

Fellow's Experience

Dr. Christopher Leyland

From March 2014 I spent 12 months working with host researcher Professor Tim Greer at Kobe University's School of Languages and Communication. This research project examined the interactional unfolding of lesson planning meetings between 'native and 'non-native speaker' English language teachers in Japanese elementary and junior high schools.

With Tokyo hosting the 2020 Olympic Games, the Japanese government has placed particular importance on improving the English language abilities of its younger generations. As such, English language education has become compulsory for elementary school 5th and 6th grade students. Additionally, the number of English native speaker Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs), who 'team-teach' with Japanese teachers, is to greatly increase. These huge changes have resulted in considerable research, much of which claims there are various linguistic and cultural problems between team-teachers that hinder their working relationship. None of this research, however, is based on analysis of actual communication between these team-teachers. As such, little is known about the collaboration between these hugely important English language educators.

For this JSPS project, I obtained 60 video recordings of lesson planning discussions between ALTs and Japanese teachers in empty classrooms and staffrooms of 13 elementary and junior high schools across Hyogo Prefecture. Analyses of these naturally occurring interactions reveal that, despite not sharing a first language ALTs and Japanese teachers' communication is not hindered by communicative or cultural problems. Indeed, ALTs and Japanese teachers skillfully manipulate various communicative tools to ensure successful communication and, ultimately, a lesson plan. For example, combining English, Japanese and gesture to enact how they foresee physical objects such as word cards will be used in the forthcoming class is a commonly used and multifunctional communicative device used frequently by ALTs and Japanese teachers while planning.

While thoroughly enjoyable, setting up this research project, as well as a life in Japan, required a lot of help from my host researcher. As such, make sure your host researcher is willing and able to give you the help you may well need. Also, try to balance this with having your own levels of independence at work. If your project is slow getting started, I suggest making some side projects. This will keep you occupied and may result in a publication or two! Working at Kobe University gave me a

great opportunity to work alongside an experienced researcher in my field. Also, it gave me access to a new and active research community. These have resulted in various collaborative research projects, which will boost my research profile, and several new friends!

I am so pleased I became a JSPS research fellow, and I will dine out on the memories for years. If you are thinking about applying, go for it!

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Research Group Meeting