

## Language learning beyond Japanese university classrooms: video interviewing for study abroad

John Brine<sup>1</sup>, Emiko Kaneko<sup>2</sup>, Younghyon Heo<sup>3</sup>,  
Alexander Vazhenin<sup>4</sup>, and Gordon Bateson<sup>5</sup>

**Abstract.** In 2014, the University of Aizu was accepted for participation in Japan's national TOP Global University (TGU) initiative. In this paper, we describe our use of video interviewing to prepare Japanese students for our Global Experience Gateway study abroad TGU project. Our university specializes in computer science education at undergraduate and graduate levels. Our students are preparing for careers or further research in either software or hardware specializations, and it is expected that English will be required increasingly in computer-related research and business. Within Japanese education, there is a view that the youth are reluctant to speak English (King, 2013), and our students use English infrequently. We have created a study abroad programme, which is intended to motivate students to study more in their regular English language classes to improve language skills and attain higher TOEIC scores. However, improved course grades and test scores do not prepare students with interpersonal communication skills required to function in an English-speaking context. Recent literature on language learning outside of the classroom (Nunan & Richards, 2014) supports our use of video interviewing to prepare students for study abroad. We are teaching Japanese students to conduct and video-record interviews with non-Japanese speakers in preparation for the conversational demands of study abroad. Practice with video equipment, interviewing techniques, simple camera work and editing helps our students to interact with our international

1. University of Aizu, Japan; brine@u-aizu.ac.jp
2. University of Aizu, Japan; kaneko@u-aizu.ac.jp
3. University of Aizu, Japan; youngheo@u-aizu.ac.jp
4. University of Aizu, Japan; vazhenin@u-aizu.ac.jp
5. Kochi University of Technology, Japan; bateson.gordon@kochi-tech.ac.jp

**How to cite this article:** Brine, J., Kaneko, E., Heo, Y., Vazhenin, A., & Bateson, G. (2015). Language learning beyond Japanese university classrooms: video interviewing for study abroad. In F. Helm, L. Bradley, M. Guarda, & S. Thoušný (Eds), *Critical CALL – Proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL Conference, Padova, Italy* (pp. 91-96). Dublin: Research-publishing.net. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2015.000315>

students and teachers. In this paper we outline the curriculum design, equipment selection, instruction, student project work, and assessment in this course.

**Keywords:** interviewing, video, study abroad, motivation.

## 1. Introduction

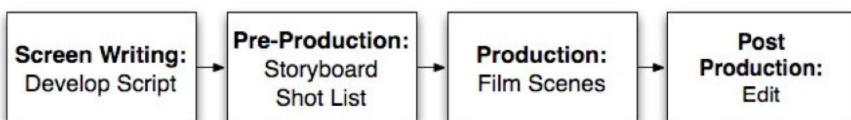
Within the context of our TGU project, students are being recruited nationally and internationally to enroll in our university to study computer science in English at the undergraduate and graduate levels. While classroom-centered approaches involving teachers and textbooks have been the emphasis in language education in Japan, there is a shift towards more open educational resources.

Nonetheless, students in formal language courses, unless required to do so, are unlikely to make much use of open internet resources. Having operated and taught with a Moodle server since 2004, we have employed open resources and worked to increase student engagement. Recently, we have sought ways to promote student interaction with non-Japanese speakers through authentic language learning activities outside the classroom (Richards, 2015). Our use of digital interviewing provides a communicative context consisting of the introduction, equipment setup, and questions and answers, which provides a scaffold for our Japanese students to conduct interviews with non-Japanese speakers.

## 2. Course design

In 2014, we began an elective course entitled *Digital Storytelling for Engineering Narratives*. Students were taught to follow a production process (Figure 1) to plan, film, and edit short descriptions and explanations of technical and engineering processes with which they were currently involved.

Figure 1. Video production process



During the first offering of this new experimental course, it became clear that digital storytelling was too open ended for most students. Allowing students to create their own stories was somewhat outside of the experience of most of the

students whose previous education had been primarily geared toward succeeding on entrance examinations. They also lacked experience with group project work. Furthermore, the technical content of the course, although not complex, needed more structure. The new structure involved development of three different assignments: 1) *The Door Scene*, 2) demonstration video, and 3) interview video. Each assignment consisted of three phases: pre-production, production, and post-production.

The course required students to create three videos, each of which was no longer than 5 minutes. The first was *The Door Scene* (AFI, 2006, p. 17), a short film about an urgent departure through a door, which was intended to help students learn the basics of storyboarding, camerawork, and acting. The second was a demonstration video to explain a process, such as folding origami paper. Students were expected to improve their skill and to add subtitles. The third was an interview which involved speaking with an international student or professor. Camerawork, subtitling and editing were more demanding for this video. Rubrics were used to evaluate two stages of development for each video: storyboarding and filming.

Our elective classes normally have a maximum of thirty students. The video class was divided into ten groups of three students with each group consisting of a director, actor, and cameraman. Most students now have mobile devices with high-quality video capability. However, ten sets of equipment were prepared (see [Appendix 1](#)) with full audio and video capabilities. The equipment was color coded so that students would use the same equipment each time. Each group was awarded a shared grade. Eventually, we intended to have individual members evaluate the performance of their fellow group members and to weigh individual grades accordingly.

In order to design and construct their digital story, students carried out the following steps:

- develop a digital story idea and create an outline;
- write a digital story script;
- create a storyboard;
- design, plan, record, and edit media files;
- produce a digital story in English and publish it online.

Throughout the three assignments students incrementally acquired the skills necessary to reach the ultimate goal of conducting an interview, or structured conversation, with an international student or professor who might or might not know Japanese. Students developed interviews with the support of collections of conversation questions ([Internet TESL Journal, n.d.](#)). Interviewees whose first language was Japanese were not selected. During the elective course, we realized that the interview video would be an appropriate exercise for study abroad students with their homestay families, for example. Our interview component in the first course has now become the main assessed activity in our study abroad course.

### 3. Evaluation

During the elective course called *Digital Storytelling for Engineering Narratives*, we adopted an action research approach during which adjustments to the course were made on a continuous basis according to educational needs.

The second course, entitled *Global Experience Gateway*, ran from October 2014 to March 2015, consisted of pertinent study abroad content, and included the study abroad trip. During the course, students also each completed two required interview videos: one before the study abroad trip and one during. After the course, these two video interview projects were evaluated with an emphasis on specific behavioral criteria in the manner of “can do” assessments.

Rubrics were set up to evaluate student work on two primary tasks. The storyboard criteria included completeness, clarity, camera angles, and scripting. The film production consisted of audio quality, video quality, open-endedness of questions, length of interview, and subtitling. Each step of each video was evaluated in a similar way. The primary goal of the interview videos was to increase student opportunity for authentic conversation around equipment and interview setup, and also during the interviews themselves.

In the second course, individual oral proficiency was also evaluated. Two weeks prior to and at the end of the three week study abroad experience, each student completed the *Oral Proficiency Interview - computer* (OPI-c) test. The OPI-c is a one-hour computerized test of English-usage skills consisting of a series of recorded questions. The evaluations were carried out by American Council on The Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) evaluators in the United States ([Burke, 2015](#)). After only five weeks between two OPIc administrations, 12 out of 18 students increased their level while 6 remained the same (see [Table 1](#)).

Table 1. OPI-c scores for 18 study abroad students<sup>1</sup>

	OPIc Same		OPIc Up		Row Totals
	Female	Male	Female	Male	
DNA	1	1	1	0	3
RHIT	0	2	4	3	9
Waikato	1	1	1	3	6
Column Totals	2	4	6	6	18

#### 4. Discussion

Pryde (2015) suggests that students' lack of communication during study abroad may indicate a lack of preparation for conversation (p. 170). Furthermore, Pryde (2015) has found that when students are studying abroad, their homestay hosts tend to dominate conversation (p. 502). Similarly, teachers tend to dominate classroom discourse. Alternatively, conducting interviews provided our students with numerous opportunities to control language in the interactions with English-language speakers. We found that various aspects of video production gave students opportunities to work with the target language, such as 1) preparing the storyboard and script, 2) interacting with interviewee(s) when showing them the interview questions, 3) editing the questions and script, 4) conducting the interview, 5) subtitling the video, and 6) reviewing the subtitles with the interviewee(s). As we develop our courses, we will increase the structure and work on clarifying the evaluative criteria.

#### 5. Conclusions

Our university, and others who have been designated TGU, are attempting to encourage Japanese students to both master technical knowledge and develop the ability to converse in English. In order to improve conversational skills, we have taught students to conduct and video record interviews. The interactional patterns that reinforce student lack of initiation in turn-taking may be changed through digital interviewing by providing students with clear control of the interactional context and by returning the initiation of conversation to the language learners (Lee, 2014).

1. Note: DNA refers to Dalian Neusoft Institute and Alpine Electronics, China; RHIT refers to Rose Hulman Institute of Technology, USA; Waikato refers to University of Waikato, New Zealand.

Furthermore, our use of widely available mobile devices with video capacity helps students to gain entry into “legitimate participation” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, p. 50) through an empowering mediating artifact, and thereby bolster confidence.

## 6. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science for its support.

## References

- American Film Institute (AFI). (2006). *AFI screen education: the 21st century educator's handbook*. Los Angeles: American Film Institute.
- Burke, B. M. (2015). Language proficiency testing for teachers. *The Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. doi:10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal1468
- Darvin, R., & Norton, B. (2015). Identity and a model of investment in applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 35, 36-56. doi:10.1017/S0267190514000191
- Internet TESL Journal. (n.d.). *Conversation questions for the ESL/EFL classroom*. Retrieved from <http://iteslj.org/questions/>
- King, J. (2013). Silence in the second language classrooms of Japanese universities. *Applied Linguistics*, 34(3), 325-343.
- Lee, L. (2014). Digital news stories: building language learners' content knowledge and speaking skills. *Foreign Language Annals*, 47(2), 338-356. doi:10.1111/flan.12084
- Nunan, D., & Richards, J. C. (Eds.). (2014). *Language learning beyond the classroom*. Routledge.
- Pryde, M. (2015). Teaching language learners to elaborate on their responses: a structured, genre-based approach. *Foreign Language Annals*, 48(2), 168-183. doi:10.1111/flan.12135
- Richards, J. C. (2015). The changing face of language learning: learning beyond the classroom. *RELC Journal*, 46(1), 5-22. doi:10.1177/0033688214561621

## Appendix 1

Apple iPad Mini version 2  
iOgrapher Case  
Apple Lightning to 30-pin Adapter (0.2 m)  
Manfrotto Pixi Mini Tripod  
Tascam iXJ2 Preamplifier  
Rode Lavalier Microphones  
Rode SC3 Adaptors

Published by Research-publishing.net, not-for-profit association  
Dublin, Ireland; info@research-publishing.net

© 2015 by Research-publishing.net (collective work)  
© 2015 by Author (individual work)

Critical CALL – Proceedings of the 2015 EUROCALL Conference, Padova, Italy  
Edited by Francesca Helm, Linda Bradley, Marta Guarda, and Sylvie Thouéšny

**Rights:** All articles in this collection are published under the Attribution-NonCommercial -NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) licence. Under this licence, the contents are freely available online (as PDF files) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.



**Disclaimer:** Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book are believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team, nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

**Trademark notice:** product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

**Copyrighted material:** every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net  
Fonts used are licensed under a SIL Open Font License

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-28-5 (Paperback - Print on demand, black and white)  
Print on demand technology is a high-quality, innovative and ecological printing method; with which the book is never 'out of stock' or 'out of print'.

ISBN13: 978-1-908416-29-2 (Ebook, PDF, colour)  
ISBN13: 978-1-908416-30-8 (Ebook, EPUB, colour)

Legal deposit, Ireland: The National Library of Ireland, The Library of Trinity College, The Library of the University of Limerick, The Library of Dublin City University, The Library of NUI Cork, The Library of NUI Maynooth, The Library of University College Dublin, The Library of NUI Galway.

Legal deposit, United Kingdom: The British Library.  
British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.  
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

Legal deposit, France: Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2015.