INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND POSSIBLE L2 SELVES IN A SHORT TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM

Matthew T. Apple
(mapple@fc.ritsumei.ac.jp)
Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan

Jonathan Aliponga
(alipongaj@kuins.ac.jp)
Kansai University of International Studies, Amagasaki, Japan

Abstract

This paper discusses the intercultural communication competence, speaking confidence, and possible L2 selves of 47 Japanese university students who participated in a short study abroad research program in Thailand. Before and after the study abroad program, students took a questionnaire concerning motivational factors such as intercultural competence, possible L2 selves, the frequency and amount of English communication with Thai students and teachers, and perception of adjustments needed to cope with cultural differences. Correlational analysis indicated that intercultural approach tendencies, motivational intensity, and ideal L2 self were positively related and ethnocentrism and anxiety were negatively related to communication frequency and adjustment to Thai life. Four study participants were selected for interviews to provide a qualitative perspective. Interviewees with high TOEFL scores had a lower sense of ideal self, a higher sense of ought-to self, and avoided outside of class activities, while interviewees with lower scores actively sought Thai friends and developed a greater sense of themselves as English users. In addition, students revealed that differences in class activities and student-teacher relationships in the two countries influenced their motivations and communication tendencies. The paper concludes with implications for evaluating a study abroad program and helping students improve intercultural communication skills.

1 Introduction

There is an awareness of the growing importance of study abroad in terms of linguistic improvement but also cultural understanding and intercultural communicative competence. Some 80% of all students engaged in study abroad programs come from Asian countries, particularly China, Korea, and Japan, and these students tend to choose English and study abroad in the US or Australia (Altbach & Bassett, 2004; Churchill, 2006; Tanaka & Ellis, 2003). However, despite the fact that there are far more non-native speakers of English than native speakers, there is still a strong sense that the only way to improve second language (L2) performance is through interaction with native-speakers (Wilkinson, 1998).

A common assumption of the most salient linguistic benefit for students studying abroad is improvement in L2 speaking fluency (e.g., Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; O'Brien, Segalowitz, Freed, & Collentine, 2007; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). On the other hand, the effectiveness of study abroad for developing positive attitudes toward the target language and culture has

been called into question (e.g., Allen, 2002; Hoffman-Hicks, 2000). Rather than specific L2 gains or positive developments in attitudes toward NS speakers, a more pertinent improvement might be the students themselves. Students who study abroad return home with a greater sense of the outside world and their place in it, and have a heightened interest in world affairs (Hadis, 2005). Therefore, the benefits of study abroad may be less a matter of linguistic competence and more of a developing sense of the self. This paper aims to examine the relationship between elements of intercultural communication competence and possible selves within a study abroad program for Japanese students.

2 Background of the Literature

The recent trend of Japanese students studying abroad has been a slow increase in study abroad numbers (Tanikawa, 2013). As short-term study abroad programs increase in popularity, it is paramount to discover evidence of the benefits of such programs. There is some evidence to suggest that learners of English vary in the amount of authentic interaction depending on the length of stay in the target language country, related to the degree to which learners successfully integrate into the target language community (Churchill, 2006). On the other hand, the perceived distance between the learner's identity as a language learner and the target culture may impede language improvement if the learner feels a sense of inability to become fluent in the language (Kininger, 2007).

While gains in language fluency and proficiency generally occur on average (e.g., Freed, 1995; Kininger, 2007), not all learners improve language performance during study abroad, and the degree of performance varies greatly depending on individual differences (Churchill & DuFon, 2006). Among the most salient individual differences that may influence study abroad experiences are *intercultural communication competence*, *speaking confidence*, and *possible L2 selves*. Since the degree to which study abroad students may engage in contact with L2 speakers may vary depending on these individual differences, we hypothesized that study participants with greater levels of these factors would have more L2 contact, thus increasing the likelihood of greater cultural awareness and language proficiency due to study abroad.

2.1 Intercultural communication competence

While intercultural communication competence (ICC) has many definitions, qualities generally ascribed to ICC by researchers include knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivations toward other cultures, languages, and people (Gudykunst, 1993; Spitzberg, 1997). Psychological readiness for intercultural communication consists of four main traits: openness or flexibility to new ideas and cultures, self-efficacy or beliefs in one's own abilities, tolerance of ambiguity, and critical thinking or creativity (Matsumoto, 2000).

In contrast, a sense of ethnocentrism and lack of confidence may lead to a lack of communication (Gudykunst, 1993). Ethnocentric behavior includes beliefs and attitudes that one's own culture and way of thinking is superior to all others, and leads to lack of cooperation, misperception, or even hostility toward members of the out-group (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). Such behavior is not entirely negative, since ethnocentrism can also lead to stronger ties within the group and a greater sense of self-sacrifice for the common good. However, ethnocentrism has been tied to communication apprehension (Lin & Rancer, 2003),

and excessive levels of ethnocentricity are seen as detrimental to communication (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

In previous studies of intercultural communication, Japanese students scored high on the ethnocentrism scale, especially compared to those from other countries such the US (e.g., Neuliep, Chaudoir, & McCroskey, 1991; Yashima, 2010). Likewise, Japanese students are frequently regarded as lacking speaking confidence in English, which strongly influences their ultimate language performance. Furthermore, Japanese students are less likely to initiate and sustain meaningful communication when they perceive their language ability to be lower than that of the interlocutor of the target language culture (Yashima, Zenuk-Nishide, & Shimizu, 2004). Thus, rather than interacting with members of the target language culture (e.g. first-language (L1) English speakers of an "Inner Circle" country such as the U.S. or the U.K.), it was hypothesized that interaction with fellow L2 English speakers of an "Expanding Circle" country (such as Thailand and Japan) might reduce the level of anxiety and increase perceived competence, thus raising confidence and encouraging more L2 contact (see Kachru, 1985, for more on Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles).

2.2 Possible L2 Selves

Although study abroad is often regarded as influential on development of the self, we also postulated that successful study abroad might also be related to an initial sense of the self as a L2 speaker. Based on the original *possible selves theory* by Markus and Nurius (1986), the L2 motivational self system (Dörnyei, 2005) consists of three language-related components. The *ideal L2 self* is an image the student has of becoming the best L2 user he or she can imagine. The *ought-to L2 self* is an image the student has of a self who is obliged to do something, such as passing a test or getting a job. Finally, *L2 learning experience* is what the student has or is doing to currently learn the L2.

While both ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self are seen as powerful self-guides, the ideal L2 self is generally seen as sustaining longer, stronger motivation for future learning. Who the ideal L2 self may emulate, however, is often seen by Japanese students as a native speaker of English, particularly an American. This sense of ideal L2 self has been linked to perceived competence and lack of anxiety, in other words, L2 confidence (Apple, Falout, & Hill, 2013). Since Japanese students frequently resist L2 contact due to a perceived lack of competence compared to L1 speakers, it was thought that L2 contact with L2 English speakers might increase the sense of an ideal L2 self, thus leading to greater L2 confidence, and hence more L2 contact, generating a positive recursive cycle of communication.

2.3 Purpose of the study

Several studies have examined changes in sense of self and confidence among studnets studying a target language or culture in a native-speaking context (e.g., Berwick & Whalley, 2000; Ingraham & Peterson, 2004; Jackson, 2006). However, few studies have examined the possible benefits of L2 language study abroad programs in an Asian L2 context in which English is used by L2 speakers for international communication purposes. Based on the gap identified in the literature and the contents of the short term study abroad program in which the study participants joined, three research questions were formulated for this study:

1) What are the relationships among the psychological variables of intercultural communication competence?
2) What are the differences between low proficiency and high proficiency Japanese learners' intercultural communication tendencies?
3) To what degree are possible L2 selves related to frequency of communication in English?

3 Methods

This study employed a explanatory sequential mixed methods analysis research approach, in which data from a quantitative investigation was triangulated with data from follow-up interviews (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). Items in the pre-study abroad program and post-study abroad program questionnaires were adapted from those in previously published studies (Apple et al., 2013; Ryan, 2009; Taguchi, Magid, & Papi, 2009; Yashima, 2010).

3.1 Study participants

Participants in this study were 47 second-year students at a small private undergraduate university in western Japan engaged in a compulsory three-week short term study abroad program in Thailand in late August and early September, 2013. Forty-two students majored in English education, three majored in social welfare, and two majored in psychology. Ten sessions of a study abroad preparatory course prior to departure were conducted by senior students in the same department, under the supervision of English professors. The preparatory course and English classes at the university in Japan used pair and group work extensively to prepare students for English language use while overseas. Students were given a specially-prepared study abroad diary in which they were asked to select goals for study abroad, to take reflective notes on a daily basis regarding their language and culture experiences, and to prepare team research reports according to a pre-arranged schedule.

The study abroad program itself was research-oriented; students formed teams of four and researched aspects of comparative culture before writing and presenting a report on their findings in English. While in the overseas program, students from the Japanese university were paired with a student at the host university in Thailand. On weekday mornings from 9 a.m. to noon the study participants took intensive English language classes taught by a native speaker of English who had been living in Thailand for over two decades. The host university received orientation by the Japanese university about the students' previous use of active learning, in other words, engaging in group activities such as reading, writing, discussion, problem solving, or cooperative learning, that promote analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of class content. The paired Thai university students joined study participants in the afternoon from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. in Thai culture classes taught by a professor who was a native Thai speaker. Weekend days were devoted to conducting research about cultural differences between Japan and Thailand, which was presented upon returning to Japan at the conclusion of the short term study abroad program.

3.2 Questionnaire instruments

Study participants were given two questionnaires, one prior to overseas departure (pre-program) and one after returning from the short term study abroad program (post-program).

The pre-program questionnaire consisted of 40 Likert-scale items. The items measured the intercultural communication variables *intergroup approach-avoidance* (α = .85), *ethnocentrism* (α = .73); the possible L2 selves variables *Ideal L2 Self* (α = .93), *Ought-to L2 Self* (α = .86); the speaking self-efficacy variables *speaking anxiety* (α = .87), *perceived speaking competence* (α = .87); *motivational intensity* (α = .92); and *frequency and amount of communication in English (pre)* (α = .93). At this time, TOEFL ITP scores were also self-reported by the 42 students majoring in English education (*M* = 402, *SD* = 30.27), as was previous study abroad or overseas travel experience.

The post-program questionnaire included eleven Likert-scale items and two open response items. Likert-scale items measured the variables *frequency and amount of communication in English (post)* (α = .81) and *perception of cultural adjustment* (α = .81). The open response items asked students to indicate, on average, how many Thai interlocutors they talked to on a daily basis (*Interloc*) and the average time of their daily English usage (*Talk*).

All Likert-scale items used a six-point scale. Responses ranged from 1 (I never did this) to 6 (I did this often) for the two *frequency and amount of communication* variables, and from 1 (I completely disagree) to 6 (I completely agree) for other variables.

3.3 Data analysis
The data were analyzed into three ways: Rasch model analysis, correlational analysis, and select interviews with four individual study participants.

3.3.1 Rasch model analysis
Data obtained from Likert-scale items were analyzed using the Rasch rating scale model for categorical data (Andrich, 1978; Rasch, 1960), which can determine item fit to the intended measurement construct and the unidimensionality of each construct. For this study, the criterion for unidimensionality of contruct was set at 50% of more variance accounted for by the main construct and item fit of between .5 and 1.5 logits (Linacre, 2007).

Rasch item-person maps were also produced, to give a visual representation of the levels of construct for each study participant. Traditional descriptive statistics were obtained, as well as item and construct reliability estimates.

3.3.2 Correlational analysis
After confirming the construct validity of variables in the study, a correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between the pre-program questionnaire variables, the post-program questionnaire variables, and English proficiency as measured by TOEFL ITP scores.

3.3.3 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with four study participants to provide a qualitative perspective of the effectiveness of the short term study program and to triangulate the quantitative data analysis. The interviewees were chosen based on the results of the Rasch item-person maps for the variables Ideal L2 Self (IS) and Ought-to L2 Self (OS) as a representative profile of combinations of the possible L2 selves. The four students selected represented high OS and

average IS, average OS and low IS, high OS and low IS, and high OS and high IS. Participants were interviewed in a single focus group for 30 minutes in a semi-structured interview to uncover details behind their experiences in the short term study abroad program in Thailand, their language and culture learning experiences, and their self-perceptions as users of English.

4 Results

Results are divided according to analysis type below. Descriptive statistics, Rasch model analysis, and reliability analysis is presented in Table 1. Correlational analysis is presented in Table 2.

4.1 Descriptive statistics, Rasch model analysis and reliability analysis

Initial descriptive statistics were obtained for all variables on both pre- and post-study abroad program questionnaire. The maximum composite index for nine variables (approach-avoid tendency, AA; ethnocentrism, ETH; motivational intensity, MI; frequency of contact pre-, FCPre; anxiety; perceived competence, Comp; ideal L2 self, IS; ought-to L2 self, OS; and perception of adjustment, Adjust) was 30.00, while the maximum for the frequency of contact post- (FCPost) variable was 24.00.

Descriptive statistics show that the most salient variable was approach-avoidance tendency, followed by motivational intensity and the two possible L2 selves variables (OS, $M = 22.17$, $SD = 5.57$; IS, $M = 20.17$, $SD = 6.45$). Students in the study were positive toward approaching those from other cultures (AA, $M = 22.51$, $SD = 5.19$, were highly motivated (MI, $M = 22.40$, $SD = 5.56$) and had had participated actively in English classes prior to leaving for the study abroad program (FCPre, M = 20.30, SD = 5.87).

Of the 47 total study participants, 25 reported previous overseas experience ranging from a short three-day shopping trip to a high school study abroad of 11 months. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for all variables to determine any differences among the students based on their overseas experiences. Significant differences were found on only one variable, approach-avoid tendency, with a strong effect size, $F(1, 43) = 4.76$, $p = .03$, $d = .64$. No other differences were found on other variables.

Students in the study were ambivalent about their own confidence, as shown by slightly above average anxiety ($M = 18.87$, $SD = 5.65$) as well as slightly above average perceptions of competence ($M = 18.53$, $SD = 5.03$). Students also had more images of their ought-to L2 selves ($M = 22.17$, $SD = 5.57$) than ideal L2 selves ($M = 20.17$, $SD = 6.45$), though both were well-developed. Surprisingly, students were slightly ethnocentric ($M = 17.32$, $SD = 4.84$), despite a high approach-avoid tendency.

Open-response items indicated that, on average, students talked to roughly five Thai speakers of English per day (Interloc, 5.39) and used English for slightly more than one hour each day with Thai interlocutors (Talk, 66.02).

Rasch model analysis confirmed unidimensionality of contruct for all variables, with variance accounted for ranging from 67.6% to 82.0%. Based on variance accounted for, the strongest

variable was perceived competence (82.0%), followed by motivational intensity (80.5%), ideal L2 self (76.1%), and approach-avoid tendency (75.7%). Item fit analysis revealed that several items misfit the model's expectations; however, only one item (FC5 in the FCPre variable, "I talked with friends or acquaintances outside school in English") affected the analysis to the degree that it had to be removed from further analysis.

Finally, Rasch model item and personal reliability estimates were obtained. Estimates ranged from .50 to .91; compared to traditional Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates which ranged from .73 to .93, the Rasch model estimates were more conservative. Overall, estimates showed a good level of questionnaire response reliability.

4.2 Correlational analysis

Following descriptive statistics and Rasch model analysis, the variables from both pre- and post-study abroad program were subject to a correctional analysis.

The most immediate surprise was the lack of importance of the TOEFL scores. Standardized test scores had no significant correlation with any of the variables. The strongest correlation was with frequency and amount of communication in English while in the study abroad program ($r = -.41$), which showed that test scores were negatively related to L2 contact. However, this correlation, like the others for TOEFL, was not statistically significant, making further quantitative interpretation questionable.

Anxiety likewise had little impact on the students prior to study abroad; however, it did have a moderate-strength correlation with the perceived difficulty of social adjustment to life in Thailand (Adjust, $r = .49$). This may be partially attributable to interacting in Thailand with new acquaintances in an unfamiliar setting.

Other variables were strongly correlated. The intercultural communication variables (approach-avoidance tendency, AA; ethnocentrism, ETH) both significantly correlated with perceived competence (Comp) and the possible L2 selves variables (IS and OS). However, the strength of association for IS was much higher for AA ($r = .63$) than that of ETH ($r = .29$), while that of OS was about the same for both AA and ETH ($r = .44$). AA was strongly correlated to motivational intensity (MI, $r = .65$), while ETH was not. There were also moderate to strong positive correlations between AA and speaking-related variables (FCBefor, $r = .63$; FCAfter, $r = .52$; Interloc, $r = .41$; Talk, $r = .49$) as well as a moderate negative correlation to Adjust ($r = -.43$). While ETH had a significantly moderate correlation to FCBefor, it had no significant correlations to speaking variables on the post-program questionnaire.

The possible L2 selves variables of Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 self correlated with each other ($r = .46$), as well as with all the pre-program variables except for Anxiety. However, Ought-to L2 Self had no significant correlations with post-program variables, while Ideal L2 Self had moderate correlations with FCAfter ($r = .43$), Adjust ($r = -.37$), and Talk ($r = .35$).

Table 1. Traditional Descriptive Statistics, Rasch Principal Component Analysis Results, and Reliability Estimates

Variable	*k*	*M*	*SD*	Variance accounted	Eigenvalue	First contrast	Eigenvalue	Item reliability	Person reliability	Cronbach's alpha
TOEFL	—	402	30.27	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
AA	5 [a]	22.51	5.19	75.7	15.6	9.1	1.9	.88	.75	.85
ETH	5	17.32	4.84	66.1	9.8	12.9	1.9	.90	.62	.73
MI	5	22.40	5.56	80.5	20.7	6.5	1.7	.82	.79	.92
FCPre	5 [b]	20.30	5.87	72.8	10.7	10.5	1.5	.77	.76	.90
Anxiety	5 [c]	18.87	5.65	72.5	13.2	12.1	2.2	.75	.76	.87
Comp	5 [d]	18.53	5.03	82.0	22.8	6.8	1.9	.86	.91	.87
IS	5	20.17	6.45	76.1	15.9	11.6	2.4	.84	.85	.93
OS	5 [e]	22.17	5.57	67.6	10.4	10.4	1.6	.73	.50	.86
FCPost	4	15.62	4.47	74.2	11.5	10.9	1.7	.76	.91	.81
Adjust	5 [f]	16.89	5.55	70.1	11.7	10.3	1.7	.74	.81	.80
Interloc	—	5.39	4.67	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Talk	—	66.02	71.02	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Notes. [a] = AA2 misfit but was retained; [b] = FC5 misfit, deleted prior to correlation; [c] = SA1 misfit but was retained; [d] = PS5 misfit but was retained; [e] = OS5 misfit but was retained; [f] = ADJ5 misfit but was retained.

Table 2. Correlations of All Variables Both Pre- and Post-Study Abroad Program Questionnaires

	TOEFL[a]	AA	ETH	MI	FCPre	Anxiety	Comp	IS	OS	FCPost	Adjust[b]	Interloc	Talk
TOEFL	—												
AA	-.11	—											
ETH	.14	.32*	—										
MI	.05	.65**	.27	—									
FCPre	-.05	.63**	.40**	.67**	—								
Anxiety	.09	-.14	.27	-.12	-.10	—							
Comp	.17	.55**	.46**	.51**	.62**	.00	—						
IS	-.11	.63**	.29*	.66**	.64**	-.18	.50**	—					
OS	.08	.44*	.44**	.57**	.58**	.26	.42**	.46**	—				
FCPost	-.41	.52**	.03	.47**	.45**	-.27	.26	.43**	.13	—			
Adjust	.11	-.43**	.20	-.44**	-.23	.49**	-.18	-.37*	-.06	-.39**	—		
Interloc	-.25	.41**	-.04	.21	.30*	-.20	.19	.18	.02	.47**	-.51**	—	
Talk	-.25	.49**	-.12	.43**	.58**	-.26	.35*	.35*	.29	.62**	-.37*	.58**	—

Notes. The four variables after the solid horizontal line indicate the post-program questionnaire variables. AA = Intercultural Approach-Avoidance Tendency; ETH = Ethnocentrism; MI = Motivational intensity; FCPre = Frequency and Amount of Communication in English (Pre); Anxiety = Speaking Anxiety; Comp = Perceived Speaking Competence; IS = Ideal L2 Self; OS = Ought-to L2 Self; FCPost = Frequency and Amount of Communication in English (Post); Adjust = Adjustment; Interloc = Number of English-speaking Thai interlocutors per day; Talk = Amount of English spoken per day; Solid line indicates pre/post questionnaire variables; N = 47 [a].
[a] n = 42 for TOEFL. [b] n = 44 for Adjust.
*$p < .01$
**$p < .05$

4.3 Interview results

Four students were interviewed to give a qualitative aspect to the data. Students were asked to describe their impressions of the study abroad program, especially pertaining their English language usage and perceived social adjustments to life in Thailand during the three weeks. The four students (one female, three male) reported varying English proficiencies as measured by TOEFL, had different overseas experiences prior to the study abroad program, and had very different reactions to life overseas (Table 3). To preserve the study participants' anonymity, the pseudonyms Taka, Naoya, Sho, and Yuri are used.

Table 3. Interviewees English Proficiency, Possible L2 Selves, and Prior Overseas Experience

Name	TOEFL ITP	Ideal L2 Self	Ought-to L2 Self	Prior overseas experience
Taka	453	Average	High	Australia, 6 months
Naoya	473	Low	Average	None
Sho	387	Low	High	None
Yuri	367	High	High	Australia, 11 months

4.3.1 Taka's interview results

The first student, Taka, was considered by his Japanese university instructor to be one of the best English speakers among the 47 study abroad program participants. Although Taka belonged to the highest language proficiency group in his home institute in Japan, he didn't consider himself to have as much competence as others in his class. Thus, his questionnaire responses placing him as "average" ideal L2 self seemed accurate. Taka commented, "I don't think I am good at English. I applied at [sic] famous universities but I didn't pass."

Taka was also somewhat anti-social during the study abroad program and avoided extracurricular L2 contact. While he was active during the weekday class sessions in Thailand, he didn't make much effort to go out after class with Thai students. Instead, he always went out with his Japanese friends. "In the class, I could communicate in English because there were Thai students," he said during the interview. "There is a limited chance outside the class."

4.3.2 Naoya's interview results

The second student, Naoya, had the highest TOEFL average among the 47 study abroad participants. However, he had little sense of himself as an L2 speaker, saying, "I don't think I'm good at English now, but I [am] doing my best and I hope I will improve." His instructor commented that Naoya could often be seen studying and preparing for English classes, right outside the instructor's office, where he could ask for advice and help.

Like Taka, Naoya also avoided L2 contact outside class time. He complained about the English class instruction in Thailand, saying, "We always had listening activities. Less chance to interact in English." He claimed that he didn't hang out with Thai students because after class was over he was too tired. However, his instructor believed that he was not confident to make friends with Thai students.

4.3.3 Sho's interview results

The third interviewee, Sho, had a markedly lower TOEFL score than Taka or Naoya. He also had a low Ideal L2 Self, but during the interview, Sho requested to change his answers to four of the IS items on the questionnaire to "6." The reason he gave was that he failed to understand the nature of the questions initially. However, he also commented: "I was worried about my ability to speak English in Thailand, but I was surprised that I could." The instructor also noted that Sho was actively "courting" a Thai female student during the study abroad program, and they had become a couple before the end of the three weeks. Unlike Naoya and Taka, Sho was very interested in hanging out socially with Thai students after classes ended.

4.3.4 Yuri's interview results

The final student interviewed, Yuri, had the lowest TOEFL score of the four interviewees, despite having spent nearly an entire year in Australia the previous academic year. Characterized as "not studious" by her instructor, Yuri was the most social of the four students interviewed and the only one who had answered "6" to both Ideal L2 Self and Ought-to L2 Self items in the questionnaire. Yuri claimed to have hung out with Thai students "every night," speaking English as best she could and making as many friends as possible.

4.3.5 Overall interviewee comments

Although reporting varying degrees of L2 contact with Thai students, the four interviewees all had negative impressions of the study abroad program. While the study abroad preparatory program in Japan had made extensive use of pair and group work, conversational activities, and presentations by students in front of class, the 90-minute classes in Thailand about Thai culture and English language were primarily teacher-fronted.

The Japanese students complained that in the classes, they had virtually no opportunities to talk with Thai students. Although minimal group activities were used for short five-minute group discussion in the culture-oriented classes taught by a Thai professor of English, students were often expected to listen to the instructor's lecture. Likewise, the English language classes taught by an L1 Australian speaker were teacher-fronted. Activities included listening to songs, watching YouTube videos, and answering questions from the teacher. The English language classes utilized no pair or group activities, and L2 contact with Thai students was limited.

Moreover, to reduce the number of students in the classroom, the instructors had divided the students into half. One group would take the class together while the second group would wait back at the hotel. After the 90-minute was over, the groups would swap. In this way, students only had one 90-minute class of Thai culture each morning and one 90-minute class of English language each afternoon.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

The first discussion point to be made concerns the first research question about the relationship among the psycholinguistic variables in the study. The most-salient variables in terms of high correlations with other variables were approach-avoid tendency, motivational

intensity, perceived competence, and the possible L2 selves variables, ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self. While students in general were motivated to communicate in English, the students with previous overseas experiences had a stronger tendency for approaching fellow L2 speakers in Thailand, thus increasing L2 contact opportunities and their own perceived competence at speaking English. While ethnocentric tendencies did not negatively affect a sense of competence during preparatory study abroad English classes with L2 speakers from the same cultural background, the correlation between ethnocentrism and ought-to L2 self and lack of correlation between ethnocentrism and communication overseas supports the literature that excessive ethnocentrism prevents intercultural communication from occurring.

On the other hand, having a certain degree of intercultural communication competence was a necessary but not sufficient prerequisite for L2 contact. The correlation between ideal L2 self and communication overseas, and corresponding lack of correlation with ought-to L2 self, suggests that students who believe it is speaking English is merely a social obligation do not experience as much L2 contact success as those who can conceive of themselves as speakers of the language for intercultural communicative purposes. In other words, students with a better sense of themselves as competent speakers of English as a second language were more likely to actively seek opportunities to speak with other L2 speakers and to experience fewer psychological problems adjusting to living in another culture.

The second discussion point concerns the next research question, regarding the influence of English proficiency on intercultural communication. This point is clear: based on the correlational and interview data results, actual English proficiency has little to do with communication tendencies. TOEFL scores had no significant correlations at all with the other variables in the study. If anything, based on the interviews, students with higher TOEFL scores may have a stronger perception of themselves as inadequate English speakers, thus paradoxically leading not to more but to less L2 contact. The failure of standardized test scores to predict L2 communication indicates a need for a new evaluation or assessment of what constitutes English communicative skills.

The third and final point of discussion reiterates the discussion about the influence of possible L2 selves on intercultural communication competence. Both ideal L2 self and ought-to L2 self variables were related to communication in the English classroom prior to the study abroad program. However, ideal L2 self alone was correlated with communication in English with Thai speakers of English. This finding agrees with the theoretical model that students of English who can imagine themselves as L2 speakers—in other words, as owners of the language—are more likely to communicate in English with more interlocutors than someone studying English as a means to an end, such as for a test score or for potential employment.

The study abroad experience thus can be viewed as more than just a means of increasing standardized language test scores, but as a way of improving and expanding individual communication skills through interaction with people from different cultures who may have different societal values.

6 Limitations and Suggestions

The context of the study abroad program in which students in this study participated raised crucial limitations that students themselves may not be able to avoid, as well as indicate areas

of improvement in the future. The study abroad program itself was run by host institution administrators and instructors who operated under a different set of accepted teaching conditions than what the students had experienced and expected from their home institution. When the expectations clashed with the actuality of the study abroad program classes, the result was less intercultural communication and disappointment. Frequency of English communication relies not only on inside class opportunities but also, and perhaps more importantly, outside classroom activities that occur in an unstructured, "natural" social setting. Simply participating in a study abroad program does not necessarily lead to increase L2 contact opportunities; as Allen (2010) pointed out, study abroad programs need to be careful organized to help students develop L2 communication strategies, to gain confidence in approaching L2 interlocutors, and to have the opportunity to engage in L2 communication activities.

For the short-term study abroad in the present study, the original time frame had been early August, when both the Japanese and Thailand university classes were not in session. Due to professor unavailability, the program was shifted to late August into early September. This coincided with the exam period for Thai university students, making them unavailable for activities inside and outside the classroom. In an effort to reduce the burden on Thai students, the host institution instructors had divided the classes into two groups. This had the effect of reducing L2 contact between Japanese and Thai students and also led to Japanese students spending much more time by themselves, trapped inside the hotel rather than experiencing Thai culture.

Thus, it is highly likely that the relationship of approach-avoid tendencies and ethnocentrism, the intercultural communication competence variables, with actual frequency of communication in English with fellow L2 speakers was influenced by the schedule and situation of the study abroad program itself. The burden of communication was placed squarely on the Japanese students; those who actively sought out L2 contact opportunities had more successful intercultural experiences than those who opted to stay within the bounds of the study abroad program.

Based on study findings, we can therefore suggest the following points for improving and enhancing the study abroad experience for all participants:

1. Improved communication among instructors and administrators at the home and host institutions should be encouraged to reduce the expectancy-actuality discrepancy among participating students.
2. Instructors in study abroad programs should be encouraged to use a wide variety of student-oriented activities within the class in order to optimize L2 contact opportunities among visiting and host student participants.
3. Both prior to and following the conclusion of a study abroad program, instructors and administrators should encourage visiting and host student participant reflection about their experiences to facilitate a greater understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of the program.

The interviewees confirmed what the questionnaire data revealed about intercultural communication tendencies and related psycholinguistic variables in the study abroad participant sample; namely, that standardized test scores had little to do with actual L2 communication and that perceptions of competence, images of the self as an L2 speaker, and intercultural approach-avoid tendencies were related to L2 contact and communication. However, the small sample size ($N = 47$) and lack of a control group prevents generalization to other study abroad participants in other study abroad contexts. In the future, the study will be expanded upon to include other cohorts of Japanese L2 learners of English who participate in short-term study abroad programs in other Asian L2 contexts such as the China, Korea, and the Philippines.

References

Altbach, P., & Bassett, R. (2004). The brain trade. *Foreign Policy, 44,* 30-31.

Allen, H. W. (2002). *Does study abroad make a difference? An investigation of linguistic and motivational outcomes.* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database.

Allen, H. W. (2010). Interactive contact as linguistic affordance during short-term study abroad: Myth or reality? *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 19,* 1-26.

Andrich, D. (1978). Scaling attitude items constructed and scored in the Likert tradition. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 38*, 665-680.

Apple, M., Falout, J., & Hill, G. (2013). Exploring classroom-based constructs of EFL motivation for science and engineering students in Japan. In M. Apple, D. Da Silva, & T. Fellner (Eds.), *Language learning motivation in Japan* (pp. 54-74). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Berwick, R. F., & Whalley, T. R. (2000). The experiential bases of culture learning: A case study of Canadian high schoolers in Japan. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 24*, 325-340.

Churchill, E. (2006). Variability in the study abroad classroom and learner competence. In M. A. DuFon & E. E. Churchill (Eds.), *Language learners in study abroad contexts* (pp. 203-227). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Churchill, E., & DuFon, M. A. (2006). Evolving threads in study abroad research. In M. A. DuFon & E. E. Churchill (Eds.), *Language learners in study abroad contexts* (pp. 1-27). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2010). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research (2nd ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Dörnyei, Z. (2005). *The psychology of the language learner: Individual differences in second language acquisition.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Freed, B. (1995). *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Gudykunst, W. B. (1993). Toward a theory of effective interpersonal and intergroup communication: An anxiety/uncertainty management perspective. In R. L. Wiseman & J. Koester (Eds.), *Intercultural communication competence* (pp. 33-71). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gudykunst, W. B., & Kim, Y.-Y. (1997). *Communicating with strangers: An approach to intercultural communication.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Hadis, B. F. (2005). Why are they better students when they come back? Determinants of academic focusing gains in the study abroad experience. *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 11,* 57-70.

Hoffman-Hicks, S. D. (2000). The longitudinal development of French foreign language pragmatic competence: Evidence from study abroad participants. (Doctoral dissertation).

Ingraham, E. C., & Peterson, D. L. (2004). Assessing the impact of study abroad on student learning at Michigan State University. *The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad, 10,* 83-100.

Jackson, J. (2006). Ethnographic preparation for short-term study and residence in the target culture. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 30,* 77-98.

Kachru, B. (1985). Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literature* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kininger, C. (2007). Research on language education through programmes of study and residence abroad: Recent publications. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 10,* 104-112.

Lin, Y., & Rancer, A. S. (2003). Ethnocentrism, intercultural communication apprehension, intercultural willingness-to-communicate, and intentions to participate in an intercultural dialogue program: Testing a proposed model. *Communication Research Reports, 20*, 62-72.

Linacre, J. M., 2007. *A user's guide to WINSTEPS: Rasch-model computer program*. Chicago: MESA.

Llanes, À, & Muñoz, C. (2009). A short stay abroad: Does it make a difference? *System, 37,* 353-365.

Markus, H., & Nurius, P. (1986). Possible selves. *American Psychologist, 41*(9), 954-969.

Matsumoto, D. (2000). *Culture and psychology.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Neuliep, J. W., Chaudoir, M., & McCroskey, J. C. (2001). A cross-cultural comparison of ethnocentrism among Japanese and United States college students. *Communication Research Reports, 18*, 137-146.

Neuliep, J. W., & McCroskey, J. C. (1997). The development of a U.S. and generalized ethnocentrism scale. *Communication Research Reports, 14,* 385-398.

O'Brien, I., Segalowitz, N., Freed, B., & Colletine, J. (2007). Phonological memory predicts second language oral fluency gains in adults. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 29,* 557-581.

Rasch, G. (1960). *Probabilistic models for some intelligence and attainment tests*. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Ryan, S. (2009). Self and identity in L2 motivation in Japan: The ideal L2 self and Japanese learners of English. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 120-143). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Segalowitz, N., & Freed, B. (2004). Context, contact, and cognition in oral fluency acquisition. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 26,* 173-199.

Spitzberg, B. H. (1997). A model of intercultural communication competence. In L. A. Samover & R. E. Porter (Eds.), *Intercultural communication: A reader (8th ed.)* (pp. 379-391). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Taguchi, T., Magid, M., & Papi, M. (2009). The L2 motivational self system among Japanese, Chinese and Iranian learners of English: A comparative study. In Z. Dörnyei & E. Ushioda (Eds.), *Motivation, language identity and the L2 self* (pp. 66-97). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Tanaka, K., & Ellis, R. (2003). Study-abroad, language proficiency, and learner beliefs about language learning. *JALT Journal, 25,* 63-85.

Tanikawa, M. (2013, March 24). More young Japanese heading abroad to study. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/25/world/asia/25iht-educside25.html

Wilkinson, S. (1998). On the nature of immersion during study abroad: Some participants' perspectives. *Frontiers, 4,* 125-138.

Yashima, T. (2010). The effects of international volunteer work experiences on intercultural competence of Japanese youth. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 34*, 268-282.

Yashima, T., Zenuk-Nishide, L., & Shimizu, K. (2004). The influence of attitudes and affect on willingness to communicate and second language communication. *Language Learning, 54,* 119-152.