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# Japanese Students and the Internet: Uses and Prospects

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## 1. Introduction

In this paper I will discuss a range of topics relating to present uses of the Internet for ESL classes at the university level.[1] I speak from my experience in Japan, but much of what I discuss relates to concerns that educators everywhere share in trying to keep up with rapidly changing environment of communications. Most conspicuous are the changes coming about as a result of the recent easy accessibility to computers and electronic communications via the so-called information highway and we are only now beginning to see where this might be taking us.

## 2. The Rate of Growth in the Global Use of the Internet

The tremendous popularity of computers and the rise in the number of Internet users is most conspicuous in the United States where, according to the Internet Industry Almanac (1998) there are 203.4 users of the Internet per thousand people.[2] The Almanac estimates that there will be 478.4 Internet users per thousand people by the year 2000, or in other words, almost every other person in the USA will be using the Internet. Many countries are not far behind. Usage

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1) This paper is based on a paper presented at an international conference, Creating Sense: Texts and Realities, organized by the National University of Singapore, 7–9 September 1998.
2) These figures are discussed in the September 1988 issue of Yahoo Internet Life, pg. 94–96.

in Canada and the Scandinavian nations is particularly high, with the number of users per one thousand people numbering 244.5 in Finland, 231.1 in Norway, 227.3 in Iceland, and 148.9 in Canada. It is estimated that nearly half of the populations in Finland, Norway and Iceland will be using the Internet by the change of the millennium, as will be the case in Australia, even though there are only 178 users per thousand persons at present. Notice that we are talking about twice the number of users in just two years time in countries where there is already a high percentage of users. In countries with fewer users, the anticipated increases are much greater, especially in the more affluent nations. The figures for Singapore are 141.2 in 1998, increasing to 370 users per thousand, and in the United Kingdom, 99.3 users increasing to 288. Japan seems comparatively slow in joining the bandwagon with 63.06 users per thousand people in 1998 and a projected 172 by the year 2000.[3] There are, of course, many countries where the desire may be there but usage is much more restricted, often for economic reasons or because of inadequate telecommunications networks, for instance, in many places in South America and particularly in Africa. There are also countries where use of the Internet is discouraged or even prohibited by law such as in the Middle East and Myanmar.[4]

## 3. The Language of the Internet

Figures do not say everything, but I think the message is clear. The same observation is reported almost daily in the press, namely that we are witnessing a huge global change in the way people go about

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3) It would be interesting to know why usage in Japan is so far behind other advanced nations. Several possible reasons come to mind. Possibly the widespread use of English on the Internet has made it more difficult for first time users to join in. On the other hand, there may be other socio-economic factors that come into play, such as the high cost of computers in Japan until recently or perhaps limitations on free time or conservative educational traditions have come into play. Whatever the reasons for the slow start may be, I have no doubt that Japan will not be long in catching up with the pack.

4) In this respect, the World Wide Web may not be as world wide as we might wish it to be.

communicating with one another and in the way people gather information. Barriers, which existed only a few years ago, are gone. Time and distance are no longer limiting factors and costs for sophisticated, highly technological means of communication are spiraling downward. The only limiting factor for many that have access to the Internet around the world might be said to be language. So far, the primary language of the Internet has been English, while the vast majority of users, especially in the high growth areas, either use English only as a second language at best, or they may have no knowledge or only a very limited knowledge of the language. The reason for the dominance of English, of course, is that much of the technology for the Internet originated in the US and also, like it or not, English has become the language of choice for international communication in education and business throughout much of the world.

## 3.1   Other Lanaguages and the Internet

Though English is essential for many Internet communications, this may not always be the case. At one point only a few years ago, computer users were required to use commands in English simply to operate their computers. However, things have changed to meet market conditions, particularly with the introduction of icon-driven applications, most notably, the Microsoft Windows operating systems. Many other providers of software have also seen to it that the average user today can operate his or her own computer in their language of choice, because the market is there.

To take a case in point, only a few years ago, students at Aoyama Gakuin University were using English-based DOS commands or programs such as EMACS on the UNIX system for communications that were developed in the USA. Although documentation for major programs was available in Japanese, for many programs, documentation was in English. Students needed skills in English to operate common programs such as foreign language word processors, grammar checkers, or statistical packages and other common applications.

This was particularly the case if they wanted to use the less expensive computers and software that were either produced, or at least sold, outside of Japan. Also, most of the newsgroups and databases they wished to access were in English. Now, in just a few years time we find that this is no longer the case. Japanese makers have lost their monopoly on Japanese-language-based software and specialized hardware and they must now meet the competition from foreign providers at competitive prices. Virtually every popular software program now comes with a Japanese language version. Recently, in fact, we find communications software packaged with English to Japanese translation programs which, however limited, may lessen the dependency on English, or at least the fear of using the language for electronic communication. English has disappeared almost completely from the icons and the pull-down menus on all machines produced in the past three or four years to be replaced by whatever the language of preference might be.

## 3.2 Languages Used in Discussion Groups and Newsgroups

In terms of languages of communication, we are seeing more language friendly programs that will allow users to read messages and bulletin boards in a variety of languages. There are many discussion groups that use a mixture of languages, especially languages that make use of alphanumeric scripts. It is not hard to find special interest news groups where many of the discussion are in languages other than English such as in Tagalog or Indonesian etc. as well as in English. Also, many programs can now handle special characters required for languages which use alphabetic scripts with minor differences from English.[5]

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5) One of my students recently looked into several multilingual special-interest news groups where Spanish, Italian and French were used and interestingly found that although Spanish and Italian were used almost exclusively in those respective groups, nearly half the discussions on French culture were in English. It would be interesting to see a systematic study of language use in news groups and to see what changes are taking place.

Non-alphabetic scripts present more of a challenge, not so much on the sending end as on the receiving end. It has become much easier recently for users around the world to view email messages in non-alphabetic scripts, but it is still a challenge to configure computers for this purpose. At this point, one may have to install a compatible operating system or a special language kit. For instance, for some Japanese language programs, it is necessary to install a Japanese language operating system (or Japanese language kit in the case of a Macintosh computer). Because of this, some of the more popular news groups on the Japanese language are still conducted in alphabetic script. At the same time, it is no longer necessary to have a Japanese operating system to read email in Japanese characters. For instance, one can simply add a subroutine to Eudora that will allow one to read messages in Japanese characters. Also, where graphic interfaces are used, as on some Web pages, operating systems are indifferent to the script used.

It is clear that much of the increase in the use of the Internet by speakers of Japanese can be attributed to the fact that it is no longer necessary to use the English language. At the same time, the ability to use English opens up possibilities of communication on the Internet immensely as little communication outside of Japan is in Japanese.

## 4. Acceptance and Resistance to Educational Technology

As a linguist and English teacher, I am particularly interested in the Internet as it relates to the field of language education and communication. I will leave the commercial implications to others to worry about. I do not necessarily see a panacea in terms of the mushrooming use of the Internet, but I feel it is incumbent on teachers to be as informed and to take advantage of this new technology in whatever ways we can. This is not an easy course for all educators to follow. In the humanities in particular, many are indifferent to changes brought about by advances in technology, and in

fact some are even hostile to the use of computers. Why else would we see individuals who even boast about their lack of knowledge relating to new technologies? As with any other major technological innovation, however, we have to accept the fact that although surfing the Internet may not be for everybody right now, it will become increasingly difficult to ignore the effects it will have on our educational endeavors. In this respect, I would like to take as an example the present use of computers at Aoyama Gakuin.

## 4.1   Computer Uses at Aoyama Gakuin

I do not think our experience at Aoyama Gakuin is particularly unique. The University is a rather typical large private university with colleges ranging from law and economics to humanities and engineering. We have a computer center that is set up to serve all the various colleges, and the center represents a considerable investment by the university. In addition to providing many services to the university at all levels, the computer center has to totally renovate the entire system every three years in an almost losing battle to keep pace with the rapid changes in technology.

The center provides computational services by way of a central super-computer and servers linked to PCs in several specialized classrooms, and in several open rooms for general access. The servers are also linked to the administrative offices and there is telephone access to outside users. All students are entitled to free use of the computer services provided by the University although, of course, planners recognize that the University cannot hope to provide individual workstations for more than a very small percentage of students at a time.

## 4.2   The Need for Individual Computer Ownership

While the scale of the computer facilities is large and growing, there is no way the computer center can keep up with demand and there is no intention to meet all the ever-increasing computational needs of each and every student. A few years ago, almost none of the

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students or faculty in the English department used computers. Now, almost every student makes some use of a computer and more teachers are doing so as well. Many students and staff now have their own personal computers. During job-hunting season and near the end of each term, there are long lines of students waiting their turn to use the computers in the open rooms. Throughout the year, use at the computer center is limited to one hour per person with chairs provided in each room for those waiting their turn. We have reached the point where the faculty will have to consider the hitherto imaginable proposal that all students be required to purchase their own personal computers as essential tools for their studies. In fact, some schools and departments have already taken this step.[6]

4.3   Individual Uses of Computers by Students at Aoyama

As I have mentioned, probably a higher percentage of students than faculty members are now computer users. However, not all of their uses would be considered educational or school related. For instance, seniors make use of the World Wide Web for job hunting, which takes up a good part of their senior year. Others use computers for travel or other recreational information. Interestingly, since many textbooks used in the English Department are published abroad, some students have begun looking to sources outside of Japan to purchase their books, since at times, depending on the exchange rate, local book stores may charge considerably more than the list price of books published outside of the country. Also, many students use the Internet for personal correspondence with friends at other universities or abroad. Still others use computers for research and writing papers or completing other class assignments. What interests me most here is the educational applications.

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6)  Beginning in 1999, freshmen in law and economics will be required to purchase personal computers. Other schools have already taken this measure. The College of Literature cannot be far behind.

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## 5.　Educational Applications in the Fields of ESL/EFL

In spite of all the talk about the Internet and use in the classroom, not too much has been said about applications for language teaching. There has been a lot of experimentation and various interesting projects have been implemented, but my feeling is that we have only begun to scratch the surface. In the abstracts for the 1998 annual meeting of TESOL, there were only a handful of presentations concerned specifically with using the Internet in the classroom, and these described specific applications or lesson plans. I think we can expect a great deal more attention to be focused on the Internet in the classroom in the not too distant future.

### 5.1　Computer Applications for Class Use

In the January/February 1998 issue of ESL Magazine, Christine Meloni gives a very good overview of the state of the art in an article "The Internet in the Classroom." She describes several interesting applications under the two main headings, E-mail Projects, and The World Wide Web. The article is an excellent resource for information relating to ESL/EFL and the Internet. Meloni (1998) discusses several of the applications I describe below.

### 5.2　Use of Email

Several teachers at our university are making use of e-mail in ways similar to those Meloni describes. One very simple application is to require each student to send a message or messages to the instructor and the instructor replies. This serves to encourage students to overcome any hesitancy to use email and it puts even the most reticent student into personal communication with their instructor. In our large department, the value of establishing personal communication with the instructor cannot be over-emphasized. Once students are in the habit of using email, it is also helpful for giving and clarifying class assignments and for advisement.

A second application places a common class activity into a different framework. English language students are required to write En-

glish journals throughout the semester, and computer readable journal entries can be forwarded easily by email to the instructors or they can be shared with other students either in the same class or in other classes. Journal entries can easily be shared with a number of individuals at the same time. Normally, the agreement is that the English in journal entries will not be corrected. Rather, journal writing is used to motivate students to write in English and to encourage fluency. As such, responses to the entries are normally comments relating to content rather than form. Through the use of email, responses can be fairly quick and also private and the risk of embarrassment is less than is the case with hard copy.

A similar application is through what Meloni refers to as keypals or electronic penpals. This approach involves more risk in that students have to rely more on replies from their respective keypals to remain active. On the other hand, the connection might result in more legitimacy to writing activities, since students may be corresponding with persons who do not speak their own language and the content is dictated by the dialogue which ensues. Also, they may remain active correspondents long after the semester is over.

A third approach is to involve the class in a project, which requires collaboration with students over the Internet for completion. One of our instructors, Joseph Diaz,[7] engineered such a project interacting with a class in the USA that was working on the same materials, in this case a project relating to "The Glass Menagerie." The project involved several different steps and finally video recordings, which they then exchanged. The project was reportedly quite successful and gratifying, but at the same time it required a great deal of preparation and planning by the instructor.[8] Probably a more practical approach would be more like the one described in by Meloni (pg. 13) that was

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7) Personal communication.
8) In fact, the instructor later told me that although the project worked very well, he did not plan to try a similar project for some time to come.

created by Ruth Vilmi (1998) at Helsinki University of Technology called the HUT email Writing Project.[9] This project, which was founded in 1993, makes use of e-mail and the Web. The main asset of this program is that it is ongoing and allows any number of classes to join for any length of time in four-week modules. This, I am sure accounts for its success on a world scale where academic years often do not follow the same calendar. This kind of formulaic and regenerating program shows considerable promise for greater use of the Internet for language learning and exchange between students in the future.

Finally, of course, we can now have students submit some assignments by email. Many are now making use of the Internet for this purpose. For class assignments, the ability to correspond electronically opens up innumerable opportunities. For thesis writing in particular, although one on one meetings are essential, students can now submit drafts of their chapters by email for review and comments at a great savings in time. It is also helpful to have smaller assignments sent by email, since it is then possible to make suggestions before the next class meeting as well as to select examples for the class use without the usual delay required when assignments are brought to the next class meeting. Also, if the class has been asked to collect information or data, this can be shared and evaluated and compiled for use in the very next class meeting. In effect, a class can continue to function as a class between class meetings. There are limitless instructional opportunities enabled by the communicative potential of email.

## 6. Chat Groups, Hypertext and Other Open-Ended Applications

The applications I have discussed thus far only represent educational uses of computers on a small and individual scale. Such uses do not require a great deal of financial support and they do not

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9) For information on the HUT E-Mail Writing Project, contact Ruth Vilmi at rvilmi@cc.hut.fi.

require changes in the basic organizational nature of the classroom. There are much more radical uses of electronic communications that are developing at a rapid pace that I might consider, but this would take us beyond the scope of this paper.[10] I will just mention two innovations that will certainly be developed for ESL/EFL instruction. Virtual classrooms already exist in the form of chat groups and distance learning programs. Here, the classroom is no longer a physical setting and students can participate from wherever they have their computer. One interesting thing that can result from this is the possibility of having a multilingual classroom even in Japan where normally students already share a language in common. Another innovation is the extended use of hypertext now used in teaching literature. Students in a class annotate a text with links to the text, building the text into a starting point for extensive annotation and critical commentary that can be accessed electronically. For instance, if the text refers to a particular historical event, a student could follow up on that event with a short paper and link it to the reference point in the text. Of course, definitions and linguistic notes can also be linked to a text in this way. The use of an interactive hypertext not only allows the students and teacher in a particular class to build on the text, but former students can continue to contribute as well to the discussion and expansion of annotation and elaboration. Such applications take us far beyond traditional uses of texts with fixed annotations, which have been available in printed and electronic form for some time. In fact, the concept of "text" takes on a totally different form from any schoolroom ideas of "text" as an entity fixed or completed in time and space. In terms of EFL, this application would seem to have

10) Several papers on innovative uses of electronic communications were presented at the conference recently held by the National University of Singapore, Creating Sense: Texts and Realities held in Singapore 7–9 September, 1998. Of particular interest was a paper on teaching writing through distance learning by Daniel Keis, College of DuPage, "I see what you mean," and a Lecture by George George P. Landow, Brown University, "How does one make sense in Hypertext? Or, reading in E-space." Proceedings for this conference are forthcoming.

considerable potential, especially in the teaching reading, where students could exchange information and participate interactively in the reading of a text.

## 7.   The Internet As a Resource

We can find innumerable resources for both teachers and students, particularly on the World Wide Web and it would be pointless to even mention a few here. Just following up on the Web pages cited by Meloni will result in hundreds of links to other Web pages with more links to follow up on with no real end in sight. Another published source useful as a starting point is Yahoo Internet Life, a magazine dedicated to telling what is on the Web. At this point, it is generally safe to assume that whatever information one is looking for, there is probably something on the Web that is relevant, and the task is simply to try to find it. At the same time, these resources cannot be viewed as permanent or necessarily accurate. Many Web sites come and go very quickly. For instance, a graduate student in a particular program may create a wonderful Web page on a particular topic, and then the next time you look, it is gone. Perhaps the author has lost interest, graduated, or changed fields. You may never know. Anyone who wants to can set up a Web page, but also, most governments and libraries, research organizations or other presumably responsible, or at least official organizations, now maintain Web sites as well.

As the variety of things on the World Wide Web is unlimited, it may be useful to describe certain types of Web sites that might be useful.[11] First there are sites designed for learners, such as sites that provide online lessons. Also, there are sites designed for teachers that contain suggested lesson plans and other teaching resources. The

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11)  Just to mention one site that links to numerous sites of potential use to students and teachers is the Purdue Online Writing Lab, http://owl.English.purdue.edu. An example of a site for students is Professor TOEFL's Fun Page, http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~itselj/quizzes. He will respond to questions about English grammar. Christine Meloni mentions numerous interesting sites that could keep you busy for a good long time to come.

Web is also a huge resource for encyclopedic information on nearly any subject, though as I mentioned, sources may be unreliable. Many libraries are also on-line now, but even more interesting is the fact that the library resources themselves, that is the contents of the reference works, periodicals and books contained in the libraries, are now also more and more available on line.

The World Wide Web and also the Internet in general have become an invaluable resource for research and class projects and quite naturally, the MLA now has guidelines (on the Web as well) for giving Web site citations. We have to recognize, however, that the popularity of the Web and it's rapid growth at present is driven more by commercial and entertainment interests than educational interests and we educators perch only on the edge of the giant's table, like Jack after he climbed the bean stock.

## 8.   Databases for Original Research

There are numerous on-line resources available which are more than information banks. Our department subscribes to COBUIlD On Line which gives us remote access to the COBUILD corpus of English. This corpus presently consists of more than twenty five million words of text from American, English and Australian sources that we can search for word usages, collocations, and statistical information. It is a useful tool for conducting original research on these varieties of English, and also it is useful for training students in methods of corpus analysis.

This is, of course, but one corpus of many archives that are accessible through telnet and language archives are being expanded at a very rapid pace. Some are described in several recent textbooks on corpus linguists, especially those corpora that have been constructed and tagged specifically for linguistic research.[12] However, there are

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12)   In particular, see the recent series of textbooks that is being published by the Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh Textbooks in Empirical Linguistics.

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also innumerable collections of texts in electronic form that are available for computerized processing making use of programs designed for that purpose.[13] Finally there is the sum total of all words which go out on the Internet which are, of course, in electronic form and could be compiled to make additional corpora for analysis. Exactly what materials can actually be used for research is up to considerable debate because of potential problems ranging from privacy to copyright and other commercial concerns. Whether it is for the taking or not, the fact remains that countless texts are out there in electronic form and a great deal of fieldwork can now be conducted with no more than a desktop computer and a modem.

## 8.1  Fieldwork Using the Internet

Clearly there are possibilities of using the Internet for fieldwork. As I mentioned, we have to give due consideration relating to matters of privacy and also copyright infringement in using data gathered from the Internet for research. At the same time, the potential is there for fieldwork projects of the sort not previously feasible. Let me give two examples from my own experience.

One fieldwork project undertaken by an undergraduate for his thesis involved use of a usenet newsgroup under the heading soc.culture.singapore. For a class project, I had the class divide into groups to explore varieties of English that might be evidenced on the Internet. They began by exploring different newsgroups centering on topics of particular interest to persons from various countries where English is not the principle language of communication. Some discussion groups were more active than others, depending on a number of factors such as the current political situation or particularly hot subjects that may have come to the forefront due to current events. The topics of discussion also dictated the amount of involvement by

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13)  A good starting point for searching for electronic text archives is A Guide to Internet/ Bitnet: Remote Connections, http://www.metronet.lib.mn.us/guide/g5.html.

persons living in that region or outsiders interested in the region. One topic might relate, for example, to travel experiences by foreign tourists to the region with considerable outside commentary. Another might relate to a current political crisis or experiences of nationals who are studying abroad where participation by people from that region is high.

One topic at the time was attitudes concerning what language or languages should be considered the national language of Singapore and also attitudes toward the local variety of English, Singlish. This topic lent itself well to the class assignment and the group came up with a number of interesting observations based on the information they gathered. In addition, although they lacked the linguistic background for sophisticated studies, since the messages were written in English by Singaporeans, students were able to make some observations on the local idiom as compared to the English they were taught in school. The students gathered some information passively, but also entered into the discussion and solicited additional information from the discussants. One correspondent in Singapore even went so far as to purchase a book on Singlish and mail it to the students in the group.

The student who wrote the thesis went one step further and submitted a questionnaire on the bulletin board and as a result received a number of replies to that. As a result, he came up with an interesting and original undergraduate thesis that, although not a highly scientific undertaking, was informative, thought provoking and also enjoyable to write.

In the current school year, I am having my undergraduate seminar focus corpus analysis. The goal is to build a clean corpus with data obtained from the Internet, to then identify features we wish to study and conduct an appropriate corpus analysis using tools available. Ultimately it would be interesting to construct several corpora of writings by users of different varieties of English where English is

not used as the principal language of communication. The project this academic year, however, can only serve as a pilot study on the basis of which we will consider the feasibility of conducting a more extensive ongoing project over the years to come.

The first semester, I asked each student to construct a mini corpus of their own from writings on the Internet having some features in common, and then to clean up the corpus and conduct some simple studies on the corpus based on research questions of their own design. At the time of writing, I have encountered several problems that will have to be addressed.

First of all, I faced a pedagogical problem. I found that the present generation of students who are accustomed to using icon-driven interfaces had much more difficulty and were even resistant to working with programs which require line by line commands than I had expected. Windows 95 has taken its toll and we got off to a very slow start switching over to programs that work best on other operating systems such as UNIX. This may seem to be a point not worth mentioning, but I have found that other colleagues at other institutions have had similar difficulties. In other words, the greatly increased accessibility to computers through icon driven operating systems and software has resulted in a rapid increase in users, but these new users have limited skills in basic computer operations and in fact may be unwilling to learn. I do not know if this is a transitory pedagogical problem or something of greater concern.

When students began building files of potentially useful data, we ran into difficulties deciding what to keep and what to discard. The variety of messages in discussion groups is considerable. Some newsgroups are monitored and contain mostly substantive exchanges but many are not. In terms of content, we found everything ranging from downloaded copyrighted news items and government documents to irresponsible emotional and sometimes offensive outbursts. Students had difficulty sorting out usable material from the rest.

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Also, in looking over the data we found it difficult to determine authorship. After determining what is of potential interest, it is still difficult to determine the nature of the sample. For instance, among messages posted in a newsgroup discussing concerns of a particular country, one can find the email address and often the name of the author, but this information alone does not allow one to determine the principle language of the author. Nor can one be certain of the native language of the author or how fluent the author is in English even after determining that the English is clearly a non-native variety.

In attempting to build a valid corpus, there are several options we might consider in determining authorship. First of all, we could send a questionnaire directly to the authors in hopes of learning more about their linguistic backgrounds. But the replies are likely to be sporadic and also not totally reliable. Also, in building a large data-base of often very short messages, this process would be extremely time consuming. A second approach would be to consider the content of the messages themselves. Writers often indicate their back-grounds in their postings in order to establish credibility. A third approach might be to look for certain linguistic features in the writ-ings that might indicate the variety of English the discussants are using. This is the same approach taken by historical linguists in iden-tifying the authorship of texts. However, the absence of such fea-tures cannot be taken as evidence that the author is not a user of the variety of English we are interested in. Perhaps with sufficient data, we can find a statistical solution that would make it unnecessary to identify the backgrounds of particular writers. The solution will no doubt have to be a combination of all of the above, but even so, the reliability of a corpus developed in this way may turn out to be lower than a corpora developed in the field.

In spite of the difficulties we face in terms of developing reliable corpora of particular varieties through work with the Internet, I re-main cautiously optimistic. Newsgroups provide a continual flow of

messages which are relatively spontaneous and unsolicited. They are also posted publicly and authored by a large number and variety of individual contributors. By posting their messages on the Internet, the participants are addressing a readership without regard to national borders. Concern is with the message rather than the form, while at the same time, the unselfconscious expectation is that the writers' English will communicate what they want to say. What we have is a source of relatively unedited English texts that will provide a database considerably different from those based on printed materials or elicited under laboratory conditions. In the end, of course, the proof of the value of corpora based on Internet communications will have to be in the product.

As a class exercise, even though the product may not have scientific worth, there is much the students can learn from the project, both in terms of learning research methods and also, perhaps, linguistically from working with the texts.

## 9.   Summary

I have reviewed several ways in which the Internet is being used by instructors and students at Aoyama Gakuin and in Japan at present. Perhaps the most common use is applications deriving from the use of email and interpersonal communication. The Internet can greatly facilitate communication between teachers and students and among students with no great restrictions in space. A Japanese classroom can become truly international. An extension of email communication is possible through the use of newsgroups and participation in readings, discussions or even projects involving individuals from around the globe. The Internet, and in particular the World Wide Web can also be used for gathering information in almost any area, ranging from library resources to very specific materials. It can serve as a resource for students and teachers and even provide online lessons and lesson plans and materials. Finally, the Internet can be

used a tool for student research projects in teaching field methods. There are, no doubt, many applications that I might have mentioned and did not, and are many changes that will take place before this paper goes to press. But, if it is clear that the Internet is now here to stay and is a resource we can no longer ignore, my point has been made.

I believe the Internet shows considerable potential as a tool for language teaching and research in Japan. Presently we are just beginning to see what effects the rapid growth in the use of computers, and the Internet in particular, will have on how we go about the business of teaching and conducting research in our fields of interest. I do not believe we can ignore what is happening in the area of electronic communications. In fact it is incumbent on us to keep abreast of developments in this area. Otherwise, for better or worse, we will be missing out on the opportunity to be part of a major change that is already well under way. We have to take the dragon by the tail and make the best use of it we can. Otherwise it will simply consume us.

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