

# ICT-based Communication Data Gathering from a Long-Term Study Abroad Case Study

長期留学ケーススタディにおけるICTコミュニケーションのデータ収集

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## 〈Abstract〉

Study has been done on ICT-based student peer communication related to when Japanese students prepare to go abroad before then meeting their international peers<sup>(1)</sup>, with investigation focusing on differences between four case studies. Other research showed that students who study abroad can tend to avoid ICT-based communication methods in favor of traditional face-to-face information exchange techniques<sup>(2)</sup>. This research goes further by collating data posted by a student after a short-term study abroad trip, and before and during a long-term study abroad experience. It then goes on to follow how the information develops over time before making predictions of how such data will change in the future. These research notes are gathered to expand the body of data currently available, and include the author's insights and interpretations. The studies and data gathering are done on a background of English language and international cultural education.

## 〈Keywords〉

ICT-based communication, long-term study abroad, English language education

## 1 Introduction

This paper is presented as research notes, and is compiled in order to aid the advancement of new ideas and information in the field of ICT-based communication in the context of Japanese students studying abroad. Due to this, a research conclusion is neither included nor reached. Previous research has investigated how “traditional methods (can) trump ICT in students’ international communication”<sup>(1)</sup> showing that face-to-face communication can be more effective and more easily embraced than ICT-based methods by students when they are part of a short-term study abroad language program. That research was followed by a more in-depth investigation using four case studies<sup>(2)</sup> which found that, although participation in short-term study abroad programs does not result in students using ICT-based communication methods more than they had done before, such participation can entice students to become “repeaters”, i.e., to decide to participate in such programs for a second or subsequent time. This second experience

provided the stage for ICT-based communication to blossom, enabling the students to independently find and communicate with friends that they would not have been able to easily contact in a non-ICT based world. A further case study in the same paper found that ICT-based communication had introduced one student to the idea of taking a year out of university for the purpose of pursuing a long-term study abroad program. He had remained in contact with several friends from the countries he had previously visited when on short-term study abroad trips, which “had inspired (him) to think more deeply about his studies, his goals, and his career path.”<sup>(2)</sup> Eventually, he decided to take a one-year gap year (meaning, to pause his studies for one year, planning to continue them on his return) from university, and return to the same place abroad for a long-term study abroad experience.

This paper looks at the online messages posted by the student (including related comments by friends and family), in terms of what was posted, when it was posted, and in what language. From these messages, we can get a

glimpse of how the student changed over time, and how his use of ICT developed. Most of the messages investigated are from Facebook, with email messages also referenced. The student was on a long-term study abroad experience from February 2016, and is due to return to Japan in February 2017 (note: this paper's time of writing is December 2016). Only some messages are mentioned in this paper, as to mention them all would be too large an undertaking, with too much redundancy to make the research valuable.

## 2 ICT-Based Messages

### 2-1 Making the Decision to Study Abroad Long Term

The student posted a message in March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2015, along with a photograph showing he had finished a short-term study abroad experience (his second one). He had been studying in Canterbury, England (CCCU – Canterbury Christ Church University) and Cork, Ireland (UCC – University College Cork) for two weeks in each place, a total of four weeks. The message he posted was in English, and the photograph included the group he had studied with. His message was as follows (grammar mistakes, etc., are included):

*Today, It will end March. I graduated CCCU and UCC English class.*

*Before going to study abroad was not good feeling, because I had to study, there was a variety of things. However, I think that it was really good for me in study abroad. I was able to meet a lot of foreign and jappanese friends. Thank you everyone. I was very happy. In addition, It was changed views on English.*

*It is important for me to communicate with foreign people and touch on culture.*

*I also continue study English and I wanna to be a my university International staff.*

*Someday I'll go back to Canterbury and Cork.*

It can be seen that the student enjoyed his time abroad, made new friends of various nationalities, learned about culture, and that his views about English education/ importance had changed or developed. Furthermore, he was able to identify a goal for his future career; that of becoming a staff member of an International Centre at a university.

Shortly after that, in April 12<sup>th</sup>, he stated simply:

*I always think that I wanna come back to Canterbury and Cork.*

The above message was followed by this message in April 13<sup>th</sup>:

*I made a only English Twitter account. @KentaroS02. Please follow me.*

*I wanna speak and use English!*

These messages show that the student's desire to use English had been retained after his return to Japan, and that he desired to maintain a connection to the places he had been. His use of ICT-based communication suggests that he felt that it to be a medium that could help him to explore his English language and cultural skills. The names and other information of the people who "liked" (reacted to) his comments revealed that he had made connections with a mix of both Japanese and non-Japanese people. It was also noticed that the number of "likes" he received from non-Japanese people increased with newer comments, reflecting his ever-expanding circle of international friends. It was also observed that he was using multiple social media platforms to express himself, and that Twitter was an additional platform from that point on.

The student posted in May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015 that he had decided to study abroad again, and that this time he would like to study abroad for a long time. The message was as follows (this time, written in Japanese):

私事ではありますが、来年の2月にアイルランドの University College Cork の UCC Language Centre に1年間留学することに決めました。

就活や休学することなど、いろいろ悩んだりしましたが語学研修で行かせてもらってすごく自分の視野が広がったし、英語だけでなく人として学ぶことができる場所だと思いました。語学研修から帰って以来、普通に大学の授業を受けて卒業して就職するのはつまらないと感じたし、もっといろいろ学びたいという気持ちが強くなりました。それだけでなく、留学でできた外国人や日本人の友達と毎日ではないけれど、LINEやメールをするのが楽しいし、いい刺激を受けました。

実際、向こうでは大学のサークル・japanese society・高校の日本語の授業のボランティアやバイ

トなどの経験をしてこようと考えています。  
 費用を出してくれる両親だけでなく、この留学を応援してくれてサポートしてくれるリンチ先生にはものすごく感謝しています。  
 先生と会わなかったら、普通で終わっていたし視野が狭いまま終わっていたと思います。  
 行かせてもらう以上は、それ以上の勉強や経験をしなければ意味がないのでしっかり目標を持って帰ってきてからそれを活かせるように残りの9ヶ月は必死に英語と学校の勉強・資格をやろうと思います。

In that message, the student wrote about how the previous study abroad had affected him, and that he wanted to study abroad again, but for a longer time. He mentioned that he was not yet ready to continue in regular university in Japan, and that he was often in contact with people in Ireland through other ICT media such as LINE and emails. He also thanked his parents and a university teacher for supporting him, and promised to study English hard over the following 9 months (while still in Japan) in order to prepare for his one year abroad in Ireland. He had decided to study abroad on a long-term program, and had promised himself to make the most of the time left in Japan before he left to join that program. In parallel to that message, he had also been in contact with his previous seminar teacher (who was advising him about study abroad), and his current seminar teacher (who was preparing him for his eventual graduation thesis), and that contact was both via email and in person.

## 2-2 Active Life in Japan Before Study Abroad

Once the student decided to study abroad long term, he became very active in terms of international-related activities. He posted the following message in May 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> about participating as a volunteer in the UNESCO World Conference in Japan:

今日はユネスコの世界会議のボランティアに参加してきたよ～笑 世界各国の人が来て面白かった  
 😊👍👏 仕事あるかと思いきやまさかの1時間半で終了してお菓子と2000円貰ってなんか申し訳なかった(▽)笑  
 国際的な会議も生で見える事できて良い刺激になったし、地域活性化について海外のプレゼン聞いてたら興味深い内容でした👍👏👏  
 また、このような世界会議あったら参加したいな笑

He wrote about how he could meet various people from around the world, listen to interesting presentations in English, and that he wanted to participate again.

From June, 2015, the message contents changed to reflect how his family were positively affected by (and getting involved in) his international views. His parents (especially, his mother) had decided to take part in their son's international life by becoming a home stay family for foreign students visiting Japan (Kanazawa, in Ishikawa prefecture). From that point on, many of his messages showed how he positively interacted with such students, and accompanied them to various places in Japan when he could. While some previous messages were written in Japanese, the stimulus of interacting with English speakers again seemed to be behind his returning to writing in English. A message dated June 7<sup>th</sup> was as follows:

*Yesterday, I went to 百万石 festival. I could talk with Harvard and Princeton and many more students!! We saw 百万石踊り流し. I enjoyed it and talk about japanese culture! It was difficult for me to explain by English! But, I think It will be in practice for my English skill.*

Such interactions continued with home stay students in Japan. A few months later, the focus of his messages changed to a new topic – that of an internship program that he had applied for (and was accepted onto), and which was sponsored by a local company. The internship program was in Vietnam. His message was written in Japanese, and began by explaining how the program allowed him to meet the governor of Ishikawa, his home prefecture.

昨日から県主催の東南アジアのインターンシップで県庁の知事を訪問してきました😊😊  
 今回はベトナムのほうで研修してきます!  
 今までは大学の語学研修でしたが、もうそれも卒業し自分で積極的に行動したいと思い参加を決めました。  
 これは将来海外系の仕事に就きたい自分にとって成長できる場でもあり、良いきっかけにもなると思うので2週間頑張って研修してきます👍👏👏👏ベトナムは今年初めてのプログラムなので、それに参加できることを光栄だと思し研修メンバーとも仲良くなれたし、お互い刺激し合えると思うので今から楽しみです笑w

He wrote that the internship program in Vietnam would connect to his future career (of working in a field that somehow required a connection with foreign countries), and that he was looking forward to the experience.

His messages written in English became longer and more detailed, and he wrote a lengthy message in August 30<sup>th</sup>, as follows:

*End of summer! I had a good time in my this summer. I was able to many communicate with another country people. So, I had spent and made many friends! I was so happy.*

*French girls, Fanny Cindy Line Manon Juliette Sara Karura are very kind and cute! Ha ha ha*

*I was amazing that everyone can speak and write japanese very well. So, I thought that I have to study English very hard. Also, Tuomas was good friends for me. Nearly four month, I had spent short time but frequently talk! Marc is new Ireland friend. Next year, when I go to Dublin, I want to play and meet again.*

*Anush was new coutry friend! Until I saw her, I did not know her country. She is also good speak Japanese and very cute.*

*I was very sad because everyone come back to their country!*

*But I am looking forward to meet again 😊😊👋👋 I will never forget them!*

It could be seen that he was looking forward to meeting the foreign friends he had made again, and that he planned to use those friendships to support exchange when he travelled abroad the following year.

His messages continued for the next few months, showing how the internship was successful, how he was interacting with the foreign students that were staying at his house, and how his preparation for study abroad long term was coming along.

There were many other messages posted by a member of his family (his mother). She had caught the “international culture and English language bug”, and was also posting about her experiences and thoughts, sometimes in English and sometimes in Japanese. This shows how the effect of language exchange and study abroad can be wider than just the student who participates, affecting other family members. Furthermore, it shows

how ICT can equally be a platform for expressing ideas and experiences about study abroad for various family members.

### 2-3 Long-Term Study Abroad in Ireland Study Abroad

The student was accompanied by his mother on the trip to Ireland (she stayed for only a short time, as a holiday). She decided to take the opportunity to travel, while supporting her son before he left her for one year. They took a holiday together, visiting France and Spain, before arriving in Ireland. This had the advantage of allowing them to learn about culture, and also allowed the student to become accustomed to the time difference between Japan and Europe (thus avoiding arriving at the language school in UCC, Ireland, with the negative effects of jetlag). It was interesting to note that the student did not post any messages on social media during the holiday, while his mother posted many messages and photographs (again, in English and Japanese). Her messages appeared on his Facebook thread, so maybe he decided that he didn't need to post similar messages.

After she returned to Japan, he began posting messages to Facebook again. He posted many photographs with short captions, and some longer messages. The following message was posted on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016:

*Today, Cristina who is my housemate left my host family's house and came back to her country 📺😊 I've spent time with her for 5 month. She is so lovely Spanish girl 🏠\_E5💖💖 I miss her 😊😊 Thank you so much Cristina. I never forget you 😊😊*

The message showed how he had made friends with different nationalities, and had become close to some of them.

The student was using other ICT-based media, too. For example, he regularly sent emails to his family and to his university teachers. For example, this email was received on October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2016:

*Hello my teacher. I talked about my English with language centre. I don't change my class because my teacher teaches how to do IELTS in the class. Thus, it's no problem.*

*In addition, I always took part in Japanese society. I could make many Irish friends; moreover, I joined*

*handball club from yesterday. Everyone is very kind for me but speak English very well. I manage to follow now. I think I must more improve my English skills. Kind regards*

The student showed that he was able to solve problems by himself, and that he was taking part in some clubs and activities. He also indicated that his motivation to learn English was still high.

The comments and posts that followed were often in English, were about the university Japanese society (whose membership mainly consisted of non-Japanese who didn't speak Japanese, yet who had an interest in Japan), and about his sporting and club activities. His followers (judged by number of "likes" and other reactions and connections) continued to increase, and were mainly non-Japanese.

For this set of research notes, his ICT-based communication was followed until December 2016. He will stay in Ireland until February 2017, so the remaining data communication will be reported on at a later date.

### 3 ICT Data Scrutiny

#### 3-1 Content Language Used

The student used the English language on his Facebook page more consistently around the time of his study abroad trips (both the short-term and long-term trips), while writing more in Japanese after he had been back in Japan for a period of time. From that, it was surmised that the environment in which a student lives/works has an influence on how likely it is that a student will use the local language or, in an ICT context, that "lifting out of social relations from local contexts and their (subsequent) re-articulation"<sup>(3)</sup> may take too much effort when moving from the real domain to the virtual (ICT-based) domain. In other words, when expressing oneself on social media, it becomes easier over time to write in the language one is living their daily life in (for this intermediate level student), and that, as more time goes by, this phenomenon becomes more obvious.

#### 3-2 ICT-based Media Usage Frequency and Depth

It was noticed that ICT-based (social) media was used more often in the months the student was getting ready to leave for study abroad, and immediately after arriving back home. This suggests a certain excitement felt by the student, increasing his willingness to tell people about his plans and experiences.

Over time, the messages became fewer, especially while living abroad. That coincided with the student being more involved in clubs, sports, and other activities that allow real access to people, instead of mostly virtual access. He continued to post photographs with very short comments/captions, and these showed his activities. Instead of being a written diary, his ICT-based social media feed became a quick snapshot of what he was doing. This shows that, once the student becomes socially established and has a circle of friends with connected activities, that the frequency of depth social media use can decrease.

### 4 Projections

#### 4-1 The Final Stage of ICT-based Media Usage

Based on previous short-term study abroad observations, it is expected that the student will increase his use of ICT-based social media in the weeks immediately prior to returning home. It is also expected that his messages will become longer, and that he will write mainly in English. This will reflect the environment in which he is living, which is an English-speaking one. Furthermore, as his excitement builds about returning home, and his emotions about leaving the place that adopted him for one year well up, he will develop the need to write about those feelings and experiences.

It is also expected that he will continue to write in English after he returns to Japan, but that his messages will begin to be written more in Japanese over time.

This paper is presented as research notes. After the student returns to Japan, an interview is planned that will fill in the missing pieces of part of the research, and enable verification of these projections.

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### Notes/References

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