

*Chapter 12*  
*Life post-study abroad for*  
*the Japanese language learner:*  
*Social networks, interaction and language usage*

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Over the past two decades, there has been a steady increase in studies concerning language learners' out-of-class interaction and social network development in study abroad contexts (e.g. Kato & Tanibe, 1997; Tanaka, 2007; Ayano, 2006; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Pearson-Evans, 2006; Zappa, 2007; Meier & Daniels, 2011; Dewey, Bown & Eggett, 2012; Trentman, 2013; research in this volume). However, to date, there has been very little research into the ongoing impact of study abroad on learners' target language (TL) speaking networks once they return to their home countries. Do they maintain these newly developed networks and/or demonstrate an enhanced ability to expand TL networks once removed from the study abroad environment? Moreover, do these networks continue to provide opportunities for TL usage, or do frequent contact with TL speakers, and opportunities for language use and learning, become but a lingering memory of the study abroad experience? These questions have become the focus of the present research, which, based within a larger doctoral project, investigates the impact of various university-level study abroad programmes on Japanese language learners' social networks with Japanese speakers after they returned to Australia. In this chapter, I provide a brief review of the literature concerning the benefits of study abroad, and then narrow the focus to studies regarding social interaction, network maintenance and/or development, and language use in post-study abroad contexts. I then introduce the methodology employed in this study, followed by a discussion of findings and directions for future research.

## **1. Literature review**

The experience of studying abroad for language learners has a multitude of potential benefits. Numerous studies have found that it has a positive influence on areas including personal, intellectual, intercultural, and professional devel-

opment (Coleman & Chafer, 2011; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; Kauffman, Martin & Weaver, 1992; McMillan & Opem, 2004; Nunan, 2006). Moreover, a significant number of studies have found evidence of a relationship between learner interaction with native speakers whilst abroad and language acquisition (Allen & Herron, 2003; Hernandez, 2010; Isabelli-García, 2000, 2006; Regan, 1995; Smith, 2002; Yager, 1998); motivation (Bachner & Zeustschel, 1994; Isabelli-García, 2006; Simoes, 1996); learners' confidence in themselves and their language skills (Allen & Herron, 2003; Magnan & Back, 2007; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Xu, 2010; Zappa, 2007); and levels of both classroom and non-classroom anxiety (Allen & Herron, 2003; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003; Xu, 2010; Zappa, 2007).

Longitudinal surveys conducted by the Institute for the International Education of Students (Dwyer, 2004; Dwyer & Peters, 2004; McMillan & Opem, 2004), Nunan (2006), and Coleman and Chafer (2011) have also highlighted the ongoing impact of study abroad even decades after the experience. Of particular importance to the current research, each of these studies found that a substantial number of participants (>50%) still maintain relationships they developed while abroad. Importantly, Coleman and Chafer (2011) found that all of their informants who had graduated between 2006 and 2009 were still in contact with each other; possibly due to enhanced communication technologies. Based on questionnaire data, however, these studies primarily report on overall trends, and thus do not account for the idiosyncrasies of individual learners. Moreover, they do not address reasons behind patterns of network maintenance, or patterns of language use post-study abroad.

A longitudinal study conducted by Jiménez Jiménez (2003), however, has taken a qualitative approach to examine American learners of Spanish and their second language (L2) interaction both during and post-study abroad. Although he found a significant decline in the degree of interactive Spanish use once students returned to America, some of his participants continued to use the L2 daily through telephone calls to friends, partners, and host families remaining in Spain, as well as through sporadic face-to-face interaction with native speakers or study abroad peers in America. It was also found that differences in learners' future plans noticeably impacted on their degree of post-study abroad L2 usage, where students planning on utilising Spanish in future activities such as travel or work exhibited a greater degree of usage than those who did not. Furthermore, several students who did not increase their Spanish proficiency as much as they had hoped to while in Spain mentioned having self-conscious feelings of failure, which further prevented them from using the L2 post-study abroad.

Further qualitative research conducted by Campbell (2011) and Kurata (2004) has found that sojourns in Japan provided crucial opportunities for Japanese learners to meet and subsequently maintain contact with Japanese speakers after returning to their normal country of residence (Australia). Networks in

Japan for participants in each of these studies were found to provide valuable sources for friendship and ongoing Japanese interaction through a wide range of channels including letters, email, chat, Skype and Facebook, which most of the informants were not exposed to pre-study abroad. These findings were also reflected in Pasfield-Neofitou's (2012) study, where participation in international exchanges provided a gateway into online interaction with Japanese speakers. Moreover, participants in both Campbell's (2011) and Kurata's (2004) studies reported perceived increases in linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural competence as a result of their sojourns in Japan, and an overall increase in frequency and duration of Japanese use post-study abroad.

In a subsequent study, Kurata (2007) further examined the language use patterns of Japanese learners in an Australian setting, the majority of whom had spent at least some time in Japan. By employing Grosjean's (1982) framework of factors influencing language choice in bilingual settings and Norton's (2000) notion of investment, she identified the following influential factors:

*Participant-related factors*

- Perceived L2 proficiency of learners and their social network members;
- Investment in L2 by learners and their social network participants;
- Awareness/sensitivity to interlocutors' language needs and their identities in relation to their L2 proficiency;
- History of linguistic interaction.

*Situation-related factors*

- Location/setting;
- Presence of monolinguals;
- Fatigue and lack of time;
- Channel/use of new technology.

*Discourse content-related factors*

- Topics;
- Type of vocabulary.

*Interactional function-related factors*

- Exclusion;
- Assistance to an L2 learner.

Kurata (2007) found that although the participant-related factors appeared to play the most significant role, patterns of language selection were influenced by a combination of the above social and contextual factors in complex ways. For example,

she found that although many of the informants continued to use Japanese with Japanese contacts they had established during sojourns in Japan, almost half of the reported interactions were conducted predominantly in English. She related this to the fact that most of these interactions were in the form of email, where her participants preferred to use English. Campbell (2011) also found that while her informants claimed to primarily use Japanese with their Japanese network members in Japan, one claimed to email one of her network members in English, reciprocating their language preference. Furthermore, Campbell found that although perceived increases in Japanese proficiency and confidence as a result of study abroad led to greater Japanese use post- compared to pre-study abroad with Japanese network members in Australia, her participants would often leave the language choice up to their network members. This was because they claimed to have greater empathy with Japanese students studying in Australia (having themselves been Japanese learners studying in Japan), and respected the fact that they had come there to learn English. Thus, learners' interactional experiences whilst on study abroad are evidently a sub-category of Kurata's (2007) "history of linguistic interaction" listed above.

This section has introduced a limited number of studies concerning language learners' network maintenance/development, social interaction, and language use after returning to the home country. Due to the dearth of research in this field, some researchers (Burns, 1996; Kurata, 2011; Zappa, 2007) have called for more longitudinal and/or follow-up studies examining how the study abroad experience impacts learners in various social, personal, and academic contexts once they return to their home countries. Furthermore, Segalowitz, Freed, Collentine, Lafford, Lazar, and Díaz-Campos (2004, p.15) have argued for more qualitative research concerning study abroad experiences, and in particular for greater focus on learners' opportunities for interaction and the nature of communication that occurs both inside and outside the classroom. The present study therefore aims to address some of these missing gaps in the literature, more specifically by examining the following research questions:

- 1) What is the nature of Japanese language learners' networks with Japanese speakers post-study abroad?
- 2) What factors influence the nature of learners' networks with Japanese speakers post-study abroad?
- 3) What are the patterns of language usage within these networks and what factors influence them?

Given the limited sample size, this study should be considered a preliminary investigation on topics and areas worthy of further, more systematic, study.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Informants

This chapter focuses on four Japanese language learner informants, who are each completing an undergraduate course at the same university in Australia. A basic outline of their relevant backgrounds is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Informants' background

	<b>Sophie</b>	<b>Phoebe</b>	<b>Oscar</b>	<b>Jane</b>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Caucasian Australian	Caucasian Australian	Colombian	Caucasian Australian
<b>Native language</b>	English	English	Spanish	English
<b>Approximate length of formal Japanese study prior to university study abroad</b>	Elementary school: 7 years High school: 6 years University: 2.5 years	High school: 6 years University: 2 years	High school: 5 years University: 2 years	University: 2.5 years
<b>Approximate level of formal Japanese study prior to study abroad*</b>	Japanese 9 (CEFR B2; JLPT N2)	Japanese 8 (CEFR B1; JLPT N2)	Japanese 6 (CEFR; B1 JLPT N3)	Japanese 5 (CEFR B1; JLPT N4)
<b>Length and purpose of trips to Japan prior to study abroad</b>	2006 Two week high school tour (homestay)	2007 Five week high school exchange (homestay) 2011 One week holiday	Nil	2011 Two weeks, programme was ended early in wake of Tohoku Disaster
<b>Details of study abroad programme in Japan</b>	Six weeks June-July 2012 at Language Institute	One semester 2012 at public University	One year 2011-2012 at public University	One year 2011-2012 at private university
<b>Time since SA programme completion (at end of data collection)</b>	15 months	15 months	14 months	6 months
<b>Subsequent Japanese studies</b>	Semester 2, 2012: Japanese 10	Semester 1, 2013: Japanese 11	Nil	Semester 2, 2012: Japanese 8

*Note:* the informants provided the level to which they had studied at their Australian university, where numbers correspond to number of semesters studied (e.g. Japanese 9 represents the level equivalent to nine semesters of study [from entry level] at this particular university). For ease of comparability, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) levels that the university deems equivalent to successful completion of each level have also been provided (cf Council of Europe, 2001; The Japan Foundation, 2012)

Reflecting the reality of study abroad, and language learners in general, these informants show differences in terms of duration and level of Japanese language study, and trips to Japan, prior to their university-level study abroad programmes. Whilst all of the other informants are native speakers of English, Oscar's first language is Spanish, though he has resided in Australia for the past 12 years, and has native-like English proficiency. Moreover, each of the informants participated in different study abroad programmes during 2011-2012, Sophie's lasting for six weeks, Phoebe's for one semester, and Oscar's and Jane's for one year. Sophie's programme was at a language institute, while the other three informants all attended Japanese universities. Each of the informants completed their study abroad programmes in July 2012; the interview data reported in this paper were collected between 5 and 8 months following study abroad. When interviewed, all were still full-time students, but Phoebe was the only informant still currently studying Japanese. Due to these various differences, difficulties obviously exist in directly comparing their experiences. The aim of this chapter, therefore, is not to attempt to draw generalisations, but rather to exploit the richness of the data, and present some of the commonalities and idiosyncrasies which have been identified.

## *2.2. Data collection and analysis*

The first stage of the data collection was to have the four informants complete a background questionnaire, which gathered details concerning their demographic and linguistic background, sojourns in Japan, and social contact with Japanese speakers, during and after residence abroad. This was immediately followed by the initial semi-structured interview, which gathered in-depth data concerning their study abroad experience, social interaction, and networks with Japanese speakers in both Australia and Japan. In subsequent months, informants were requested to complete one-week interaction journals at three to four month intervals, which detailed any interaction that occurred with Japanese speakers during that time. They were then interviewed again by the author as soon as possible after completion of each journal.

The data utilised in this study is summarized in Table 2. Note that because Sophie and Phoebe commenced their participation in this research while they were on study abroad, their background questionnaire, initial interview, first interaction journal, and Sophie's first subsequent interview were completed during this period. The remaining data were all collected post-study abroad.

The combined use of journals and interviews offers a good balance between validity and practicality. On one hand, Marsden (1990) and Badstübner and Ecke (2009) have cautioned that retrospective accounts of interaction may have limitations such as overestimation of L2 usage, and therefore suggest that the

**Table 2.** Summary of collected data

<b>Informant</b>	<b>Background questionnaire</b>	<b>Initial Interview</b>	<b>Interaction Journal</b>	<b>Subsequent Interviews</b>
<b>Sophie</b>	Jul 2012	Jul 2012	Jul 2012	Jul 2012
			Dec 2012	Dec 2012
			Jun 2013	Jun 2013
<b>Phoebe</b>	Jul 2012	Jul 2012	Aug 2012	Sept 2012
			Feb 2013	Feb 2013
			Aug 2013	Aug 2013
<b>Jane</b>	Sept 2012	Sept 2012	Dec 2012	Dec 2012
<b>Oscar</b>	Mar 2013	Mar 2013	Mar 2013	Mar 2013
			Jul 2013	Jul 2013
			Sept 2013	Sept 2013

use of a daily journal is a more efficient means of eliciting detailed data concerning L2 usage and interactions. A number of studies have also shown that the use of one-week logs is an effective means of eliciting language learners' social networks (Isabelli-García, 2000, 2006; Pearson-Evans, 2006; Whitworth, 2006; Kurata, 2004, 2011). On the other hand, although it is acknowledged that it would have been desirable for the informants to keep interaction journals over the entire period of data collection, it was envisaged that this would place too great a demand on the informants, especially considering the voluntary nature of their participation in the research. Therefore, any interaction that occurred outside of the period covered by the journals was discussed at the end of each subsequent interview. These interviews were conducted to discuss any occurring interaction in further detail, particularly concerning patterns of language choice, as well as any changes in the informants' networks since we had last met. Utilisation of the journals as stimuli was found to considerably enhance the recollection of recently occurring interaction, so that detailed data was obtained for the one-week periods.

The data collected by each of the above methods was then imported into NVivo data analysis software for thematic analysis, a method that Braun and Clarke (2006) claim "should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis" (p. 78). In the initial stage of analysis, the interview transcripts were coded using the *a priori* themes of post-study abroad networks, interaction, and language usage. From these coded interview segments, the factors influencing the nature of networks and patterns of language use emerged, and further analy-

sis was guided by themes, categories and constructs drawn from the literature. For example, from excerpts of interviews coded as “language use with NSs”, various factors influencing language use were then identified and coded according to Grosjean’s (1982) framework of factors introduced in Section 1 above. Once the data collection was complete, the transcripts were reviewed in greater depth and comparative analysis at both the within-case and cross-case levels was carried out. Within-case analysis, that is, looking at the data collected from a single informant, affords a more profound understanding of that informant (Bazeley 2007). This was achieved through comparison of their interview data collected at the different stages, as well as their interactional patterns with different network participants. On the other hand, cross-case analysis has two goals: to enhance generalisability, by testing whether the findings can be applied to other settings/informants or if they are more idiosyncratic in nature; and to strengthen understanding and explanation.

In addition to qualitative analysis conducted in NVivo, basic quantitative analysis was also carried out in Microsoft Excel. In particular, lists of pre-, during-, and post-study abroad network members generated in each of the informants’ interviews were uploaded into an Excel spreadsheet, along with various network characteristics such as frequency, channel, and language of interaction. This then enabled calculations of network size, composition, and degree of maintenance, as well as degree of language use occurring within the networks.

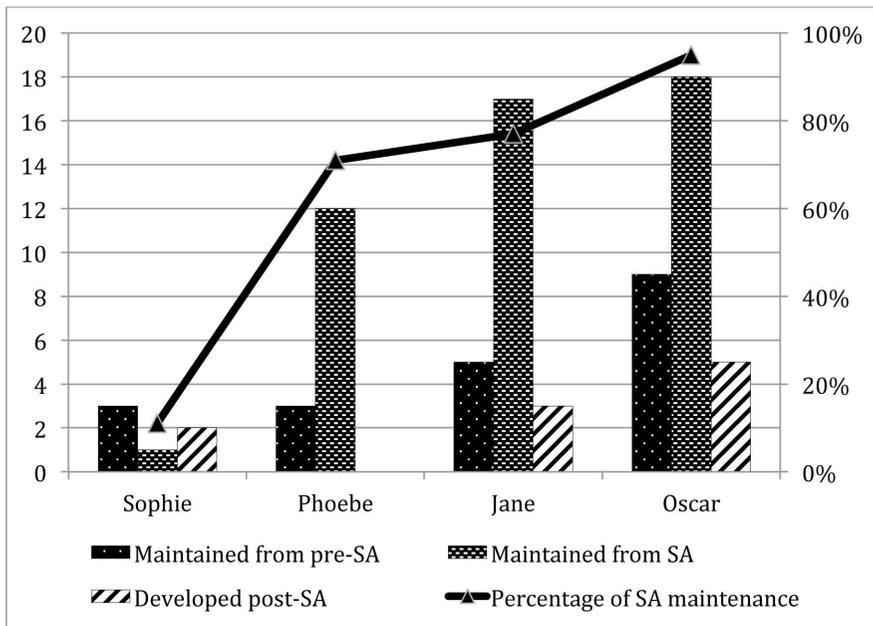
### 3. Findings and discussion

#### *3.1. Informants’ post-study abroad networks and interaction with native Japanese speakers*

In this section, I provide a discussion of the informants’ post-study abroad networks<sup>1</sup> and interaction with native Japanese speakers post-study abroad. The size of the informants’ networks at the end of data collection is presented in Figure 1, with a focus on composition in terms of when the relationships were established.

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1 This research draws upon Milroy’s (1987, 178) definition of social network as “the informal social relationships contracted by an individual”. For a person to be included as a network member, the informants had to know them by name, be able to contact them by phone, mail, or internet, and have contacted them in the past two years.

**Figure 1.** Informants' post-study abroad network with native Japanese speakers

All of the informants currently maintain contact with between three and nine Japanese they had met prior to their study abroad experiences. The vast majority of these pre-study abroad contacts were established in the educational context: through clubs, social activities, or classes. Due to space constraints I will not discuss these network members in detail; however, providing these figures as a comparison, it can be observed that each of the informants' networks at least doubled after their study abroad experience.

As indicated in Figure 1, Sophie's network is considerably smaller than the other informants', with a total of six network members. She has only maintained contact with one of the network members encountered while on study abroad in Japan, the significantly lower maintenance likely due to the fact that she participated in a six-week programme at a language institute as opposed to a one or two semester programme at a university. Sophie explained that while in Japan she only met her Japanese network members once or twice in person, and thus only maintained contact with the person with whom she developed a closer relationship, established through regular Facebook messaging. Although she is connected with a few others on Facebook, she mentioned that she does not have any active contact with them, and thus would not include them in her current social network.

In contrast to Sophie, the largest portion of the other three informants' networks is composed of contacts they have maintained from their study abroad period, and their degree of maintenance was also significantly higher. Contacts maintained from this period primarily fit into clusters formed around activity fields whilst abroad, such as shared residence (Jane), university clubs (Oscar, Jane), buddy/tutor programmes (Phoebe, Jane), home visit programmes (Jane, Phoebe), and English conversation classes (Jane). Although frequency of contact with network members established whilst on study abroad has drastically reduced since the informants returned to Australia, this maintained contact was found to provide increased opportunities for interaction with Japanese speakers compared to pre-study abroad (cf. Campbell, 2011; Kurata, 2004).

For each of the four informants, contact was maintained exclusively through interactive communication technologies, including email, social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) programs such as Skype, and smartphone messaging applications such as Line.

The impact of interactive communication technologies on network maintenance was a predominant theme in the data, and the primary reason for discontinued contact was that the informants' network members did not have a Facebook account. Phoebe, for example, stated that maintained contact was "mostly Facebook, they don't do emails or anything, it's just so much easier. They either use it a *lot* or they don't use it at all". Interestingly, however, Oscar observed that within his Japanese network, contacts who had both Facebook and Twitter accounts utilised Twitter far more frequently. Regardless of the platform, interactive communication technologies have greatly aided the ease at which networks can be maintained, and may even postpone the "natural decline" that is witnessed in many relationships (Cummings, Lee & Kraut, 2006).

In line with the findings of Ellison, Steinfield and Ecke (2007) and Lewis and West (2009), each of the informants in this study noted that Facebook was the most convenient and easiest way to maintain contact. They simultaneously utilised multiple functions of Facebook to varying degrees, including private messages, wall posts, and commenting on and/or liking their network members' posts. They also highlighted how features of Facebook facilitate interaction, where a notification about a birthday, or an update appearing in the News Feed, might initiate a topic of conversation that may not have otherwise occurred. As observed in Lewis and West's (2009) study, the News Feed may also provide a form of passive engagement, enabling users to stay informed about their network members' lives without necessarily making any direct contact. Although beyond the scope of this paper, examination of self-initiated versus reactive interaction (i.e. commenting on or "liking" of posts), and whether or not this correlates to strong or weak tie strength, is thus a point of interest (cf. Haythornthwaite, 2005).

In addition to Facebook, Jane also heavily utilised Line, a smartphone messaging app, that allowed her to send either individual or group messages directly to her friends' phones for free. When talking about people she has lost contact with, Jane explained that: "It's not that I wouldn't talk to them, it's just that they don't really use Facebook and I don't have them on Line". Line was her everyday and preferred means of contact; because messages came directly to her phone like text messages, Jane explained that she did not have to go out of her way to keep in contact like she did with friends who were not on Line. Sophie is also an avid user of WhatsApp, an app similar to Line; however, she only uses this for contact with her non-native Japanese speaker friends. Oscar was the only informant who claimed to use Skype with his Japanese network, though he had only used it once since the completion of his study abroad programme.

Although the impact of interactive communication technologies was the factor impacting network maintenance most frequently discussed by the informants, a few other factors also arose from the data. Each of the informants mentioned that the closeness of relationships established whilst abroad influenced frequency of contact. As stated by Phoebe: "The more time goes on, it does tend to be that if we weren't as close, the frequency does tend to drop off a little bit". Moreover, frequency of contact was also influenced by the informants' workloads at university. Oscar mentioned that contact with his networks in Japan was much less frequent during semester because he simply did not have time to initiate conversations. Likewise, at the time of her last interview, Jane was completing an internship, and mentioned being too busy to go out of her way specifically to contact people.

Whilst these findings reflect Kurata's (2007) in that commitment to study and lack of time negatively impacted contact frequency, Phoebe presented a different case. She stated: "Around exams it's not very much, but when there's a pile of work that you need to chip away at, it's those times that we're mostly in contact". Thus, her contact patterns were the reverse of the other informants', in that she claimed to have more interaction during semester than holidays. For Phoebe, holidays were an opportunity to "get out of the house more" and "do stuff". A similar case was also observed in Pasfield-Neofitou's (2012) study, where one informant mentioned that most of her online communication occurred during exam or assignment periods, as opposed to holidays. Therefore, it is possible that these patterns of contact frequency are reflections of individuals' overall communication habits.

Another factor found to influence network maintenance was the tangible opportunity to meet again in person. Jane explained that: "Akemi is going to come to Australia so I've been sending a lot of private messages [on Facebook] to her, 'cause she's going to stay at my place. So I'm organising everything with her there". Similarly, Oscar had also recently initiated contact with one of his friends in Japan "because he's about to come to Australia". For these two informants, it appears

that the anticipation of meeting someone again in person enhanced interaction, prompting an exchange of frequent private messages on Facebook. As Pasfield-Neofitou (2012) found, interactive communication technologies may play an important role in organising offline contact between Japanese learners and their social network members. Moreover, data from my larger doctoral project also shows that as further time elapses, opportunities to meet up with contacts again in Japan or elsewhere are of particular importance for further maintaining, strengthening, or rekindling ties even a decade after study abroad programme completion.

In terms of post-study abroad network development, two trends emerged. Firstly, although Phoebe and Sophie expressed the desire to further expand their Japanese networks in order to practise their L2, they exhibited little agency in doing so. One month post-study abroad, Phoebe mentioned the desire to “search for some sort of Japanese speaking club”, because she considered spoken interaction “ideal” for maintaining her Japanese proficiency. By the time of her final interview six months later, however, Phoebe remained the only informant who had not established any new native Japanese network members. She admitted that she had “not particularly” gone out of her way to do so, and explained: “the uni[versity] study schedule tends to make it just a little bit difficult to... go out of your way to meet up with people who speak Japanese”. In other words, Phoebe did not have the availability of time and resources that is required to establish new networks. Thus, Phoebe commented that the extent of her Japanese interaction was largely limited to “at university” with her non-native speaker classmates. She did, however, also meet up with her pre-study abroad native Japanese friend Kae every few weeks, though she claimed that they would primarily interact in English.

Similar to Phoebe, Sophie’s realisation that she was not “using the [Japanese] language” five months post-study abroad prompted her to “immerse [her]self in the cultural things available to [her] in Melbourne”. Specifically, she mentioned in her final interview that she had recently attended a Japanese conference for undergraduate students because she “wanted to meet Japanese people [with whom] to practise [her] Japanese”. While she succeeded in establishing two new contacts at this event, she was somewhat disappointed because they wanted her to “speak in English for practice”. Nevertheless, she claimed to interact with them several times a week via Facebook messages, and also met up once a fortnight in person. Although these relationships were just at their early stages at the end of Sophie’s participation in the research, it would have been interesting to see how long they were maintained. As Pasfield-Neofitou (2010, p.146) has suggested, primarily instrumental relationships such as these are likely to be seen as a burden when other priorities intervene, which may lead to their disintegration unless some common interest is found.

Compared to Phoebe and Sophie, Jane and Oscar appeared to invest more time in Japan-related activities, which presented greater opportunities for meeting native Japanese speakers. Although their post-study abroad network development was still relatively minor, it is important to note that because they were both members of members of a Japan-related club at their university prior to their study abroad experiences, they were able to return to the same community upon their return, which acted as a springboard for further network development. Oscar also commented that because the club has scheduled events on a weekly basis, it is one of the best ways for learners to make native Japanese speaker friends in the Australian context. This reflects the findings of several previous studies that have found clubs to promote frequent contact and increased opportunities for interaction and friendship development between Japanese learners and native speakers (Burns, 1996; Kato & Tanibe, 1997; Morofushi, 2008; Campbell, 2011). Indeed, Oscar established a further three Japanese contacts when he joined the committee of his Japan-related club, and Jane another one through her involvement in the weekly events.

Although the Japan-related club was the primary source of face-to-face interaction with native Japanese speakers for both Oscar and Jane, they also claimed to develop additional friendships through classes. Jane established two contacts through a visitor session in her Japanese language class, though she explained that unfortunately the visitor session was held just before the participating students went back to Japan, and thus although she spent a day with them before they left, they had only had minimal contact on Facebook since. Similarly, although Oscar claimed to establish two native Japanese speaker contacts through his Chinese class, they were no longer taking the subject, and, although they were connected on Facebook, they had not had any recent virtual contact at the time of the interview. He had, however, had several impromptu meetings with them on university campus.

Given the fact that each of the informants had been back in Australia for six to thirteen months, and exhibited an ongoing interest in Japan, it was somewhat surprising to find that their networks had not expanded to a greater degree. However, networking requires effort and the investment of time and resources, and if these are committed to existing friends, it is less likely that individuals will seek out further friendships (Fehr 1996). Indeed, it was found that each of the informants still had considerable interaction with network members established either prior to or during study abroad, who continued to offer them opportunities for engagement with Japanese language and culture. Thus, it was possible that they had more of a focus on network maintenance as opposed to development, as I also found in a previous study (Campbell, 2011). More longitudinal data collected from other informants in my larger doctoral project, however, does suggest that given time, and learners' continued desire for interaction with Japanese, networks

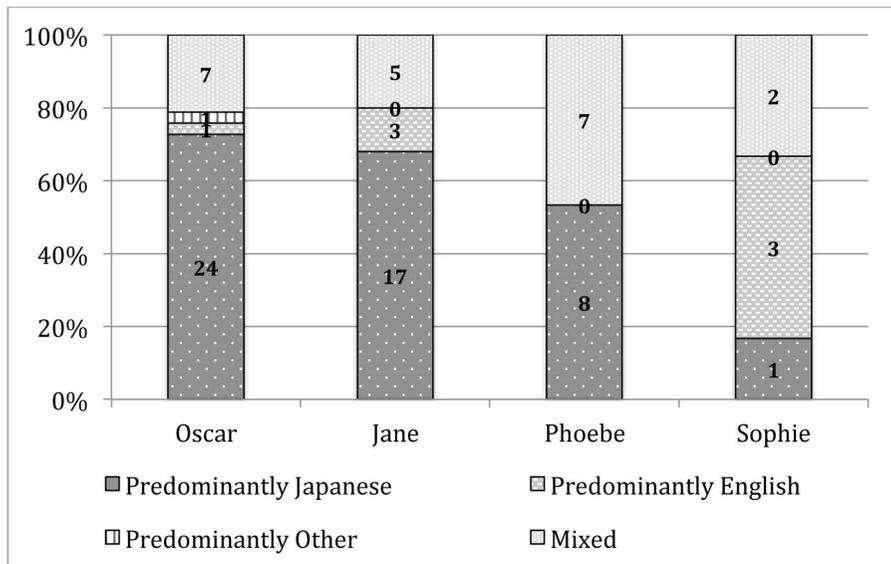
developed post-study abroad are likely to eventually outweigh networks maintained from the study abroad period.

Although the findings discussed above indicate that networks established while abroad continue to offer important opportunities for interaction with native Japanese speakers, as other studies have found, access to native speakers does not necessarily guarantee opportunities for L2 practice (Campbell, 2011; Kurata, 2007, 2010, 2011; Pearson-Evans, 2006). The following section thus examines the patterns of language use that occur within the informants' social networks, and then discusses some of the factors influencing such patterns.

### 3.2. Patterns of language use with native Japanese speakers

In order to identify the informants' language use patterns, Nishimura's (1992) categories of bilingual speech were employed. She uses three categories, namely "the basically Japanese variety", "the basically English variety", and "the mixed variety", which refers to simultaneous use of both languages. In the present study, these first two categories were renamed as *Predominantly Japanese* and *Predominantly English*. Because some of the informants are speakers of other languages, an additional category of *Other language* was also employed. Figure 2 depicts the percentage of the informants' networks (and number of contacts) that they claimed to use each language variety with.

**Figure 2.** Patterns of language use with native Japanese



As can be seen, either predominantly Japanese or mixed varieties were the most common selections, whilst the choice of predominantly English or other language varieties was relatively minor. Thematic analysis revealed a number of different influential factors, which I have categorised according to Grosjean's (1982) factors influencing language choice in bilingual settings: participant, situation, content of discourse, and function of interaction. Although each individual learner-native speaker case warrants an in-depth analysis, due to space constraints, the major factors influencing language selection are summarised below.

In terms of participant-related factors, the most frequently discussed factor influencing all four of the informants' language use with their network members post-study abroad was the perceived proficiency of their shared language(s). Obviously, if Japanese was the only shared language then this became the language of interaction by default. If, however, the informants' network members were also bilingual, this resulted in interesting patterns of language negotiation. In the majority of cases, network members established whilst on study abroad in Japan tended to have less knowledge of English than network members established in Australia, and thus there was a stronger tendency to use Japanese with those contacts. The language that the relationship was established in was also found to be influential, and in most cases continued through time. This can be categorized under Grosjean's (2010, p.45) factor of "language history", where he explains that individuals tend to develop an "agreed upon" language that becomes the language of communication from then on (even if never discussed). These two factors are effectively reflected in Phoebe's comment, where she stated that: "If Japanese was the language that we established our relationship in then generally I'll always use Japanese. But that is mainly for people I met in Japan".

Patterns of language choice could also be influenced, however, by the informants' or their network members' insistence on using their second language in order to gain practice. The informants' and their network members' investment in their respective L2s resulted in interesting patterns of language negotiation, and sometimes non-reciprocal language use. Both Phoebe and Jane, for example, observed that a number of their network members started to use more English with them when they went on study abroad to America. Interestingly, Phoebe mentioned that she tended to reply to English posts in Japanese "to keep in line" with her pre-established language choice while in Japan, thus engaging in non-reciprocal language use. Grosjean (1982, p.142) has suggested that non-reciprocal language use indexes a lack of group solidarity, which may lead to embarrassment or even anger between bilinguals. Thus, Li Wei (2013, p. 369) has indicated that this pattern of language use in spontaneous spoken discourse is not usually sustainable. However, it appears that this may not be the case when it comes to written discourse, as

Phoebe claimed to engage in non-reciprocal language use with several of her network members because they share an “understanding that we both want to practice the language that we’re learning”. Kurata (2007) also identified a case of non-reciprocal language use between a Japanese learner and two of her Japanese friends in Japan and, together, these examples provide evidence that when it comes to written forms of interaction, non-reciprocal language use may be considered comfortable and even natural in bilingual networks.

In contrast to Phoebe, Jane claimed that with her networks maintained from study abroad she would reply to their posts in whichever language she was addressed in. Jane’s contacts, however, were her English students when she was in Japan, so she was already accustomed to using English with them when they were “feeling eager” to practice. It is therefore possible that their previous role-relation of teacher-student influenced ongoing patterns of language selection, where Jane’s use of English was associated with an identity as English teacher. Similarly, Oscar did not mind writing in English to his friends in order to help them improve their English. Interestingly, he further commented: “While I was in Japan I would try to use Japanese because I was trying to practise. But now it’s at the level where I don’t take notice if I use Japanese or English. I don’t care so much anymore now that I’m comfortable with it”.

Likewise, Jane also felt more “comfortable” with using Japanese, and Sophie mentioned that study abroad had greatly enhanced her confidence in using the language (cf. Magnan & Back, 2007; Xu, 2010; Zappa, 2007), which contributed to increased Japanese use post-study abroad.

In terms of situation-related factors, it is plausible that for Phoebe and Jane’s contacts currently in America, their location or setting, where English is the dominant language, also impacted on their language choice. This also holds true for each of the informants’ network members currently in Australia, where Jane, Oscar and Sophie all claimed to use either the mixed or predominantly English variety of language. This relates to another situation-related factor: the presence of monolinguals. Sophie, for example, claimed that although she always used Japanese when alone with her Japanese family friends, if her own family (who do not speak Japanese) were also present, they would switch to English. Similarly, Oscar stated that although he predominantly used Japanese with the native Japanese speakers in his Japan-related club committee, all proceedings are conducted in English, because “otherwise it’s unfair” to those who are less proficient in Japanese language. Jane, on the other hand, primarily interacted with club members at club events, and claimed that these were conducted predominantly in English.

While the above finding is in accordance with that of Kurata’s (2007) study, Phoebe also made interesting observations about language use on Facebook, in particular, concerning the presence of monolinguals. She mentioned that she rarely

posts things exclusively in Japanese on Facebook because she “didn’t want to be too alienating” to non-Japanese speaking Facebook friends. In addition to her own language use on Facebook, Phoebe also observed that her study abroad peers tended to post in both English and Japanese “because obviously half the people we met were Japanese, and if it’s mostly directed towards Japanese people then you might comment in Japanese”.

Oscar was the only informant to mention a discourse-related factor influencing language choice with native speakers: topic of conversation. He explained that with his current girlfriend, who is a Japanese international student in Melbourne, their language use constantly varies depending upon topics, but that “when she’s speaking about her study and things like that, she’ll use English – definitely”. He explained that: “Because she studies in Australia there are some things that she can’t say in Japanese because, what do you say, *senmon kotoba* (sic) [technical language], the words on a specific topic or whatever, she probably doesn’t know the words in Japanese either. She didn’t study that in Japan.”

As the above discussion demonstrates, patterns of language selection depend upon a multitude of different factors. Overall, each of the informants claimed to have increased opportunities for Japanese use currently compared to pre-study abroad, either in person or by other forms of communication. Importantly, interactive communication technologies were found to provide each of the informants with enhanced opportunities for Japanese reading input and writing output. Phoebe mentioned that she enjoys being able to observe native speakers’ online language conventions, which differ significantly from spoken discourse. This type of behavior, known as online “lurking”, or reading without posting, provides important opportunities for language acquisition and cultural learning (Pasfield-Neofitou, 2012). Phoebe and Oscar also mentioned that they participated in mediated language assistance within their social networks, providing and receiving feedback on emails written in their respective L2s. Moreover, Sophie mentioned that spending time with her Japanese contacts in Melbourne has been beneficial not only for her language development, but also for cultural knowledge that she believes can often be missed when learning languages in institutional settings.

#### **4. Conclusion and future directions**

Through qualitative examination of four informants’ post-study abroad interaction with native Japanese speakers, this study has provided evidence of the ongoing impact that study abroad can have on language learners’ TL networks. Although previous research (e.g. Coleman & Chafer, 2011; Kurata, 2004; McMillan & Opem, 2004; Nunan, 2006) has found that study abroad positively contributes to

ongoing opportunities for interaction with native speakers, this is the first known study that has conducted a preliminary investigation of post-study abroad patterns of network maintenance, development, and language selection.

This study found that although each of the four informants still maintain contact with a number of network members established pre-study abroad, for all but one of them, the largest portion of their TL-speaking networks is composed of contacts established whilst on study abroad. Participation in a one or two semester study abroad programme therefore appears to impact significantly on such networks. On the other hand, as Sophie's case demonstrated, the limited contact available with native speakers within a six-week programme at a language institute may not be sufficient to promote ongoing contact.

Importantly, there appeared to be a stronger focus on network maintenance as opposed to development of new networks post-study abroad, where each of the informants continued to draw upon the valuable linguistic affordances provided by their networks developed during study abroad. Post-study abroad networks were influenced by a number of factors, including the closeness of relationship established while abroad, utilisation of interactive communication technology, university workload/availability of time, opportunities to meet again, and degree of investment in Japan-related activities. Moreover, as this group of informants represents relatively recent study abroad returnees, it is likely that time post-study abroad is also a relevant factor influencing network development. Even within this small sample, the informants' networks showed a considerable degree of individual variation, which suggests the need for further larger-scale studies to investigate more systematically the impact of learner characteristics such as TL proficiency, motivation, attitudes, and willingness to communicate.

In line with previous studies (Kurata 2004; Pasfield-Neofitou 2012), the informants reported interacting with their network members over a variety of interactive communication technologies, which were not necessarily utilised in the TL prior to their study abroad experiences. They also highlighted ways in which these technologies are being utilised to enhance network maintenance. Importantly, it was found that although Facebook positively impacted the potential for initial network maintenance, with time, some of the Facebook friendships became passive in nature, and decreasing interaction suggests that others might be moving in the same direction. The findings therefore suggest that future research into language learners' post-study abroad networks takes the novel nature of constantly evolving interactive communication technologies into further consideration. In particular, there is a need to gauge the degree of reactive interaction, such as commenting on or "liking" of posts that appear on social networking sites, and further categorise network members as either active or passive ties (cf. Daming, Xiaomei & Li Wei, 2008; Li Wei, Milroy & Ching, 1992).

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