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Appendix A: Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions used are based on the original conventions provided originally by Jefferson (1989) and summarized by ten Have (1999).

	Transcription conventions
.	Falling intonation, declarative intonation
,	Falling-rising, continuing intonation
?	Rising intonation, question intonation
-	False start
:	Elongated vowel
=	Latched turn with no gap or overlap, or continuation by same speaker from non-adjacent line
[Overlap
(0.5)	Length of pause
(word)	Unsure hearings
°word°	Relatively quieter than surrounding talk
(xxx)	Unclear speech
ha	Laughter token
(h)	Laughter token within a word
h	Audible outbreath, more letters indicate longer outbreath
.h	Audible inbreath, more letters indicate longer in breath

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12 Learners' Participation in Japanese-Related Online Communities and the Relationship between Online Activities and Classroom Learning: A Comparative Case Study of Two JFL Learners

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Introduction

In recent years, participatory media fandom devoted to pop culture has been an object of inquiry in applied linguistics (e.g. Gee, 2005; Thorne *et al.*, 2009), cultural studies (e.g. Lee, 2011; Napier, 2006; Pérez-González, 2012; Pérez-González & Susam-Saraeva, 2014), education (e.g. Black, 2009; Ito, 2006) and beyond. These studies point to the global impact of Japanese pop culture on today's youth. A recent survey conducted by the Japan Foundation (2015) also confirms that interest in pop culture remains among the top reasons for the study of Japanese language worldwide. Pop culture products, in particular anime and computer games, are frequently accessed online and via websites devoted to such media. In response to the importance of Japanese pop culture and online activities, a growing number of researchers (e.g. Ohara, 2011; Sauro, 2014, 2017) are considering the connection between students' pop culture activities and their foreign language development. One early example is Fukunaga's (2006) interview study of three American Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) learners who self-identified as anime fans. Although Fukunaga did not address online activities specifically, she described how

JFL learners can use anime as an 'out-of-class L2 [second language] learning tool' (Fukunaga, 2006: 208); Fukunaga used her findings to argue for the importance of teachers developing familiarity with students' pop culture interests in order to utilize them in the classroom.

While the call for studies of online activities is being heeded by more researchers (e.g. Abe, 2009; Chan & Wong, 2017), few studies have examined what connections, if any, students themselves make between their formal Japanese classroom learning and their participation in extra-curricular activities such as online communities or 'affinity spaces' (Gee, 2005), where participants interact around a topic of shared interest. Given the ever-increasing involvement of students in online activities, it seems likely that online communities represent an untapped resource for both students and teachers. To expand our knowledge of the role that online communities can play for Japanese language learners, the current study compares the cases of two JFL learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds studying Japanese at a large American university. By juxtaposing these two learners' experiences and perspectives, this study considers how online communities offer a range of activities and spaces within which Japanese language learners can both participate as contributors as well as benefit from as learners. Implications drawn from this study also offer insight into how instructors may respond to increasingly globalized classrooms in today's higher education, where they must accommodate students with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In other words, strategic incorporation of students' extracurricular interests offers increased possibilities for personalizing classroom content to better match students' interests, thereby meeting the various needs of a more diverse group of learners. In particular, this chapter makes the argument that even online activities conducted in English, which on the surface may seem not directly connected to Japanese language development, can contribute to students' Japanese language learning.

Literature Review

Online communities as communities of practice

While there are numerous ways to conceptualize a community, the notion of 'communities of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) is particularly useful when examining participatory activities that take place in online communities. Lave and Wenger developed the idea of communities of practice as a way to describe and examine learning which is the result of changing or evolving participation in a group that shares some common interest(s) and pursuit(s). In the years since Lave and Wenger introduced the idea of communities of practice, it has been adopted in a wide variety of disciplines including second language acquisition. Of particular importance to this study are the key elements of the communities of practice framework. First, communities of practice may be more, less, or not at all,

formalized and can be related to work, school, leisure or other activities in which people are engaged in some practice together. Wenger (1998) specified that there are three criteria that are present in a community of practice: (1) joint enterprise, which refers to an understanding (often continually negotiated) of what the community is about; (2) mutual engagement in terms of how the community functions; and (3) shared repertoire, which could include shared jargon, products and artefacts, as well as practices or shared routines and ways of doing community activities. Next, within the community, there are different types of membership in terms of the degree to which one is a core or peripheral member. These memberships are not static but dynamic; as members engage in the practice of the community, their membership evolves. Peripheral members often engage in 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 29) or LPP, which refers to the experience of members new to the community who lack sufficient knowledge to engage fully in the practice of the group. New members begin at the periphery, and as they gain competency and increasing knowledge of the shared repertoires of the group, they gradually move to the center and towards fuller or core participation. This process takes place in and through engagement with other members in what is described as situated learning. In addition to research on communities of practice in physical spaces, a growing body of work examines communities of practice in online spaces, using terms like virtual, distributed, or mobile (e.g. Kietzmann *et al.*, 2013; Kimble *et al.*, 2001). These studies demonstrate the various ways that Wenger's criteria for communities of practice can be seen in groups where most or all of the interaction and practice of the community occur online.

Thorne (2009) focused on the notion of online communities and in particular how community can be understood 'in the context of internet-mediated contexts and processes' (Thorne, 2009: 82). Thorne problematizes the notion of community, citing the lack of consistency in its many modified forms (e.g. *online* community) and the 'homogeneity and similarity' (Thorne, 2009: 92) that its use can suggest. Nevertheless, he concludes that use of the term has its place, provided that researchers and educators do so with a critical awareness of its limitations. A major takeaway from his investigation into what constitutes a community is his description of the basic components of community:

Core elements shared across many definitions of community include membership, shared location, shared cultural practices and values, interpersonally meaningful relationships, commitment, reciprocity, collective goods and resources, sense of shared identity, and generally social formations that are durative over time. (Thorne, 2009: 83)

Thorne's notion of community fits well with that of 'community of practice' as described above. We can then draw from both depictions to evaluate a particular community and examine the types of participation in that community.

In considering various internet-mediated communities and what they may offer to members, Thorne draws on Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development, or ZPD (e.g. Thorne, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978) to evaluate online activities and the potential they hold for second language learners. The ZPD refers to the difference between what individuals can do on their own and what they can do with assistance from someone else (often a more advanced peer) (e.g. Thorne, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD has been utilized in second language acquisition research (e.g. Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Kinginger, 2002). Ohta (e.g. 1995, 2001, 2005, 2006) in particular has examined the ZPD in the context of Japanese language classrooms. For example, Ohta (2001) described one instance that demonstrates how the ZPD can be seen in classroom pair work. In this example, one member of a classroom pair assists another in arriving at the correct grammar form. The first student uses scaffolding: rather than merely telling her partner the correct form and moving on, the student guides her partner to the correct form. Once the partner produces the form, but with slightly incorrect pronunciation, the student offers a prompt, stopping at the point of the pronunciation mistake, to which the partner responds with the correct form in the correct pronunciation. This example shows how peers can scaffold each other to produce more accurate speech during classroom interaction. With regard to online contexts, Thorne (2009) highlighted ways in which online activities can be seen as ZPDs by virtue of the interaction among members. For example, he reported on writers of fan fiction and the feedback they received from readers, which allowed the fan fiction writers to continually refine and improve their output (i.e. the fan fiction). Thorne's discussion underscores the utility of ZPD as a concept that can further our understanding of practices within the online communities in which increasing numbers of second language users are active.

Pop culture and online activities

Websites devoted to pop culture are becoming increasingly common and include those centered around the discussion of specific games or anime as well as those involved in the creation of new content related to pop culture products. As these websites proliferate, researchers are beginning to examine both the websites and the people who frequent them. Some studies examine websites that revolve around fansubs or fan fiction, two examples of participatory media fandom. Although scholarly attention to these activities is increasing, most studies have been conducted in disparate disciplines, and online activities have only recently begun to receive more attention within the field of Japanese language pedagogy. In addition, informal discussions with Japanese teachers suggest that efforts to apply new research findings to classroom practice remain inconsistent (cf. Hatasa, 2012, who pointed out

that pedagogical implications presented in JFL research can be difficult for Japanese teachers to incorporate).

One important pop culture study is Fukunaga's (2006) examination of American college students studying Japanese as a foreign language. She considered the role of pop culture in foreign language literacy development and conducted interviews with three American college-level Japanese language students (described as 'Caucasian ... born in the United States and ... native speakers of English,' (Fukunaga, 2006: 209)), whose interest in Japan was tied to an interest in anime, which generally began in high school. Based on her findings, Fukunaga argued that language teachers should pay greater attention to students' pop culture activities, understand students' pop culture interest and draw those interests out in the classroom. Fukunaga also noted that her participants tended to view the same anime multiple times, and generally watched subtitled rather than dubbed versions. She found that the repeated viewing of anime benefited Japanese language learners in terms of: 'word recognition, listening and pronunciation, and awareness of various Japanese linguistic features' (Fukunaga, 2006: 213); an increased sensitivity to 'good or bad translation' (Fukunaga, 2006: 214); and an 'increased Japanese cultural knowledge of nonverbal gestures, mannerisms, social settings and rules, families, meals, and homes' (Fukunaga, 2006: 215). Fukunaga found that students were often 'exposed to many aspects of the language and culture of Japan through anime and its subcultures before they start taking Japanese courses' (Fukunaga, 2006: 215). As her participants continued their language studies, they benefited from what Fukunaga called 'a cycle of anime watching and Japanese learning' (Fukunaga, 2006: 215) in which watching anime provided exposure to cultural knowledge while Japanese language classes provided instruction in grammar, writing, and speaking. As the cycle of anime viewing and classroom experiences continued, classroom learning allowed them to understand more of the anime they watched, and the anime activities served as 'reinforcement of Japanese knowledge' (Fukunaga, 2006: 216) acquired in the classroom. Finally, Fukunaga argued that 'foreign language learning in the United States often lacks cultural context' (Fukunaga, 2006: 217) and thus 'the most significant advantage that anime offers JFL students is in the contextual and multiple meanings of the text' (Fukunaga, 2006: 217). As such, anime and anime-related activities online give students an important opportunity to connect to a Japanese-related community beyond their classrooms. Fukunaga concluded with several important implications: that teachers of JFL need to 'be aware of the power of pop culture' (Fukunaga, 2006: 220); 'encourage students to share their insider knowledge of a particular form of popular culture and spend some time learning from students' (Fukunaga, 2006: 221). Although Fukunaga's study is over 10 years old, her findings about the important role that Japanese pop culture can play in Japanese language study have been supported in subsequent studies (e.g. The Japan Foundation, 2013, 2015; Mori & Takeuchi, 2016).

While Fukunaga (2006) described how Japanese language learners could benefit from their consumption of Japanese pop culture, a related question is how foreign language students benefit from actual participation in computer-mediated activities and how those activities differ from or complement formal classroom activities. In their comprehensive review of research on digitally-mediated interaction, Thorne and Black (2007) examined activities in formal instructional contexts and in non-classroom-related participatory online spaces. They also considered how online activities give foreign language learners important opportunities to move beyond the role of learner/student and take on other identities. They argue that for second language learners, internet-mediated interactions are becoming almost as common as face-to-face interactions and these interactions can result in greater motivation to learn or improve in a target language. Thus, Thorne and Black advocate for language educators to maximize students' classroom opportunities to make use of knowledge gained online, but note that to do this, educators need to be able to understand and accommodate the various online genres in which students are active. Building on such an understanding, educators can then guide students to incorporate their outside interests to complement classroom activities, thereby expanding the possibility for language learning and increasing the personal relevance of classroom activities.

With regard to online contexts, one common online activity is the creation of fan fiction or fansubs. Fan fiction refers to stories written by fans of a particular fiction or film series; fansubs refer to subtitles for anime or video games that are created not by professional subtitling companies, but by fans who do not receive payment for their work. Most often fansubs are created through extensive online collaboration with multiple people contributing to the production of an individual fansubbed product. Given how increasingly common fansubbing is, it is not surprising that there are a number of different kinds of research being conducted to examine it. Pérez-Gonzalez and Susam-Saraeva (2014) described the history of fansubbing with a particular focus on the role of non-professionals as compared to professionals. Their article shows how wide-spread fansubbing has become, including groups in a variety of countries translating Japanese anime into languages such as English and Chinese.

In another example, Rush (2009) used ethnographic participant-observation field research to examine English-language fansubbing of Japanese anime with regard to its origins, its participatory culture, and the motivations of the people involved in its creation. Rush noted the difficulty of translating cultural details. He found that one motivation to fansub was fansubbers' concern with the removal of 'essential Japanese elements' (Rush, 2009: 6) when anime was localized by English-language production companies – the fansubbers responded by working to preserve what they saw as important Japanese cultural aspects. Often fansubbers

felt that they were creating translations which were truer to the Japanese original than the subtitled versions produced by professional companies.

Rush also described the role of the fansubbing community as a whole, in which 'even if a member of a fansubbing community isn't producing new texts, he can still contribute something to the discussion' (Rush, 2009: 7–8) surrounding the creation and assessment of the fansubs in progress. Rush's study demonstrates the do-it-yourself attitude often seen in participatory media fandom, in which a member of the community can move from being a viewer of fansubs to being a creator of fansubs 'by learning one of the skill sets needed in the production process' (Rush, 2009: 8). Rush drew a parallel between these fansubbing sensibilities and the tendency of the internet to both value and foster collaboration. He explained that the various tasks involved in producing a fansubbed video were shared across members such that, 'by combining their various talents, groups of users can collaborate to produce a text that could be beyond the skills of just one person' (Rush, 2009: 8). Similarly, Lee's (2011) case study of anime fansubbing presents another example of extensive collaboration in English fansubbing of Japanese anime, echoing Rush's conclusion that friendship and community play important roles in fansubbers' motivation.

Although neither Rush nor Lee addressed the language learning experiences of the fansubbers, their observations of what language learners can accomplish by collaborating on an activity with others recall the notion of the ZPD. In addition, Rush's study adds insight to our understanding of the role of community and collaboration in motivation for second language learning and use. Similarly, Lee's descriptions of how members of online communities learned and improved their translation and editing skills through participation in the production of fansubs offer a clear example of how a ZPD can manifest in an online community.

While the studies described thus far examined the phenomenon of fansubbing with attention to the communities and members, other studies have more directly considered what benefits online activities can offer language learners. For example, Black (2009) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study to examine English language learners' (ELLs) participation in an online fan fiction community. Black explained that in fan fiction, writers 'extend storylines, create new narrative threads, develop romantic relationships between characters, and focus on the lives of undeveloped characters from various media' (Black, 2009: 398). Her description accentuates a significant difference between fan fiction and fansubbing; fansubbing does not involve the creation of new storylines, while fan fiction does not require the technical tasks elemental to fansubbing. Black described both the fan fiction products as well as the interaction between the writers and readers of fan fiction, in particular examining how the ELLs described their proficiency with English and how they used (written) codeswitching within the fiction. We can draw on the notion of the ZPD to understand

how fan fiction writers benefit from such interactions with readers in the fan fiction community. Through these activities, in addition to improvements in English, the ELLs enacted 'cosmopolitan identities' and were able to make connections to other fan fiction community members who were located in places around the world. Black found that her participants 'creatively employed language and other representational resources to enact cosmopolitan identities, make trans-border social connections, collaborate with other youth, experiment with new genres and formats for composing, and challenge traditional author/reader and producer/consumer distinctions' (Black, 2009: 423). Of particular relevance is Black's description of how the language skills of the ELLs evolved both through their efforts in creating fan fiction as well as through participation in the fan fiction community and interaction with other members. Further, the participants in Black's study made use of English as a lingua franca, and her examination of their online activities presents a good example of how the language skills of foreign language learners can change and improve outside of the context of a traditional classroom.

The aforementioned studies shed light on the impact that online activities and online communities can have on foreign language students. The findings demonstrate that online activities, whether they are primarily centered on the consumption of pop culture or whether they take more participatory forms, offer significant opportunities for increasing knowledge of language and developing language ability by making use of the ZPD as afforded within online communities of practice. As many researchers have stressed, if this potential is to be maximized, it is essential for instructors to actively seek to understand students' online activities and create opportunities to incorporate students' outside interests into classroom activities and foreign language curricula. At the same time, these studies are in a range of disparate fields and not all are concerned specifically with foreign language learning. Further, few studies have examined what connections, if any, students themselves make between their formal Japanese classroom learning and their participation in online communities. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the online and classroom experiences of two JFL learners and considering their views about those experiences. The analysis of participants' narratives was guided by the following questions:

- (1) What kinds of Japanese-related online communities did participants join and in what ways did they see themselves as members of those communities?
- (2) What kinds of online activities did participants engage in and in what ways, if any, did they perceive those activities as being beneficial to their Japanese language development?
- (3) How did participants depict the respective roles of classroom and online activities?

The Study

Participants

Participants in the present study were part of a larger study (detailed in Mori & Takeuchi, 2016) in which 15 Japanese language learners were interviewed about their Japanese learning experiences. Participants in the original study included Asian international students and American students who had completed third- or fourth-year level Japanese language classes at a large university in the American Midwest; their Japanese proficiencies ranged from intermediate to advanced. Most of the participants began formal study of Japanese at the university-level. All described various technologies they used to support their Japanese language learning (such as flashcard apps and other digital language tools). Many participants watched Japanese anime or television shows online, and some participants made use of social media or messaging and video chat services to interact with first language speakers of Japanese. However, the two participants selected for examination in this study distinguished themselves from the others in that they explicitly described themselves as members of Japanese-related online communities. While other participants may indeed have been members of similar online communities, these two were the only participants who explicitly described themselves as such, and this distinction led to the choice to focus on them for this study. These participants, introduced here by their pseudonyms, were Bo, an international student from China, and David, an American student. (Although they attended the same university, they were not classmates.)

Data

Semi-structured interviews with each participant were conducted by Mori for the original study. The interviews were conducted in either English or Japanese; interview language was chosen by individual participants.¹ Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed in full by Takeuchi. The interview was designed to be similar to a program exit interview and the same interview protocol was used for all participants. Based on participants' answers, follow-up questions and additional topics were pursued freely such that all interviews included the topics as addressed by the interview protocol as well as those that emerged within individual interviews (cf. Block, 2000; Miller, 2011, 2012; Roulston, 2011). The interview protocol included questions about participants' Japanese level, their reasons for studying Japanese, their Japanese language goals, and any Japanese-related communities and activities that they participated in within and beyond the classroom.

In the interviews, Bo chose Japanese, while David chose English. (This author produced all of the translations of Bo's interview.) Bo and David each provided extensive narratives regarding their participation in various

communities. The primary data come from these interviews, and as such represent self-reports of the experiences of the participants. In addition, for this study, we also drew on accounts from teachers who taught these participants. The teachers' accounts offered confirmation of details such as the participants' Japanese ability and their descriptions of classroom activities such as project work.

Methods

For this study, thematic and content analysis was conducted (Schreier, 2014; Willig, 2014). The goal of the analysis was to identify themes that emerged from the interviews. Participants' similarities and differences were also examined. After considering the two participants as a whole (cf. Creswell, 2007; Erickson, 1992), they were then individually examined and each interview transcript was coded by hand, in particular making use of holistic coding (Saldaña, 2009, 2013) in order to examine longer portions of talk and complete stories. Examples of holistic codes include the following: Japanese online communities; memberships; pop culture; use of technology; impacts on classroom learning; and impacts on online activities. Coding was then used to make tables in Excel for comparison. In response to questions about non-classroom activities, the participants mentioned their use of technology in language learning, and they reported that a key motivator was their interest in Japanese pop culture and pop media, which they accessed online. The portions of interviews which addressed classroom versus non-classroom activities and online communities were then made the focus of analysis for this chapter.

The analysis reveals that Bo and David differed in some crucial ways in terms of their language use in their online activities. In addition, they also differed in how they viewed the role of formal classroom instruction in their Japanese language development. At the same time, they shared some important similarities, most notably the fact that they each strongly identified with their respective online communities. Therefore, in this study, I focus on their narratives to examine how these two learners utilized online communities for their language learning, how they contributed to the communities and in what ways they benefited from them.

Two Japanese Language Learners

Both Bo and David were highly motivated to learn Japanese because they were interested in Japanese pop culture products. Moreover, both majored in computer-related fields and had an affinity with technology. Their personal interests in Japanese pop culture were realized by being highly active in online communities devoted to Japanese pop culture, in particular, Japanese computer games and anime. Bo's Japanese abilities were largely the result of self-study and the Japanese language input he

obtained through various online activities. Bo received formal classroom instruction after he had already developed his Japanese skills to a fairly high level. On the other hand, David had taken four years of university Japanese classes and developed his Japanese language abilities in the context of traditional classroom instruction. Although David had been an avid follower of various online groups devoted to Japanese pop culture, initially he was more of a consumer of online content than a contributor. After his Japanese language abilities advanced through formal classroom instruction, David began to participate in online communities in a greater capacity. The following discussion draws on their answers to interview questions to better understand their participation in online communities and consider how they each viewed the respective roles of classroom instruction and online activities in Japanese language development. (Comments in quotation marks represent interview excerpts.)

Bo

Bo is a Chinese national who came to the USA as a high school student and then attended a large state university in the American Midwest, where he majored in computer engineering and completed a certificate in technical Japanese.² After graduating from the university, Bo planned to attend graduate school in Japan. Bo described his interest in Japanese language as arising from his interest in Japanese anime and games, which began in junior high school in China. Bo made it a point to describe his initial experiences of studying Japanese as 'unconscious', which he explained was a byproduct of watching anime and playing games in their original Japanese versions with Chinese subtitles. Bo described his online Japanese language activities as a hobby that he wanted to do so he engaged in it every chance he had. As a result of this intense interest, he spent several years from junior high school to high school engaging with Japanese language online for several hours a day. Often on days when he did not have to be in school, he reported that he spent eight hours a day engaged in Japanese activities online. He also mentioned that he took and passed the highest level (N1) of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) prior to receiving any formal Japanese language instruction. In these ways, Bo differed from the other participants in that his Japanese language skills were already advanced when he started Japanese courses at the university. His first formal Japanese language class was a fourth year class, unlike David, who began his Japanese coursework with the first year class.

Developing Japanese through participation in a fansub community

Bo's interest in Japanese anime led him to join a fansub community even though he had not yet started studying Japanese formally. This community was actively involved in producing fan-generated Chinese subtitles for Japanese anime. Bo explained that he 'admired and looked up to the

people who were actually making the subtitles' and he described how he wanted to 'contribute to the community'. He explained that, initially, his lack of Japanese ability meant that translating the Japanese dialogue was impossible. Instead, he compensated for his lack of Japanese language ability by performing technical tasks, such as integrating subtitles with the correct portion of the video. He said that these tasks became the impetus for him to learn hiragana and katakana, and at the same time, they helped him develop listening skills. For example, in order to place the subtitles correctly, he had to listen closely to identify what portion of the dialogue matched which section of the translations.³ He also noted that because the tasks were repetitive, it allowed him to learn and remember the sounds and vocabulary words of Japanese. Through the fansub community and his activities with it, Bo's Japanese developed in the absence of formal classroom instruction. It seems clear from Bo's descriptions that he was able to take advantage of the support and scaffolding provided by other members of the online community. This created a ZPD which played a facilitative role in the development of his Japanese abilities.

From an early stage, Bo's interest in Japanese pop media combined with his admiration for the more linguistically advanced online community members. This resulted in a strong motivation both to participate in fansub production and also to improve his Japanese language skills so that he could participate in increasingly significant ways. As his Japanese language abilities developed, his participation in the community evolved and he took on other tasks that were not only technical but also Japanese-related in nature. In Bo's depictions, we can see an example of his movement within the online community from more peripheral to more central participation (cf. Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Developing communicative competence through participation in online communities

As Bo's Japanese ability developed further through participation in the fansub community, he gradually began to explore other online communities where the medium of interaction was Japanese, and the majority of members were first language (L1) speakers of Japanese. Bo described frequenting a website where some users engaged in livestreaming broadcasts and other users typed comments or responses. Bo watched these livestreams, which were broadcast by people whom he described as 'average Japanese people killing time'. Initially, he only listened and watched, but over time he began to write comments and receive responses from the livestreamers. Through these interactions, he developed another online community made up of L1 Japanese speakers.

Although Bo's Japanese ability had developed a great deal through his online activities, in the interview, he reported being conscious of gaps in his linguistic knowledge and described his Japanese skills as being lopsided. Bo explained that this was because most of the Japanese language

input he had received up to that point was based primarily on anime and games. In the community of livestreamers, however, he engaged in another set of important learning activities which filled in the gaps created by the previous anime-based language input. Bo described the voice actors that he heard in anime as speaking 'properly' and at a speed that was easy to follow. On the other hand, the livestreamers, who were 'just average Japanese people', spoke using abbreviations and contractions, leaving out some words or adding others. Here, Bo did not clarify whether he meant that the livestreamers used words he did not know or whether they used extra words to a degree he had not encountered in the more concise and standardized speech used in anime. It seems likely that he encountered both unknown words as well as simply a larger number of words, which may have contributed to his initial difficulty in understanding. Regardless, he reported that it was difficult to follow the speech of the livestreamers, and, in the beginning, he could either listen to their spoken commentary or he could read comments from other members that appeared (in Japanese) on the screen, but he could not do both. After about six months of this activity, he became better able to understand the livestreamers' speech, and he began to be able to read the written commentary as well.⁴ It was at this point, he said, that he started to want to communicate more and he began to type comments for the livestreamers. Initially, he said, the Japanese comments he posted were 'incoherent,' with incorrect or sometimes what he called 'English-style' grammar. However, if his comments contained mistakes or were not understood, the livestreamers would provide feedback, either with the correct forms or by asking for clarification. Bo ultimately developed friendships with some of the livestreamers, which then led to conversing with them in real time. This offered Bo important opportunities for practice in spoken conversation. In these exchanges, Bo received a great deal of spontaneous Japanese-language instruction, and he felt that these activities, which he engaged in repeatedly, enabled him to develop the ability to 'sense' whether the Japanese he was using was correct or not.

In Bo's descriptions, we can see numerous ways that his online activities connected him to more experienced peers who provided crucial scaffolding that supported his Japanese language development. Although Bo did not describe this using terms like ZPD or communities of practice, his depictions show that he was aware of the ways in which his online communities benefited him. First, Bo pointed out that the linguistic input he received from anime consisted of 'proper' pronunciation and speed, or what might be described as idealized speech. However, he described the livestreaming speech as more variable (at times abbreviated or elaborated). It was more authentic speech in that it was unedited, unscripted and delivered by speakers who were not professional voice actors. In addition, by interacting with the livestreamers, Bo reported that he was able to receive feedback from native speakers on his Japanese production. As will be seen

in the discussion of David below, these kinds of Japanese language interactions with native speakers and spontaneous corrective feedback are something that David did not experience in his online activities.

Drawing on his linguistic background in English and Chinese

Bo's activities with the fansub community and the livestreaming community offer a partial explanation of how he was able to develop an advanced level of Japanese in the absence of formal classroom instruction. Follow-up questions during the interview addressed additional factors in Bo's background that also made positive contributions to his linguistic development. One point uncovered in the interview was the role that English language study played for Bo. Although Bo did not receive formal instruction in Japanese prior to joining advanced level Japanese courses at the American university, he did study English as a foreign language during elementary and junior high school in China. During the interview, Bo described his gratitude to a junior high school English teacher whose teaching method Bo found particularly helpful. Namely, the class required reading in English every day, and one main activity was working on breaking down sentences and thinking about the meaning. Bo found this to be a practical approach, and he said that it was similar to how he approached self-study of Japanese. Based on the influence of English instruction, Bo explained that when he needed to analyze Japanese grammar, he drew on his experiences of analyzing English grammar. Thus, although he had not received formal Japanese language instruction, he had received foreign language instruction, and he was able to call on the techniques developed in English as a foreign language classes and apply them to his Japanese linguistic pursuits.

In addition to drawing on his experience learning English, Bo also described relying on his familiarity with Chinese characters to learn how to understand Japanese kanji and determine when the Japanese meaning diverged from the Chinese one. Bo explained that his knowledge of Chinese characters made it possible to guess at the meanings of Japanese vocabulary written in kanji. Bo made reference to the idea that, when learning a foreign language, it can be discouraging to feel like nothing can be understood. However, because he could draw on his knowledge of Chinese characters and guess at the meaning, this became a source of motivation. In addition, he was also able to bypass the need for learning how to write kanji, and he recognized that this was an important advantage.

Views about classroom learning compared to online activities

Bo's comments about the ways in which he benefited from the English instruction he received in China demonstrate that he recognized the important role classroom instruction can play, in particular in terms of showing students how to analyze linguistic structures. As for Japanese, Bo explained that he decided to enroll in advanced Japanese language courses

at the American university to supplement the Japanese he had learned online and on his own. Although he also enrolled in the university's technical Japanese courses (which were focused on Japanese used in fields such as engineering), he was dismissive of those courses, saying that they were 'only' translation courses. He contrasted these with the advanced Japanese language courses he took, which he described as 'proper' or comprehensive instruction. During this portion of the interview, the interviewer pointed out that since Bo had already passed JLPT N1 prior to beginning Japanese coursework at the American university, he did not really need to enroll in a Japanese course. However, Bo disagreed and noted that in fact, he did need what the courses offered him. For example, he explained that the Japanese he had studied up to that point consisted of a great deal of internet jargon and slang, and prior to taking the advanced class, he was not able to properly use honorific and polite expressions. Bo pointed out that he could read books in Japanese, particularly those that were in line with his hobby interests (such as reading about Japan's warring states period), but he was not able to use what he called 'proper' (*chanto shita*) Japanese or have a conversation with a 'normal' (*futsū no*) Japanese person. He also used the word 'lopsided' (*katayotta*) to describe his language skills, and it was this awareness that led him to enroll in the advanced Japanese class at the university.

By the time Bo began formal Japanese coursework, he had already learned a great deal through his online interests. What started out as an interest in anime grew into an interest in other areas, including Japanese history and various periods from Japan's past, Shintoism, classical Japanese and Japanese literature. Although Bo was highly critical of what he described as ways in which his Japanese development was lopsided and incomplete, his Japanese teacher described how Bo brought a great deal of understanding about Japanese culture and a significant body of knowledge of various genres of Japanese language use (e.g. anime, classical Japanese, internet livestreaming) to his Japanese classes. This background knowledge made it possible for him to do project work during his Japanese classes through which he pursued his interest in these genres. This also allowed him to further build on the skills he had developed before participating in formal Japanese language courses. The project involved researching a topic, writing a paper about it and then presenting it to the class. Bo chose to examine Japanese attitudes toward death in various historical periods. The choice of topic came from Bo's personal interests, thus he brought with him a great deal of knowledge of the subject, which was further expanded by the project. Thus, for Bo, online participation was a driving force behind his Japanese language development, while classroom instruction, which came late in his Japanese learning trajectory, provided a supplement to online activities. Nevertheless, Bo viewed classroom learning as contributing essential components to his Japanese skills which were previously lacking.

One other aspect that stands out in Bo's interview is how he depicted his relationships with online friends versus those with people he met in his Japanese classes. Bo created close connections with people he met online, often fellow anime and fansub enthusiasts who were fellow Chinese-Japanese bilinguals. It is also notable that he developed friendships with some of the Japanese livestreamers as well. In comparison, he did not make close connections with the classmates in his Japanese language courses. This may be because in the classroom environment at the university, he was joining a fourth year class with a group who, for many students, had been studying Japanese together since their first year on campus. Although he ultimately studied with that group for two semesters, Bo did not have the same experiences and sense of community that other students shared. In comparison, his online connections were built up over a number of years through various projects and activities. In this way, we can see Bo's online activities as taking place within online communities characterized by shared values and shared goals (cf. Thorne, 2009; Wenger, 1998). Conversely, the classroom environment, in which he participated for a much shorter time, did not provide him with the same richness of interaction and connection. Thus, for Bo, online activities were an essential source of linguistic input and training, as well as a realm in which he made connections and friendships with others who shared his passion for Japanese pop culture. The classroom, on the other hand, offered supplementary instruction and gave him the opportunity to develop a more well-rounded set of linguistic abilities with the addition of more formal registers, but did not offer the community that he was able to find and cultivate online.

David

David, an American, majored in computer science and completed four years' worth of Japanese language courses as well as a certificate in professional Japanese.⁵ Although David and Bo shared some commonalities, they also differed in key ways. For example, at the time of the interview, Bo had visited Japan twice and was planning to pursue graduate study in Japan. David, on the other hand, had never been to Japan and had no immediate plans to go there. Instead, David planned to stay in the USA after graduation and work for a large computer firm. Unlike Bo, David had not studied Japanese on his own prior to enrolling in a beginning level course at the university. David became interested in Japanese because of his interest in computer games and Japanese authors and, as he explained, he desired to study something that was 'completely different from English and Spanish'. Although David had not yet taken the JLPT, he was a dedicated student and consistently received A grades in his Japanese courses. In his online activities, David sought out communities that were devoted to discussions about game strategy (for computer and online games) and

issues that arise in conjunction with localization when games are translated from Japanese to English.⁶ Notably, while both Bo and David were interested in translation, Bo was involved as a creator while David was only involved as a consumer.

Developing cultural appreciation through online activities

David's online communities revolved around community members' shared interest in Japanese-language games; however, the lingua franca was English, not Japanese. For example, David followed a fan group that was involved in translating a famous Japanese game, where online discussion centered around the linguistic and cultural issues encountered during the translation work. David enthusiastically described the fan group's efforts to 'reverse engineer' the game and the various localization issues they grappled with in the process. David found their discussion 'always very fascinating to follow.' However, unlike Bo, David initially did not make any efforts to become involved in or contribute to the fan group, nor did he see his online activities as a direct source for learning Japanese grammar or vocabulary. Instead, he described the many ways in which he learned *about* Japanese language and culture through his online activities. Nevertheless, David enjoyed those activities a great deal and felt they were beneficial to his overall understanding of the Japanese language.

David also acknowledged that his pursuit of Japanese language learning outside of Japanese class was 'a little more passive' than many of his classmates. At the same time, he highlighted other ways that he benefited from his online activities. For example, David described making online friends from around the world, with whom he shared his love of Japanese language learning and enjoyed discussions (conducted in English) about the Japanese authors and Japanese games that were his passion. When asked what he learned from his online activities, David again explained that his activities online did not result in learning discrete items such as vocabulary words or grammar points. Instead, David discussed the challenges of translation and localization when going from Japanese to English. He explained that his activities online often involved reading or participating in discussions about the cultural and linguistic distance between Japanese and English and examining how fan groups accounted for the 'cultural norms' and 'cultural jokes' that need to be conveyed in the translations. David was keenly aware of the difficulty of the task of making Japan understandable and accessible to Westerners, and he enjoyed talking and reading about how this task was handled by those involved in producing translated and localized versions of Japanese pop media and games. David also described learning about these issues as adding an important component to traditional study based on vocabulary and grammar learning. Throughout the interview, David displayed his view of the benefit of online discussions in English, emphasizing that he learned cultural information and other facets of Japanese which enriched

his overall understanding despite the fact that the interactions were not taking place in Japanese.

Views about classroom learning compared to online activities

When the interview questions turned to the topic of how formal classroom instruction and non-classroom learning might be compared, David was very clear in crediting formal classroom instruction as the source of the majority of his knowledge of Japanese. He explained that what he learned through his Japanese coursework formed a base upon which he was able to build. This then enabled him to engage in the online discussions and other activities that centered around examining Japanese language and translation issues. Unlike Bo, who participated in the fansub community even before his Japanese language skills developed, David explained that he felt he was not able to participate in online communities until he had 'already spent a few years learning the basics in a classroom environment'. David described an online community that he had been involved with for five or six years; however, he said it was not until he had completed several semesters of Japanese coursework at the university that he felt his Japanese knowledge was sufficient to allow him to participate in the discussions as an active member. Although David's descriptions of his online activities are quite different from Bo's, we can see ways in which David's participation evolved from being a more peripheral member to a more central one. What is difficult to ascertain is whether or to what degree his following the online communities as a consumer facilitated his gradual evolution into a more active participant. It seems likely that the knowledge he gained by reading the discussions of others played a significant role in making it possible for him to become a more active contributor later. However, when he described his shift to becoming a contributor, David credits only classroom instruction. David's comments demonstrate his belief that classroom instruction is a necessary component of language learning and that if there is to be an order to learning, for him at least, formal, classroom-based learning is a necessary prerequisite for informal learning and should be undertaken before other activities.

David's belief that he could not even participate in English-language discussions about Japanese until he achieved a certain level of Japanese proficiency contrasts starkly with Bo's approach, which was to participate in whatever capacity he could from the beginning of his association with the online community. While Bo found ways to participate in his online community even as a novice member, and through that participation increased his Japanese use over time, David's online activities were initially passive (i.e. reading) and only later did he begin participating in discussions, which were *about* Japanese *in* English. Thus, David's comments show that he felt grammar and vocabulary learning were best undertaken in a formal classroom environment, while informal interactions online were sources of information that could enrich one's overall understanding

of the language and culture. Ultimately, David, like Bo, was able to achieve a high level of Japanese language ability.⁷ In addition, like Bo, David incorporated interests he developed online and outside of the classroom into project work in his advanced Japanese classes. These classroom projects included translating a Japanese mystery story into English (notably, the choice of story was based on the advice of an online friend) and researching the background of a Japanese computer game. Because David was a fan of a Japanese detective game, he chose a topic related to the Japanese legal system and its newly introduced jury system. His experience playing the game in Japanese gave him an advantage in that he already knew much of the relevant vocabulary he would need for the project. Through the project work, he was then able to deepen his understanding of the topic, and his knowledge of the vocabulary needed to discuss it.

David developed some friendships with people he met online, describing them as being 'from all over the world', for example the friend mentioned above was from Europe. These friends were sources of ideas and information for David, and he clearly valued them. However, unlike Bo, David's online friendships were forged through English-language interactions, and he did not meet or befriend Japanese native speakers online. At the same time, David formed close connections with his Japanese language classmates, which he described as a 'tight-knit community'. David, unlike Bo, began his Japanese coursework at the beginning level and studied with approximately the same group of classmates over multiple semesters, which is likely to have contributed to the strong relationships he developed with them.

Conclusion

By comparing the interview responses from Bo and David, we can develop a picture of their online communities and activities that allows us to examine how they contributed to those communities and how they each benefited from being members of those communities. We can also consider how each viewed the respective roles that classroom and non-classroom activities played in their Japanese language development. While it may seem obvious how these two participants differ, the following discussion highlights key similarities and argues that both types of online communities described in this study can be beneficial for learners and function as communities of practice, creating zones of proximal development where learning can occur.

In particular, for both Bo and David, their online communities shared many of the core elements of community (Thorne, 2009) or community of practice (Wenger, 1998), including shared practices and pursuits, shared values and interpersonally meaningful relationships with other members. In addition, the actual content of the online activities served as a kind of source material from which they then drew upon for classroom activities.

Further, both Bo and David experienced a change in their participation over time, as they became more competent and were able to do more in their respective communities.

Bo's online activities, both with the fansub community and the livestreamers, can be understood as taking place within a ZPD (e.g. Thorne, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978) in that support from other members allowed him to progressively expand his participation from peripheral to active. The ways in which Bo used Japanese online evolved by drawing on the support from other members and repeating similar activities numerous times. This segued into opportunities for real-time spoken conversations which ultimately played an important role in improving his Japanese language abilities. David, on the other hand, described being a passive, peripheral participant for many years, only reading about accounts of how other members approached issues of translation and localization. As his Japanese ability and knowledge developed through classroom learning, David gradually began to participate more actively in online discussions where he had previously been only a consumer. David attributed his increasing participation to his increased Japanese abilities. We also may speculate that years of reading online discussions was an additional factor in his ability to become a more active participant and contributor.

When we view Bo's online activities through the lens of the ZPD, it is clear that his online activities provided him with scaffolding upon which his Japanese language skills were built. Although David did not use Japanese in his online activities, it can be argued that his online activities were similarly a source of learning and a zone within which he was able to access and benefit from the knowledge of more experienced members. As he gained confidence in his own knowledge, David increased his active participation online and he incorporated online learning into classroom activities which were conducted in Japanese.

The most obvious way that Bo and David differ is in how they viewed the respective roles of online and classroom activities. For Bo, online activities were both the initial realm and the primary source of his Japanese language learning. He then applied techniques learned in English classes to his study of Japanese and later augmented that by enrolling in university Japanese classes. As such, for Bo, we see that online activities were significant sources of Japanese development, while classroom activities were supplemental. David, on the other hand, acquired almost all of his Japanese language knowledge and ability in the context of formal classroom instruction. Online activities then offered him opportunities to learn about cultural issues related to translation and to consider the cultural and linguistic distance of the two languages. Thus, classroom instruction was the primary source, and a necessary prerequisite, of David's Japanese language learning, while online activities were supplemental in that they offered him a chance to enrich his understanding of Japanese language and culture.

While the roles of online and classroom activities differed for Bo and David, one key similarity is that the motivations that propelled their Japanese language learning were found in online communities and fostered through self-initiated online activities. It is notable that these two participants were not Japanese language majors while in university, and yet they spent a significant amount of non-classroom time engaging in Japanese-language related pastimes. In addition, while their assessments of the roles of classroom versus online activities differed, both were able to articulate benefits derived from participation in online communities. Further, both took advantage of classroom project work to incorporate their interests into the classroom, making classroom content more personally relevant (cf. Fukunaga, 2006; Thorne, 2009). In this way, regardless of whether online or classroom activities were primary, we can see that their online experiences enriched their classroom study, and vice versa, their classroom study added important components to their beyond-class activities.

For Japanese language educators, as Fukunaga (2006) argued, this is a clear implication of the importance for teachers to discover *why* their students are pursuing Japanese language learning. Such knowledge can then be called upon to better include student interests in classroom content, especially but not only in more advanced classes. Because the fourth year classes included a project component, Bo and David were each able to incorporate their outside-of-class interests into their classroom activities and choose topics of personal relevance for their projects. Further, although a consideration of the impact of their projects on other classmates is beyond the scope of this study, we can imagine that, through project activities, classmates exposed each other to new information and ideas, expanding the possibilities for how students can take their Japanese interests beyond the classroom. Similarly, Bo's and David's teachers were impressed by their topics, papers, and presentations, and viewed the quality of each project as being in large part due to their respective extracurricular interests and activities, further supporting a positive assessment of the extracurricular activities of both of these participants.

Researchers have found that participation in online activities is a source of motivation (e.g. Thorne & Black, 2007) and that even beginners draw on Japanese media in their Japanese learning pursuits (e.g. Ohara, 2011). As such, JFL teachers need to consider how to more consistently incorporate students' pop culture interests and online activities. Even in beginning classes, tailoring projects and activities to students' levels can ensure that even beginners are encouraged to incorporate their in-class and beyond-class activities. Including such project work in all levels of instruction would be beneficial in at least three ways. First, it would allow students to engage with more personalized content while being able to call upon their teacher's guidance to increase language learning. This would, in turn, encourage those students to make more explicit connections between classroom and non-classroom activities. Second, it would expose

other students in the class to a wider range of Japanese language and cultural topics. Third, it would position students as additional resources for each other in discovering and accessing new Japan-related information. This would benefit teachers as well, because although teachers may be the 'language experts', students are often the 'experts' in terms of Japanese pop culture. Teachers may not be able to keep up with constantly emerging digital and pop media content, thus, incorporating project work and other activities to allow students to share their interests in class would be a resource for both students and teachers.

Lastly, given David's experience, it must also be argued that not only activities conducted in Japanese are of value. It might be tempting to downplay the contribution of David's online activities in English and to assume that David benefited less than Bo did. However, it could be argued that such a conclusion is mistaken – indeed, David's experiences demonstrate the value in activities that lead Japanese language learners to engage repeatedly and enthusiastically with topics related to Japanese language and culture.

In closing, as Thorne and Black (2009) argue, online identities and activities are becoming increasingly real for language learners. As such, it is imperative that Japanese language educators assist students in developing their class-external interests so that students can more fully participate in communities beyond the classroom, increasing the chances that they will be successful in taking Japanese beyond the classroom.

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Notes

- (1) Participants were given the choice of either English or Japanese for the interview. The choice of interview language should not be assumed to correspond to a participant's Japanese ability. Rather, a complex set of factors (beyond the scope of this study) are likely to have contributed. In particular, the interviewer was a native speaker of Japanese, and while the American students could choose to conduct the interview in their native language, the Asian international students had to choose between two second languages (English or Japanese) since the interviewer was unable to speak their native languages.
- (2) To receive this certificate, students take a selection of courses that includes Japanese language courses and courses focused on translating Japanese texts related to computer science and engineering.
- (3) It is likely that Bo's understanding of Chinese characters helped him complete some of these tasks even without knowing the Japanese vocabulary; however, during this part of the interview, he did not make the connection between Chinese characters and the subtitling task, and instead focused on his efforts to learn hiragana and katakana, for which his knowledge of Chinese characters would be of little benefit.

- (4) It is worth noting here that Bo's literacy in Chinese, and his ability to read Chinese characters, likely gave him an advantage in dealing with the Japanese kanji he encountered on the screen during the livestream broadcasts. During this point of the interview, however, he did not make this connection.
- (5) This certificate program focuses on communication in professional contexts to help students prepare for careers in which Japanese is used.
- (6) Localization refers to how a product (here, a computer game) is adapted to customize it for a country and/or language other than the one in which it was originally released. The term highlights the fact that linguistic translation alone is insufficient to account for cultural differences. (See O'Hagan & Mangiron, 2013, for an in-depth discussion of game localization.)
- (7) This statement is based on a combination of reports from David's Japanese teachers and his consistently high grades across multiple Japanese courses.

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**Erica Zimmerman and
Abigail McMeekin**

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