



# Occasional Papers

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## STUDY ABROAD: RETHINKING OUR WHYS AND HOWS

The theme of the 17<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the Central Association of Teachers of Japanese was “Study Abroad: Rethinking Our Whys and Hows.” In the two-day conference, held April 15-16, 2005, at The Ohio State University, we had eleven excellent presentations, including three keynote addresses, which provided the basis for much stimulating discussion. We are pleased to present to the ATJ membership three articles based on the keynote speakers’ original presentations.

Professor Dan P. Dewey’s article, “Maximizing Learning During Study Abroad: Some Research-Based Programmatic Suggestions,” provides an insightful set of suggestions for preparing our students for study abroad. While acknowledging the difficulty of interpreting the various research findings on the one hand, and the large variation among individual students and study abroad programs on the other, Dewey offers practical thoughts on the many aspects of study abroad. These include its timing in relation to the proficiency level, benefits of pre-departure orientation, in-country factors that may influence the quality of the experiences, such as participation in a well-defined social domain, attention, and reflection. He further reflects on post-return issues, ranging from transfer of credit and skill assessment to continuing study.

In her article, “A Year Abroad in Japan: Participants’ Perspectives,” Professor Noriko Iwasaki offers an insider’s view of study abroad experiences, focusing on students’ views on their uses of social registers. Employing both standardized proficiency testing and personal interviews, she examines language gains of individual students that may be neglected in larger-scale statistical studies. Through interviews two years after students’ return from a year abroad in Japan, Iwasaki’s study also offers important insights into long-term impacts of study abroad.

Professor Stephen P. Nussbaum offers fresh viewpoints in “Facilitated Learning on Study Abroad: an Approach.” He is a cultural anthropologist with extensive experience in administering study abroad programs both from the U.S. and within a Japanese institutional setting. Viewing study abroad as both setting and process in socially engaged learning, he argues that educators have several crucial tasks to accomplish: shaping learning environments, providing learners with tools and insights suited to in-situ learning, and developing critical thinking and a sympathetic understanding of other peoples. He then offers a multitude of ideas and concrete suggestions for ensuring that a study abroad experience leads to a better appreciation for the various manifestations of human culture.

For those of us who were fortunate to be present at the time of the presentations, these articles provide valuable reminders of the issues raised at the conference. For those who were not able to attend, we hope you will let these essays engage your own thinking on study abroad.

The conference organizers wish to thank the keynote speakers for submitting their articles for publication. We are grateful to the many supporters of the conference and to Masa Itomitsu for his editorial work, and to the ATJ for publishing these pieces in its *Occasional Papers* series.

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# A YEAR ABROAD IN JAPAN: PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES

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## Introduction

Japanese language teachers may have a number of questions about their students' study abroad experiences: How much does their Japanese language proficiency really improve while abroad? Why do students do things that study abroad administrators and teachers may consider undesirable, such as leaving their host family's residence and withdrawing from the Japanese program in Japan? Why do some of them start speaking very informally, even to teachers, when returning to the United States? What do their study abroad experiences really mean to them?

A number of previous studies on study abroad provide some answers to these questions, but the majority of them concern Indo-European languages such as Spanish, French, and German—research on study abroad in Japan is scarce. Of the few studies regarding study abroad in Japan, very few investigate college- or university-level students studying in Japan for more than 1 semester (i.e., for an academic year).

In an attempt to answer the preceding questions, I began a research project three years ago, keeping track of a few students who went on study abroad for 1 academic year. Their study abroad experiences and gains were assessed in multiple ways, including 2 types of proficiency tests administered both before and after study abroad, and questionnaires designed to elicit their own focal points of study abroad prior to departure and their own perceptions of their experiences and accomplishments upon return.

## Previous Studies

Previous research related to study abroad in Japan primarily investigated either college/university students who studied in summer intensive programs in Japan (e.g., Collier-Sanuki & Hanabusa, 1998; Dewey, 2004; Huebner, 1995; Makino,

1996) or students who studied in Japan for a year as high school students (e.g., Hashimoto, 1993; Marriott, 1993, 1995). One of the few exceptions was Siegal (1994, 1995), who studied the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by 4 adult women studying in Japan, three of whom were exchange students.

With respect to learning Japanese during study abroad in Japan, Huebner (1995) and Dewey (2004) both compared the gains of students who studied in intensive Japanese programs in Japan to those of students who studied in intensive summer programs in the United States. Huebner found that beginning-level learners who studied in Japan outperformed those who studied in the United States, especially in reading comprehension, which he attributed to the urgent need that the students felt to read text in their surrounding environment in the community, such as signs and print media. Dewey focused on the reading development of students who had studied Japanese for 2 to 4 years prior to their intensive summer language instruction. He found that the 2 groups differed significantly only in self-assessment of their reading comprehension, specifically, that the study abroad group rated their reading comprehension abilities higher, but the groups did not differ on other measures of reading (i.e., free-recall and vocabulary). It is important to note that both Huebner and Dewey found that there was greater variability in language performance and in experience (e.g., contact with language and culture outside of class) among those who studied in Japan.

Makino (1996) and Collier-Sanuki and Hanabusa (1998) also researched college/university students who studied Japanese in summer intensive programs in Japan; both used questionnaires to shed light on the experiences of the students, all of whom stayed with Japanese families. Both studies indicated that the host families were essen-

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tial language resources for the students. Although the major linguistic difficulties that the students experienced were related to informal language (Collier-Sanuki & Hanabusa), many students also reported improvement in the use of informal language as a result of homestay (Makino).

The acquisition of register (i.e., appropriate switch between formal and informal styles of language) appeared to be the major obstacle for Australian secondary school students who studied in high school in Japan. Hashimoto (1993), Marriott and Enomoto (1995), and Marriott (1993, 1995) found that high school students who studied in Japan for 1 year had problems in terms of sociolinguistic competence while showing substantial gains in communication skills, especially in listening and speaking (Marriott & Enomoto). In particular, students tended to overuse the informal, plain form in situations where the more formal *~desu/masu* form should have been employed (Hashimoto; Marriott 1993, 1995). Although most students had knowledge of both forms, they were unable to vary them appropriately. Likewise, when Atsuzawa-Windley and Noguchi (1995) examined the language performance of university students who had previously studied in Japan, they found that those who had study abroad experiences had difficulty with expressions of politeness while outperforming students without study abroad experiences in other aspects of performance (e.g., pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension). Considerable variation among the students was also noted in terms of the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence (Marriott, 1993).

Siegal (1994, 1995) conducted an in-depth study of 4 women studying Japanese in Japan and demonstrated the complexity involved in the acquisition of sociolinguistic competence by White women—involving the interplay of race, gender, and social status.

The studies summarized here show that although study abroad may be beneficial for acquisition of Japanese as a second language, it often leads to students' deviance in inappropriate language behavior—namely, overuse of the plain form. The studies also suggest that there is greater variability among those who study abroad compared to those who study Japanese in the United States.

In fact, substantial individual variation is also found in research on acquisition of other languages during study abroad, and the importance of focusing on individual learners is recognized by a number of researchers (DeKeyser, 1991; Pellegrino, 1998; Wilkinson, 2000), because large-scale quantitative studies fail to recognize the individuality of the participants' experiences and their accomplishments. DeKeyser noted that "it would be wise to capitalize on the advantages of intensive case studies first" (p. 48). Furthermore, in her review of studies on students' perspectives of study abroad, Pellegrino underscored the value of introspective techniques to elicit students' perception of their study abroad experience for the purpose of "understanding the language use and social behaviors of students immersed in an L2 environment" (p. 93).

Pellegrino (1998) also pointed out that study abroad experience changes students as individuals, in addition to providing linguistic gains. Barrutia (1971), for example, stated that, as a consequence of study abroad, "Perhaps most valuable of all are increased self-understanding, clarified life purposes, and the broadening and deepening of the value system to which each student gives allegiance and on the basis of which he makes his choices" (p. 233). However, to my knowledge, there is very little research on the personal growth of college/university students who study abroad. Hence, the current study focuses on a small number of students and elicits the students' own perceptions of their study abroad experiences.

## Current Study

### Research Questions

The current study uses the results of questionnaires, interviews, and proficiency tests to examine the experiences of university students who studied abroad for 1 academic year. Specifically, this study investigates the following questions:

1. Upon their return, how did the participants perceive their own experience and gains of study abroad as compared to the goals that they articulated prior to study abroad?

2. How do they perceive different registers (i.e., informal, plain form vs. formal *~desu/masu* form) as a result of study abroad?

3. What was the reasoning behind some of their actions (i.e., decision to leave homestay ar-

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rangement, decision to withdraw from the Japanese program)?

4. In retrospect (almost 2 years after studying abroad), how did they perceive their study abroad experiences? What do they consider to be the impact of study abroad in their lives, beyond gains in language proficiency?

### Participants

Students who were going to Japan for the 2002-2003 academic year at a state university in the northeastern United States participated. Among a total of 15 students who were preparing to go to Japan (11 men and 4 women), six students, all of whom were male and non-Asian, volunteered to participate in pre-departure proficiency tests and a questionnaire.

Among the six, five participated in at least to part of the post-study-abroad tasks. One of the five participants had studied Japanese for only 1 year (6 hours of formal instruction per week for 2 semesters) and the other 4 had completed 2 years of Japanese instruction (6 hours of formal instruction per week for 4 semesters). Their ages at the time of departure ranged from 19 to 21. The five students went to 4 different universities in Japan, all of which had an exchange agreement with the students' home university. Four of the five participants, at least initially, stayed with host families in Japan.

Of the five participants, three participated in all the post-study-abroad proficiency tests and interviews in 2003. One participated only in OPI in 2003 and in the retrospective interview 2005. Another completed both proficiency tests and questionnaires in 2003 but did not participate in the retrospective interview in 2005. Four parttime-participated in retrospective interviews in 2005.

### Methods

Prior to departure for Japan, the Japanese proficiency of the participants was assessed using two measures: the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) conducted by the author, who is a certified tester, and a past version of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) administered by the author. Due to time constraints, of the three sections of the test, namely, listening comprehension, character-vocabulary, and grammar-reading, only the latter two were administered. The 1999

version of the Level 2 JLPT was given to the participants who had studied Japanese for 2 years and the Level 3 JLPT was given to the student who had studied Japanese for 1 year. The students' goals (or focal points of their study abroad) and expectations were assessed by a questionnaire on which students indicated their agreement with 30 statements, such as "I would like to increase my Japanese vocabulary" and "I would like to focus on improving my ability to speak Japanese," on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Appendix A has a list of the items that are most relevant to the current discussion.<sup>1</sup>

After the students returned from their year abroad, in September and October in 2003, their proficiency was re-assessed using the OPI and the JLPT (2000 version),<sup>2</sup> administered by an instructor at the students' home institution; five students participated in the OPI conducted by the author over the phone Japanese Language Proficiency Test is the most established test of the Japanese language. These students were also informally asked about their study abroad experiences immediately preceding or following the OPI. The tapes and ratings were sent to ACTFL Language Testing International to receive official ratings.<sup>3</sup> Only four of the five students also completed the JLPT. The Level 2 test was again given to the three who had studied Japanese for 2 years prior to study abroad and the Level 3 test to the one student who had studied Japanese for 1 year before study abroad. They were also given the option to take the test the next level. Two students, including the student with 1 year of prior study, opted to take the higher level test for both sections of the JLPT (character-vocabulary and grammar-reading), and one chose the higher level test for only the character/vocabulary section. These four students also completed the post-study-abroad questionnaire, which contained items that corresponded to those in the pre-study-abroad questionnaire, such as "I am happy with my increased knowledge of Japanese vocabulary" and "I am happy with the improvement in my ability to speak Japanese." The students also provided their own comments about their study abroad experiences immediately preceding and/or following the OPI. These comments and their responses to the questionnaire were used to answer research questions 1 and 3.

In 2005, I asked for their participation in interviews to retrospectively evaluate their

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study abroad experiences—almost 2 years later after they studied abroad. Because their OPI performances after study abroad revealed that some of the participants overused the plain form, similarly to what Marriott (1993, 1995) found, I asked the participants to provide observations and thoughts regarding language register and politeness (i.e., informal plain form vs. more formal *~desu/masu* form). I conducted most of these interviews over the phone.

## Results

**The participants' pre-departure focal points and their outcome.** This section provides answers to the first research question: Upon their return, how did the participants perceive their own experience and gains of study abroad as compared to the goals that they articulated prior to study abroad? In order to better understand their perceptions, their actual gains in proficiency, as assessed by the two measures, are first discussed.

The five participants will be referred to using the following pseudonyms: Alan, Henry, Peter, Sam, and Greg. The first four participants took the equivalent of 2 years of Japanese prior to going to Japan, and Greg had studied Japanese for 1 year before study abroad. Alan and Greg went to the same institution in the Kansai region, Henry in the central region, and Peter and Sam in the Kanto region. Among the five, Peter was the only one who did not stay with a host family; he stayed in a university dormitory.

There was little variation in the participants' responses to the pre-study-abroad questionnaire. All five participants expressed a desire to improve in every aspect of the language, but Alan's priority was more on speaking and listening than on reading, writing, or the learning of kanji and vocabulary. Henry placed a higher priority on language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) than on the learning of kanji and vocabu-

lary. Sam, Peter, and Greg all rated their agreement at 5 (strongly agree) on statements that they would focus on speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, kanji, and cultural understanding.

Peter did not complete the post-study-abroad questionnaire, but the other participants' responses on post-study-abroad questionnaires varied substantially, unlike their responses to the pre-study-abroad questionnaire. Alan was satisfied with his improvement in listening and speaking (rating both as 5), but less satisfied with his improvement in reading (rating 3) and in writing (rating 4). Henry was relatively satisfied with his improvement in listening and speaking (rating both as 4), but quite unsatisfied with his improvement in other areas: 2 for both reading and writing, 1 for vocabulary, and 2 for kanji. Greg was satisfied with his increased knowledge of kanji and vocabulary, rating kanji 5 and vocabulary 4, neutral with his improvement in reading, but unsatisfied with his improvement in productive skills, rating both speaking and listening as 2. Sam was quite satisfied across the board, rating his happiness with improvements in listening and reading as 5 and in speaking and writing as 4, and increase of knowledge of kanji as 5 and vocabulary as 4.

The language proficiency assessments revealed that all the participants improved their proficiency in Japanese. A comparison between the questionnaires and proficiency tests indicated that the areas of their strengths and weaknesses are closely related to the participants' initial focal points, and are mostly compatible with the participants' feelings of their own improvements. Table 1 shows their OPI ratings and Table 2 shows their scores on the JLPT 1999 (administered before study abroad) and 2000 version (administered after study abroad).

**TABLE 1. Gains in OPI Ratings**

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Prior Instruction</i>	<i>Before Study Abroad</i>		<i>After Study Abroad</i>	
Alan	2 years	Section 1.01	<u>Intermediate-High</u>	Section 1.02	<u>Advanced-Low</u>
Henry	2 years	Section 1.03	<u>Intermediate-Mid</u>	Section 1.04	<u>Intermediate-Mid</u>
Peter	2 years	Section 1.05	<u>Advanced-Low</u>	Section 1.06	<u>Advanced-High</u>
Sam	2 years	Section 1.07	<u>Intermediate-High</u>	Section 1.08	<u>Advanced-Mid</u>
Greg	1 year	Intermediate-Low		Intermediate-Mid	

**TABLE 2. JLPT scores**

<i>Name</i>	<i>Character-Vocabulary</i>			<i>Reading-Grammar</i>		
	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Posttest</i>	<i>Higher Level</i>	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Higher Level</i>
Alan	Level 2 52%	Level 2 71%	Level 1 40%	Level 2 29%	Level 2 55%	Level 1 39%
Henry	Level 2 42%	Level 2 60%	n/a	Level 2 23%	Level 2 46%	n/a
Sam	Level 2 59%	Level 2 78%	Level 1 72%	Level 2 17%	Level 2 66%	n/a
Greg	Level 3 56%	Level 3 96%	Level 2 76%	Level 3 68%	Level 3 92%	Level 2 73%

*Note:* Peter did not take this test; the percentages in parentheses indicate the difference from the scores on the 1999 version of the test.

Alan's and Sam's gains in speaking are evident in their OPI ratings (and so is Peter's gain in speaking although we have no basis to discuss his own perception of the gain in speaking.) Greg felt that he did not improve as much as he wished in speaking, but he was rated one sublevel higher. Henry's rating did not go up, but this may reflect the wide range of the Intermediate-Mid rating. In the interview, he was more confident and fluent.

On the JLPT, Sam's and Greg's gains in character-vocabulary and reading-grammar are salient. Sam showed enough knowledge of character-vocabulary (72%) to be able to pass Level 1.<sup>4</sup> After study abroad, Greg, who had studied Japanese for only a year before departure, scored better in Level 2 reading/grammar (73%) than the

other three participants, who had studied Japanese for 2 years prior to study abroad. Alan and Henry, who were not happy with their improvements in reading, did show evidence of improvement, though to a lesser extent.

When compared to the participants' own focal points of study, Alan achieved the gain in speaking that he prioritized, and Sam also achieved what he set out as his goals (i.e., across-the-board increase in proficiency). Henry and Greg's gains might not have met their expectations, at least in some areas. Henry did not gain as much as he wished in reading and writing, and the area he believes he improved most, listening and speaking, did not improve enough to obtain higher rating by OPI. Greg gained substantially in reading and

knowledge of kanji and vocabulary, but he felt that he did not improve as much as he wished in speaking although he improved enough to obtain a higher rating in the OPI.

Thus far, discussion has been limited to the students' gains in language proficiency. However, it is extremely important to also consider their perceptions of their overall experiences as well as their gains in other areas such as personal growth and (cross-)cultural understanding. Indeed, all four participants (Peter did not complete the post-study-abroad questionnaire) were happy with their study abroad experiences overall.

Upon their return, the participants responded to the question "In what area did your experience contribute to your growth most?," choosing from three possible answers (language learning, personal growth, and cultural understanding), and then provided their own explanation. Alan chose cultural understanding rather than language learning as the area where he grew most, explaining that "the world looks different nowadays." Henry chose personal growth, explaining that "the Japanese way of thinking is so different from mine, I changed to adapt." Sam chose language learning, but commented that he felt that he grew in all three areas. Greg chose personal growth and explained that he gained much better study skills.

The participants' answers indicate that there are areas of growth that are rarely assessed but undoubtedly have significant value for the participants themselves.

**Participants' use and explanation of the *~desu/masu* form and plain form.** As discussed in the review of the previous study, on the one hand, students in summer intensive programs tend to encounter difficulties using the informal plain form when they go to Japan. On the other hand, secondary school students who spend a year abroad tend to overuse it after they return to their home country (i.e., Australia). Among the five participants who participated in the OPI both before and after study abroad, two, Henry and Greg, overused the plain form, but it was evident that both of them had a good grasp of both forms. They both maintained the use of the plain form when talking to the interviewer (which is considered inappropriate), but switched to the *~desu/masu* form when they were given role plays in which they had to talk to a teacher to arrange a makeup test or to an apartment manager to

arrange a window repair. The other three, Alan, Peter, and Sam, appropriately maintained *~desu/masu* with the interviewer, but were able to vary forms when given a role play in which they talked to young children. To assess their understanding of when to use *~desu/masu* and how they perceived the form, in the 2005 interviews, I asked the participants their views and understanding of *~desu/masu* forms to answer the second research question: How do the participants perceive different registers (i.e., informal plain form vs. formal *~desu/masu* style) as a result of study abroad?

Peter and Sam's extracurricular activities made them realize the importance of appropriate register. They were always very attentive to how Japanese speakers addressed the senior members of the club or older people. They strived to learn the sociolinguistic rules of the communities and to be members of the communities. Sam initially experienced some confusion as to when to use *~desu/masu* because in the United States he had had only had interaction in Japanese with Japanese teachers and exchange students. He explains:<sup>5</sup>

When I was sort of like, "Okay, I use *desu/masu* to talk to the teacher and I use plain form to talk to practicum."<sup>6</sup> But besides that, I don't think I had a real good understanding of when to use it and when not. Because, I mean, first of all, teachers and practicum, but when I go to Japan, I was thinking you have to extend it. How do I talk when I'm speaking to someone at the door; how do I talk when I, am, you know, in a meeting with a club member; how do I speak to, the, the head of the Psychics Department who's in a church choir, singing tenor with. You know what I mean? It's very complicated. Especially, when I know people who are, you know, I mean, are in a high position. But <<when>> getting to know you well, xx they use plain form. Then they speak casually. Then you kind of wonder ... they, these things, it confuses you.

It appears that Sam became a very careful observer of Japanese native speakers' verbal behavior. He says the reason why study abroad was a positive experience is that it allows you to observe how people use the language and how language varies within the context.

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Alan's experience was somewhat different: A "critical linguistic incident" made him realize how important it is to be sensitive to the expected level of politeness. According to him, although he had been taught that he was supposed to use *~desu/masu* when talking to people who are not close friends, there was some confusion when he arrived, especially because many people that he interacted with at the university were other students who were also studying Japanese.

The critical linguistic incident happened when he was getting comfortable using the plain form, which he described in the following exchange:

Alan: Um, I would be hanging out with my friends a lot. And there was um, when I come back when I was still at (name of the institution) and I was talking to one of my professors. And trying to explain to him why like I should be in the next class because I wanted things more, harder and challenging and more *taihen*. Um, And I hadn't realized it, but in classes, everyone, all the students speak very informally. So I just without even thinking, I went to him and didn't really use any kind of polite forms at all. He uh, he looked kind of shocked.

Interviewer: Really?

Alan: *Shocked* [with emphasis]. Yeah, like, he wasn't happy when I stopped, when finished speaking.

Interviewer: When you say that you didn't use any polite language, you didn't even use *~desu/masu*?

Alan: Yeah.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. So, from that point on, did you try to use *~desu/masu*?

Alan: With him always. I was for him, then I would use the most polite words I could with him. I think he was happier after then on.

Alan says although he is still not good at using the polite expressions like *keigo*, which people do not expect from a White man, he feels that he is able to speak appropriately without offending people.

Of the two participants who showed overuse of the plain form in the post-study-abroad OPI, Greg

and Henry, only Greg participated in the 2005 interview, but his account is very insightful. He says that he has now defaulted to the use of the plain form rather than the *~desu/masu* form. First, he felt that there was a disconnect between the emphasis on *~desu/masu* in the courses at the home institution on the one hand, and Japanese speakers' (especially his host mother's) assumption that the plain form must be easier and better for him to use, and their resultant encouragement of him to use the plain form. Second, he realized how important the plain form is in the grammar of Japanese, such as in relative clauses (e.g., *tabeta keeki* "a cake [I] ate") and how useful knowledge of the plain form is to comprehend and produce more complex language. He felt that in 1 year of Japanese instruction in the home institution, the plain form was not given the attention that it deserves, which probably led him to his preference of this (previously neglected) important form. Third, although he feels that he is probably supposed to use *~desu/masu* with teachers, none of the teachers at either the host institution in Japan or the home institution in the United States seemed to mind his use of the plain form.

The four participants had diverse experiences of interacting with people and their experiences and their perceptions account for their use of the plain form versus the *desu/masu* form. Their responses illuminate the complexity of the use of styles, coupled with expectations of people with whom they interacted. Whereas socialization and interaction with Japanese people in Japan helped Sam and Peter, Greg's responses reveal that the interactions he experienced as a young male foreign student led him to the default use of the plain form.

**Participants' accounts of what happened during study abroad.** The participants' own accounts of what happened during their study abroad provide some answers to the third and fourth research questions: What was the reasoning behind some of their actions (i.e., decision to leave homestay arrangement, decision to withdraw from the Japanese program)? and In retrospect (almost 2 years after studying abroad), how did they perceive their study abroad experiences; what do they consider to be the impact of study abroad in their lives, beyond gains in language proficiency? The participants' accounts also pro-



vide some hints about why and how they achieved (or did not achieve) their goals.

Henry, who was perhaps the least satisfied with his gains in language proficiency, was unable to successfully adapt to the host stay. He stated that it was very inconvenient for him to have to go back home at a certain time to have dinner with the family, whose residence was quite far from campus. Such tight constraints on his independence, something that American students are used to embracing during their college years, was perhaps difficult for Henry. Henry is not alone—American students in other countries may also encounter this problem given that host families in other countries find Americans to be more independent than their own children (Chilean families reported by Stephenson, 1999; Mexican families reported by Knight & Schmidt-Rinehart, 2002). American students also have difficulty with their host families in other countries (e.g., Wilkinson, 1998; 2000). According to Henry, the members of the host family were also critical of his Japanese, and he decided to leave the host family's house and to share a house with other students, including other foreign students. It has been reported in previous studies He also felt that "unused" Japanese was taught in his Japanese classes. What he learned most was casual speech through interaction with friends that he met in an extracurricular activity circle. Henry did not participate in the interview in 2005, and therefore his delayed reactions were not assessed.

Alan also found his homestay arrangement somewhat undesirable and his classes ineffective. He thought that even though the host family was nice, they were a too busy to interact with him. He was also disappointed to find that he could not take the general education classes that he thought he could take; he wished to take classes to fulfill general education requirements at his home institution and to satisfy his intellectual curiosity by taking challenging courses. Consequently, he decided to leave his host family and withdraw from the host program after one semester. Alan's actions as described thus far might lead an administrator or teacher to conclude that his study abroad experience was an undesirable and unsuccessful one. However, interviews with him upon his return and in 2005 revealed otherwise: He often interacted with the Japanese and he also used his time traveling within Japan and in neigh-

boring countries. He made friends both at the host institution and during his travels. His travels gave him the greatest opportunities to use the language, as shown in the following response to the question of what helped him the most in terms of language learning:

Alan: ... classroom's much pretty much, um, much less, lower stressed. .... it was a more of a system for learning things, like for studying and, you know, "let's practice things," or like "let's practice that." But there was the need to learn that was much greater outside of the classrooms.

Interviewer: So you are saying in fact there was more stress outside.

Alan: Yes.

Interviewer: I see.

Alan: Yeah. Well, because I mean you're talking to someone then you wanna communicate with them.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Alan: And if you don't understand—

Interviewer: Sometimes maybe embarrassing or something?

Alan: Um, it could be embarrassing or just like your purpose of communicating with them is gonna fail. Like if you want to, I'm trying to think of a good example. Um, most of my examples are like trying to find a place to stay. Um, I just remember one night, I don't remember that night so well. I'm trying to look for a good example, okay, there was one night. This is another one of those need-a-place-to-stay stories. Um I was in um, Maizuru kara minami-no hoo-wa.... What's the next big town down from Maizuru?

Interviewer: I don't know.

Alan: But uh, anyway, so I was traveling then and I was very ill-prepared just because I wasn't prepared xx for it. And I was expecting, you know, that (there would be) like a town or like I could find some lobbies or something. You know, some place just to spend, you know, the night <<to be>> warm. And next day it would be

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warm the next day. And then, then the xx no problem. Um but it was really cold and there was nowhere to go. Um, so, what I finally, I was asking about warm places and finally I met this woman who suggested that there is a Tenri-kyoo church down the street and that the owner is nice and he might, you know, let me sleep there. Um, so I tried that. I went there. And, they were of course very reluctant to let anyone kind of, sleep and stay there. Um, and there was, it was a big thing, with like they brought me down to the kooban and like police came. I tried to figure out, like you know, "where can I stay?" and, um, how did this end up? So it's a funny story how it ended up, which is kind of beside the point, which is when I was finally about to give it up, the guy says, it's okay you can stay here. Right? But um, I guess the big point is that if I hadn't been able to communicate to him, that I wasn't some scary, you know, giant guy, um, there would have been no way I could stay there. I would've been cold outside all night long. So, there was definite motivation to really perform my best at communicating

Evidently, he became proficient in speaking Japanese as a result of effortful negotiation outside the class. Furthermore, the recent interview with him revealed his relationship with his host family did not fail either, as seen in the following exchange:

Interviewer: You told me that you have a better relationship with your host family now.

Alan: I do, I do.

Interviewer: How did it improve?

Alan: Oh ... they were happy to see me when I came back... So, I mean, when we lived together, you know, whenever you live together, you know, whenever you live with someone, there's going to be some kind of stress, you know, depending on the two people. Um, so that's the stress we got in the way of our relationship before, but just for a visit, though yeah, that was a wonderful time.

Interviewer: I see, that's nice. So, this was last year?

Alan: I visited them twice now, actually.... Both times, I went to the Osaka area and stopped by for, you know.

Interviewer: That's nice. They must have been very happy to see you.

Alan: Yeah. First time I went back, I didn't know I was going, so it was kind of a surprise visit. So she was so surprised that she slapped me in my face. <laugh>

Interviewer: Really.

Alan: Yeah. She was happy about it but um, she was completely completely surprised.

Interviewer: Is that right.

Alan: Yeah. The second time I actually called ahead. <laugh> ... It was just fun.

A brief report about Alan in 2003 upon his return would have prematurely misled the administrator of study abroad programs that his study abroad was a failure. On the contrary, his study abroad was successful in a number of ways: improvement in his oral proficiency, his cross-cultural understanding, long-lasting relationships with his Japanese friends and the former host family, and impact on his life and career. He states in 2005 that he had the greatest time in his life and that his study abroad experience and his own achievements surpassed his expectations. To him, the study abroad was an unforgettable adventure, whose impact on his life is long-lasting. It is interesting to note that his perception of the study abroad experience is more positive now than at the time of his return. He says that he is more distanced from the downsides and he now has rosier memories. He graduated as a computer science major, with a minor in Japanese. He is now in Japan working for a Tokyo branch of a major U.S.-based company, doing work in which he is fully utilizing his Japanese language skills as well as his specialization.

Whereas Henry and Alan had some difficulties with their homestay while studying abroad, Greg enjoyed his homestay and enjoyed talking with his host mother in Japanese. In fact, the host mother was the primary native Japanese speaker that he interacted with regularly outside the classroom.

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He states in the interview that he learned the language and culture the most at homestay where “you really have to communicate something.” He experienced different ways of thinking and acting; for example, he learned how to interpret or convey “no” in Japan. In the recent interview, he says he achieved what he wanted to achieve while abroad. Upon his return, he said that his greatest gain was in his study skills, but now his cross-cultural understanding appears to be what strikes him as the greatest gain other than language proficiency, as seen in this response:

Being in the culture and be able to know sort of what’s out there and found what, how things work.... You are really only exposed to one way of life, unless they travel, most people don’t really know much about what happens in the world ... because there is, you know, a lot of different ways to do things. So there are a lot of different ways for people to act and it’s, it’s interesting to see the different system where those things are done differently ... particularly where values are different. You know, you really didn’t think about that, just because, typically you have a family and the ... you are away from your hometown and, and<<when you are >> in your own town and you are sort of immersed in your own culture, you don’t really think about your value system and how you think about things. There is just one system, and it’s really hard to gauge that.

Greg’s difficulty was in making Japanese friends, and he ended up with too much free time, which he used to study on his own. This may explain the impressive gain in his reading/grammar and character/vocabulary as shown in Table 2. He never thought that he would graduate with a degree in Japanese, but he had decided to major in Japanese as well as his original specialization, computer science. He successfully graduated with the two degrees. He also feels that his perception of study abroad is more positive now than before, with a hint of nostalgia. At the time of the 2005 interview, he was in Japan looking for a job teaching English.

Sam truly enjoyed his homestay. His host mother later visited him and his (American) mother in the United States more than once. He

participated in two major extracurricular activities: glee club and church choir. It appears that he enjoyed every one of his activities and found that all aspects of his experiences contributed to his gains, as seen in this exchange:

Interviewer: Do you think that overall, your study abroad experience met your expectations?

Sam: I think I did more than that. Because first of all, I expected I’d get better <<learn>> Japanese but I was a pretty much in a perfect position to improve. I was in a host family. My host mother was very concerned about my life, very curious about me. So <<we>> talked a lot about many different topics. It allowed me, opportunities xx rest of the family and to learn a lot about Japanese culture to improve my ability. Also, I had a mentor in a school program. Expert expert. I got a lot of guidance that helped there. And also, the club. ... I joined the club, and I joined a church choir, and I feel altogether was just such a great opportunity. I never expected things to come together like that. Because I heard a lot of horror stories from other students that a lot of stories about how things did not turn out well. You know, their host family, they joined a club but didn’t like it, so they ended up hanging around with American students all the time.... Like I said, things like that could have happened to me. That’s one way that it meets my expectations.

Besides gains in language proficiency, he seems to feel that he grew as a person as a result of knowing very different perspectives. He says that being in Japan gave him an opportunity to experience racial minority for the first time:

For one, it’s the first time in my life that I would ever, I can ever state that I was a racial minority. I actually got that experience.... Also, it was difficult to everybody. You feel you do the best to fit in, but still kind of running out against the barrier.

Sam also graduated with two degrees—in linguistics and in Japanese. At the time of the recent in-

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interview, he was looking for a job before eventually pursuing a higher degree at a graduate school.

Peter did not complete the first, immediate post-study-abroad questionnaire. The recent 2005 interview revealed that he had been suffering from a reverse culture shock immediately after his return to the United States, which made him unmotivated to study Japanese at his home institution. This may explain his reluctance to participate in the post-study-abroad test and questionnaire—except for the OPI. His responses to the pre-departure questionnaire indicated that he wanted to improve every aspect of his Japanese language. He also indicated that he hoped to achieve personal growth and cultural understanding as well, and that all were equally important to him. As seen in Table 1, his oral proficiency surpassed all the other participants before study abroad and improved further during his time in Japan. What helped him the most was his activity in the kendo club where no one spoke English. He also says that his Japanese improved in all areas, including writing, which was largely due to formal instruction. In addition to his gains in language proficiency, he learned to see his own culture differently. In response to the question of what his greatest gain besides language was, he responded:

Probably being able to take America out of context. Like, I can look at Japan objectively because I'm not Japanese. But coming back to America, I'm able to look at America and politics and societies and things like that, very critically as well. Like it's not just accept this fact, <<that or something>> else. So coming back and realize, hey, you know, there's no reason why we can't have national health insurance and something like that. Pretty important I think.

Peter graduated as a Japanese major, and is now working for a company where he translates Japanese into English.

### Concluding Remarks

A close look at individual participants and their own perceptions uncovered the participants' diverse experiences—despite the fact that the five participants were relatively homogenous in terms of their social status, age, race, and gender. Because of this variation, it is vital to consider

participants' own perceptions and accounts when examining the effects of study abroad.

The ways in which the participants choose to speak the Japanese language now (e.g., preference for the plain forms speech style vs. efforts to use more polite language) were shaped by their experiences, such as the host family's and friends' encouragement to use the plain form, another student's conscious efforts not to forget *~desu/masu* after a critical linguistic incident, and the other two students' careful and consistent efforts to use appropriate language in their club activities.

The participants' gains from study abroad extend far beyond language proficiency. They broadened their perspectives in the ways they view the world and their country. The courses of their careers and their lives are, or may be, largely influenced by their study abroad experiences. The impact seems alive and well almost 2 years after their return to the United States.

### Notes

1. The entire questionnaire as well as a detailed report of the participants' responses can be found in Iwasaki (in press).

2. To my knowledge, data or studies that support the equivalencies of the tests of the same levels given in different years, but because this is the most well-established published test of the Japanese, this test was used.

3. Only post-study-abroad OPI tapes were sent to ACTFL for official ratings. This was because the author was concerned about potential rating biases as a result of knowing the interviewees' pre-study-abroad proficiency ratings and the fact that they had studied abroad for a year. When an interview conducted by a certified tester is sent to ACTFL (to be precise, its affiliated division Language Testing International), the interview is sent first sent to another certified tester to obtain his/her rating without revealing the interviewer's ratings. When the second rater's rating matches that of the interviewer's, then the rating becomes official. If not, the interview is sent to yet another rater, and the rating agreed by two raters become an official rating.

4. Those who take the JLPT need to score 70% or higher on the Level 1 test to receive a Level 1 proficiency certificate and 60% or higher to receive a Level 2, 3, or 4 certificate.

5. In the transcripts of the participants' responses, "... " indicates that some parts are omitted, xx indicates that the segments were difficult to decipher, and segments within << >> were recorded as the best

guess of the author. The recording quality of two interviews (Sam's and Greg's) was poor, and they thus contained more unintelligible sequences than the other interviews.

6. *Practicum* refers to exchange students from Japan who help with Japanese language courses for course units at the participant's home institution.

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## Appendix A

- No.2\* I expect that my study abroad experience will change me as an individual.
- No.3 I would like to focus on improving my ability to speak the language.
- No.4 I would like to focus on improving my ability to read Japanese.
- No.5 I would like to focus on improving my ability to write Japanese.
- No.6 I would like to focus on improving my listening comprehension.
- No.7 I would like to increase my Japanese vocabulary.
- No.8 I would like to gain more kanji knowledge.
- No.9 I would like to gain a deeper understanding of Japanese culture.
- No.10 I would like to make a lot of Japanese friends.
- No.11 I would like to have as much contact with Japanese people as possible.

Note: The item numbers on the pre-study-abroad questionnaire correspond to the item numbers on the post-study-abroad questionnaire. There is no item no. 1 on the pre-study-abroad questionnaire because there was no item that corresponds to no. 1 on the post-study-abroad questionnaire.

## Appendix B

- No. 1 I feel that I gained the kind of overseas experience I wished to gain.
- No. 2 My study abroad experience changed me as an individual.
- No. 3 I am happy with my improvement in the ability to speak Japanese.
- No. 4 I am happy with my improvement in the ability to read Japanese.
- No. 5 I am happy with my improvement in the ability to write Japanese.
- No. 6 I am happy with my improvement in listening comprehension.
- No. 7 I am happy with my increased knowledge of Japanese vocabulary.
- No. 8 I have gained more kanji knowledge.
- No. 9 I gained a deeper understanding of Japanese culture.
- No. 10 I made a lot of Japanese friends.
- No. 11 I had as much contact with Japanese people as I expected.