a university in Canada), and at the virtual “third place” of the ICT platform where students interacted (Basharina, 2007, p. 88). Though limited in its scope, the research usefully illustrated the complexity of online activity sites by demonstrating the way various contextual factors inform the participation of different members.

Both of the aforementioned studies demonstrated ways that historically-rooted and culturally-entrenched (discursively-mediated) practices and perceptions fueled misunderstanding in cross-cultural encounters, and thus point to the importance of research that looks carefully at communicative and pedagogical practices in various cultural and institutional contexts. They spotlight particular

“cultures of use” that develop in local settings. Such research can help identify factors that contribute to the development of various local communication genres, and identify how (societal and cultural) discourses structure participation in these genres.

These and other cross-cultural studies (e.g. Katz, 2001; Bonk & Kim, 2002; O’Dowd, 2005) point to “contradictions” that arise in intercultural encounters when English or other languages are used for communication across electronic media. They reveal that despite identical or similar tools, *practices* vary significantly across locales. A limitation of studies like these though is that they sometimes fail to adequately explore the situatedness of the practices they represent. For example, though Basharina’s (2007) study demonstrates contradictions that may arise in cross-cultural encounters via CMC, it does not point to the particularities of where and how and why these cultural practices develop.

Despite significant practice-focused contributions from the CHAT tradition like the ones mentioned above, it has been argued that applied linguistics research has often failed to focus adequately on (discursive) practice itself, and has lacked concepts for connecting analysis of language use in local contexts with broader societal currents. Block (2013), for example, argues that though in applied linguistics there is “clear acknowledgements of the presence (and reality) of social structures and their role in shaping (though not determining) individuals’ lives, there is still little overt or detailed consideration of exactly what

one might mean when the structure agency relationship is invoked” (p. 128). Further, Kramsch (2005) has suggested that applied linguistics lacked a theory of practice; and Pennycook (2010) and others have argued that such a theory is essential for the field to remain tethered to real world contexts.

As I discussed above, various notions of discourse have been used by NLS researchers to try to bridge understandings of local language use with institutional and societal structures. However, I demonstrated that “discourse” is such a vast term that even researchers within the same micro-tradition are apt to use it in different ways. How, then, can “local literacies” be connected to new literacies and CMC “cultures of use” that exist in other places and contexts?

This problem is what Brandt and Clinton (2002) call “the limits of the local.” These authors attempt to bridge the local/global divide by way of concepts such as “sponsors of literacy” and also through their notions of “localizing moves” and “global connects” which draw upon Latour’s (1996) actor-network theory (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, pp. 349 – 351). The authors are concerned with the ways that literacy is at once a local and a global phenomenon that is mediated by non-human actors that are often undervalued in ethnographic accounts of literacy. As they explain:

The problem enters when, as researchers, we fail to consider the objects in a literacy event as active participants in the context or if we consider them only in terms of their function in the local, interactive work alone.

With such omissions, it is easy to conclude that literacy when it happens is only particular and locally situating. (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p. 246)

One putative solution Brandt and Clinton (2002) offer to this problem is the concept of “sponsors of literacy.” They explain that:

We can think of sponsors as underwriters of acts of reading or writing – those agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable or induce literacy and gain advantage by it in some way. The concept of the literacy sponsor recognizes the historical fact that access to literacy has always required assistance, permission, sanction, or coercion by more powerful others or, at least, contact with existing “grooves” of communication. (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p. 349)

It is clear from this quote that the authors are attempting to conceptually account for the power of both human and non-human agents in local literacy practices, but it is less clear how the concept can help reveal practices themselves, for which no definition is offered. Also, because the everyday objects of our lives are so intertwined with other places and power centers, it would seem that a full accounting of literacy “sponsorship” might not even be possible. While Brandt and Clinton (2002), following Latour (1996) are right to point out that the existing designs of objects themselves play a significant role in shaping literacy (and associated CMC practices), I argue that it is the way that objects (hardware and software) are used in contexts that influences local and non-local power dynamics.

Thorne's (2003) 'cultures of use' concept discussed above has the potential to uncover such local patterns of tool use, but for the purposes of my study it is Pennycook's (2010) emphasis on *language as local practice* that carries the most force for connecting everyday mediated action with understandings of broader social, cultural, and historical organization. In emphasizing the conceptual affordances of a practice theory approach to language research, Pennycook (2010) explains that:

The important point about practice is that it sits . . . between Big-D discourse (the abstraction of the worldview) and little-d discourse (everyday language use) and asks how they connect, how this meso-political level organizes local activity in relation to broader social, cultural, or historical organization. (p.123)

Pennycook's focus on local practice thus moves away from Gee's bifurcated notions of discourse, and also from the associated structure/agency debate in applied linguistics. In Pennycook's hands, discourse as an abstract notion loses its singular power, but *discursive practice* along with myriad other practices can be revealed for their sustaining and evolving roles in local communities, institutions, and societies. Further, Pennycook (2010) places emphasis on how language is always enacted (practiced) *locally*, and thus "needs to be understood through the emic lenses of anthropology as much as the etic lenses of sociology" (p115). This provides a conceptual bridge between ethnographic studies focused on social semiotics and linguistic ecology (e.g. Scollon and Scollon, 2003; Lam, 2009; Bezemer and Kress, 2016) with work exploring



“cultures of use” (Thorne, 2003) or even research that draws upon communities of practice theory (Wenger, 1998) such as Hourdequin (2011, 2013a). The essential question becomes: what practices are enacted at research sites, and how do these practices function and intertwine with other practices in other (near and distant) places?

## **Practice**

But what is a practice, and how can practices serve as a unit of analysis for research on CMC in intercultural higher education institutional settings? Definitions of practice vary slightly within the field, but some common ground can be found in one offered by Reckwitz (2002):

‘A ‘practice’ (Praktik) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. (p. 249)

Whereas definitions of discourse focus on the connections between language use, identity, and society, definitions of practice, like this one, call attention to repeated embodied activities. Schatzki (1996) has called a practice a “nexus of doings and sayings” which would seem to cover almost all human activity (p. 89). What makes an activity a practice though is its repetition in human cultural contexts. Repetition reifies activity into what is knowable as a practice. As Reckwitz (2002) explains: “Moreover, the practice as a ‘nexus of doings and sayings’ (Schatzki) is not only understandable to the agent or the agents who

carry it out, it is likewise understandable to potential observers (at least within the same culture)” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 250).

The final parenthetical of this characterization of what constitutes a “practice,” however, points to a need to redefine practice in a way that works in *cross-cultural* contexts. That is, the aforementioned characterization assumes practices are definitively recognizable and observable by a single, monolingual observer. But in the reality of a research context that crosses cultural and linguistic lines, the nature of a practice must come from a negotiation of meaning between the observer and the observed. For the purpose of this type of cross-cultural educational research, I thus wish to argue that a term such as “perceived practice” might be merited. Consistent with the definition of practice given in the introduction of this thesis, perceived practice could be defined as ‘recognizable, repeated actions that constitute the creation of meaning among individuals and groups in a given locale.’ Such a definition thus includes Schatzki’s (2012) idea of a “nexus of doings and sayings,” but would also emphasize the idea that such sayings and doings are not “spatially-temporally dispersed,” but rather locally realized, interpreted, and in this case translated (p. 14). That is, to be seen as significant, practices need to be understandable as practices by the practitioners themselves and observers with enough deep linguistic and cultural knowledge to allow for interpretation that reflects the semiotic complexity of the practices in cultural-historical context.

## **Symbolic competence**

Whereas the need to define a concept of perceived practices above stems from my project's first two research questions, my third and fourth questions call for a clarification of the concept of "symbolic competence" and my use of this term to interpret findings from the research site. Symbolic competence is a term introduced by Kramsch (2006), and further developed over the past decade or so. As noted in Chapter One, the term is initially framed as encapsulating three main qualities: "the production of complexity, the tolerance of ambiguity, and an appreciation of form as meaning" (2006, p. 251). Beyond these qualities, Kramsch (2006) does not offer a direct definition of the term, however a subsequent annotated bibliography by Kramsch and Whiteside (2015) characterizes the original concept as: "The ability to manipulate symbolic systems to interpret signs and their multiple relations to other signs, to use semiotic practices to make and convey meaning, and to position oneself to one's benefit in the symbolic power game." (Kramsch & Whiteside, 2015). Kramsch (2011) also explicates the way that symbolic competence evolved from a previous concept, "third place," that had lost its relevance in our postmodern information era:

The proliferation of global communicative technologies has made intercultural communication into a much more complex, changing and conflictual endeavor than just a L1/ C1 self-understanding another L2/C2 self from a third place in between. THIRD PLACE, THIRD CULTURE and SPHERE OF INTERCULTURALITY are metaphors that attempt to capture through a place marker what is in fact a process of positioning

the self both inside and outside the discourse of others. It is the capacity to recognize the historical context of utterances and their intertextualities, to question established categories like German, American, man, woman, White, Black and place them in their historical and subjective contexts. But it is also the ability to resignify them, reframe them, re- and transcontextualize them and to play with the tension between text and context. (Kramsch, 2011, p. 359)

In this thesis, I use the term “symbolic competence” in a way that is consistent with this evolution in order to unite a practice perspective with a discourse perspective. Here, symbolic competence thus characterizes an ability to understand and interact with (and in) symbolic systems through culture (as discursive practice) and media. My use of the term is thus explicit about a dependence upon foundational concepts in media literacy. My definition of this concept is borrowed from the Center for Media Literacy, which defines media literacy as “the ability to communicate competently in all media forms as well as to access, understand, analyze, evaluate and participate with powerful images, words and sounds that make up our contemporary mass media culture” (Center for Media Literacy, N.D.) Symbolic competence is thus understood as a combination of cultural literacy and media literacy consistent with the impetus for the New London Group’s pedagogy of multiliteracies (1996). As I discuss in Chapter Seven, multiliteracies pedagogy is an approach where I see potential in helping students develop symbolic competence.

At the research site, foreign language learners encounter multimodal resources that draw upon a variety of cultural (discursive) practices. As they begin to enact new CMC practices, they require a competence characterized by an ability to understand and ultimately play with the complexity of cultural and media discourses as practices. Symbolic competence is used as an organizing concept for the realization of proficiency in such multilingual and multimodal practices.

### **Practice-focused Studies in Asia**

Given the notion of “perceived practice” that I articulated above, the filter for studies that might inform this one becomes narrower. This is not because contexts vary, but because the idea of “perceived practice” creates a methodological mandate that researchers offer rich description of the social contexts within which their studies are set, and also allow participants to explicate practices in their own terms. And while survey-based studies such as Mihalidis (2014) demonstrate an ability to characterize the digitally-enabled communications “habits” of college students in various locales, this study seeks to uncover what might be particular about these habits—here termed “practices”—in a university context embedded in Asian, and specifically Japanese traditions of literacy and communication.

Despite a plethora of recent research in Asia that has focused on ICT-based tools themselves and also the role of ICT in classroom settings, relatively little ethnographic research exists that explore youth CMC practices in cultural and

institutional contexts in Japan or other parts of Asia. The studies of this type that inform my own research can be divided into two broad categories: those that consider Asian or Japanese youth as a unit of analysis for understanding contemporary CMC practice, and those set in Japanese higher education institutional settings that focus on the experiences and practices of undergraduate English learners. While taking into account broader historical movements and trends, the rapidly changing nature of the tools and platforms young people use to communicate has necessitated that this review focuses mostly on studies within these two categories that have been carried out within the past decade or so.

### **Research on youth CMC practices**

Ito (2005) and Ito & Okabe (2005) are two foundational ethnographic studies that explored youth CMC practice as “keitai practices” in and around Tokyo. *Keitai* (携帯) is a Japanese word that means “portable” or “handheld.” It thus serves as a proxy term referring to mobile devices, which have evolved over the past two decades from pagers, to mobile phones capable of sending text messages, to modern-day “smartphones” (*sumaho*、スマホ). Ito (2005) reveals that despite an increase in discretionary time and mobility, college-aged Japanese youth remain very dependent upon their parents and educational institutions and lead relatively proscribed lives. As I will discuss in Chapter Seven, this is a situation that continues today, especially in the regional university setting where my thesis research is set. Ito (2005) discusses what she terms “power geometries of space-time compression” in an analysis of the communication practices of high-school and college-aged urban youth. This

contextual approach begins with the notion that “practices and cultures of youth are not solely outcomes of a certain state of developmental maturity, or even of interpersonal relations, but are also conditioned by the regulative and normative force of places” (Ito, 2005, p. 133).

Ito and Okabe (2005) also used Japanese “youth” as a category, to further explore the way societal norms and the constraints and affordances of physical spaces and technological tools can be seen to inform and shape youth mobile communication practices. While not set within any one institutional context, Ito and Okabe’s (2005) study offers essential “thick description” of youth mobile messaging practices in Japan, and theorizes the way these fit within Japanese society as a whole. The authors argue that “youth technology use is driven not only by certain psychological and developmental imperatives, but also by youths’ position in historically specific social structures” (p. 1). Their conclusions about CMC practices among youth in Japanese society as a whole is that “youth messaging can undermine certain adult-defined prior definitions of social situation and place, but also construct new techno-social situations and new boundaries of identity and place” (p.5). This research points to rigid generational structures that exist in Japanese society and usefully identifies CMC as one venue for resisting or operating outside of these structures.

But in addition to highlighting the social use of technology for pushing back against societal and generational boundaries, Ito & Okabe’s (2005) research also pointed to the way the *keitai* as a tool of resistance was creating “new

disciplines and power-geometries” that center around “the need to be continuously available to friends and lovers, and the need to always carry a functioning mobile device” (p. 11).

This theme of mobile device ubiquity and the social implications of such ubiquity was taken up by Takahashi (2014). Like Ito & Okabe (2005), Takahashi’s (2014) study also uses “youth” as an analytical category, but focuses more on the way mobile CMC tools create affordances for a variety of social practices across societal, cultural, and institutional boundaries. This comparative ethnographic study between youth social media practices in Japan, the US, and the UK finds some common social media practices among youth in all three countries, though in each case the explanatory cultural logic is different.

In analyzing the social media habits of Japanese youth, Takahashi (2014) emphasizes the concepts of *uchi* (内、inside/in-group) and *soto* (外, outside/other) and *kūki* (空気、social atmosphere). That these concepts are well-worn in the *nihonjinron* (theories of Japanese uniqueness) literature does not diminish their explanatory power or necessarily disprove their validity, but it does raise questions about the generalizability of Takahashi’s (2014) research, which freely traverses various intra-societal contexts (e.g. regional, institutional, social, class). I will return to explore the usefulness of these terms as analytic tools in Chapter Seven of this thesis.



## **Institutional studies**

What I term “institutional” case studies on CMC practice in Japan are those that explore the practices of participants from single or multiple institutional contexts. This distinction is important because it marks research that seeks to understand participant practices in terms of the purported purposes of their institutional membership, as opposed to the more general terms of demographic characteristics. Since the purpose of the knowledge created by my own study is to advance an understanding of the effects of digital practices on foreign language learning in Japanese higher education, I have looked for studies of CMC practice that come from similar institutional and cultural contexts.

Aoki (2010) is an example of a survey-based study that bridges the above-mentioned research on “youth” practices with institutional case studies. This paper provides English summary and analysis of the state of ICT use and e-Learning in Japan at the time of writing based mostly on results of Japanese language research conducted by MEXT, and other research institutes. It paints a grim picture of Japanese higher education as a whole and of the efficacy of ICT use in at universities across the country. Aoki (2010) cites a range of statistics to support her claim that “the application of technologies in education in Japan is far behind other developed counties” (p.854). This is generally seen as the result of Japanese culture, as Aoki (2010) explains:

In the Confucius value system which Japanese culture and society has built upon, teachers are authorities students should not challenge. In a typical classroom at a Japanese university, students rarely engage

themselves in intellectual inquiry, independent and critical thinking, or problem solving. The pedagogical emphasis tends to be placed upon the mastery of a specific body of knowledge instead of fostering the students' ability to reason and think critically and creatively and to articulate and defend their views. (p. 858)

This type of analysis, however, begs that questions be asked about the practices of youth themselves in some sampling of the types of educational institutions surveyed by Aoki (2010). If educational institutions serve to reproduce societal practices and discourses, it is worth asking what the participants in particular institutions do and think and say with and through and about the ICT they engage with.

As a burgeoning area of research, and with an increased push from MEXT for online learning, more recent studies such as Mehran, Alizadehl, Koguchi, and Takemura (2017) have looked at the readiness of Japanese “digital natives” for learning English online. This study (Mehran, et al., 2017), entitled “Are Japanese digital natives ready for learning English online? a preliminary case study at Osaka University” provides rich contextual information related to one institutional setting, but is nonetheless a useful addition to the field. The conclusion that Japanese students are in fact “not ready” though is helpfully cast in the light of other studies of ICT literacy in Japan which offer similar conclusions about e-learning and computer assisted language learning (CALL) readiness (e.g. Murray and Blyth, 2011, Goertler et al. 2012). Mehran et al. (2017), however, never unpack or problematize the “digital native” concept itself,

though brief mention is made of the Harada's (2010) *keitai* (mobile) native concept that has been developed for describing some of the CMC habits of Japanese youth. I will return to a deeper exploration of this construct in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

There is a very limited number of other studies of ICT literacy in Japanese higher education as a whole, and those that do exist usually narrate the practices of students at one or two local university communities. McDonald (2012), who attempted to compare the "IT practices" of Japanese students with their counterparts in North America, points out that while researchers looking at digital literacy practices in the latter location have access to comprehensive surveys like the *ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology* (2010), no such comprehensive study exists for Japan. McDonald (2012) explains:

While much more modest studies conducted in Japan do seek to provide some of these same details on a smaller scale, the unique contexts in which they are often conducted, the dramatic differences between one institution and another, the prospect of ongoing change in IT, and language barriers between researchers all serve to severely limit how generalizable or useful any findings may be. In order for instructors, administrators, and support staff in Japan to have access to the kinds of valuable information that can be revealed through studies like those of ECAR, it is clear that a great deal more research into these areas must be conducted, shared, and discussed. (p. 254)

McDonald's own study was unable to rectify this lack of broad-based survey data. This study (McDonald, 2012) looked at ICT literacy in one institutional context which is similar to the one I have explored in my thesis: that of a Japanese university's department of English (his study was set at a women's university in the Kansai region of Japan). The study polled 74 undergraduates using a paper-based survey instrument with open and closed questions modeled on the ECAR survey to "elicit information about the students' experiences, preferences, and perceptions related to IT use in conjunction with their classes as well as their opinions on their own self-efficacy and the importance of technology skills" (p.256).

The author found that students express an "overall preference for moderate use of IT in higher education" (McDonald, 2012, p. 260). This result was estimated to be "comparable" to results of the ECAR survey of North American students. Two additional notable results emerged from this study. McDonald (2012) found that approximately 50% of the Japanese students he surveyed were "friends" with their instructors on social networking sites (compared to 31.9% of the North American students), and a majority (55.4%) of the Japanese students surveyed also expressed a desire for interaction via SNS to be more prevalent (pp.258-259).

Among other limitations related to sample size and generalizability, McDonald (2012) notes that "One final limitation of this study worth noting was that the survey was conducted in English, a non-native language for the respondents,

which may have affected their understanding of the questions and possible answer options” (p. 260). As I will return to later, this issue of comprehensibility is an important factor that I took into account when designing research methods for my own study.

Despite its limits, McDonald (2012) is one of very few based in Japan that effectively explores student ICT practices, and pushes back against the narrative of ICT illiteracy, that is present in Aoki (2010). McDonald (2012) concluded that:

Contrary to expectations given the generally lackluster image of IT use in Japanese higher education propagated both in the literature and between instructors, the findings of this study seem to indicate that not only are the Japanese undergraduate students surveyed using a wide range of IT in relation to their academic coursework from the first year, but a majority of these students also see themselves and their instructors as relatively effective users of technology. (p. 260)

Barrs (2011) is another small-scale study that focused specifically on one aspect of Japanese university students’ CMC practice. The researcher undertook a survey of smartphone use in one university context and explored the pedagogical implications of the results. And though the study was limited in scope, Barrs (2011) was unique in its attempt to identify and describe “normalisation” of smartphones in the everyday practices of students of English as a foreign language, while also exploring students’ mobile language learning

practices. Though this study provided very limited contextual information, thus limiting its generalizability, Barrs (2011) did point to a way that smartphones and their applications open avenues for student agency around language learning that did not exist previously. Students who had smartphones were shown to be actively pursuing language learning on their devices in parallel to the institution's curriculum. But Barrs (2011) did not show that students were taking advantage of the social affordances offered by smartphones to connect with other English language users. On the contrary, it seems likely that "normalization" of smartphone use may have been creating stronger local social networks with limited interaction to foreign ones.

In contrast to Barrs (2011), and similar survey-based CALL studies, Mindog (2016) presented rich case-studies of four Japanese undergraduates from varying institutional and disciplinary contexts. Despite its very small number of participants, this study was unique in its ability to provide rich description about the participants' CMC practices related to English. Whereas many studies set in institutional settings tend to focus on the use of ICT "tools" (smartphones, software apps) for language acquisition (or "practice" in the vernacular sense) of discrete elements such as lexical or grammar knowledge, Mindog's (2016) study succeeded in revealing much about the everyday CMC practices of participants. Mindog (2016) examined and discussed participants' use of mobile software applications (heretofore "apps"), and found that "The most common types of apps . . . are content apps (10) and SNS apps (8)" (p. 12). Writing about her findings, the author notes that "intermediate language learners use apps

because they want to be a part of social networking sites and access various content rather than study discrete language parts . . .” (p.17). As I will discuss in subsequent chapters, this is a result that is consistent with my own findings.

Mindog’s (2016) study does not, however, explore issues of identity transformation that are bound to arise as students increase their consumption of and interaction with foreign language digital media. The only significant exploration of these issues set in an Asian institutional context was a qualitative study set at the high school level. Wu (2010) employed an NLS framework for understanding language use and literacy as social practice with an emphasis on students’ identity performances and appropriation and use of various genres for communication with different audiences online. Similar to Mindog (2016) this study was small in scale, and thus limited in its generalizability, but it provides valuable insights into some of the ways foreign language learners language use for the performance of identities in non-academic life worlds influences academic performance. The study found that “identities and multimodal literacy practices are central to literacy practices” (p.139). This echoes results found by Pasfield-Neofitou (2011) in a study that looked at Australian learners of Japanese participating in online speech communities. Results from this action research project lead the author to make a pedagogical recommendation that teachers recognize the various (oral and written) speech communities that technology now allows intermediate foreign language learners to naturally join. But similar to the results found in Thorne and Kramsch (2002), Pasfield-Neofitou (2011) highlight the benefits of raising student awareness about the

conventions of various online genres and how they differ from academic or other forms of communication.

Pedagogical case studies like these have the most to offer teachers working in similar contexts because they show great potential for using CMC to connect students to broader speech communities that they would otherwise not be able to interact with. In a similar vein, from the grey literature, Mehring's (2015) PhD thesis offers a valuable exploration of the "flipped classroom" as a pedagogical intervention at a Japanese university. And while the study offers valuable insights about the lived experiences of a certain population of Japanese university students involved in the author's experimentation with flipped classroom pedagogy, the research project also suffered from a significant lack of contextual information about the institutional settings and its students. This limits the study's usefulness for understanding how web-based pedagogical interventions might succeed in other settings. Also, there is only a very limited amount of information about the students' existing CMC practices that would help explain the suitability of flipped classroom pedagogy at the research site or possibly other settings.

This section has elucidated some important empirical contributions that inform my study through their focus on CMC practice in Asian institutional contexts. While the field is enriched by broad surveys such as Aoki (2010), it is single-site case studies like Wu (2010) and Mindog (2016) that have the most potential



for contributing to a mosaic that can help reveal how societal and context-specific factors shape student CMC practices in Japan.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has located my study within a broad body of literature by exploring concepts from various academic traditions that form a theoretical foundation for my research. By exploring the findings of existing case studies set in contexts similar to the one where my study is set, I have demonstrated a gap that exists in the empirical literature that my study attempts to fill by offering a close account of CMC practice in a specific, richly-described Japanese higher education context. In the next chapter I turn to the research design and methods used to gather and analyze data related to my study's research questions.

## **Chapter Four: Research Design & Methods**

The purpose of this single-site quasi-ethnographic case study was to investigate CMC practices and perceptions amongst foreign language learners in the department of English at a private regional Japanese university. The study sought to answer the following four research questions: (a) What types of computer-mediated communication (CMC) practices do students at the research site engage in, and how do these connect to culturally and historically-rooted societal discourses and practices? (b) How do students at the research site perceive their native and foreign language CMC practices? (c) To what extent can students' multilingual CMC practices be seen to contribute to the formation of symbolic competence? (d) Given student CMC practices and perceptions, to what extent are pedagogical practices and affordances at the research site utilized to enhance students' critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors via CMC?

This chapter serves to explain the research methods used to explore the aforementioned questions through a discussion of the following areas: the study's methodological paradigm and approach, the study's overall research design, my methods for gathering and reviewing related literature, data collection and sampling methods, and methods for data analysis and synthesis. I then include a discussion about issues of trustworthiness in my project. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

## **Methodological Approach and Paradigm**

This project employs a qualitative methodological approach that is based in a social constructivist/interpretivist paradigm. This approach is sociocultural in nature, and rooted in cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT). Wertsch (1998) explains that “The task of a sociocultural approach is to explicate the relationships between human action, on the one hand, and the cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which this action occurs, on the other” (p.24). Though it must be recognized that qualitative traditions are themselves socially constructed and historically situated, Denzin and Lincoln (2002) assert that irrespective of time and tradition, qualitative research generally implies “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p.3). Such research is grounded in the collection of data that reveal the emic perspectives of social actors at the research site.

The methods I employ in this study, which are described in greater detail below are quasi-ethnographic in nature. The primary unit of analysis that I focus on in this study is that of “practice.” Trowler (2013) explains that “a practice approach . . . is particularly congruent because both that approach and ethnography are best applied at the meso level: at the level of relatively small groups engaged in their everyday activities” (p.3). By allowing for detailed narrative description of everyday activities and reflexivity that would be difficult through a quantitative approach, my study’s focus on practices has allowed for an exploration of the complex fabric of social relations and discourses that

inform foreign language digital literacy and CMC use in a Japanese higher education setting.

Though this study does not fully conform to the specific genre conventions of any one traditional or contemporary type of ethnography, the interpretive methods used here are nonetheless influenced by ethnographic theory, particularly the postcritical ethnographic tradition. Postcritical ethnography seeks to remedy some of the epistemological trappings evident in critical ethnography. As Hytten (2004) explains:

Critical researchers argue that the hegemony of dominant structures creates a false consciousness in people that disables them from collectively challenging the status quo. Yet what we have not considered enough are the ways in which many critical researchers substitute one form of hegemony for another. That is, they do not truly problematize their own understanding of the social world and rather argue for the oppressed to replace their false consciousness with the "critical consciousness" the researcher has. (p. 96)

Gunzenhauser (2004) outlines four rhetorical "promises" that characterize the critical approaches alluded to here: ". . . giving voice, uncovering power, identifying agency, and connecting analysis to cultural critique" (p. 77). He suggests that though these are very noble methodological goals, two additional promises are necessary for contemporary ethnography to resolve the problems outlined by Hytten (2004) and others: self-reflexivity and non-exploitation. Guzenhauser (2004) argues that self-reflexivity—what other researchers now

simply call "reflexivity"—is necessary because without this there is a risk of "reinscribing power" (p.84) He argues that "anyone making knowledge claims needs to take responsibility for those claims and understand the ways in which the claim to knowledge and truth serve political interests and achieve desire" (p. 84). The fifth promise of nonexploitation serves a similar function, but additionally acts to assure that the researcher's own notion of agency is not artificially imposed upon his or her subjects. As Guzenhauser (2004) explains, "the additional promise of nonexploitation is needed to maintain opportunities for agency in others in the face of differential power relations" (p.89).

I consider this qualitative, quasi-ethnographic methodological approach to be appropriate to this project for several reasons. First, given my liminal status as both insider (full-time faculty member at the host-institution) and outsider (one of only three resident Western instructors at the campus, and a faculty member on a limited-term contract), it is important to collect and analyze data in a way that clarifies relationships of power and disempowerment while avoiding, or at least reflexively acknowledging the imposition of theory that may not be supported by other informants at the host-institution. In that a postcritical approach emphasizes multivocality, reflexivity, and non-exploitation, these aims are more likely to be achieved than would be the case with other approaches. Postcritical ethnography also fits well with the project's CHAT framework, which emphasizes the culturally and historically situated nature of knowledge and knowing. More specifically, a CHAT framework recognizes that what constitute cultural and historical activity exists as such in the mind of those giving these

phenomena voice and prominence, and calls on researchers to uncover discourses that frame various activities for stakeholders involved. As Roth & Lee (2007) explain, CHAT:

theorizes persons continually shaping and being shaped by their social contexts that immediately problematize knowledge as something discrete or acquired by individuals. In fact, CHAT explicitly incorporates the mediation of activities by society, which means that it can be used to link concerns normally independently examined by sociologists of education and (social) psychologists. (p. 189)

This type of theoretical stance, which associates knowledge with activity, requires a research methodology capable of uncovering various perspectives on cultural-historical activity. While in no way fool-proof, the aforementioned six promises of postcritical ethnography point to a progressive methodology for doing this, while at the same time avoiding overly postmodern/poststructuralist interpretive analysis that privileges deconstruction and complexity above all else.

## **Overview of Research Design**

This research project was designed as “insider research,” which can be simply defined as “doing research at the institution where one is employed or studying” (Trowler, 2011, Chapter 1, Section 1, para. 1). This approach was chosen because I reasoned that being embedded in the culture of the research site would allow me access to insights not attainable by conducting research outside of my institution. My review of the literature (Chapter Three) revealed that few

case studies on CMC practice at universities in Japan contained the type of depth and granularity that comes from an insider researcher's deep knowledge of institutional culture and language. For example, even in Mehring's (2015) thesis—which offered more insight than others into students' "lived experiences,"—the author noted that more extensive participant observation would have created a fuller picture of student practices. Mehring (2015) set his research at a university other than the one that employed him, and noted that distance from the research site, time and access constraints, and other logistical factors impeded his ability to conduct in-depth observation of student practices (p. 11). As I mentioned previously, McDonald (2012) also noted that conducting his survey-based research entirely in English with non-native English users limited the richness and reliability of his data. In designing my own study, I sought to avoid such problems and instead take advantages of my own insider perspective from within a Japanese university. Such a design, I reasoned, would offer me constant access to the social world under consideration, and thus to "emic accounts," which Trowler (2011) defines as "depictions of the social world derived from data generated within a culture and presented to an audience in such a way as to provide an understanding of the meanings and frames of reference in that culture" (glossary, para. 3).

Like any research design, insider research has limitations and pitfalls as well. For example, over-privileging emic accounts of practice risks eclipsing views of similar practices in other institutional settings or broader societal contexts (Trowler, 2011). Given the limited existing literature on CMC practice at

Japanese universities, however, I decided that as long as the limitations of insider research were mitigated through triangulation and reflexivity, it would be the approach most likely to offer a rich, granular picture of CMC practice at the host institution.

### **Sources of data**

I draw upon three main sources of data for my study. The first source is a research journal with field notes that I have maintained since the beginning of the project. This journal is a collection of unstructured paper and digital notes based upon my observations of practice at the research site. The second source of data is from a more structured form that I created for recording “critical incidents” around CMC that I experienced in my interactions with students. Within the structure of this form (included as Appendix Seven), I sought to record any specific interactions or observations that seemed to speak to the four research questions informing my study. The final source of data for this project came from student responses in a Japanese narrative frame which I designed. All three of these data sources are discussed in greater detail below.

### **Stages of research**

A diagram in Appendix One of this thesis offers a graphic overview of this project’s research design. The following list of steps summarizes the main stages of the project. Following this list, more detail is offered about the methods in subsequent sections of the chapter.

1. Before collecting data for this project, and before the winnowing process undertaken for the literature review presented in Chapter Three, I began reviewing a wide range of empirical and theoretical literature from the



new literacy studies (NLS), educational sociology, and applied linguistics.

This process continued throughout the research process until the completion of the literature review chapter (mid-2017).

2. In October of 2013, I completed and published a small-scale pilot study (Hourdequin, 2013b) that helped determine the broader questions that are asked in this larger study. The study analyzed data collected from a small group of students at the research site, and explored their experiences using a learning management system (LMS). The study also helped inform my choices for data collection in my main study.
3. Before beginning my main study, I drafted a participant information sheet (Appendix Two) and informed consent form (Appendix Three). Based upon these and a description of my project I obtained ethical approval from Lancaster University and from the host university for research involving human subjects. A letter of approval from the host university is provided in Appendix Four of this thesis.
4. I developed and pilot-tested a narrative frame form that I had designed for empirical data collection based upon my research questions. I revised the narrative frame document per participant feedback and with input from colleagues at the host university. An English translation of the narrative frame used is provided in Appendix Five, and the Japanese version is provided in Appendix Six.
5. I constructed a simple note-taking form for my own reflective “critical incident reports” which would allow me to record salient observations

about CMC practices and ICT use at the research site in a standardized format (Appendix Seven).

6. Using a snowball sampling technique (described below), I recruited 20 undergraduate students at the research site who voluntarily consented to participate in my project after being informed about its scope and their role as informants in a manner that conformed to Lancaster University's ethical standards, and the standards of the host university.
7. I assigned numbers to all participant narratives and input raw Japanese text data from the 20 completed narrative frames I collected into the software package NVivo and coded the text data according to emergent themes (open coding).
8. I translated into English passages from the student narratives that connected to the themes I identified.
9. Based on these themes in student narratives and themes identified in my field notes and critical incident reports, I sought answers to my four main research questions. I compiled data from these sources into four main findings, which I present in Chapter Six of this thesis.
10. I analyzed my findings according to three analytic categories (see Appendix Eight and Nine). My analysis culminated in the completion of Chapter Seven of this thesis.
11. I completed a focused review of literature (Chapter Three) related to my project as I analyzed my data in light of readings in the field.
12. I completed a full translation of all student narrative data and had my translations checked for accuracy by a bilingual (Japanese) colleague.

Complete English translations of all twenty student narratives are included in Appendix Eleven.

### **Literature review methods**

The literature reviewed for this thesis has been gathered through an iterative process that started when I first began to outline the nature of my research problem and questions. I have conducted keyword searches in major international journals and gray literature (e.g. other PhD theses) in the fields that directly relate to my study, varying these keywords to account for journal or database scope. I have also read broadly in theoretical literature related to multiliteracies, the new literacy studies, and social practice theory. The process has necessarily become increasingly focused and systematic as my study progressed. Throughout the process I have maintained a database of articles, books, and gray literature relevant to my topic using a citation database program called Zotero. I have tagged these articles with information related to context and location, study type, data collection methods, analytical methods, and results.

Despite the ongoing nature of my review of relevant literature, the literature review included in Chapter Three of this thesis concluded five years of concerted effort to organize and make sense of empirical and theoretical findings that have a bearing on my own study. Because of the importance I've placed on context in my study, in my survey of literature on literacy I began with searches related to digital literacies and social practice in Japanese higher educational contexts. I combined various search terms such as "computer-

mediated communication” and “digital literacy” and “literacy as social practice” with terms such as “Japan,” “Japanese higher education,” and “Japanese students,” to search several research databases available through Lancaster University’s library. The main databases I searched in were Lancaster’s OneSearch database, the Institute of Sciences ERIC database, Academic Search Complete (EBSCO), the JSTOR database, and Google Scholar.

## **Researcher Positionality**

Researcher positionality is defined as “the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group” (Rowe, 2014, p.627). In this section, I discuss my own positionality as a teacher-researcher within the context of the research site given its situation within Japanese society, and within the broader landscape of English language teaching and teaching research. Further, I explore how this positionality influenced certain decisions related to research design.

Describing stratification in the internationalization of English, Kachru (2006) defines “inner circle” countries as the “traditional bases of English” such as the U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (p. 242). Beyond such countries, Kachru (2006) delineates a second group of countries whose common characteristic is some type of deep, historical connection to inner circle countries. Former British or American colonies and territories such as India and the Philippines respectively constitute examples of such “outer

circle” countries for Kachru. Finally, Kachru (2006) delineates an “expanding circle” of countries like Japan (p.243). In these countries, despite the fact that English was never historically institutionalized through actual colonization, the language’s status is nevertheless ascendant due to English’s role as an international or universal language (Kachru, 2006, p.243).

Given this status of English as an international language within Japanese society and thus educational institutions, native English-speaking instructors from “inner circle” countries have long enjoyed a certain type of privilege. For example, with English now an official part of Japanese school curricula from the upper grades of primary school (4<sup>th</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> grade) through high school, demand remains high for instructors from inner circle countries. The role of English in the primary and secondary school curriculum has been steadily expanding throughout the post-war period, and during this time, English teachers and teacher trainers have been in demand in various educational contexts. With just a college degree, such individuals can find work as assistant language teachers (ALTs) in public and private primary and secondary schools, or as full- or part-time tutors at cram schools, and English conversation schools.

At the university level, similar privilege exists for native English-speakers, however, long-term employment prospects in the sector are limited in particular ways. For example, Rivers (2016) found that eighty-one percent of university employment advertisements that call for native speakers in their

descriptions offered limited-term contracts (p. 81). Further, many of these advertisements specify that contracts are either non-renewable or renewable only once or twice. Though institutional motivations for employment practices are difficult to ascertain, and academic research is lacking in this area, labor law specialists have speculated in the vernacular press that such practices are attempts to skirt the Japanese government's Labor Contract Law which was amended in 2012 and took affect the following year (see, e.g. Okunuki, 2016; Carlet, 2017). This law attempts to reverse a broader trend of job insecurity in Japanese society by requiring employers to offer permanent positions to workers who are contracted with a company for more than five years. Given these conditions, research by Whitsed (2011) likens the positionality of many foreign teachers at Japanese universities to that of a person standing in the *genkan* (玄関、entryway) of a Japanese house (also see, e.g., Whitsed and Wright, 2011). One is inside the house, but still very close to the exit.

When this project began, and throughout the data collection phase, I was, metaphorically, standing in the *genkan* of the university that constituted the research site. To my knowledge, only three other "native" English-speaking teachers had (ever) successfully navigated to tenured positions at the host institution, but many, many others had failed over the years and moved on to short-term contracts at other university, or shifted to adjunct status. Despite my positionality in the *genkan* of the research site, due to a variety of personal and family considerations, I was interested in staying on to work for the long-

term rather than shuffling along to another university for another short-term stint.

My liminal status as a teacher-researcher, however, had implications related to the scope of data that could be collected, and how this could be done. Most importantly, it informed my decision to focus on student practices and perceptions alone, rather than a more comprehensive picture of these practices in relation to *faculty* CMC practices inside and outside of the classroom. Specifically, I feared that potentially face-threatening requests for data on classroom and personal CMC practices and perceptions from colleagues who were my superiors in age and position might be detrimental to my career path at the host institution.

As I note in the final chapter of this thesis, the university's faculty also conformed to national demographic trends related to a "graying" society: at the time, most colleagues in my department were significantly older than me (most by at least 10 years), and also apparently less familiar with the ICT practices of contemporary youth. Given this situation, I elected to focus my study on student practices and perceptions, and informally share my findings with a few trusted, relatively younger colleagues in order to help assess their validity.

## **Data Collection Tools, Methods, and Sample**

Empirical data for this project was collected using three tools: Japanese language narrative frames, ongoing researcher field notes. and reflexive critical

incident reports. Below, I discuss each of these tools and explain how they were used in more detail followed by a section that describes my sampling methods.

### **Narrative frames**

Barkhuizen (2011) describes a narrative frame as "a written story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths. It is structured as a story in skeletal form" (p. 402). Using this definition, I designed a Japanese-language narrative frame based upon my research questions and the kind of information I wanted to elicit from informants. I consulted colleagues to confirm the accuracy and usefulness of the Japanese sentence stems I had written, and the overall coherence of the frame I produced. I then pilot-tested the completed frame with a student volunteer. This student provided useful feedback on ways that I could improve the data collection tool. For example, she suggested places where blank space following certain sentence stems should be abbreviated or expanded. She also identified language that she found overly ambiguous or unclear. I made adjustments to the narrative frame template based on this students' suggestions in consultation with other multilingual colleagues at my university.

From among a wide variety of qualitative research data collection tools, narrative frames were chosen as a primary source of data for several reasons. First, narrative frames seemed apt because they would allow students to engage in an asynchronous and reflective dialogue without being overly concerned with comprehensibility to a foreign interlocutor. That is, in an interview or focus group setting, I felt that (a) students who normally



communicate with me in English might be hesitant to express their views directly and complexly in Japanese, and (b) might not have enough time to reflect before responding to questions. Secondly, unlike typical paper-based surveys with various question forms, I reasoned that narrative frames could serve to stimulate students to construct their own meaning around the issues under consideration. Finally, the format of narrative frames whereby sentence stems are completed by students to form a narrative that fits well with the “topic-comment” grammatical construction that is common in Japanese discourse.

### **Narrative frame data collection method**

After a brief orientation and explanation of my research, and upon obtaining informed consent, participants received the narrative frame to complete at their own leisure over the course of one or two weeks. Participants were asked to fill in the narrative frames freely, in Japanese, and without asking follow up questions about the meaning of the sentence stems. These prompts were intentionally designed to be clear enough to elicit rich textual responses about CMC practices and perceptions, but not so overly prescriptive as to lead informants in particular directions.

### **Target population and sampling procedure**

To collect empirical narrative frame data related to my research questions, I first delimited the target population of my study to the roughly two hundred second- and third-year university students in the university’s *Department of British and American Studies*. I then employed a purposeful sampling technique to gather student narratives of CMC practices, and student perceptions of these practices. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) note that, in contrast to random sampling

techniques which seek generalizability to larger populations, “The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p.119).

In my study, the aim was to understand CMC practice among foreign language learners at the research site, and I thus employed a purposeful sampling technique known as “snowball sampling” to recruit participants at the research site. Snowball sampling (also commonly referred to as network sampling, chain sampling, or referral sampling) is a technique whereby study participants recommend or recruit other potentially willing participants for the study. This is repeated until data saturation occurs. I chose this method because of the homogenous nature of the relatively small target population and the logistical difficulty of either surveying all members (census), or gathering an entirely random sample. I judged that this technique would produce a reliable picture of CMC practices and perceptions in the target population because this data could be triangulated with my own field notes, critical incident reports, and tacit knowledge of the research site.

To begin snowball sampling, I recruited four undergraduate students (2 male and 2 female) I knew who I thought might be willing to participate in the study. I chose these students deliberately based on my knowledge of the range of their experience (and lack thereof) abroad. Specifically, I recruited students with the following mix of study abroad experiences: no experience abroad, limited

holiday travel experience abroad of a week or less, limited (short-term) study abroad experience of two to six weeks, and a student with long-term study abroad experience. Upon obtaining informed consent from these students, I asked them to complete the narrative frames I had designed for the study. When they submitted their completed frames, I asked them to recommend other students they knew who might be willing to participate in my study. After collecting ten narratives from students, I read through the data I had received and made highlights and notes on copies of the frames (figures and details related this process are provided in Chapter Five). Several patterns were beginning to become evident, but I determined that more data was needed. I thus collected a second round of narratives from 10 more students using the same procedure.

After the second round of data collection, I had collected 20 very detailed narratives describing student practices and perceptions. I had reached what I considered to be “data saturation”.

The frames in the first and second round were identical except for two small changes. First, at the beginning of the narrative frame, I added a prompt for students to input information about study abroad experience. In the first round I had collected this information verbally during the informed consent and orientation briefing. And though I continued this practice in the second round of data collection, I decided it would be best to have the information in the body of the frame as well. Second, towards the end of the narrative frame, I added two

prompts that encouraged participants to write about the way they conceived of ICT-enabled written communication versus face-to-face oral communication in English.

### **Field notes**

Field notes for this project were collected in a research journal based on my participant-observation at the research site. As a teacher-researcher at the host-institution, in addition to teaching, I have face-to-face and online interactions with students through many of my roles on campus: in my capacity as the advisor for one of the university's athletic "circles," as the leader of a university "game lab" in the campus' Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC), and through my involvement in a joint research projects related to campus sustainability that involved students. In order to record my experiences and observations in such interactions, and in my general observations of campus life, field notes were collected in two ways: they were written by hand in a research notebook and later transferred to an electronic journal (in a program called Scrivener), or they were journaled directly into the electronic journal document. When written or transferred to electronic format, many of my field notes were recorded as free-form journal entries, but others which revealed what I deemed to be "critical incidents" were written within the framework of semi-structured reports (Appendices Seven and Ten). According to McAteer et al. (2010) a "critical incident is one that challenges your own assumptions or makes you think differently" (p.107). I thus used my reflective semi-structured critical incident reports as a vehicle for explicating new understandings about

CMC practice at the research site based on specific observations and experiences.

## **Methods for Data Synthesis and Analysis**

The primary means of analyzing the data I collected was an inductive form of discourse analysis that sought to identify emergent and repetitive themes and what Agar (1995, 2006) terms "rich points." I corroborated the themes and rich points I identified in the narrative frame data with my field notes, critical incident reports and implicit knowledge of the research site and its culture. The organization of the data I collected constituted the four major findings which I present in Chapter Six. Then, as a means of analyzing the findings presented in Chapter Six, I further developed a set of analytic categories with which to synthesize patterns that emerged from the data. These categories were constructed by relating the data I collected to theoretical and empirical research that I encountered in my review of literature in the field, and building upon these to make sense of the data. A diagram of the thought process by which I developed my analytic categories is included in Appendix Eight of this thesis. Appendix Nine shows how the categories relate to the interpretive analysis presented in Chapter Seven of this thesis, and the conclusions presented in Chapter Eight. In the next chapter of this thesis, I provide a comprehensive overview of my empirical data, and discuss the way I organized, interpreted, and analyzed this data in greater detail.

## **Trustworthiness**

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) note, qualitative research requires different definitions of what constitutes "good science" (p. 250). For my study, I broadly sought to establish "face validity" by measuring the process and product of my research in terms of what Tracy (2010) has termed "Big Tent Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research" (p. 839). Such criteria guide the qualitative researcher to work toward an end product characterized by: choice of a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical research, and meaningful coherence (p. 839). Below, I briefly discuss aspects of my methods in relation to five of these eight characteristics: choice of a worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, and ethical research. I exclude "significant contribution" here because this is already addressed in Chapter One and Chapter Seven, and I leave the very subjective issues of "resonance" and "meaningful coherence" as characteristics for readers to judge for themselves.

### **Worthiness of topic**

In describing what constitutes a worthy topic Tracy (2010) argues that good qualitative research must be "relevant, timely, significant, interesting, or evocative" (p.840). This project attempts to meet these criteria by presenting case study data and rich description of CMC practices from a type of context not previously explored with significant depth in the literature. That contemporary CMC practices mediated by digital mobile devices are transforming society in Japan and higher education across much of the world is obvious to even the most casual societal observer. What is often hidden from view are the perceptions and practices that inform this transformation in various local contexts. Thus, through this project's deep dive into one such context, I

offer insight into the factors that inform local practices and perception with a view toward improving pedagogy and curriculum.

## **Rigor**

Drawing upon the work of Winter (2000), Golafshani (2003), Week (2007), and others, Tracy (2010) argues that “High-quality qualitative research is marked by a rich complexity of abundance” (p. 841). Such abundance is achieved through rigorous qualitative research practices that are characterized by “. . . due diligence, exercising appropriate time, effort, care, and thoroughness” (p.841). I sought to achieve this type of “rich rigor” by collecting data from multiple sources for as long a period of time as possible during the study. The empirical data collection phase lasted approximately three months, and my embeddedness at the research site has meant that field notes and critical incident reports were produced over most of the six-year research period. The twenty completed narrative frames that I collected and translated offered significant insight into participants’ CMC practices and their perceptions of these practices, and I was able to corroborate this data with observations from my field notes and critical incident reports.

## **Sincerity**

Tracy (2006) notes that another characteristic of excellent qualitative research is what she terms “sincerity,” which can be achieved through practices of self-reflexivity and transparency (p. 842). This chapter is one part of my efforts to achieve these two objectives. Also, in Chapter One I sought to realize this type of “sincerity” by narrating my own assumptions about higher education in three

areas relevant to this thesis. In this chapter, I am attempting to reflexively and transparently narrate the decisions I made in order to carry out my project. I thus include detail about the formation of my research questions, my positionality at the research site, the development of my primary data collection instrument (a narrative frame), and the collection and analysis of my data. In this and other chapters I have also used self-reflexivity to interrogate the assumptions that I bring to my study and to honestly characterize the limitations and partiality of the narrative my thesis creates.

### **Credibility**

“Credibility” is a cover term for the “trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (Tracy, 2006, p. 842). Whereas quantitative researchers seek to achieve credible generalizability of their findings through rigorous statistical methods, credible qualitative research is achieved by way of narrative description and other methods such as multivocality, triangulation and crystallization. As I explained above, though the sample population for this study was somewhat homogenous, I nevertheless attempted to achieve multivocality by including both male and female participants who had had a range of experiences abroad and with CMC. I also triangulated what I found in the narrative frame data with my field notes and critical incident reports. Further, I discussed my findings and analytical categories and conclusions with colleagues working at the research site (both Japanese and non-Japanese). I believe that these practices helped to produce a credible account of student CMC practices and perceptions at the research site.

### **Ethical research**



The final, but eminently important aspect of excellent qualitative research that I consider relates to ethics. Here, Tracy (2010) provides some useful categories that serve as heuristics for working through essential ethical considerations in qualitative research. The first is entitled “procedural ethics,” which, she notes, “refers to ethical actions dictated as universally necessary by large organizations, institutions or governing bodies” (Tracy, 2006, p. 847). As noted above, in this area I was careful to conduct my research according to the letter and spirit of the ethics requirements related to research on human subjects that exist at Lancaster University and the university that constituted the research site. This process involved obtaining a letter of permission from the research site and obtaining informed consent from all individual participants in the research project. Examples of the participant information sheet, informed consent form, and letter of permission from the host university can be seen in Appendix Two, Appendix Three, and Appendix Four of this thesis.

Another equally important area of ethical concern for qualitative researchers is what Tracy (2010) terms “situational and culturally specific ethics” (p. 840). This refers to “ethical practices that emerge from a reasoned consideration of a context’s specific circumstances” (Tracy, 2010, p. 847). In insider research such as this, such considerations may be difficult to separate from site politics, including the power dynamics that stem from the researcher’s position within the institution being studied. As Trowler (2011) notes:

A third issue arises from the power structures within universities and the subordinate position of some categories of people. This has implications

in terms of data collection: the consequences of being too forthcoming in revealing sensitive information about the university can be very serious for those in more vulnerable positions. Not all respondents have equal latitude in respect of what they say and how they say it. (Chapter 5, Section 2, paragraph 4)

In my case, such considerations led to a decision early in the planning stages of my research to limit the scope of my study to student practices and perceptions rather than focusing on faculty and institutional practices as a whole. As I explain above in the section on positionality, as a relatively new junior faculty member at the host institution, my initial idea of collecting documentation, interviews, and observation notes from more senior faculty and staff seemed fraught with political and ethical pitfalls. I thus decided to focus on student practices and perception while maintaining the promises of non-exploitive postcritical ethnography (described above) in order not to abuse the power imbalance that exists between instructor/researcher and student. One example of a concrete step I took in this area was to ensure student-participants understood their freedom to either not participate in the project or to opt out at any time. Another was to ensure that no student participated in my study during a period in which their grade was not finalized for a class I (had) taught them in.

A final ethical consideration that has been prominent in my mind throughout this project is what Tracy (2010) terms “exiting ethics,” which “continue beyond the data collection phase to how researchers leave the scene and share the results” and call for a consideration of “how best to present the research to avoid unjust

or unintended consequences (p. 847). This ethical category relates to the promises of non-exploitation and against reinscribing power outlined above, and involves having a clear vision of the audience and purpose of the research project. In a chapter entitled “The ethics and politics of insider research in universities,” Trowler (2011) calls upon researchers to ask “whose concerns are being framed in my research questions and design?” (Chapter 5, section 2, paragraph 3).

In the case of this study I am keenly aware that my research questions and design frame largely Western and globalist concerns about technological practice in higher education, but I nevertheless seek to offer the knowledge produced by this thesis as a resource to educators in the increasingly multicultural landscape of Japanese higher education.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided background detail about the methodological approaches and techniques used to complete research for this thesis. I have attempted to clearly and transparently explain and justify my research design, and have explored issues of trustworthiness that give credence to the truth claims made in my thesis. In the next chapter, I move to an overview of the empirical data that my study draws upon. This is followed by a chapter that presents my main findings from the data collection phase of this project.

## **Chapter Five: Overview of the Empirical Data**

In order to illustrate the empirical basis for my research, in this chapter I present evidence of the raw data on which the main findings of my thesis rest. I show the data in granular detail while discussing the processes by which I organized this data to form the findings I present in Chapter Six. More detail about the development of themes from the data that ultimately formed categories I used for analysis is provided at the beginning of Chapter Seven, and a graphic and textual explanation of the thought process for doing this is laid out in Appendix Eight and Appendix Nine. Here, my purpose is to show the data itself, and to highlight the processes I used to collect, organize, digitally transcribe, translate, and make sense of this data for my thesis' findings.

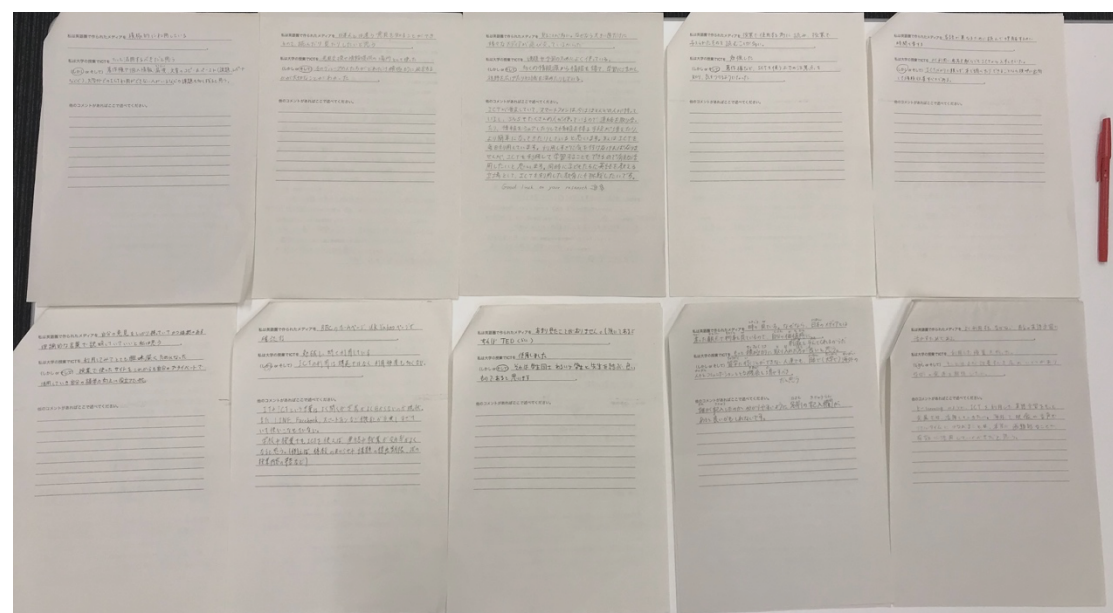
In the chapter's first section, I show pictures of the entire narrative frame data set, and discuss and present several full examples of these narrative frames (in their original Japanese) that were completed by students. Chapter Six of this thesis presents translated quotations from student narratives to support my findings, and Appendix Eleven of this thesis offers all 20 completed narrative frames in English translation. Here, however, I present portions of the raw data I collected in order to show what it looked like in its original form, and to discuss the process by which I digitally transcribed, translated, and made sense of this data. I also highlight the ways I initially organized information from the narrative frames with conceptual categories in Nvivo.

The second section of this chapter turns to my field notes: I explain in more detail the nature of my participant-observation at the research site, and I clarify the processes by which I documented what I observed. I offer several passages verbatim from my field notes to show more detail about this important additional data source that informed my thesis' findings.

Finally, I present information about a third source of data: critical incident reports that I made which constitute more focused observations about specific events or practices that I observed at the research site and in online spaces connected to the research site. The completed reports are included in Appendix Ten of this thesis, but here I offer detail about the focus of the five reports I made, and discuss my process for creating them.

## **Narrative Frame Data**

The primary source of empirical data for this thesis is twenty narrative frames completed by twenty different students from the Department of British and American Studies at the university that constituted the research site for this thesis. A photograph of this data set is given in the figures below (figures 5.1 and 5.2). To protect participants' privacy, names and other personal information such as email addresses (which some students included at the top of the narrative frames they completed) have been redacted. In one case, a student included her given name in the body of the narrative she wrote, and this has also been redacted in Figure 5.2 below, and in Appendix Eleven.



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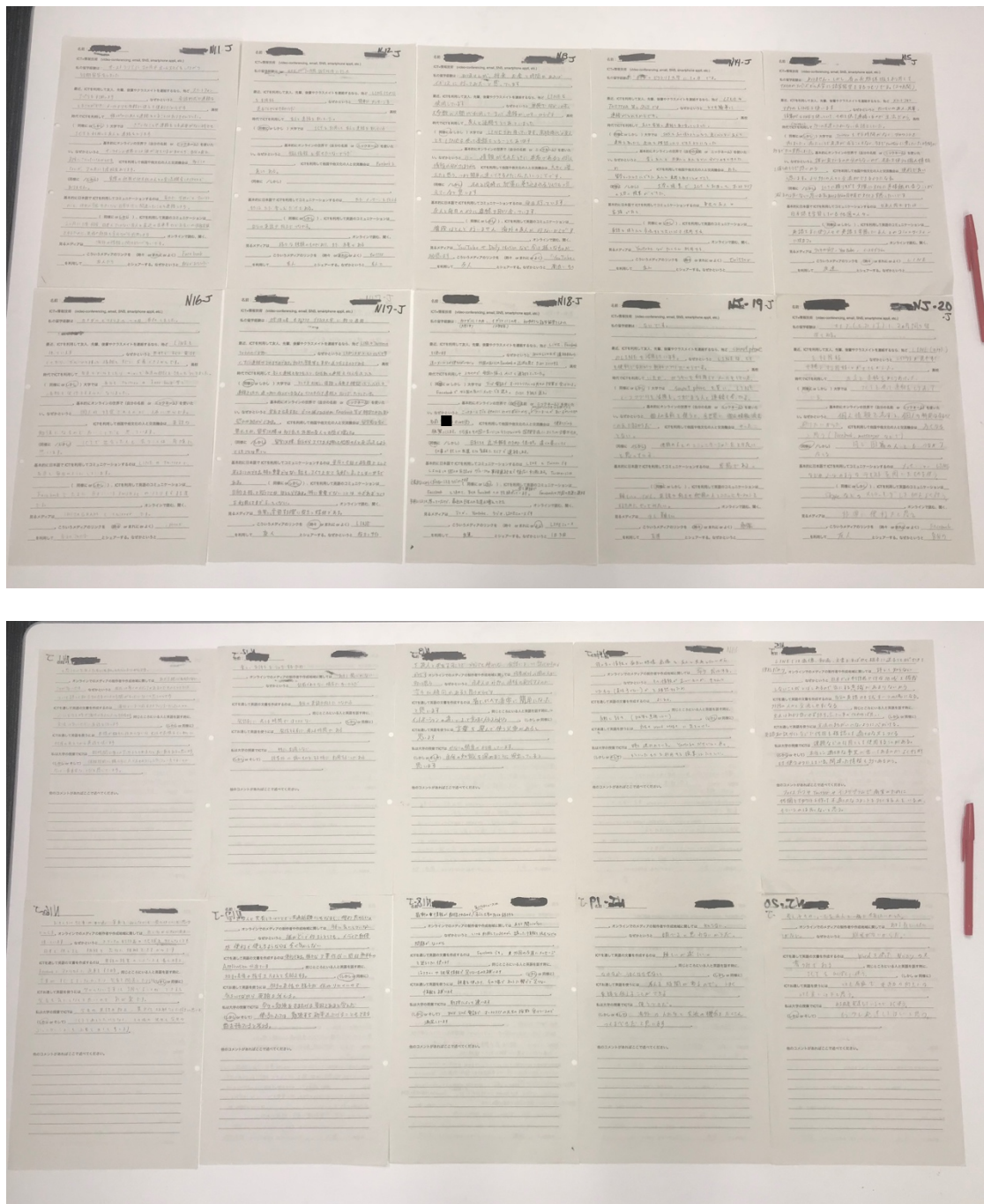


Figure 5.2. First and second pages of all completed narrative frames from the second data set.

These images offer a birds-eye view of the narrative frame data set, but a closer look is necessary to understand what each narrative looked like after it was completed by participants. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below show close-up scans of the first and second pages of a participant's completed narrative frame (N3) from the first data set of ten narratives that I collected. Figures 5.5 and 5.6 show



the same for a narrative frame (N15) completed in the second round of data collection.

N3

ICT=情報技術 (video-conferencing, email, SNS, smartphone appli, etc.)

最近、ICTを利用して友人、先輩、後輩やクラスメイトと連絡するなら、殆ど スマートフォンやSNSを利用する。なぜかという 多くの人が使っているため、すぐに連絡が取りやすいから。高校時代ICTを利用して 主に友達と連絡を取り合っていた。

(同様に or しかし) 大学では 友達と連絡を取り合うだけでなくアプリで学習したり、友達の近況を知ったりするために利用している。

基本的にはオンラインの世界で 自分の名前 or ニックネーム を使った。なぜかという FacebookなどのSNSは、友人同士の間で使うためニックネームを使う必要はないから。その代わりに アバター を使った。ICTを利用した他国や他文化の人との交流機会は 身近にたくさんあり、直接会わなくても、ネット上で異文化交流ができて、言語交換をすることが出来る。日本語でのICTを利用するコミュニケーションは 毎日のようにあり。

(同様に or しかし)、ICTを利用する英語のコミュニケーションは 日本語ほどの量ではないが、頻繁にある。

オンラインで読む、聞く、見る物は 手帳に利用することができ、とても便利である。

こういうメディアのリンクを (時々 or まれに or よく) FacebookやTwitterなどのSNS を利用して 友人 とシェアする。なぜかという 自分が良いと思った情報(記事など)を友人にも紹介したいから。

オンラインでのメディアの制作者や作成地域に関しては 気にするほうだ。なぜかという 全ての情報は本当または嘘であるとは限らないから。

Figure 5.3. First page of a completed frame narrative (N3) from the first round of data collection



私は英語圏で作られたメディアを見ることが多い。なぜなら大きい国だけに  
様々なメディアが飛び交っているからだ。

私は大学の授業でICTを課題や予習のためによく使っている。  
(しかし or そして) 多くの情報源から情報を得て、学習に活かし、  
視野を広げたり知識を深めたりしている。

他のコメントがあればここで述べてください。

ICTが普及していて、スマートフォンは今ではほとんどの人が持っ  
ていて、SNSもたくさんの人が使っているので、連絡を取り合  
ったり、情報をシェアしたりして情報を得る手段が増えたり、  
より簡単になってきたりしていると思います。私はICTを  
毎日利用しています。利用しすぎに気を付けなければなら  
せんが、ICTも利用して学習することでもできるので有効に活  
用したいと思います。同時に子どもたちに英語を教える  
立場として、ICTを利用した教育にも挑戦したいです。

Good luck on your research ㊦

Figure 5.4. The second page of a completed narrative frame (N3) from the first round of data collection.

ICT=情報技術 (video-conferencing, email, SNS, smartphone appli, etc.)

私の留学経験は：ありません。しかし、春の長期休暇を利用して  
アメリカのエバズビル大学に語学留学をするつもりです。(2ヶ月間)。

最近、ICTを利用して友人、先輩、後輩やクラスメイトを連絡するなら、殆ど スマートフォン  
アプリのLINEを使います。なぜかという たいいの友人、先輩、  
後輩がLINEを使っている、それを使って連絡とるのが主流だから。高校  
時代で<sup>(Twitter)</sup>ICTを利用して 多くの友達とたれない会話をしていた。

(同様に or しかし) 大学では Twitter をやる時間がなく、アカウントを  
消しました。消したところで友達が減ることもなく、今までTwitterに費していた時間が  
多すぎた実感しました。基本的にオンラインの世界で(自分の名前 or ニックネーム)を使いた  
い。なぜかという 誰が見ているのか分からないので、本名を使うと個人情報  
と探られそうで怖いから。ICTを利用して他国や他文化の人と交流機会は 便利で良い  
と思います。より多くの人と交流ができるようになる。

(同様に しかし) ICTに頼りすぎて実際に文化に直接触れ合うことが  
減るのは良くないと思います。私は自分の目や耳で文化を実感したいです。

基本的に日本語でICTを利用してコミュニケーションするのは 日本人同士または  
日本語を学習している他国の人々。

(同様に or しかし)、ICTを利用して英語のコミュニケーションは  
英語を主に使う人々や英語を学習している人とのコミュニケーション  
に役立つ。オンラインで読む、聞く、

見るメディアは ウィキペディア, YouTube, インスタグラム

。こういうメディアのリンクを (時々 or まれに or よく) LINE  
を利用して 友達 とシェアする。なぜかという

Figure 5.5. The first page of a completed narrative frame (N15) from the second round of data collection.



LINEでは画像、動画、文書をすばやく相手に送ることができて便利だから。オンラインでのメディアの制作者や作成地域に関しては詳しく知らない。なぜかというとなら日本では制作者や作成地域を掲載しないことがしばしばあるので気にする意識があまりないから。

ICTを通して英語の文書を作成するのは自分の英語力を試す一つの場になる。外国の人々と交流しやすくなる。同じところにいる人と英語を話す時に、文法はあまり気にせず話す。言いたい事が伝われば良い。(しかし or 同様に)

ICTを通して英語を使うには文法の勉強の必要がないように思われる。英語和訳サイトなどで何回も確認して適切な文をつくる。

私は大学の授業でICTは課題などの引用として使用する必要がある。(しかし or そして) 本当に適切な事実を書いているのかよく判断して使うようにしている。間違えた情報も時々あるから。

他のコメントがあればここで述べてください。

フェイスブックやTwitterやInstagramで商業のために何個もアカウントを作って不適切なコメントを写す人もいるから、そういうのは良くないと思う。

Figure 5.6. The second page of a completed narrative frame (N15) from the second round of data collection.

As completed frames such as these were collected, I began transcribing the paper-based narratives into a digital format. I used a digital version of the narrative frame template discussed in Chapter Four (and included in Appendix Five of this thesis) in Microsoft Word to create digital versions of the twenty completed narratives. In order to distinguish the frame text that I originally wrote from the text that students added, I turned the frame text blue, and input the students' data I transcribed in black. Figure 5.7 below shows one of the twenty transcriptions I made from the student's written Japanese to a digital form that could be analyzed more extensively in Nvivo.

N15-J

私の留学経験は：ありません。しかし、春の長期休暇を利用してアメリカのエバンズビル大学に語学留学をするつもりです。（２ヶ月間）最近 ICT を利用して友人、先輩、後輩やクラスメイトと連絡するなら、殆ど：スマートフォンアプリの LINE を使います。なぜかという：たいていの友人、先輩、後輩が LINE を使っていて、それを使って連絡とるのが主流だから。高校時代 ICT を利用して：多くの友達とたわいない会話をしていた。（Twitter）しかし大学では：Twitter をやる時間がなく、アカウントを消しました。消したところで友達が減ることもなく、今まで Twitter に費やしていた時間が多すぎたと実感しました。基本的にオンラインの世界でニックネームを使いたい。なぜかという：誰が見ているのか分からないので、本名を使うと個人情報を探られそうで恐いから。ICT を利用して他国や多文化の人と交流機会は：便利で良いと思います。より多くの人々と交流ができるようになる。しかし：ICT に頼りすぎて実際に文化に直接触れ合うことが減るのは良くないと思います。私は自分の目や耳で文化を実感したいです。基本的に日本語で ICT を利用してコミュニケーションするのは：日本人同士または日本語を学習している他国の人々。同様に、ICT を利用して英語のコミュニケーションは：英語を主に使う人々や英語を学習している人とのコミュニケーションに役立つ。オンラインで読む、聞く、見るメディアは：ウィキペディア、YouTube、インスタグラム。こういうメディアのリンクを時々：LINE を利用して：友達とシェアする。なぜかという：LINE では画像、動画、文書をすばやく相手に送ることができて便利だから。オンラインでのメディアの制作者や作成地域に関しては：詳しく知らない。なぜかという：日本では制作者や作成地域を掲載しないことがしばしばあるので気にする意識があまりないから。ICT を通して英語の文書を作成するのは：自分の英語力を試す一つの場になる。外国の人々と交流しやすくなる。同じところにいる人と英語を話す時に：文法はあまり気にせず話す。言いたい事が伝われば良い。しかし ICT を通して英語を使うには：文法のまちがいのないように心がける。英語和訳サイトなどで何回も確認して適切な文をつくる。私は大学の授業で ICT は：課題などの引用として使用することがある。しかし：本当に適切な事実が書いてあるのかよく判断して使うようにしている。間違った情報も多くあるから。

その他、コメント：フェイスブックや Twitter やインスタグラムで商業のために何個もアカウントを作って不適切なコメントを多くする人もいるが、そういうのは良くないと思う。

Figure 5.7. A screenshot from Microsoft Word of the author's transcription of a handwritten student narrative (N15) into digital form.

Carefully transcribing all twenty narratives into digital form was a long and tedious process, but it created an excellent opportunity to become intimately familiar with the data.

As I transcribed the student narratives into digital form, I made highlights and notes on photocopies of the handwritten narrative frames. I highlighted passages of text that seemed significant to my research questions, and/or those that pointed to issues not previously considered. Figures 5.8 and 5.9 show examples of such highlights and annotations I made on two narrative frames. In the examples shown, I have added some digital annotations to show readers not fluent in Japanese what types of things I was highlighting in the texts. These examples show only the first pages of two narrative frames (N2, and N10), but they are illustrative of the types of highlights and annotations I made on copies of all twenty completed Japanese frames that I transcribed.



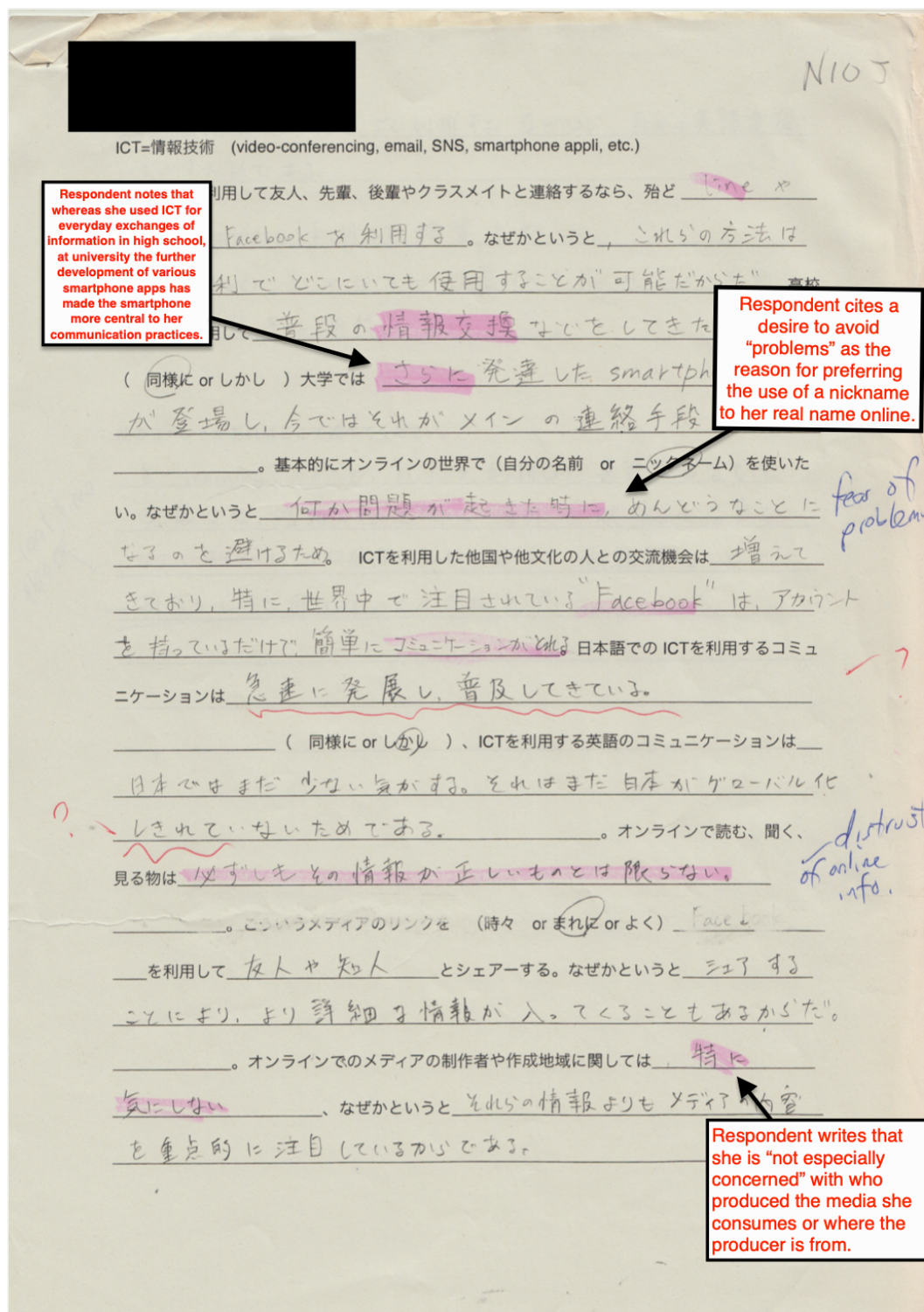


Figure 5.8. A scan of a handwritten student narrative (N10) with some of my highlights and annotations.

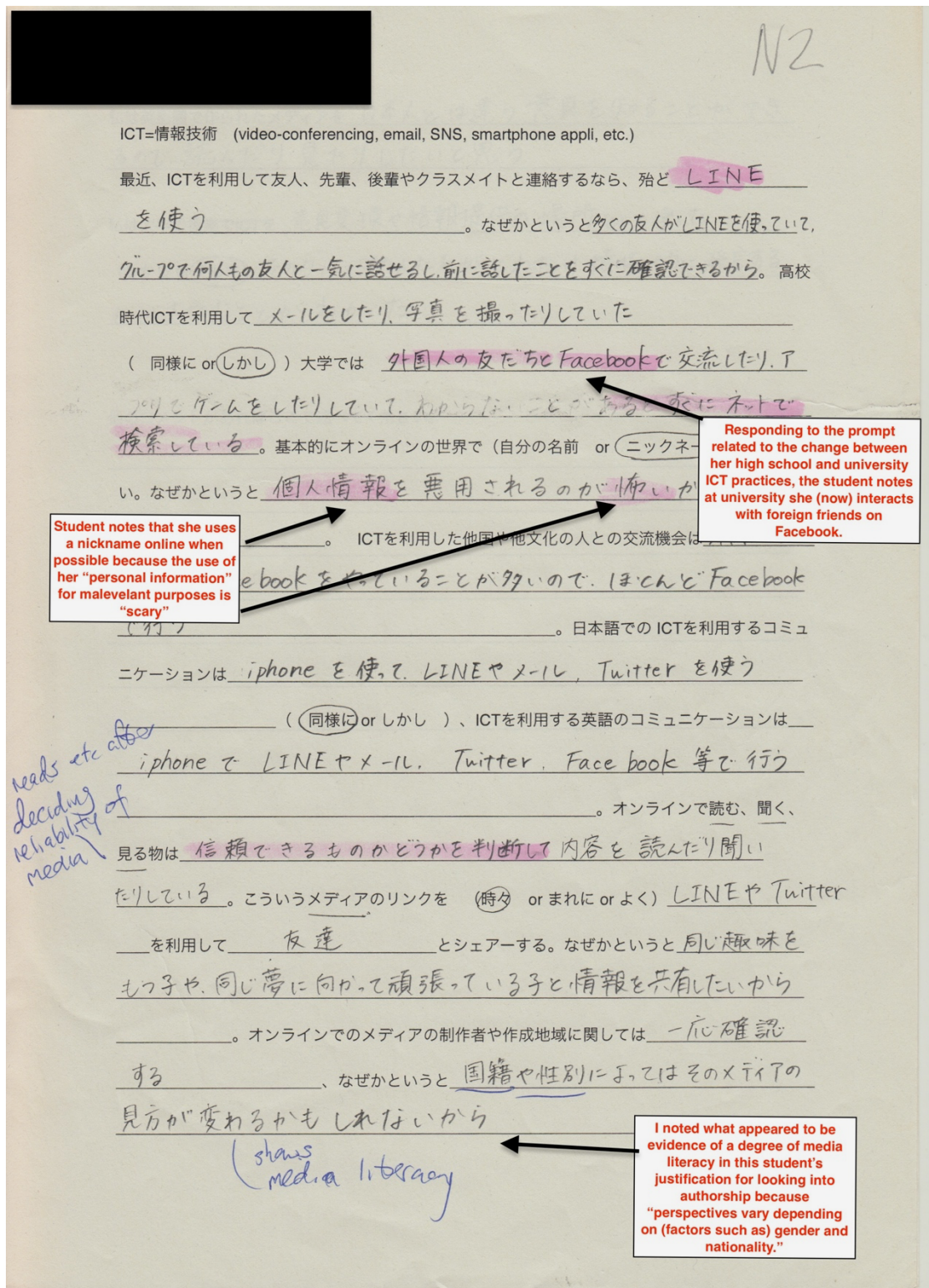


Figure 5.9 A scan of a handwritten student narrative (N2) with some of my highlights and annotations

After transcribing the student narrative data into digital format, I began my coding and analysis of these narratives. I intentionally kept the data in its original

Japanese for as long as possible because I wanted to preserve the indigenous student perspectives rather than immediately interpreting my own translation of the data in my organization of my study's findings. Translation is an art that always involves degrees of interpretation, and so as much as possible I wanted my findings to be connected directly to evidence in the raw data.

As I explained in Chapter Four, I used an open coding technique to highlight “rich points”—areas of interest in the data that constituted repetitive themes that seemed to relate to my research questions. This was an iterative process that alternated between analogue and digital analysis work. For example, after reading through all twenty of the narrative frames and highlighting significant passages of text, I imported the Japanese narrative data I had transcribed into NVivo. There I read the texts carefully again and assigned codes to passages of text in correspondence with emergent themes related to my research questions. Figure 5.10 below is a screenshot from Nvivo that shows five conceptual categories I initially made to organize the data and a variety of codes within these categories that correspond to passages of (Japanese) text.



Name	Sources	Refere...	Created On	Created By
▼ C1 ICT Interaction Practices	20	92	8/2/15, 10:09 AM	PFH
College ICT transition	20	22	5/20/15, 8:33 AM	PFH
Communicating in groups	4	5	5/20/15, 8:31 AM	PFH
Comparing tools	8	11	5/20/15, 8:39 AM	PFH
Specific tools	20	51	5/20/15, 8:37 AM	PFH
▼ C2 Student perceptions of foreign language digi media literacy practices	20	114	8/2/15, 10:09 AM	PFH
Ease of use	8	11	5/20/15, 8:33 AM	PFH
Enthusiasm for ICT's Potential	14	19	5/21/15, 9:15 AM	PFH
Fear of malicious people online	11	13	5/20/15, 8:35 AM	PFH
Language and Tool relationship	10	17	6/5/15, 5:02 PM	PFH
Language use	5	5	5/23/15, 2:47 PM	PFH
Protecting personal info with an alias	13	14	5/20/15, 8:36 AM	PFH
Trust - Distrust of online materials	10	15	5/20/15, 8:46 AM	PFH
value of sharing	14	20	5/21/15, 9:12 AM	PFH
▼ C3 Formation of Symbolic Competence	20	37	8/2/15, 10:10 AM	PFH
Form as Meaning	6	7	8/13/15, 11:14 AM	PFH
Media awareness	8	8	5/23/15, 3:08 PM	PFH
Media Awareness - No	13	13	8/18/15, 4:47 PM	PFH
Media Awareness - YES	7	7	8/18/15, 4:48 PM	PFH
▼ C4 Pedagogical Affordances	12	20	8/2/15, 10:11 AM	PFH
Educational use	11	13	5/23/15, 3:13 PM	PFH
Foreign media	3	3	5/23/15, 3:06 PM	PFH
▼ C5 Construction and Performance of Complex Transnational ID	20	60	8/2/15, 10:11 AM	PFH
Interacting with Foreigners	15	24	5/21/15, 9:19 AM	PFH
Nickname	15	15	8/18/15, 11:26 AM	PFH
Place	7	12	5/20/15, 8:40 AM	PFH
Real Name	5	5	8/18/15, 11:27 AM	PFH
Reservations	3	3	8/20/15, 1:12 PM	PFH

Figure 5.10 Screenshot from Nvivo, where data from narrative frames was coded

The coding of passages from the student narratives shown above that I did in Nvivo was part of a winnowing process that broke down the raw data I collected into manageable chunks that I could relate back to my research questions. As will be visible in Chapter Six, quotes from participant narratives served a significant role in uncovering unsuspected themes (rich points) and also in leading to findings that directly related to my research questions. The digital tagging of passages of participants' narrative text that I did in Nvivo thus served as a basis for this organization of my findings data, and for further analysis.

When combined with my field note and critical incident report observations, these data are what ultimately led to the findings I present in Chapter Six.

By carefully reading, rereading, highlighting, annotating, and coding the narrative frame data, I was able to develop a broad understanding of student practices and perceptions related to ICT in their everyday lives. This allowed me to answer my four research questions, and further, to identify some of the themes and subthemes that inform the conceptual framework for the analysis I present in Chapter Seven. An illustration of this framework is presented in Appendix Nine of this thesis.

## **Field Notes**

As I explained in Chapter Four, field notes from my participant-observation as an insider at the research site were either made in a research notebook and later transferred to digital form, or were input directly into a digital document in a word processing software program called Scrivener. My notes spanned the entire research period, from the time I began formulating research questions to my data collection phase, and through to the final write-up of my thesis. The notes covered many topics and varied in length: some were based on very brief observations of student behaviors and practices in physical campus spaces; other field notes were jotted down as I learned more about the host institution through reading digital and paper documents; other notes were made after interactions in virtual spaces such as LINE groups that I was a part of with students; finally, a significant portion of my notes were attempts to relate what I observed and experienced at the research site to theories and concepts I was encountering in the literature I was reading and processing at the same time.

Some portions of what I observed in my field notes made it into the body of this thesis in some form or another. For example, relevant information that I noted from readings about the institution is included in Chapter Two: The Research Site in its Cultural-historical Context. Also, some of my methodological and theoretical (ontological) decisions were informed by field notes I wrote which reflected upon the relevance of readings on social practice theory to what I was observing at the research site. Finally, my observations about students' behaviors in physical spaces and in virtual LINE groups were a significant foundation for the analysis I provide in Chapter Seven.

To illustrate the value of my field notes to this thesis, below I share some passages from these in the aforementioned areas: notes related to the physical and virtual spaces inhabited by students, notes related to student practices in these spaces, and notes related to connections between theoretical constructs of "practice" and my own cross-cultural observations at the research site.

### **The campus and built environment.**

*The campus is set within what might be called a semi-urban area. Much of the inhabited southeast coast of Kanto (island) could be described this way though, so this is a distinction that lacks descriptive power. Transportation hubs seem to dictate levels of urbanization on Kanto. This campus is set about seven kilometers from the city central Japan Railway (JR) station in a mostly residential neighborhood. A stop on the main (Tokaidō) JR line that*

*connects to this station is approximately two kilometers away. The same train line runs all the way to Tokyo to the Northeast, and Osaka to the Southwest. But scanning the landscape from campus makes these metropolises seem very distant indeed. With the exception of the campus buildings themselves, few nearby buildings reach more than two or three stories. A few nearby shops and restaurants and an old “shotengai” (shopping street) exist a few blocks away. Though the area bustles with car and pedestrian traffic during the day, it is clearly a peripheral (suburban) zone.*

*Campus is on a hill and adjacent to one of the university organization’s high schools. There are four main buildings on campus: three connected buildings house classrooms and faculty and administrative offices, a cafeteria, and a few student-focused “centers”: the Career Support Center, the Teacher Education Center, and the Foreign Language Learning Self-Access Center. The fourth building is a (Buddhist) retreat center used by member schools in the larger organizational group, and also for the 1<sup>st</sup> year students’ annual 2-day retreat (every February). The main campus structure is tripartite: an 11- floor tower flanked by two four-story buildings. The two main administrative offices are on the second floor of the main building, on either side of the main entrance. Other than these two centralized offices, use of the rest of the campus does not seem to be governed by any inherent special logic. Classrooms and faculty offices can be found throughout the rest of the campus. The Art and Design Faculty has a few main computer*

*and drafting rooms consolidated on two floors of building 3, but classrooms and offices for other faculties are not organized spatially.*

*There is only one access road up the hill and down the other side, and so the campus is somewhat isolated from the surrounding residences and businesses. However, the surrounding area is not at all vibrant. Only a few nearby restaurants, and many that have come and gone. As students and teachers just take public transportation, bicycles, motorbikes, or cars in and out of the university campus, it does not seem to have much positive economic impact on the immediate neighborhood within which it resides. Very much a commuter university. Students tend to come on the days they have classes (weekdays), and leave when their last class ends if they don't have club activities or other commitments.*

### **Student CMC practice via LINE**

*Participating in several one-to-one and group LINE correspondences, I have noticed several features that seem to be a part of the communication culture here. One is the use of timestamps and “read” marks (read receipts). This seems to create a high degree of reciprocity for interlocutors. With email, we send out missives without knowing whether they have been received, or, if so, when; but with LINE we know this information immediately. Once we can see that the message has been read, we can know that interlocutor feels some pressure to respond in a timely fashion. By the same token, when I receive a message I'm very aware if I have read it that I am going to need to respond sometime*

*relatively soon. This creates a higher degree of intimacy between people correspond this local social network app. This intimacy is especially pronounced in two-person dialogues, like the one I've had with K. But I've noticed that in large group conversations like those that take place in the ultimate frisbee LINE group, the timestamp loses its responsibility producing power. In fact, as in face to face large groups, responsibility seems to decrease as the population of the group increases. What can be said in larger spaces is also limited because of all the eyes watching. I've experienced situations where a message I've sent can be seen as "read" by 10 or more people, but no one responds. This would never happen in a two-person conversation on LINE. More likely, as was the case recently with H, the person will ignore messages altogether, never opening them from the preview screen, and thus avoiding the "read" mark that implies responsibility.*

*Stickers and emoji are an integral part of LINE communication. They are constantly used to say 'thanks' or 'understood' or 'onegaishimasu' (please) in a way that conveys additional emotion: whimsy, cuteness, sincerity, humor, etc. They offer an alternative to words, or a supplement, that creates an atmosphere for conversations that would be missing from text-only communication. Also, by using stickers and emoji to perform speech acts such as requests, apologies, and expressions of gratitude, interlocuters can perform the acts outside of the Japanese linguistic and cultural frame. Recently a student of mine used an Evian sticker to say "merci" to thank*

*me and others in an asynchronous class discussion within LINE. As a middle-class American English speaker, I grew up knowing aware of how one says “thank you” in French. It is less clear that all of the students’ classmates would know this, or recognize the utterance. But in the chat, accompanied by a sticker of a caricaturized fashionable young French woman, the impression of thanks, and also of a stylish expression was clear (to me at least). It strikes me that students are constantly encountering multilingual messaging such as this in many places online, and here in the case of LINE stickers (and the LINE sticker store), they are able to appropriate these signs at will for various purposes, to perform various functions.*

### **On Twitter semi-anonymity**

*It seems that when there are avenues for semi-anonymity online they are taken by students and others in online communities. By semi-anonymity, I mean the use of online monikers that are known to a peer group, but anonymous to the broader community of users. In the case of LINE, user IDs are tied to mobile telephone numbers, and social networks seem to grow through face to face contact. Sharing QR codes is the most common way to connect that I have observed. But Twitter’s architecture is based on network connections that can expand irrespective of geography. And so when opting to join such a network, it’s been my observation that Japanese students inevitably choose this semi-anonymous model for interacting on the platform. I have learned of several of my students’ online Twitter handles,*

*but have never seen one that uses the student's "real" identity. Whether this is done out of digital "savvy" or some other reason, I am not yet sure . . .*

### **On Connecting Theory to Empirical Observations and Reflections**

*For this project, I have chosen a theoretical approach based in the CHAT tradition, but with theoretical tools borrowed from contemporary practice theory. Looking at practices as repeated social actions helps ground my observations in the real world, but the framework also presents challenges because of the transcultural, translingistic, and transdisciplinary nature of my project. With the use of narrative frames I have tried to privilege the emic perspectives of the participants in my study in their native language. However, this in turn leaves a significant amount of interpretive work to be done via translation. Translation, however, is widely recognized as a somewhat subjective and interpretive act. This is why machines continue to fail in all but the simplest, transactional types of translation work. Contextual factors always have a strong influence on how language is interpreted and translated into a foreign language, and thus something is always, as the saying goes, "lost." I am conscious of this inevitable loss, but am also trying in this work to find and reveal something to an English-reading audience: the culturally and linguistically informed perspectives of students who are in the process of becoming bilingual consumers and producers of digital language in social networks. They are developing social and literacy practices that are intricately entwined with the mandates of global consumer culture, and thus the ways they perceive information and their own practices is important to understand. However, labeling*



*practices become difficult in a cross-cultural and cross-linguistics research context. Whose labels and whose conceptual frameworks should be privileged, and how are questions I continue to wrestle with, but I have found thinking in terms of practices and perceptions of practice to be an apt heuristic for understanding the social world around me as a researcher. Inevitably, as my thesis is written in English, ultimately the terms and sense of this social world will turn on my own academic socialization in three interdisciplinary fields: I have academic training in the field of area studies, with a focus on Asia; TESOL/applied linguistics in the Sociocultural tradition, and now Educational Research, where I am trying to map out territory between Educational Sociology and Literacy studies. I am doing this in English while also making sense of the social world within which I am embedded with and through the Japanese language. Such a “situation” yields concepts and embodied ways of understanding the world that don’t always easily translate to any one academic tradition. However, in order for local knowledge to avoid the colonization of what Phillipson terms “linguistic imperialism,” I believe this hybridity may actually be apt.*

## **Critical Incidents**

What I term “critical incident reports” are more structured reflective memos focused on particular events that I produced using the digital template introduced in Chapter Four. These constituted my own critical reflections upon what I deemed to be particularly significant encounters with student ICT practices at the research site. The reports were written as short,

focused attempts to make sense of certain experiences at the research site that seemed to relate directly to my research questions, or surrounding concerns. They offer an additional site for reflexivity that supplements my primary empirical data set of narrative frames in a way that reveals the perspective of the researcher who ultimately interpreted the student narratives presented within these frames. I produced five such reports during the course of my participant-observation. These reports related to the following five incidents:

1. A pre-departure study abroad information session in which students needed to fill out web-based forms to register with a host-institution in the U.K.
2. A skype video-conference exchange about campus sustainability issues that I hosted with students at my university and a professor, a student, and staff member at a university in America.
3. A student email I received from a second-year student that was indicative of others I have received in the past. It showed a lack of basic email etiquette – compared to very set etiquette conventions (stock phrases etc.) present in Japanese email that I receive on a regular basis.
4. An attempt with students in the university's language learning self-access center to set up a LINE group that could be joined virtually by outsiders.

5. Non-responsiveness of student members of a LINE group that I was a part of. The group's larger size led to many "lurkers" who exhibited passive behavior in relation to the group's function.

These reports are included in their entirety in Appendix Ten of this thesis, and are quoted in support of my findings in the following chapter. The reports represent short snapshots of my own impressions of incidences at the research site, and thus they are interpretive in nature, but they reveal my interpretation of various events I observed in relation to my research questions. As such, they offer a transparent and reflexive account of the way I, as a participant-observer, viewed certain events that I experienced at the research site.

## **Chapter Summary**

By offering a comprehensive view of the three main data sources used for this project, this chapter has clarified the empirical basis for my subsequent findings, analysis, and conclusions. The first section examined the primary empirical data from 20 narrative frames in granular detail and explained my winnowing process for making sense of this data. The second section considered my field notes, and offered several excerpts from these. Finally, I discussed the critical incident reports I used to record particularly salient events that I experienced as an insider at the research site. In the next chapter, I use evidence from the data portrayed and described here to answer my four main research questions.

## Chapter Six: Findings

This thesis seeks to generate knowledge about how local practice and technological affordances shape learning outcomes related to the development of symbolic competence in a Japanese higher education foreign language learning context. This chapter presents key findings obtained from 20 narrative frames completed by students in the department of British and American Studies at the private four-year higher education institution described in Chapter Two. Qualitative data from unstructured field notes and structured critical incident reports are also integrated into the presentation of data below in order to respond to my study's four major research questions. In response to these questions, the following four major findings emerged:

1. Students engage in a wide variety of CMC practices in Japanese and English. These practices mostly center around the use of applications on their smartphones. Local CMC practices mirrored the reported and observable practices of youth across Japan in the same age bracket, and affirmed a broader societal discourse of *keitai* nativity—a highly multimodal fluency with mobile CMC.
2. Students see ICT as a practical means of gathering information and communicating with both local and non-local individuals and in groups in a variety of contexts. They value different tools and platforms for different people and purposes.

3. Students reported significant recognition of the constraints and affordances inherent to CMC in general, and to various specific platforms. A majority of students, however, failed to exhibit a high degree of media literacy, and very few structured opportunities for the development of symbolic competence were apparent.
4. At the research site, ICT infrastructure and existing student CMC practices offer promise for facilitating student engagement with foreign peers and texts, but social learning affordances are underused.

What follows is a discussion of each of these four findings organized in corresponding categories with background information and textual data from student narratives, field notes, and critical incident reports to support each. As the majority of my analysis will take place in the following chapter, the emphasis here is on allowing the participants to speak for itself by way of illustrative text samples from their narratives, and to summarize observations from my focused participant observation. In order to maintain transparency, in texts that are excerpted from student narratives below, I delineate the narrative frame from the handwritten text that students filled in with two different colors. The frame text is written in blue, and text transcribed from students completed narrative frames is written in black. Underlined text represents the choices students made from conjunctions offered in the narrative frames. The original, blank narrative frames that students filled in is viewable in Appendix Seven of this thesis. Full translations of all of the narrative that were collected are available in Appendix Eleven of this thesis.

## **Finding One: Changing Practices at University**

*Students engage in a wide variety of CMC practices in Japanese and English. These practices mostly centered around the use of applications on their smartphones. Local CMC practices mirrored the reported and observable practices of youth across Japan in the same age bracket, and affirmed a broader societal discourse of keitai nativity—a highly multimodal fluency with mobile CMC.*

My data on students' foreign language media literacy practices revealed that participants engage in a variety of digital media language practices, mostly centered around the use of their smartphones. Two sub-themes emerged from the data:

1. Most participants reported that a significant change in their CMC practices took place after they transitioned from high school to college.
2. Participants reported using a wide variety of different ICT tools for different purposes that overlapped among their academic, social, and work lives (e.g. their part-time jobs).

Regarding the change in ICT practices between high school and college, 16 of 20 respondents (80%) indicated that significant changes occurred in their ICT-

enabled communication practices after their transition from high school to university. Some examples of how participants expressed this follow:

Concerning the use of ICT during high school I mostly did not use ICT to take classes, hand in homework, contact my teachers, etc. However, at university classes involving video conferencing, submitting assignments by email, doing (internet) research, interacting with my professor(s) using ICT and the like are common. (N1)

Concerning the use of ICT during high school it consisted of using email and snapping and sending photos. However, at university I have begun to interact with foreign friends on Facebook, to play game applications, and to use the net to quickly research things I don't know about. (N2)

Concerning the use of ICT during high school it was normal to email my friends and use the Internet. However, at university I have come to use the internet mostly as a means of collecting the information I need, with interacting with friends becoming a secondary activity. (N5)

Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I used it) for presentations and research for presentations. However, at university I used ICT to prepare for presentations etc. However, at university, I visit auction sites and sites that introduce presentations, and in my classes I have had opportunities to use Edmodo and other applications to interact with other students and my professor(s). (N6)

Concerning the use of ICT during high school I used a "Galapagos-style" (*garake*, ガラケー) phone<sup>3</sup>. [However](#), [at university](#) I bought a smartphone and started to use an application called LINE, contacting a variety of people. (N19)

Concerning the use of ICT during high school I emailed my friends, read my friend's diaries (blogs) on Mixi, etc. [However](#), [at university](#) I myself started posting information on Twitter and Facebook. (N16)

The nature of the survey instrument meant that answers varied in their level of specificity, and as the selection of quotations above indicates, different participants chose to interpret the prompt in slightly different ways. As noted in Chapter Three and Chapter Four, such differing interpretation is not seen as a "problem" to be solved by further negotiation of meaning or explication, but rather a rich data point that speaks to *perceived practices*—interpretations of practice in the participants' own terms.

The main divide between the student responses in this area was in their binary choice of two opposing conjunction choices provided in the narrative frame. The

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<sup>3</sup> This term refers to mobile phones that were developed within Japan for domestic use only, and were thus mostly incompatible with foreign phones and other communication devices. These phones included a rich variety of features, many of which have been incorporated into modern "smartphones." While young people favor globally compatible smartphones, many people in older generations (including this author) still use *garake*.



samples of narrative frame texts excerpted above come from students who contrasted their experience with ICT in their high school days to their present (university) experience by choosing the Japanese word *shikashi* (しかし) , which translates as "however" in English. The other conjunction option was *dōyō ni* (同様に) which means “similarly” or “likewise” (as I translated it in the narrative frame) in English. Though six student participants chose this conjunction to continue their narratives, two of these students nevertheless indicated changes in their practices after entering university. They also highlighted various significant changes, as can be seen in my translations of these two students’ comments here:

Concerning the use of ICT during high school I used ICT to contact friends, and exchange information with my club members. Likewise, at university I use ICT to confirm whether or not there is homework, for contact with my part-time job employer, and for contacting friends who live far away in real-time. (N17)

Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I used it) to contact friends and family. Likewise, at university (I’ve) come to use SNS more broadly, contacting friends who are not (living) nearby. I have thus become able to check in on their situation (what's new with them). (N14)

Throughout the narrative frame that was used (see Appendix Five for the English translation), there were also prompts which offered students opportunities to input information about the specific applications and sites they

associated with their CMC practices. For example, the first portion of the narrative frame contained the following narrative prompts which tended to encourage students to note and/or describe specific ICT tools and practices they associate with these tools (ellipses indicate longer lined spaces where students input text):

*Basically, using ICT in Japanese for communication . . . ( likewise / however)、 using ICT in English for communication . . . Using ICT to contact friend(s), I mostly use . . . because. . .*

In response to these prompts, and others throughout the narrative frame, students referred to different types of hardware, and also to specific software applications as communication tools. Most respondents referred to these separately, though one respondent (N3) seemed to conflate the two, writing: "(I use my) smartphone and SNS."

Despite the narrative frame being written in Japanese, most respondents wrote the names of software applications using the English alphabet. The few that were not rendered this way were (temporarily) converted from Katakana (the Japanese phonetic script used for foreign loan words) to English. A word-count query in Nvivo indicated the frequency of references to different software applications, websites, and hardware. Rendered as a word-cloud, the most common references to applications such as Facebook, LINE, and Twitter are readily apparent (the most frequent terms appear in the largest fonts):



*Figure 6.1.* Word cloud of ICT tools mentioned in student narrative frame data.

Facebook, the globally dominant social network platform and the popular Asian messaging application, LINE, were both mentioned frequently by participants. Both discourage anonymity—Facebook as a matter of policy, and LINE as a design characteristic of being directly connected to users’ mobile device numbers and mobile email addresses.

Students who had studied abroad in an English-speaking country frequently referenced their use of Facebook, whereas students who had not studied abroad referenced the platform less often in their narrative frames. As would be expected, the popular Asia-based messaging application, LINE, tended to be mentioned by participants irrespective of whether they had studied abroad.

The prominence of Facebook in the data is indicative of the platform's increased market share in Japan and worldwide. But a closer look at student narrative data reveals that the platform represents just one of a variety of channels for communicating with different people in different ways. My second finding further elucidates some of this variety in CMC practices at the research site.

## **Finding Two: Practical Ways to Gather Information and Communicate**

*Students see ICT as a practical means of gathering information and communicating with both local and non-local individuals and in groups in a variety of contexts. They value ease of use, and different tools and platforms for different linguistic and social purposes because they generally recognize the affordances and limitations of these.*

Most students express a preference for the use of smartphone applications to engage in a wide range of foreign language literacy practices and to interact with foreigners in English. Participants reported that though these practices intersect in some ways with their Japanese language communication practices, different applications were often used for Japanese and English communication. The following text excerpts from students' completed narrative frames illustrate some of the ways that students think about the differentiation of platforms and tools for different purposes:

Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese (I) mostly use LINE to share specific information with specific people. However, I use

Facebook to broadly share general information about my everyday life with friends living abroad without specifying who receives this information. (N1)

Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese I use LINE and Twitter to interact with friends on an everyday basis. However, for using ICT to communicate in English I just sometimes use Facebook to correspond with American(s) in Japan. (N16)

Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese I use LINE and Twitter. I use LINE for a broad range of things: from personal conversations to groups, to administrative correspondences. On Twitter I tweet serious things and also trivial things. However, for using ICT to communicate in English I decided on Facebook. When I post on Facebook, I always post in English. I thought I would use Facebook only for my foreign friends, but recently my Japanese friends have increased (there). (N18)

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPai, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use a smartphone. This is because (one) can contact (others) conversationally; (one can) use it more readily and conveniently than email. (N11)

As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences is connected to the improvement of my own English ability. When speaking in English to people in my location I usually don't have any time to think before I speak. However, when using English via ICT I have time to think before sending (a message). (N12)

When speaking in English to people in my location, meaning can be conveyed depending on changes in intonation. However, when using English through ICT (I) think it's necessary to choose the words one uses. (N13)

As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences it's one place to test my English skills. It makes interacting with foreign people easier. However, when speaking in English to people in my location, I speak without really paying attention to grammar. However, when using English through ICT I try to be careful not to make grammatical mistakes. I use Japanese to English translation site repeatedly in order to confirm and compose appropriate sentences. (N15)

As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences it's difficult but fun. When speaking in English to people in my location, I can't really speak. However, when using English through ICT since I have time to think, I can skillfully convey (my thoughts) in English. (N19)

Student awareness of affordances and limitations of CMC generally, and of different platforms specifically is exemplified by the following excerpts:

As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences (I) often (do this). When speaking in English to people in my location, (I) just talk freely (without being concerned about grammar and the like). However, when using English through ICT (I) tend to become concerned with such things as grammar and word usage. (N14)

As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences I do so when I email members of my former host-family abroad or when I am when emailing my overseas friends. When speaking in English to people in my location, (I) speak English while paying no attention to grammar. However, when using English through ICT (I) think carefully and repeatedly think about grammar and phrasing to account for what cannot be conveyed by facial expression. (N11)

In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures because many of my foreign friends use Facebook, most [of these] occur on Facebook. (N2)

My observation of student practices revealed students' fluent use of the LINE application—which has become very popular in Asia over the course of this study—for both social and educational purposes, and often a mix of the two. LINE is a mobile chat software application that allows users to communicate individually and in groups. The interface encourages responsiveness that

appears to mirror relational values in Japanese society. Though also enabled with voice and video-chat functionality, most of the LINE communication I have observed and taken part in involves exchanges of text and image. The unique feature of LINE that encourages interlocutor responsibility is the “read” indicator. This feature works by displaying the word “read” in English or 「既読」 (*kidoku*) in Japanese next to text that has been viewed by its recipient(s). As explained on LINE’s website, this feature “indicates that the person has seen your message. In group chat-rooms, the signs will be shown as *Read by 2* etc., showing the number of people who have seen your message within the group” (“LINE,” n.d.). A critical incident report I wrote about this notes that this feature appears to encourage responsibility and group cohesion, and that the platform itself has allowed me to engage students individually and in groups for the achievement of various pedagogical and logistical goals. I will discuss the characteristics and affordances of LINE in more detail in Chapter Seven.

### **Finding Three: Platform Awareness without Media Literacy**

*Students reported significant recognition of the constraints and affordances inherent to CMC in general, and to various specific platforms. A majority of students, however, failed to exhibit a high degree of media literacy, and very few structured opportunities for the development of symbolic competence were apparent.*

Though students’ foreign language ICT practices appear to create affordances for the development of symbolic competence, full development of this



competence may be hampered by limited media literacy and limited opportunities for pedagogically structured dialogical interactions around texts and with peers from other cultures.

Symbolic competence is a model of intercultural competence that is operationalized into three components: “the production of complexity, the tolerance of ambiguity, and an appreciation of form as meaning” (Kramsch, 2006, p. 251). If “an appreciation of form as meaning” is understood in this context as a kind of genre awareness related to the modes of communication students choose, then—as noted in finding two—student participants can be said to exhibit a moderate level of competence in this area. Students often discussed the affordances and constraints of ICT for using their foreign language to communicate, and the benefits and limitations of using language to convey meaning in face-to-face encounters vs. online ones. However, when discussing the online media they consume, only seven of twenty student participants (35%) expressed what I interpreted to be some degree of media literacy, which is defined as the ability to “access, analyze, evaluate, create and participate with messages in a variety of forms — from print to video to the Internet” (“Media Literacy: A Definition and More | Center for Media Literacy,” n.d.). Statements supporting this are evident in the following excerpts:

As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I make a cursory check (confirmation). This is because perspectives vary depending on (factors such as) gender and nationality. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries I often read and watch this

because it allows me to know opinions different from those (expressed by) Japanese. (N2)

As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume, (I'm one who) tends to pay attention. This is because it can't be guaranteed that all information is true or false. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries, I look at a lot of this. This is because a lot of media flows (flies forth) from big countries. (N3)

As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online (one) mustn't swallow everything whole.<sup>4</sup> (N5)

As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I've started to pay more attention to the producers of online materials and where they are from in the world. This is because different media producers have different politics. I confirm (the veracity of) English language media I consume at sites (such as) the BBC homepage, and Yahoo U.K. (N7)

As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume it's best to be aware of this. This is because we cannot see their face, and we thus cannot trust them. In terms of media made in English-speaking

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<sup>4</sup> Here, the student participant used the phrase 鵜呑み (*unomi*) which means to swallow something whole. The first character, 鵜, means "cormorant," and the second character, 呑, means "drink." Cormorants swallow fish whole, and have been used in traditional Chinese and Japanese fishing practices.

[countries](#), I sometimes look at this because it provides a different perspective from the Japanese media. It's a form of stimulation for thinking about my own value (N9)

[As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume](#) (I) pay a little bit of attention. [This is because](#) I (want to) confirm whether that information is accurate or not. (N14).

[As for ICT use in my university classes](#) I sometimes use it to gather quotes for assignments. [However](#), because there is a lot of mistaken information (online), I carefully judge whether or not the quotation contains a relevant fact before using it. (N15)

Statements from these seven students indicate a moderately critical stance towards foreign language online media. In narrating practices that pay attention to authorship, view online media with skepticism, and seek out foreign media for perspective taking, these students tell of an ability to access and assess foreign digital media, though it is not clear how critically they are able to think about what they consume. The remaining students, however, reported paying little or no attention to the authorship (and thus authority) of materials they consume online, as exemplified in the following excerpts:

[As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume](#) I don't really stop to think much about authorship and where online media I consume

is produced. **This is because** when choosing media (to consume) I make decisions based more on the contents than the author or origin of the media. (N6)

**As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume** I pay absolutely no mind (to this). (N1)

**As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume** I'm not really interested. **This is because** I am always using it and don't have problems related to the passing along of mistaken information and the like. (N18)

**As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume** I'm not really interested. **This is because** nowadays there's lots of media and (I) think it would be a waste of time to try to know (such) details one by one. (N11)

Student responses to prompts in the narrative frames did not alone conclusively provide enough data to assess symbolic competences related to the "production of complexity" and "tolerance of ambiguity," but my field notes and critical incident reports provide some insight into these areas. When applied to digital literacy skills, "production of complexity" can be mapped to the media literacy ability to "create and participate with messages in a variety of forms" ("Media Literacy: A Definition and More | Center for Media Literacy," n.d.).

Regarding this competency, I noted that students I observed interacting with and through digital media in their preparation for a study abroad trip showed “fluency interacting with me, other teachers, and other students in an ICT context that had already become familiar through prior social interactions.” But I noted that “many of these same students have trouble navigating a (British) university’s simple English language institute website without assistance.” Further, I found that though students had been explicitly taught how to use their university-issued email accounts, many had trouble applying these skills to the real-world context of applying to a study abroad program online.

One critical incident report I completed summarized my observations leading up to and directly after a pre-departure guidance session for 11 third and fourth year students preparing for a short-term study abroad program at a prestigious British university. A critical incident report I wrote records the details of the incident as follows:

*As one of two main organizers of the program, I scheduled this session for students to ensure that they could properly complete their online applications to the program . . . In advance of the session I told students several times via LINE and in person that they would need a PC email address in order to start and complete the application process. 8 of the 11 students were able to start the application process by accessing PC email addresses, whereas three students were not. One student brought the addresses of his home computer’s email, but*

*had no way to access it. Another student knew his email address but didn't know his password, and another student had no external email address, and thus had to create an account at that time. On registration at the university, all students are given university email addresses, and (supposedly) taught how to access them in a first-year computer literacy class. Only one student used this email address, and that student needed assistance finding the login portal and correctly inputting his username.*

I also noted in my field notes that ICT infrastructure at the research site enables some students to engage with foreign teachers via video link, but opportunities to interact with foreign students are very limited. Also, while some student CMC practices involve unstructured (local and distance) social encounters as a means of language learning, few opportunities exist for structured dialogic cross-cultural engagement with foreign peers. Engaging students on platforms they already know for iterative, dialogic, project-based interactions with foreign peers and texts offers the potential for implicit learning and explicit learning that could enhance symbolic competence if supported by reflective tasks and face-to-face in situ interaction between students and teachers.

Many student narratives pointed to the usefulness of ICT for practical correspondences related to their classes, and for the construction of foreign language sentences required in homework assignments. Employing online

dictionaries, grammar-checking software, and translation sites is relatively common.

Students also noted that asynchronous CMC practices allow them the freedom to focus on form without pressure for instant response. As evident in parts of narrative 15 and narrative 12 excerpted above, constructing English texts on social media is a practice that students appear to value as an opportunity to test their skills in the real world while nevertheless taking adequate time to focus on accuracy. Student narrative 16 echoes a similar sentiment:

*When speaking in English to people in my location*, words don't come immediately, and I make pronunciation mistakes and the like.

*However, when using English through ICT*, I can easily look up words I don't know, and I don't have to worry about pronunciation and the like, so this is nice. *As for ICT use in my university classes*, I think it's useful for improving students' English skills and for cross-cultural understanding. *However*, this shouldn't just be done through ICT, rather I think it's necessary to have communication between teacher(s) and student(s) in the place. (N16)

One student (N7), noted that ICT is not often used in his university classes, and that he sees its potential more in terms of administrative efficiency. In these additional comments he provided at the end of his narrative, he wrote:

Also, (I feel that) when LINE, Facebook, and smartphone functions are so prevalent, (I am) unable to make good use of all of them. If/when ICT is used at school, and for lessons, I think it is good for contacting

(students) and making classes more efficient. (For example, notifications from the university or assignment deadlines, or information about upcoming classes, etc.) (N7)

Many students also wrote enthusiastically about ICT's great potential as a tool for intercultural exchange and engagement with online media, as in the following excerpts:

*As for ICT use in my university classes*, I think it would be good for ICT to be used more proactively in university classes. *In addition*, I think it would be good for opportunities for students who cannot study abroad to have increased opportunities to communicate with people from other countries. (N9)

*As for ICT use in my university classes*, I sometimes use it in my lessons at university. Not only YouTube, but many different applications. Using such tools makes my classes (more) fun. (N14)

*In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures*, (I) have lots of opportunities around me. Even when not meeting directly, (we) can have some cultural exchange over the internet, and also can have language exchange(s). (N3)

Data from this study indicates that students are not inclined to think critically about their mediated participation in globalized social networking practices or



their own CMC practices. This results in such practices as “oversharing” in an effort to perform in the culture of the platform where they have foreign “friends.” For example, informants told of sharing practices on platforms such as Facebook that would not be possible or culturally acceptable on “local” platforms such as LINE or “localized” platforms such as Twitter.

However, as for using ICT to communicate in English in order to inform my friends abroad about my everyday life, I often use Facebook to share information with an indefinite number of people. (N1)

Despite their enthusiasm, however, most students do not appear to think critically about the online social cultures of their foreign peers or their own ICT practices. This means that despite the facade of transcultural bonds via social media such as Facebook, it is unclear whether or not students’ unstructured online interactions lead to any significant development of symbolic competence to interpret the messages on their screens.

## **Finding Four: Untapped Resources**

*At the research site, ICT infrastructure and existing student CMC practices offer promise for facilitating student engagement with foreign peers and texts, but social learning affordances are underused.*

My study’s fourth research question asked about the types of pedagogical affordances and practices at the research site that appear to enhance students’

critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors via CMC. I found that students' current mobile CMC practices—especially their “fluency” with the use of a variety of social media platforms—present unique opportunities for facilitating their engagement with foreign peers and texts. However, data showed that such social learning affordances are mostly unexploited at the research site. As evident from some of the excerpts already presented above, many students use their mobile phones to access English-language news and entertainment media. They also use social networking sites to maintain relationships with friends from other countries and foreigners living in Japan. Statements such as that in N18 (quoted above) that “ . . . *when using ICT for English communication, I decided on Facebook*” were common, and they indicate that the foreign language learners in my study readily adapt to new communication tools and practices that align with their language acquisition and social goals. What was rare in student narratives—and in my observations and field notes—were reports of structured uses of ICT tools for cross-cultural communication and learning, or for deep engagement with foreign texts and ‘cross-talk’ about such texts. For example, though students noted that ICT was occasionally used in connection with coursework in their classes, none referred to pedagogically-structured, dialogic engagement with foreign texts or interlocutors. I reviewed syllabi for required classes in the department where data was collected, and found that such opportunities are not offered to students at the research site. One notable exception is described below, but this was part of a one-off extra-curricular project conducted by faculty members and student volunteers.

The two “e-learning” classes that are offered at the research site via video link are “content” courses that follow a traditional lecture format. The classes thus require students to engage with teachers located abroad (in America and Australia) in video-mediated class sessions, and via email when submitting assignments. But in both cases, students learn *about* cultures as objects of study rather than as a set of practices to be understood through experience, dialogue and interaction.

Though the structure of these lecture-based e-learning courses offer limited interactive potential, field notes from my own involvement with students in a single tele-collaborative exchange that was part of a campus sustainability research project revealed tele-collaborative project-based learning to be one area where students’ CMC fluency could potentially be leveraged for dialogic critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors. The project involved the use of Skype as a medium for the exchange of local information related to environmental sustainability efforts at the research site and at a university campus in the United States of America.

In a critical incident report I wrote about this experience with an international Skype video-conferencing session, I noted that students made significant efforts to prepare for their tele-collaborative exchange by researching the partner university online and preparing questions for their interlocutors in the U.S. They were thus able to obtain valuable information about the partner

university's more advanced campus sustainability efforts. Through their dialogic interactions with a professor, a student, and a campus sustainability officer at the partner institution, students were also able to share and discover ways that local practices are intertwined with social and geographical factors. My report notes that the shared concern for campus sustainability led to unforeseen student questions about local contexts and practices within these contexts. For example, my notes on a debriefing session held with students after the above-mentioned exchange revealed that my students appeared to gain new insights into the deeply embedded "car culture" of the American West, and some of the social, economic, and geographic realities that shape this culture. This in turn led to reflections after the conference call on commuting practices at our own university, and how these relate to campus sustainability goals.

As can be seen in Chapter Five, my field notes also pointed to ways that the built environment of the campus research site appears to limit the potential for students to collaborate with each other and with faculty outside of the classroom. As I will explore in Chapter Seven, and in the concluding chapter of this thesis, the location of the campus, the physical learning spaces it offers, and the overall characteristics of the built environment within which practices take place appears to be integral to the development of CMC practices that can lead to increased degrees of symbolic competence.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented four major findings that were revealed by this study. Findings each related to the study's four main research questions, and drew

upon data from student narratives, researcher field notes, and critical incident reports. The chapter presented extensive data from student-participants that, taken together, narrates a picture of CMC practice that will be further analyzed in the following chapter.

Data showed that students engage in a very wide variety of multilingual CMC practices as a means of socializing, gathering information, and sharing with peers and others. Student CMC practices centered mostly around the use of mobile devices (smartphones). Students reported adopting many new practices after entering university as they interacted with local peers. The practices they reported differed significantly from their high school CMC practices, involving a wider range of media and expanded social circles associated with “native” communication apps like LINE, and also globally popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Students are mindful of privacy concerns and about their choices of different platforms for different communicative purposes; however, they lack broader media literacy. Further, at the research site, affordances for developing media literacy and broader symbolic competence were found to be underused.

In the next chapter, I undertake a deeper exploration of the CMC practices reported here. I frame these practices within larger cultural discourses and discourse practices, and within the unique contextual constraints of the research site.

## **Chapter Seven: Analysis of Findings**

The purpose of this single-site case study is to investigate multilingual CMC practice at a Japanese university amidst the continuing integration of ICT into the educational, curricular, and social practice in Japanese higher education. In Chapter Five, I presented four main research findings, which drew upon data from student narratives and field notes from participant observation at the research site. The purpose of this chapter is to provide interpretive analysis of these empirical research findings. To do this, I first explain the process of developing three main analytic categories for interpreting the research findings. Next, I provide analysis via each of these analytical categories with reference to relevant intersecting literature in linguistic anthropology, media studies, and Japan studies. Finally, I frame some of the implications of my analysis that will be taken up in more detail in the final chapter of this thesis.

### **Analytic Category Development**

To further interpret the data presented in Chapter Six, I considered the consequences of my research findings and developed a set of analytic categories with which to synthesize patterns that emerged. A diagram of the thought process by which I developed my analytic categories is included in Appendix Eight of this thesis.

The first analytic category frames the findings of research questions one and two, which asked about the types of CMC practices students engage in and

how students perceive these practices. An overriding finding for these two questions was that many students adopt new CMC practices when they enter university. However, formal training did not appear to be the primary method by which students came to adopt the main CMC practices they narrated. Rather, new digital literacy practices appeared to be largely acquired and developed through peer-group social interaction. This analytic category is thus entitled “Local acquisition of new CMC practices and perceptions.”

The second analytic category is used to analyze findings related to research question three, which asked about the relation between students’ CMC practices and the development of symbolic competence. Analysis in this category explores the literacies and discursive practices that inform semiotic work through CMC at the research site. In their usage of mobile ICT to interact via various software platforms, young people participate in a global youth discourse while adopting a variety of new practices. But my research revealed that these new participatory practices are connected as much to the platforms employed for communication as to local cultural practices of the research site and the socio-material constraints and affordances of that site. It is in this light that the second analytical category was developed and entitled “Cultural Designs of Meaning—CMC Platform Practices in a Japanese Context.” This category takes into account the real-world CMC practices at the research site in cultural-historical context, and is used to examine the degree to which students can be seen to develop symbolic competence through these practices.

The third analytic category, entitled “barriers to deeper cross-cultural engagement via CMC” is based upon my fourth research finding. Data showed that despite ICT infrastructure and students’ fluency with mobile CMC, few pedagogically-structured opportunities existed within which students could engage deeply with foreign peers and/or texts. Here, I explore three main obstacles to a more full-fledged use of affordances for CMC at the research site.

### **Local Acquisition of New CMC Practices and Perceptions**

Data collected for this research project revealed that the primary means for the development of students’ CMC practices came from their social interaction with local peers—through relationships developed in Japan and abroad. The practices students developed centered mainly around their use of mobile devices for a variety of activities, building upon practices they reported to have begun in their high school days. At university, however, students’ digital social media practices evolved to incorporate larger, and in some cases more geographically dispersed networks and information resources, as well as new social networking applications.

This thesis takes the view, consistent with functional-systematic linguistics, that all communication practices develop within unique sociocultural contexts, and they must therefore be analyzed vis-a-vis the physical and societal constraints and affordances of those contexts. Here, the "physical" refers to the natural and built environment of a place, whereas the "societal" refers to the realm of social power. Both natural and designed environments make certain kinds of



communication practices possible, and other types of practices difficult or impossible. As Fenwick and Landri (2012) explicate, these and other “educational things” can be seen as “network effects” using the lens of Actor-Network Theory, which align within the “broader realm of Science and Technology Studies (STS)” (p. 2).

### **Practices in place**

In Japan, the scarcity of livable physical space in general, and the limited space for social interaction outside the classroom at the research site specifically can be seen to have a marked effect on social relationships and communication practices. It has also been noted by Takahashi (2011), and Ito (2001, 2005) that Japanese youth are afforded limited physical space within which to conduct their social lives. At the regional university setting where this study was set, approximately 90% of students live at home with their parents. And though most parents of university students give their children more freedom to manage their own time than they had in high school, physical space constraints remain much the same at home as they would have been before students entered university. For all but the wealthiest of families, houses and apartments are small due to limited land availability and consequently high home prices. Ito (2005) notes that the lack of privacy to conduct one’s social life in the home leads to youth seeking out other public and private spaces within which to socialize, and also the utilization of the silent multimodal (virtual) “spaces” enabled by their *keitai* (mobile) devices. Ito (2001) characterized the way that mobile devices were—at the turn of the millennium—already functioning to create social networking spaces for Japanese youth:

There is an important sense in which text messages, combined with the capability for voice messages, inscribes a flexible but very concrete place-like awareness, a sense in which a small peer group inhabits the same ever-present communicative space. These mobile places reflect the status of youth peer relations as personally central, but lacking in legitimate spaces and times for assembly. (p. 8)

And yet even while most students continue to live with their families, entry into a four-year degree program nevertheless marks a significant increase in students' freedom over their own time and movements outside of the home. Whereas in high school Japanese students living in proximity to the research site would generally be accounted for by adults (parents, teachers, coaches, etc.) for all but their time in transit to and from school and extracurricular activities, college students here are generally able to control their own schedules. This is similar to the situation that Ito (2005) describes for the youth she studied at elite urban universities in the Kanto region:

... youths lack financial and social power, and their time and space are highly regulated by adult-dominated institutions of home and school. While they do have large amounts of discretionary time, energy, and mobility that is the envy of working professionals and parents, they are limited in their activities by certain structural absolutes, such as dependence on parents for food and shelter, and educational requirements that regulate their schedules and attentional economies. (p.3)

A difference between the urban setting that Ito (2005) describes and the suburban regions like the one where this study is set is that here students spend much of their non-class time socializing *on* their university's suburban (semi-rural) campus. As I explained at the end of Chapter Two, the campus is situated in a location that is accessible by limited public transportation (bus) or personal transportation such as bicycle or motorbike (there is no student car parking). The university's location, and its lack of easy access to off-campus social spaces means that students generally spend their time between classes on campus, except in rare cases where students live alone in nearby rented apartments. They gather in the school's canteens, department resource centers, and at their club practice spaces. All of these on-campus spaces have Wi-Fi access that allow students to shift between face-to-face interactions with co-located peers, and online interactions with those near and far via mobile CMC.

It is thus initially on campus, in face-to-face interaction with new peers from the region that university students begin to adopt new communication technologies and practices to communicating with each other, and with new "others" in their new and expanding social circles. However, these practices—which inherently liberate users from traditional geographical and temporal constraints—grow rapidly more advanced and complex through students' online interactions after their arrival at university.

## **Cultural Designs of Meaning: CMC Platform Practices in a Japanese Context**

To understand the development of CMC practices observed and reported at the research site, it is necessary to consider the historical and cultural discourses into which contemporary Japanese youth literacy practices are set. In Chapter Two, I discussed the history of literacy in Japan and the relation between this and Japan's higher education system. In the literature review presented in Chapter Three, I explored studies of Japanese youth CMC practices, and case studies from institutional contexts in Japan and abroad. Here, I consider CMC practices in Japan's contemporary media landscape while placing these practices in the cultural-historical context of research on Japanese communication cultures.

Researchers from various disciplinary traditions have offered conceptualizations of Japanese communication that align with many aspects of my data. These point to the semiotic resources and practices that create what Kress (2010) calls "ensembles of meaning" (p. 159), and here they allow for an understanding of what Liu (2011) terms "Asian Epistemologies."

### **High-context communication**

In the parlance of cross-cultural studies, Japanese culture is described as "high-context" because social relations are built upon close attention to contextual clues such as body language, silences, facial expressions, and subtle linguistic utterances (Hall, 1976). As I discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, the Japanese language itself is highly intertextual and context-dependent. This is

true in the sense that situational social position and other contextual factors have a very strong bearing on the language used in a given instance of communication. But it is also true from a strictly linguistic sense: as Nishimura, et al (2008) point out, the surfeit of homonyms in the Japanese language means that if one is not privy to background knowledge of a conversation, it can be very hard to understand what is being discussed.

But where auditory language eludes precision, text can be visually explicit. Japanese *kanji*, for example, make the meaning of homonyms pictographically clear to educated readers. Thus, the vagueness and context-sensitivity of spoken communication juxtaposed with the explicitness of written communication creates a communication paradox that must be bridged somehow. That is, the ambiguity and context-sensitivity that is privileged in one communication mode (the spoken) where context clues are simultaneously available through other modes is difficult to reproduce in two-dimensional text (written mode). Thus, subconscious cultural concerns that may arise among Japanese social media users might include questions such as: Given my interlocutor's social position, what register of politeness do I need to use? How might he or she be reacting to the language I am conveying? What adjustments need to be made to my discourse in order not to offend? How can I effectively maintain adequate vagueness while also conveying an adequate amount of emotion?

Of course, these are questions that all language users must consider (consciously or not) when communicating with others. However, given the highly context-specific nature of Japanese communication culture, it appears these questions may be more pronounced in the minds of Japanese youth. At the level of youth peer groups communicating amongst themselves, these issues at first appear to be less prominent, but my data shows that social position is, in fact, already important, especially among *sempai* (先輩、seniors) and “*kohai*” (後輩、juniors) at the research site.

However, text-based in-group communication that is explicit in terms of meaning but can be easily shared creates another paradoxical challenge in the lives of young people: the private intimacy of textual explicitness is combined with the share-ability of digital media.

### **Intimacy and indulgence in Japanese culture**

From the different disciplinary perspectives of comparative philosophy and clinical psychology, Doi (2001) and Kasulis (2002) highlight “intimacy” and “indulgence” (*amae*, 甘え) respectively to describe key aspects of interpersonal relations in Japanese society. They point to a society built on interpersonal relations that are more affective, somatic, and intuitive than those in the West. Leaving aside debate about the essentialism apparent in these broad claims, it is worth noting that they nevertheless fit with more empirical research, such as that of Nisbett and Masuda (2003), who found a proclivity among East Asians in general, and Japanese specifically, for richer and more holistic understanding of (visual) context information, in contrast to a proclivity to focus on individual

elements and categories among (European) Americans. That is, in Japan, relationships and contexts seem to bear more importance than do categories of meaning. Just as visual information is read more holistically for contextual meaning, so too are social contexts “read” more carefully for interpersonal dynamics and subject positioning.

In Kasulis’ (2002) terminology, the “intimacy” of Japanese social relations is a matter of “belonging with,” as opposed to the categorical “belonging to” valued by societies oriented towards “integrity” (p. 36-37). For Doi (2001), the concept of *amae* (indulgence) is cast in terms of a mother’s attendance to her child’s (unspoken) needs, “. . . so that mother and child can enjoy a sense of commingling and identity” (p. 74). Doi (2001) argues that the relational process inherent in this prototypical example of *amae* is an apt metaphor for social relations throughout society, for example, between employers and employees, teachers and students, and *sempai* and *kohai*.

If “intimacy” and “indulgence” (*amae*) represent broadly accurate characteristics of Japanese social interaction, there is no reason to believe that these characteristics would not be visible in the CMC practices of Japanese youth. However, the way cultural values are reproduced through the new technological practices of our digital age is a normative question that can be investigated on a variety of levels (macro, meso, micro). Takahashi’s (2011, 2014) research, for example, was conducted in the vast urban landscape of Tokyo and its suburbs, and sought to generalize broadly about the communication habits of

contemporary Japanese youth. My own case study—set far from Tokyo, and focused on the CMC of a small, very specific population of English department undergraduates at a local private university—revealed that the “intimacy” and *amae* of physical ties played a very important role in shaping practice. Below, I further explore how these CMC practices are realized locally via available CMC tools and modes.

### **Platform practices: privacy and identity**

The global nature of communication technologies means that the design characteristics of different platform can also be seen to influence practice. However, at the research site, I observed what Thorne (2003) calls “cultures of use” with patterns of practice that match the sociocultural setting in which research was conducted, and the cultural characteristics mentioned above. Cultures of use, in my use of the term, refers to the nexus between the universal design features of communication tools and the way these features are adapted or appropriated to local needs. Stated another way, these could be called “platform practices” to refer to the way particular users interact within the constraints of particular digital communication technologies.

Takahashi (2011, 2014) has drawn on concepts from the work of Nakane (1967) to conceptualize Japanese-style youth communication in digital *uchi*. In Japan studies, the word and concept of *uchi* (内) is frequently contrasted with *soto* (外), which refers to that which is “outside” or “foreign.” Though the phonetic



reading is different, the same *kanji* concept of *soto*, is used in the term *gaikokugo* (外国語), which means “foreign language”.<sup>5</sup>

Whereas Nakane (1967) conceived of face-to-face Japanese social networks as centered around locally situated inner-circle peer groups, Takahashi (2014) theorizes that certain ICT platforms like LINE, with their multimodal affordances for conveying emotional meaning, have extended the reach of inner-circle groups beyond the local. My own investigation supports this conclusion, and below I will further explore how software tools such as LINE afford unique opportunities for Japanese-style in-group (*uchi*) communication.

As noted in Chapter Five, the social network platforms most commonly referenced by students were Facebook, LINE and Twitter. However, based on comments made by students in the narrative frame data set, and in my field notes, these three social networking platforms appear to be used differently by the students who were the focus of my study.

One distinction that can be made relates to identity: of the three platforms, only Twitter affords users the easy ability to communicate anonymously via an alias. My data revealed that most students who use Twitter and other services that allow anonymity take advantage of this design feature, but they do so in a way that in-fact affords them semi-anonymity. They use the service to follow and interact with their real-world friends who know each other’s handles (online

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<sup>5</sup> Literally, “outside-country-word(s)”

monikers) while remaining anonymous to friends of friends and others they choose to follow and who may follow them back.

In their narratives, students express a high degree of concern for privacy, and thus on relatively open platforms the usage of a nickname or handle for interactions on social media makes sense. Takahashi (2014) quotes 2014 statistics from Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication that reveal that 75% of Japan-based Twitter users use their accounts anonymously, as opposed 35% and 31% in the US and UK respectively (p. 17). The preference for anonymity online can thus be seen as a cultural characteristic, or a discursive practice common to CMC in Japan.

This reluctance to perform public identities on social media that allow anonymity affirms a preference among Japanese youth for more intimate in-group communication as well. That is, students' semi-anonymous Twitter handles mask implicit identity knowledge that is shared among friends, but no further. This too, points to a desire for indulgence and intimacy within a protective peer group, albeit in a semi-public (digital) space.

### **Keitai native to *sumaho* native**

Just as the "native speaker" construct has garnered significant criticism for what it occludes in an increasingly hybrid and mobile world (see, e.g., Rampton, 1990, Jenkins, 2006, Holliday, 2006), Prensky's (2001) conceptualization of the "digital native" has also been widely criticized for overgeneralizing generational tendencies, and reifying skill sets that in fact develop through specific types of

practices by specific types of people in certain socio-economic contexts. Despite its serious limitations, the idea encapsulated by “digital nativity”—that youth possess some kind of inherent fluency with technology—has popularity in Japan as well. Takahashi (2011) points out that the discourse of digital nativity has had prominence in Japanese media and academia since at least 2008, when it entered popular consciousness with the broadcast of an NHK documentary entitled “Digital Natives: Portrait of Young People Who Will Shape the Next Age” (Takahashi, 2011, p.48). Takahashi (2011) further notes that the discourse of digital nativity in Japan has been one alternatively of hopeful—almost utopian—expectations and fearful despair for the generational discontinuity that new technologies portend.

Previously, Harada’s (2010) term “*keitai* native” offered a more apt label for Japanese youth, who, for more than two decades have served as the market and testing ground for new mobile communications technologies. Japan’s history of mobile communications, which is intertwined with the history of the communications practices of high school girls in urban settings does not need to be explicated here, but it is nevertheless important to note that the intense social networking that high school-aged youths become engaged in has long has long relied on text-based communications, and as technologies have advanced, these communications have gone digital and grown to incorporate a broad range of visual imagery and other extensions of text.

Harada (2010), and others (see, e.g., Ito et al., 2009) have, however, highlighted the pitfalls of the mobile phone generation's evolving practices. Summarizing Harada's (2010) analysis (untranslated), Takahashi (2011) writes that "As young people constantly connect with each other via mobile phones, they feel the same kind of commitments and obligations as Japanese people used to have when they lived in small villages in the pre-modern era" (p. 70). This phenomenon appeared to be present at the research site, but how it plays out through contemporary, highly multimodal smartphones used by youth in Japan deserves further exploration.

Though mobile phones have been ubiquitous among Japanese college youth for more than a decade, the development and widespread adoption of smartphones (スマホ - *sumaho*) in recent years has led to two significant changes in CMC practice. First, Japanese youth have begun to use applications such as LINE for both synchronous and asynchronous communication that maximizes the multimodal affordances of *sumaho* to create intimacy and responsiveness in ways that might previously have been characteristic of face-to-face encounters. Second, whereas a decade ago mobile devices (*keitai*) may have been used to post and exchange text-based information *about* common cultural artifacts experienced individually (for example on television, in theaters, in the pages of magazines, or even through the music library of one's mobile device), today's Japanese youth often use their *sumaho* to share multimodal cultural artifacts directly with peers to be experienced in real-time (e.g. YouTube videos, digital "stickers", animated GIFs, etc.).

The deployment of a visual lexicon associated with manga and other visual discourses from Japan and abroad in CMC spaces can thus be seen as corresponding to the component of symbolic competence that Kramsch (2006) calls “the production of complexity” (p. 251). However, the referential complexity of the image differs significantly from the referential complexity of written (and spoken) text. As Kress (2003) notes:

The two modes of writing and of image are each governed by distinct logics, and have distinctly different affordances. The organisation of writing—still leaning on the logics of speech—is governed by the logic of time, and by the logic of sequence of its elements in time, in temporally governed arrangements. The organisation of the image, by contrast, is governed by the logic of space, and by the logic of simultaneity of its visual/depicted elements in spatially organised arrangements. (pp. 1-2)

This contrast between modes points to a need to recognize the way increasing awareness about different discursive (genre) practices could lead to the further development of the two components of symbolic competence: “tolerance of ambiguity” and “the ability to recognize form as meaning” (Kramsch, p. 251).

The multimodal discourses that Japanese youth access at the research site and in their everyday lives form a complex mix of genres. The CMC practices observed and reported at the research site revealed a population of Japanese

youth who freely choose from among a wide variety of globally available media “texts” to share with their peers, employing these for communicative purposes beyond their original intent. Something akin to what Gee and Hayes (2012) term “affinity spaces” may form around multimodal texts themselves, rather than social discourse *about* media texts from a more or less “common” national media culture. For example, members of the school dance club have told me they share their own videos, or videos of other dancers around the world via LINE and other apps to communicate with each other creating a flow of multimodal meaning across borders.

### **Intercultural signs, symbols, and stickers**

The aforementioned phenomena, while broadly recognized as a characteristic of the “transcultural flows” of contemporary global youth culture (see, e.g. Pennycook, 2006), can also be seen to be influenced by particular practices and literacies connected to Japanese popular culture, but often remixed with foreign language elements (e.g. orthography). Such practices draw upon a mixture of semiotic codes to convey emotion using a rich visual vocabulary partially rooted in Japanese popular and traditional culture. For example, both static and animated digital “stickers” are used to convey symbolic nuance where text alone would not suffice.

As the examples below illustrates, LINE Corporation sells stickers in multiple languages. The Japanese and English sticker pack in Figure 6.1 below shows a recognition of the broad appeal of Japanese performative pop culture that is not hemmed in by language barriers. The sticker pack features the animated

gags of a shock comic whose lewd and comic contortions are easily understood across cultural lines. The same sticker store also serves as a platform for sponsored content such as the “Merci” sticker available to users through a campaign by the French company Evian (Figure 6.2 and Figure 6.3). With the “merci” sticker, a user can say the equivalent of thank you in Japanese without really saying it, but instead referencing a global brand and its glamorous foreign cultural connotations.



Figure 7.1. Egashira sticker pack for sale at the LINE store. June, 2017.



Figure 7.2. Evian promotional sticker pack for sale at the LINE store. June, 2017.



Figure 7.3. A sticker from the promotional Evian pack. June 2017.

Such stickers and other media are thus used symbolically to create intimacy and shared emotional space during in-group (*uchi*) communication. This practice of using multilingual and multimodal codes to convey nuance and emotion draws upon Japan's long popular history of supplementing pictographic and phonetic text with rich visual elements, as in *manga*. Recent research by Bezemer and Kress (2016) as well implies that Japanese students may be more inclined to draw upon such visual resources to make meaning in multimodal environments as a result of the "multimodal ensembles" they have grown accustomed to in, for example, the more visually integrative textbooks they have encountered in school settings (p. 67 - 68).

However, fluency in the multimodal forms of communication relevant to what Takahashi (2011) calls Japanese youth's "digital *uchi*" does not necessarily translate to an ability to interpret other forms or to understand how these forms are mediated by global popular culture, which is itself mediated by global corporations and inherently limited to easily digestible chunks such as internet memes. In Chapter Seven, I will offer some recommendations for ways that pedagogy might address this gap.

### **Media effects**

The evolving role of the *sumaho* in the lives of Japanese youth can also be usefully viewed from a Media Studies perspective. In *Laws of Media: The New Science* (1989), Marshall and Eric McLuhan propose ". . . a heuristic device, a set of four questions, which we call a tetrad" (p.7). These questions, according to the authors, ". . . can be asked (and the answers checked) by anyone,



anywhere at any time, about any human artefact” (McLuhan, 1989, p.7). They are posed as follows:

1. What does the medium amplify or intensify?
2. What does the medium drive out of prominence?
3. What does the medium recover which was previously lost?
4. What does the medium do when pushed to its limits?

(McLuhan, 1989, p.7)

The tetrad has also been rendered in a visual model (not present in the 1989 book), as seen in Figure 7.4.

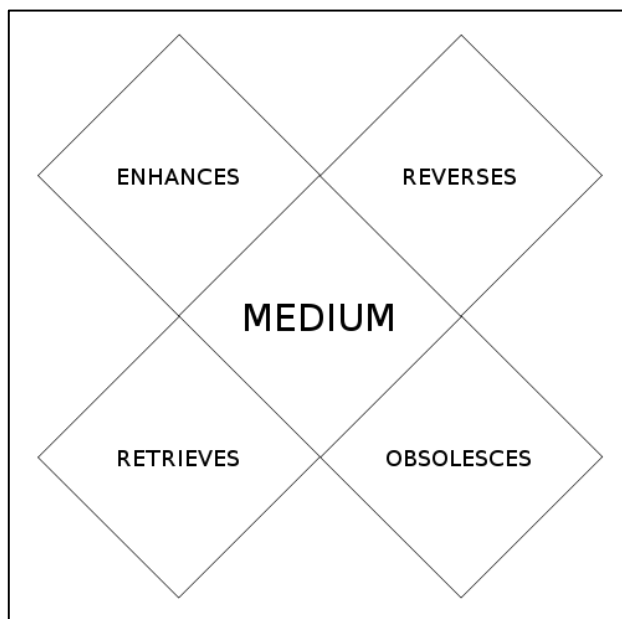


Figure 7.4. Media Tetrad.

File: MediaTetrad.svg. (2012, July 14).

In Wikipedia. GNU Free Documentation License. Retrieved from

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:MediaTetrad.svg&oldid=502281519>

In modern times the *keitai* can be seen to have thus “retrieved” certain aspects of the orality of village culture. It did this by opening communication lines between and among individuals and groups that might otherwise be eclipsed

by the physical constraints of urbanized post-modern Japan, where traditional village life is in rapid retreat.

But the *keitai*-enabled text-based SMS culture of Japan's in the 1990's and beyond was still nothing like that of a "global village," as McLuhan envisioned in earlier work (McLuhan, 1962, 1964). Characterizing the technological situation that led to some of Japan's "Galapagos" *keitai* ecosystem of mobile phone technology, Tabuchi (2009) writes:

The industry turned increasingly inward. In the 1990s, they set a standard for the second-generation network that was rejected everywhere else. Carriers created fenced-in Web services, like i-Mode. Those mobile Web universes fostered huge e-commerce and content markets within Japan, but they have also increased the country's isolation from the global market.

Then Japan quickly adopted a third-generation standard in 2001. The rest of the world dallied, essentially making Japanese phones too advanced for most markets. (p. 19).

In this sense, until the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, *keitai* culture was more like that of a "Japan village." Though services such as DoCoMo corporation's i-mode system pioneered offering users mobile internet access, throughout the first years of the new millennium, mobile phone platforms were used primarily for email and text messaging (Ishii, 2004, p. 49). Web services were limited to

custom interfaces which often made non-Japanese websites inaccessible (Tabuchi, 2009). Further, despite the new access to larger webs of information via the mobile internet, young people continued to use mobile phone technology for text-messaging in ways that paralleled practices of communicating with text via pagers (Ishii, 2009, p. 54-55).

However, when McLuhan's tetrad of media effects is employed to describe the role of the *sumaho* in Japanese life today, a picture of contemporary *Japanese* communication practices emerges that is closer to the "global village" characterization:

1. Enhancement (figure): What the medium amplifies or intensifies. *The sumaho amplifies text and image via graphics.*
2. Obsolescence (ground): What the medium drives out of prominence. *The sumaho appears to reduce the importance of real-time face-to-face interaction.*
3. Retrieval (figure): What the medium recovers which was previously lost. *The sumaho returns the dialogic nature of village culture on a global scale.*
4. Reversal (ground): What the medium does when pushed to its limits. *The sumaho flips into a tool for audio-visual communication.*

The final stage "reversal" already appears to be at hand. For example, the initially text-focused communication application LINE—which is discussed more extensively below—has been steadily improving and adding augmented reality

(AR) features to a video chat component of its messaging application. As could be predicted for a communication application made in the context of East Asia's traditions of visual discourse, the new services offer extra-linguistic features such as avatar animations to enhance the conveyance of emotion on the platform.

Another indication of the growing trend towards visual communication can be seen in a surge in the popularity of Instagram, a social network application based entirely around photo and video sharing. The number of Instagram users in Japan rose by almost 50% between August, 2016 and August, 2017, from 11.9 million to 17.1 million users (Japan Sees a Surge in Instagram, 2017). Twitter, which has been making its interface more and more centered around photos and videos grew by 17% in the same period, whereas Facebook grew by only 7% (ibid).

In my narrative frame data, which was collected before Instagram's explosion in popularity in Japan, platform practices appeared to be divided between external, performative practices that happen on foreign-born social networks such as Facebook, and internal interdependency practices that occur on local networks such as those offered through LINE and to a lesser extent, the localized cultures of use on Twitter (e.g. the custom of "handles" that create semi-anonymity). The architecture of each platform magnifies ("intensifies" in McLuhan's formulation) certain types of practices and directs users to interact in certain ways.

At the research site, students tended to associate their foreign language practices with foreign-born platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. Whereas these platforms are designed around a participatory ethos of contemporary youth, my data indicated that students are more often passive participants in their interactions with these media. With indigenous social media, such as LINE (which I consider next in more detail), students appear more engaged and interactive.

### **Asian communication on LINE**

At the research site, LINE is overwhelmingly used for “local” communication among those considered “*uchi*.” This includes family, local university friends, peers, and teachers, as well as those formerly contained in students’ local face-to-face social circles (e.g. former teachers and classmates). As an instructor at the research site, I have not had direct interaction with students via Facebook or Twitter, nor have I been approached by students to interact via these platforms. It is LINE that has allowed me the most opportunities to observe student interactions, and to participate in many of these interactions in both English and Japanese, and thus it is LINE that seems most appropriate to explore in greater depth.

LINE is a mobile phone chat application developed and distributed in Japan by LINE Corporation, a Japanese subsidiary of the Korean company Naver. LINE Corporation promotes its services as tailored to the communication norms of people in specific locales, specifically Asia, where the company was founded.

On the LINE Corporation's website, the company's mission statement juxtaposes its foundation with a response to the March 11<sup>th</sup> 2011 Tohoku Disaster, and frames its services as fulfilling the need for "a tool that could strengthen human relationships." The full mission statement, the English version of which is included below, provides insight into the local values of community, empathy, and interdependence:

LINE was conceived as a mobile messaging service shortly after the massive earthquake that devastated Japan on March 11, 2011. After the tragedy, it became apparent that there was a fundamental need for a global communication tool that could strengthen human relationships. Just a few months later in June, we launched the LINE messaging app. With this approach, LINE has grown into a social platform with hundreds of millions of users worldwide, having a particularly strong focus in the rapidly advancing continent of Asia. Rather than settle for globally standardized services based on a generic approach, we believe that it is essential to respect the culture and norm of each individual country in order to engage users on a very deep level and evolve in each region. We call it culturalization and it's at the heart of everything we do. In the world we strive to create, users will have seamless online and offline access to all the people, information and services they need in their daily lives – LINE is the gateway. Our journey to evolve into a Smart Portal will continue, as we will meet all needs that our users face in a constantly changing mobile universe. LINE is your daily life companion – Engaging the world with you. ("LINE Corporation "MISSION," n.d.)

This mission statement is thus explicit about LINE being designed fit with local communication norms. Exploration of some of the platform's design characteristics will illustrate what this may mean.

### **Design features**

At first glance LINE appears to be a standard messaging app like any of its Western counterparts. But certain design features create affordances for the more intimate and group-oriented communication characteristic of “high-context” Asian cultures like Japan's.

LINE is used extensively for group communication, and seems to be designed around a certain cultural logic of intimacy, membership, and interdependence, as opposed to the more performative functionality that can be evident on platforms like Facebook. As mentioned briefly in Chapter Six, one example of this is that users who send lines of text messages can immediately see when interlocutors have read their messages. As soon as one's interlocutor reads a sent message, the message is marked “read” (in Japanese, *kidoku*, 既読), and given a timestamp. In group chats, messages appear as “read by 1,2,3...etc.), indicating how many participants of the group chat have read the message, but notably not which ones.

This design feature has two effects on practice: it means that small group discussions are marked by intimacy and responsibility, whereas larger group discussions allow for increased anonymity. Though similar features exist in chat

applications developed elsewhere, the *kidoku* mark in LINE can be seen as one design feature that creates affordances for certain types of intimacy and certain types of responsibility for interdependent social groups characteristic of East Asian cultures.

A second feature, that has been a part of LINE from the start, and has now being incorporated into many Western communication applications, is the ability of LINE users to use free and purchased emoji and “stickers” and animations in their communications. I have already discussed stickers, and presented some examples in Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 above.

A final significant design feature of LINE is that users may not delete or edit text that they have produced in a chat session. The ability to edit and revise within chat threads is a feature that is becoming more common in other platforms that focus on group interaction. For example, in the U.S.-based application, SLACK, which otherwise functions quite similarly to LINE, users can easily edit or delete messages after they are posted. This is not possible on LINE. Thus, the inability to edit text utterances after they are posted amplifies the stakes of reading and responding to interlocutors. It points to the integrity of spoken words in Japan, and it thus likely drives a tendency for more image-based communication that conveys emotion to create or contribute to atmosphere (空気、*kū ki*) via Gestalt. Conveying emotion in this way offers users an expanded (visual) vocabulary that can be deployed in lieu of text that could risk offending or confusing one’s interlocutor.



## **Barriers to the Development of Symbolic Competence**

My study's fourth finding was that despite generally adequate ICT infrastructure and existing student CMC practices that are potentially conducive to the development of symbolic competence through structured interactions with foreign texts and interlocutors, these educational affordances are underused at the research site. There are various possible explanations for this state of affairs, but my research points to four main "barriers" to further development of symbolic competence via CMC.

### **One-way e-learning**

The first of these barriers sits at the institutional level, and relates to the nature of relationships with partner higher education institutions abroad. My research found that study abroad programs and two "e-learning" classes accessible to students in the department under consideration are all based on unidirectional relationships with foreign universities rather than exchange agreements. This means that the department sends students to host universities abroad—or to study on-campus in "e-learning" classes provided by such institutions—but does not receive students from abroad or offer its own video-link "e-learning" courses to students at partner institutions. Therefore, while students who return from study abroad are "carriers" of certain types of CMC practice, these practices are not spread by "native" practitioners at the research site. Further, the lack of inbound study abroad or exchange students and faculty means that faculty at the research site have few opportunities or incentives to develop the

kind of deep long-term relationships that could lead to productive CMC exchanges.

One explanation for the lack of incoming exchange or study abroad students and/or faculty relates to administrative and curricular infrastructure at the research site. The university currently lacks the administrative capacity to arrange home-stays, support Japanese language learning, or offer classes in English (or other languages) for inbound students. These are all things that many top-tier universities in Japan do, and while they would not be impossible at this institution, there may be a perception at the research site that such undertakings would require too much cost and effort and not enough benefit.

### **A generation gap**

A related set of barriers to realizing the potential of existing ICT infrastructure and student CMC practices for the development of symbolic competence at the research site may relate to the demographic make-up of the department's faculty members, to the teaching and research focus of these faculty members, and likely also to teacher beliefs. The department under consideration is made up of sixteen full-time members. Thirteen of these individuals are Japanese nationals, whereas three faculty members are non-Japanese (two from the U.S., and one from Canada). The age range of faculty in the department is 38 to 69, with an approximate median age of 55. Thus, for most faculty members, the explosion in mobile ICT—including the development of smartphone applications such as LINE—that has taken place over the past two decades occurred after they had established their professional teaching and research roles,

pedagogical practices, and tools for communicating with students, colleagues, family and friends. The high median age of faculty members in the department parallels demographics in Japan's aging society as a whole.

The wide generation gap belies a corresponding gap in CMC practices, and also perhaps a resistance among faculty to practices that might unseat their traditional teaching roles. Writing in 2008 with reference to demographics in the United States, Fieldhouse and Nicholas (2008) posit that "The digital generation gap represents something of a dichotomy, with digital natives and digital immigrants using different languages" (p. 60). These authors further note that for today's generation of youth, there is no pre-digital life experience with which to compare current practices, meaning that these "digital natives" are firm in their preference for CMC practices characterized by instant access to increasingly multimodal sources of information. In contrast, "Digital immigrants prefer to handle knowledge systematically, logically, and to inform discrete activities (Fieldhouse & Nicholas, 2008, p. 60).

The generational divide in preferences and practices may be even broader in Japan, where, as previously noted, a Confucian value system privileges teacher authority over intergenerational participatory culture (Aoki, 2010). Notably, however, I did not collect data from instructors about their perceptions and practices related to CMC (for reasons explained in Chapter Four), and so claims that can be made in this area are limited. Still, student data and my implicit knowledge of classroom practices at the research site clearly indicates that in

cases where CMC is being used in connection with classes, it is not used in ways that radically alter the traditional roles of teachers and students in Japanese higher education.

### **A skill vs. content divide**

A final barrier relates to the department's curriculum. A "skill" versus "content" divide that is maintained in the curriculum, and a divide between the roles of "native" and "non-native" English speakers may represent curricular and administrative (hiring) trends that remain from a more stable era of foreign language learning in Japan before the advent of powerful and ubiquitous ICT. It can be argued that as late as the 1980's and 1990's in Japan, despite rapid globalization, the *foreign* could still safely be represented as 'out there' from Japan — accessible by paper texts and through experiences abroad (or in international settings in Japan), but not constantly accessible or intertwined with everyday communication technologies and practices.

The English department curriculum can be seen to have three primary teaching and research areas: one focused on language acquisition itself (receptive and productive skills), another focused on language acquisition studies (theory), and a third focused on explorations of English-language literature. This type of curricular arrangement, which aligns with a broader trend known as communicative language teaching (CLT) is still typical at many universities in Japan (Johnson, Lyddon, Nelson, Selman, & Worth, 2015), and indeed in many university-level foreign language departments throughout the world (Byrnes and Maxim, 2004). The way in which CLT is implemented at the research site is

typical as well. It involves “a skill-based language focus in years 1 and 2, and then a content focus in years 3 and 4” (Johnson et al., 2015, p. 106). The curriculum thus views “communication skills” as necessarily antecedent to engagement with “higher” culture and analytical thinking that takes place through classes on literature and language acquisition theory.

In addition to upper level “content” classes, Japanese faculty members all teach a variety of “communication” classes centered on three of “four skills” of reading, writing, and listening. Classes focused on speaking skills (entitled “Oral Communication”) are all allocated to the three non-Japanese faculty members. The “content” classes taught by Japanese faculty relate to their specializations in either language acquisition studies or English-language literature.

Describing a Spanish curriculum at an American university, Lopez-Sanchez (2009) explains why this type of curricular arrangement was problematic:

. . . Due to its focus on oral communication, it did not foster the kind of advanced abilities required in academic work. Students at the advanced levels of the curriculum are asked to engage in the analysis of literary texts and to confront activities and expectations that bear little to no resemblance or connection with those they encounter in the beginner and intermediate phases of their learning: the goal of such activities is not communicative competence but critical thinking and perhaps cultural (with a capital C) literacy. CLT does not address and cannot resolve this

separation between language to communicate and survive 'in the real world' with language in certain forms of higher culture (p .31).

As I will discuss in Chapter Eight, a more integrated approach to CMC practice, and other reforms are necessary in order to improve the development of symbolic competence among foreign language learners at the research site.

### **Limited space for teaching and learning**

A final barrier that can be seen to have impeded the development of symbolic competence via CMC at the research site relates to the limited amount of space for teaching and learning available outside of the campus' classrooms.

Recent research and new theoretical understandings point to the important role that designed physical spaces play in affording opportunities for effective teaching and learning (e.g. Ellis and Goodyear, 2018). Within this perspective, ICT infrastructure is just one component in the configuration of physical spaces for learning in higher education institutions that has an influence on CMC and other practices. One example of space-focused research is presented by Ravelli (2018), who uses a social semiotic approach that draws upon the work of Kress et al. (2005), Jewitt (2006), and others. Consistent with the theoretical perspectives of these authors, Ravelli (2018) recasts university learning spaces themselves as "communicative texts" that "say something to and with students and teachers in their design and their social and cultural locations" (p.64).

Following this metaphor, the very limited learning space resources on the campus where data was collected can be seen to have been “saying” to students and teachers that there is little room for collaborative learning outside of the classroom. As I explained in my description of the research site in Chapter Two, very few sizable spaces existed outside of classrooms where students could gather to collaborate and learn with each other or with their instructors. Apart from the library, which required silent study, and the Foreign Language Study Support Center—which I discuss below—the primary gathering spaces were two mixed-use student lounges. As I also explained in Chapter Two, these spaces, however, were ill-suited to collaborative learning because of their primary functions as eating and social areas. They doubled as cafeterias at lunch time, and at other times of the day these spaces were generally noisy. Further, the configuration of heavy tables in long rows meant that group study was difficult. The spaces did not offer material affordances for learning such as audio-visual equipment, white boards, or reconfigurable table seating that might encourage student collaboration or informal learning with instructors. Finally, though the wi-fi network on campus offered open, free access to the internet, it was often congested and hard for students and teachers to access.

The Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC) existed as one potential alternative for the development of CMC practice on campus outside of classroom contexts. However, for several reasons, this space lacked affordances for the development of types of collaborative and mentoring

practices around ICT that could lead to improved symbolic competence via CMC. First, though there were several computers aligned against one wall of the FLSSC, these were slow and outdated, and thus rarely used. Further, wi-fi access in the center was spotty at best. The network was frequently congested, making it difficult to get online from the mobile devices students all carried.

More importantly, the practices that had come to develop within the space—which were loosely related to curricular goals but nevertheless heavily promoted—had the effect of limiting other practices such as the type of collaborative learning via ICT that could lead to greater symbolic competence. The space was frequently dominated by students in the department who were engaged in various aspects of narrowly defined practices: foreign language extensive reading or *kaiwa renshu*、(会話練習、conversation practice). For extensive reading, this meant that students were either queuing up to borrow or return books or engaged in sustained silent reading (SSL) as part of a broader practice called extensive reading. For conversation practice, the typical model was for students to reserve time with one of three “native” English instructors on campus to chat in 20-minute blocks. The structured promotion of these practices—referred to earlier as “practices in place”—appear to have inhibited the broader scaffolded development of learning via CMC.



## **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have offered further interpretive analysis of the study's four findings in three main categories. The first category explored how local contextual factors influence CMC practice. I discussed the formation and development of student CMC practices at the semi-urban campus setting where this project was set. Analysis in the second category framed student CMC practices in the context of culturally-rooted ideas and values about individual and group communication in Japanese society. The messaging application, LINE, was shown to have design characteristics that afford certain types of communication practices valued among its Japanese users. A final analytical category framed the exploration of four barriers to deeper cross-cultural engagement via CMC at the research site. I identified interrelated institutional, faculty, curricular, and physical barriers to the development of deeper cross-cultural engagement via CMC. In the next, final chapter of this thesis, I offer conclusions that draw upon my study's main findings and the interpretive analysis presented above.

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusions**

This thesis has explored the multilingual CMC practices of undergraduate students of English as a Foreign Language at a medium-sized, private university in central Japan. This final chapter draws conclusions from my study's findings and subsequent analysis related to its four main research questions. My conclusions are divided into three categories: (a) CMC Practices and Perceptions in Flux (b) From Mobile CMC Fluency to Symbolic Competence; and (c) Innovations in Practice. Diagrams which show the logical consistency between my research questions, findings, analytic categories, and these conclusion categories are provided in Appendix Eight and Appendix Nine of this thesis.

Below, I discuss my conclusions in the aforementioned categories and offer relevant recommendations for English language educators and curriculum planners. In addition, I offer some comparative analysis related to affordances for teaching and learning available at the new campus where the department under consideration here moved in 2018. I then discuss areas for further research as well as the limitations of this study. Finally, I offer some final reflections on this thesis and its contributions to knowledge.

### **CMC Practices and Perceptions in Flux**

This study's first research question asked: "What types of CMC practices do students at the research site engage in, and how do these connect to culturally

and historically-rooted discourses?” In response to this question, I found that students engage in a wide variety of CMC practices in Japanese and English. These practices mostly centered around the use of applications on their smartphones. Local CMC practices mirrored the reported and observable practices of youth across Japan in the same age bracket, and affirmed a broader societal discourse of keitai nativity—a highly multimodal fluency with mobile CMC. For a majority of the student participants, these practices were relatively new—differing significantly from their digital media communication practices in high school.

This study’s second research question asked: “How do students perceive their native and foreign CMC practices?” Answering this question, my data showed that students see ICT as a practical means of gathering information and communicating with both local and non-local individuals and in groups in a variety of contexts. I found that students value ease of use, and different tools and platforms for different linguistic and social purposes because they generally recognize the affordances and limitations of the technologies they use.

A conclusion that follows from my first and second findings is that CMC practice is shaped significantly by local socio-material arrangements. That is, local geography, the built environment, the designed digital architecture of available media tools, as well as users’ pragmatic (cultural) communicative norms all shape CMC practice. These are factors that teachers and curriculum planners should understand and take advantage of when thinking about how they can

affect communication practice at university. Since implicit learning through peer interaction was shown to drive the development of CMC fluency, it also makes sense that educators leverage students' existing and emergent practices for curricular goals and skill development.

For example, if there are online resources that educators want students to access regularly, or if there are other specific types of CMC practices that educators want students to engage in, teachers and administrators should better utilize the physical space of the university campus to encourage access to such resources and the development of desired practices via familiar local and localized CMC platforms such as LINE, Twitter, and Facebook.

Further, given the myriad cross-cohort interactions that take place in Japanese universities via clubs, circles, student government, and other associations such as those between teaching assistants and students, policies and curricular reforms aimed at *sempai* (先輩、seniors) in leadership positions might be able to affect positive change in CMC practice among the student population.

Earlier research conducted at the same research site that focused on a language acquisition practice called “extensive reading” (ER) showed the effectiveness of pairing faculty and administrative support with the implicit peer-learning that naturally develops among students in foreign language learning communities of practice (Hourdequin, 2011, 2013a). These studies showed that, with guidance, university-level Japanese language learners can develop

effective literacy practices, in this case around foreign language extensive reading.

### **From mobile CMC fluency to symbolic competence**

This study's third research question asked, "To what extent can students' multilingual CMC practices be seen to contribute to the formation of symbolic competence?" In relation to this question I found that students showed significant recognition of the constraints and affordances inherent to CMC in general, and to various specific platforms. A majority of students, however, failed to exhibit a high degree of media literacy, and very few structured opportunities for the development of symbolic competence were apparent. That is, while students' CMC practices exhibited some degree of what Fieldhouse and Nicholas (2008) terms "information savvy," most appeared to lack deeper media and information literacies. In particular, students showed a lack of awareness about issues such as the authorship, authorial intent, audience, and purposes of digital (and print) messages. Further, despite evidence that peers provide each other with guidance in the use of CMC platforms, and acceptable practices on these platforms, this guidance does not appear to lead to the development of broadly applicable media literacy or symbolic competence.

As a foundational step to the development of symbolic competence, I argue that students of English as a foreign language need to develop at least a basic understanding of Western media and digital literacy education principles, with

particular focus on practices of interpreting media in various modes for authorial intent, audience, and purpose. Without such skills, communicative and symbolic competence developed for face to face interactions does not seem likely to carry over to digitally-mediated modalities because of the different ways that these are designed to convey information.

Further, my data showed that despite their technical fluency with Japanese CMC, students tend to be relatively passive participants in the online intercultural “affinity spaces” they reported inhabiting. And thus, a pedagogical implication from my first finding is that foreign language educators should leverage students’ existing CMC fluency and their access to a wide variety of online communities to help scaffold the development of symbolic competence.

Building on my first conclusion above, here I thus conclude that EFL students should be guided to practice media literacy in the earliest possible stages of their university careers. Considerable attention appears to be placed on “acquisition” of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), without recognition of the role that certain types of English media practices play in real world places and online spaces.

In language education that focuses on the simple acquisition of vocabulary and transactional competences, students are not adequately prepared for real-world interactions in our digitally-mediated world. As Johnson, et al., (2015) note:

. . . Language programs suffer when language itself is abstracted out of cultural and academic contexts to be taught as a system for the everyday exchange of interpersonal information. Tourist-like competences will serve neither learners who need to study and live abroad nor those who interact with international friends and fellow students in digital spaces. (p. 106)

As I stated earlier, a move away from the concept of language “acquisition” to a “participation metaphor” (Swain & Deters, 2007) allows for more purposeful pedagogical considerations. It calls upon educators to consider questions about what communities students are preparing to participate in, and how this participation will take place in the future. It is clear that CMC in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is increasingly multimodal, thus requiring new cross-cultural communication skills and media literacy practices.

## **Innovations in Practice**

The fourth research question of this thesis asked, “To what extent are pedagogical practices and affordances at the research site utilized to enhance students’ critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors via CMC?” In answer to this question, I found that though ICT infrastructure and existing student CMC practices at the research site offer promise for facilitating student engagement with foreign peers and texts, social learning affordances are underused.

My conclusions related to this finding also draw upon my first finding about student CMC practices. In that finding, I noted that students use different CMC platforms for different purposes and for different people. For example, there appeared to be a tendency for students to use Facebook for the maintenance of ‘weak ties’ with interlocutors residing abroad, and LINE for ‘strong ties’ in their local *uchi* or in-group. My findings also point to the fact that the interaction and learning—the “semiotic work”—that takes place across digital platforms among students and with their teachers at the research site is inherently dialogic and multimodal, involving a mix of textual and graphic (image) information, including video. But I argue that the cross-cultural sharing of information and emotion by multilinguals cannot in its own right lead to the development of symbolic competence in a foreign language. It can lead to greater fluency and familiarity, but symbolic competence implies higher order thinking skills and the ability to develop deep discursive understanding that allows language users to re-contextualize and play with forms and meanings in the foreign language as well as in their native tongue.

Given this argument and the aforementioned findings, I thus conclude that local CMC tools—with their East Asian cultural logics of intimacy and in-group communication—may lend themselves to positive outcomes such as the development of closer student-teacher relationships, and the development and maintenance of group cohesion; but for CMC practices on such platforms to effectively lead towards the development of symbolic competence, educators



need to work with students to co-construct rich, dialogic, teacher and peer-mediated “channels” of communication.

I use the term mediated “channels” here to indicate CMC practice that uses existing media in ways that scaffold critical literacy and the development of symbolic competence. Just as foreign language educators have traditionally drawn upon the field of cross-cultural pragmatics to focus attention on the cultural logics of various types of face-to-face interaction, it now seems essential that students of foreign languages develop an understanding of how cultural communication practices function across various digital media platforms in what Gee (2004, 2009) terms “affinity spaces” and Kramsch (2009), terms “third places.”

Rather than focus on the metaphors of affinity “spaces” or virtual “places,” however, my research has centered upon on common types of localized CMC “platform practices,” thus highlighting how students’ communication is shaped by the platforms they interact through in specific contexts. Like geography and physical infrastructure in the offline world, CMC platforms afford and delimit a range of texts and interlocutors that students can interact with, and they shape how these interactions take place. Students, however, lack awareness about ways that platforms such as LINE, for example, create affordances for intimate in-group communication, and give prominence to visual modes of communication such as “stickers”, gifs, and short videos, whereas other platforms such Facebook and Twitter may orient users more towards the

performative maintenance of “weak ties” in expanding social networks. Email, on the other hand is a relatively unfamiliar way of communicating for the current generation of Japanese college students, despite its continuing function as an “intimate” communication channel in many English-speaking cultural contexts. Such generalizations about different platforms though are made amidst an ever-shifting social media landscape, however, and the development of symbolic competence requires media literacy and awareness of CMC practice and “cultures of use” that are dynamic by nature.

A recommendation in this area is that English educators in Japanese higher education contexts approach their use of CMC with students for the development of symbolic competence in two ways: via curricular implementations of multiliteracies pedagogy, and through the development of teacher-mediated channels for intercultural exchange to help students compare practices with distant “others” and share ways of understanding the various media that saturate their lives. Below, I further explore each of these recommendations in turn with specific recommendations for implementation in Japanese higher education contexts.

### **Multiliteracies pedagogy**

Multiliteracies pedagogy (The New London Group, 1996; Cope and Kalantzis, 2009, 2015) is the first approach I recommend for EFL contexts in Japanese higher education. This pedagogy points to some valuable ways to develop students’ symbolic competence by creating affordances for students to reflect upon, recontextualize, and remix the media they interact with on a regular basis.

This can be done in both face-to-face and computer-mediated spaces, or through a combination of both in what are referred to as “blended learning” environments. In explicating “the How of Multiliteracies pedagogy,” the New London Group (1996) demarcate four distinct categories of pedagogical practice: “situated practice” is a phase whereby students immerse themselves in discourses and practices familiar to their own lifeworlds; “overt instruction” is a conceptualizing phase in which explicit language for discussing discourses, designs, and practices is introduced; this stage is followed by “critical framing” in which students are asked to view various designs of meaning in cultural context—that is to analyze the people and purposes at work in various communicative practices; finally, “transformed practice” is a stage that encourages students to apply their new meanings to real-world contexts (pp. 86 - 88).

Pedagogical practices associated with multiliteracies pedagogy would appear to contribute to the development of symbolic competence by focusing on the connection between form and meaning, and the multiplicity of productive and interpretive practices among different groups of people in relation to various types of texts. Still, only a few authors (e.g. Lopez-Sanchez, 2009; Warner, 2011) have connected the pedagogical goal of symbolic competence in the field of applied linguistics to multiliteracies pedagogy.

In the extant literature on higher education foreign language curricular innovation in Japan, I have found only one report that documents the use of

multiliteracies pedagogy as a vehicle for learner development that goes beyond language acquisition goals to address issues of media literacy and multimodal practice. This report (Johnson, et al., 2015), effectively outlines how multiliteracies pedagogy was used as a basis for reforming an elite private university's freshman English course for the development of what they term "sophisticated competence"— a term that is left undefined, but which appears to parallel what is meant here by "symbolic competence." The report—a conference proceedings paper from Japan's top language teaching conference—is, however, limited in its scope and ability to describe contextual factors affecting program implementation. Still, if case studies such as this one are replicated and gain prominence in Japan's relatively small foreign language teaching community, they have the potential to serve as what Bamber, Trowler, Saunders, and Knight (2009) call "practice-based exemplars" (p. 274).

The first phase of multiliteracies pedagogy, "situated practice," means "experiencing the known" and "experiencing the new" (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, pp. 18-19). With a focus on CMC practices, this could mean, for example reflexive discussion about how communication practices vary across cultures and platforms, with attention to genre practices. A recent multiliteracies perspective on genres sees these as "how things get done through language, and where the cultural system and the lexicogrammatical resources intersect . . ." (Lopez-Sanchez, 2016, p. 71). This phase would allow students, for example, to rediscover the types of texts and images they encounter and

share. They could explore the variety of these discourses and compare the values and connotations that are conveyed in different way via various modes.

Images from Japanese culture and from English-language global popular culture could then be the subject of “overt instruction” and conceptualization—in this case through an exploration of the semiotic work done by selected images—before students engage in the “critical framing” that allows them to see various communication discourses and modes in their cultural contexts (Cope and Kalantzis, 2015, pp. 19-22). Students could, for example, be asked to connect imagery to discourses in societies they have studied or gained familiarity with. What is termed “Transformed Practice” in the original multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996), would here form a final creative phase that asks students to “remix” what they have learned for use in other modes and/or cultural contexts. This could happen through participation in online “affinity spaces” identified as appropriate by educators. Tasks could be as simple as commenting on a video or website comment board, or more involved, such as making and uploading videos or other content to specific sites. Both types of activities could require a careful study of various practices that could be applied through participation.

### **Appropriating local media as “texts”**

Kumagai and Iwasaki (2015) use the term “critical multiliteracies” to refer to explorations of intertextuality and values across communication modes, and argue that this type of work can begin with language learners even at the beginner level. Japanese society is, in fact, infused with multilingual media texts

that point to symbolic complexity ripe for consideration and critical analysis in the Japanese language classroom. It is common for media messages—like the job recruitment poster pictured in Figure 7.1 from a bulletin board on campus—to include a host of imagery alongside a mixture of Japanese and Roman scripts. The poster in the example (Figure 7.1) is layered with multilingual, multimodal, and multicultural codes for various purposes, and can be seen to draw upon a mixture of Japanese and English connotations directed towards multi-literate students, who, if interested can use the QR code readers on their mobile devices to access more information on the web (QR codes are printed at the bottom right).

**BONDS INC.**

# 成功と失敗の分岐点

楽しんで働くんじゃない、楽しいから働くんだ！！  
その思考の違いで、人生は「成功」にも「失敗」にも変わる

Failure Success

楽しい、嬉しい、おもしろい、そう感じられた脳だけが「成功」していく  
そんな体験してみませんか？

**★インターン生募集★**

■募集人材 WEB アプリの法人営業マン  
■仕事内容 電話でアポイントを取り、クロージングへ同行して頂きます  
■月給 1,000円 交通費別途支給、成果報酬あり（1件3,000円～10,000円）  
■就業時間 月～金の9:00～17:00の間で1日2～3時間程度からでOK、週3日以内  
大学の授業や試験、ゼミなどのスケジュールは最大限に考慮します  
■その他 男女不問、経験不問、最寄駅「音羽町駅」徒歩3分  
未経験者歓迎、社長直下、新規事業立ち上げ、ベンチャー企業のノウハウが身につく、  
長期インターン生雇用により試用期間（半年）を過ぎた場合は正社員採用制度あり  
今回募集の勤務地につきましては、  
静岡市葵区音羽町4-1-1/レシオン音羽301の弊社事務所となります  
ご質問や詳細などは直接、担当の山梨までお気軽にお問い合わせください  
山梨 / 080-7978-1077

**★会社情報★**

■会社名 株式会社 Bonds  
■会社住所 静岡市葵区御幸町11-8  
■電話番号 054-265-9077  
■事業内容 アプリケーション事業  
WEB制作事業  
モデルキャスティング事業  
■WEBサイト <http://www.bonds-kizuna.com>  
WEBサービスを通じて、  
企業やお店を明るく笑顔へ変えていくお手伝い  
アプリの開発、WEBデザインなど様々なことをサポートいたします！！  
職業は自分のスキルを Bonds と一緒に目指しましょう！  
「しょうがなく」を「やりがい」に、「やめたい」を「楽しい」に

システムエンジニア・WEBデザイナー同時募集！！

Figure 8.1. Work recruitment poster on a bulletin board outside the campus' Career Support Center. March, 2018. Photo by the author.

Appropriating media such as this (and linked web content) as multilingual and multimodal classroom texts is one promising avenue towards helping students develop greater symbolic competence. Such texts are ripe for entry-level discourse analysis through discussions about culturally-constructed

communicative practices, purposes, and the denotations and connotations of text and imagery for different audiences. The poster pictured above, for example, includes all three Japanese scripts (*hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*) along with English words, and a variety of images. Discussions about how meaning is “carried” by the different linguistic and non-linguistic elements of such material for different audiences might offer one path to deepening students’ symbolic competence.

At higher levels, students might encounter and analyze “native” and “Western” texts which have essentialized characterizations of “Japaneseness.” For example, orientalist text could be viewed alongside *nihonjinron* texts and contextualized according to their intended (target) audiences and purposes, thus helping students gain critical perspective on perceptions of culture, language systems, and discursive practices in various genres and speech communities.

### **Curricular implementation**

From a curricular perspective, my findings point to a need for universities to create affordances for students to reflect and build upon their existing media literacies and CMC practices while expanding their awareness of CMC practices common in other contexts and cultures. For a multiliteracies curriculum that sought to raise awareness about the influence of CMC practices on meaning making, the first stage of “experiencing the known” could begin early in students’ first year of university. For example, in their first-year seminars students could be asked to reflect upon their evolving Japanese language CMC

practices and consider what these practices say about their values and culture. Later, “conceptualizing” could form a curricular component in various classes which would seek language in Japanese and English that makes meaning out of CMC practice.

This final stage would not need to entail only translating Western media literacy principles into Japanese. On the contrary, a Japanese university foreign language curriculum informed by multiliteracies pedagogy would have access to rich literary and cultural traditions that have a long history of multimodal communication via gestural, verbal, visual, spatial, and aural forms, and, a tradition of intertextuality (Darling-Wolf, 2000).

### **Teacher-mediated peer-to-peer CMC channels**

Lam (2000, 2013), Gee (2011, 2012), and many others have shown how online spaces offer unique affordances for language learning. These spaces have the potential to afford learners real world opportunities to practice 21<sup>st</sup> century “life skills” with a certain degree of autonomy and anonymity. Online spaces can enable learners to participate in discourse communities and thus discursive practices that involve trying on new identities, or “L2 selves” (Dornyei, 2009). In the language of communities of practice theory, such practices could be considered part of a process of “legitimate peripheral participation”—whereby newcomers to a community begin to internalize the language of that community with which they begin to identify (Lave & Wenger, 1991).



Still, it is natural to conclude that learners need guidance as to *which* online communities they might begin to participate in, *how* they might do so, and to *what ends*. As Kramsch and Hua (2016) note:

many educators are concerned that online environments like Facebook or Instagram foster a culture of narcissism and personal display that is not conducive to the development of any deep communicative competence. Rather than connect people, such environments risk isolating them in communities of like - minded peers, makes them vulnerable to electronic surveillance, and makes them addicted to peer approbation and peer pressure. The challenge for ELT professionals is to balance these concerns with the evident opportunities for learning and personal development which online communication offers (p. 45).

Pedagogical practice that involves the reflexivity called for by multiliteracies pedagogy mentioned above points to one way for educators to encourage students to think critically about the performative discourses alluded to here. But amidst youth culture that researchers such as Takahashi (2014) characterize as “Always on and Connected” it seems naïve to think that classroom-based work alone will lead to significant gains in symbolic competence. Indeed, my own findings indicate that it is peers more than instructors who exert the strongest influence on the formation of students’ CMC practices.

One approach to this challenge which has a relatively long history in foreign language education is the use of CMC for teacher-mediated peer-to-peer

language and cultural exchanges. These have been used as a means to encourage deep language and intercultural learning for many years, but authors such as Kramsch & Thorne (2002) have shown the difficulty of creating opportunities for deep intercultural learning in structured CMC-only settings. That is, even highly structured text or video-based peer interaction between interlocutors of different cultures can lead to confusion, misinterpretation, and fractured dialogue.

Negotiations of meaning are a key component in Lave and Wenger's (1991) original formulation of the concept of communities of practice, placing emphasis on the importance of real-world opportunities for exchanges of tacit knowledge. Furstenberg et al. (2001) affirm such negotiations as essential for cultural literacy, which must be "an ongoing dynamic process of negotiating meaning and understanding differences of perspective" (p. 56). Asia-based, case studies such as those by Chase (2008) and Azuma (2010) point to the significant potential of peer-to-peer CMC exchanges for intercultural learning, but these studies have not taken local CMC practice as a starting point for constructing exchanges, nor have they attempted to approach the type of critical literacy issues important to the development of symbolic competence. And while tele-collaborative projects such as *cultura*, *etwinning*, and *etandem* have revealed the vast potential inherent in CMC for intercultural exchange (see, e.g., O'Rourke, 2007), few studies have focused directly on the challenges and benefits of such exchanges amidst Japan's unique sociocultural context.

My research indicates that students at the research site are not currently engaged in any teacher-mediated exchanges with foreign interlocutors on a regular basis. Further, considerations of CMC practices in English-speaking cultures are not part of the department's curriculum.

Thus, a final conclusion that I draw from my research is that EFL learners in Japan would benefit from rigorously planned and carefully implemented opportunities for teacher-mediated peer-to-peer CMC interaction with interlocutors from the target culture. The specifics of how such exchanges could be designed and incorporated at the research site are beyond the scope of this thesis, but suffice to say that such opportunities, if rigorously implemented, would seem likely to help fill a gap in student knowledge about the CMC practices that inform their own digital communications, and those of English language users in other locales.

## **A New Location and New Learning Spaces**

As noted in Chapter Two, the Faculty of Foreign Studies within which this study was set relocated to a newly built campus nearby in April of 2018. As plans of the relocation were not known throughout most of the research period, this thesis did not set out to engage in a comprehensive comparison between the location where data was collected and the new campus. However, the move to the new campus highlighted the critical importance of the built environment and well-designed learning spaces for teaching and learning. This sparked reflection on the limitations of the old campus in comparison with opportunities at the new

one. In Chapter Seven, I also discussed the research site's spatial limitations for teaching and learning as one of four barriers to the development of symbolic competence via CMC. Here, as a means to pointing to additional areas for further research, I consider some of the affordances for teaching and learning at the new campus.

Though it is a preliminary study related to a different research project that was completed only a few weeks after the move to the new campus, Hourdequin, Tani, Bando, and Ponvarut (2018) offered some comparative analysis between the learning space resources in the Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC) on the old campus and the new spatial affordances of the new campus such as the common pool resources of a learning commons near the library. The authors concluded that the limited learning space resources on the old campus (where this research project was set) encouraged “departmental entrenchment,” whereas the spaces available at the new campus offer valuable opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration (p.25). Below, I will offer some more detailed analysis of the potential of the new learning spaces by looking at several of these in comparison with those on the campus that was the main setting for my study.

The new campus brings together seven faculties (including a graduate school) from the old campus and another nearby campus that was closed as part of the move. This campus is located seven minutes on foot from a Japan Railways (JR) train station on the Tōkaidō (東海道, east coast road) line—the main rail

artery that unites the Kanto region of Japan (named after the historical trade route). The city center is a six-minute train ride away in one direction; a 33-minute ride in the other direction brings one to a smaller city, which is nonetheless one of the prefecture's major industrial hubs. A train stop on the city's light railway network is located one minute's walk from the nearby JR station. These train lines serve many small towns between and beyond the abovementioned locations, and thus the new campus is significantly more accessible than the previous one which required an additional 20 to 30 minutes by bus (including transfer time) to access via public transportation. The new campus is also situated along a busy automobile thoroughfare that leads to and from the city center in parallel to the Tōkaidō train line, making it also easily accessible by bicycle and motorbike for students, and by car for faculty and visitors (for whom parking is available).

With four large inter-connected six-story buildings, the new campus offers a more horizontal layout with a variety of useful spaces for teaching and learning, many of which provide affordances for hybrid learning suitable to a mixture of face-to-face interaction with CMC.

ICT infrastructure and support on the new campus as a whole has improved as well. Whereas ICT operations on the previous campus were the responsibility of one staff person, the new campus has a dedicated staff of three technicians who work from an IT help-desk to support students and faculty. The wi-fi network that exists on the new campus is more stable than that on the old

campus, allowing students to easily access the internet for free anywhere on campus. However, it is worth noting that in contrast to the open the wi-fi network at the campus where this study was situated, the wi-fi network on the new campus requires students to log in with their student IDs, which means their browsing and use of the internet is more open to central surveillance. How this might affect student CMC practices and perceptions in comparison to the old campus' more open network is an important an interesting question, but it is one that was not investigated in this thesis.

### **A New Foreign Language Study Support Center**

The Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC, fig. 8.2 below) at the new campus has been slightly reduced in size, and the scope of the types of practices it supports has changed significantly. As noted in Chapter Two and outlined in previous research (Hourdequin, 2011, 2013a), the FLSSC at the research site had once been the center for a community of practice around foreign (English) language extensive reading. As I explained in Chapter Two, though this was perceived by several senior faculty members in the Department of British and American Studies as a highly effective use of the FLSSC, the administration and senior faculty members in other departments pushed for the

center's resources to be shared more openly with the broader university community.



*Figure 8.2.* The Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC) at the new campus. February, 18<sup>th</sup> 2019. Photograph by the author.

The design of the FLSSC on the new campus thus dedicates much less space and far fewer resources to learning in situ. Instead, the center's design now emphasizes consultation and support. Compared to the facility on the old campus, the FLSSC's design can be seen to have been transformed in three important ways.

First, and most prominently, the new FLSSC is literally open to the entire university community. At the campus that constituted the main research site for this project, the FLSSC had two doors to the hallway along a long windowed wall that was plastered with posters and announcements. This made it virtually translucent, and thus it was very difficult to ascertain who was inside at any

given time. This design created physical and psychological barriers to entry for students not familiar with the community of learners who gathered at the FLSSC. On the new campus, however, there is no wall at the FLSSC's entrance. Instead, the entrance is formed by an opening that spans its entire width (see Figure 8.3, below). This creates a more open and accessible space. Students coming or going from the library and learning commons space (discussed below) can easily see and hear who is inside the FLSSC, and may be enticed to enter by a friendly face or well-placed announcement on one of the message boards in the entrance area.



*Figure 8.3.* A view of the new Foreign Language Study Support Center (FLSSC). February, 18<sup>th</sup> 2019. Photograph by the author.

Second, the FLSSC's new design no longer supports in situ language learning practices such as extensive reading, extensive listening, and conversation practice. Graded readers, audio-books, and other support resources for the practice of extensive reading that I discussed in Chapter Two have been completely removed from the FLSSC, and are in the process of being reallocated to the university library. The center does contain a small library of support materials related to language proficiency tests such as TOEIC and



TOEFL, and information on study abroad opportunities, language exchanges, and local foreign language-related events. Notably, however, these resources are *about* language study, rather than materials *for* language learning practice. Also, whereas the FLSSC on the campus that constituted the primary research site contained many tables, chairs, and benches where students would gather to read, chat, and study, the new FLSSC has only one four-person table and several cubicle-like areas for one-to-one consultations. Figure 8.4 below shows a view of the inside of the FLSSC. In the foreground is the administrator's desk, and above that in the image is the aforementioned four-person table.



*Figure 8.4.* A view of the new Foreign Language Study Support Center from just inside the entrance. Photograph by the author.

A final significant change is that the FLSSC no longer contains any ICT resources except for the computer used by the staff-person who works there.

Whereas the previous site of the FLSSC had a row of seven computers which were used occasionally by students for word processing or web research, the new center has ceded computing resources to large computer labs located elsewhere on campus. However, the addition of a new learning commons, which I discuss next, may signal the university's recognition of larger importance of mobile ICT to students, and to contemporary 'bring-your-own-device' (BYOD) approaches to teaching and learning.

### **A new learning commons**

The most significant change to the learning environment at the new campus is an expansive learning commons space in front of the new campus' main library (Figures 8.5 - 8.8, below). In a document that makes the case for the importance of such spaces in the development of learners' 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, the Ontario School Library Association (2010) defines the idea of a learning commons as:

. . . a flexible and responsive approach to helping schools focus on learning collaboratively. It expands the learning experience, taking students and educators into virtual spaces beyond the walls of a school. Within a Learning Commons, new relationships are formed between learners, new technologies are realized and utilized, and both students and educators prepare for the future as they learn new ways to learn. (p. 3)

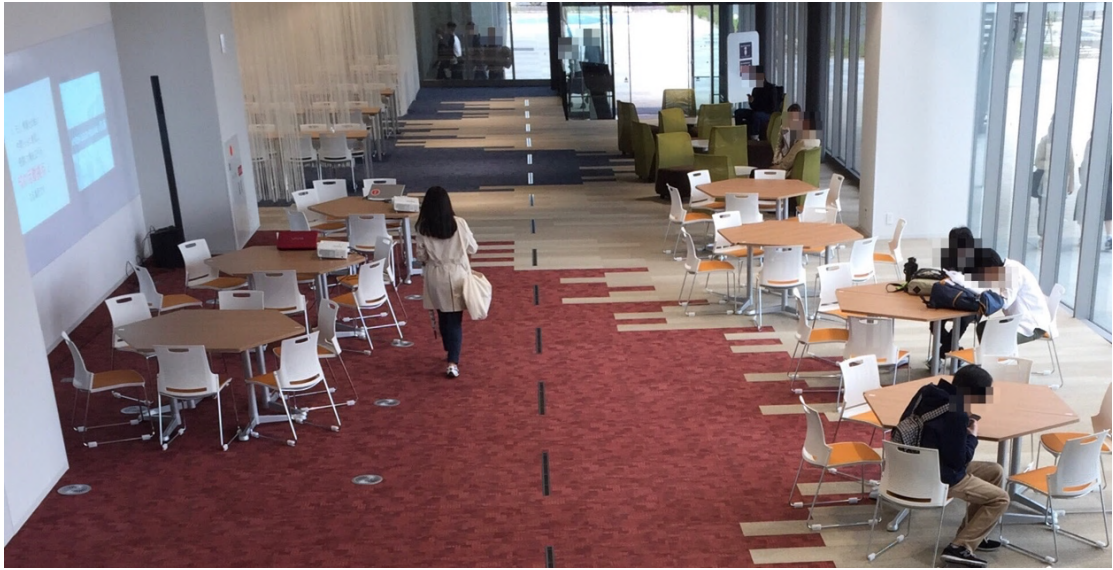
The design of the new learning commons—which is called “Knowledge Square”—appears to align with contemporary higher educational facility

design standards. For example, it's spatial-material features mirror many of those described in Ellis and Goodyear (2018). The learning commons is constituted by three open and semi-open areas for collaboration and group study. Two of the collaborative work spaces (Figures 8.5 and 8.6, below) in Knowledge Square are equipped with easily movable hexagonal tables, portable white boards, and—in one of these spaces—a large dry-erase whitewall. The tables and white boards can be reserved by teachers, students, or community members at the library's circulation desk for group study, class and information sessions, or other events. A third group study area contains six separate spaces partitioned by string curtains (Figure 8.7). These spaces contain rectangular tables set in a long horizontal configuration with either an analogue or digital white board at one end. Food and drink are prohibited in the entire learning commons, and these spaces are designed for group project work, presentations, and other types of digitally-enhanced and/or traditional learning.



*Figure 8.5.* One of three open learning spaces designated for group study at the new campus' learning commons. April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Photo courtesy of the university library. Used with permission.





*Figure 8.6.* A second learning space at the learning commons on the new campus. April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Photo courtesy of the university library. Used with permission.



*Figure 8.7.* The group study area in the learning commons. July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Photo courtesy of the university library. Used with permission.

In the foreground, tables have been reconfigured for an interactive learning session involving group work and digital whiteboards. A small group of students can be seen in the background in a curtain-enclosed group study area. In Figure

8.8 below, one of these group study areas is being reconfigured by an instructor for a learning session in which groups of students will use laptop computers.



*Figure 8.8.* One of the group study areas in the learning commons at the research site being reconfigured for learning via ICT. Photo courtesy of the university library. Used with permission.

Students and teachers are still getting used to new spaces such as the learning commons and the reconfigured FLSSC, and various practices and structures are still being trialed by the library which manages the space. The Department of British and American Studies—within which this study was centered—has yet to develop any systematic or curricular plans for structuring students' use of the new learning spaces, but recently a proposal has been put forth for the purchase of digital subscriptions that would give students in the department access to extensive reading e-books via their smartphones. If this proposal is adopted, it remains unclear to what degree these new spatial resources might be used to encourage the positive benefits of the face-to-face extensive reading

community of practice that once existed in the old campus' FLSSC (discussed in Hourdequin, 2011, and Hourdequin, 2013a).

## **Areas for Further Research**

More research is needed to paint a richer picture of Japan's diverse landscape of student CMC practices in higher education settings. As I explained in my review of the literature, previous studies have offered little information about Japanese students' existing CMC practices, and how these are mediated by various sociocultural and material constraints in specific institutional contexts. Research has already shown media literacy education to be seriously lacking at the primary and secondary level in Japan (see, e.g. Suzuki, 2010); however, more studies are needed that focus on higher educational contexts and explore pedagogical interventions and curricular reforms that combine foreign language learning with the study of CMC practice. Such studies could further demonstrate how foreign language learners can develop critical literacies that can lead to improvements in symbolic competence.

In addition, more research is needed that explores the use of new types of learning spaces in Japanese higher educational contexts. As I discussed above, the relocation of the department within which most of the data for this thesis was collected to a new campus in 2018 brought into stark relief the importance of designed learning spaces, or lack thereof, in the development of CMC practices.

In Ellis and Goodyear's (2018) recent book entitled *Spaces of Teaching and Learning*, several authors offer useful perspectives on the interplay between learning spaces, the artefacts they contain, and the people who inhabit these spaces. In that volume, Mulcahy (2018) argues that “. . . space is an under-acknowledged and under-theorised concept when attempting to understand how learning spaces work and the work they do” (p.15). Various perspectives on university spaces are offered that attempt to fill this gap. Temple (2018), for example, uses common pool resource (CPR) theory to explore how university spaces are transformed into places. As noted in Chapter Seven, Ravelli (2018) employs a social-semiotic approach in order to read university learning spaces as texts by looking at them in terms of representational, interactional, and organizational meanings.

These, along with the other university-based studies in Ellis and Goodyear (2018) point to some of unique ways that learning spaces and the practices they afford can be usefully explored as a path to better outcomes and new competences. However, a very limited amount of research of this type has been conducted in Japanese contexts. Notable exceptions exist—such as an ongoing ethnographic research project at Kanda University of International Studies (Burke, Kushida, Lyon, Mynard, Sampson, & Taw, 2018) which is currently exploring how students use that university's self-access learning center—but much more research remains to be done in this vein. At the new campus where I currently reside, I would like to make contributions to this type of research as well by exploring how new learning spaces described above can

be used in conjunction with CMC to develop the symbolic competence of foreign language learners.

## **Limitations of This Study**

As with any case study, there are limitations to the claims made herein that are important to acknowledge. As I discussed in Chapter Four, I have attempted to mitigate this risk by conforming to Tracy's (2010) "big tent criteria for excellent qualitative research" (p. 839). Another way I have attempted to mitigate this subjectivity is be transparently explicating my own positionality within the research site. As previously mentioned, because I only collected data on *student* CMC practices, it remains unclear how much influence instructors and others at the research site have on the way these practices develop. My research questions did not ask about how instructors and others at the research site influence student CMC practices, but if they had, and had I been able to collect data on this at the research site, a richer picture of institutional practices might have emerged. Though this picture of instructors' ICT practices does not fully emerge, the description of my own positionality at the research site and the difficulty in accessing certain types of data as an insider offers something in return that future researchers undertaking insider research in Japanese higher education contexts might be able to avoid through different methodological choices.

Finally, the fact that this study took place over the course of six years, amidst the continuing rapid development of mobile ICT hardware and software has made students' CMC practices something of a moving target. For example, as



mentioned above, the image-based blogging platform Instagram has been rapidly growing in popularity over the course of this study. Because I supplemented the narrative frame data I collected over a limited time period with longer-term field notes and critical incident reports, I have been able to mitigate this limitation to some degree, but this limitation to the student empirical data is nevertheless important to acknowledge.

## **Contribution to Knowledge**

This study contributes to knowledge about contemporary Japanese EFL students' CMC practices in higher education institutional settings. It narrates a detailed picture of student CMC practices in a Japanese university in light of socio-material factors influenced by cultural-historical activity. It also offers unique interpretive analysis that draws upon work from media studies, Japan studies, and educational research on literacy. As CMC tools continue to evolve, so do the practices of foreign language learners who use these tools to interact with each other and with a variety of multimodal "texts" and foreign interlocutors. This thesis has demonstrated that a close reading of students' CMC practices in a specific institutional context can uncover ways that educators might respond more effectively to learners' educational needs.

This thesis also makes significant conceptual contributions. First, the concept it offers of "perceived practice" highlights the value of narrating practices in intercultural contexts using local linguistic and cultural concepts that would be understandable to the participants themselves. Doing so has the potential to

enrich English-language academic discourses with concepts that extend understanding of the variety of “cultures of use” that exist in different locales.

The second concept of practice that I put forward is a notion of “platform practices.” Platform practices are the ways that individuals or groups of people use different CMC platforms vis-à-vis those platforms’ technological characteristics and design features. In Chapter Seven, an example of this was given via the popular social networking application, LINE. As I explained previously, design characteristics of that platform can be seen to give prominence to visual modes of communication, intimately dialogic interactions, and collectivist (group) interaction and coordination. Because of what Kress (2003) calls the “move to the screen” that continues to progress in Japanese higher education, I argue that awareness about such platform characteristics and platform practices are now essential to foreign language education at the tertiary level (p.1).

Finally, the use of narrative frames to collect qualitative data in participants’ native language of Japanese represents a methodological contribution to research on CMC practice. As noted in my review of literature in the field, few case studies exist that examine CMC practice at Japanese universities, and still fewer that offer rich ‘insider’ accounts. The use of narrative frames to uncover student practices and perceptions, combined with my description of the research site in historical context thus provides a valuable template for future higher education institutional studies of CMC practice.

## Final Reflections

As discussed in Chapter Four, the insider research of this quasi-ethnographic case study has attempted to keep “four promises” that characterize postcritical ethnography: “giving voice, uncovering power, identifying agency, and connecting analysis to cultural critique” (Guzenhauser, 2004, p. 77). I believe these promises have been kept by virtue of long-term participant observation and data collected, interpreted, synthesized, and presented in a way that allowed for an authentic narration of participants’ CMC practices and perceptions. I have thus aimed to provide a close account of student practices while acknowledging their liminal position within Japanese society and within a global media landscape dominated by English.

I have also sought to keep two additional promises which Guzenhauser (2004) identifies: self-reflexivity and non-exploitation (pp. 84 – 90). In Chapter One, I took one step toward “self-reflexivity” by articulating three assumptions about higher education that I brought to this project. In relation to the promise of “non-exploitation,” in addition to the steps I took to design and implement ethically sound research (described in Chapter Four), I have drawn upon the work of many Japanese and Japan-based scholars throughout this work in order to avoid the exploitation of a potentially hegemonic monolingual academic discourse.

Also related to the promise of “non-exploitation,” I have remained ever-aware of my privileged position as a “native” English-speaking teacher in a Japanese

higher education institutional context. However, I also believe that this position, combined with knowledge I have developed over many years about Japanese language and culture has allowed me to offer a unique and meaningful account of the practices I observed, interpreted, and analyzed. That is, I think I was able to see and portray CMC practices at the research site as both foreign and familiar.

It is my hope that this thesis thus serves as an authentic account that advances knowledge about CMC practice and digital literacies in cultural-historical context. As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Seven, Japan has long and highly developed traditions of literacy practice that have, in a sense, always been “multimodal.” In the past several decades, however, amidst what Mizumura (2015) calls “the age of English,” and the accelerating adoption of ICT in Japanese educational contexts, the development of symbolic competence seems more essential than ever.

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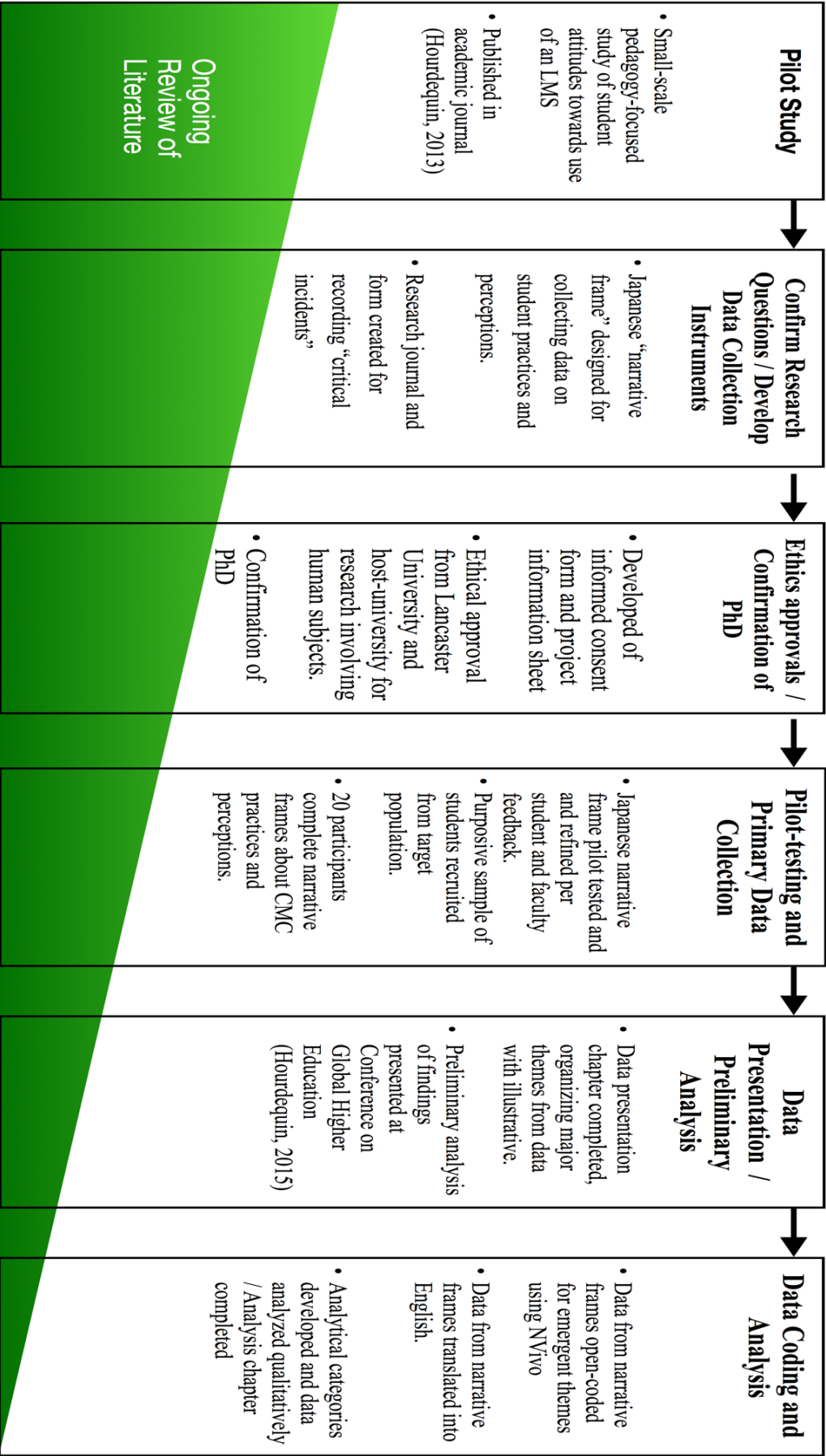
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# Appendix One: Research Design Model



## Appendix Two: Participant Information Sheet

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### Participant Information Sheet

**Title of Project:** Changing Discourses of Social Practice: foreign language literacy and digital mediation in Japanese higher education

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**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_,

**Dear** \_\_\_\_\_,

I would like to invite you to take part in my thesis research in the Department of Educational Research at the University of Lancaster.

Before you decide if you wish to take part you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

This document includes:

- Information about the purpose of the study (what I hope to find out).
- Information about what participation means and how to withdraw when and if you wish (what you will be doing).
- Details of what notes, recordings and other sources of information may be used as 'data' in the study - for the group and with you as an individual.
- Information about how this data will be secured and stored.
- Information about how any quotes will be used and how you will be involved in checking, agreeing and consenting to their use.

## Appendix Three: Consent Form

Department of Educational Research  
County South, Lancaster University, LA1 4YD, UK  
Tel: +44 (0) 1524 592685




### Consent Form

**Title of Project:** Changing Discourses of Social Practice: foreign language literacy and digital mediation in Japanese higher education

**Name of Researcher:** Peter Hourdequin

		Please Tick
1.	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated _____ for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
2.	I understand that my participation in this research study is voluntary. If for any reason I wish to withdraw during the period of this study, I am free to do so without providing any reason. I understand that my contributions to the workshop activities will be part of the data collected for this study and my anonymity will be ensured. I give consent for all my contributions to the research (my responses in the researcher's narrative frame) to be included and/or quoted in this study.	
3.	I understand that the information I provide will be used for a Ph.D research project and may be published. I understand that I have the right to review and comment on the information provided before the final submission	
4.	I agree to take part in the above study.	
<b>Name of Participant:</b>		
Signature		
Date		

## Appendix Four: Letter of Permission from Host Institution

<p>November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2013</p> <p>To: Professor [REDACTED] (Acting) Dean, Faculty of Foreign Studies [REDACTED] University</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Permission Request for Research</p> <p>Dear [REDACTED]</p> <p>I am writing in relation to my practice in the Foreign Studies Department and my doctoral studies supervised by Dr. Paul Trowler within the Department of Education Research at Lancaster University. I would like to ask permission to recruit current third and fourth year students who have enrolled in courses using internet &amp; communications technologies for English communication to investigate their perspective on their emerging new media literacy practices and identities.</p> <p>This study will help to gain an understanding of students' in the department of foreign studies new media literacy practices and perceptions. This research can serve to improve learning outcomes by providing a clearer understanding of student behaviors and attitudes towards the use of new media within the context of their English language education.</p> <p>Participation in the study involves the use of data collected using a narrative frames. A narrative frame is a simple document with writing prompts and blank lines that are filled in by participants to tell a coherent story of attitudes and practices. The students selected for this study will be given short narrative frames and asked to complete them within about a week of receiving them. Data may also be collected by interviews with the staff of the department of foreign studies and partner institutions. Participants' anonymity will be maintained in my research and publications, and participant data will only be kept for the duration of the study, after which time it will be destroyed. Ethical clearance in relation to the research is being sought from the Lancaster University Research Support Office.</p> <p>If you would like further information about this project please contact me by email. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Paul Trowler, or the Head of Educational Research Department, Dr Paul Ashwin.</p> <p>Please sign below and return to give permission for this research. A copy is attached for your own records.</p> <p>Dean: [REDACTED] Date: <u>December 4, 2013</u></p> <p>Researcher: Peter Hourdequin, <a href="mailto:p.hourdequin@lancaster.ac.uk">p.hourdequin@lancaster.ac.uk</a></p>	<div style="text-align: left;"><p><b>LANCASTER</b> UNIVERSITY</p><p>Department of Educational Research</p></div>
<p><small>Head of Department <b>Paul Ashwin</b>, BA, MSc, PhD Professors <b>Mary Hamilton</b>, BA, MA, PhD <b>Carolyn Jackson</b>, BSc, PhD <b>Colin Rogers</b>, BA, PhD <b>Murray Saunders</b>, BA, MA, PhD <b>Malcolm Tight</b>, BSc, PhD <b>Paul Trowler</b>, BA, MA, Cert Ed., PhD</small></p>	<p><small>Supervisor: Professor Paul Trowler, <a href="mailto:p.trowler@lancaster.ac.uk">p.trowler@lancaster.ac.uk</a></small></p> <p><small>Head of Department: Dr Paul Ashwin, <a href="mailto:paul.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk">paul.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk</a></small></p>



## Appendix Five: Narrative Frame (English translation)\*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

ICT=Information Communication Technology (video-conferencing, email, SNS, smartphone applications, etc.)

Concerning my study abroad experience: \_\_\_\_\_

Recently when (if) I use ICT to contact friends, classmates, etc, I usually \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. The reason for this is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

When I was in high school I used ICT \_\_\_\_\_

( likewise or however ) 大学では \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. Generally in the online world I use (my own name or a pseudonym)

because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. Concerning the opportunities ICT affords for connecting with people of other cultures \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. Concerning communication in Japanese using ICT \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ( likewise or however ) 、 using ICT in English to communicate \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. Concerning what I listen to, watch, and read online \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. I (sometimes / often / rarely ) share links to such media \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_. Concerning who created things I encounter online, and where it was

created \_\_\_\_\_, this is because \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_.

\* This is the slightly expanded frame used for narratives 11-20. For an explanation of the difference between this frame and the one used for narratives 1 – 10, see page 116-117.

In terms of online media created in English-speaking countries \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Regarding the use of ICT in/for lessons at university \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (however or in addition) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

If you have any other comments, please give them here:

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## Appendix Six: Narrative Frame (Original Japanese)\*

名前： \_\_\_\_\_

ICT=情報技術 (video-conferencing, email, SNS, smartphone appli, etc.)

私の留学経験は： \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_。

最近、ICTを利用して友人、先輩、後輩やクラスメイトを連絡するなら、殆ど \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_。なぜかという \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_。高校

時代でICTを利用して \_\_\_\_\_

( 同様に or しかし ) 大学では \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_。基本的にオンラインの世界で (自分の名前 or ニックネーム) を使いた

い。なぜかという \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_。 ICTを利用して他国や他文化の人と交流機会は \_\_\_\_\_

(同様に /しかし) \_\_\_\_\_

基本的に日本語で ICTを利用してコミュニケーションするのは \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ ( 同様に or しかし )、ICTを利用して英語のコミュニケーションは \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_。オンラインで読む、聞く、

見るメディアは \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_。こういうメディアのリンクを (時々 or まれに or よく) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_を利用して \_\_\_\_\_とシェアする。なぜかという \_\_\_\_\_

\* This is the slightly expanded frame used for narratives 11-20. For an explanation of the difference between this frame and the one used for narratives 1 – 10, see page 115-116.



私は英語圏で作られたメディアを\_\_\_\_\_。  
\_\_\_\_\_。

私は大学の授業でICTを\_\_\_\_\_  
(しかし or そして) \_\_\_\_\_。  
\_\_\_\_\_。

他のコメントがあればここで述べてください。

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## Appendix Seven: Critical Incident Reporting Form

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location / Platform:** \_\_\_\_\_

**People involved:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Details:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Implications / Relevance to Research Question(s):**

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## Appendix Eight: Analytic Category Development Table

Adapted from Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), p.283

Research Questions	Finding Statement	Outcome /Consequence	Analytic Category
1) What types of computer-mediated communication (CMC) practices do students at the research site engage in, and how do these connect to broader societal discourses and practices?	Students engage in a wide variety of digital communication practices in Japanese and English, many of which were newly adopted after they arrived at university. These practices mostly centered around the use of applications on their "smart phones." For a majority of the student participants, these practices were relatively new – differing significantly from their digital media communication practices in high school.	L1 and L2 digital literacy practices are acquired and developed at university implicitly through social interactions on campus.	<b>Category 1: The local acquisition of new digital language practices and perceptions in physical places and virtual spaces</b>
2) How do these students perceive their native and foreign language CMC practices?	Students see ICT as a practical means of gathering information and communicating with both local and non-local individuals and in groups in a variety of contexts. They value different tools and platforms for different people and purposes.		
3) To what extent can students' multilingual CMC practices be seen to contribute to the formation of symbolic competence?	Students reported significant recognition of the constraints and affordances inherent to CMC in general, and to various specific platforms. A majority of students, however, failed to exhibit a high degree of media literacy, and very few structured opportunities for the development of symbolic competence were apparent.	Students exhibit some degree of genre and tool (form) awareness but lack critical understanding of media.	<b>Category 2: Cultural Designs of Meaning – CMC Platform Practices in a Japanese Context</b>
4) Given student CMC practices and perceptions, to what extent are pedagogical practices and affordances at the research site utilized to enhance students' critical engagement with foreign texts and interlocutors via CMC?	At the research site, ICT infrastructure and existing student CMC practices offer promise for facilitating student engagement with foreign peers and texts, but social learning affordances are underused.	Lack of affordances for critical reflection on digital literacy practices	<b>Category 3: Barriers to deeper cross-cultural engagement via CMC</b>

# Appendix Nine: Consistency Matrix

Adapted from Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), p.284

Analytical Category	Interpretation / Analysis (I think my findings mean . . .)	Conclusions (Thus I conclude . . .)
<p><b>Category 1: The local acquisition of new digital language practices and perceptions in physical places and virtual spaces</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geography, the built environment, and socio-material "arrangements" of students' lives influence the development of particular practices.</li> <li>• Face-to-face interactions with peers on campus significantly shape communication practices</li> <li>• The new freedom that students have over their own time is significant in shaping their CMC practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In order to improve outcomes, teachers and curriculum planners should better understand how local geography, the built environment, the designed digital architecture of available media tools, as well as users' pragmatic (cultural) communicative norms shape CMC practice.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Category 2: Cultural Designs of Meaning—CMC Platform Practices in a Japanese Context</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local CMC platforms and practice create affordances for visual elements to supplement text to convey meaning</li> <li>• Japanese traditions that privilege context-mediated communication and attention to interlocutor reactions in the oral mode are fraught when taking place over CMC</li> <li>• Software such as LINE can be seen to be developing symbiotically from within Japan to create affordances for culturally-mediated communication practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students should be guided to practice media literacy in the earliest possible stages of their university careers.</li> <li>• Multiliteracies pedagogy can help structure transformative tasks for the development of learners' symbolic competence, creating opportunities for reflection and analysis around local and localized CMC tools, practices, and artifacts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Category 3: Barriers to deeper cross-cultural engagement via CMC</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inbound study-abroad non-existent, thus inhibiting diversity in CMC practice and reflection</li> <li>• High median age of faculty members means that generation gap is compounded by a "tech gap"</li> <li>• The "skill" vs "content" divide unhelpfully separates knowledge from knowledge practices.</li> <li>• Space limitations inhibit CMC practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Teacher-mediated channels" for intercultural exchange can also serve students' development of greater symbolic competence.</li> </ul>

## Appendix Ten: Critical Incident Reports

### Critical Incident Report 1

**Date:** June 11<sup>th</sup> 2014

**Time:** 3:30 - 5:30

**Location:** Computer room 314

**People involved:** Eleven 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year students who have signed up for short-term study abroad at a prestigious UK university.

**Details:** The purpose of this session was to assist students in the completion of online applications to a UK university's short-term summer English program. As one of two main organizers of the program, I scheduled the session for students to ensure that they could properly complete their online applications. The co-organizer and I both agreed that students lacked the necessary computer literacy to complete the applications on their own. Even though all students had no trouble communicating in a LINE group I formed for sharing information about the study abroad program, many of these same students have trouble navigating a (British) university's simple English language institute website without assistance.

In advance of the session I told students several times by LINE and in person that they would each need a PC email address in order to start and complete the application process. Eight of the 11 students were able to start the application process by accessing PC email addresses, whereas three students were not. One student brought the addresses of his home

computer's email, but had no way to access it. Another student knew his email address but didn't know his password, and another student had no external email address, and thus had to create an account at that time. On registration at the university, all students are given university email addresses, and (supposedly) taught how to access them in a first-year computer literacy class. Only one student used this email address, and that student needed assistance finding the login portal and correctly inputting his username.

**Implication / Relevance to Research Questions:**

The lack of basic PC literacy among second and third-year students was striking. This is relevant to RQ 1: many undergraduates are not familiar with basic desktop PC practices. They are fluent with their mobile phones, with various "apps," and show fluency interacting with me, other teachers, and other students in an ICT context that had already become familiar through prior social interactions but when it comes to legacy systems like email that many people in my generation take for granted, many students seem to lack familiarity. In today's session, even the more competent students required assistance navigating page elements and inserting information properly.

## Critical Incident Report 2

**Date:** February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Time:** 8:30 - 9:30 AM (JST)

**Location:** My office (1202) / Campus of a partner university

**People involved:** Myself, four English dept. students involved in grant-funded sustainability project, professor at an American university, sustainability office officer and student at same university (all co-located)

**Details:** The interaction focused on campus sustainability but inspired a variety of questions about local conditions, culture, etc. Students prepared well and asked several good questions about important sustainability issues on the partner university's campus and in the local area. They had read materials online in advance. The event turned out to be what might be viewed as an effective use of ICT for cross-cultural exchange in English, and for sharing information about *practice*—the stuff of everyday life on our campus here in Japan, and the campus of the university in America. The skype connection was clear, and though interaction needed to be facilitated, there was a frank exchange between students. Both sides had prepared questions based on research about the partner university and its surrounding environment, and the discussion also lead to additional questions and real dialogue about life on and around both campuses. For example, the discussion revealed a lot about “car culture” in the American West, and about the more condensed commuting lives of students in Japan.

**Implications / Relevance to Research Questions:**

This seems to point to ways that scaffolded uses of ICT for dialogic interaction with “others” in different locales/cultures can deepen cross-cultural understanding, and potentially greater symbolic competence. A “tolerance of ambiguity” (a notion from Kramsch’s concept of symbolic competence) is essential, but the purpose-driven scaffolded exchanges seems to allow for inquiry to take place in a way that promotes discovery of practices in each place. If this kind of pedagogy of discovery could be further scaffolded with focused readings of authentic materials (in various genres), videos, and/or lectures about the “target” lingua-culture vis-à-vis global issues, further development of symbolic competence would seem likely.



### Critical Incident Report 3

**Date:** October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Time:** 9:53 AM

**Location / Platform:** university email system

**People involved:** researcher / student

**Details:** I received an email yesterday from a 2<sup>nd</sup> year student attempting to communicate about a class matter (submission of an assignment). I rarely receive emails from students. and was thus very surprised. With the exception of a few students who I am in contact with via LINE groups because of extra-curricular work, students in my classes usually communicate with me face-to-face, or not at all. I would estimate that I have received less than 5 emails from students in my five years here. This email, however, fits a pattern in that it exhibits a general lack of understanding of (email) genre conventions (both Western and Japanese), and seems to fit more with the text message genre. The student did not give her name anywhere in the email (and it was not apparent from the address). I was ultimately able to identify the student by process of elimination and attendance records, but otherwise I would not have known who was writing me. What is striking here and in previous similar emails is not that mistakes are made in terms of vocabulary and grammar, but that there are no attempts made to conform to any type of genre conventions at all, except maybe those associated with friendly chat via LINE. My extensive experience with Japanese language emails in academic contexts has taught me that among adults, email communication is often significantly more formal than that in the spoken mode. Further, correspondents tend to be

especially vigilant about providing key information like name and subject. Most every email I receive from colleagues and office staff at the university begin with an identification of the writer's department or office, and name. This is the case even for correspondents who are already on familiar terms. While I would not expect students to know these conventions yet (in Japanese), it is striking that they would fail to include basic information like name and class when corresponding with a teacher. I do not have data on how such students interact with their teachers via email in Japanese, but I would expect that they would give at least this minimal information of their name and the subject of their correspondence in most cases.

**Implications / Relevance to Research Question(s):**

This issue relates directly to student CMC practices (RQ1) in English and the development of symbolic competence and media literacy (RQ3). Email correspondence in English or Japanese can be analyzed in terms of genre, and genre conventions can be taught and learned. However, having received many emails like this in the past, it seems that students in the department under consideration are generally not gaining familiarity with such genre conventions as they pertain to email—a legacy form of digital communication still favored by older generations. Correspondences like this point to a curricular gap, and also a gap in awareness and media literacy among students. It mirrors the casual use of ICT platforms such as Facebook and Twitter without consideration of any possible social conventions that exist across and within cultures on these platforms.

## Critical Incident Report 4

**Date:** May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016

**Time:** Late afternoon (5:30 p.m. or so)

**Location:** Foreign Language Study Support Center

**People involved:** Three 3<sup>rd</sup> year English department student. One Art & Design department student. All members of a university “game lab” organized by the researcher.

**Details:** Interacting with students at the research site’s foreign language study support center today, I realized that LINE is essentially a kind of semi-closed, geography-based social network. That is, though it is now used internationally (mostly in Asia), it fosters person-to-person, and group ties that are—at least initially—based in real-world interactions. Today, as part of a student activity I lead, students and I decided to set up a LINE group. Doing so was a two-step process for all members. First, a member needed to “invite” another to join his contact list. Next that person could set up a group and invite contacts. However, joining someone’s contact list cannot easily be done at a distance as with other SNS platforms. There are two primary ways to become someone else’s contact (the equivalent of a “friend” on Facebook or a “follower” on Twitter). The most common method is for one party to use their LINE app to produce a QR code that is scanned by the other person at that time. The other way is for the two co-located people to shake their devices to create the contact connection.

Though I had joined groups by invitation before, it struck me today that setting up groups and adding initial members is designed on LINE as a face-to-face process. The reiterates my sense of distinctly LINE as a localized platform in a way. One that privileges strong ties rather than vast social networks of loose ties.

**Implications / Relevance to Research Question(s):**

This relates to my question about student CMC practices, and particularly about the techno-social affordances of LINE as a platform. LINE's design dictates that co-location is relatively central to the development of one's social network. I cannot say much about students' perceptions of this platform design except that they were surprised by my surprise. I had expected that, for example, the group could issue its own QR code so others could easily join, but was shocked that this is not possible. Students saw this as natural—that groups should, in a sense, grow by “invitation only.” This seems to align with the “uchi” / “soto” (inside/outside) dynamic that is so commonly theorized in relation to Japanese culture.

## Critical Incident Report 5

**Date:** July 2016

**Time:** N/A

**Location:** H28アルティメットサークル (this is the name of the university's 2016 Ultimate Frisbee circle's LINE group)

**People involved:** 29 undergraduate students who are members of the Ultimate Frisbee Circle. Students from all school-year cohorts and all three faculties at the research site.

**Details:** This interaction occurred in what Gee would call an “affinity space”: it is a digital space for interaction around shared interests. Students have joined this group by invitation from friends who are already members of the space, but because of the loose nature of the ultimate frisbee “circle” (the most basic level of officially recognized student organizations), it is safe to assume that not all members know each other. I am the circle's 顧問 (kōmon), or advisor. Recently, I am particularly struck by the “silence” of the vast majority of members within the LINE group. They have become what would be called “lurkers” in online parlance. That is, activity in the group is dominated by just three or four members. Other members seldom initiate communication, and often do not even respond to queries that would normally merit a response. During the past week, the student leader of the circle has been trying to confirm a practice schedule document he has to submit ahead of the summer break. He has made various inquiries to the group, but only a few students have responded. I have experienced the same thing when making inquiries to the group, and to other groups. My messages show as “read by” most or all of

the 29 members (in this case), but I only ever receive 1 or 2 responses. This happens whether queries are made in English or Japanese. While it is difficult to draw conclusions from this informal observation, what I've observed does raise questions about why students might be remaining silent: is there a kind of safety to be silent in numbers? Are students reticent because social positioning within the group is not well-established? Would "speaking" be a kind of performance that members don't want to risk?

**Implications / Relevance to Research Question(s):**

The issues raised here seem to relate to intracultural symbolic competence and also practices on a specific ICT platform for CMC. The prominent read-receipt feature of LINE seems in dyadic interactions and in small groups to orient users towards intimate dialogic communication and/or close group communication. But in groups like this one with weak ties, the platform no longer engenders such communication. Read receipts just tell one that her message has been read, but with a large, loose group, knowledge of this fact does not seem to encourage dialogue.

## Appendix Eleven: Student Narratives in English Translation\*

N1

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE. This is because I can readily get in touch (with them), and also can make groups and be in touch this way as well. Concerning the use of ICT during high school I mostly did not use ICT to take classes, hand in homework, contact my teachers, etc. However, at university classes involving video conferencing, submitting assignments by email, doing (internet) research, interacting with my professor(s) using ICT and the like are common. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because I don't want total strangers to know my personal information, and using a pseudonym (would) offer some relief in a case in which personal information were to be leaked (from a site). In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures I use mostly SKYPE、LINE、and Facebook, but of these FACEBOOK is the one I use most. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese (I) mostly use LINE to share specific information with specific people. However, I use Facebook to broadly share general information about my everyday life with friends living abroad without specifying who receives this information. However, as for using ICT to communicate in English in order to inform my friends abroad about my everyday life, I often use Facebook to share information with an indefinite number of people. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online : (I use) Facebook、YouTube、Twitter, and the

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\* This appendix contains full translations of all twenty narratives that I collected from student participants in my study. The text in blue text is that of the original narrative frame text (in translation). Black text is a translation of comments filled in by participants. Underlined text represents a choice of a conjunction offered in the narrative frame. Blank lines indicate parts of the narrative frames that were not filled in by students. These lines are, however, not directly equivalent to the actual amount of space provided for the given prompts or comments. Because subjects are routinely omitted from Japanese sentences, implied subjects are sometimes included in parentheses to clarify meaning where necessary.

Internet. I sometimes use Facebook to share links (of this content) with: friends. This is because if I think it's interesting, I want other people to know of this information and share my feeling. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I pay absolutely no mind (to this). This is because the online world is full of lies. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries, I am actively using (consuming) this. As for ICT use in my university classes: I think it should be used more. However, issues will remain related to copyright, leakage of personal information, plagiarism (homework, reports, etc) and people who cannot use ICT outside of university.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

## N2

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE. This is because: most of my friends use LINE, (one can) instantly talk in a group and/or with any number of friends, and can confirm what has been said previously. Concerning the use of ICT during high school it consisted of using email and snapping and sending photos. However, at university: I have begun to interact with foreign friends on Facebook, to play game applications, and to use the net to quickly research things I don't know about. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because I am scared about (my) personal information being used maliciously. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures: because many of my foreign friends use Facebook, most [of these] occur on Facebook. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese I use LINE, Twitter, email and the like on (my) iPhone. Likewise, for using ICT to communicate in English I use LINE, Twitter, email and the like on (my) iPhone. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online: while deciding whether content can be trusted or not, I read and listen (to various things). I sometimes use LINE



and Twitter to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because : I want to share information with kids who have the same interests (as me), or kids who are striving towards the same dream(s) (as me). As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I make a cursory check (confirmation). This is because perspectives vary depending on (factors such as) gender and nationality. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries I often read and watch this because it allows me to know opinions different from those (expressed by) Japanese. As for ICT use in my university classes I used it as place for sharing opinions and offering information. In addition, I could see how important it is for people in those groups to actively communicate.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### N3

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAI, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use my smartphone and SNS. This is because most people use these, so it's easy to contact (people) quickly. Concerning the use of ICT during high school : I mostly kept in touch with friends. However, at university (I use it) not only for contacting friends, but also (I use) study apps, and to update friends on what's new. Generally, I want to use (for Facebook) my own name, for everything else a pseudonym in the online world. This is because since I am only connected with my friends on SNS applications like Facebook, there is no need to use a pseudonym. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures: (I) have lots of opportunities around me. Even when not meeting directly, (we) can have some cultural exchange over the internet, and also can have language exchange(s). Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese it's just about every day. Likewise, for using ICT to communicate in English the amount (of use) is not as much as in Japanese, but it's quite

frequent. *As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online*: it's very handy to use, and so it's very convenient. *I sometimes use*: SNS such as Facebook and Twitter *to share links (of this content) with friends*. *This is because*: I want to introduce information that I think is good (like articles) to friends. *As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume*: (I'm one who) tends to pay attention. *This is because* it can't be guaranteed that all information is true or false. *In terms of media made in English-speaking countries*, I look at a lot of this. This is because a lot of media flows (flies forth) from big countries. *As for ICT use in my university classes*: I use it a lot for assignments and review. *In addition*, I get a lot of information from many sources, use it in my studies, expanding my horizons, and deepening my knowledge.

*Additional comment*: ICT has become pervasive and most people now have smart phones; additionally, the number of people is increasing who are using SNS as a means for contacting to each other, getting and sharing information. As for me, I use ICT in my everyday life. I have to be careful not to use it too much, but I think it is effective to use ICT for study. At the same time, in the role of someone who teaches English to children, (I) would like to rise to the challenge of educational uses of ICT.

#### N4

*Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually* the LINE app. *This is because* it is used by the most people, and is now one of the main means of contacting others. *Concerning the use of ICT during high school* to contact (others) keitai mail was the main means. *However, at university* (my) smartphone has become important, I've come to use SNS that can be used for free. *Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world*. *This is because* unless (one's) personal information is locked, anyone in the world can obtain it. *In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures* I've

experienced this on Facebook. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese I use Twitter, Facebook, Skype and other SNS. However, for using ICT to communicate in English in my case I only use Facebook. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online I often use the news (apps) on my smartphone, and TV news. I sometimes share links (of this content) with friends via SNS. This is because: it is information that I think is useful to friends: As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume: I don't really pay attention to it. This is because I've never paid attention to it. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries I read things that are related to my classes, reading things assigned for my classes is common. As for ICT use in my university classes: I studied this. In addition, I've come to know and pay attention to copyright issues related to the use of ICT.

## N5

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAI, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use my smartphone and/or computer. This is because it's easy to carry (my cell phone) and I can quickly and conveniently use it. Concerning the use of ICT during high school it was normal to email my friends and use the Internet. However, at university I have come to use the internet mostly as a means of collecting the information I need, with interacting with friends becoming a secondary activity. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because If (I) use my real name, from their (I might) slip and reveal my university, and then my (home) address could be discovered. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures It's become incredibly useful. (One can) exchange pictures via SNS, and (so) making contact has become easy. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese (I) send messages with Japanese people in mind, because writing in Japanese it's easier to convey my feelings and the like. However, for using ICT to communicate in English (I) want to share with friends in other countries. Even with separation at great distance, (I) can easily tell of what's new, and (with English) as a international lingua franca there are few misunderstandings. As for reading,

watching, and listening (to things) online (one) mustn't swallow everything whole. I sometimes use the Internet to share links (of this content) with friends, family, and teachers. This is because as anyone can update ICT information, it all can't be reacted to individually. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume there should be a principle of privacy protection. This is because what is produced cannot easily be copied, and thus privacy protection ensures the health of the information. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries, I am reading to understand the difference in language, and thus time is required. As for ICT use in my university classes I use it frequently to obtain reference literature and the like. However, (one) should not depend only on ICT, (one should) search books, and if possible go out to collect information on site.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_.

## N6

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use my keitai e-mail. This is because the phone one might often call at a bad time, and so e-mail—which can be checked at any time—is more reliable. Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I used it) for presentations and research for presentations. However, at university I used ICT to prepare for presentations etc. However, at university, I visit auction sites and sites that introduce presentations, and in my classes I have had opportunities to use Edmodo and other applications to interact with other students and my professor(s). Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because using one's real name online raises the risk of getting caught up in trouble. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures right now, I don't have many (such opportunities), but as globalization progresses, I want to make use of these to live as an internationalized person. Generally, when

using ICT to communicate in Japanese Sometimes I have a bit of trouble conveying differences in nuance, but basically since it's my mother tongue, I don't struggle. However, for using ICT to communicate in English as it's not a language I am usually using, because of the differences in ways to reply (to questions) and in vocabulary, it is often hard to convey my meaning to interlocuter(s). As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online I often watch videos and (read) blogs. I sometimes use email or (spoken) conversation to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because by sharing recommended things with friends, (we) can expand what we know about each other's preferences. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I don't really stop to think much about authorship and where online media I consume is produced. This is because when choosing media (to consume) I make decisions based more on the contents than the author or origin of the media. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries, I think it's good to have your own firm opinion as a base, and explain this with logical words. As for ICT use in my university classes I tried using it and it proved fascinating. In addition, the sites I used in my classes I would now like to use in my private life to serve the development of my language skills.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_.

## N7

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use email (cell phone), LINE, Facebook. This is because its fast, easy, and cheap. Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I) contacted my friends. (email). Likewise, at university I am staying in touch with my friends (email, LINE, Facebook are most common). Generally, I want to use my own name in the online world. This is because (I want) the person (I am corresponding with) to be sure I am me. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and

cultures I only use Facebook. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese (I use) telephone, LINE, email, and Facebook. Likewise, for using ICT to communicate in English Facebook. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online(I) use the Internet, cell phone.

I use \_\_\_\_\_ to share links (of this content)

with\_\_\_\_\_. This is because\_\_\_\_\_.

As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I've started to pay more attention to the producers of online materials and where they are from in the world. This is because different media producers have different politics. I confirm (the veracity of) English language media I consume at sites (such as) the BBC homepage, and Yahoo U.K. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries (I) check ("confirm") the BBC home page, and UK Yahoo's homepage. As for ICT use in my university classes I study and use it sometimes." However, it's not that (I'm) not good at using ICT, it's more that I don't use it often.

**Additional comments** Though I often hear the words "IT" and "ICT" I don't presently understand their definitions. Also, (I feel that) when LINE, Facebook, and smartphone functions are so prevalent, (I am) unable to make good use of all of them. If/when ICT is used at school, and for lessons, I think it is good for contacting (students) and making classes more efficient. (For example, notifications from the university or assignment deadlines, or information about upcoming classes, etc.)

## N8

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use email. This is because compared to using LINE, Facebook, etc., its more convenient. Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I) only used it to get in touch (with others) and to get information However, at university it's not just that, (my use of ICT now) has come to include submitting assignments, contacting teachers Generally, I want to

use my own name in the online world. This is because (I) think it is necessary to take responsibility for what one says. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures I think (these are) a really good thing. This is because more smoothly than with letters, one can know about one's correspondent's present state and situation.

Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese

\_\_\_\_\_ for using ICT to communicate in

English \_\_\_\_\_. As for reading, watching,

and listening (to things) online \_\_\_\_\_ I

rarely use Facebook to share links (of this content) with friends. This is

because it can be viewed immediately on the internet. As for authorship or

origin of the online media I consume (I) don't worry about this. In terms of

media made in English-speaking countries, (I) haven't watched much (if

necessary, I'll watch a TED talk). As for ICT use in my university classes I

used it. In addition, (I) think it is good for connecting students with each other and with their teachers.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

## N9

Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAI, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE This is because it can be readily used, and

(I) can get replies quickly. Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I

used it) to communicate with the people around me. However, at university

beyond the purpose of communicating with the people around me, (I use) it to

communicate with people I met online, and also increasingly to contact

people from my part-time job, volunteer work, etc. Generally, I want to use a

pseudonym in the online world. This is because (my) personal information

could be targeted. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with

people from other countries and cultures I think it can be enjoyed readily; as

much as possible I want to engage with a lot of people, however because one cannot completely know the background (of those contacted online) there is also an element of anxiety. **Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese** because it's my mother tongue it is relatively worry-free, and (I) use it frequently. **As for using ICT to communicate in English** as it's not my mother tongue, (I) am aware of taking a lot more care in my communication. **As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online**(I do this on) Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. **I use SNS to share links (of this content) with friends.** **This is because** (I) want to share things I am interested in with my friends because I want to communicate (with them). **As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume** it's best to be aware of this. **This is because** we cannot see their face, and we thus cannot trust them **In terms of media made in English-speaking countries,** I sometimes look at this because it provides a different perspective from the Japanese media. It's a form of stimulation for thinking about my own values. **As for ICT use in my university classes** I think it would be good for ICT to be used more proactively in university classes. **In addition,** I think it would be good for opportunities for students who cannot study abroad to have increased opportunities to communicate with people from other countries.

**Additional comments:** In order to make it easier to see who filled out this form, you should add a line for writing the writer's name.

## N10

**Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAI, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually** (I) use Line, Email, Facebook. **This is because** these are the easiest methods. It's possible to use them anywhere. **Concerning the use of ICT during high school** (I) used it for general exchange of information. **Likewise, at university** even more highly developed smartphone apps have been introduced and now these have become my main way to communicate. **Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because**(I



want to) avoid difficulties in case problems arise. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures these have increased, especially on globally recognized “Facebook,” (where) by virtue of just having an account (one can) easily communicate. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese it is developing fast and spreading. However, as for using ICT to communicate in English I sense that it is still limited in Japan. This is because Japan is still not really globalized. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online one cannot be sure that this information is accurate. I rarely use Facebook to share links (of this content) with friends and acquaintances. This is because as a result of sharing there are also cases where more detailed information comes back (to me). As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I don’t pay particular attention to this. This is because rather than focus on that, it’s more important to focus on the content of the media. In terms of media made in English-speaking countries (I) use this a lot because it can be used for my own English studies. As for ICT use in my university classes I had a class that used it. However, there were several points there which should be improved. I want to hope for the development of the technology. Additional comments As with E-learning I want to see the further development of English studies (using ICT). Connecting overseas with via video and audio in real-time is truly epoch and so I think it should be employed effectively.

## N11

Regarding my experience studying abroad I studied abroad and had a homestay in Australia for two and a half months. Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPai, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use a smartphone. This is because (one) can contact (others) conversationally; (one can) use it more readily and conveniently than email. Concerning the use of ICT during high school I did not frequently use it to contact friends. However, at university for trivial matters or even when getting in contact (it) is not

essential, (I) use it to contact friends. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because there is no telling who is watching in the online world, and I don't want to put myself in danger. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures these are not common, but occur about once every two months. However, I have hardly any opportunities for exchange with people who are really from other countries or cultures. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese (I use it) every day for contacting (others) about school, for my part-time job, for asking about weekend plans, and other such things related to everyday life. However, for using ICT to communicate in English about once every two months, I use it to contact a non-Japanese friend and talk about recent news and to exchange information, and as this includes English study, it is useful. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online it's of overseas information. I rarely use Facebook to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because I want friends to know about things I think are interesting. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I'm not really interested. This is because nowadays there's lots of media and (I) think it would be a waste of time to try to know (such) details one by one. As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences I do so when I email members of my former host-family abroad or when I am when emailing my overseas friends. When speaking in English to people in my location, (I) speak English while paying no attention to grammar. However, when using English through ICT (I) think carefully and repeatedly think about grammar and phrasing to account for what cannot be conveyed by facial expression. As for ICT use in my university classes I think taking many short surveys is a good aspect. However, (I) feel that having person to person communication that does not rely on information technology is what is most necessary now.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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**N12**

Regarding my experience studying abroad: I studied in Canada for a month-long language program. Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE (App). This is because messages can be sent easily. Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I) contacted friends. Likewise, at university I am using ICT to contact friends. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because I don't want to upload personal information. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures there exist via Facebook. However/Likewise \_\_\_\_\_.

Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese I just send messages or just have fun. However, as for using ICT to communicate in English it's related to the development of my own English skills. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online a great variety of material, and a great amount. I rarely use Twitter to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because (I) want to share fun feelings with friends. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume (I'm) not really interested in it. This is because most often (this information) is not given. As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences is connected to the improvement of my own English ability. When speaking in English to people in my location I usually don't have any time to think before I speak. However, when using English via ICT I have time to think before sending (a message). As for ICT use in my university classes I don't really use it. However, (I) use it at times to research things outside of class.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

**N13**

Regarding my experience studying abroad: I've never been, but in the future if I have money and time I want to go to England. Recently when using ICT to

contact friends, SEMPai, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE. This is because it's simple, easy to use, and used by a vast majority of people. Concerning the use of ICT during high school I used it to keep in touch with friends. Likewise, at university I am using LINE. I also use LINE to get in touch with my high school friends. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because if ever there were a breach of data, personal information connected to one's name could be known. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures these are increasing greatly. That is to say, it has become easy to (have such interactions) across long distances. However, at the same time (I) think the risk of getting involved with criminal activity is also increasing. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese it's an everyday activity. (I) am in contact with friends just about every day. However, as for using ICT to communicate in English (I) mostly don't do it because I have few overseas friends. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online YouTube, Daily Motion, etc., nowadays I think there are a variety of things. I often use YouTube to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because by sharing interesting things with friends, our conversations that do not use media are enriched ("broadened"). As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume (I) think countries other than Japan are common. This is because (I) think Japanese people tend to be bad at sending information to the outside (world). As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences compared to the old days, it has become very easy. When speaking in English to people in my location, meaning can be conveyed depending on changes in intonation. However, when using English through ICT (I) think it's necessary to choose the words one uses. As for ICT use in my university classes (I) use it quite often. In addition, it serves to deepen my own knowledge.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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## N14

Regarding my experience studying abroad: I studied in Canada at Victoria University for 1 month. Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE, Twitter and other SNS. This is because it's very easy to get in touch (with people). Concerning the use of ICT during high school (I used it) to contact friends and family. Likewise, at university (I've) come to use SNS more broadly, contacting friends who are not (living) nearby. I have thus become able to check in on their situation (what's new with them). Generally, I want to use my own name in the online world. This is because so it's easy for old friends and foreign friends to understand In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures(I) have these. (I) can contact friend(s) I made while studying abroad. Likewise, in a university course we use ICT, (I) could take an Australian University's class. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese this is for local friends and family. However, for using ICT to communicate in English (I) only use it to interact with English users . As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online(I) use YouTube etc. a lot. I sometimes use Twitter to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because(I) want to share useful information or amusing pictures and videos with friends. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume (I) pay a little bit of attention. This is because I (want to) confirm whether that information is accurate or not. As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences (I) often (do this). When speaking in English to people in my location, (I) just talk freely (without being concerned about grammar and the like). However, when using English through ICT (I) tend to become concerned with such things as grammar and word usage. As for ICT use in my university classes I sometimes use it in my lessons at university. Not only YouTube, but many different applications. Using such tools makes my classes (more) fun.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

## N15

Regarding my experience studying abroad: (I) have none. However, during the upcoming spring semester break I am planning to do a language course at Evansville University in America (for 2 months). Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use the LINE app on my smart phone. This is because as most of my friends, SEMPAL, and KOHAI use LINE, using to contact (each other) is mainstream. Concerning the use of ICT during high school I engaged in trivial conversations with most of my friends. (Twitter). However, at university I don't have time for Twitter, I deleted my account. When I deleted my account, my friends didn't decrease, (rather) I realized that the time I'd spent on Twitter until now was too much. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because one doesn't know who is watching so if one uses one's real name it is scary that it would seem someone could search for one's personal information. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures I think it's convenient and thus good. IT allows more people to interact. However, depending too much on ICT instead of actually directly experiencing culture is not good. I want to directly experience culture with my own eyes and ears. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese this is usually with other Japanese people or with people from other countries who are studying Japanese. Likewise, for using ICT to communicate in English it is useful for people who mostly use English, or for people from who are studying English. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online Wikipedia, YouTube, Instagram. I sometimes use LINE to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because it is convenient because on LINE one can quickly send pictures, videos, and text to others. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I don't know about this in detail. This is because in Japan, information about the author or place where media is produced is frequently not given and so I don't really pay attention to this. As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences it's one place to test my English skills.

It makes interacting with foreign people easier. [However, when speaking in English to people in my location](#), I speak without really paying attention to grammar. [However, when using English through ICT](#) I try to be careful not to make grammatical mistakes. I use Japanese to English translation site repeatedly in order to confirm and compose appropriate sentences. [As for ICT use in my university classes](#) I sometimes use it to gather quotes for assignments. [However](#), because there is a lot of mistaken information (online), I carefully judge whether or not the quotation contains a relevant fact before using it. [Additional comments](#): On sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram there are people who make multiple accounts and leave comments for commercial purposes, but I think this is not good.

[Additional comments](#): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

## N16

[Regarding my experience studying abroad](#): I stayed in Victoria, Canada for one month. [Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, \(I\) usually use LINE](#). [This is because](#) it's free and one can quickly make calls, and use in groups to share information.

[Concerning the use of ICT during high school](#) I emailed my friends, read my friend's diaries (blogs) on Mixi, etc. [However, at university](#) I myself started posting information on Twitter and Facebook. [Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world](#). [This is because](#) being personally identified is scary. [In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures](#) it leads to English learning and so I think it's a good thing. [However](#), I think it's dangerous to meet people you encounter online. [Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese](#) I use LINE and Twitter to interact with friends on an everyday basis. [However, for using ICT to communicate in English](#) I just sometimes use Facebook to correspond with American(s) in Japan. [As for reading, watching, and listening \(to things\)](#)

online Instagram and Twitter. I sometimes use iPhone to share links (of this content) with my followers. This is because I think I want them all to see interesting articles and videos or pictures. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I use it without knowing (this information). This is because even without knowing the author or their community one can use (the media) in Japan and understand the function (of it) sufficiently. As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences I use it to write reports for class and to reply to American friend(s) on Facebook . When speaking in English to people in my location, words don't come immediately, and I make pronunciation mistakes and the like. However, when using English through ICT I can easily look up words I don't know, and I don't have to worry about pronunciation and the like, so this is nice. As for ICT use in my university classes I think it's useful for improving students' English skills and for cross-cultural understanding. However, this shouldn't just be done through ICT, rather I think it's necessary to have communication between teacher(s) and student(s) in the place.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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## N17

Regarding my experience studying abroad: In the spring of my 3<sup>rd</sup> year of university, about 10 weeks at Griffith University in Australia. Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually short messages via LINE or Twitter is common. This is because response(s) are faster compared to email, I can get in touch with people immediately. In addition, pictures and the like can quickly be sent together. Concerning the use of ICT during high school I used ICT to contact friends, and exchange information with my club members. Likewise, at university I use ICT to confirm whether or not there is homework, for contact with my part-time job employer, and for contacting friends who live far away in real-



time. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because if I use my real name I fear that I could be identified via Facebook etc. somewhere by who-knows-who. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures before I studied abroad there were absolutely none, but after studying abroad thanks to the foreign friends I met (opportunities) increased. However, after studying abroad, I have never used ICT to initiate interactions with people from other countries. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese it can be thought of as a way to extend regular conversations. Especially unimportant conversations too, as via ICT one can just speak freely. However, for using ICT to communicate in English it's mostly just when I have a reason to do so. For unimportant things, I wouldn't say I'd go out of my way to use ICT. As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online it's an incredibly useful medium for study. I sometimes use LINE to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because by sharing useful sites and the like with friends this becomes a common topic for conversation, and after all it's just fun. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I don't really pay attention to it. This is because no matter who made it and where if the media itself is convenient and can be used, I don't pay any attention at all. As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences it's convenient. When speaking in English to people in my location, I converse while considering the person's (facial) expression and appearance. However, when using English through ICT since a person's (facial) expression and appearance is hard to convey, I take care in thinking about (my) English. As for ICT use in my university classes I learned that it is a factor that hinders student's study. However, depending on the way it is used, I think it also has an aspect of increasing the efficiency of study.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## N18

Regarding my experience studying abroad: Canada for 1 month (university 1<sup>st</sup> year), England for 1 month (2<sup>nd</sup> year of university), rudimentary language study abroad. Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE and Facebook. This is because everyone uses LINE to stay in touch and conversely there's no one who uses email. As for my foreign friends, I check their updates on Facebook and comment. Concerning the use of ICT during high school I used Skype to contact my former Assistant Language Teacher (ALT) who had returned to his mother country. Likewise, at university I am taking a class with a professor in Australia via video link. I send messages to my foreign friend(s) via Facebook. I occasionally send letters. Generally, I want to use my own name in the online world. This is because if I use a pseudonym it's difficult for other people to identify me. In situations where everyone else uses nicknames as they are embarrassed to use full names, I just use -----\* only. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures it's convenient, so I often do it. I can't go visit that country many times, so international exchange via ICT is essential. Likewise, I use it for updates from Japanese people. I can freely contact people who are in distant prefectures, friend who are busy with work. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese I use LINE and Twitter. I use LINE for a broad range of things from personal conversations to groups, to administrative correspondences. On Twitter I tweet serious things and also trivial things. However, for using ICT to communicate in English I decided on Facebook. When I post on Facebook, I always post in English. I thought I would use Facebook only for my foreign friends, but recently my Japanese friends have increased (there). As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online it's television, YouTube, radio, LINE news. I often use LINE News to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because 3 times a day they send along recent news updates and I talk immediately with my

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\* The student wrote her given name here. It has been redacted to protect her privacy.

university friends about news that interests me. *As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume* I'm not really interested. *This is because* I am always using it and don't have problems related to the passing along of mistaken information and the like. *As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences*, I use Facebook. I use it to send messages to my foreign friends. *When speaking in English to people in my location*, I compensate with gestures and visual cues. *However*, when using English through ICT I use a dictionary, or compensate by connecting to the internet then and there. *As for ICT use in my university classes* it varies by class. *However*, as I am taking a class via video link with an Australian professor, I am satisfied.

*Additional comments:* \_\_\_\_\_  
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## N19

Regarding my experience studying abroad: I have none. *Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually* use the LINE app on (my) smartphone. *This is because* LINE is a very convenient free app. *Concerning the use of ICT during high school* I used a "Galapagos-style" phone. *However*, at university I bought a smartphone and started to use an application called LINE, contacting a variety of people. *Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because* if I use my own name, (my) personal information will be leaked to the whole world. *In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures* I've never done so. *However*, I do think I want to communicate with people from other countries. *Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese* it's easy. *Likewise*, for using ICT to communicate in English it's difficult. However, in order to improve (my) English skills and communicate with people from other countries, I want to do so. *As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online* it's a bit difficult. I *sometimes* use my studies to share links (of this content) with friends. *This is*

because\_\_\_\_\_. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I don't know. This is because I don't think to research this. As for using ICT in producing (written) English sentences it's difficult but fun. When speaking in English to people in my location, I can't really speak. However, when using English through ICT since I have time to think, I can skillfully convey (my thoughts) in English. As for ICT use in my university classes (we) should use it. In addition, I think (we) should make many opportunities to interact with people overseas.

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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## N20

Regarding my experience studying abroad: I studied abroad in Canada for two months (Victoria University). Recently when using ICT to contact friends, SEMPAL, KOHAI, classmates, and others, (I) usually use LINE (app). This is because the layout is easy to see and it can be used easily. Concerning the use of ICT during high school I corresponded back and forth with friends. Likewise, at university I use ICT to correspond back and forth. Generally, I want to use a pseudonym in the online world. This is because of leaks of personal information, and as much as possible I want to avoid being identified. In terms ICT-enabled opportunities for interacting with people from other countries and cultures these will increase (with Facebook, messenger). Likewise, I can make connections with people of the same nationality. Generally, when using ICT to communicate in Japanese I use things like messenger and LINE that have text functionality. However, for using ICT to communicate in English I use often use (tools) such as Skype with speaking (functionality). As for reading, watching, and listening (to things) online I think it's incredibly convenient. I rarely use Facebook to share links (of this content) with friends. This is because I want to share my opinion and/or news together with friends. As for authorship or origin of the online media I consume I don't

really worry about it. [This is because](#) I'm not interested in that. [As for using ICT in producing \(written\) English sentences](#) I used Word only for my writing (class) assignment(s). [When speaking in English to people in my location](#), I frequently use ICT [However, when using English through ICT](#) I think it is really helpful and really good for improving my English skills. [As for ICT use in my university classes](#) it's moderately developed so I often use it. [However,](#) I think I want it developed a bit more.

[Additional comments:](#) \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Appendix Twelve: Glossary of Transliterated Japanese Terms

Amae (甘え)	Dependence or indulgence. Takeo Doi, the psychologist who popularized this term in <i>Anatomy of Dependence</i> (2001) singles it out for its uniqueness to Japanese culture, and thus leaves it untranslated throughout the book.
Hiragana (ひらがな)	One of two phonetic Japanese syllabaries. Hiragana is the more common syllabary and is used in conjunction with kanji in standard prose.
Kanji (漢字)	The adopted Japanese version of Chinese logographic characters.
Katakana (カタカナ)	The second Japanese phonetic syllabary. This one is used mostly for loan words. The phonemes represented by <i>Katakana</i> are the same as those represented by <i>Hiragana</i> .
Keitai (携帯)	This means “something portable”, but has become a synonym for “cell phone” or “mobile device.”
Kidoku (既読)	“Read” (past participle). The <i>kanji</i> compound used on LINE to show that a message has been read.
Kohai (後輩)	A more junior member of a Japanese social group.
Kūki (空気)	Literally “air” or “atmosphere.” The word is used, however, to indicate the prevailing mood of a social context. Reference to “reading the air” is common in Japanese discourse.
Nihonjinron (日本人論)	A body of literature focused on Japanese uniqueness, often highlighting positive cultural traits and concepts.
Sakoku (鎖国)	Literally, “locked country”: a period of self-imposed semi-isolation from Western powers (1633 – 1853).
Sempai (先輩)	A more senior member of a Japanese social group.
Soto (外)	“Outside” or “foreign.”
Sumaho (スマホー)	Japanese (loan) word for “smartphone.”
Uchi (内)	“Inside” or “in-group.”