

## **JSPS Fellowship for Research in Japan: Research Report**

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### **Outline of academic activities**

The research visit took place between 18<sup>th</sup> March and 7<sup>th</sup> April 2014. The purpose of the visit was to present a number of papers on issues concerning language education policy, and at the same time to learn about the state of the art in language teaching and learning in Japan. My visit was hosted most graciously by Professor Nishiyama Noriyuki of the University of Kyoto, supported by Emeritus Professor Ohki Mitsuru and by colleagues and doctoral students in the Kyoto Graduate School. The Dean of Humanities at the University of Southampton, Prof. Anne Curry, generously gave her permission for me to make this visit during the academic term-time.

Prof. Nishiyama and his team were extremely effective in arranging accommodation and travel during the three weeks of my stay. Prof. Nishiyama was very thoughtful in ensuring a social programme that allowed me to meet many colleagues in less formal circumstances. I had some free time to explore the cultural highlights of Kyoto and the surrounding area, which was a great pleasure and enrichment. It provided me with insights into the culture and society of Japan, which I was able to compare with cultural and social aspects of Europe. I was fortunate to be in Kyoto at the time of cherry blossom and was able to appreciate the great natural beauty of this period and its importance for Japanese people.

My first contact with the University community was a meeting with students preparing theses at doctoral and masters levels under Prof. Nishiyama's supervision. They were working on different aspects of language contact and language education policy and gave short presentations of their subject and expectations. I was able to comment in some detail on their work, suggest ideas they might wish to explore and mention sources that they might find useful.

I subsequently had one-to-one meetings with several doctoral students. I was very interested in their research programmes, which brought some new and interesting perspectives to the study of language in society and language in education. I met with a junior member of staff, Dr Noa Mishimoto, and after discussing her work, I have invited her to make a research visit to Southampton.

I travelled to Tokyo with Mme Mayo Oyama on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> March, taking the Shinkansen. During the journey, I had detailed discussions with her on the issues of language, culture and identity she was studying. She also provided translation into Japanese for my lecture at Waseda University, for a meeting of the Japanese Association of Language Policy, which was attended by around 15 academics from different parts of Japan.

My paper was on the theory and practice of European language policy. I spoke in English and analysed the development of language policies by the Council of

Europe and the European Union. I outlined both the achievements and the current difficulties that have emerged. A number of interesting questions were asked during the discussion period, and I got a strong feeling that the language policies held a strong interest for teachers and researchers in Japan, especially in providing tools, such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Modern Languages*. There were some areas where the Japanese context was appreciably different from the European case, and European policies could not be applied without significant adaptation. There was also some disappointment at the reduction in political priority for language policies, resulting from the recent economic crisis.

On Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March, I met Prof. Torikai Kumiko, currently of Rikkyo University. She has recently been asked to develop a humanities/ liberal arts faculty at Juntendo University and I was able to understand the motivations for a specialist medical university to extend its range of disciplinary scope. We also discussed some of the innovative ideas that she was planning to incorporate in the new venture.

On Monday 25<sup>th</sup> March, I gave a lecture at the French Institute in Tokyo as part of an intensive professional development programme for French language teachers. I spoke in French on the conflicting perspectives of the 'grammar-translation' and 'communicative' approaches to language teaching, and suggested that both approaches had strengths and limitations. The audience of around 20 people appreciated the lecture and contributed insights and perspectives in the discussion session that followed.

I returned to Kyoto on 26<sup>th</sup> March and was able to work in the University, where I was allocated a desk space in a larger office. I also arranged meetings with doctoral students to discuss their work.

On 28<sup>th</sup> March, I travelled with Prof. Nishiyama to Osaka to attend the *Rencontres Pédagogiques du Kansai*, a two-day meeting of French teachers at universities and institutes, attended by 130 teachers from all areas of Japan. This is an annual conference, hosted by the French Institute of Kansai (Osaka). I was a guest of honour and had ample opportunity to meet leading figures in French teaching, including the editors of the *Revue japonaise de didactique du français* and its Rédactrice en chef, Mme Laurence Chevalier. I had a detailed discussion with Prof. Nishiyama on the achievements of the journal and the strategies that would enable it to further develop its academic objectives.

On the second day of the conference, I undertook an hour and a half workshop in French on the advantages of a more dialogical approach to language teaching. This was one of three parallel workshops, attended by about 40 people. I led the session as far as possible as a discussion of issues, seeking to exemplify a dialogical approach and was rewarded by a strong engagement in discussion and exchange. The conference gave me the opportunity to talk to a large number of French teachers and to gain a clear sense of the community of teachers and the issues they are currently facing. The issues ranged from the increased emphasis on learning English, often at the expense of other foreign languages, to the

professional status of non-Japanese teachers, which is often part-time or temporary. I also had the opportunity to have discussions with publishers of language textbooks, and with professional members of the French Institute, both of whom are important 'stakeholders' for language teachers.

Returning to Kyoto on 29<sup>th</sup> April, I took two days to recover from a very bad cold I had picked up. On the third day, I was able to spend a day walking in Kyoto and enjoying the cherry blossom, which had opened. I met an exchange student from the University of Southampton, Ms Jolif Guest, who is studying at Kyoto for the current year, and was pleased to see how valuable this experience is for her. I completed my preparations for the forthcoming colloquium, and met some of the other international speakers who had been invited to speak, in particular M. Pierre Martinez (Université de Paris-8) and Mme Geneviève Zarate (INALCO, Paris).

The international colloquium was held at the Graduate School for Human and Environmental Studies at the University of Kyoto on Saturday and Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> April 2014. It was held in both French and Japanese, with simultaneous translation between the two languages. The overall title was: *L'Interculturel à la croisée du monde. Didactique et pédagogie des langues et des cultures* (translated approximately as: The intercultural crossroads of the world; Learning and teaching languages and cultures).

It took as its starting point the divergent conceptions of intercultural understanding in different parts of the world, related to learning and teaching languages. It sought to address these in both theoretical and pedagogical terms, taking multidisciplinary, multicultural and multilingual approaches. The conference was largely organised by Prof. Nishiyama, and I was part of the advisory group for the conference programme. It was attended by approximately 150 people from a range of disciplinary perspectives and from at least 6 different countries in Europe, Asia and Australasia.

I made four specific interventions in the conference:

1. A short paper in French on the implications of language policy for intercultural teaching, and participation in a round table discussion of the aims and means of intercultural education.
2. A response in French, as discussant, to a paper by Prof Matsuda Takeshi on the historical perceptions of Japan by American elites.
3. A workshop in English on 'Intercultural competence and teacher training : the European challenge', including discussion by the 50 or so participants on obstacles to intercultural teaching.
4. A concluding synthesis, drawing together the main themes that had emerged from the conference and pointing to the opportunities for collaboration in future development.



The conference was a resounding success, both in the number and diversity of participants it attracted and in the quality of discussion. It will certainly lead to the publication of an edited volume, to which I expect to contribute.

Regrettably, this was my final commitment and I left Kyoto on 7<sup>th</sup> April, to return to England. It was, however, very pleasing to leave with the feeling of having contributed to important discussions at a major international event that will undoubtedly take forward reflection on the areas of language teaching and language policy.

### **Impressions and thoughts on the present state of science in Japan in my field**

I have been very struck by the desire of teachers and researchers in language education to engage with issues of language policy. On the one hand, they are professionally committed to promoting learning of the particular languages they teach, and on the other hand they are increasingly committed to promoting the diversity of languages that are studied in Japan.

There are clear signs that collaboration in improving between the teachers of different languages, as evidenced by the multilingual nature of the Kyoto conference, which was attended by teachers of French, German, English and Japanese as a foreign language. This collaboration has not always existed and is not easy to develop.

I have been interested to see evidence that native-speakers and non-native speakers of foreign languages appear to have differentiated pedagogical roles. Japanese staff appear to take responsibility for lectures, mainly in Japanese, on cultural and linguistic topics, including language structure (grammar), while native-speakers conduct smaller group work in practical language learning. There is a pragmatic logic in this division of responsibilities, but it may limit the level of cross-fertilisation between Japanese and international approaches, which is particularly important in the field of intercultural awareness. It may

also limit the opportunities for language teaching staff to develop more reflective forms of practice and more theoretically informed analysis.

There is considerable concern that policies at government level and at institutional level do not adequately support a diversity of languages or intercultural approaches to language learning. One aspect of this is an increased emphasis on learning English, which is tending to reduce opportunities to learn other languages.

I have been somewhat surprised to find relatively little evidence that Japanese universities are teaching Asian languages that are important for relations with neighbouring states: Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, Russian and others. While my own interest is in European languages, I had expected the language learning environment in Japan to be more diverse. No doubt there are cultural reasons for this, but I do wonder whether Japan's language education fully matches the country's strategic interests.

### List of papers delivered

1. "Theory and practice of European language policy: lessons identified"
2. "Le long combat dans la pédagogie entre l'approche "grammaire-traduction" et l'approche communicative"
3. "Pour un enseignement dialogique"
4. "L'interculturel devant les politiques linguistiques"
5. "Réponse aux réflexions de M Matsuda Takeshi sur le Japon vu par les Américains."
6. "Intercultural competence and teacher training : the European challenge"
7. "Synthèse des travaux. Perspectives"

These papers have been delivered, but not published. It is expected that numbers 1 and 4 will subsequently be published. Other publications will be developed from the remaining papers and from discussions recorded above.

### Comments or suggestions to JSPS concerning the Fellowship programme

The programme is an enormously valuable means of promoting international collaboration and partnerships. The flexibility of supporting shorter visits is particularly important for researchers who have responsibilities in their home institution that may not allow them to allocate longer periods of time.

### Other comments

I would like to record my particular thanks to Prof. Nishiyama, who sponsored and organised this visit. He has provided a dynamic and welcoming environment that has enabled me to contribute my knowledge and expertise, but also to learn new things and develop my own research perspectives.

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