

Voice! from Alumni member

Vol.14 Dr Hannah Gibson



Dr Hannah Gibson of the University of Essex, an active member of JSPS Alumni Association of the UK and RoI (Republic of Ireland) recounts her experiences as a JSPS Fellow and Alumni member. Please have a look at her experiences below.

At the end of 2017, I spent three months based at Osaka University in Japan. My host was Professor Nobuko Yoneda and I was based in the Graduate School of Language and Cultures, Osaka University.

When I first told people about my up-coming trip to Japan, they were surprised to hear that there is a thriving community of linguists based in Japan working on African languages. But indeed there is! My JSPS Fellowship provided me with an opportunity to collaborate with this dynamic community of linguists, gain from their knowledge and expertise, and to find out more about their research. My programme of work while in Osaka would also fit in naturally with the project I had been involved in at SOAS in London. It was a great fit and great timing!

At the beginning of October I boarded my flight to Osaka. This was not my first visit to Japan. I had attended a conference on African languages at Kyoto University in 2015 and thoroughly

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Biography

2017-present	Lecturer, Department of Language and Linguistics, University of Essex
2017-2018	JSPS Postdoctoral Fellow (Short-term), Osaka University
2014-2017	British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Linguistics, SOAS University of London
2008-2012	PhD in Linguistics SOAS University of London
2007-2008	MA in Linguistics, SOAS University of London
2003-2007	BA Swahili and Law, SOAS University of London

enjoyed the little of Japan I had seen on that trip. In March 2017, I was also lucky enough to have been invited to a workshop at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA), based at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. So I had seen enough of Japan to know that I wanted to go back!

During my JSPS fellowship, I would be working on complex construction in Bantu languages. The Bantu languages are a group of some 350-500 languages spoken across much of Sub-Saharan Africa. This geographic spread includes vast parts of Central, Eastern and Southern Africa. The Bantu languages exhibit a number of broad similarities, as is expected of languages from the same language family. However, due to their geographic distribution and high levels of bi- and multi-lingualism across much of the region, they also exhibit a high degree of micro-variation – more subtle differences which can provide us with invaluable insights into language history, as well as processes of language contact and change.



Picture 1: Bantu study group meeting at Osaka University

Along with my host Professor Yoneda, I would be embarking on a project examining variation in complex constructions as it is found in the Bantu languages, drawing on data that we and other colleagues had collected over a number of years. The project also fitted within the scope of two larger on-going projects examining variation in Bantu. The first was a Leverhulme Trust funded project under the guidance of Professor Lutz Marten at SOAS University of London and the other under the direction of Dr Daisuke Shinagawa of ILCAA.

I was welcomed into a fantastic community of researchers at Osaka University. In addition to carrying out the planned research with Professor Yoneda, along with other colleagues working on African languages, we had a weekly meeting where people presented their on-going research (Picture 1). This was a fantastic opportunity to gain invaluable insights from knowledgeable colleagues on their area of expertise. It was also a good opportunity to get to know each other better, and for me to ask questions about living in Japan and my attempts to learn Japanese!

The hospitality of my colleagues and the friends I made along the way was amazing. The students also took me under their wing and invited me to a welcome dinner. I attended a performance of the Lion King in Swahili which the university students had

translated themselves.

During my time in Osaka, Professor Yoneda and I managed to complete the research which led to the publication of the article 'Functions of verb reduplication and verb doubling in Swahili' which was published by the Journal of Asian and African Studies in September 2018. I was also invited to give a talk at a workshop at Tokyo University of Foreign studies during my visit. This provided me with a fantastic opportunity to meet with the broader community of researchers working on African languages from across Japan.



Picture 2: Dr Gibson gives a talk at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in Japan. I was lucky enough to be there to witness the changing colours of the autumn leaves. I also experienced more delicious meals than I can count. And as a vegetarian, I can say that everything I ate was absolutely delicious. Just don't expect to encounter many other vegetarians along the way!

Since leaving Osaka, Professor Yoneda and I have also met at two

conferences and are planning to continue with our research collaboration. I am also in the process of planning a joint research project with two other colleagues who are based in Japan. I am also looking forward to hosting a JSPS Fellow at my home institution – the Department of Language and Linguistics at the University of Essex. Dr Furumoto is due to join us in April 2019 and we are all very much looking forward to his arrival!



Picture 3: Autumn leaves in Kyoto



Picture 4: A delicious vegetarian lunch

JSPS Alumni Association of the UK and the Republic of Ireland (RoI)

Please join the JSPS Alumni Association of the UK and the Republic of Ireland (RoI)!

As a former JSPS Fellow, we would like to ask you to join the JSPS Alumni Association of the UK and the Republic of Ireland (RoI). Our Alumni Association was established in 2003 and carries out a number of activities throughout the UK and RoI with numerous benefits for members. One of them is "The JSPS London Symposium and Seminar Scheme." The aim of this scheme is to provide support for members holding a symposium or seminar and to create high quality collaboration in cutting edge/ internationally competitive areas at institutional or departmental level between research institutions in the UK or RoI and Japan. Under this scheme, JSPS London will partially support the following matters*:

*The detailed support is subject to change.

- 1 Costs for inviting symposium/ seminar speakers from Japan
- 2 Costs for hiring a venue, printing materials, advertising and so on*
- 3 Strategic support to help advertise and organise the event.

The application details of this scheme will automatically be e mailed to registered Alumni members during our next call. For further information please contact JSPS London by email at enquire@jps.org. Again, this is exclusively open to the JSPS Alumni members.

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Joining us

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