

JSPS London Report: Samantha Gregory

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Field: Psychology

Current Institution: University of Aberdeen

Host Institution: Kyoto University

Department: Kokoro research institute

Host Researcher: Prof. Sakiko Yoshikawa,

Research Summary:

My research is on the topic of social cognition. I look at the ways we remember information gathered during social interactions. My research in Japan looked at an aspect of this, namely the interaction between eye-gaze and face emotion on memory.

When gaze is direct, memory for a neutral face has been shown to be better than when the gaze is averted. However when gaze interacts with emotion there are other social dynamics that will affect the integration into memory. In long term memory (LTM) happy faces are remembered better than angry faces. Researchers at Kyoto found that this memory for happy faces is not affected by averting gaze, but the memory for angry faces becomes even poorer when gaze is averted. Contrastingly, in working memory (WM) memory for angry faces is better. Researchers at Aberdeen showed that eye gaze did not affect memory for angry faces, but did have an effect on memory for happy faces, with happy faces being remembered better when gaze was averted. This was a strange result and lead me to Kyoto to see how Japanese participants would be affected by eye gaze in WM, as the original LTM study was conducted there.

I originally intended to see how participants memory would be for own race stimuli, however the Japanese participants showed a very high degree of memory for the faces, resulting in ceiling effects. Therefore I ran the experiment using the original Caucasian faces. This resulted in no ceiling effects, and a replication of the UK result. This provides evidence for the argument that the differences seen in the working memory experiment are due to memory system differences, and not cultural differences.

In general, it has been wonderful to experience the Japanese research environment and everyone I have met has been incredibly friendly and interesting. I have had many opportunities to talk to fellow academics in informal settings and in doing so I have had the fantastic opportunity to hear of the many research projects going on here. It has been interesting to see how much the work compares to that done at home.

The highlight in terms of cultural trips was Hiroshima. The peace garden and museum are incredibly powerful and worth a visit for anyone who comes to Japan. Kyoto itself is also

incredibly rich with culture and it has been a wonderful opportunity to work and live in such a beautiful area.

To anyone thinking of taking part in this programme, I say go for it. You will not regret it. The language barrier has rarely been an issue for me, despite having little to no Japanese ability. The food is great and the people are friendly. Make the most of the time you have, it goes quickly!

