

Foreign students as tutors for 2 FL classes? – exploring some new paths in second foreign language education: 2 FL Chats in FL Salc at Niigata University¹

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1. Introduction

This article is the follow-up to previous observations made regarding how to successfully incorporate foreign exchange students into the second foreign language education (2 FL) at Niigata University. Whereas we have been focussing on foreign exchange students in 2 FL classes in the last study², this time we want to take a look at autonomous learning in the framework of the so-called “second foreign language chats” (2 FL chats) at the FL Salc (Foreign Language Self Access Learning Center) located in the newly opened library of Niigata University. These 2 FL chats are usually held during semester time once or twice per week for nearly all of the 2 FL languages taught at Niigata University and English.

In order to grasp the overall context we will first give a short overview on how these 2 FL chats started and how they are organized (chap. 2). Then we will try to analyse a little deeper based on two different sets of data collected by the authors. First, Chinatsu Komagata will introduce how the 2 FL chats have been perceived by participants (chap. 3.1), basing her observations on written questionnaires (quantitative data from July 2014) and interviews held with a variety of Japanese student participants (qualitative data from Sept. – Nov. 2014). Her focus will be on the relation between 2 FL students

1 This article is based on two presentations held by the authors in the fall of 2014.

The first was held in Japanese: 「実践的外国語運用能力習得のための互恵的学習環境の創造—初修外国語チャット」 and was presented at the 59th NULC session (新潟大学言語研究会第59回研究発表会) on October 23rd 2014 at Niigata University. The other was presented in English on Nov. 23rd 2014 at the JALT conference in the SIG OLE / Multilingualism forum „Foreign students as Tutors for 2FL classes? – exploring some new paths in second foreign language education: 2FL-Chats in the FL Salc at Niigata University”. In accordance to the latter presentation this article has been written in English.

2 ホップ・アンニャ、駒形千夏 (Anja HOPF and Chinatsu KOMAGATA) (2014): 「新潟大学の初修外国語教育における初修外国語チューター制度: 受講生・留学生のフィードバックを中心に」 [Foreign Student Assistants in Foreign Language Classes at the University of Niigata: a Preliminary Study Based on Student Feedback], in: 新潟大学言語文化研究第19号 [Niigata Studies in Foreign Languages and Cultures No. 19], 2014年7月、29-52頁.

participation and study abroad, why the students choose to participate in the 2 FL chats, and how the participation might be connected to a stronger motivation to study abroad. For the latter she uses Grounded Theory to analyse her data.

Anja Hopf will then present the perspective of the foreign exchange students, who are organizing the 2 FL chats at Niigata University more or less autonomously as foreign student assistants, as we have called them in the last study³. She bases her findings on questionnaires conducted at the end of term along with one interview with two German exchange students held in August 2014 after their two term experience as foreign student assistants in 2 FL German chats (chap. 3.2). Her focus is on the question, whether or not these 2 FL chats might be an enhancing tool not only to improve language skills but also to learn and gain intercultural and global skills. She is using an interpretative and descriptive approach to present and analyse her data. In the third and last chapter the authors will try to interpret the results of their findings hoping to further deepen insights on the nature and functioning of the 2 FL chats in order to further improve the practical use of 2 FL chats at FL Salc of Niigata University in the future⁴.

2. Autonomous learning in 2 FL chats: a short overview

Experimenting with 2 FL learners & native speaker oral communication in order to improve language skills and to enforce autonomous learning in foreign language education, Niigata University has started to provide so-called “chats” since the academic year 2012, starting in the so-called “FL SALC mini” as its pilot programme. After the FL Salc in the new library opened in April 2013, the 2 FL chats have been organized along with English chats for the 2 FL languages French, German, Chinese and Korean and are continuing to this day⁵.

Originally, 2 FL teachers at Niigata University started these 2 FL chats because they wanted to provide the 2 FL learners with more opportunities to practice speaking in addition to regular course time work. Secondly, during the last few years Niigata University has improved its student-exchange programmes with universities overseas from 20 Universities in 9 countries (128 faculty level agreements in 23 countries/

3 In contrast to the term “foreign student tutors”, which is used already for Japanese students, who are assigned to every foreign exchange student during their stay at Niigata, we decided to rather use the term “foreign student assistants” to avoid confusion. A. Hopf & C. Komagata (2014): *ibid.*, p. 30.

4 Chapt. 1. Introduction and chapt. 4. Conclusion were written together by Anja Hopf (AH) and Chinatsu Komagata (CK), whereas AH was in charge for chapt. 2 The short overview, the main chapter 2 was divided by both authors as mentioned above.

5 Since winter term 2014 also a Russian chat has been started with two Russian students in charge.

6 Niigata University: Outline of Niigata University 2010 p. 43/44.

regions) in the year 2010⁶ to 35 Universities in 16 countries (202 faculty level agreements in 28 countries) in the year 2014⁷. Accordingly, the number of incoming foreign students has risen significantly⁸. Often their native languages are the target languages of the 2 FL language education, and since 2009⁹ these foreign students can be hired as foreign language assistants for 2 FL class for the purpose of connecting exchange students and 2 FL learners. But we also felt the need to create a more autonomous learning environment, in order to enable 2 FL learners to engage in the target languages independently and outside of class with their peers based on mutual exchange, discussions and maybe even friendships despite their different cultural backgrounds.

These 2 FL chats are held weekly (once or twice) depending on the 2 FL and are mainly taken care of by one or more foreign exchange student, with the assistance from language teachers and the staff at FL Salc. The foreign students are paid for their efforts according to the standard rate for Teaching Assistants (TA) at Niigata University.

Ideally these chats provide a “space” where foreign language learners can try out their language skills outside of class with one or more native speakers of their peer group in the more intimate setting of smaller groups than in 2 FL courses. These 2 FL chats are open to every student learner at Niigata University and the students can take part as often and as long as they choose to. In order to create a “flat” and thus non-threatening and hopefully rather enjoyable learning environment usually no teachers are present, and as participation in the 2 FL chats is on a total volunteer basis, no credits are granted. In this respect these spaces can be fully understood as spaces for autonomous learning. The locations of the 2 FL chats inside FL Salc are either the semi-enclosed study rooms for students (fig. 1) or the round tables in the open area of the FL Salc (fig. 2). For the German chats two iPads are available, and the German students also made frequent use of the white boards. In the French chats the supporting teacher sometimes provided teaching materials for model dialogues and the like depending on learner levels.

7 Niigata University: Outline of Niigata University 2014, p. 43/44.

8 In the year 2010 a total of 364 foreign students have come to study at Niigata University (Outline of Niigata University 2010, p. 42), whereas 450 foreign exchange students came in the year 2014 (Outline of Niigata University 2014, p. 42).

9 For details see: A. Hopf & C. Komagata (2014).



fig 1: Semi-enclosed study room for students, Learning Commons Area in the University Library (photo: A. Hopf)



fig. 2: Round tables in the open area of the FL Salc (photo: A. Hopf)

“Learning“ topics for 2 FL learners of beginner or advanced beginner levels and for advanced 2 FL learners concerning content and topics of discussion inside the 2 FL chats can be chosen freely by the foreign students, and usually were organized along with input from the Japanese students in accordance with their needs and interests. Thus in most cases the students organize their specific learning environment autonomously and independently with each other.

Starting out with one 2 FL chat for French in the spring term of 2012 (once a week, 2 Tutors, held 6 times, with a total of 12 participants) the number of 2 FL chats held in the spring term of 2014 has steeply risen: 50 sessions per semester in the languages French, German, Chinese and Korean, with 11 foreign students in charge in total and a total number of 294 participants (for detailed numbers: 5. Appendix: 5.1. Chart 2 FL chats from spring term 2012 to spring term 2014). I also want to mention, that in the German chats a lot of repeaters are counted, a fact that is not explicitly mentioned in these numbers. The programme is continuing up to today and it is safe to state just looking at the numbers, that the 2 FL chats at Niigata University are an overwhelming success and have been extremely well received by the 2 FL language learners.

3. Second foreign language chats (2 FL chats) in FL Salc

In order to study 2 FL Chats seen from the participants point of view, we would like to focus here on the relationship between the participation in 2 FL chats and the participants' motivation to study abroad.

3.1. Participants perspective: 2 FL chats as seen from participants point of view

When the authors examined the language class activities with the foreign language assistants as seen in the questionnaires of the participants in our previous article¹⁰, they got the impression that in language class activities there might be a connection between 2 FL learners and the foreign language assistants, which leads again to participation at the 2 FL chats. Also they found, that the participation in these 2 FL chats might enforce the motivation to study abroad for the participants. In this chapter, I have tried to put these impressions into the following research questions as a starting point.

3.1.1. Research questions

- i) Is there any relation between 2 FL students' participation in the 2 FL chats and study abroad?

10 Hopf & Komagata, 2014.

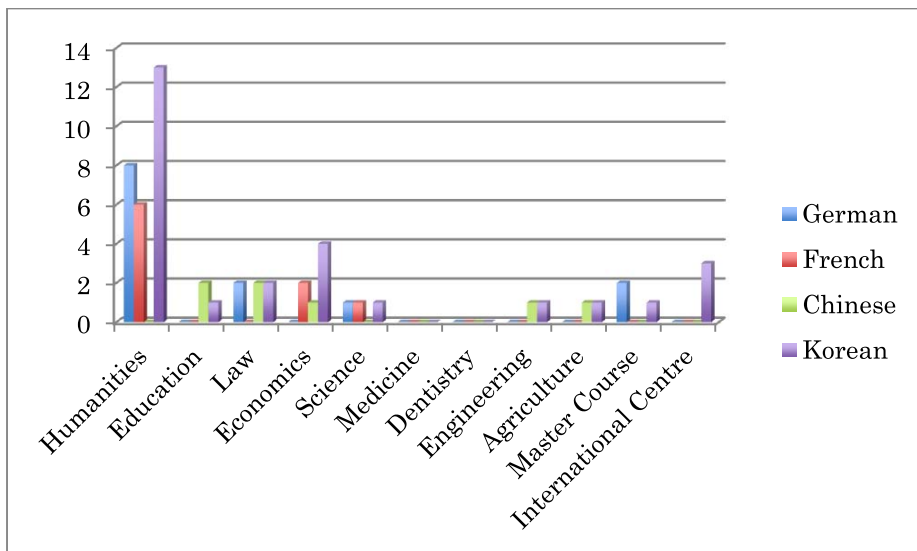
- ii) Do the students participate at the 2 FL chats because:
 - they have an actual plan to study abroad?
 - they want to maintain their language level after a study abroad?
- iii) Do the 2 FL chat participants have a stronger motivation to study abroad after taking part in the 2 FL chats?

In order to conduct research about these questions, I took two types of approaches, which were quantitative and qualitative, as we will see in the next section.

3.1.2. Quantitative Research: questionnaires for participants of 2 FL chats (July 2014)

1) Approach

I created a questionnaire with ten questions to carry out a survey among all the participants in all 2 FL chats held during July 2014 (for the questionnaire see Appendix 5.2. Questionnaire for participants in 2 FL chats) to gain data suitable for a quantitative approach. During spring term 2014 German, Chinese and French chats have been held regularly once or twice a week, and I asked the participants of all 2 FL chats to fill out this questionnaire at every chat session held during July 2014. All 2 FL chat participants have been asked to respond to the questionnaire once. The Korean chat was not held regularly in the first semester of the year 2014, but two special sessions were organised in July, to which I also took the questionnaire. As a result I could gain 56 sets of answers in total.

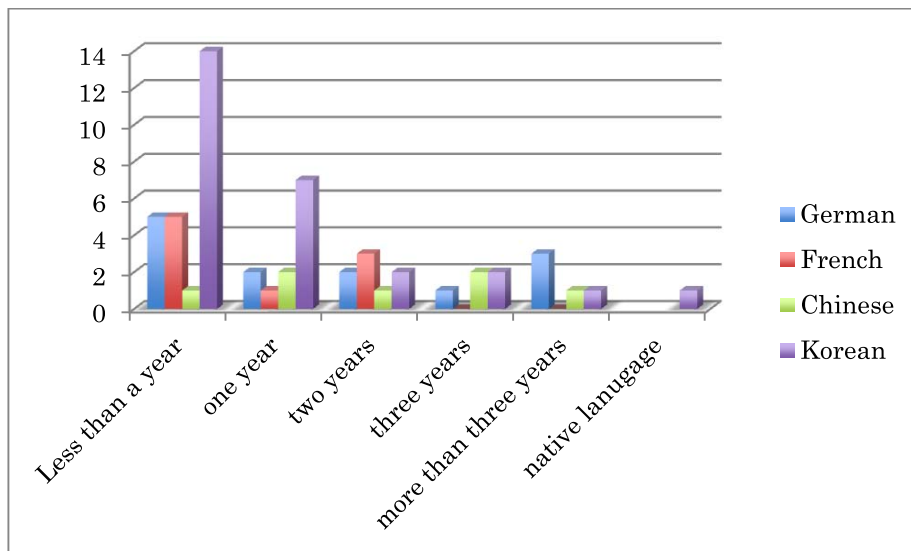


Graph 1: Faculty distribution of 2 FL chats participants

2) Data Analysis

In order to examine the participants characteristics, as we will see in the following graphs, I asked for the faculties of the 2 FL chats participants, the length of time they have learned the target language and their experience of study abroad.

As it is clear in Graph 1 most participants of the 2 FL chats are enrolled in the faculty of humanities especially for German and French chats. Many humanities students can also be found in the Korean chat, but this chat attracts also some participants from various other faculties. It is regrettable that we do not have any participants from the faculty of medicine or dentistry. These students move to the rather distantly located Asahimachi Campus in the city center from their second year. Therefore students of these two faculties have difficulties to attend 2 FL chats, which are organised in Igarashi Campus¹¹ and mostly in the late afternoon class time (5th period from 16.25-17.55). The faculty of medicine requires 2 FL classes in the first year but German and French are the only options for the enrolled students in the actual curriculum, and usually they have no chance to continue in their 2 FL education from year two.



Graph 2: Length of 2 FL learning

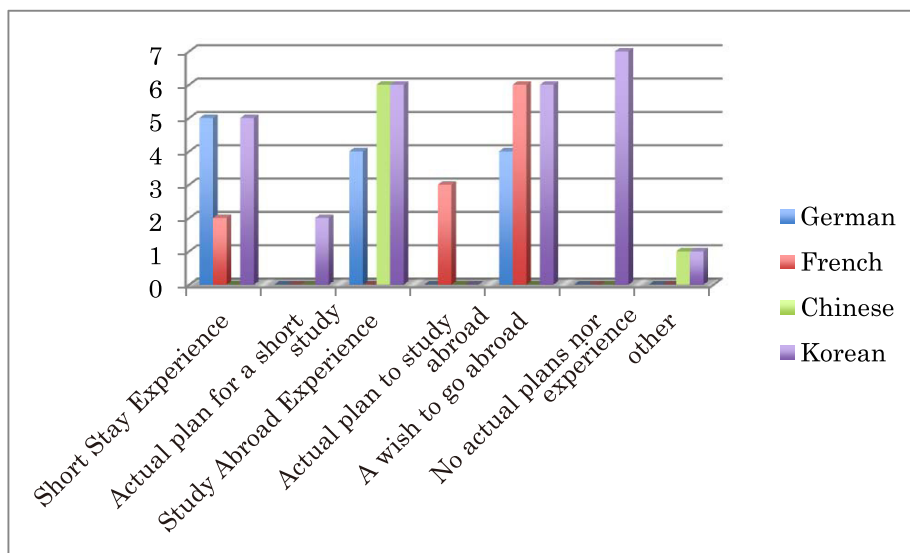
According to Graph 2 the largest number of participants who have learned Korean for less than two years is remarkable. One of the reasons for that might be, that the Korean chat sessions were held only twice during the spring term 2014 in the month of

¹¹ The two campuses are about 10 km apart, and it takes roughly an hour to get to the other campus by bus, which is expensive and the buses do not drive very often.

July and the organizer has probably made announcements in a wide range of all Korean courses beforehand.

It is compulsory for all first year students to take at least one 2 FL course during their first year, except for the dentistry students as mentioned above. As many of the students abandon their 2 FL language learning at the end of the first year, there are many more beginners than intermediate and advanced learners in 2 FL on campus in general. Even so, 2 FL chats attract more intermediate and advanced learners in general and especially the Chinese chat shows a balanced number of participants regarding the length of 2 FL study.

Finally I examined student experience of studying abroad. This question asks participants if they have gone to study overseas and suggests seven options to answer: 1) I have participated at a short programme overseas organised during the summer/spring vacation, 2) I have an actual plan to participate at a short programme in the near future, 3) I have studied abroad for more than a semester, 4) I have an actual plan to go study abroad for more than a semester in the near future, 5) I do not have any actual plan but I am interested in studying abroad, 6) I am not interested in studying abroad, 7) Other. As for results see Graph 3.



Graph 3: 2 FL chat participants and studying abroad

In German, French and Chinese chats, all the participants had an experience, plans or at least an intention to go study abroad and no one answered that they were not interested in going to an university overseas. These three language chats were held for more than ten weeks, from the middle of May to the end of July 2014. We cannot tell if

the participants might come to 2 FL chats because they have an experience/plan/intention to go study abroad or if the regular attendance to 2 FL chats potentially gives them a bigger motivation to study overseas. But we can find participants who answered that they were not interested in going to study abroad in the Korean chat. Those students might have developed an interest to study overseas if they had had more occasions to come to a Korean chat regularly, but we cannot be very sure of it. Incidentally, there are two students who chose the “Other” option. One of them answered that he/she was an exchange student from overseas him/herself and the other said that he/she had participated at a short programme for another language other than the one they used in the attended 2 FL chat.

As a summary of the analysis of this questionnaire I believe it is safe to say, that 1) we can find humanities students as majority in 2 FL chats, 2) 2 FL chats attract not only beginners but also intermediate and advanced learners, 3) all the participants in regularly held 2 FL chats have experience, a plan or at least an interest to go to study abroad. However we cannot tell if the participation in regular chats gives them a stronger motivation to study abroad. Therefore I will think about this question through the analysis of the participants interviews in the next section.

3.1.3. Qualitative Research: Semi-structured interviews with 2 FL chat participants (September to November 2014)

1) Approach

In order to gain more insight on the question regarding the relationship between attendance of 2 FL chats and motivation to study overseas, I looked for students to interview among the 2 FL chat participants and found eight students who agreed to take part. These semi-structured personal interviews were organized from September to November 2014. I asked the interviewees mainly about their experience and their motives to study abroad and also how they evaluate the 2 FL chats in general. The privacy of the interviewees is fully considered in this research.

I use the Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) to analyse the interview data in this section. Glaser and Strauss published the Grounded Theory Approach in 1967¹², Kinoshita examined it critically and as a result published his modified version as the M-GTA in 2003¹³.

12 Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory : Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York : Aldine Publishing Company, 1967.

13 木下康仁, 『グラウンデッド・セオリー・アプローチ—質的研究への誘い』, 東京 : 弘文堂, 2003年.

Kinoshita (2014) identifies three key points of the original version of the Grounded Theory Approach as follows :

To make a summary of this section, the basic characteristics of the original version will be understood as the method to produce the Grounded Theory, the theoretical qualities needed for the produced Grounded Theory and the relationship between the producer and the applicant of the theory¹⁴.

In other words, the Grounded Theory Approach is first of all a process to produce a theory based on collected data. Secondly the characteristics of the produced theory should be effective to explain and predict human behaviour, which is called 'fit and work'. The last key point is the human relationship between the producer of the theory (that is a researcher in many cases) and the person who applies the theory (that is an expert in many cases). Kinoshita points out that the theory will be produced on the assumption that the expert will apply it actively in his/her social context, and therefore the researcher should recognise his/her own social context as well in order to conduct the study reflectively.

The original version of the Grounded Theory Approach gave such a big impact to quality approach studies that many successive theories were published since, but Kinoshita says that most of them paid attention only to the first characteristic and stagnated in methods to analyse the data collected with quality approaches. He also proposes that his Modified Grounded Theory Approach (M-GTA) "stands on the viewpoint to actualise the innovative possibility of the Grounded Theory Approach by succeeding all the three key points of the original version"¹⁵. He insists that we should start from the third characteristic, which is the relationship between the theory-producer and its applicant, and everybody who is concerned with the problem should place themselves firmly in the context to find the theory which 'fits and works' to the problem.

2) Data Analysis

Before the analysis of the data collected through the semi-structured interviews to the 2 FL chat participants, the researcher is required to fix a *theme of analysis* and an *Analytically-Focused Person*¹⁶ in order to study the problem with the help of M-GTA¹⁷. The

14 木下康仁,『グラウンデッド・セオリー論』,現代社会学ライブラリー17,東京:弘文堂,2014年.p.56.

15 *ibid.*, p.128.

16 This term is the English translation of Kinoshita's Japanese term 「分析焦点者」 according to the HP of The Japanese Society of M-GTA. <http://m-gta.jp/en/qa.html> (as of 13th of July 2015).

17 *ibid.*, pp.140-141.

theme of analysis is the question to be asked for what we want to know in the situation and what we want to reveal through the analysis. The *Analytically-Focused Person* is a collective image of the interviewees and we need this abstract image as an object of the analysis because one should examine their statements as a whole. When analysing the data on the analysis theme, one has to ask further what the result means to the focused person.

Therefore, in this section, I set ‘the impact of the 2 FL chat to the participants’ decision to study abroad’ as my theme of analysis, and ‘a Japanese student who participates in a 2 FL chat’ as *Analytically-Focused Person*. The analysis result is represented in diagram 1:

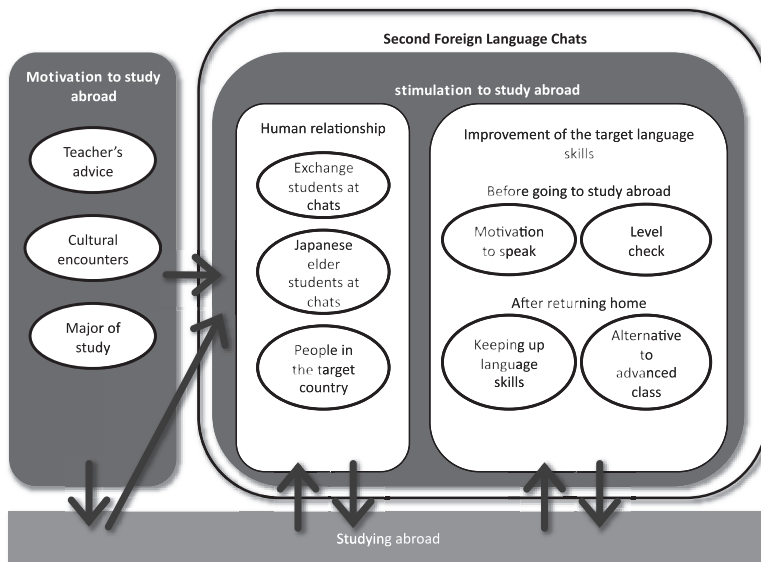


Diagram 1: Process at work as to how a 2 FL chat gives an impact to a Japanese student in relation to studying abroad.

Two concept categories have appeared as the result of my analysis of the data to find out the impact of the 2 FL chat to the participants’ decision to study abroad. Firstly, we cannot say that the 2 FL chat participation leads directly to the decision to study overseas. It seems to be rather the contrary: the motivation to go abroad takes the participant to a 2 FL chat. Usually Japanese students open up to different cultures before they enter the university from their teacher’s advice at high school or by their reading habits of foreign literature when they are very young. In another case, taking a major and a second foreign language course together in the university, they gradually form an intention e. g. to carry out research in a university outside of Japan, which is a leading institution in their specific field.

The other concept category is about the stimulation to study abroad. When the *Analytically-Focused Person* who is motivated to study abroad comes to a 2 FL chat this person can receive various kinds of stimulations about study abroad. These stimulations can be divided into two sub-categories: one is human relationship concerning study abroad, and the other is the improvement of their target language skills. In the following section I will examine these two sub-categories.

The first one, human relationship concerning study abroad, shows that the encounters at 2 FL chats work as factors which strengthen the motivation to study overseas. The *Analytically-Focused Person* will meet foreign students at the 2 FL chats, develop friendships because they see each other regularly once a week and sometimes they will share time together outside of the 2 FL chats. They exchange various ideas about the country of the foreign students. The *Analytically-Focused Person* can get to know other Japanese students, sometimes elder students who have studied in one of the exchange universities. They can offer useful information to the *Analytically-Focused Person* in order to encourage him/her. As one of the missions of the 2 FL chats is to promote encounters among foreign students and the 2 FL learners, I think it is safe to say, that this intention is well shared amongst the participants. Friendships can be another important factor to motivate students to 2 FL learning and even to study abroad. In order to realize such kind of friendship-based language learning environments, I would like to emphasize here the importance of the foreign students assistants in 2 FL courses, as a place of first encounter for the Japanese 2 FL learner. Further I believe, it might be a good idea to create some kind of system to recruit senior Japanese students with study abroad experience as 2 FL advisors in the future.

I will now move to the second sub-division and this is improvement of target language skills. It goes without mention, that this is the biggest mission of the 2 FL chats. The *Analytically-Focused Person* can participate in chats not only before going overseas but also after returning to Japan. In the latter case as well, the two sub-categories play very important roles. Especially concerning the improvement of language skills, I noticed from the analysis of the data that 2 FL chats function as alternatives to advanced learners' class. When the *Analytically-Focused Person* comes back to Niigata university after spending several months in a foreign culture, the university unfortunately can not offer satisfying levels and hours of language courses to this person in order to maintain and improve the language skills which were developed during the stay overseas. The majority of 2 FL language courses provided at Niigata University are for beginner levels. For this level in the 2 FL curriculum Niigata University has succeeded to create various types of introductory courses to learn a new language. But courses for 2 FL learners at advanced levels are not sufficiently set in place and these are in very strong

demand. Sometimes the *Analytically-Focused Person* attends all the classes for intermediate and even for advanced learners before going abroad, that is to say that he/she 'takes up' all the possible language classes, therefore they cannot find any suitable class for their level after returning from their stay abroad. These students then create their own assignments c. e. to attend a 90-minute 2 FL chats to discuss with foreign students in the target language in order to maintain their language ability instead of attending 90-minute language class for their levels. This analysis of the data concerning the improvement of language skills points out clearly the defect of the 2 FL education curriculum at Niigata university in regard advanced 2 FL learners.

I could set one more concept category as the 'intention to take a master/doctor degree overseas'. This category means the case when the *Analytically-Focused Person* is not interested in going abroad as an exchange student to improve their language skills but rather to study their field of study at an internationally renowned university.

3.2. Foreign students perspective

3.2.1. Results of questionnaires for foreign students after the end of term (spring term 2012 - spring term 2014)

In order to make the picture as complete as possible of the 2 FL chats and how they work and are perceived by everybody involved, the perspective of the foreign students, who are organizing the 2 FL chats, should not be omitted.

In contrast to section 3.1., where the data analysis has been compressed and interpreted through Grounded Theory, I have chosen a rather interpretative and descriptive approach because of the small size of the data I could collect, due to the nature of the small numbers of foreign students, who are responsible for the 2 FL language chats. I am well aware of the weakness of data validity and lack of theory in order to interpret my data. I still believe, that even this small pool of data adds an interesting facet to uncover the meaning of these 2 FL chats for foreign students and Japanese participants.

At the end of term, all German foreign exchange students, who work as foreign students assistants in 2 FL courses and at the 2 FL chats, are asked to give their feedback of their experiences. This questionnaire does not distinguish specifically between work in 2 FL course and 2 FL chats. All questions are open and are intended to especially get feedback for how to improve the cooperation with the foreign students in class in general including the 2 FL chats. Their main purpose is, to collect valuable advice for the new foreign students arriving and to keep track and record of the

foreign students assistance work in the framework of German language classes and German chats. As mentioned above, due to the limited numbers of foreign exchange students and the nature of the above mentioned questionnaire, I could only collect a few comments on 2 FL chats references from eight of the German students in total, who have been in charge of the 2 FL chats from spring term 2012 to spring term 2014 (for the questionnaire see Appendix 4.3. Feedback questionnaire for foreign students (German) after term).

It seems that most of the German students perceived the FL Salc chats as a very positive learning environment in the sense of autonomy of learners. Especially the non-presence of teachers has been mentioned three times, as this creates the possibility of direct and authentic communication inside their peer group without any pressure of performance to gain higher grades. Further it has been stated, that the nature of the 2 FL chats are thus far more focused on the needs of the individual learner than a language class could ever be. Another student mentioned that too much preparation could rather hinder a free exchange, as it is hard to plan, how many students of what levels would attend the specific chat, although an idea on a topic for the start should be necessary. In contrast to 2 FL classes, where a specific curriculum and textbook usually dominates the content and proceeding of a class, the 2 FL chats seemed to have worked on a far more personal basis, as Japanese and foreign students started to get to know each other during the course of the semester, which led to some valuable exchanges regarding their differing cultural backgrounds. This exchange has been especially appreciated, as it creates a space, where same-aged students can start a direct dialogue about academic, cultural and language-related topics. Especially for students, who have not been abroad, but nevertheless have a strong interest in the language and culture of the foreign student, the 2 FL chats offer a chance to exchange with each other without having to be afraid of failure, as it all happens in their home culture in the comfortable zone of the well known environment of the university.

3.2.2. Results of interview with two German students in charge of 2 FL chat (August 2014)

As I realized that above mentioned questionnaire is far too general for gaining more specific knowledge about the 2 FL chats in regard of the foreign students perspective, I decided to hold an interview¹⁸ on that matter. Due to the fact, that there are only a limited number of foreign students available for the 2 FL chats, I favored the qualitative method in contrast to the quantitative method, though I am well aware, that an interview with only two students might be not really representative and therefore has its problems regarding validity. But I do still believe that this interview can give some valuable insights into my research question. I wanted to find out, firstly how 2 FL chats

works for the German foreign exchange students and what their perspective on this programme was. Secondly, and mainly, I was looking for some kind of proof that could back up my impression, that these 2 FL chats could be a successful tool to gain, deepen and in some cases keep intercultural and global skills beyond mere language knowledge for both types of students involved – the German tutors and the Japanese German learners, and that they therefore could function as a tool to improve so-called overall “global education“ at Niigata University, which is in strong demand in recent years at all institutions of higher education in Japan.

Both interviewees¹⁹ have been at Niigata University for two terms, during which they have acquired a good command of Japanese or improved their already existing Japanese levels during their stay. At the time they were interviewed, student A was majoring in law, student B majoring in Japanese studies and they were from two different universities in Germany, who have exchange programmes with Niigata University. Both students have been taking care of one German chat during both terms of their stay, and worked also as foreign student assistants in German classes during the same time period. The interview took place at my office and was held in German, the native tongue of all three persons involved, in order to secure the best possible communication. Before the start of the interview I explained its purpose, that it will be recorded for transcription and used for publication later. In order to semi-structure my interview, I tried to come up with a pool of general questions, to make it as easy as possible to answer and at the same time not to lose my focus on what I wanted to find out. I have chosen the form of a semi-structured interview (with some leaning toward a structured interview) with open questions in order to give some room for the interviewees to talk freely and take some control of the interview themselves²⁰ (for interview questions see Appendix 5.4. Interview questions for tutors (German) (August 2014)).

I asked questions about three sub-topics: part 1 on preparation, form and realization of the German chat (q. 1.1 – 1.5), on 2. meaning (of the 2 FL chat) and learning effects (q. 2.1.-2.5) and in 3. I asked for advice for the future foreign students (q. 3). In the

18 In regard of how to design the interview I have been relying on the following: Aquado, Karin (2013): “Wie wirkt Unterricht? Potentiale und Grenzen der empirischen Untersuchung des Lehrens und Lernens von Fremdsprachen [How does teaching work? Potentials and Limits of empirical research on teaching and learning foreign languages]” . In: Schart, Michael, Hoshii, Makiko, Raindl, Marco (Hrsg.): *Lernprozesse verstehen – empirische Forschungen zum Deutschunterricht an japanischen Universitäten [Understanding learning processes – empirical research on german as a foreign language teaching at Japanese Universities]*. München: iudicium 2013, , p. 11 – 39, p. subchapter: 3.3.2. Interviews, p. 26-31.

19 I would like to express here my sincere gratitude to both foreign exchange students who so generously shared their experience, and granted permission to use their views for this publication.

20 As for the necessary elements and how to proceed in an actual interview see David Nunan (1992): *Research Methods in Language Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 149-152.

subsequent section I will summarize the main points following the line of questioning.

Both students estimated their preparation time for one German chat was 90 minutes or more, and also said that they were constantly looking for new and interesting topics during the week (q. 1.1).

The topics they chose have been often taken out of daily life, which seemed to be most popular with the participants, had to do with comparisons of similarities and differences between German and Japanese culture or were timely topics (e. g. the soccer world cup in Brazil held in early summer 2014). Internet and youtube have been used as references for preparation and inside the chat. Usually they started out with easy topics to lead into a conversation. Both students tried further to find a good balance between language and cultural topics. In regard to language, useful phrases for daily life conversations and slang for young people have turned out to be very popular. They found it also fruitful to compare experiences made in similar situations in Japan and Germany, as some of the participants have experienced short or long term stays in Germany (q. 1.2).

To find a suitable topic every week was one of the mentioned difficulties they experienced along with the problem of how to grasp the German level of the participants. They found also the problem of a sometimes indifferent attitude from the participants difficult to deal with. They also stated that thorough preparation was rather necessary to develop a meaningful conversation, and finally they mentioned, that abstract subjects seemed to be the least popular topics and were not suitable (c. e. What does freedom mean to you?) (q. 1.3).

The format of the chat (room, equipment and 90 minutes time) have been evaluated very positively and seen as being sufficient (q. 1.4).

Looking back on their one year German chats they said, that the “room“ as an enclosed space or “box“ worked very efficiently to make the participants feel comfortable enough, so they could muster the courage to actually use the 2 FL, despite the sometimes noisy atmosphere in the neighbouring rooms (q. 1.5).

In the second section of questions asked, both students expressed their strong belief, that participants have sharply improved both: their intercultural understanding and their language skills alike, especially for adhoc daily life communication skills. They also said, that the ideal environment would be a group of learners on the same level of language skills, which was not always the case and is hard to achieve due to lack of foreign students and the nature of the 2 FL chats (q. 2.1).

On the question of merits/demerits for tutors only merits could be found. Both interviewees said, that their own learning results were equally immense in regard of: communication methods, intercultural understanding and understanding Japanese culture, acquiring an open-minded and flexible attitude toward the members of the other culture, reflecting on their own cultural background, global skills in general and how to lead and hold up a conversation (q. 2.2).

As differences between 2 FL chats and 2 FL courses, both interviewees agreed, that in contrast to 2 FL courses, which are based on grammar or vocabulary learning and where language knowledge is accumulated, the 2 FL chats provide a space to experiment with the language skills already acquired. Due to the fact, that there is no teacher present, no hindering hierarchies exist and as there are no tests to be mastered no pressure is involved when trying to communicate with each other. They concluded, that the 2 FL chat constructs a space, where the participants and foreign students alike can experience each others (foreign) different cultural backgrounds in an authentic environment and in a very natural manner. For the tutors that meant a completely different relationship to the Japanese participants as in 2 FL classes, as the familiarity with each other could evolve much more strongly than in class, not to mention the fun of interacting with each other (q. 2.3).

They also agreed, that out of these 2 FL chats have evolved even friendships on a personal level, as everybody got to know each other quite well during the term (q. 2.4).

Both students also stated, that most students deepened their general interest in the German language and the German speaking culture. In regard to language also some improvement could be seen, and in the case of returnees from Germany their language levels could be kept up (q. 2.5).

As advice for future foreign students being in charge of an 2 FL chat both students came up with the following four points: 1. Try not to be too formal and try to create a relaxing atmosphere, 2. Try to treat every participant equally and on par with each other and a top-down attitude (teacher – student) should be avoided, 3. Try to focus on “communication“ rather than on “teaching“, 4. Be well prepared and 5. Try to reflect your own cultural background to avoid the trap of stereotypes and prejudice (q. 3).

4. Conclusion

After analysing the data collected the impressions of the authors have been strongly reassured, that the 2 FL chats are an overwhelming success and function extremely well as part of the 2 FL language education at the Niigata University, in all kinds of

aspects and on all kinds of levels.

Keeping in mind that Niigata University is located in a rather rural prefecture and not in a metropolitan area like the highly populated centers of Kanto or Kansai, with their much higher percentages of international inhabitants, let alone foreign students, well educated native and Japanese 2 FL teaching personnel and many more opportunities for a Japanese 2 FL learner to experience, improve and get to know foreign cultures and foreign languages, these 2 FL chats provide a very necessary opportunity for 2 FL learners to improve and keep their 2 FL language along with the experiences and skills gained overseas outside their regular 2 FL curriculum.

In regard to the relations between the motivation of 2 FL students to study abroad (3.1.1 research questions i and ii) the data analysis is suggesting a clear “yes”. Regarding research question iii, whether 2 FL chat participants have a stronger motivation to study abroad, no satisfying answer could be found. This result seems disappointing at first glance, but instead the data analysis, especially of the participants interviews (3.1.2), points out the major shortcoming of the 2 FL education at Niigata University, which is its lack of courses for 2 FL learners after a long term study stay overseas. These 2 FL chats are therefore de facto functioning as substitutes for 2 FL language courses for intermediate and advanced learners. This fact opens up quite a new field of problems, which should be tackled by curriculum designers for 2 FL education in the future. According to our findings, there are not only more 2 FL courses for intermediate and advanced 2 FL learners necessary, but also better care for students, who wish to go abroad. As senior students, who are returnees, are de facto providing information and advice about their experiences for their juniors, who are planning to go abroad, inside the framework of the 2 FL chats, and can provide a point of view regarding a possible stay overseas which is more up to date, thus a very different perspective that what 2 FL teachers or the University could provide.

The authors have found further, that not only Japanese 2 FL learners benefit from the 2 FL chats, but also so do the foreign exchange students themselves in regard to language improvement and intercultural understanding and global skills (chapt. 3.2). In order to provide proof for this point more data needs to be collected and more thorough research should be undertaken in the future, but at least a glimpse of reassurance of the original research question can be seen here.

A perspective which is lacking in this study, is the 2 FL teachers or 2 FL chat planners perspective, in order to further complete the big picture and to add to understanding and therefore improvement of the further effects of these 2 FL chats.

Foreign students as tutors for 2 FL classes?

The authors strongly believe, that these 2 FL chats contribute immensely to the improvement of 2 FL skills and also for the development and education of global skills and intercultural skills for the Japanese and foreign students alike. We therefore think, that these 2 FL chats should be a part of the 2 FL education at Niigata University in the future. Further this model might present an alternative for other regional universities, which also face the same lack of funds, personnel and opportunity to educate internationally minded students – a problem which we think is not only of urgency at Niigata University.

5. Appendix:

5.1. Chart: 2 FL chats (spring term 2012 - spring term 2014)

SEMESTER	FRENCH	GERMAN	CHINESE	KOREAN
Spring term 2012	1 x per week Total: 6 times 2 Tutors Students: 12	-		-
Winter term 2012	1 x per week Total: 10 times 7 Tutors Students: 20	1 x per week (60 Min.) Total: 8 times 1 Tutor Students: 10	Group chat	-
Spring term 2013	1 x per week Total: 10 times Beginners: 1 Tutor Group: 4 Tutors Students (total): 80	1 x per week (90 Min.) Total: 8 times 1 Tutor Students: 55	Group chat	
Winter term 2013	1 x per week: Total: 8 times Beginners: 1 Tutor Group: 4 Tutors Students (total): 34	2 x per week (90 min. each) Total: 19 times 2 Tutors Students total: 72	2 x per weeks 2 Tutors each Total: 18 times Students: 36	3 x per semester 2 Tutors Students: 15
Spring term 2014	1 x per week: Total: 12 times Beginners: 1 Tutor Group: 4 Tutors Students (total): 104	2 x per week (90 min. each) Total: 18 times 2 Tutors Students total: 105	2 x per week 2 Tutors each Total: 18 times Students: 54	2 x per semester 2 Tutors Students: 31

5.2. Questionnaire for participants in 2 FL chats:

「初修外国語チャット」アンケート

新潟大学初修外国語企画部

初修外国語チャットにご参加ありがとうございました。今後この取り組みをより有意義なものにしていくために、みなさんのご感想やご意見をぜひ教えてください。アンケートへのご協力をお願いいたします。

1. あなたの所属学部を教えてください。
(a) 人文 (b) 教育 (c) 法 (d) 経済 (e) 理 (f) 医 (g) 歯 (h) 工 (i) 農 (j) 大学院
(k) 国際センター (L) その他 ()
2. あなたの学年を教えてください。
(a) 1年生 (b) 2年生 (c) 3年生 (d) 4年生 (e) 大学院生 (f) 特別聴講学生
(g) その他 ()
3. あなたはこの外国語を習い始めてどのくらいになりますか？
4. あなたは、今学期に、この初修外国語チャットに何回くらい参加しましたか？
(a) ほぼ毎回 (b) 5回以上 (c) 5回以下 (d) 今日が初めて
5. あなたは、初修外国語チャットを何で知りましたか？ *複数回答可
(a) 留学生に聞いた (b) 留学生以外の学生に聞いた (c) 教員に聞いた
(d) 学内掲示で見た (e) 教務課からのお知らせメールで見た (f) その他 ()
6. 留学したことはありますか？
(a) 夏／春休みに海外研修に参加した経験がある
(b) 夏／春休みに海外研修に参加する予定がある
(c) 1学期間以上の留学経験がある (d) 1学期間以上の留学を予定している
(e) 予定はまだないが、留学したい (f) 留学はしないと思う
(g) その他 ()
7. あなたが、初修外国語チャットに参加した動機は何ですか？ 以下の空欄に記述してください。
8. 初修外国語チャットに参加して、よかったと思うことは何ですか？ 以下の空欄に記述してください。

Foreign students as tutors for 2 FL classes?

9. 逆に、参加する意味がないと思ったことは何ですか？ 以下の空欄に記述してください。
10. 最後に、来学期も来るとしたら、あなたは何を期待しますか？ 以下の空欄に記述してください。

アンケートは以上です。ご協力ありがとうございました。

5.3. Feedback questionnaire for foreign students (German) after end of term²¹

- 1 チューターをする準備に毎回、平均してどのくらい時間がかかりましたか？
Wie viel Zeit haben Sie für die Vorbereitung pro Unterrichtseinheit durchschnittlich gebraucht?
- 2 次のチューターへのアドバイスがあればお願いします。
Haben Sie irgendwelche Ratschläge oder Tipps für die nachfolgenden ausländischen Tutoren?
- 3 この制度に対するご意見があればお願いします。
Wie finden Sie das System der ausländischen Tutoren im Fremdsprachenunterricht an der Universität Niigata? (Kommentare, Meinung etc.)
Herzlichen Dank für Ihre Kooperation. ご協力ありがとうございました。

5.4. Interview questions for German tutors (August 2014)

Q1. Zu Vorbereitung, Form und Durchführung: 準備、形と実施について

Q1.1. Wie haben Sie sich vorbereitet – und wie lange haben Sie dafür gebraucht? どのような風にドイツ語チャットの準備をしましたか？ どのくらい時間がかかりましたか？

Q1.2. Wie haben Sie Ihre Themen gewählt, und wie hat das mit der Durchführung geklappt? テーマはどうやって、選択したか？ 実施はどうでしたか？

Q1.3. Hatten Sie irgendwelche Probleme bei Vorbereitung & Durchführung? Wenn ja, welche? Was fanden Sie schwierig, was einfach?

準備、形や実施の際に何か問題がありましたか？ そうであれば、どんな問題でしたか？ 何が簡単に思ったか、何が難しいと思ったのか？

21 This questionnaire has been sent to all foreign student assistants after the end of term and is not distinguishing between 2 FL chats or work as foreign student assistants in 2 FL courses. The outcome is used to find out specific problems of the foreign students and to provide valuable advice to their successors.

Q1.4. Wie finden Sie die Form (2 Tutoren, 90 Minuten, Rolle der organisierenden Lehrperson)? 今のドイツ語チャットの形はどう思いますか? (90分間、チューター2人で担当、担当教員の役割)

Q1.5. Nach der Erfahrung von einem Jahr Deutsch Chat: Gibt es im Rückblick etwas, dass Sie verbessern oder anders machen würden?

1年間のドイツ語チャットを担当していて、どうでしたか? 振り返ると、何か改善すべく点がありますか?

Q2. Zur Bedeutung / Lerneffekt: ドイツ語チャットの意味&学習効果について

Q2.1. Inwiefern und wie viel, glauben Sie, haben die Teilnehmer sprachlich und kulturell vom Chat profitiert?

ドイツ語チャットの参加者はドイツ語学習や文化交流の面で、どんなことで、どういうふうにも上達したかと思えますか?

Q2.2. Inwiefern und in welcher Form haben Sie als Tutoren vom Chat profitiert? チューターとしてどういう風なメリットがあったかと思えますか?

Q2.3. Welche Vor- und Nachteile sehen Sie beim Chat im Vergleich zum regulären Fremdsprachenunterricht? 普段の外国語の授業と比べると、チャットはどんなメリット、デメリットがあるかと思えますか?

Q2.4. Haben sich durch den Chat auch persönliche Freundschaften, Kontakte ergeben? ドイツ語チャットを通して、個人的な付き合いが生まれませんか?

Q2.5. Haben Sie den Eindruck, dass durch den Chat, das Interesse seitens der Teilnehmer an Sprache / Kultur oder sogar an einem Studium im deutschsprachigen Raum gestiegen ist?

ドイツ語チャット経由で参加者はドイツ語、ドイツ文化圏の興味度、留学願望が増したかと思えますか?

Q.3. An zukünftige Tutoren: 将来のチューターへ:

Welche Tipps oder Ratschläge können Sie den nachfolgenden Tutoren geben?

これから、チャットを担当しているチューターたちにはどんなヒントとアドバイスがありますか?

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