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Feature Article: Colin Rundle

Identity Construction in a Third Place: A Japanese Intern's Social Network

第3国アイデンティティの確立：日本人インターンの社会的網



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要約

縦断的および民族誌的な本研究は、英語を媒介語とする修士課程のインターンシップ中に苦難に直面しながらも成長する、ある日本人学生について報告する。5ヶ月間の滞在中、彼女はブログを継続し、研究者とのやりとりのなかで日々の体験を綴っている。インターンシップはアメリカで実施されたが、英語は多数の国籍が交じり合う国際的組織内の共通語として使用され、事実上の第3国という環境 [liminal third place]もあった。このような国際的なインターン受入れ機関で強く成長していく一方他の生活面においても驚くべき困難に遭遇することになるが、法的サポート、警察および法廷制度に対応するべく築かれた非ネイティブ・スピーカー同士の大きなネットワークからの助けを受けて乗り越えていく。本学生の80件にわたるブログの記録からネットワークの分析を行い、またフォローアップのインタビューを実施した結果、こ

のネットワークは、彼女が困難な状況を乗り越えるにあたり中心的な役割を担っていたばかりでなく、英語が話せる国際的なプロフェッショナルとしてのアイデンティティの確立に貢献していたことが分かった。海外研修プログラムが持ち得る意味合いについても議論する。

Introduction

The “third place” originally referred to a hybrid social-linguistic classroom environment which emerged from elements of language learners’ L1 and the target language (Kramsch, 1993). This conception has evolved dramatically with awareness that English-using communities have become less associated with native speakers, and that few English learners follow a linear progression from non-native speaker, through interlanguage, all the way to native speaker goal. Firth and Wagner (1997) argued that this dominant linear model ignored the situatedness of language, particularly the emergent socio-linguistic practices of actual English users outside the classroom, which may have little to do with native-speaker norms (e.g. Rampton, 1995). The emergent nature of language and learning is often discussed as a “liminal” process of continually creating and crossing thresholds whenever speakers of different languages interact in a lingua franca (Baker, 2009; Brumfit, 2006).

Such social-cultural approaches, in contrast to computational metaphors of input and acquisition, conceptualize language learning as participation and interaction in communities. Van Lier (2000) argues that language is learnt through “affordances”, that is opportunities for perceptual and social activity, which do not just facilitate learning, but actually are learning because they are infused with negotiation of meaning

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and roles, and processes of testing and reformulating cognitions. Affordances do not rely on the presence of a native or even expert speaker, but can occur among peers of equal ability. The participation metaphor thus takes the focus from linguistic competence, placing it instead on communicative competence and a speaker's ability to achieve a sense of affiliation and belonging in specific contexts or communities.

Integral to participation, affiliation, and belonging is identity. Membership in a community relies on a mutually constituted identity arising from constant negotiation and renegotiation of relationships in the community. A person who consciously "is defined by as well as defines these relationships" embarks on trajectories of participation towards fuller membership in the community (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). Indeed, from social cultural perspectives, the person who speaks cannot be understood apart from the social networks in which they speak (Norton, 1997).

This study charts one Japanese female's trajectory of participation in an internship, the final stage of her English-medium master's program in Development Economics at a Tokyo university (see Table 1). After the coursework, Yoko undertook the internship at an international organization in Washington DC. The purpose of the present study was to improve preparation of interns by revealing their successes, challenges, or inadequacies, and their methods of dealing with difficulties during the internship.

Network analysis of Yoko's blog and a follow-up interview reveals that she was able to participate in an extensive non-native speaker network, enabling her to construct her identity as an international English-speaking professional and overcome the difficulties she faced. It also shows that Yoko had little interest in or need for native-speakers or their norms.

Table 1: Participant Details

Name	Yoko (alias)
Age	30
Education	BA Architecture, MA Development Economics (coursework and thesis completed)
English Proficiency (TOEFL-iBT)	Pre-MA: 69; Post-MA: 91
Previous Experience Abroad	Several 2-4 week tours of Europe during BA studies. No study or home-stay abroad experience
Internship	Final component of 1.5 year MA
Location	International Agriculture Organization (IAO) (alias), Washington D.C.
Period	10 October 2009 – 28 February 2010

Methodology

During her five-month internship, Yoko and I maintained a private blog, on which she recorded her experiences from 19 October to 28 February. Based on diary studies, using a blog had the advantage of allowing me to follow up on specific issues as they were occurring. The analysis began by reading Yoko's 80 blog entries as she posted them, while I also made 13 responses to her posts requesting details and giving encouragement. On her return to Japan, we conducted an unstructured interview, and I reread the complete blog, totalling 17,215 words, another three times, looking for salient features and themes. I checked my observations by identifying the most frequently occurring words (Brown, 2001) using Wordsmith Tools, confirming that people's names were by far the most salient category. I thus decided that

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network analysis would be an appropriate framework in which to analyze Yoko's participation and interactions (Kurata, 2004, 2007; Milroy, 1980; Wakimoto, 2007; Zappa-Hollman, 2007). Then, one year after her return, I conducted a semi-structured interview to probe issues that emerged from the analysis of the blog. Yoko finally read and made suggestions on drafts of this paper.

Network Analysis

Network approaches analyze participation in social networks using structural and interactional criteria (Kurata, 2004, 2007; Milroy, 1980). These criteria will be used to explain Table 2 and Figure 1, which depict the relationships that Yoko had with the people she mentioned by name in her blog, thereby illustrating the international professional identity which emerged as she participated in this network.

Most basic among the structural criteria, "size" of

Yoko's network was 29 members. Based on members' salient characteristics, I divided the network into 3 fields, shown in Table 2. The largest field, consisting of 21 members, is the International Agricultural Organization (IAO) where Yoko undertook the internship. The most striking structural characteristic of Yoko's network is ethnic diversity. Yoko's network consisted of 10 Chinese, six Japanese, four Africans, three Filipinos, two Americans, two Europeans, an Indian, and a Korean. Moreover, in spite of being in a major US city, only three members of her entire network were traditional native speakers of English, one from the UK and two from the US. At the IAO, there was only one native speaker in Yoko's network for the whole period, the team leader Geoff (UK Male). An undergraduate American male undertaking a short internship was present for only one month. For this reason, the IAO can be considered a liminal third place, where native speaker English norms did not dominate.

Table 2: Fields, Clusters, and Members of Yoko's Social Network¹

International Agricultural Organization Field	Japan Field	Home Field
IOA Team Cluster	Japan Alumni Cluster	Home 1
Wang (Chinese Male 1)	Japanese Female 1	Botswanan Female
Shen (Chinese Female 1, Wang's wife)	Japanese Female 2	Home 2
Lisa (Philippine Female 1)	Japanese Female 3	Brenda (US Female)
John (Philippine Male, Lisa's husband)	Zimbabwean Female	Home 3
Leng (Chinese Male 2)	Japan Family Cluster	Philippine Female 2
Geoff (UK Male)	Husband	
Nigerian Male	Sister	
Korean Male		
Austrian Female		
US Male		
IOA Cluster		
Hiroshi (Japanese Male 1)		
Hao (Chinese Female 2, Hiroshi's wife)		
Chinese Female 3		
Indian Female		
Ugandan Male		
Philippine Female 2		
IAO China Visit Cluster		
Chinese Female 4		
Chinese Males 3-6		

¹ Names are used for only the most commonly mentioned members and are all aliases.

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At the same time, Yoko's network was very narrow in professional terms, with 26 of the 29 members involved in international development. That is, everyone in the IAO field and the Japan field, except for her family; in the home field, 2 of the 3 main links were related to Yoko's profession: Botswanan Female worked at a related international organization with Japanese Female 2, and Philippine Female 2 was an IAO colleague (thus appearing twice in Table 2 and Figure 1). This respective diversity and narrowness suggests an emerging international rather than US identity, and Yoko's strong professional identity. These fit well with the goals that Yoko set for her internship, which she stated at the beginning as:

- 1) Obtain skills to manage geographic data (GIS, Geographic Information System, derived data) and socioeconomic data (economic statistics).
- 2) Strengthen own profession through writing a paper using practical data.

(Email, 23 October)

Primarily referring to professional goals, language is hinted at as "writing," but only instrumentally to strengthen her profession. During the second interview, she did stress that improving English was her third goal, and that she would have liked to meet more native speakers. Nevertheless, she did feel that her English had improved markedly, and that meeting native speakers was not necessary for that.

Clusters

IAO is divided into three "clusters," which are groups with high "density," that is groups in which many members know each other independently of the central person (Yoko). The largest IAO cluster is the research team that Yoko was assigned to. The next cluster consists of IAO staff not in her team but who mostly sat

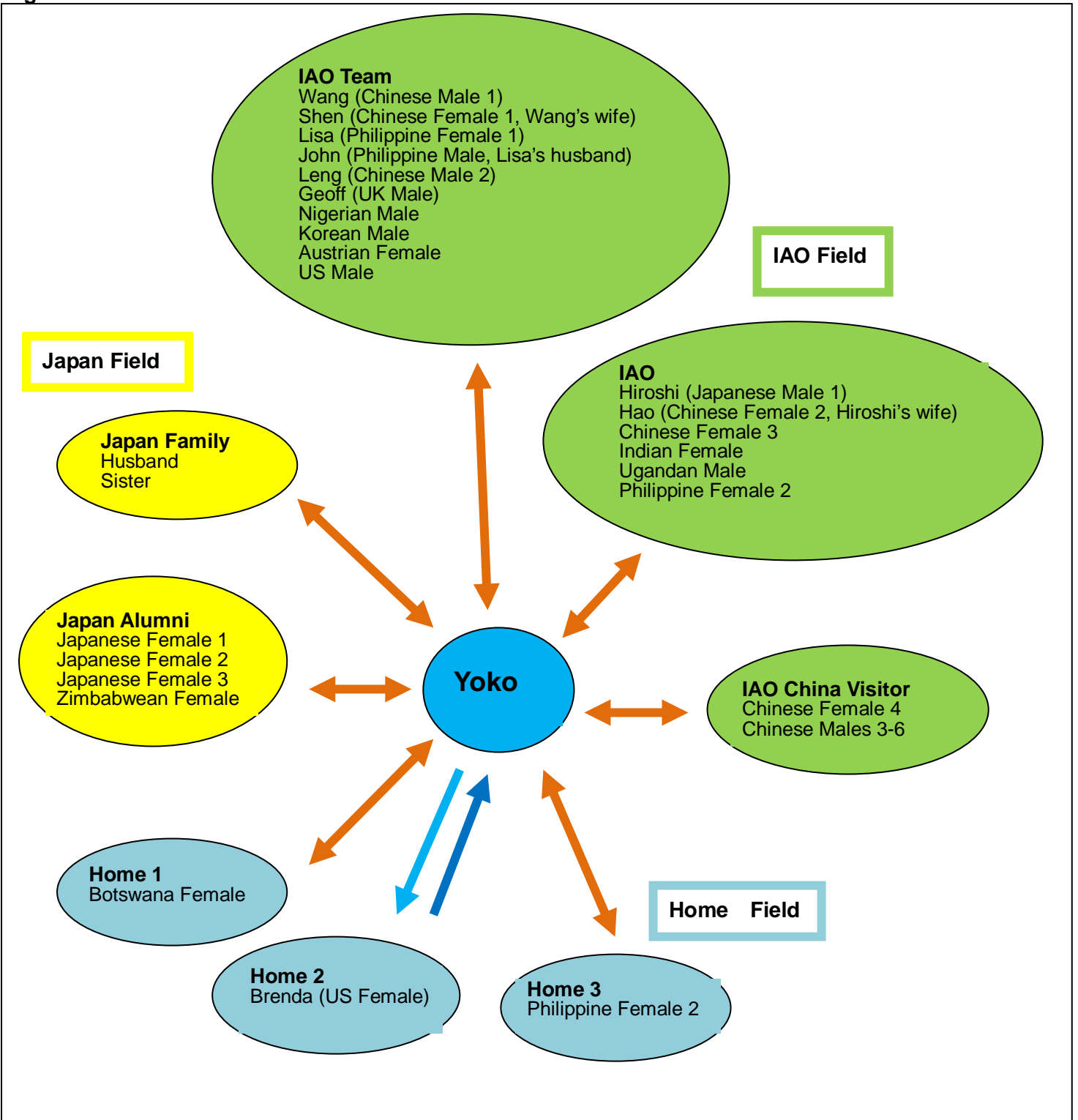
near Yoko in the office or during lunch. The China cluster consists of researchers introduced to Yoko by her supervisor, Wang (Chinese Male 1), when she accompanied him on a 10-day field trip to China. The next biggest field, Japan, consisted of people Yoko knew from Japan who were in Washington but not at IAO. The largest Japan cluster consists of Japanese Females 1, 2, and 3, and Zimbabwean Female, all alumni from Yoko's development economics program in Tokyo who were working at a larger international organization in Washington DC. Her husband and sister formed a small cluster when they separately visited Yoko during the internship. The final field, home, consists of Botswanan Female and US Female whose spare rooms/basements Yoko lived in, and Philippine Female 2 who sub-let her apartment to Yoko, all referred to in her blog as "landlords."

Density is used as an index of the potential communication among members of the cluster as well as the quantity and quality of transactions (Kurata, 2004). This suggests that, in a large cluster such as the IAO team, Yoko was involved in a number of varied interactions. In addition, as Yoko was only one of many participants, the language used would be typical of the discourse community formed by the cluster, with little simplification for a newcomer. This environment would better socialize her into the norms of that community than dyads or small clusters. Even in the Japan alumni cluster there was a non-Japanese speaker, which meant that Yoko often used English even when meeting with this cluster. Yoko's high-frequency interactions with members from the large IAO clusters, detailed in the following interactional criteria, index the many affordances she had to participate in that professional discourse community.

Frequency of Interaction

"Frequency of interaction" clearly indicates Yoko's

Figure 1. Yoko's Social Network



most important relationships. Counting the number of times Yoko mentioned individuals in her blog posts showed that her most important relationships were Wang (62 times), an environmental scientist in her team and her supervisor, Hiroshi (Japanese Male 1, 46

times), a development economist, and Lisa (Philippine Female 1, 34 times), a project manager in her team and her closest friend during the internship. These are all in the IAO field, again suggesting the centrality of Yoko's professional identity. The next most frequently

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mentioned person was the only native speaker regularly named, Brenda (US Female, 33 times), one of her 3 landladies. To understand the significance of these relationships, directional flow and power must be taken into consideration.

Directional Flow and Power

“Directional flow”, another interactional criterion, refers to the direction in which elements are exchanged, best interpreted here as flow of power. According to much of the literature, identity is structured by contextualized power relations, which are mutually generated in relationships. Two important relations of power are coercion, detrimental actions which “maintain inequitable division of resources” and collaboration, which is empowering rather than marginalizing (Norton, 1997, p. 412). Figure 1 depicts power relations with arrows between Yoko and clusters: a double-headed arrow indicates a collaborative relationship, while a single headed arrow indicates a coercive relationship.

Most of Yoko’s relationships were collaborative, empowering her to participate productively in most clusters. Most important among these are the high-density IAO clusters, especially her team. The team’s weekly meeting was a highly collaborative activity which Yoko was able to participate in. Yoko explained that:

Most of the topics at the weekly team meeting are on the projects we are implementing and at the end [of one meeting], I had an opportunity to talk about the progress of my research thanks to my supervisor, [Wang]. (Blog, 28 October)

In this episode, Yoko’s supervisor collaborated by giving her the floor, an affordance encouraging her participation as a fellow researcher.

This led to further affordances where Yoko expressed her identity as an economist. Another team member, Leng (Chinese Male 2, a scientist specializing in GIS), cooperated on Yoko’s research, which involved applying econometric analysis to GIS data. Yoko was able to gain useful information for her project by explaining the economic aspects of her project, boosting her own professional identity.

After my talk, I found Leng He is a GIS specialist... we had time for short discussion on GIS and economic stuff. He knows about GIS but not so much about economics and me vice versa. So it was very interesting... I found that the weekly meeting is really working! (Blog, 28 October)

In general, Yoko felt that the team valued her research, commenting, “actually, they are very interested in my research” (second interview). Thus, her IAO team, in particular the meetings and exchanges stemming from them, was highly collaborative, providing opportunities for Yoko not just to participate in the existing professional discourse of the cluster, but also to actively co-construct it by adding her own discourse of economics. In this way, she was able to collaboratively express and construct a professional identity.

Multiplexity

However, Yoko’s interactions in IAO clusters went beyond professional roles, accounted for by the interactional criterion “multiplexity.” Multiplex relations cover multiple roles, resulting in greater two-way communication and closer, stronger relationships (Kurata, 2004). Yoko socialized a great deal with her IAO colleagues, attending various seasonal parties, dinner parties, and other social events. Yoko’s relationship with Lisa, was particularly close, meeting almost every day for lunch, often for dinner, and

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sometimes visiting her home.

“Lisa was special... Sometimes she skyped me, that you have lunch now, or let’s go to have coffee...” (second interview)

A tangible linguistic result of this close relationship that I noticed when I first interviewed Yoko was her unmistakable Philippine accent.

The accounts below show how Yoko’s other IAO relationships spanned professional and personal roles.

Today, I had two Christmas parties; one is at the office and the other from Geoff’s home. IAO’s party was fun with good food, dancing, and singing. After that, Lisa, her husband, and me went to Geoff’s apartment. Wang with his family kindly gave us a drive and got the apartment around 7... We enjoyed 'karaoke' with good white wine, cocktail, salmon, pizza, cheese, fruit, tacos, etc... It was a great night. (Blog, 18 December)

Not only were relationships continued outside the workplace, but Yoko felt that IAO actively promoted close personal relationships in the workplace.

We had a farewell party of our Director General at the office from 4 to 7. Every division made some performances like a short drama, quizzes, playing instruments, and speeches. We gave several presents to him and had big dinner... Maybe more than 100 staffs were there... What was impressive to me was the word the DG said in closing his remark, 'Humor is productive.' That is exactly what I have been thinking since I came here, I couldn't find a good expression for that though. (Blog, 9 December)

These accounts demonstrate that Yoko’s IAO relationships were not only dense and collaborative, but also multiplex in that they fulfilled professional and social roles.

Coercion

Yoko’s relationship with Brenda, her second landlady, is a dramatic contrast to these collaborative multiplex relationships. This became an intensely coercive relationship, indicated in Figure 1 with two single headed arrows: one indicating Brenda’s efforts to coerce Yoko, the other representing Yoko’s resistance. Other members in her network rallied to support Yoko through the difficulties, further strengthening their collaborative relationships. Yoko first explained the situation like this.

The problem is that the landlord is kind but extremely sensitive [to something in my room]. I was told about it last week so I [organized all personal effects to avoid the problem]. But they told me the day before yesterday that [the problem persists.]... She suggested that I should change all my belongings...!² (Blog, 7 December)

Yoko’s immediate reaction to Brenda’s “suggestion” was resistance.

Should I? It's a kind of crazy. I think I'm flexible, you know I already gave up using [that] stuff for my relaxation, plus originally I rarely use [that] stuff compared to the US ordinary people. Lisa told me I am so unlucky and so do I to myself. (Blog, 7 December)

Yoko clearly feels that Brenda is exercising illegitimate

² The exact nature of the dispute is not specified here in order to protect Yoko’s identity.

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power. Even at this early stage, Yoko is sharing her problem with colleagues, and receiving support. This was her main coping strategy as the coercion escalated when Brenda seized Yoko's property.

I found the landlord [had interfered with all personal belongings]...I thought it is an extremely abnormal situation and called to some friends in DC. Luckily, Japanese Female 1 took the phone and strongly suggested to leave the apartment immediately... While I was packing my stuff waiting for her picking me up by car, the landlord came into to the basement without my permission ... The landlord did not allow me to go out with my belongings and ordered me to leave passport and keys of the apartment, although I have paid this month rent. Ultimately, I went with only my laptop, purse, and cell phone. I could also contact to Lisa and she gave me advice on the phone and told me to come to her apartment. (Blog, 15 December)

After this, Brenda pursued Yoko at work by phone, at which point Yoko resolved to resist the coercion by drawing on her network.

Today the crazy landlady called my office and spoke to Lisa. Then, to Wang. They told me no worries about the bothering to them but watch out my safety... I understand ultimately I have to resolve this issue by myself with the help of my friends. (Blog, 17 December)

Yoko's identity emerges here through contrast with her landlady as a "crazy" other. More telling though, during an interview Yoko referred to Brenda's intellectual abilities.

"I thought that she is not, um, very much, um,

highly educated ... Observing her way of speaking, and her topics, I didn't think that, she is, not sophisticated" (second interview).

In contrast to the "crazy", under-educated, unsophisticated landlady, Yoko positions herself amongst a highly educated, sophisticated community of professionals. Indeed, Yoko specifically highlights the landlady's "way of speaking" and "topics" of conversation as indicators of her lower status, suggesting that Yoko feels that she is a member of a superior discourse community. This dramatically demonstrates how, according to Yoko's priorities, "native-speakerness" was inconsequential compared to professionalism.

The role of advocate adopted by several members of her network increased multiplexity, deepening several collaborative relationships. The advocacy roles intensified as the problem escalated to local authorities and finally court.

I skyped with Hiroshi... He strongly advised me going to see the Office of Tenant Advocate (OTA) which is one of [local] government organizations (Blog, 20 December).

"I and Hao [Hiroshi's wife] meet 4 police officers near the house. We then all went to get my passport and stuff from the landlord" (second interview).

What convinced the OTA officer to proceed to a legal action is the evidence photos taken due to the strong recommendation by Hao (Blog, 30 December).

I went to the OTA and consulted with a lawyer accompanied with Hiroshi. The Lawyer suggested

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me to file this case at the small claim court (Blog, 29 January).

These comments identify important advocates besides Yoko's IAO team members Wang and Lisa as Hiroshi and his wife Hao.

The use of Skype mentioned above also played an important role. Because office computers did not have Japanese fonts, even when Yoko communicated with other Japanese members of her network, it was often in written English (second interview). This, together with her main Japan cluster including a non-Japanese speaker, extended the liminal third space beyond the IAO clusters and into at least one Japanese cluster.

Conclusion

This study has shown that a Japanese intern of modest English proficiency very successfully developed a strong sense of affiliation and belonging in an international professional community of practice. She was not just an observer, but participated by contributing a highly valued discourse while being socialized into existing discourses and relationships, co-constructing her own emerging identity as an international professional. Her main challenge was the dispute with her landlord. She coped with this by strategically drawing on the strong professional relationships she had built, mainly with IAO colleagues but also with Japanese alumni. These relationships had already extended beyond the workplace before the dispute, making it easier for Yoko to rely on her network when law enforcement agencies became involved. The formidable resistance she presented through this strategy is a marked departure from stereotypes of passive Japanese students.

Yoko's experience further sheds light on a common finding that study abroad work-placements are much more productive than student-placements (Coleman,

1997). Yoko's experience shows how workplace relationships, with both peers and supervisors, can become multiplex, forming deep bonds that not only are conducive to language development, but can provide essential support in exceptional difficulties. In traditional student-placements, students may form multiplex bonds with other students, but I cannot imagine that even adult students would often form them with senior university staff, or that such people would be willing to use their authority to support a visiting student as Yoko's colleagues, supervisors, and their wives did.

At the same time, she avoided the "ambiguous social cultural role of the professional non-native speaker" which can detract from work-placements (Coleman, 1997, p. 13). This seems to have been due to the absence of native speakers, suggesting that a liminal third place can be a desirable destination for study abroad, even in a "native speaking" country. Students may thus be well served by aiming to immerse themselves in a discourse community of their interest, such as agricultural development, rather than a speech community, such as "Anglo Americans" (see McKay, 2002). However, IAO seemed to be an exceptional organization with a strong culture of promoting positive personal relationships in the workplace. Planners of study abroad wishing to ensure the physical and emotional security of students would do well to investigate whether potential internship hosts have similar cultures. Finally, Yoko found blogging very beneficial for her language development. In the final post to the blog, she commented:

I learned a lot from blogging. It gave me good opportunities to try using new expressions I had learned in everyday life. Blogging definitely helped and encouraged me to use what I found through conversations in the office, chatting with friends,

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and interesting phrases jumping into ears at public places, such as buses, restaurants, stations, shops, and streets. (Blog, 28 February)

This suggests that a blog can be a very beneficial medium to support students participating in study abroad or internship programs. Establishing a blog so that students can share their experiences not just with teachers but with each other could enhance interactions in real communities by creating complementary interactions on-line.

Yoko's case never made it to court, but all of her belongings were retrieved and she completed the last 6 weeks of her internship in relative peace while subletting the apartment of a Philippine friend in the IAO cluster.

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