Title: Study Abroad as a Space where Akogare Circulates: A Case Study of Japanese University Students’ Study Abroad Experiences for English Language Learning

Author(s): 北野, 知佳

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# Abstract of Thesis

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Chika Kitano</th>
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**Study Abroad as a Space where Akogare Circulates:**

A Case Study of Japanese University Students’ Study Abroad Experiences for English Language Learning

(「憧れ」のサーキュレーションの空間としての留学: 日本人大学生の語学（英語）留学体験に関する事例研究)

In Japan, the number of students taking part in short-term study abroad (SA) programmes has been notably increasing over the past few decades. Although a short-term SA setting has been chosen as a ‘first-step SA environment’, in general, there has been scarce research that has focused on how short-term SA students perceive themselves and their interlocutors in their SA destinations. Therefore, this study scrutinises a short-term SA setting as a research site, in particular, by shedding light on SA gender issues: SA for English language learning (ELL) in English-speaking countries has been overwhelmingly dominated by Japanese female students rather than male students over the past few decades. As one of the key gendered phenomena in ELL, akogare [Japanese women’s strong romantic desire for or a sense of idolisation towards the West and Western men; in particular, ‘white’ Western men] has been researched from the sociolinguistics and sociological perspectives, although its definition is not fundamentally gendered. There has yet been little interest in the inclusive discussion on akogare in SA or ELL studies in Japan, since its definition has been in the premise of Japanese female sexual desire towards white Western men.

Redefining akogare - not as a mere sexual/romantic desire for the West, but as a strong aspiration consisting of multiple desires, looking for something or someone unattainable in a current place, which necessarily involves physical mobility - two research questions were discursively investigated in this study: 1) What kind of akogare do both Japanese female and male SA students have in the pre-sojourn period? and 2) How does their akogare influence their attitudes towards their interlocutors throughout the sojourn period?

In order to investigate the aforementioned research questions with the emphasis on the mobility aspect of SA and akogare, this study borrowed the concepts of ‘materiality’ and ‘space’ from the theory of ‘Third Space’ (Bhabha, 1994). To be specific, multidimensional ‘space’, which is differentiated from ‘place’ containing only geographical meanings, was employed to investigate the ways in which Japanese SA students perceived themselves and their interlocutors in the status of ‘in-betweenness’ where cross-border physical and psychological experiences are involved. In addition, the concept of materiality was employed to analyse the ways in which akogare for Japanese SA students circulated in the SA settings, by observing both objects of akogare: ‘people’ and ‘thing’, as their significant encounters.

This study presents an exploratory investigation, which consists of a two-phase approach: 1) semi-structured in-depth interviews (N=7), and 2) a questionnaire survey including both open-ended and closed ended questions (N=299). For phase one (Study 1), not only female students (n=5) but also male students (n=2) from the same university participated in the interview sessions which were conducted in
pre- (in Japan), during- (in the UK), and after- (in Japan) sojourn periods throughout a four-week SA programme in the UK. Combining inductive and interpretive analysis, their narrative data was analysed through a thematic map for akogare which was created simultaneously in the process of reviewing literature on SA and ELL. In phase two (Study 2), a questionnaire survey, which comprised 299 participants from seven Japanese universities, was conducted to investigate Japanese university students’ general perceptions and knowledge with respect to SA and ELL, and to deepen understanding of the results of Study 1. Analysis of the closed-ended questions was carried out mainly with the Pearson chi-square tests.

Analysis of the results of Study 1 and Study 2 provided several significant findings and discussions. One of the significant findings is that the concept of ‘the West’ was crucial to explore what constitutes akogare for Japanese SA students. Akogare of the interviewees in Study 1 was divided into two: akogare for Westerners who are equated to the singular entity of the Inner Circle English-speaking countries, and akogare for English speakers not limited to Westerners. It went on to clarify that the boundary between the two groups was delineated by agency’s cognitive distance towards the dominant discourse of the West. In the during-sojourn period, each akogare differentiated the interviewees’ attitudes towards their interlocutors. The theoretical consideration, that SA can be the in-between space functioning as an empowering space to negotiate SA students’ views, provided a rationale for each interviewee’s different attitudes towards their interlocutors. This result and analysis present an implication that well-organised pre-sessional programmes are needed, in particular for short-term SA participants, in the pre-sojourn period. Furthermore, employing the concept of materiality, this study demonstrated that not only akogare for people but also akogare for things largely motivated the interviewees to explore social activities, and the access to akogare for things was linked to the extension of a new self. The consideration of materiality is a quite new theoretical attempt in the fields of akogare, SA and ELL studies.

With discursive inquiries towards the aforementioned two research questions of this study, the research returned to discuss what akogare is in SA settings for ELL: akogare is never obtained or captured, even though language learners physically move to their destinations because there is necessarily a gap between the object of akogare and self in a psychological space. Each akogare circulates in varied orbits influenced by SA students’ micro- and macro-discourse: in this sense, it was discussed that SA vividly reflects the gendered society to which SA students belong. For instance, the results of this study showed most of the interviewees/participants were constrained by Japanese society’s gendered social norm. Finally, this study raises an alarm concerning the depiction of Japanese internationalist women as a collective entity: sexual agency. More straightforwardly, it must be considered who, and what society, portrays Japanese women as a sexualised agency, and there must be careful examination of what/how akogare circulates in SA settings for individual agency.
### 論文審査の結果の要旨

**Title: Study Abroad as a Space where Akogare Circulates: A Case Study of Japanese University Students' Study Abroad Experiences for English Language Learning**

An overseas experience has been framed by policy makers as a necessary rite of passage to become global "jinzai" or global human resources. Various funds have been created by successive governments to encourage university students to have a study abroad (SA) experience in order to acquire linguistic and inter-cultural competencies that will enable them to support the Japanese economy in the context of global competition. While the concept of global "jinzai" is not specifically gendered, the continued marginalization of women in the Japanese workplace means that expectations of men to become global "jinzai" are higher. Yet the reality of SA mobility, is that women rather than men account for the overwhelming majority of SA sojourners. The feminization of Japanese SA has resulted in research that has focused on women’s motivations for studying abroad and the idea of akogare has featured prominently in a number of studies as having explanatory power. Here akogare is defined as a strong heterosexual romantic desire for Western men and idealized ‘native speakers’.

This doctoral thesis builds and expands the parameters of previous studies looking at SA and akogare by investigating whether the latter may be directed at material things and not just people. At the same time, it also asks whether Japanese men might also experience akogare, but differently framed and with alternative targets. This research starts from the premise that akogare, as a SA motivator, may not be simply be about romantic desire, but driven by and a driver of multiple desires; a looking for ‘something or someone unattainable in a current place, which necessarily involves physical mobility’ (p270). Here Chika Kitano draws from a number of disciplines and fields – including sociolinguistics, sociology, gender studies and cultural studies – to provide a sophisticated and nuanced theorizing of akogare as a frame within which ideas about the SA are circulated and experienced. She builds on Homi Bhabha’s idea of Third Space to theorize ‘materiality’ and ‘space’ within which she proposes akogare circulates in SA settings. Here ‘space’ ‘emerges in the relationships between Japanese SA students and the object people/things of their akogare in the process of SA experiences’ (p27). In addition, ‘multiple relationships between ‘people’ and ‘things’ are identified: Japanese SA students and their interlocutors (e.g. ‘people’ such as native English speakers, non-native English speakers, Westerners, Asia, and ‘things’) and explored’(p27).

The study sets out to contribute to the research in this area in three ways:

i. To make a theoretical contribution to the research on akogare in SA settings.

ii. Analyse the narratives of Japanese SA students’ discursively by looking at their relationship with ‘people’ and ‘things’ in the pre-, during- and post-sojourn periods.
iii. Clarify the implications of the findings with regards to educational support and theoretical understandings of Japanese SA students’ attitudes in short-term SA settings.

There were two arms to this study, an in-depth qualitative study of eight students from the same university who participated together in a short-term, four-week SA experience that was primarily for English language study. The students were interviewed before, during and after their sojourn. The researcher went to the study destination to collect this data. Participants were also invited to submit photos via SNS platforms and diary accounts of their SA experience as it happened. Thus, the study was able to capture the experience at three different stages in time, and in verbal, written and visual form making this rich data. This research primarily aimed at addressing research questions 1 and 2. On the basis of the analysis of this data, a 16 item questionnaire survey was created to ‘quantitatively identify the general images of desired interlocutors in SA settings and that of desired marriage partners for those respondents who have the willingness to [do] SA in English-speaking countries in comparison to those who do not have the willingness to SA’ (p85). Students in six universities (four private and two public) in the Kansai region were targeted and completed questionnaires were received back from 299 students (178 female and 121 male students). Efforts were made to get a balance between those with a SA experience and those without. Data from this arm of the study primarily addressed research question 3.

The main findings of the study were as follows. Firstly, analysis of the discursive framing of SA and English Language Learning (ELL) showed that while in official government literature the idea of global jinzai was masculinized, the vast array of literature promoting SA experiences was heavily feminized and articulated stereotypical ideas around ‘native speaker-ism’ and idealized images of White, blond and blue-eyed men as the perfect interlocutors. In both studies it was found that a concept of the ‘West’ was a crucial part of the akogare expressed by male and female students. In the qualitative study, the results showed that many students expressed an akogare for Westerners stereotypically construed as White, ‘native speakers from what Kitano and others have described as Inner Circle English-speaking countries. Others had akogare for that fluent English speakers, but not limited to ‘Westerners’ or ‘native’ English speakers. Those in the second group displayed a ‘cognitive distance towards the dominant discourse of the West and English language learners’ and from an internalization of the discourse in SA/ELL settings’ prevalent in the literature and sales material (p256). It was found that pre-sojorn ideas were reflected in different attitudes towards their interlocutors in the sojourn period between these two groups. ‘To be specific, the interviewees whose akogare was restricted to Western people showed relatively critical views towards non-Western and non-native English speakers’ (p258). In contrast, participants whose akogare was not limited to ‘Western people’, ‘showed more respectful attitudes towards non-Western English speakers’ (p258). Next, akogare created the dynamic for mobility. In both arms of the study, participants clearly articulated ideas and created visual ideals revealing their expectation that mobility to the SA destination would enable them to attain something unattainable in Japan. This included the materiality of contact with the English language and ‘the West’. It was also about creating and acquiring images of the West. There were expectations of the attainment of a new psychological orientation as a result of this contact. Thus akogare that circulated around SA was much more than (heterosexual) romantic desire for a person. Finally, the questionnaire survey revealed that many of the women who had or desired to do a SA linked this to improving their career prospects, suggesting that the global jinzai can shape the SA desires of women as well and men (p268). This study brings new theoretical tools for examining the phenomenon of SA and akogare, as well new insights. It also practical insights that should be used to prepare students for study overseas.