Essay

Japanese, English or Multi-Language? Communicating with Foreign Students in Japanese Universities

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The number of foreign students in Japanese universities has been increasing rapidly year by year*. This is regarded as the result of various support programs such as the 'Global 30 Program'** provided by the Japanese Government.

For example, my laboratory in Kyoto University includes seven faculty members and twenty one graduate students now. Among them, two of the faculty members and eleven graduate students are from foreign countries such as China, Nepal, Finland, Australia and United States. We expect a few more from Netherland, Indonesia and Vietnam in the next semester.

Before the Global 30 Program was launched, most classes and course works were given in Japanese. As a result, foreign students, first of all, had to learn Japanese. Though research discussions could be done in English, since the majority of laboratory members were Japanese, it was natural that they thought the *official* language to be Japanese, all announcements and daily discussions were done in Japanese in due course.

But, the situation has dramatically changed in the last few years. Our department has officially announced that students could finish their Master and PhD courses in English, classes and course works would be given in both English and Japanese. For the time being, major players in my laboratory, especially in the PhD courses, are foreign students.

As a result, a serious language problem has arisen in the laboratory. Most Japanese students are not good at speaking, listening to, and writing English, though they can read English quite well. Most Chinese and other Asian students are not really fluent in English when they arrive at the laboratory. Many foreign students can speak Japanese but not read it or write it well. Instead, some foreign students don't understand Japanese at all.

Fig.1 Students presenting and discussing their research topics in a multi-language and multi-culture environment to communicate their research ideas in their mother languages, in the laboratory.
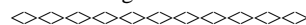
The question is what language we should use in the laboratory for daily research discussions. Shall we keep Japanese as the official language? Shall we shift from Japanese to English to follow the globalization trend of education and research activities? Or, shall we create a multi-language, multi-culture laboratory, which no one has ever tried before?

It is not easy to answer this question, but we are currently trying the third direction: towards a multi-language, multi-culture laboratory. Since we have Chinese and Australian faculty members, we decided to allow students to present their work in Japanese, English, Chinese or mixed one, if students think it is the best way for them to communicate their research ideas. Please do not see this as the common trend in Japanese universities. This would be a quite extreme example of the third direction because a scheme of our laboratory is to study *Intercultural Collaboration* (see it at *http://www.ai.soc.i.kyoto-u.ac.jp/intercultural_ collaboration.html*).

To support the multi-language communication, we have developed a *multi-language community site* using the Language Grid *** that enables students to use multi-language chat and presentations. Fortunately, most students prepare English slides and documents, though their English is not very good. In the worst case, students just try to use the machine translation function of the Language Grid to create English slides and documents, but it might be still better than doing nothing. A few Japanese students use English for their presentation, and the other Japanese students stick with Japanese. From the standpoint of reciprocity, why then can't allow foreign students use their mother tongue? That is the reason why we allow all students to use any language for their presentation. Of course, the goal is to find the best way of communicating their research ideas over the language barrier.

We all understand that English is the most efficient language in a research community for Informatics. At the same time, we believe in the spirit of respecting different languages and cultures, and of doing our best towards intercultural communication to help students to work together in Asia and the world in future, where the diversity would be the first principle.

What do you think? Is it a good idea?

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Hot Topics

The 4th EU-Japan Symposium on the "New Generation Network" and the "Future Internet" was successfully held by NICT

The international event, The 4th EU-Japan Symposium on the "New Generation Network" and the "Future Internet" was held at TKP Tokyo Eki Yaesu Conference Center on January 19, 2012. It was organized by National Institute of Information and Communications Technology (NICT) and co-organized by European Commission (EC). The first Symposium was commenced by NICT and EC's Information Society and Media Directorate-General (DG-INFSO) in 2008, to step up the collaborative research activities, and it has been followed every year. NICT and EC agreed to evolve the joint research activities over testbeds in 2011 and the 4th Symposium was focused on issues to be solved in collaboration between Japan and EU.

The Symposium was inaugurated with Welcome Address by Dr.Hideo Miyahara, President, NICT, Dr.Zoran Stan či č gave a speech on EU's Digital Policy covering the New Generation Network (NWGN) and the Future Internet (FI), and Mr. Shigeyuki Kubota, Director-General of International and Technology Policy, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) gave Opening Remarks. The Symposium venue was full with about 170 participants. In Plenary Session, Prof.Tomonori Aoyama, NICT/Keio University overviewed the R&D of NWGN and FI in Japan, Ms.Megan Richards, Director, Directorate-D/INFSO:Convereged Networks and Services gave a Plenary Speech on FI research perspectives based on EU policy.

Fig.2 Dr.Hideo Miyahara's Welcome Address

Fig.3 Dr.Zoran Stan či č giving Guest Speech

Fig.4 Mr.Shigeyuki Kubota giving Opening Remarks

Fig.5 Prof.Tomonori Aoyama giving Plenary Speech

Fig.6 Ms.Megan Richards giving Plenary Speech

Fig.7 Symposium venue full of many participants

Following the Plenary Session, six technological Sessions were provided to cover interesting topics of green content centric networking, ultrahigh data rate WLAN, Internet & Things and Cloud Computing, empirical R&D of FI over Japan and EU testbeds and the security issues against cyber threats.

The secretariat of the Symposium was managed by Dr.Nozomu Nishinaga, Network Research h.q., NWGN Laboratory, NICT. See the details of the Symposium with speech materials at *http://www.prime-pco.com/4thJEUsymposium/program_e.html*. *(Reporter: Kenzo Takahashi, IEICE-TFIPP)*

Call for Papers in Time

TJMW2012- 2012 Thailand-Japan MicroWave, IEICE Electronics Society
Date of Conference: August 8-10, 2012

100 word Abstract submission deadline: June 1, 2012
Final manuscript submission deadline: June 15, 2012
Acceptance notification June 30, 2012
Contact: Dr.Tuptim Angkaew at *tuptim.a@chula.ac.th*
APCC2012- The 18th Asia-Pacific Conference on Communications, IEICE Communications Society
Date of Conference: October 15-17, 2012

Paper submission deadline: May 1, 2012
Notification of acceptance: June 30, 2012
Tutorial proposals: June 30, 2012
Contact: TPC Secretariat at *secretariat@apcc2012.org* or Dr.Takashi Shimizu at *t-shimizu@m.ieice.org*
ISAP2012- International Symposium on Antennas and Propagation, IEICE Communications Society
Date of Conference: October 29-November 2, 2012

Paper submission deadline: April 27, 2012
Contact: Organizing Committee at *isap-2012@mail.ieice.org*
IWSEC2012- The 7th International Workshop on Security, IEICE Engineering Sciences Society
Date of Conference: November 7-9, 2012

Paper submission deadline: May 2, 2012
Notification of acceptance: June 6, 2012
Contact: Secretariat at *iwsec2012@inf.kyushu-u.ac.jp*
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Upcoming International Conferences

APMP2012- IEICE Electronics Soc., in Kyoto, Japan, on April 25-27, 2012, *http://www.apmp2012.org/Asia-Pacific_Microwave_Photonics_Conference_2012/Home.html*
VTC2012-Spring in Yokohama- IEICE Communications Soc. & Engineering Sciences Soc., at Pacifico Yokohama in Yokohama, Japan, on May 6-9, 2012, *http://www.vtc2012spring.org/*
STF2012- IEICE Communications Soc., in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina,on May 24-25, 2012, *http://www.iwwtf.com/*.
COIN2012- IEICE Communications Soc., in Yokohama, Japan, on May 29-31, 2012, *http://www.ieice.org/~COIN2012/*
ISOME2012- IEICE Electronics Soc., at NTT Musashino Research Center, Musashino, Tokyo, Japan, on June 7-8, 2012, *http://www.ieice.org/eng/s_issue/cfp/2013_3EC_2.pdf*.
ITC-CSCC2012- IEICE Engineering Sciences Soc., in Sapporo, Japan, on July 15-18, 2012, *http://www.knt.co.jp/ec/2012/itc-cscc/*
TJMW2012- IEICE Electronics Soc., in Bangkok, Thailand, on August 8-10, 2012, *http://www-ap.apsci.yamaguchi-u.ac.jp/TJMW2012/TJMW2012/Home.html*
APCC2012- IEICE Communications Soc., in Jeju Island, Korea, during October 15-17, 2012, *http://apcc2012.org/main/*.
ISITA2012- IEICE Electronics Soc., in Hawaii, USA, on October 28-31, 2012, *http://www.isita.ieice.org/2012/*
ISAP2012- IEICE Communications Soc., in Nagoya, Japan, on October 29-November 2, 2012, *http://www.isap12.org/*
APSITT2012- IEICE Communications Soc., in Santiago and Valparaíso, Republic of Chile, on November 5-9, 2012, *http://www.ieice.org/cs/in/APSITT/2012*.
IWSEC2012- IEICE Engineering Sciences Soc., in Fukuoka, Japan, on November 7-9, 2012, *http://www.iwsec.org/2012/*
ICPR2012- IEICE Information Systems Soc., in Tsukuba, Japan, on November 11-15, 2012, *http://www.icpr2012.org/*
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Message from TFIPP Secretariat

This issue is delivered also by a free mail magazine "IEICE Global Plaza on Line" with updated news of interest for you. Please contact Prof.Takahashi, TFIPP (Task Force for International Policy and Planning) at *global@ieice.org*, if you need. Back numbers are available in archives at *http://www.ieice.org/eng/global_plaza/index.html/*.