Translation and Trust:
A Case Study of How Translation was Experienced by Foreign Nationals Resident in Japan for the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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ID No.: 57210947

Date: ________________________
Acknowledgements

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Publications and presentations from this research

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Abstract

Patrick Cadwell

Translation and Trust: A Case Study of How Translation was Experienced by Foreign Nationals Resident in Japan for the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake

This thesis examines translation and interpreting in a particular context: the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. Motivated by the researcher’s experience of being resident in Tokyo when the disaster struck, a study was carried out to better understand translation and interpreting in this context using the case of foreign residents who experienced the disaster. A constructivist philosophical approach and the academic traditions of ethnography were adopted when designing the case study, and face-to-face, individual interviews with 28 participants from 12 nationalities (Irish, Dutch, French, German, Sudanese, Tunisian, Chinese, Bangladeshi, American, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealander) made up its core primary data. The diverse linguistic and demographic profiles of these participants provided access to multiple perspectives on the objects of enquiry. These perspectives were then analysed over six phases of thematic analysis to describe and explain how foreign residents communicated and gathered information, how translation and interpreting formed part of these activities, and why any of this was important. The analysis suggested that the objects of enquiry can best be understood as written and oral interlingual and intercultural transfer, dominated by the Japanese-English language pair, carried out mostly by volunteers known to the user, to create products that were not always received as translations, but that were valorised when seen to produce timely information of adequate quality. It also suggested that a lack of sufficient resources and a strongly culturally-bound space of interaction created problems for translation and interpreting. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that trust was a significant category in these data. For this reason, a socio-cognitive model of trust was selected and applied to the data to describe and explain the role that translation and interpreting played in some foreign residents’ decisions to trust and to argue for the importance of these phenomena to the existence of trust in this and other disasters.

Keywords: translation and interpreting; disaster; Great East Japan Earthquake; case study; ethnography; trust theory
Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis enquires into the phenomena of translation and interpreting in disaster situations and uses the concept of trust as a theoretical lens to further examine these objects. A disaster is taken here to be ‘[a] serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope’ (UNISDR 2009: 9). A disaster can also usefully be thought of as passing through four phases: pre-event, lasting only seconds or minutes; event, lasting about one week after onset; response, lasting about one month after onset; recovery, lasting about one year after onset (WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific 2012: 58). The thesis situates its arguments mainly in the small body of literature in the domain of translation studies on the topics of disaster translation and interpreting, but also engages with certain literature in associated areas – disaster studies, crisis communication, computational linguistics, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and business studies – to ensure that all important themes are considered. These themes include the profiles of translators and interpreters working in disaster settings, the practical and ethical issues that they encounter, ways to support and improve their work, as well as the voluntary capacity of much of these efforts and how the interaction between volunteers and official disaster responders can be improved. The literature also discusses the methods of communication used in disasters – especially information and communication technology (ICT) – and how they correspond to collaborative translation, to machine translation (MT), and to translator and interpreter training. A detailed review of the above literature and of the academic debates therein is presented in Chapter 2.

The scope of this thesis is limited largely to one disaster context: the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (the 2011 disaster). This context was chosen firstly because of the researcher’s own experience of the setting; he was resident in Tokyo at the onset of the disaster. In addition, though, Japan is an information-rich, digitally-enabled society. It has a population of foreign residents, multiple links to the global community, and is frequently exposed to high-risk threats such as earthquakes and tsunamis. As such, studying the long and complex context of the 2011 disaster was expected to reveal a large volume and wide variety of disaster-related communicative activities that would potentially involve translation and/or interpreting. The context was examined to answer three questions:
• How did foreign residents communicate and gather information during the 2011 disaster? (See Chapter 4)
• How did translation and interpreting form part of foreign residents’ communication and information gathering in the 2011 disaster? (See Chapter 5)
• Why are issues of translation and interpreting important to the 2011 disaster or to other disaster contexts? (See Chapter 6)

A methodology – adapted from the work of Kaisa Koskinen (2008) and situated in a constructivist philosophical frame – was developed to answer these questions. Koskinen applied a selection of ethnographic methods and was guided by an overall ethnographic ethos to present a case study of a translating institution (ibid.: 3, 37). Similarly, the case study methodology in this thesis was informed by certain methods and theories from ethnography to describe, understand, and explain the phenomena of translation and interpreting in the 2011 disaster using the case of foreign nationals who were resident in East Japan at the time. Koskinen’s work was adapted for this research because her methodology was suited to the ‘situated analysis of a particular group of people’ (ibid.: 36), because it offered ways to systematically capitalise on a researcher’s previous personal experience of a research context, and because it promised guidance in negotiating the insider and outsider identities that a researcher with such past experience holds. Face-to-face, individual interviews with 28 participants from 12 nationalities (Irish, Dutch, French, German, Sudanese, Tunisian, Chinese, Bangladeshi, American, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealander) made up the core primary data gathered using this methodology. These and other secondary data were analysed using a form of thematic analysis operationalised from Braun and Clarke (2006) in which themes were developed over six phases that progressed from participant-led, to interpretive, to abstract analysis. Discussion of the architecture of theory and method that was used to gather and analyse the data in this thesis and of the practical steps implemented within this architecture is provided in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 begins to provide an answer to the first research question posed in this thesis; how did foreign residents communicate and gather information during the 2011 disaster? To do so, it describes the environment in which communication and information gathering were being carried out, it indicates the types of foreign resident who were involved in these communicative acts, and it analyses in detail how these foreign residents went about these acts. Specifically, the chapter comprises an overview of the disaster, an explanation of how the boundaries of this enquiry into the disaster have been established, the researcher’s autoethnographic account of his experiences of the disaster, short descriptions of four other
foreign residents’ experiences of the disaster, and an illustration of some of the content of relevant communication and information gathering.

This detailed exploration of how the foreign residents in this case study communicated and gathered information in the 2011 disaster began to indicate that issues of language and culture may have been involved in the communicative scene for them. Chapter 5, then, begins a more rigorous and systematic examination of the phenomena of translation and interpreting and proposes an answer to the second research question in this thesis; how did translation and interpreting form part of foreign residents’ communication and information gathering in the 2011 disaster? The main aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explain the ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’, ‘how’, and ‘who’ of translation and interpreting in this one disaster context. The chapter establishes that the phenomena of translation and interpreting are worthy of academic enquiry and operationalises a definition of these phenomena for this research. Hence, Translation (operationalised in this research with an uppercase T) comes to mean: a process of written and oral interlingual and intercultural transfer, dominated by the Japanese-English language pair, carried out mostly by volunteers known to the user, to create products that were not always received as translations, but that were valorised when seen to produce timely information of adequate quality and when seen to come from trusted sources. In short, this chapter provides empirical evidence – admittedly on a small scale, but rigorously gathered and analysed nonetheless – that Translation was received and provided by foreign residents in the 2011 disaster and begins to suggest that it formed a significant part of their experiences. But was Translation, in fact, really important for the foreign residents in this study?

Chapter 6 deals with this topic and proposes an answer to the final research question in the thesis; why are issues of translation and interpreting important to the 2011 disaster or to other disaster contexts? A review of the literature showed that there is precedent to a limited extent for using the concept of trust as an analytical category in translation studies, especially with regard to issues such as professionalism, ethics, and collaborative practices. This review also showed that trust is a much-discussed and highly relevant concept in disaster contexts, especially in relation to disaster communication. As a result, trust was deemed to be an appropriate conceptual lens through which to systematically examine the case study data and answer the final research question. Specifically, the thesis makes use of a socio-cognitive theory of trust developed by Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) in which they identify and formalise the conceptual components and relationships that are necessary and sufficient to theoretically explain the phenomenon of trust. This theory is complex and takes time to explain, but it is also robust, well-delimited, and has good explanatory power.
for the purposes of this thesis. The explanations provided by the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model indicate that Translation is, at times, theoretically relevant to the concept of trust. Therefore, as trust can be shown to be important to the 2011 disaster and to other disaster contexts, we have a viable answer to the final research question in this thesis; Translation is important to the 2011 disaster and beyond because of its relationship to trust.

With answers thus proposed to the three research questions in this project, the thesis ends in Chapter 7 by setting out the contributions of the thesis to knowledge, by arguing for the significance of these contributions while recognising their limitations, by identifying and refuting alternative answers to the final research question, and by identifying prospects for future work arising out of the thesis.
‘All understanding, and the demonstrative statement of understanding which is translation, starts with an act of trust.’

George Steiner, Philosopher (1929 – present)
Chapter 2 – Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This research enquires into the phenomena of language and culture in times of disaster with a particular academic focus on issues of translation and interpreting and on how these issues relate to the concept of trust. As a result, this thesis engages with the relevant literature and academic debates in the domain of translation studies in particular. However, it also looks to the literature in associated areas – disaster studies, crisis communication, computational linguistics, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and business studies – to review all relevant important themes. Even so, the final aim of this thesis is to contribute to the literature in translation studies, and reference to other literat

ures will be accordingly limited in scope.

This chapter begins in Section 2.2 with an illustrative review to indicate the scope of authorship and the major themes related to translation and interpreting in disaster settings in the literature. There follows, in Section 2.3, a more detailed discussion of this literature. Then, Section 2.4 presents a review of literature on the concept of trust: the analytical category that has been used in this thesis to tie the research findings into a coherent narrative.

2.2 Literature on translation, interpreting, and disaster: scoping review

A series of title-only searches of the Elsevier Scopus and Google Scholar databases were carried out using the logic that academic authors place keywords from their abstracts in their titles. These databases were chosen for their relevance to publication within translation studies. The search strings created were made up of keywords taken from the research questions set out in Chapter 1 along with certain synonyms and variations of these words. It must be acknowledged at this point that the selection of these databases and the keywords used introduced a significant English-language bias to the literature reviewed. Research on relevant topics is likely available in other languages but has not been referenced here. Nevertheless, the searches initially returned 911 academic works, with 632 coming from Scopus and 279 coming from Google Scholar, as has been detailed in Table 2–1.

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1 While certain authors working on issues of interpreting may prefer to situate their work in the discipline of interpreting studies rather than translation studies, this disciplinary distinction has been ignored here for convenience.
Searches relating to the keywords ‘emergency’ and ‘crisis’ accounted for the majority of these 911 works. The relevance to this study of these works was checked by reading their titles and, when necessary, their abstracts. This showed that most of these works dealt with medical interpreting or translation in the emergency wards of hospitals or with the translation of information relating to an economic crisis (e.g., translation at the time of the Global Financial Crisis). These are high-risk contexts, but they do not correspond to the definition of a disaster set out in Chapter 1. Therefore, such works were not seen as being relevant to this thesis and were removed from consideration. It was also necessary to remove any works which used the concepts of translation or interpretation outside of the meaning of interlingual or intercultural transfer. Thus, this scoping review did not consider any works that:

- used translation only to mean ‘change into’ (e.g., translate from theory to practice);
- used interpret only to mean ‘understand’ (e.g., to interpret findings);
- referred to translational science or knowledge translation approaches to research;
- referred to ‘technical translation’ in the sense of monolingual simplification of complex technical concepts or details.

Following this relevance check, 59 titles remained (see, again, Table 2 - 1). 26 titles remained in Scopus and 33 remained in Google Scholar. Once the overlap of any titles that appeared in both of these databases had been accounted for, 21 individual works dealing with translation or interpreting in disaster settings remained. As such, this initial scoping review of the literature indicated that discussion on these topics is not extensive. Within

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Table 2-1. Search of titles relevant to this thesis in the Scopus and Google Scholar databases
Table 2.2: Detail on the results of an initial scoping literature review

Table 2.2 indicates that authors have been working over the last decade to draw on a variety of disaster contexts across Europe, Asia, America and Africa. Publication has not been restricted to journals (but has included books, conference proceedings, and even official reports) and has been largely interdisciplinary in nature, with the dividing lines between translation studies, information science, disaster studies, and health studies becoming blurred. However, Table 2.2 provides a summary of the main issues of concern.
blurred. Authors have been interested in both interpreting and translation and have been concerned with issues relating to the voluntary work of interpreters in disaster settings, as well as volunteer crowdsourcing, and practical issues of how translation is carried out in disasters. For the purposes of this thesis, then, this snapshot of the existing literature supports the idea of enquiring into both translation and interpreting in the 2011 disaster and encourages the examination of diverse channels of publication across various disciplines. It suggests that the thesis should not be restricted to a purely professional definition of translation and interpreting, and it indicates that the thesis should look at the specific ways in which mediated communication took place in the 2011 disaster, considering the interest in the literature in the technological aspects of translation and interpreting.

Of course, much relevant literature was not captured in this title-only search. For this reason, the next section provides a more comprehensive, discursive review based on the researcher’s reading of the literature inside and outside the academic sphere, on his attendance at relevant conferences, and on his attempts at publication.

2.3 Literature on translation, interpreting, and disaster: discursive review

This section discusses the main issues of concern to authors writing on translation and interpreting in disaster settings. It deals firstly with translation studies, then with disaster studies, and finally with other disciplines and works published outside of the academy.

2.3.1 Translation, interpreting, and disaster in translation studies

The first dominant theme in the translation studies literature relates to the work of interpreters in disaster settings. A variety of high-risk events that overwhelmed the societies in which they took place have been used as contexts for these studies: earthquakes in Turkey (Bulut and Kurultay 2001, Doğan and Kahraman 2011, Kurultay and Bulut 2012); conflict in Somalia and its effect on the people there and in refugee camps in Kenya (Moser-Mercer and Bali 2007, Moser-Mercer, Kherbiche, and Class 2014); conflicts in Syria or Iraq and their effect on the people there and in refugee camps in Jordan (Businaro 2012, Kherbiche 2009); conflicts involving Finnish military interpreters (Snellman 2014); the combined earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan (Cadwell 2014, Cadwell 2015, Mizuno 2012, Naito 2012, Naito 2013, Tsuruta 2011). These works explore the influence of linguistic and cultural barriers on the contexts chosen, the profiles and roles of the interpreters working in these contexts, the practical and ethical issues that they encounter in their work, and ways to better support and improve their work. Many authors underline the frequent absence of specialised training in the interpreting work done in these
high-risk settings. However, at the same time, some other authors show that use of the term volunteer can be problematic when applied to these interpreters. They underline that volunteer does not equate with nonprofessional and that some volunteer interpreters working in these zones of crisis do hold professional qualifications. Also, they show that the interpreting work studied is generally not done in return for remuneration, but can come, at times, with other rewards in kind. Much work has been done on what motivates volunteers and on the impact on quality and the professional status of translators (e.g., McDonough Dolmaya 2012, O’Hagan 2011, Pérez-González and Susam-Sarajeva 2012), and these ideas are relevant to the work of interpreters in times of disaster, too.

The second dominant theme in the translation studies literature concerns the role of ICT in disasters and how it corresponds to translation and interpreting activities. Contexts include the use of MT in disaster settings in China (Lin et al. 2009) and in Japan (Ikeda, Yoshioka, and Kitamura 2010), and on how technology can facilitate collaborative translation in disasters in Japan (Kageura et al. 2011). The largest body of work on this theme, though, looks at the use of ICT to facilitate crowdsourced translation and MT efforts in the 2010 Haiti Earthquake. In this disaster, the majority of emergency responders spoke languages other than Haitian Creole and French, the official languages of Haiti. Thus, in an effort to facilitate communication between the residents of Haiti and the responders, technologically-proficient volunteer organisations based outside of Haiti used various technology platforms as well as basic ICT (such as landlines, mobile telephones, or chat rooms) to process the content generated by Haitians and create maps, translate text messages, create person-finder tools, or build MT engines (Lewis 2010, Lewis, Munro, and Vogel 2011, Morrow et al. 2011, Munro 2010, Munro 2013).

In addition to the above dominant themes, other works in the translation studies literature look at the training of translators for work specifically in crisis settings (O’Brien forthcoming), signed interpreting services over television in times of disaster (McKee 2014), how translation is used to structure the narratives or journalistic products around a disaster (Harding 2011, Lian 2008), and whether providing translated information is preferable to providing information in one of the dominant languages of a disaster setting (Carroll 2012).
2.3.2 Translation, interpreting, and disaster in disaster studies

Issues of translation and interpreting are notable for their absence in the disaster studies literature. Translation and interpreting (in the sense of interlingual or intercultural transfer) are dealt with in only a cursory manner, if at all. Core texts, such as Drabek (2003, 2010) and Quarantelli (1978, 1987) do not treat these topics at all. In Auf Der Heide (1989), foreign language translators are mentioned as a resource that could be useful in a disaster, but only in an appendix and without any accompanying discussion, and it remains unclear whether this term is taken to include interpreters. Issues of language and culture are treated briefly in Rodríguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes (2006), where these concepts are problematised for the otherness they create, and in Farazmand (2014), where they are considered with reference to disaster researchers working in developing countries and are, again, seen mainly as problems. The sub-discipline of crisis communication is similarly silent on translation and interpreting, and only sparse evidence for consideration of interlingual or intercultural transfer in disasters can be found (see O’Brien [forthcoming]).

However, it is still possible to learn about translating and interpreting in disasters by looking to the disaster studies literature. Disaster Relief 2.0, published by Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (2011), argues for increased cooperation and dialogue between humanitarian agencies and technical and linguistic volunteers spread around the globe. This call arose from looking at the experiences of those volunteers who helped process the communication generated by the disaster-affected communities in the 2010 Haiti Earthquake. The work also calls for deeper interactions in future disasters between those responding to and those experiencing a disaster. This document even identifies translation as a perennial hidden issue in disaster relief that causes delays and poor communication, and yet only one paragraph of the 72-page report deals specifically with the topic of translation. There are also useful studies of how disaster responders – especially medical teams – can improve their interactions with translators and interpreters in disaster settings (e.g., Bolton and Weiss 2001, Freeth 1993, Powell and Pagliara-Miller 2012). However, the pitfalls in these interactions tend to be defined by the responder side, and the issues do not seem to be questioned from the perspective of the providers of translation and interpreting in these works or those needing these services.

Much can be learned about the context of the 2011 disaster from the disaster studies literature. For instance, there are comprehensive works on disaster management issues (Claremont 2014, Suzuki and Kaneko 2013), on disaster risk reduction issues (Shaw 2014), on the special effect of education and voluntarism on the disaster outcomes (Shaw and Takeuchi 2012), and especially on the issues brought about by the nuclear element of the
2011 disaster (Birmingham and McNeill 2012, Kingston 2012). However, none of these works deals with linguistic or cultural issues in any systematic way in that they do not reference scholarship or apply any of the categories or theoretical frameworks prevalent in translation studies or other related disciplines such as linguistics or intercultural studies.

2.3.3 *Translation, interpreting, and disaster discussed elsewhere*

Looking to some other academic disciplines for discussion of translation and interpreting in disaster can be instructive, and the domains of information science and health studies provide several useful references.

Authors in information science and health studies share the dominant concerns of translation scholars detailed in Section 2.3.1; they examine how ICT and the services of interpreters were used in various disaster settings and suggest ways for how these uses could be improved. For instance, several authors working in information science use the examples of the 2010 Haiti Earthquake or the 2011 disaster in Japan to examine how ICT – especially the Internet – can facilitate crowdsourced information processing, translation, and novel forms of information distribution in disaster settings (Hester, Shaw, and Biewald 2010, Hu et al. 2011, Murakami 2014, Sutherlin 2013, Tanaka et al. 2007). The concern of authors in health studies, however, is the need for the specialised training of medical interpreters to allow them to work effectively in disaster or emergency settings, especially to be able to deal with the specific physical and mental health risks and ethical dilemmas involved in such contexts (Greenstone 2010, Shiu-Thornton et al. 2007).

Much can be learned, too, about the general communicative scene in the 2011 disaster by looking to those authors working in the domain of communications. While most of these works deal with issues of interlingual or intercultural transfer tangentially at best, they help to give a detailed understanding of the experiences of those communicating in Japanese in the 2011 disaster. For instance, works deal with: the role played by the mass media in the 2011 disaster (Asari and Kimura 2011, Fukuda 2012); the various communicative methods that were used and their relative effectiveness (Jōhō shien purobono purattofōmu 2012, Kaigo 2012); the different experiences of certain social groups, in particular the elderly or those in rural areas who may have been at an information disadvantage (Tanaka, Shineha, and Maruyama 2012); the importance of trust to disaster communication and how trust in the Japanese government and nuclear power operators was lost (Kageura 2013).
Though authors in the domain of communications fail to deal systematically with translation and interpreting and do not focus on the experiences of populations other than those identifying themselves as Japanese, authors in other disciplines do give us some insight into the experiences of foreign nationals and do address issues of language and culture in the 2011 disaster. In sociology, Ohara-Hirano (2012) examines the disaster from the perspective of Indonesian nurses transferred to Japan after the outbreak of the 2011 disaster. In business studies, Bebenroth (2014) examines how the disaster impacted on foreign employees working at German subsidiaries in Japan in 2011. Meanwhile in economics, Bhula-or and Ikemoto (2014) approach the disaster from the perspective of labour economics and socio-economic development using a study of migrant workers and come to the conclusion that in disaster in Japan ‘[l]inguistic barriers and inaccessibility to “understandable” information are the main problem for foreigners’ (Bhula-or and Ikemoto 2014: 1000).

Finally, works published outside academic channels – especially by major disaster responders, governmental authorities, and NGOs – are another source of rich information on disaster contexts and, to a certain extent, on how issues of translation and interpreting manifest in these contexts. The World Disasters Report series and other publications of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are influential and present broad, deep research on various aspects of disaster settings in a practical and user-friendly way. From the point of view of translation and interpreting, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2005) focusing on information in disasters, (2006) focusing on disaster management in a global world, (2013) focusing on technology, and (2014) focusing on culture are particularly relevant. Various reports by other NGOs and governmental authorities tackle the 2011 disaster context specifically and show a particular interest in how to improve disaster-related communication (Appleby 2013, Japanese Red Cross Society 2012, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication of Japan 2013). Disappointingly, though, the reports mentioned so far focus on the supply-side of disaster information, and the voices of consumers of such information are largely absent from these studies.

Of course, translation, interpreting, and consideration of the experiences of foreign nationals of disaster are not entirely absent from the humanitarian and governmental discourse, and some works do treat these issues. The Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada (2003) provides a comprehensive disaster terminology database for translators and interpreters working in the Canadian locales, and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (2014: 200) provides the strongest
recognition so far in this discourse that culture and translation are issues that should not be ignored in disaster contexts. Specific to Japan, too, there are many reports by various NGOs that consider the experiences of foreign nationals of disasters in Japan, identify translation and interpreting as one set of tools that can be used to provide assistance to these populations, and give general advice to foreigners in Japan about what to do if they experience a disaster (Miyagi International Association 2013, Sendai City Government 2011, Sendai International Relations Association 2011, Tokyo International Communication Committee 2011).

2.4 Literature on trust

Having now outlined the relevant literature and debates concerning the objects of enquiry in this thesis – translation and interpreting in disaster settings – this section will review the literature on the analytical category that has been used in this thesis to theoretically examine these objects in more detail: trust. (See Chapter 6 for this trust-based analysis of translation and interpreting.)

2.4.1 Trust theory

There are various views taken on the concept of trust in a variety of disciplines: ethics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, political science, economics, and business studies. The accounts of trust across these disciplines fall into two categories: firstly, holistic accounts that attempt to explain trust with reference to broader social or cultural phenomena; secondly, reductionist accounts that ultimately attempt to explain trust through the lenses of subjective probabilities, rational calculations, or strategic self-interest.

2.4.1.1 Key works in the literature

Some key authors in the holistic camp include sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1979), organisational theorist Bart Nooteboom (2002), and sociologist Piotr Sztompka (1999). Luhmann and Nooteboom see trust as a way for dealing with the risks and uncertainties of social life. Luhmann sees trust as ‘a device for coping with the freedom of other persons’ (Luhmann 1979 cited in Dunn 1988: 80), and Nooteboom views it as a wager taken on the future options of others and ourselves with respect to behaviour in the face of radical uncertainty (Nooteboom 2002: 188). While still considering social life, Sztompka (1999) considers trust to be a dimension of culture and analyses how cultures of trust can emerge and decay, with particular reference to communist and post-communist societies.
In the reductionist camp we find social psychologist Morton Deutsch (1958, 1973), social scientist Diego Gambetta (1988), and political scientist Russell Hardin (2002, 2006). Both Deutsch and Gambetta draw on aspects of game theory – in particular, the so-called ‘Prisoner’s Dilemma’ game – to explore rationales for trusting and cooperating under various experimental and thought-experimental conditions. For them, trust is usefully reduced to a subjective probability. The main idea might be summarised as follows:

When we say we trust someone or that someone is trustworthy, we implicitly mean that the probability that he will perform an action that is beneficial or at least not detrimental to us is high enough for us to consider engaging in some form of cooperation with him. (Gambetta 1988: 217)

Alternatively, Hardin (2002) argues that much of trust can usefully be explained by reducing it to an explanation in terms of ‘encapsulated interest’, by which he means that we trust another, essentially, because we believe they have our interest at heart in some way (Hardin 2002: 1).

Other less influential, but nonetheless interesting and informative, works on trust include Rousseau et al. (1998), who conduct a review of trust research across disciplines to assess the level of agreement existing on meanings of trust and on how trust is analysed; Möllering (2006), who examines how reason, routine, and reflexivity are involved in the concept of trust to argue that ‘at the heart of the concept of trust is the suspension of vulnerability and uncertainty (the leap of faith), which enables actors to have positive expectations of others’ (ibid.: 191); and Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010), who model the necessary and sufficient components and relationships involved in conceptualising trust from a socio-cognitive perspective.

Adjacent to the study of trust in and of itself, some influential authors use trust as a key category in their descriptions or explanations of other phenomena. For instance, trust features as a prominent concept in Anthony Giddens’ (1991) explanation of modernity and self-identity, it is associated intimately with social capital by Robert Putnam (2000) in his work on community in the United States, and Francis Fukuyama (1995) uses trust to explain the economic life and prosperity of different societies and cultures.

It is not difficult to imagine that conceptual and terminological confusion is rife in the literature on trust, filled as it is with these many perspectives from across disciplines, traditions, research philosophies, methodologies, and motivations. Hardin (2002: xx) warns that ‘[t]here is remarkably wide disagreement over just what trust “really” is even among those who have given the topic a lot of careful thought’. The lack of conceptual consistency is exacerbated by terminological issues, and Hart (1988: 187) asserts that ‘[t]he set of
synonyms to which trust belongs is unusually confusing’. For instance, we find that faith, confidence, belief, cooperation, and probability can all be difficult to distinguish from trust in the literature at times.

2.4.1.2 Consistent themes around trust in the literature

Despite this lack of conceptual and terminological clarity, academics writing on trust seem to agree on two major themes. They all assert that trust is a vital component of the social world, and they all argue that trust requires the presence of risk, uncertainty, or vulnerability.

Trust is important because it helps us to reduce social complexity (Möllering 2006: 85), to make choices about what we can and should do (Dasgupta 1988: 51), and to cope with the complicated division of labour present in everyday life (Dunn 1988: 85). In the 2002 series of Reith Lectures given by Onora O'Neill on trust (transcribed online), she argued that ‘[e]very day and in hundreds of ways we trust others to do what they say, to play by the rules and to behave reasonably’ (O’Neill 2002). In more abstract terms:

Trust can have extrinsic value, as a basis for achieving social and economic goals. It can also have intrinsic value, as a dimension of relations that is valued for itself, as part of a broader notion of well being or the quality of life. (Nootenboom 2002: 2)

O’Neill goes on to point out, though, that we do not assume in placing our trust in someone that they will be predictable or reliable; we know that we could be disappointed (O’Neill 2002). This brings us to the second theme on which there is consensus in the literature; to trust necessarily implies exposure to uncertainty, risk, or vulnerability.

According to Hardin (2006: 27) ‘[a]ll standard accounts of trust assume that it involves reliance on someone or some agency when there is at least some risk that the agent will fail the trust.’ For Deutsch (1958: 266) risk and trust are two sides of the same coin, while other authors argue that trust presupposes a situation of risk (Luhmann 1988: 97, Nootenboom 2002: 5), and that, when we have to act in spite of such risk, ‘[t]rusting becomes the crucial strategy for dealing with an uncertain and uncontrollable future’ (Sztompka 1999: 25). Indeed, other authors anchor their definition of trust itself on such vulnerabilities. For instance:

Trusting behaviour consists in action that (1) increases one’s vulnerability to another whose behaviour is not under one’s control, and (2) takes place in a situation where the penalty suffered if the trust is abused would lead one to regret the action. (Lorenz 1988: 197)
In conclusion, a review of the literature on trust theory shows us that, while it might be difficult to find agreement on what trust is or how to term it, it can be claimed with assuredness that it is an important feature of our social world and that it is predicated on the risks and uncertainties therein. It is not only scholars in the disciplines referenced here in Section 2.4.1 that take an interest in the concept of trust. Scholars of translation and scholars of disaster are also concerned with issues of trust, and an overview of their discussions on the topic will be given in the following sections.

2.4.2 Trust in translation studies

Trust is not a major analytical category in translation studies, but it does feature as a construct in some influential discussions of translation and is used in some thinking on translation and interpreting, in particular with regard to professionalism, ethics, and the increasing importance of collaborative practices in translation. For instance, Newmark (2009: 26) points out that the first stage in George Steiner’s hermeneutic theory of translation is the stage of trust, followed by penetration, embodiment, and restitution. Steiner (1998: 312) even states that ‘[a]ll understanding, and the demonstrative statement of understanding which is translation, starts with an act of trust’. Trust is a central concern, too, for authors working to define and delimit translation as a profession; they argue that it is in the fostering and maintenance of trust in their abilities and services that translators can make some of their strongest claims towards the status of professional (Chesterman 1997, Pym 2012). Talking about translators who wish to be considered as professionals, Pym (2012: 86) states that ‘[i]ncreasingly, they will have to realize that what they sell is their seal of approval, their trustworthiness, their responsibility.’ Ethically speaking, trust is found in one piece of research to be a key element in how users of interpreting services understand good interpreting (Edwards, Temple, and Alexander 2005). This view on the importance of trust causes the participants in this research to look for these services from informal networks of family, friends, and acquaintances, and the authors argue that this fact has serious implications for the policy and practice of interpreting. Finally, the growing importance of collaborative practices in contemporary translation workflows has led to an increased interest in trust as an analytical category (Abdallah 2010, Abdallah and Koskinen 2007). As translators in collaborative workflows will draw on resources created by others ‘…the single most important criterion in selecting a translation solution may not be what the solution is, but where it came from, and whether that source is trusted’ (De Barra-Cusack 2014: 16). In short, trust, when seen from the perspective of the translation studies literature, is a useful theoretical construct to examine issues of professionalism, ethics, and collaborative practices.
2.4.3 Trust in disaster studies and the humanitarian space

It was shown in Section 2.4.1 that trust theorists claim that trust is vital to social life. The disaster studies literature and reports from various humanitarian responders make similar claims for the significance of trust in times of disaster or emergency. Trust is, indeed, a much-discussed concept in this literature and covers a variety of themes: trust building and failures of trust between the various stakeholders in a disaster; the important role that trust plays in communication and information-gathering during and after a disaster; the way that trust can be seen as a form of social capital; and the relationship between trust and technology in the context of a disaster.

2.4.3.1 Trust and stakeholders in disasters

Much of the literature in the discipline of disaster studies on trust is concerned with how the parties involved in a disaster – responders, volunteers, local authorities, beneficiaries of response aid, and even researchers – need to have relationships of trust to be able to carry out their respective roles and with how they build trust through sustained contact prior to the disaster’s onset (Auf Der Heide 1989, Munro 2013, Shimodaira 2012, Stallings 2002, Stephenson 2005). Of course, the literature also studies many cases where trust failed between the various parties to a disaster and proposes that ineffective communication by or between stakeholders may be one of the reasons behind this failed trust (Goldsteen and Schorr 1982, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2005, 2006, 2013, Katoch 2012, Kowata et al. 2012, Rodríguez, Quarantelli, and Dynes 2006, Rubin 1987, Sato 2013, Society for Risk Analysis Japan 2013).

2.4.3.2 Trust, communication, and information-gathering in disasters

Trust is seen to be a vital component of communication with the public during a disaster or other emergency; if trust is lacking, effective risk communication will not be possible. ‘Information needs to be prepared and disseminated. To be useful, it must be accurate and trusted and it must be understood and used by the community’ (Coyle and Meier 2009: 17-18). In relation to communication, trust can be used as a management tool to provide effective warnings, to influence the public’s perception of the disaster, and to prevent the spread of rumour (BBC Media Action 2012, Drabek 2010, Miao and Li-ping 2011, Quintanilla and Goodfriend 2012, Society for Risk Analysis Japan 2013, Wray et al. 2006). In addition, authors find that the source of the information is as important as the content in establishing trust (Arlikatti, Lindell, and Prater 2007, Rodríguez, Quarantelli and Dynes 2006, Ruffer 2011).
2.4.3.3 Trust and social capital in disasters

Humanitarian organisations in disaster settings need to be seen as skilled responders, effective partners, and responsible users of donations (Drabek 2010, International Committee of the Red Cross 2011). Trust is the social capital that helps them achieve these goals, and some organisations refer to trust as their ‘brand’ (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative 2011: 39). Trust is difficult to build and easy to lose, so authors in the literature attempt to better understand the complex functioning of trust as social capital (Dussaillant and Guzmán 2014, Nakagawa and Shaw 2004).

2.4.3.4 Trust and technology in disasters

Much of the literature on trust in disaster studies and the humanitarian space relates to trust in social media (Coyle and Meier 2009, Signorini 2011), radio (Appleby 2013, Quintanilla and Goodfriend 2012), and television (Mitomo et al. 2013, Sato 2013). In general, newer technologies are viewed with more suspicion, while older technologies are more trusted. Also, demographic factors – such as age, gender, or digital literacy levels – and fears around information security are suggested as factors influencing the levels of trust in technology in times of disaster (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2013, Quintanilla and Goodfriend 2012). The important role of trust in the adoption of technologies is summarised by Morrow et al. (2011: 17) ‘As one NGO leader said, “You need to face it -- people will not use it if they do not trust it -- if they do not believe it.”’

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this review of the literature on translation, interpreting, and trust in disaster settings has several implications for the present thesis. The literature supports the value of enquiring into both translation and interpreting instead of translation alone. It encourages the examination of diverse channels of publication across various disciplines. It shows that examining only professional translation and interpreting activities in the disaster would be restrictive and would likely cause informative instances of interlingual and intercultural transfer to be missed. Furthermore, it suggests that discussing communicative methods, how these methods can be improved – especially through technological assistance – as well as discussing the experiences of foreign nationals of the 2011 disaster will be valued not just by scholars of translation but by scholars in other disciplines, too. Finally, it indicates that, while the concept of trust is complex, there is some precedent for its use as an
analytical category in translation studies and great precedent for its use in examining disaster contexts, especially in relation to communication. The next chapter will explain how a methodology was developed for this research and how this methodology helped orient the thesis toward engaging with the existing literature in these ways.
'Verum esse ipsum factum.'
(the true is precisely what is made)

Giambattista Vico, Philosopher (1668-1744)
Chapter 3 – Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains how a methodology for this thesis was developed from the work of Kaisa Koskinen (2008) in Translating Institutions: An Ethnographic Study of EU Translation. In this work, Koskinen applied a selection of ethnographic methods and was guided by an overall ethnographic ethos to present a case study of a translating institution (ibid.: 3, 37). In a similar way, the present thesis made use of certain methods and theories from ethnography within a case study methodology to describe, understand, and explain the phenomena of translation and interpreting in the 2011 disaster.

The chapter begins by discussing the development of the ethnographic and case study traditions and provides definitions for these methodologies in Sections 3.2 and 3.3 respectively. Section 3.4 then outlines the similarities and differences in the methodologies in Koskinen (2008) and in this thesis, while Section 3.5 situates the thesis within its epistemological and ontological frame. Finally, Section 3.6 explains how these various methods, theories, traditions, and philosophies were converted into the practical steps undertaken in this research.

3.2 Ethnography

Ethnography developed out of anthropology and sociology over the last century, and is now a frequently-used method of enquiry in the social sciences (Rist 1980). It is also an increasingly influential approach in translation studies, as will be shown below. The ideas and viewpoints dominant in ethnography have varied over time, and the major turns will now be described.

3.2.1 Development of ethnography

Before the late 19th century, scholars relied on traveller accounts to make their studies of humankind. This is referred to in the literature as the period of ‘armchair’ anthropology or ethnography (Tedlock 2005: 475, Wolcott 2008: 14). Ethnography in the field was born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when trained anthropologists and sociologists in the US, Britain, and France began to study humankind experientially through systematic field studies carried out using scientific methods of observation (Hammersley 1992, Wolcott 2008). The US tradition was pioneered by such scholars as Franz Boas and Alfred Kroeber, while the British tradition was begun by such scholars as A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and
Bronislaw Malinowski (Saville-Troike 1989: 5). Some of the main contributors to the French tradition at this early stage were Claude Levi-Strauss and Alain Touraine (Fassin 2006).

Early ethnographic scholars in the US tradition tended to focus on presenting cultural patterns and artefacts, while early scholars in the British tradition tended to focus on presenting social and cultural meanings (Saville-Troike 1989, Wolcott 2008). These presentations, though, were criticised for their haphazard descriptiveness, and attention turned to more problem-based research. The research was still descriptive in nature, but the description provided was intended to answer some question. In 1925, Margaret Mead travelled to American Samoa to examine whether the experience of adolescence as a period of strain depended on one’s cultural upbringing, and the resulting work, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (published in 1928), is said to be the first problem-focused ethnographic fieldwork (Tedlock 2005, Wolcott 2008). At about the same time, leading figures in the University Of Chicago School Of Sociology, notably W. I. Thomas and Robert E. Park, were using first-hand enquiry in Chicago’s urban environments to answer questions on the social theory of human behaviour (Bulmer 1984).

By the 1960s, postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques of society and culture began to be applied to ethnographic research. Critical theorists questioned the way in which conventional ethnographers at that time defined the ‘problems’ that they set out to examine, and they questioned the very idea that these ‘problems’ could be solved. In short, these critiques: questioned modern assumptions about the objectivity and authority of the ethnographic researcher; questioned the power relations that formed the context of ethnographic research in a colonial and postcolonial world; proposed that ethnographic projects should be concerned not with solving problems but with bringing about human emancipation, especially in socialist and/or feminist terms, and with accounting for ethnography’s roots in imperialism. These theorists set out to explain the nature of the social order in such a way that it would serve as a catalyst for the transformation of that order (Angrosino 2005, Asad 1973, Gough 1967, Hammersley 1992).

Scholars influenced by two decades of postmodernist, postcolonialist, feminist, and other critical theory, began to question issues of representation and legitimacy in ethnography by the 1980s. The modes of analysis prevalent in critical theories made scholars question whether a researcher has the right to write about someone else’s world and worldview. Debates at this turn centred around the idea that the researcher is part of the social world that s/he studies, that the research projects will be shaped by the socio-historic processes, values, interests, and personal characteristics that shaped the researcher, and that the
findings of research have consequences and that these findings may even change the character of the situations that were studied (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). The reflexive turn in ethnography implies that the reader must be aware of the researcher’s situation – especially in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, and other key categories found in critical theories – in order to interpret the ethnographic product and that the research should be re-focused on placing the participants’ voices at the centre of the process (Sundar 2006). Writing Culture, published in 1986 by James Clifford and George E. Marcus, is canonical and greatly debated in the ethnographic literature. It is seen to be part of the postmodern, critical, and reflexive turns. It criticised how previous generations of ethnographers had attempted to claim authority through their detached writing styles, and it recommended writing strategies (such as personalised accounts) to bring the researcher’s voice into the ethnographic product (Atkinson 2001).

Now in the 21st century, globalisation and technological developments have confronted ethnographers with another turn. In a networked and increasingly literate world, where communication technology is available even in remote corners, those people ethnographers may wish to research are now in a position to spread knowledge about their own cultures and societies by themselves to wide audiences (Angrosino 2005). Such developments have led to new challenges. How can the boundaries of virtual worlds be established? Is the ethnographer immersed in observation or simply following transient online traces? How should ethnographers treat issues of self-representation, new forms of discourse, and ethical challenges in online environments? If people are recording their own lives and making them public, what becomes of ethnography’s descriptive role? Many of these questions are only beginning to be answered. Christine Hine is a scholar working on the challenges of pursuing ethnographic research in a networked world, and Hine’s Virtual Ethnography, published in 2000, is an early work in the field. More recent works in the area of computer-mediated ethnography include Kozinets (2010) and Boellstorff (2012). Debates around the ethnography taking place in computer-mediated environments are becoming increasingly sophisticated, and there is now a distinction being made between virtual ethnography (e.g., ethnography of an environment such as Second Life where it is a world in and of itself) and cyber-ethnography, online ethnography, netnography, or digital ethnography (in which the physical world is more obviously also a possible locus of investigation). Moreover, the idea of a final monograph being privileged as the main outcome of ethnography is being challenged by these new forms (Hallett and Barber 2014, Hine 2014). Finally, the many new challenges arising out of the global and technological turns have caused a number of ethnographers to focus on ethics. Some in the literature even claim that ethnography is distinctive in the academy for the ethical rigour it now applies to
all stages of the research process. See, for instance, Lederman (2006), Markham (2005), or Warner, (2009).

3.2.2 How ethnography is viewed in the discipline of translation studies

The disciplinary developments in ethnography detailed above suggest that translators, translation scholars, and ethnographers share some similarities in how they work, how they see the world, and how their worlds are structured. Certainly, processes of interpretation, of writing, of reflexivity, and of dialogue with external research sources are characteristic of all three occupations (Buzelin 2009, Wolf 2002). In particular, Wolf (2002: 183) draws a clear comparison between ethnographers and translators in relation to their engagement with interpretation: ‘While the ethnographer interprets experiences, notes and observations, the translator interprets a pre-given text.’ Valero-Garcés (1995) takes this engagement with interpretation and adds to it a characteristic relativism:

In short, relativism and manipulation of information are present in the task of both ethnographer and translator. Both of them share a series of characteristics as practitioners of an activity that will never end: the activity of translating. (Valero-Garcés 1995: 562)

Meanwhile, Buzelin (2007) sees self-reflection as a category that all three occupations share:

In a certain way, each time they have attempted to reflect upon and theorize about translation on the basis of their own practice, translation scholars and translators have acted as ethnographers. (Buzelin 2007: 143)

World views and philosophies offer up other areas of common ground. Early scholars in translation studies, such as Eugene Nida and Georges Mounin, saw ethnography as a promising approach to solving problems and building theory in the area of translation (Buzelin 2009). Moreover, Hans Vermeer, who developed Skopos Theory with Katharina Reiss, used the work of cultural anthropologist Heinz Göhring in his development of this influential theory of translation (Bahadir 2004). Following the move to a post-structuralist, post-colonialist, critical framework in translation studies – the so-called cultural turn – scholars began to draw on ethnographic research as ways to deal with issues of partiality, historical contingency, and representation (Agorni 2007, Bachmann-Medick 2009) and especially to draw on efforts made by anthropologists to understand the dichotomy between Self and Other that was seen to be a distinctive feature of the work of both the ethnographer and the translator (Wolf 2002).
The cultural turn that revolutionized translation studies occurred in the wake of the important historical period of decolonization. A little later, translation studies adopted the epistemological and critical ideas of the anthropologists, who had earlier questioned their practices and resulting effects… The anthropologists were concerned to know what happened to the translation of otherness when that otherness was little understood. (Brisset 2010: 71-72)

Chief among the ethnographers that provided inspiration at this time were Talal Asad (1973), Clifford Geertz (1973), James Clifford & George Marcus (1986), and James Clifford (1988).

Ethnography is also seen as a repository of methodological tools and approaches that can be used by translation scholars (Hubsher-Davidson 2011). Some projects in translation studies borrow and adapt elements of the ethnographic approach without including some characteristic features of the method, such as fieldwork or participant observation. For example, in one translation project, Martha Cheung (2006) applied the ethnocritically-informed idea of ‘thick translation’ to illustrate the specificity of certain Chinese intellectual concepts from their approximate renderings in English. ‘Thick translation’ was recommended by Kwame Anthony Appiah (2000) to develop a notion of translation rich in annotations, glosses, and context and was adapted from the concept of ‘thick description’ popularised by the ethnographer Clifford Geertz (1973: 20–21). In Cheung’s practical application of Appiah’s notion, certain distinctive, intellectual concepts in Chinese are illustrated by explanatory notes, contextualizing texts, and texts on translation from the historical period in question. The idea of ‘thick translation’ was also applied by Wakabayashi (2009) as a way to gain insight into Japanese views on translation through a semantic mapping of the domain of ‘translation’ in the Japanese sociolinguistic context. In another practical application of ethnographic methods, Marinetti and Rose (2013) made use of ethnography’s tools for self-reflection to foreground the many negotiations, tensions, conflicts, and controversies that occurred in their translation of a play for the theatre.

Other projects in translation studies are larger-scale projects that resemble more closely research projects in the full ethnographic tradition. For instance, Angelelli (2004) performed the first ethnographic study of the role of medical interpreters in a hospital setting, and Risku (2004) used extensive ethnographic fieldwork to examine the work of translation management and project coordination in one real-world office setting. These works are seen as key developments in the move towards ethnography becoming a more popular approach in translation studies. In other examples, Hélène Buzelin (2005, 2007, 2009) used the anthropologist Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory to carry out an ethnographic study of three Montreal-based independent publishing houses, while Peter Flynn (2007) carried out an ethnographic study of literary translation practice in the
Netherlands and Belgium. Then, in the area of computer-mediated ethnography, Magdalena Dombek (2014) used methods tailored specifically to carrying out ethnographic research online to investigate the motivations of a community of Polish Facebook users to contribute to the crowdsourced translation of the Facebook experience. The work on which the methodology in this thesis is based – Koskinen’s (2008) study of the Finnish translation unit at the Luxembourg branch of the European Commission – has also been influential in how ethnography has come to be viewed in translation studies. (Koskinen’s work will be explained in detail in Section 3.4.)

To fully understand the academic tradition on which this thesis project is calling, it is also instructive to examine the ways in which translation is viewed in the discipline of ethnography.

3.2.3 How translation is viewed in the discipline of ethnography

A discourse of otherness runs throughout the development of ethnography, and the study of the Other was long seen as its raison d’être. Navigating these Other social worlds has long implied translation and interpreting. Part of the rite-of-passage for the ethnographer was to use key informants from the local culture or social group as translator/interpreters. The researcher was also expected to develop her/his own fluency in the local language. However, it is remarkable how little record there is in ethnographic literature for the issues of translation and interpreting. Agar (1980) declares his own surprise at this invisibility:

One of the most interesting results of my trip through the literature was the scarcity of discussions I found on the topic of translation. Many authors emphasize the importance of language competence in ethnography, and they also note the new problems that are introduced when one must rely on an interpreter. Yet the literature is eerily quiet on the subject. I get the image of nervous ethnographers who are far from fluent trying not to bring up the subject. (Agar 1980: 150)

More recent ethnographic works – such as an often-referenced collection of ethnographies in Burawoy (2000) which explore the interactions of local struggles and the forces of globalisation – still make no reference to translation or interpreting in the sense of interlingual or intercultural transfer. A possible reason for this lack of acknowledgement of linguistic mediation is the fact that the ethnographic process arises from an interpretivist dilemma; ethnographers claim to be interpreting the meaning that the researched people attribute to objects in their social or cultural worlds, but when the interpretivist researcher is doing this through a third party, s/he is suspicious of the vulnerability to confounding extra meanings that this can produce:
Some researchers, especially in anthropological interviews, tend to rely on interpreters and so become vulnerable to added layers of meanings, biases, and interpretations, and this may lead to disastrous misunderstandings (Freeman 1983 cited in Fontana and Frey 2005: 707).

Of course, all this is not to say that language is absent from the ethnographic discourse entirely. Indeed, there is a sub-discipline of ethnography introduced by Dell Hymes in 1962 – the ethnography of communication – that deals with what the speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community, with how he or she learns it, and with how language interacts with all other systems of culture (Saville-Troike 1989: 1–3). A contemporary area of interest among ethnographers is in the role of volunteers, especially children, in the linguistic and cultural brokering of ethnographic interactions (e.g., Reynolds and Faulstich Orellana 2014), and work is being done to emphasise how the systematic study of translation practices can enlighten typical ethnographic objects of enquiry such as meaning, representation, and culture (Sturge 1997, 2007).

In sum, the chapter so far has shown that ethnography brings with it a rich academic heritage that allows the researcher to draw on a variety of methods and theories. It has also shown that there are significant areas of convergence in the disciplinary developments and the academic conversations present in both ethnography and translation studies. Finally, it has equally been shown that there is precedent in the translation studies literature for applying the principles of ethnography to research in the discipline, and that an interest in ethnographic approaches in translation studies (whether full ethnographies or a selective application of ethnographic elements) is growing, but that the same level of interest in translational issues is not present in the discipline of ethnography.

To better understand the ethnographic methods and elements of an ethnographic ethos that have and have not been applied in this research project, an operational definition for ethnography will now be proposed.

3.2.4 Defining ethnography

Based on the discussion above, the following definition of ethnography created by the researcher is proposed for this research: ethnography is a form of research that provides a holistic description of a culture or society through the integration and interpretation of a variety of datasets that are usually gathered over a prolonged period from an ecologically-valid setting through the researcher’s direct experience. This definition encompasses the
central elements of ethnography that needed to be considered when adapting the Koskinen (2008) methodology to this research.

3.2.4.1 Description

Specifically, it was necessary to consider the extent to which this research would involve the description of social and cultural phenomena. As explained in Section 3.2.2, the term ‘thick description’ appears regularly in the literature. Popularised by Geertz (1973: 20–21), the term refers to the production of an ethnographic account that contains not only observations but also interpretations, commentaries, and contextual detail related to these observations. A feature of the ethnographic method, therefore, is that it describes social and cultural phenomena in great detail. If such ‘thick description’ is done well, it is intended to closely recreate the social or cultural setting in question, to reveal the complex layers of meaning surrounding the ethnographic object, and to give enough context to allow phenomenological understanding (Jones 2010).

3.2.4.2 Culture or society

It was also necessary to consider whether the research would describe a culture, a society, or some other cultural or social phenomena. For some authors in the literature, culture is what defines ethnography. For instance, Clifford (1988) sees ethnography essentially as thinking and writing about culture, and Wolcott (2008) proposes that culture in ethnography serves as the bonding agent that allows disparate bits of data from the social world to be formed into a cohesive whole. However, other authors do not see the principle of culture as being so fundamental. For example Blommaert and Jie (2010: 42) assert that ‘research is ethnographic because it accepts a number of fundamental principles and views on social reality.’ Note that culture is not mentioned. Moreover, the introduction to Atkinson’s *Handbook of Ethnography* (2001) gives prominence to both the social and the cultural:

> They are grounded in a commitment to the first-hand experience and exploration of *a particular social or cultural setting* on the basis of (though not exclusively by) participant observation. (Atkinson 2001: 4, emphasis added)

In fact, a focus on either the social or the cultural is often used as a stamp of the researcher’s ethnographic heritage; scholars in the British tradition tend to focus on society, while scholars in the US tradition tend to focus on culture (Wolcott 2008).
3.2.4.3 Integration and interpretation

Another consideration was how this project would integrate and interpret the data gathered. A distinctive feature of ethnography is how it uses its thickly described detail to find the interconnectedness between the cultural, social, political, economic, and other contexts in which the phenomena to be understood are located. Where the ethnographer adds value is in how these observations are organised, analysed, and reported (Wolcott 2008: 46). Keesing and Strathern (1998: 7) highlight the central place of interpretation in their definition of ethnography: ‘The process of recording and interpreting another people’s way of life is called ethnography.’

3.2.4.4. Ecologically-valid, ethical datasets

It was furthermore necessary to consider the datasets that would be gathered for this study. The data-gathering process in ethnography will generally produce a variety of datasets to provide as much detail as possible to convey the quality of a personal interaction, a place, or a point in time. The object of study may be recorded in the form of field notes, voice recordings and transcripts, ethnographic encounters, personal reflections, grey literature, maps and diagrams, recorded images, or computer-mediated communications. Many ethnographic objects will be speaking objects, and contemporary ethnographies place importance on having the participants’ voices at the centre of the account (Sundar 2006) and on representing under-represented voices (Angrosino 2005). Since the reflexive turn, these voices usually include the researcher’s own voice. This centrality of participant voices in ethnography implies that ethical issues must be interrogated actively throughout all stages of the research process (Lederman 2006, Markham 2005). While the gathered data may differ from project to project, many authors in the literature see carrying out studies in ecologically-valid settings as the essence of ethnography (see, for example, Brewer 2000: 6).

3.2.4.5 Prolonged period

The period of data gathering was another consideration in how ethnography would inform this research. Historically, ethnography has entailed long periods of fieldwork lasting a year or preferably more (Handwerker 2001). Such time in the field was seen as necessary to build relationships, gain trust, recruit informants, and become immersed in the language and culture of a group. It also came to be seen as a rite-of-passage in the career of an anthropologist (Rist 1980). Views in the literature about the period and frequency of visits to the field have changed, as have ideas of what constitutes the field in a networked world.
Thus, recent authors talk of projects ranging in length from several days, to several weeks, to several years (Agar 1980, Hammersley 1992). This raises the question of what period of fieldwork might be considered too short or too long. The consensus in the literature seems to be that ‘[a] long-term commitment is assumed but there is no specified minimum’ (Wolcott 2008: 66).

3.2.4.6 Researcher’s direct experience

Finally, it was necessary to consider how the researcher’s direct experience of the objects of enquiry would be treated in this research project. ‘Observation and participation (according to circumstance and the analytic purpose at hand) remain the characteristic features of the ethnographic approach’ (Atkinson 2001: 4-5). It should be noted here that observation in a detached, scientific sense of the word is not what is characteristic of ethnography. Rather, it is better understood as the negotiation between perspectives, between the emic and the etic, between the viewpoint of the insider and the perspective of the outsider:

Ethnographers make a commitment and demonstrate a willingness to participate in the social worlds of their research subjects on different levels: physical, social, mental and emotional. (Jones 2010: 7)

It can be seen from the above why ethnography is referred to in the literature as ‘an approach in which the self is instrument’ (Wolcott 2008: 45). A corollary of the fact that the researcher is expected to participate in social worlds at different levels like this, though, is that these levels must be strictly bounded in the project. Otherwise, the researcher would not be able to directly observe and participate in them, and analysis would become unwieldy if not impossible.

To conclude, this section has outlined the fundamentals of ethnographic research and introduced the main issues to be considered when applying the principles of ethnography to a research project. As was explained in Section 3.1, both this thesis and Koskinen (2008) – on which the methodology for this thesis is based – present case studies. The following section, therefore, will discuss case study research.
3.3 Case study

The term ‘case study’ means different things to different people. Areas of similarity and difference first become apparent by examining how the case study has developed over time.

3.3.1 Historical development of the case study

The case study has been developed over the years in a variety of different disciplines and research traditions. In particular, the study of cases has been crucial to the development of certain health sciences, the law, political science, and anthropology (Swanborn 2010). The case study has also been a widely used design in the discipline of translation studies (Susam-Sarajeva 2009). However, it is in sociology and the social sciences that much of the most active theoretical discussion of the case study has taken place, and this chapter draws mainly on debates in this social science tradition.

In a systematic review of the term case study in American sociology, Platt (1992) traces the use of the term to social workers’ case histories and case work, pointing out that the term began to appear in textbooks in the 1920s. The use of the case study in France, though, dates back even further to 1877 when Frédéric Le Play’s Les Ouvriers Européens was published (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993). The most significant period in the development of the case study in the social science tradition probably resulted from research done by the Chicago School. The Chicago School refers to studies of social problems linked to increasing urbanisation and immigration carried out at the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago from 1916 to the 1930s (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993, Platt 1992). Here we begin to see some overlap between the case study and ethnographic traditions, as the Chicago School is also claimed as a point of development in the ethnographic literature (see Section 3.2.1). Regardless of the academic tradition to which this school rightfully belongs, its focus is described in both literatures as being on encouraging students to create knowledge in the field through participant observation. Students in this school were advised to ‘go beyond official documents and come into personal contact with poverty and deviance’ (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993: 14). The dominance of the case study in the Chicago tradition was eroded by the rise of the statistical method and the popularity of the survey as a form of social investigation (Platt 1992).
3.3.2 Case study typologies

Despite these tensions between experiential and statistical approaches to social investigation, the case study can embrace both qualitative and quantitative methods (Gerring 2007, Platt 1992, Stake 1995, Swanborn 2010, Yin 2014). A more useful way of differentiating the many forms of case study, therefore, is suggested by Stake (1995: 37-39) and Swanborn (2010: 22). They divide case studies into those that seek to understand and explain relationships of cause and effect and those that aim to describe, understand, and explain some part of human experience. While the two types seek to attain different goals, they are both, nonetheless, inductive approaches in which the researcher moves from empirical observations to engage with broader generalisations and theories. Other influential typologies have been created by Yin (2014: 50), who differentiates between variants of single- and multiple-case designs, and by Gerring (2007: 88), who proposes a typology of case studies based on how the researcher selects the case(s) to be studied.

3.3.3 Case study epistemologies

Linked to the variety in case study types, it should be noted, too, that the method does not imply an invariable epistemological or ontological perspective (Mitchell 2000, Yin 2014). The case study is flexible. Generally, researchers using a case study design adopt either a realist orientation that assumes the existence of an independent reality that can be known by an observer (see Gerring 2007, Swanborn 2010, Yin 2014) or a constructivist-relativist orientation that assumes multiple realities, the knowledge of which is constructed by observers through their experience and perception (see Creswell 2007, Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993, Stake 1995).

3.3.4 Key common features

Despite the many traditions in which the case study is used, despite its many types, and despite the many theoretical perspectives on knowledge and reality that it can incorporate, there are certain core elements that are common to most descriptions of case study design. These are that the case study deals best with ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions; is descriptive; employs and triangulates multiple methods to gather multiple sources of evidence to present multiple perspectives; is progressively focused; is an effective research design when the goal is to generalise analytically rather than statistically. These features will now be discussed in more detail.
The case study is not appropriate for answering questions related to frequency or incidence, but it is a useful method when the main research questions to be answered are ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions (Yin 2014). The object of enquiry in a case should be a complex phenomenon that requires in-depth description before it can be properly understood. A common feature of case study design is that it implies a form of description that is ‘complex, holistic and involving a myriad of not highly isolated variables’ (Stake 2000: 24). A case study will flexibly employ a variety of methods to gather empirical data. These data may include interviews, observations, artefacts, field notes, and documentary evidence. It is the variety of these materials that ensures the depth of description of the object of enquiry and that allows the researcher to generate a holistic and real-world perspective (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993, Yin 2014). In presenting multiple perspectives on the object of enquiry, the researcher will aim to go beyond pure description and achieve understanding and explanation. These multiple perspectives – varied and even competing interpretations and understandings of the object – will be triangulated by the researcher to present the most reasonable explanation as it relates to the theoretical stance taken toward the case (Stake 1995), and the search for the convergence and non-convergence of evidence is standard in the case study process (Yin 2014). The inductive nature of these processes means that any case study design will be open to unanticipated developments. As the study progresses, the organising concepts of the study may need to be changed. However, this ‘progressive focus’ (Stake 1995: 133) should be matched at all times with systematic procedures, methodological rigour, and a commitment to the fair and open reporting of all these developments (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993, Yin 2014). Perhaps because of this openness to flexible and developing methods, the case study is characterised by how carefully and transparently it establishes the boundaries of its enquiry (Stake 2000, Swanborn 2010), so that, as the study progresses, the initial object of enquiry does not get lost or forgotten. In addition, while it is true that some case study researchers seek to represent samples and extrapolate probabilities about cause and effect relationships (see, for example, Gerring 2007), the case study – especially the case study seeking experiential understanding – is better suited to expanding and generalising theories than to generalising to populations or universes (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993, Matthews and Ross 2010, Yin 2014). In other words, in a case study, the researcher is attempting to shed some empirical light on a theoretical concept rather than to make inferences about a population based on these empirical data. However, it must be recognised that generalising from case study data is a contentious issue, and some authors deny the possibility of generalisation entirely; see, for example Gomm, Hammersley, and Foster (2000) for more detail on these debates.
3.3.5 The viability of an ethnographically-informed case study

It can be argued, then, that a case study design fits well with the fundamental principles of ethnography. Specifically, we have seen that the case study may sometimes employ participant observation and may use the direct experience of the researcher as sources of data. It tries to holistically describe and understand some aspect of human experience, and it triangulates multiple sources of evidence to search for the connections and interrelationships that create a convincing explanation of that experience. In other words, there is clear support in the literature for the viability of Koskinen’s (2008) method of presenting a case study using a selection of ethnographic methods and being guided by an overall ethnographic ethos. With this in mind, the next section will discuss the similarities and differences in how such an ethnographically-informed case study methodology was applied in Koskinen (2008) and in this thesis.

3.4 Comparing the methodologies of Koskinen (2008) and this thesis

This thesis responds to Koskinen’s call for extended, sociologically-framed empirical work in translation studies (Koskinen 2008: 39, 57). It uses a new context (that of disaster translation and interpreting) to show how ‘the principles of ethnography were applied in one particular case study’ (ibid.: 12). Adapting Koskinen’s methodology to the needs of this research promised to be useful for three main reasons. Firstly, it promised ‘a robust and adaptable framework for a situated analysis of a particular group of people’ (ibid.: 36); this study aimed for such an analysis of certain foreign residents of Japan. Secondly, it offered ways for a researcher to systematically capitalise on her/his previous personal experience of a research object and incorporate it into the research (ibid.: 8–9, 52–55); the researcher himself experienced the 2011 disaster. Finally, it promised guidance in negotiating the emic and etic tensions created by such insider and outsider perspectives (ibid.: 51, 91). How similar, then, to the methodology in Koskinen (2008) was the methodology implemented in this thesis?

3.4.1 Similarities between Koskinen (2008) and this thesis

Table 3–1 explains in detail how Koskinen (2008) and this thesis shared the same general methodological framework and ethos, applied many of the same ethnographic methods, and analysed data at similar levels. The table also explains how the roles of the researcher in the two projects were broadly similar, how similar in scale and contextual dependence the two projects were, and how many of the same practical steps were implemented in both methodologies. In addition, the table details how the two research processes aimed for a
Despite the similarities between Koskinen (2008) and this thesis, the two methodologies also diverged in significant ways, as has been detailed in Table 3.4.

### Differences between Koskinen (2008) and this thesis

| Differences between Koskinen (2008) and this thesis | Proposed goals and scope of research projects | Technical and ethical aspects | Research planning and methodology | Analytical tools | Data collection and analysis during data collection | Data analysis and interpretation | Overall research product
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<tr>
<td>Koskinen (2008)</td>
<td>Both projects aimed to explore and understand social phenomena, to the polemic function of different kinds of data (social science, textual analysis, ethnography)</td>
<td>Ethical considerations were included in the research product</td>
<td>Ethical considerations were included in the research product</td>
<td>No analysis tools were used</td>
<td>Qualitative data collection, such as interviews and observations, were used</td>
<td>Qualitative data analysis, such as content analysis and thematic analysis, were used</td>
<td>Polished research product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This thesis</td>
<td>Research projects focused on the analysis of textual data and social phenomena</td>
<td>Ethical considerations were included in the research product</td>
<td>Ethical considerations were included in the research product</td>
<td>No analysis tools were used</td>
<td>Qualitative data collection, such as interviews and observations, were used</td>
<td>Qualitative data analysis, such as content analysis and thematic analysis, were used</td>
<td>Polished research product</td>
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Table 3.4: Differences between methodologies in Koskinen (2008) and this thesis.
Table 3.2 Differences between the methodologies in Koskinen (2008) and in this thesis

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<th>Differences between the methodologies in Koskinen (2008) and in this thesis</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Object of enquiry</strong>: Koskinen (2008) leaves interpreting outside of the scope of her study (ibid. 3) focusing only on translation and uses culture as the guiding construct for the study of her object of enquire (ibid. 6). The present thesis, meanwhile, enquires into both translation and interpreting and uses culture only as an element of context and not as a central construct in the enquiry.</td>
<td>The lack of a claim to be making a study of culture in the present thesis is another major factor in why this work does not situate itself as a full ethnography.</td>
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**Analytical strategy**: Koskinen (2008) operationalises a nexus model of analysis in which the object of study is put as the nexus and connections are made from it to all relevant data sets during the process of analysis (ibid. 1-2). The work also uses shift analysis of certain translated texts to conduct textual analysis at the micro level (ibid. 121). The present thesis, however, analyses its data according to a form of thematic analysis operationalised from Braun and Clarke (2006). This thematic analysis provided an explicit audit trail of analysis with clearly detailed analytical phases and tasks, definitions of all codes considered, and a log of how these codes were derived and manipulative to create a final interpretation. It also replaces textual analysis with a micro analysis of instances of trust, and merely provides a small corpus of real communication (including some translated material) to better illustrate the context. | The constructivist philosophical approach adopted for the present thesis required an explicit audit trail that would allow the interested reader to attempt to reconstruct and confirm the viability of the researcher's interpretations. Thus, an explicit and detailed analytical strategy was needed. Thematic analysis fulfilled that need better than the strategy used in Koskinen (2008) which was found to be vague and lacking in a clear audit trail. Moreover, interpreting data using a form of thematic analysis is well established in both the ethnographic and case study traditions. See, for instance, O'Reilly (2009) and Stake (1995). |

**Ethnographic methods applied**: Koskinen (2008) utilises participant observation and focus group discussions (ibid. 53) as main data gathering tools. However, the present thesis uses ethnographic interviews as the main way to gather data. | The lack of participant observation in the present thesis is a major factor in why it makes no claim to be an ethnography but situates itself, rather, as an ethnographically-informed case study. |

**Case study methods applied**: Koskinen (2008) did not make use of vignettes in her methodology. However, this method proved a useful tool for highlighting important contextual elements of the present thesis (see Section 4.2.1) and helped to stamp the work more clearly as a case study that was, nonetheless, heavily informed by ethnography. | A vignette is a brief representation of a part of the case used to help illustrate an important aspect of the overall case study (Stake 1995: 128) and is frequently included in case study reports. |

To sum up, the methodologies in Koskinen (2008) and in this thesis have been shown to be broadly similar and differed mainly in some of their objects of enquiring, their analytical strategies and the ethnographic and case study methods that were employed.
strategies, and their ethnographic and case study techniques. What, then, has been learned as a result of adapting Koskinen (2008) to this research project?

### 3.4.3 Learning points from implementing this methodology

One learning point from adapting Koskinen’s (2008) methodology to this research concerned assessment. Combining two similar methodologies such as ethnography and the case study can lead to richer techniques of research and can allow the researcher to call on more diverse datasets and theories. However, it can also make the final research products more difficult to assess. Should the research be assessed as an ethnography, a case study, or both? Both Koskinen (2008) and this thesis claimed to be combinations of both ethnography and case study, but to differing degrees. As a result, it was necessary in this thesis to detail the developments and fundamental definitions of both ethnography and case studies and to make explicit the elements of both traditions that were and were not included in the final methodology. Choosing to situate this thesis purely as a case study would have mitigated the need for this extra work, but would also have diminished the theories, datasets, and techniques that could have been called on, especially to deal with the researcher’s personal experience of the object of enquiry and to deal with the ethical responsibilities involved in using others’ life experiences as a basis for research. On balance, the combination of ethnography and case study was more advantageous than a case study alone.

Another learning point was to realise how difficult it is to define exactly what makes a methodology ethnographic. For instance, this thesis does not make a study of a culture. Does a culture have to be studied for the methodology to be ethnographic? While Koskinen (2008) does claim to be studying a culture, she was not clear on whether the study of a culture was necessary to define ethnography. While she clearly sets out to explore a ‘cultural scene’ (ibid.: 40), examine ‘the artefacts of a particular culture’ (ibid.: 6), and to ‘learn from those who inhabit the culture’ (ibid.: 37), she also defines ethnography in terms of community (‘Ethnography is a holistic study of a particular culture, or community…’ [ibid.: 37]) and of society (‘The ethnographer attempts to acquire a comprehensive understanding of what is going on in a particular pocket of society, and seeks answers by entering the scene and trying to make sense of it’ [ibid.: 51]). Koskinen herself seems to recognise how problematic defining ethnography in terms of culture can be: ‘Ethnography, the study of cultures, always implies a theory of culture, but what the concept of culture actually means has become a tricky issue’ (ibid.: 40). Culture, indeed, may not have the explanatory power once claimed of it and, with ample precedent in the literature for
defining ethnography in terms of the study of a social setting (see Section 3.2.4.2), it became clear that not studying a culture did not preclude this thesis from claiming to be ethnographic in approach. Additionally, another way in which ethnography can be defined is by the centrality it places on participant observation in the field. Koskinen (2008) combined observation of her target translators in the field with focus group interview data to make her analysis. However, this thesis uses interview data without observation, and the research participants were not observed as they experienced a disaster. Does this lack of observation void this thesis’ claim to being ethnographic? Another learning point here was that answering ‘yes’ to this question would be to take an impoverished view of the possibilities of ethnography. Over and above participant observation, ethnography provided access to novel datasets (e.g., the researcher’s personal emails or blog entries), to tools for self-reflection, and to guidance on how to negotiate the interpretation of these personal experiences. Moreover, virtual and online ethnographies are now diminishing the centrality of observation in the field to ethnography, and immersion in the social world around the phenomenon being researched is a more desirable aim (Hallett and Barber 2014, Hine 2014). In short, culture and participant observation are important to ethnography, but they are not the only elements that make a study ethnographic.

A further learning point related to the appropriateness of Koskinen’s analytical strategy. Koskinen operationalised a nexus model to analyse her data and used the metaphor of weaving a net to explain how this model tied the various datasets she gathered together (ibid.: 11). However, precisely how she weaved these nets remained too unclear to be of use in a constructivist philosophical frame; the constructivist perspective adopted in this thesis required the presentation of an explicit analytical strategy and a detailed audit trail so that the reader of the research could potentially attempt to reconstruct the researcher’s interpretations and independently assess their viability (see Section 3.5 for more detail). For such a purpose, the thematic analytical strategy operationalised from Braun and Clarke (2006) proved more appropriate.

A final learning point concerned the difficulty of replicating Koskinen’s microanalysis: that is, the textual analysis of translated documents focusing on shifts. The inability to copy this form of microanalysis arose from the different research contexts in which the two projects took place. This thesis set out to explore whether translated information was used or even needed in the 2011 disaster. Without knowing whether translation or interpreting were used or needed, what value would there be in the detailed analysis of a translated text? Nonetheless, as conducting analysis at the macro, meso, and micro levels was central to Koskinen’s methodology, a microanalysis of participants’ encounters with translation and
interpreting through the theoretical lens of trust was carried out. (See Chapter 6 for more on this.) In addition, a small corpus of real texts from the disaster (including some translated texts) was presented in the thesis to compensate for this lack of textual analysis. (See Section 4.5.5 for this small, illustrative corpus.)

Now that it is clear how the methodology in this thesis compares to that of Koskinen (2008), and with the knowledge that any differences can be defended with reference to the literature on ethnography and the case study, the next section will clarify the epistemological and ontological perspectives taken on this research, as well as some other relevant assumptions and biases.

### 3.5 Epistemology, ontology, assumptions, and biases

The aim of making explicit the ontological and epistemological aspects of this enquiry is to clarify what is being claimed to be known in this research and how this knowledge might usefully be evaluated (Margolis 2004).

This research has not been carried out in a realist paradigm, even though this paradigm is not uncommon in the traditions of case study and ethnography. Realism assumes the existence of a separate, objective reality made up of certain indisputable facts that can be experienced by all in the same way and discovered to be true in the research process (Gibbs 2002). Rather, this research has been carried out in a constructivist paradigm. ‘Constructivism (interchangeably referred to in the literature as constructionism) is an intellectual tradition present in the disciplines of education, psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology…’ (Maréchal 2010: 220) and is a widely used theory of knowledge and reality found in many case studies and ethnographic projects (Stake 1995, Creswell 2007).

Constructivism originated in the 17th century with Giambattista Vico and was developed in the 19th and 20th centuries by proponents such as Jean Piaget, Gaston Bachelard, and John Dewey (Glaserfeld 1984, Maréchal 2010). The theory’s original proposition is that we only know something when we make it, because this allows us to understand the components of the thing in question and how these components interrelate. A more sophisticated interpretation of this proposition is: ‘Knowledge is not passively received but actively built up by the cognizing subject’ (Glaserfeld 1984: 162). Thus, from a constructivist perspective, everything – even our concepts of what is real and what exists in the world – are the results of human cognition (Gibbs 2002). The important implications here are twofold. Firstly, this then means that our conceptions of what is real, true,
objective, and rational must be seen as artefacts of our own history and are, therefore, culturally determined (Margolis 2004). Secondly, as a result:

The purpose of both lay and scientific knowledge construction is to provide useful, adequate, coherent, stable, or meaningful representations of the world in accordance with particular sets of systemic or sociolinguistic rules and constraints in given contexts. (Maréchal 2010: 220)

If reality, knowledge, and truth are culturally relative constructions based on subjective perceptions and experiences, how then do we find structure and create meaning and valuable knowledge in our world? Constructivists in the biological-systemic tradition assert that we create the experience of ‘reality’ by finding the structures – the ordered ways of behaving and thinking – that allow us to establish repeatable experiences and relatively reliable relations between these experiences (Maréchal 2010). Knowledge is what we build up to order our flow of experience, and viable knowledge is the knowledge that helps us achieve the goals we set in our experiential world (Glasersfeld 1984). From a biological-systemic perspective, this building up of knowledge is carried out individually. This differs from the position taken in the social constructivist tradition, a theory developed by Lev Vygotsky in the 20th century, wherein knowledge is co-created by people in their interactions with others (Daniels 2008). Whatever the approach, constructivism involves the shaping of our structures of behaving and thinking to fit with those of others around us, and ‘[v]iews held by large numbers of people, especially respected people, are held credible, even factual’ (Stake 1995: 101). However, even these credible or factual views are historically and culturally contingent and are just one representation of how the experiential world can be structured. The most fundamental trait of a constructivist perspective is the idea that we value what we know of the world, not because we claim it truthfully corresponds to some objective ontological reality, but because it is deemed to be a viable way to structure our experiences (Glasersfeld 1984). A constructivist researcher does not claim to say how the world is, but claims to say how some people see it (Gibbs 2002). Working in a constructivist paradigm, then, it is the job of the researcher to propose one viable construction without making any commitment to truth or saying anything about an underlying shared reality (Gibbs 2002, Glasersfeld 1984, Maréchal 2010).

With such plurality of explanation, how then should the knowledge and meaning created in a constructivist paradigm be evaluated? It would not be useful to attempt to evaluate constructivist knowledge in terms of the validity or reliability characteristic of the realist or positivist traditions. These quality criteria assume the existence of an external objective reality that is not present in a constructivist paradigm. Instead, the quality of knowledge created within a constructivist paradigm should be evaluated in terms of the viability of the
new knowledge. The researcher convinces the reader of the viability of her/his constructed knowledge by displaying systematic interconnectedness in discrete elements of evidence that support this construction. Viability is further strengthened when the research is shown to be carried out in a manner that is trustworthy, credible, and transparent. However, the constructivist position always underlines that these viable answers may not be the only answers (Glaserfeld 1984). Margolis (2004: 639) argues for explanations in a constructivist paradigm that are ‘plurally reasonable more than uniquely correct’. For this reason, the constructivist researcher has a responsibility to rigorously investigate rival explanations and maintain an explicit chain of evidence in order to allow the reader to make an informed evaluation of reasonableness and viability. The constructivist researcher also has a responsibility to consider: ‘the problematic status of empirical data and delimitation of phenomena; the problematic status of the researcher resulting from subject-object interdependency or inbetweenness; methodological relativism; the emergence and contingency of research design; and the problematic ethics of results evaluation’ (Maréchal 2010: 224). Ultimately, rather than searching for external, objective truth, constructivists aim merely to provide answers that are in some way valued by the reader. ‘The quality and utility of the research is not based on its reproducibility but on whether or not the meanings generated, by the researcher or the reader, are valued’ (Stake 1995: 135).

Another important step in aiding the reader to evaluate knowledge produced in a constructivist paradigm is to make the researcher’s own subjectivities explicit in the study (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993). For this reason, a brief inventory follows of the assumptions and biases of the researcher that are relevant to this research.

A basic assumption of this research is that translation and interpreting are social phenomena. Many views on the phenomena exist. The idea that they are social is supported in the literature in, for instance, Pym, Shlesinger, and Jettmarova (2006) or Wolf and Fukari (2007).

Another assumption about translation and interpreting made by the researcher in this project is that these phenomena are under-recognised in general. Despite often going unnoticed, the researcher also assumes that translation and interpreting aim to be processes that provide value to those who receive them.

There is also an English-speaking bias in this research. The researcher speaks English and Japanese but recognises that there may be valuable research or empirical data available in other languages that he cannot access. Moreover, an operational decision arising out of financial and time constraints was made to limit the scope of the case study to only those
participants who could speak English. This decision could have excluded the potentially interesting data of participants who did not match this profile.

With respect to culture and society, the researcher holds a considerable bias with regards to multilingualism and multiculturalism. He sees these concepts as beneficial ones that should be encouraged, and he believes that governments and individuals in a state have a responsibility and obligation to treat people from diverse ethno-linguistic backgrounds with fairness.

Finally, with respect to disaster, two assumptions made in this research are that those who experience a disaster will always want more and better information and that the most appropriate solutions to problems in the humanitarian field are the ones that require the least time and resources; adequacy is preferable to perfection delivered too late in disaster settings.

3.6 Methodological steps taken in this research

The preceding sections of this chapter described the architecture of theory and methodology chosen for this research, as well as the researcher’s epistemological and ontological perspectives and relevant basic assumptions. This section will explain how these frameworks were translated into concrete methodological steps in order to move the research from initial propositions to final conclusions. Figure 3–1 summarise these steps and their interactions with the frameworks explained above.
A case study research design begins with an initial idea about the phenomenon to be investigated. This idea can condition the choice of study, the data gathering and analysis, and even the expected results (Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin 1993). Care must be taken to acknowledge these predetermined notions and to ensure that the study is designed in such a way that the researcher remains open to having her/his preconceptions about the phenomenon challenged.

3.6.1 Step 1: Initial theories and lived experience

Figure 3.1: Steps for an ethnographically-informed case study within a constructivist paradigm.
case challenged by the gathered evidence (Wakabayashi 2007: 12). For this research, the initial idea was that the phenomena of translation and interpreting are probably a feature of large-scale disasters because of trends in migration and globalisation, because of the international character of much humanitarian response, and because disaster-related information should be available to all on ethical grounds, whatever their linguistic or cultural background. Thus, the original motivation for the project was to find empirical evidence for translation and interpreting using a disaster setting of which the researcher had personal experience: the 2011 disaster. An autoethnographic account of the researcher's experience of the disaster in Section 4.4.1 forms the first dataset in this study.

3.6.2 Step 2: Research questions

An initial review of the literature showed that, while there were data available describing how Japanese people had communicated during the disaster, there was little evidence for how foreign nationals in Japan communicated and, thus, little evidence to show that translation or interpreting had been used or needed. The research, therefore, set out to answer the questions introduced in Chapter 1:

- How did foreign residents communicate and gather information during the 2011 disaster?
- How did translation and interpreting form part of foreign residents’ communication and information gathering in the 2011 disaster?
- Why are issues of translation and interpreting important to the 2011 disaster or to other disaster contexts?

3.6.3 Step 3: Literature review and research design

The three specific research questions above were, of course, elaborated over a period of months and only came about as a result of continual engagement with the literature described in Chapter 2. In fact, earlier potential research questions centred on the intersection of translation, social media, and disaster. This topic had gained academic interest following the 2010 Haiti and 2010/2011 Canterbury Earthquakes. However, empirical evidence could not be found to support the proposal that translating social media content would be beneficial during a disaster and, worse still, little evidence was available to suggest that translation and interpreting were, in fact, needed or beneficial at all in the various disaster settings presented in the literature. As a result, the research came to focus on filling this gap in knowledge, and the research questions above were formed to establish
whether a need for translation or interpreting in the 2011 disaster could be empirically supported.

An ethnographically-informed case study adapted from Koskinen (2008) was chosen as the final design for this research, but other methods of enquiry were considered beforehand. An experiment was discounted because it would have required the reproduction of multiple, complex variables that could not be replicated or controlled easily. A survey was also discounted because respondents might have been reluctant to discuss their experience of a traumatic disaster at a distance with an unknown researcher. Participant observation was not attempted because the disaster had largely concluded by the time research began. Finally, a grounded theory design was discounted because the limited time the researcher would spend in the field would not allow for the cycles of simultaneous data gathering and analysis that are required of this approach (Charmaz 2006).

3.6.4 Step 4: Ethical approval, participant recruitment, and pilot interviews

Ethical approval for this project was received from the Research Ethics Committee of Dublin City University on July 3, 2013. A copy of the official Letter of Approval is available in Appendix A. As this was an enquiry involving human participants into a potentially distressing topic, the project required a full hearing of the committee. One of their concerns was that an attempt should be made to receive local ethical approval from an authority in Japan, the locus of study. Multiple enquiries were made by the researcher to various authorities in Japan, but the conclusion drawn from a response of the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (responsible for research guidance for medical and scientific projects carried out in Japan) was that it is not possible to receive ethical approval for a research project in the humanities in Japan unless the investigators are affiliated with a Japanese academic institution. With no such affiliation possible for this project, it was instead shown that the research had been undertaken in accordance with the broad standards expected of researchers in Japan under the Science Council of Japan's Code of Conduct for Researchers. Potential risks that participants in the research might face were identified and measures to manage these risks were put in place. A review of the disaster studies literature revealed two main risks to participants: a risk that talking about their experience of the disaster could become unpleasant, stressful, or even traumatic; a risk that providing a third-party introduction for the researcher could damage their social standing in Japan. How these two risks were mitigated will now be discussed.

As the focus of the interviews was on the linguistic and cultural aspects of the disaster and not directly on the hardships participants may have endured, it was thought that the
interviewees would be unlikely to experience severe mental health or psychosocial effects. Nonetheless, during each interview, the researcher asked participants to report on their stress levels (see Section D in the interview topic document in Appendix B). If any participant had reported elevated stress, or if the researcher had noticed symptoms of elevated stress, the researcher would have provided the participant with the telephone number and website of Tokyo English Lifeline. This is a free, anonymous telephone counselling service that operates throughout Japan in several major languages. In the end, no participant in this study required counselling. As for the social risk, participants in this research were to be recruited through personal introductions. In a Japanese context, those who provide an introduction take on the role of social (though not legal) guarantor (Bestor, Steinhoff, and Lyon-Bestor 2003). Therefore, the behaviour of the researcher would directly impact on the social standing of the introducer. It was hoped that the researcher’s knowledge of Japanese language and culture would minimise the risk of potentially damaging missteps, and it was this social risk that originally motivated the member checking steps taken in this research (see Sections 3.6.6 and 3.6.8).

The Research Ethics Committee requested only one clarification when the application was submitted. They were concerned that, though attempts had been made to manage the physical risks to the researcher in the field, no plans were in place to deal with the risk of psychosocial or mental health distress that he might encounter as a result of his own experience of the 2011 disaster and of repeated exposure to accounts of the disaster. This concern on the part of the committee for the mental and emotional wellbeing of the researcher underlines the presence and central role of the researcher in the ethnographic approach. In the committee’s eyes, the researcher’s own direct experience would have an impact on the research process, and they wanted the potentially adverse results of this experience to be acknowledged and prepared for. To do so, the researcher set up a protocol for regular communication with his supervisor while in the field so that she would be able to monitor his condition. He also maintained a log of data gathering to monitor and record his own reactions to the data-gathering process and pay special attention to symptoms of stress. (The log will be explained in detail in Section 3.6.5.)

Once ethical approval had been received, it was possible to begin recruiting participants for the study. As explained above, the goal of this ethnographically-informed case study was not statistical generalisation and, therefore, no effort was made to consider target sample size or the representativeness of participants to the population of foreign nationals.

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2 There was a need to be able to provide counselling support in languages other than Japanese because participants were not all likely to be able to speak Japanese.
resident in Japan. Rather, the researcher aimed to enquire into the experience of anyone who met the participant criteria below.

The potential participant:

- identified as a foreign national in a Japanese context;
- was resident in East Japan at the outbreak of the disaster on March 11, 2011;
- self-reported to be confident in speaking, listening to, reading, and writing English;
- was not a minor at the time of interview.

These criteria were chosen to gather empirical data to explore the research questions listed above; to meet the researcher’s need to conduct the research through English without the extra time and cost involved in translating questionnaires, hiring interpreters for interviews, and getting transcripts made and translated in other languages; to meet the ethical obligation to seek participants who could consent independently. All participation in the research was voluntary and unremunerated, participants were not naïve to any aspect of the research, and participants were free to withdraw at any time.

Table 3–3 illustrates that most of the participants in this research were introduced to the researcher by current academic colleagues, by his network of contacts in Japan, or by fellow delegates at conferences and seminars attended prior to fieldwork. In addition, the table also shows that some of the participants were already friends of the researcher before the project began.
Thus, without the researcher’s previous experience of the research setting and without a third party to vouch for the researcher’s integrity, it is unlikely that the rate of participation would have been as high. The importance of working with gatekeepers and taking advantage of personal networks of contacts can be seen by the fact that only one participant came to this research by a cold call; the researcher read an Internet article referring to the participant in question which included contact details and used these to request an interview. There is evidence, too, for a significant snowball effect in the recruitment of participants in this study, as 9 of the participants were introduced by a previous interviewee. The fact that none of these participant introductions was made prior to interviews suggests that the experience was neither unpleasant nor wasteful for participants. It also supports the need to include flexibility in the fieldwork element of an ethnographically-informed case study. These introductions by prior interviewees also suggest the importance of trust, as it might be assumed that participants would not have suggested others for interview if they had not trusted the researcher.

Not all attempts at participant recruitment were successful. Asking for participation without a third-party introduction proved highly ineffective. Direct requests for interview to
members of various Facebook groups of foreigners who experienced the disaster, to representatives of the US armed forces, to a radio network run especially for American forces in Japan, and to representatives of certain Japanese local government authorities all failed to produce a concrete interview opportunity. The social obligation created by the gatekeeper’s introduction is further suggested by the fact that, of all the interviews scheduled in this research, only one interviewee failed to show up, and this person was a Facebook-group administrator contacted by the researcher without any third-party introduction.

The process of recruiting participants for this research was iterative, and the interview stage of the research began before all participants had agreed to participate. Two pilot interviews were carried out in Ireland in July 2013 to allow the researcher to practise his interview technique. These pilot interviews were carried out with former foreign residents of Japan who had been in Japan at the time of the disaster and had returned to Ireland and who were either known to or introduced to the researcher. The pilot interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to learn what questions worked better than others, to identify where his ethnographic interview techniques needed to be improved, to understand how time-consuming transcription would be, and to practise some preliminary analysis techniques. Consequently, the researcher felt some confidence that he would be able to gather and analyse data effectively using the ethnographic interview technique before he made the commitment to travel to Japan.

3.6.5 Step 5: Data gathering in Japan

Following the pilot interviews, the researcher proceeded with participant recruitment. In all, including these two pilot interviews, 28 people were recruited to participate in this research. Table 3–4 displays the profile data of these 28 participants; these participant profile data constitute the second dataset of this case study.
It can be seen from Table 3–4 that all participants met the relevant criteria listed in Section 3.6.4; they were all English-speaking, foreign adults resident in East Japan in the disaster. Furthermore, these participants provided the multiple perspectives desired of a case study design; they represent 12 nationalities, were resident in 5 different cities in East Japan, were in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s at the time of interview, possessed a variety of linguistic abilities, and had varied occupations at the time of the disaster.

The interviews that make up the core empirical evidence of this thesis took place in Ireland, Japan, and New Zealand between July and October 2013, but 25 of these 28 interviews were held in Japan during an intensive, four-week period of data-gathering from September 18 to October 13, 2013. These data were gathered more than two years after the onset of the disaster, so it may seem difficult to argue that this was still research in a disaster context. However, aftershocks from the 2011 earthquake continued at the time of interview (a significant aftershock occurred during the data-gathering trip and was referenced in several interviews), the nuclear disaster remained unstable and threatening at the time of interview, and several interviewees spoke of how they did not yet feel that the disaster had ended (see Section 4.3.3). For this reason, the researcher maintained a log of the data-gathering process to record his observations of the context and of his own reactions to the research process.

Table 3-4. Profile data of research participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Nationality:</th>
<th>Residence during the disaster:</th>
<th>Age range at interview:</th>
<th>Time in Japan prior to disaster</th>
<th>Confidence in English*</th>
<th>Confidence in Japanese*</th>
<th>Occupation at time of disaster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>An EU state</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&gt;10 years &lt;15 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>9/8/8/7</td>
<td>(Withheld for anonymity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&gt;1 year &lt;5 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>5/4/3/3</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>An EU state</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&gt;1 year &lt;5 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>8/8/7/6</td>
<td>Office worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;5 years &lt;10 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>8/8/7/6</td>
<td>Language instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&gt;1 year &lt;5 years</td>
<td>10/9/10/10</td>
<td>7/8/5/6</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;5 years &lt;10 years</td>
<td>9/9/9/9</td>
<td>6/7/6/5</td>
<td>PR consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>&gt;20 years</td>
<td>8/8/6/8</td>
<td>8/8/5/4</td>
<td>Recruitment consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>&gt;1 year &lt;5 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>2/6/1/1</td>
<td>Finance manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Tokai</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;10 years &lt;15 years</td>
<td>9/9/9/9</td>
<td>6/8/4/4</td>
<td>Language instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Mito</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;10 years &lt;15 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>7/7/3/3</td>
<td>Restaurant / bar owner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P11</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>&gt;30 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>8/8/7/7</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P12</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>6/7/6/6</td>
<td>Company employee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P13</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>&gt;20 years</td>
<td>9/9/8/8</td>
<td>9/9/7/7</td>
<td>Interpreter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P14</td>
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<td>Sendai</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;5 years &lt;10 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>8/8/8/8</td>
<td>Language teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>Sendai</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&gt;1 year &lt;5 years</td>
<td>5/8/8/7</td>
<td>3/5/2/2</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P16</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Sendai</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;1 year &lt;5 years</td>
<td>8/8/8/8</td>
<td>1/2/0/0</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P17</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Sendai</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&lt;6 months</td>
<td>4/7/8/5</td>
<td>7/9/7/5</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P18</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;15 years &lt;20 years</td>
<td>9/9/9/9</td>
<td>8/8/4/4</td>
<td>Agency director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P19</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>&gt;15 years &lt;20 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>8/9/5/6</td>
<td>Advertising executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P20</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;5 years &lt;10 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>4/3/3/3</td>
<td>Advertising executive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P21</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;5 years &lt;10 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>4/5/4/2</td>
<td>Recruitment consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P22</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;6 months &lt;1 year</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>3/3/1/1</td>
<td>Language teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P23</td>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&gt;6 months &lt;1 year</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>3/4/5/2</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P24</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Sendai</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>&gt;5 years &lt;10 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>7/9/8/8</td>
<td>Japanese government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P25</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;10 years &lt;15 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>8/8/8/8</td>
<td>Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P26</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;5 years &lt;10 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>5/5/4/2</td>
<td>IT engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P27</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Tokyo</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>&gt;20 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>6/6/2/3</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P28</td>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Sendai</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>&gt;1 year &lt;5 years</td>
<td>10/10/10/10</td>
<td>5/5/3/3</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An anonymised version of this log is included in Appendix C, and it constitutes the third dataset of this case study.3

Interviews were the main data-gathering tool used for this project. The interview is used when the researcher wants to examine how somebody experiences and understands something but also how they talk about these experiences (Matthews and Ross 2010), and it is relatively common for ethnographic enquiries to rely on interview material (Koskinen 2008). Thus, the ‘analytically focused discourse’ (Gibson and Brown 2009: 86) that an interview aims to produce was likely to be a methodologically-appropriate way in which to answer the research questions being asked in this thesis. The interview is a flexible research tool: the researcher can choose from various types of interview (individual, group, focus-group), various methods of questioning (structured, semi-structured, unstructured), and various modes (face-to-face, by telephone, online) (Fielding 2003). Such flexibility is suited to the unanticipated developments characteristic of the case study. However, the interview can also be expensive and time-consuming, produce large amounts of non-standardised data, require particular skills in conversation management, and often require participants to come up with answers on the spot (Gibson and Brown 2009, Matthews and Ross 2010). Some of these disadvantages were mitigated by the fact that the researcher had experience as a language teacher and was equipped to build rapport quickly and deal with issues of managing a conversation. Moreover, the topics to be discussed at interview were emailed to each participant before the interview to give participants time to think about the interview topics in advance. These topics covered the participants’ experiences of the disaster, their linguistic needs, and their sense of community in the disaster and can be consulted in Appendix B. This step was not without risk; sending the topics in advance can risk prematurely shaping the data and can be an imposition of time and effort on the interviewee. In this research, though, most interviewees were happy to have the topics beforehand because it aided their memories and helped them to trust that the interview would not cover overly distressing or intrusive topics.

This research attempted to implement an ethnographic method of interviewing. This method resembles the semi-structured interview. In semi-structured interviews, the interviewer frames the structure of questioning towards a particular research area while flexibly ordering the questioning in response to the answers provided (Gibson and Brown 2009). Also, in the semi-structured interview, the researcher can be thought of as the

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3 This log has been fully anonymised and extensively abridged to protect participant anonymity. Furthermore, a reading of this log is not required to understand this thesis. The log is provided merely for interested readers to be able to independently assess how the researcher constructed knowledge in this thesis.
primary instrument; s/he develops and works through ideas with the research participants within the interview itself (Gibson and Brown 2009, Matthews and Ross 2010). As a primary instrument, it is natural in the interview for the researcher to disclose her/his own experiences to break down barriers, build rapport with the participants, and prompt them with discursive resources that may be helpful to their contributions (Gibson and Brown 2009). All of these techniques – common to the standard semi-structured interview – were applied in the present research project. However, the ethnographic interview method differs from the semi-structured interview in three main respects: its form, its attitude to silence, and its encouragement of unrelated anecdotes. The ethnographic interview is less concerned with form and a priori content and does not focus on a traditional question-and-answer format (Josephiddes 2012). By expressing interest in a topic rather than asking a question, the researcher attempts to develop this topic through a dialogic process with the interviewee; this technique gives the interviewee time to develop what they actually think about the issue – instead of feeling pressure to answer on-the-spot – and implies that the researcher's interventions are as important as the interviewees’ contributions in terms of data (Blommaert and Jie 2010). The ethnographic interview is also strategic in its use of silence; silence is not seen as the absence of speech but as the production of an intervention in the conversation designed to elicit and encourage contributions from the interviewee (Blommaert and Jie 2010). Finally the ethnographic interview views the tangents or apparently unrelated anecdotes contributed by an interviewee as valuable and to be embraced:

Thus, in your interviews, try to have people produce stories, anecdotes. If they embark on one, let them do so and do not interrupt it, even if some voice in your head tells you that the informant is getting side-tracked. S/he is only getting sidetracked in your universe, in relation to your research questions. But the side-tracking may be precisely what there is to find out: a connection between things, one that you had not previously spotted, but which the informant establishes by his/her seemingly erratic and weird jump from one topic to another. Things that in your world are disconnected may be solidly connected in their life worlds, and anecdotes offer you a rich way into that. (Blommaert and Jie 2010: 58)

While the method of questioning was ethnographic, the mode and type of interview chosen for this project was the face-to-face, individual interview. This choice over other modes and types was made to help the participants feel secure talking about potentially distressing topics without the concern of being overheard by another person (Matthews and Ross 2010) and to allow them to focus on the aspects of this complex disaster that were important to them. Each interview began with the participant filling in the questionnaire from which the profile data in Table 3–4 were created. Interviews were scheduled to take about 60 minutes,
but were shorter or longer depending on the interviewee's convenience. After each interview, an interview record sheet to archive the researcher's learning process was created. These sheets are recommended by Gibson and Brown (2009: 95) and Matthews and Ross (2010: 232) and list descriptive information about the context of the interview, reflections on the participant and the process, and initial impressions of the data. They mark a first step in data analysis and, thus, constitute the fourth dataset of this case study; anonymised versions are available in Appendix D.

The number of interviews in this thesis is not large, but this number was a function of the time and resources available to the researcher, the aims of the research, and the theories of knowledge and reality held by the communities to which the research is being addressed (Fielding 2003). Conducting 28 interviews was an achievable goal for a single researcher with one month to spend in the field. Additionally, a case study design in a constructivist frame required only a sufficient number of interviews to provide multiple perspectives on the phenomena under examination that would, where possible, continue until no significant, new data were being provided (Stake 1995, Yin 2014). The diversity in the profiles outlined in Table 3–4 and the systematic interconnectedness found in the interview data convinced the researcher that these conditions had been met. Moreover, though there is no optimal interview number, and though quantity does not denote quality of data gathering or analysis, some guidelines have been established in the qualitative research literature; as few as 6 interviews are deemed appropriate for a study using phenomenology, and 30 to 50 interviews are thought to be suitable for ethnography or grounded theory (Morse 1994: 225).

It should be noted, too, that these 28 interviews took place some 30 months after the onset of the 2011 disaster. The timing of research interventions in disaster settings must not be considered in isolation, but in tandem with issues of access to participants, the safety of the researcher and the researched, the readiness of participants to agree to interview, and the ethical appropriateness of the intervention. While this can lead to research being carried out anywhere from immediately post-disaster to up to five years after onset, the early recovery phase of a disaster is seen to be the optimal time at which to go into the field (Stallings 2002: 83-86). Recovery is generally said to take place from one month to up to one year after onset (WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific 2012: 58). Thus, the timing of interviews in this case study was less than optimal, but well within the bounds established in other disaster studies. A major concern related to the issue of timing, though, was the issue of participant recall in their reporting of their experiences. Despite this concern, a clear correlation between the timing of interviews and the quality of participant
recall has yet to be shown in the disaster studies literature, and it has been argued by some that ‘[t]here is reason to believe that many details of disasters will be recalled to good effect by the people who experienced them firsthand, even when a number of years have passed’ (Grimm et al. 2014: 63).

Following the completion of the interviews, it was also decided to build a small, illustrative corpus of examples of real communication (including some translated texts) from the time of the disaster for use in analysis. The corpus contains transcripts of media broadcasts, newspaper reports, and computer-mediated communication created by various actors at the time of the disaster. These data exemplify some of the communicative and information-gathering acts that took place during the disaster. This illustrative corpus of communication from the disaster is the fifth dataset of this case study and is available in Section 4.5.5.

3.6.6 Step 6: Transcription and member checking

The audio of each interview for this research was recorded using an Olympus VN-711PC Digital Voice Recorder. Each interview was transcribed by the researcher using Express Scribe software. This package aids transcription by allowing the transcriber to control audio playback using keyboard hot keys. Transcribing the 28 interviews in this project required approximately 400 hours of typing time from November 2013 to March 2014. The theoretical view taken on transcription in this project was that it is a partial, iterative, and value-laden representation of the original discourse (Blommaert and Jie 2010, Gibson and Brown 2009). However, the constructivist philosophical stance adopted in this research embraces such subjectivity and considers the various analytic judgements made by the researcher on what to represent and how to represent it as objects for analysis. For this reason, decisions made during the transcription process are detailed in the log of data analysis. (This log will be explained in detail in Section 3.6.7.4.) In line with the ethnographic orientation of this case study, the researcher aimed to produce ‘focused’ transcripts in the typology proposed by Gibson and Brown (2009: 109-118). Such transcripts show not just what was said but also how it was said and include as much contextual information as possible to convey the original quality of the dialogue. Nonetheless, when directly referenced in the body of the thesis, some contextual information – such as filler words, repetitions, etc. – have been removed from participant quotes to improve their readability. Once the transcripts were completed, they were anonymised. These anonymised transcripts are the sixth dataset of this case study and are available in Appendix E.
Following anonymisation, a unique link was shared with each participant showing them where the transcript of their interview (and theirs alone) was stored on the DCU-federated Google App. This form of sharing was deemed to be more secure and ethically appropriate than sending an e-mail attachment of the transcript to each interviewee. This step was the first stage of ‘member checking’: the validation of the knowledge produced in the name of the participant with the option for the participant to provide an alternative wording, to add further interpretation, or to clarify misunderstandings on the part of the researcher (Saldaña 2009: 28, Stake 1995: 115). The participants were asked first to acknowledge receipt of the link. If no additional communication was received within 30 days of delivery of the shared link, it was then taken that they had no feedback to offer, and analysis of the data continued. These conditions were explained to each participant. Member checking is a time-consuming and hazardous step in research; there is always the danger that it may cause the participant to exercise her/his right to withdraw from the study at a time when publication starts to come near. However, the constructivist paradigm of this research and the ethical rigour required in current ethnography to faithfully represent participant voices meant that it was a step that could not be overlooked.

This step proved to be worthwhile. In total, 18 of the 28 participants chose to acknowledge receipt of the transcript. Of course, as Koskinen (2008: 90) emphasises: ‘…relative silence is not to be interpreted as a sign of agreement.’ We cannot, therefore, assume that the 10 participants that did not reply had no problem with their transcripts. What we can say, though, is that, of the 18 participants that did reply, 11 participants had no changes to request, 5 participants had minor changes to request, and 2 participants had significant changes to request. The minor changes included the correction of words misheard or incorrectly transcribed by the researcher and the deletion of some filler words to improve readability. The significant changes to two transcripts were made to further protect the anonymity of the participants. Specifically, the participants asked for their country of origin to be made more ambiguous, for less detail to be given about their time spent resident in Japan, and for a more generic description of their occupation at the time of the disaster to be used. The fact that making these changes allowed these participants to feel better protected and to feel that their voices and experiences were being respected and more faithfully represented in the research made this time-consuming step worthwhile.

3.6.7 Step 7: Data analysis

Though initial analysis began at the interview stage, commencing coding represented a shift to systematically identifying and explaining the interrelationships, patterns, and
categories in the research data. Thus, an appropriate and rigorous analytical strategy needed to be implemented at this point. The analytical strategy adopted was a form of thematic analysis operationalised from Braun and Clarke (2006). In this operationalisation, themes were developed over six phases that progressed from participant-led, to interpretive, to abstract analysis.

3.6.7.1 Participant-led analysis

The first phase entailed multiple readings of hard copies of the interview transcripts to generate a list of code candidates that displayed features of interest to the research. Codes can come in various types, and this research used a mixture of a priori descriptive codes, based on the three research questions and defined prior to examination of the data, in vivo descriptive codes, generated from the voices of the participants during the coding process, and inductive codes, generated by the researcher when directly examining the data (Gibson and Brown 2009, Saldaña 2009). This first phase produced 79 codes in total.

Then, the second phase of the Braun and Clarke (2006) workflow involved creating a rule-for-inclusion for each of these 79 codes and proceeding again through the interview data to highlight any passages that satisfied the rule. This second and all subsequent phases of coding of the data were facilitated by QSR's NVivo 10 software. This software was used to make the process of analysis more accurate, reliable, and transparent (Gibbs 2002). Such rigour is essential to the constructivist paradigm explained in Section 3.5. The functions of the software that proved useful were its code and retrieve functions, its functions to assign definitions to codes, and its functions to build a log of analytical decisions and to create conceptual networks (Gibson and Brown 2009).

Coding in this research was taken to be an iterative and cyclical act that facilitated the organisation and analysis of data by linking an idea with data that somehow exemplified that idea (Bazeley and Richards 2000, Gibbs 2002, Saldaña 2009). The codes generated formed a focus for thinking about the data and their interpretation with the aim of finding new understanding from the data (Bazeley and Richards 2000, Gibbs 2002). As a result, the codes should not be seen as a product of this research but are better conceptualised as part of the process. For this reason, as recommended by multiple authors in the literature (e.g., Bazeley and Richards 2000, Gibson and Brown 2009, Saldaña 2009), a codebook
was kept of all the coding definitions that were created. This is the seventh dataset of this case study and is available in Appendix F.\(^4\)

Once initial coding had been completed for the interview data, the same rules-for-inclusion were used to work through the secondary data. Seventeen pieces of secondary data are explicitly referred to in the participant-led and interpretive analyses of this thesis. The secondary data included: television news broadcasts and documentary excerpts; a survey of 282 foreign nationals in Sendai; websites, emails, and social media content from 2011; government pamphlets, publications, and photos; a crisis map; an NPO’s annual report; a newspaper report. This is the eighth dataset gathered for this case study, and a separate reference list for these secondary sources is available in Appendix G.

3.6.7.2 Interpretive analysis

The third and fourth phases in the Braun and Clarke (2006) analytical strategy involved using the above coded data to make interpretations about their meaning and significance. Specifically, the third phase involved combining the coded primary and secondary data into larger groups to produce themes. Again, a rule-for-inclusion process was used here. The main objectives of the fourth phase were to refine and further define the themes and to re-read the hard copies of the data with these themes in mind to ensure that the process of moving to interpretive analysis had not removed the research too far from the original participant data.

Overall, the focus in these two largely interpretive phases was on creating interpretations through a process of triangulation; that is to say, through the search for systematic interconnectedness within the interview data themselves and between the primary and secondary data. Again, from a constructivist perspective, the triangulation process was not carried out to increase the likelihood of truth but to help search for additional and competing interpretations and to identify the most viable of them (Stake 1995). Two frameworks were particularly instructive for triangulation. The first framework was Gibbs (2002: 13-14), which listed various threats to quality in the process of analysis and triangulation. The threats include: an overemphasis on positive cases and an ignoring of negative cases; a focus on the exotic and unusual; unwarranted generalisation; the introduction of bias, vagueness and inconsistency in the analytical process. The second framework came from Hatch (2002 cited in Saldaña 2009: 6) and advises the reader on how

\[^{4}\text{Appendix F shows that, of the 104 codes in the codebook, 49 were inductive, 31 were } \text{in vivo, and 24 were } \text{a priori.}\]

58
to search for patterns when qualitatively analysing data. Hatch suggests thinking of patterns as varying forms, not as stable regularities, and encourages the reader to examine the data not just for forms of similarity, but also for forms of difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation.

3.6.7.3 Abstract analysis

Following any necessary adjustments after re-reading the hard copies of the data with the thematic rules-for-inclusion in mind, the fifth phase introduced abstract analysis and involved the production of a well-defined thematic map that was linked plausibly to abstract ideas contained in the literature to which the research would contribute. In this case study, the overriding argument made visible through the thematic map was about the importance of trust to the communicating and information gathering carried out by foreign residents in the disaster, and the abstract application of trust theory to these data to argue for an important role for translation and interpreting in the existence of this trust. (These abstract arguments will be explained in detail in Chapter 6.) The ninth dataset created for this case study came during this abstract analysis phase and consists of the detailed breakdown and analysis of instances of trust according to the trust model developed by Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) explained in Chapter 6. This dataset is available in Appendix H. The sixth and final phase in this operationalisation of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) strategy involved the write-up of the report. It is included in the workflow here to underline that interpretation, abstract thinking, and the refinement of these ideas continued up to the final stages of the writing process.

Figures 3–2 and 3–3 illustrate how the coding described here in Section 3.6.7 was developed from the second phase of the Braun and Clarke (2006) workflow through to the final thematic map.
Figure 3-2. Thematic map phases 2 & 3 [no. of code is ref. no. in codebook in Appendix F]
3.6.7.4 An assessment of Braun and Clarke’s strategy

At the early stages of the project, analytical strategies such as narrative analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), and framing analysis were considered. However, thematic analysis was chosen because of its more frequent application to ethnographic and case study projects than the other three options (Atkinson 2001, Yin 2014), and because a focus on the participants’ stories (narrative analysis), experiential identities (IPA), or communicative/discursive frames (framing analysis) might have proved to be more analytically restrictive than a broader thematic search. The Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analytical strategy was labour intensive, especially with more than 280,000 words of transcript data to read through repeatedly over various phases. Nonetheless, these repeated viewings at different times and with different focuses (sometimes participant-led, sometimes interpretive, sometimes abstract) encouraged fresh insights about the data and led to new realisations and valuable questioning of assumptions as the process of analysis progressed. The development of the researcher’s ideas about the data and the major analytical decisions taken can be tracked in the log of data analysis. This constitutes the tenth and final dataset of this case study and is available in Appendix I. Most valuably, the realisation that trust was an analytical category that could be used to tie the major themes of the thesis together – that is to say, the driving force behind the final abstract analysis in this work – came about only in the fourth of Braun and Clarke’s six-phase workflow. In sum, the cost in terms of labour-intensive repetition in this strategy was outweighed by the benefit of new insight afforded by repeated viewings of the same data at regular intervals but from different perspectives. Additionally, the costs would have been further mitigated had the transcripts been of a more manageable length.

3.6.8 Step 8: Further member checking and report writing

With the data analysis phase completed, a second member checking step was carried out in which Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of this thesis (the analytical chapters) were sent to all 28 participants. Here participants were once again given the opportunity to ensure that their experiences and voices had not been misrepresented in the research and to provide any

5 The mean word count per transcript was approximately 10,000 words, the median was approximately 9,000 words, and the mode was approximately 8,000 words, so all transcripts were relatively long and took a considerable amount of time to read through.

6 This log has been fully anonymised to protect participant anonymity. Furthermore, a reading of this log is not required to understand this thesis. The log is provided merely for interested readers to be able to independently assess how the researcher constructed knowledge in this thesis.

7 The participants were sent these three chapters rather than the full thesis to check so as not to impose an excessive burden on them and to ensure that there was ample time after member checking for the full write up of the thesis.
feedback or changes for the researcher to consider. This step also contributed in part to fulfilling the researcher’s ethical responsibility to provide the people who might benefit the most (i.e., foreign residents of Japan who might experience another large disaster in the future) with the findings of this research as soon as possible. In the end, only 7 of the 28 participants acknowledged this second member checking step. None of these participants requested any changes and all gave a positive assessment of the work. A representative example is the following line taken from Participant 6’s reply: ‘I think the mentions accurate [sic] and in context, and I am fine with it as is’. Again, we must remind ourselves of Koskinen’s (2008: 90) caution that silence from participants should not be interpreted as agreement. However, some validation for the findings in this report can be claimed by the fact that, when given the opportunity to refute the arguments advanced in the thesis, 7 of the 28 participants did not do so and, on the contrary, supported and positively evaluated the knowledge that was created in the work. With this second stage of member checking completed, the researcher finished the write up of the PhD document and notified his university of his intention to submit the thesis for examination.

3.7 Learning points from implementing the methodological steps

In addition to the various learning points that have been mentioned in Sections 3.4 and 3.6, two broad, unanticipated lessons were learned by the researcher in implementing Koskinen’s (2008) methodology.

The first lesson concerns the importance of trust and its relationship to the emic and etic tensions inherent in any ethnographically-informed project, as well as its relationship to the value of some of the data gathered. A need to build and maintain trust conditioned some of the practical steps applied in this methodology: choosing to use face-to-face, individual interviews over other data-gathering tools; sending an outline of interview topics to the participants in advance of meeting; providing participants with the opportunity to member check the interview transcripts and data analysis chapters. In addition, though, it was the researcher’s ability to claim insider status or to display an insider perspective that helped to foster trust and intimacy at crucial times in the interviews. Selectively employing identities in such a strategic way did, at times, lead to some feelings of guilt or dishonesty on the part of the researcher, but these feelings were mitigated by the other ethical steps that were put in place to ensure that the participants did not feel manipulated. Moreover, at other points in the project, it was deemed more important for the research to keep the trust of the participants than to add interesting new data; specifically, three participants initially provided supplementary data that illustrated the thesis’ arguments well but then asked that
these data not be included due to their sensitive and personal nature. To maintain participant trust, these data were entirely omitted from the research project.

The second lesson concerns the value but occasional impracticality of the ethnographic interview method. This way of interviewing that encourages tangents, anecdotes, and strategic silence certainly generated rich interview data, helped the researcher to deal with sensitive and potentially distressing topics in the interviews, and encouraged interviewees to remember details gradually over a developing dialogue. Ultimately, though, the success of this method was found to be dependent on several factors. Firstly, time; when under time pressure (e.g., knowing that the participant needed to get back to work soon, etc.) the interview required greater structure and researcher control. Secondly, the participant's character; some people are naturally more or less talkative. For the less talkative people, it was more difficult to leave them in control of the interview or there would have been unproductive, non-strategic silence. Finally, the ethnographic quality of the interviews was also affected by how much each participant felt they had a 'story' to tell. Some participants did not see their experience as being worthy of the title 'story' and they needed more prompting and structure to give more contextual, fuller answers.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided extensive discussion from the literature on the fundamental aspects of the ethnographic and case study methodologies in order to show that the Koskinen (2008) methodology was appropriate to the aims of the research and to detail the ways in which this methodology was operationalised to describe, understand, and explain the social phenomena of translation and interpreting using the case of the community of foreign nationals resident in East Japan during the 2011 disaster. The next chapter begins the investigation of these phenomena and describes and explains the context in which translation and interpreting took place in the 2011 disaster.
‘Civilization exists by geological consent, subject to change without notice.’

Will Durant, Historian (1885-1981)
Chapter 4 – Context of communicating and gathering information

Participant-led analysis:

Beginning to answer the following research question:

• How did foreign residents communicate and gather information during the 2011 disaster?

Figure 4-1. Word cloud from coded data used primarily in the creation of Chapter 4

This word cloud has been created (using NVivo 10 software) from text contained under the following codes: Beginning of the disaster; Disaster culture; Ending of the disaster; External factors; Instances of communicating; Instances of information gathering; Principal perceived hazard; Relationship with a significant other; Rural Residence; Suburban residence; Urban residence. The word cloud displays the 100 most frequent words with a minimum length of 1 character. Only the default stop words for US English preset in NVivo 10 software (generally articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions) have been applied to this list.
4.1 Introduction
This chapter describes and explains the environment in which communication and information gathering were being carried out in the 2011 disaster, indicates the types of foreign resident who were involved in these communicative acts, and analyses in detail how these foreign residents went about these acts. To achieve this, the first half of the chapter presents largely contextual and experiential information, while the second half of the chapter offers descriptive data and findings. The contextual and experiential elements consist of an overview of the disaster, an explanation of how the boundaries of this enquiry into the disaster have been established, the researcher’s autoethnographic account of his experiences of the disaster, and short descriptions of four other foreign residents’ experiences of the disaster. The findings in the chapter are a form of participant-led analysis in which data from interviews with the 28 participants described in Chapter 3 have been combined with secondary data to create the first arguments that make up this thesis. The chapter begins, though, with a reminder of the catastrophic events that took place in Japan in early 2011.

4.2 An overview of the disaster
In Japan on Friday, March 11, 2011 at 2.46pm a powerful magnitude 9.0 earthquake created a massive tsunami that set off a serious nuclear disaster. UNESCO (2012: 3) underlines the catastrophic scale of this complex disaster: the tsunami had a run-up height of 40m at its highest point and inundated 535km² of land over a coast line of about 2,400km; 128,753 houses were completely destroyed and 245,376 houses were partially destroyed. Furthermore, at the time of writing, 200,495 people remain internally displaced as a result of the disaster (Reconstruction Agency of Japan 2015). The tsunami was certainly the deadliest of the three hazards, and approximately 92% of fatalities in the disaster were by drowning (UNESCO 2012: 3), but the disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power plant was assigned the highest possible rating on the International Nuclear Event Scale and continues, at the time of writing, to be a volatile situation that authorities are attempting to control (McCurry 2015). The estimated economic losses from the disaster are put at some US$220 billion and recovery operations are predicted to be on-going until 2020 (UNESCO 2012: 3).

The response to the disaster was the largest in Japanese history and involved the deployment of personnel from both national and international bodies. The Japanese Self Defense Forces dispatched almost half of their uniformed personnel, or some 107,000 people (Ministry of Defense of Japan 2011). In addition, the US Military – Japan’s sole
defence ally, with forces based throughout the Japanese territory – mobilised approximately 16,000 troops, 15 vessels, and 140 aircraft to assist Japan in search and rescue, reopening transport channels, transport of supplies, and information gathering (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2012). Additional humanitarian relief and support were provided on a large scale by organisations such as the Japanese Red Cross Society or United Nations bodies like UNOCHA, UNICEF, WHO, or UNESCO. For instance, the Red Cross alone dispatched 896 medical teams (totalling some 5,300 staff) throughout the worst-affected areas, coordinated the activities of thousands of volunteers, and collected US$3.89 billion as of April 2012 (Japanese Red Cross Society 2012).

The areas worst affected by loss of life, injury, displacement, and destruction of property in the 2011 disaster were the fishing villages and rural areas of Japan’s north-eastern Tohoku region, in particular Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefectures (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies 2013). In all, 15,887 people lost their lives, 2,615 are still unaccounted for, and 6,150 were injured (National Police Agency of Japan 2014). Sixty-five percent of those who lost their lives were over 60 years of age (UNESCO 2012: 3), and 41 of the fatalities in this disaster were recorded as having a nationality other than Japanese; three quarters of these foreign fatalities were Chinese or Korean (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan 2012). The numbers of foreign residents registered in Japan dropped dramatically following the disaster, and 41,207 fewer foreign nationals were resident in Japan by the end of March 2011 than had been there at the start of the year; in the three worst-affected prefectures, the number of foreign residents dropped on average 14.3 per cent (Ministry of Justice of Japan 2012).

This overview has attempted to show that the context of the 2011 disaster is important and needs to be understood to interpret the arguments presented in this thesis. However, the scale and complexity of this contextual information are also potentially overwhelming, and this fact reinforces the need to establish boundaries in this enquiry; failing to do so would risk losing the objects of enquiry in the midst of this voluminous context. The next section explains how the boundaries for this case study have been defined.

4.3 Boundaries of the enquiry

The long-running and complex disaster described in Section 4.2 showed that many groups of individuals could have been chosen as cases to be studied in this enquiry. Emergency responders, affected communities, or government institutions were all communicating with each other and with the outside world during the disaster. The objects of enquiry in this thesis are the phenomena of translation and interpreting. Therefore, it made sense to focus
on a group that would likely have been producers and consumers of translation and interpreting.

4.3.1 Defining the case to be studied

It would have been interesting to study Japanese people’s experiences of translation or interpreting in this disaster, and this group could have begun to form the case in this enquiry. However, the dominant linguistic and cultural context of Japan is Japanese, and Japanese domestic responders took charge of the majority of response activities. Therefore, it might have been difficult to find expressions of the phenomena of translation and interpreting when viewed from the point of view of Japanese nationals. In contrast, less than 2% of the total population of Japan were registered as being foreign nationals at the time of onset of the disaster (Ministry of Justice of Japan 2012). Thus, foreign languages and cultures would have been unlikely to dominate the disaster scene and, if it could be assumed that a portion of this population of foreign nationals were not competent in a Japanese linguistic and cultural context, then translation would likely have formed part of their experiences of the disaster. Prior disaster contexts in Japan seemed to support these assumptions. Sato, Okamoto, and Miyao (2009) explain that, in the 1995 Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, foreigners – mostly Korean, Chinese, and Brazilian nationals – made up 2% of the total population in the disaster area but 3% of the fatalities in the earthquake. This happened because these foreigners lived in cheap, poorly earthquake-prepared housing, because they could not understand the emergency communications in Japanese, and because they found insufficient support in other languages. Satisfied that it made sense to focus on foreign nationals as a potential case with which to study the phenomena of translation and interpreting in disaster, the question then became the selection of the most appropriate sub-group of foreign nationals on which to focus.

Foreign nationals in Japan in the 2011 disaster did not form a homogenous group, and even unpacking the concept of foreignness in a Japanese context is a complex and sensitive task. (For an instructive exposition of some of the debates surrounding how language, culture, and identity intersect with ideas of foreignness in Japan, see Gottlieb [2012].) For the purposes of this research, however, it was necessary to be clear about whose experiences were being considered as data. Potential groups of foreign nationals present in Japan for the 2011 disaster included foreign responders, short-term foreign visitors to Japan, and documented and undocumented foreign residents of Japan. Each group will be discussed briefly before the group chosen as the case in this study is explained.
4.3.1.1 Foreign responders

Foreign troops working in a humanitarian capacity as well as specialised and volunteer humanitarian responders from overseas were present in Japan in the 2011 disaster. The US military was the largest foreign presence in the emergency response effort, and the Japanese government requested the US to play a central role for several reasons: the US is Japan’s sole defence ally and has forces based throughout the territory; they have a huge response capacity; Japanese and US forces regularly carry out joint military exercises and have a high level of interoperability (Ministry of Defense of Japan 2011, Shimodaira 2012, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars 2012). Other foreign responders performed a largely supporting role and represented a wide variety of countries and institutions:

Countries, territories and organizations with teams on-the-ground at the initial stage included Australia, China, France, Germany, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Mexico, Mongolia, Singapore, South Korea, Russia, South Africa, Switzerland, Turkey, Taiwan, UK, USA, IAEA, UNDAC, and UNOCHA, which all responded with search, rescue and relief activities. (Japanese Red Cross Society 2012: 4)

4.3.1.2 Short-term foreign visitors

This sub-group of foreign nationals is made up largely of tourists, business travellers, and journalists. It is difficult to find records in the literature on the experience of this category of foreigner due to the fact that they were in Japan for just a short time. One mention of this group, however, came in a press conference given by the mayor of Sendai (the largest city in the three worst-affected prefectures). In this conference, the mayor underlined that it was not only citizens resident in the disaster zone that were forced to evacuate to refuge areas, but also tourists and business travellers, and that providing information to such non-residents proved difficult (Matsuoka 2012). Furthermore, it is not difficult to imagine that foreign nationals in this group would have had few established support systems in Japan and might have had little experience of Japanese language or culture.

4.3.1.3 Documented and undocumented foreign residents of Japan

Japan has a strict residency management system for foreign nationals. All mid-term to long-term foreign residents are issued with a registration card and have a legal obligation to register their place of residence with local government authorities (Immigration Bureau of Japan 2011). This means that reliable, up-to-date data on the number of foreign residents in each prefecture of Japan are accessible through the national statistics agencies (E-Stat
These data are detailed and include collated information on categories such as country of origin, purpose for being in Japan, and visa status. Of course, just because an individual was registered in a prefecture does not mean that they were necessarily present at the onset of the disaster, but this group of foreign nationals provided the researcher with a sub-group whose numbers could be estimated and whose profiles could be known. Additionally, not all foreign nationals resident in Japan at the time would have entered the country with the appropriate documentation, and the numbers of such undocumented residents and their profiles are difficult to estimate.

All of these foreign nationals – the US military, other humanitarian responders, tourists, business travellers, journalists, documented or undocumented residents – could have made interesting cases, but this thesis focuses on just one sub-group: documented foreign residents of Japan, specifically those foreign nationals who were resident in the disaster zone at the time of onset of the 2011 disaster. For convenience, all references to ‘foreign residents’ or to ‘foreign nationals resident’ in Japan in the remainder of this thesis refer to this particular case.

This group was chosen for a variety of reasons. As explained in Chapter 3, the researcher had connections to communities of long-term foreign residents still living in Japan as a result of having lived there himself. Additionally, the longer-term engagement of this group with Japan implied that they might have been involved in communication at more varied stages of the disaster. Finally, this engagement with Japan coupled with continued ties to linguistic and cultural contexts beyond Japan promised that this group would hold interesting views on language, culture, translation, and interpreting.

4.3.1.4 A note on foreignness

Adopting the appropriate terminology to refer to the case being studied in this research has been problematic. The decision to use the term ‘foreign resident(s)’ or ‘foreign national(s) resident in Japan’ was made after due consideration of alternative terms and of the issues of language, culture, and identity that the use of such terms entails. In fact, these terms are translations of the terms 在留外国人 (zairyū gaikokujin – which can be glossed as ‘resident foreign national’) and 日本に在留する外国人 (nihon ni zairyū suru gaikokujin – which can be glossed as ‘foreign national resident in Japan’) used in official Japanese immigration literature. (See, for instance, Immigration Bureau of Japan [2011] or Ministry of Justice of Japan [2012]). Nevertheless, it is recognised that the use of the adjective ‘foreign’ could bring with it unintended connotations of ‘other’ or ‘less than’. Moreover, ‘foreign’ in a Japanese context could imply a lack of Japanese linguistic or cultural
competence that would not necessarily represent the case. In the end, it was decided that these terms – though far from perfect – were preferable to the other terms that had been considered. The rejected terms and a brief reason for their rejection are listed below.

- ‘Non-Japanese speaker’ did not reflect the fact that some members of the group making up the case could speak Japanese proficiently.
- ‘Migrant’ conveyed a nuance of ‘temporary’ or ‘transitory’ that did not represent the experience of some members of the group making up the case.
- ‘Economic migrant’ ignored the fact that some members of the group making up the case came to Japan to study or to accompany a partner.
- ‘Expatriate’ in a Japanese context was found to refer to only one urban, high-income socioeconomic group of residents originally from other countries.
- ‘Non-Japanese’ was thought to convey a more profound connotation of ‘other’ or ‘less than’ than foreign national.
- ‘Centre-periphery’ and ‘majority-minority’ conveyed a power relation that does not necessarily reflect the high social status and non-marginalised status of some members of the group making up the case.
- ‘International residents’ was thought to be equally applicable to Japanese people who had lived overseas but were now back in Japan. For instance, the term ‘international school’ is used in a Japanese context to indicate a student body usually made up of non-nationals and Japanese returnees from overseas.

It should now be clear that the group of people being used to make a study of translation and interpreting in this thesis is foreign residents. More specifically, as was indicted above, it is looking at those foreign nationals who were resident in the disaster zone at the time of onset of the 2011 disaster. This specification implies spatial and temporal boundaries that must now be explained.

4.3.2 Defining the disaster in space

Section 4.2 explained that the worst of the disaster was concentrated on Japan’s north-eastern Tohoku region. However, the officially-designated disaster zone spread over much of the eastern half of Japan’s main island. This is evidenced by the fact that Japan’s 1947 Disaster Relief Act was applied to give relief to areas contained in the following ten prefectures: Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima, Aomori, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba, Tokyo, Niigata, and Nagano (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan 2011). Figure 4–2 represents
on a map of Japan divided into its forty-seven prefectures the areas in which this act was applied. It also indicates the place of residence at the time of the disaster’s onset of the 28 participants in this case study (see Section 3.6.5 for detail).

Figure 4-2. Map of the official disaster zone

Official records can be used to estimate the number of foreign residents that may have been in these ten prefectures at the time of the disaster. Figures for 2011 indicate that about 670,000 foreign nationals from more than 190 different countries were registered as being resident in this zone (E-Stat 2011). Specifically, 28,830 foreign nationals were recorded as being resident in the three worst-affected prefectures (Iwate, Miyagi, Fukushima) and 649,704 foreign nationals were recorded as being resident in the remaining disaster-hit prefectures (Aomori, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Chiba, Tokyo, Niigata and Nagano). In short, the phenomena of translation and interpreting were open to being explored from the

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9 These records are available in Japanese from: http://tinyurl.com/n2udcxq [Accessed 12 June 2015].
perspective of a large number of potential informants and, if a foreign national was resident anywhere in the red area outlined in Figure 4–2, their data was considered for potential inclusion in this case study.

**4.3.3 Defining the disaster in time**

Having defined a sufficient scope in space, it was necessary to establish a scope in time for eligible data. Guidelines proposed by the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (2012: 58) were adapted to choose temporal cut-offs for the disaster. These guidelines define the phases and timeline of a disaster as pre-event (lasting only seconds or minutes), event (lasting about one week after onset), response (lasting about one month after onset), and recovery (lasting about one year after onset). Thus, any data from a few minutes before the first earthquake hit to up to about a year after the onset of the disaster were to be considered for inclusion in this research. This choice was largely supported by data from those who participated in the study. Figure 4–3 graphically represents when participants in this case study felt the 2011 disaster started and ended, with the 28 participants listed on the y-axis and their experiences of time listed on the x-axis, allowing for the temporal scope for the whole group to be plotted.
It should be noted, first of all, that the red line indicating the starting point of the disaster is not smooth. The bumps in this line represent those participants (numbers 14, 28, 2, 24, and 25) who began their accounts of the disaster with the large, 7.2-magnitude foreshock that occurred two days before the principal earthquake. This foreshock acted as an important reference point for these participants and was when they claimed to have entered a frame of mind for getting ready to cope with a disaster. For instance, certain participants found that their sleep was disturbed before the principal earthquake on March 11 or that the foreshock made them think about disaster-related topics, such as the need to buy earthquake insurance. Thus, ‘pre-event’ in this study came to be considered not seconds or minutes but two whole days before the disaster, and so data from this extended ‘pre-event’ period became eligible for inclusion.\(^\text{10}\)

Participants varied greatly in how they defined the end of the 2011 disaster; some participants felt it lasted as little as two weeks, while others felt it had not yet ended at the time of interview some two-and-a-half years after onset. There does not seem to be any

\(^{10}\) The ‘progressive focus’ of the case study method explained in Section 3.3 allows for such changes during the enquiry.
The correlation between geographic location and experience of time in the disaster. We might have assumed that those in areas that incurred great damage or that were located near nuclear power plants (such as Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture or Mito and Tokai in Ibaraki Prefecture) would have felt the effects of the disaster longer than those who were further away (for instance, in Tokyo). However, this was not the case, as can be seen from the data labels along the y-axis in Figure 4–3. Despite these varied opinions on when the disaster ended, it would seem reasonable to include data from any point from Wednesday, March 9, 2011 (the date of the foreshock that acted as a precursor to the 2011 disaster) to about one year later, sometime in March 2012.

So far this chapter has argued that an understanding of the context of the 2011 disaster is vital but potentially overwhelming and that, to keep a focus on the phenomena of translation and interpreting, it was necessary to orient the case study on one group of people in one specific place over one defined period of time. The next section works on the premise that, to understand the type of data generated by the people who make up the case in this study, we must first understand some of the ways in which they experienced the disaster.

4.4 Lived experience of the disaster

This case study presents a thesis about translation and interpreting, but ultimately it is a story about how people experienced these phenomena as social beings. People’s experiences form the bulk of the primary data gathered for this enquiry, and the enquiry’s ethnographically-informed methodology recognises the personhood of the researcher in the research process. In order to provide the reader with a sense of what it was like to experience the 2011 disaster as a foreign resident, this section presents the researcher’s autoethnographic account of his experiences of the disaster as well as short descriptions of the experiences of four participants selected from the dataset. These accounts focus on issues of communication and information gathering: the elements of disaster experience thought to be most relevant to the phenomena of translation and interpreting. In addition, this section provides a brief summary of how participants in the research experienced Japanese disaster culture; another element of experience that emerged as important context for interpreting this study’s findings.

4.4.1 The researcher’s autoethnographic account

A first-person account of how the researcher came to this research, experienced the disaster, and communicated and gathered information in the disaster is provided here to enable the reader to understand the frames of knowledge and understanding with which the researcher
approached the research questions in this case study and, more broadly, to give the reader a sense of what it was like to live the experience of the 2011 disaster.

4.4.1.1 How I came to this research project

I had been living in Japan on and off for almost eight years when the 2011 disaster struck. I was working in a Japanese company headquartered in downtown Tokyo that had factories, research centres, and sales offices throughout Tohoku and especially in two of the worst-hit prefectures, Iwate and Miyagi. I had been hired into this company to work on translation, language training, and related issues. However, my role had changed over time, and by 2011 I was being asked to deal with international recruitment and international transfers more and more. I did not like this change in my career path, and I missed working solely on translation and proof-reading. Nonetheless, I was happy in my life outside work. I had studied Japanese throughout my time living in Japan, and I had attained the highest grade of the Japanese-Language Proficiency Test – a well-known certification of Japanese ability. Therefore, I could speak, read, write, and listen to Japanese well enough that I was able to live independently without assistance from other Japanese speakers. Moreover, my long experience of life in Japan meant that I felt comfortable in a Japanese cultural context.

I stayed in Japan for another one-and-a-half years after the disaster. I stayed because I felt a responsibility to be part of the rebuilding of Japan and of the company that I worked for; many colleagues that I was close to were in the worst areas of the disaster zone when the earthquake hit, and many of the company’s facilities and operations had been severely damaged by the disaster. However, as the months wore on, my unhappiness started to increase; I was stressed by the constant aftershocks, my dissatisfaction with my new work responsibilities continued to grow, and I began to miss my family and friends in Ireland more and more. Eventually, I quit my job in Japan and returned to Dublin to begin a PhD.

Initially, I worked with my supervisor to propose a project looking at the translation of user-generated content produced over social media in the disaster. The intersection of translation, social media, and disaster was a topic that had been gaining academic interest at the time of our proposal in early 2012, in particular in light of the 2010 Haiti and 2010/2011 Canterbury Earthquakes. As I began to review the literature on this topic, though, I became frustrated at the lack of empirical evidence to suggest that translating social media content would be beneficial to foreigners in times of disaster. Worse still, I struggled to find empirical evidence that translation and interpreting were, in fact, needed by foreigners when a disaster struck. As a result, the focus of my research changed, and one small contribution that I felt I could make was to attempt to provide empirical evidence
for translation and interpreting being needed in the one context with which I was most familiar, the 2011 disaster.

4.4.1.2. How I experienced the disaster

I was working at my desk in a big, open-plan office on the fourth floor of a ten-story building in the centre of Tokyo when the first earthquake struck on March 11. A new co-worker from Ireland who had just started some months prior was at the desk beside me. I had been through many earthquakes in my eight years of living in Japan, but this was the first time I ever went under a desk for cover. The shaking was strong, but scarier for me was the two-minute length of the earthquake and how it seemed to keep getting stronger; any earthquake I had experienced before that had lasted just a few seconds with the sharpest jolt coming at the beginning. When the shaking subsided, my co-workers and I stood around a television located in one corner of the office. A television was on each floor of the building in preparation for precisely such a scenario. All I remember of that first broadcast is a lot of flashing colours, and I did not take in any of the initial information. After some discussion among the senior executives, the call was made to evacuate the whole building.

The evacuation proceeded smoothly and quickly as these procedures had been regularly rehearsed. We stood in groups outside the building to have our names checked off a list of employees. My first instinct at this time was to tell my family in Ireland that I was okay. I used my smartphone to access Facebook over a 3G connection and posted a status saying that there had been a big earthquake but that I was okay. I never even thought to make a call because I could see all the other people around me unable to get a signal. As we were standing outside the building, the first major aftershock hit, and we became aware that a large crane on top of the building under construction next to us was dangling precariously. We were starting to think that coming outside had not been such a good idea. This decision had been taken by senior executives despite the fact that at annual emergency drills we had been told that the safest place to be following an earthquake was indoors. In the months of aftershocks that followed, announcements were made not to evacuate the building.

There was no sense of panic as we stood outside the building – I clearly remember seeing a Japanese woman in a hair salon continuing to have her hair done – but there was a buzz of anxious energy. Many people were checking their mobile phones, and public address systems were repeating warnings in Japanese that a tsunami could hit Tokyo Bay just down the road. At no time yet had I felt a need for information in my own language. While I had communicated over Facebook in English, I had communicated with most of my colleagues
in Japanese and gathered information so far in Japanese. At about 3.30pm, it was decided by senior executives that anyone who wanted to go home could do so. My apartment was just a ten-minute walk from my office, but many of my Japanese colleagues were facing the decision to walk three or four hours home or stay the night in the office; the transportation system was in chaos, and most trains had stopped and many roads were jammed.

I had always been nervous about earthquakes, so I was prepared in terms of having supplies of water, dry goods, batteries, photocopies of important documents, cash, medicine, etc., in my home. I also knew to fill my bathtub full of water as soon as I got in, in case water supplies would be cut off later. I did, however, stop in at a nearby convenience store to buy some fresh food, and already supplies in the shop were low. My apartment had been built only two years previously and had the most advanced earthquake-proofing. Nothing was damaged and nothing had even fallen off the shelves. The gas had automatically cut off as a fire prevention measure, but power, water, and Internet were still functioning normally.

My first goal on returning home was to call each of my family members in Ireland. I was able to connect to each person’s landline or mobile using my prepaid Skype account and the Internet connection at my apartment. The Irish colleague who had been sitting beside me when the earthquake struck joined me in my apartment. We were trying to figure out what was going on. By now, it was late afternoon. I did not own a television, so my first instinct was to turn on the emergency battery-operated radio that I had in my disaster pack. The radio was just broadcasting long lists of places where tsunami warnings were in effect, so we went online to look for information and found that NHK (the Japanese national broadcaster) was streaming news over certain social media websites. We used the ustream.tv website to follow the live NHK broadcasts in Japanese. At this time, it was mostly a mixture of tsunami warnings, footage from Tohoku, and footage of the oil refinery fire in Chiba near Tokyo. I was helping my colleague – who could not yet speak much Japanese – to understand the broadcasts and discussing what we thought was best to do. After eating some food together, my colleague went home.

Shortly after, a nuclear emergency was declared at the Fukushima power plant. All at once, I was out of my linguistic and cultural comfort zone. While I had been concerned about events so far in the disaster, I had not been concerned about my understanding of these events. The nuclear disaster introduced new, specialised vocabulary and concepts that I was unfamiliar with. I spent the weekend sleeping in my clothes and not leaving my apartment just glued to the live streaming of NHK news on ustream.tv. I focused in particular on the ‘Social Stream’ function that allowed users to comment (almost
exclusively in Japanese) in real time on the stream being broadcast. I depended on this function less for the content and more for the fact that it made me feel less alone. I also remember checking major news websites in English, such as The Guardian, and using Skype to phone home to my family and friends in Ireland. Despite doing some independent information gathering like this, my response to the disaster was largely dependent on direction from my company. I had confidence that they would inform all employees if it was really dangerous to be outside, so I copied what my Japanese colleagues were doing; if they thought it was safe enough to show up for work, then so would I. As a result, I returned to work as normal on Monday morning, three days after the onset of the disaster.

Email records and entries from a blog that I kept while living in Japan illustrate in some detail how I experienced the disaster. This is the entry that I posted on my blog on Saturday, March 12, the day after onset:

The past 24 hours have passed by so oddly. The quake lasted about two minutes, but it felt much, much longer. And since then time has somehow sped up: a whole day in Tokyo has passed in an eerie blink of an eye. I feel powerless and at a loss. We are told that if we are somewhere safe, we should just stay there. We should avoid unnecessary travel because it blocks up the routes for emergency relief and for people who really need to get home. And above all we are told to save electricity: with the nuclear plants in trouble and all the devastation from the tsunami, the people in the north need every kilowatt we can send them. So I have just sat around all day with everything off except my computer so I can watch the streamed news. It's really been like watching a bad movie with all this talk of natural disaster and nuclear meltdown, and at times it has felt like it is happening somewhere else. But then you get another aftershock (we've been getting about 4 or 5 serious shakes per hour – some serious) or hear a familiar place name on TV and it brings you right back to reality. I want to assure you all, though, that I am fine: I'm unharmed and I have shelter, food, running water and power. The worst I've suffered is that I didn't sleep much last night. Please send out your thoughts and prayers to the people in the north.

By April 6, the content of my blog entries was moving much more in the direction of a return to normality:

Signs that things are back to normal:
1. Bottled water is starting to reappear on shelves.
2. People (myself included) are bitching and moaning about stupid, pointless stuff again.
3. I went for a run tonight just bringing keys and my phone; no emergency water, no food, no radio, no torch. (Though the torch would actually have been kind of handy...)

Signs that things are still far from normal:
1. People are talking excitedly about finding sliced white bread in their local supermarket.
2. There are rumours going around that the power saving measures and rolling blackouts will have to continue for two years!!!
3. Companies like mine are having serious, long meetings about how to deal with working in Tokyo in summer with no air conditioning. You guys in Ireland might not be able to imagine, but it’s a serious health and safety problem. Our office will easily break a humid 40 degrees in the height of summer, what with all the computers and human heat. Suggestions are on the table that I never thought I’d hear from a conservative company like mine: teleworking (blasphemy!); late-to-night shifts for office work (I like this one as I work late anyway and would get the mornings off!); and even temporarily moving offices.

But April 11 – one month after the disaster’s onset – saw a setback in this trend, and I wrote on this day to a friend overseas:

We had ANOTHER sizable earthquake today. We’re all just fed up of them at this stage. As soon as you start to forget about them, another one comes along and sets us right back to square one.

I returned home to Ireland for one week at the end of April for a holiday that had been booked prior to the disaster, and by the end of May (about two-and-a-half months after onset) the disaster was over for me personally. I wrote:

I went home for Golden Week (the week-long string of Japanese public holidays in April/May), and it ended up being just the tonic. I completely relaxed, despite a hectic social schedule, and came back to Japan refreshed and over the anxiety that the quake and constant aftershocks had created in me. We’ve had about 10 significant aftershocks since GW and none of them has ruffled my feathers, not even the one where the early-warning alarm went off in the middle of the night: I didn’t open my eyes!

While the temporal boundary of the disaster could be set for me at about two to three months after onset, the effects of the disaster were longer term and, as explained above, it was as a direct result of my experience of the disaster that I changed the course of my career and left Japan to come back to Ireland to work on this PhD.

In addition to issues of communication and information gathering, the emails that I wrote at the time of the disaster also reveal that I was focused on such issues as the danger of panic, the sensationalism of overseas media, and the good job I thought the Irish embassy was doing. Excerpts from March 21 and March 26, ten to fifteen days after onset, represent this mood:

The radiation stories you are probably hearing in the west are likely to be much more sensationalized than the reality. It’s true, it is a very serious situation. But at the moment it is localized to that poor area around the plant.

I thought you’d be happy to know too that the Irish embassy have been pretty great in this crisis. We’ve gotten regular e-mails from them (sometimes more than one a day) trying to give practical reasonable advice about all the things
that have been going on around us. It has been really helpful. I think they've gotten the balance right between warning us all of the severity of the situation and encouraging us to keep a cool head and evaluate the risks as calmly as possible.

In addition, it is clear that I had to deal with some cultural differences in how to respond to a disaster. An excerpt from an email that I sent to my family four days after the disaster illustrates this point:

It might seem strange to be saying I'm back in work, but that really is the Japanese way. There's a culture of just getting on with things. The feeling is that in this group culture, if everyone continues to do their small part (even a small part), the bigger thing (school, company, country, etc.) keeps running. So we're trying to be as normal as possible without forgetting the terrible tragedy and dreadful circumstances that so many of the Japanese people are in. I struggled with this attitude on Monday a bit and just felt the tasks and decisions I was involved in were so trivial and pointless in the scheme of things. But then today, being in work really helped and kept me from going into a spin of panic about the nuclear situation. I mean, I know it's bad, but I don't think it will be the Japanese Chernobyl. And there is really nothing I can do about it, so I may as well try to make the most of each day that is given to me and have confidence that the people in charge are doing everything they possibly can to make the situation better.

This autoethnographic account, of course, represents only one perspective on the 2011 disaster. The next section describes briefly how four participants in the case study lived the experience of communication and information gathering in the disaster in their own social worlds. These vignettes are intended as a complement to and not a replacement for a reading of the interview transcripts in the case study, and simply allow quick access to particularly instructive aspects of certain participants’ accounts.

4.4.2 Vignettes of participants’ experiences

The logic for selecting the participant accounts from which to create vignettes was based on three major elements: the frequency with which each participant referred to the units of meaning selected as the main codes to be analysed in this chapter; each participant’s Japanese ability; other demographic factors. Table 4–1 shows the number of references that each participant interviewed in this case study made to the units of meaning that have been analysed as the major codes in this chapter. Four participants (who were dispersed throughout the table, who did not seem to represent extremes, and who had provided particularly instructive interviews) were first selected. Then, the self-reported Japanese abilities of these four participants were checked to ensure that they represented a broad
range of language fluency. Finally, it was confirmed that these four participants would have had diverse perspectives on the disaster as a result of their place of residence, nationality, age, and occupation at the time of the disaster. (The information on the four selected participants has been shaded light blue in Table 4–1.)\(^{11}\)

\(^{11}\) Other demographic factors, such as gender, disability status, or relationship status could also have led to an interesting selection of vignettes. However, demographic factors can be analytically endless, and five factors – Japanese ability, place of residence, nationality, age, and occupation – were chosen for their relevance to translation and interpreting, to the case, and to the context outlined so far in this chapter.
## Table 4.1: Number of references made by participants to the units of meaning analysed in this chapter

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Beginning of the disaster</th>
<th>Culture of disaster in Japan</th>
<th>Focus in response or recovery</th>
<th>Ending of the disaster</th>
<th>Instances of communicating NEGATIVE</th>
<th>Instances of communicating NEUTRAL</th>
<th>Instances of communicating POSITIVE</th>
<th>Instances of information gathering NEGATIVE</th>
<th>Instances of information gathering NEUTRAL</th>
<th>Instances of information gathering POSITIVE</th>
<th>Principal perceived hazard</th>
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4.4.2.1 The translator

(Participant 24: high Japanese ability; resident in Sendai; from New Zealand; age 20-29; living in Japan for 5 years when the disaster struck; local government employee)

This participant was living and working in Sendai when the disaster struck. He was focused on communication and information gathering because of his job in Sendai City Government to act as a liaison between the institution and the foreign communities in the city. He was well trained in how to respond to disaster as part of this institutional structure, and the focus of his role was on working with a team to get relevant disaster-related information from the government and other sources translated and distributed to foreign nationals in Sendai. This was done through radio broadcasts, group emails using lists set up prior to the disaster, Facebook groups, noticeboards, visits to evacuation centres, and public meetings. These methods of communicating and information gathering did not operate in isolation, and methods interacted with each other in feedback loops. When the disaster moved into the recovery phase, his role became focused on ensuring that various administrative forms were translated and that foreign residents would not be blocked by language from volunteering to help rebuild the devastated areas. This participant came from Christchurch in New Zealand, and his family had been affected by the Canterbury Earthquakes several months prior. This background certainly influenced his desire to make contact with his family by mobile phone as soon as possible after the disaster struck and influenced his relief at hearing that foreign friends who had heard him on the radio had posted on Facebook that he was safe.

4.4.2.2 The interpreter

(Participant 13: high Japanese ability; resident in Tokyo; from France; age 50-59; living in Japan for 27 years when the disaster struck; business interpreter)

This participant worked in Tokyo as a professional business interpreter at the time of the disaster, and he had just finished interpreting for some overseas clients when the disaster hit. His first effort at communicating was to contact his wife and family by mobile phone message, and then to Skype with the clients that he had just parted company with as soon as he got home. As a fluent speaker of Japanese with a Japanese wife and more than twenty years’ experience of life in Japan, his information gathering was largely Japanese-based. He read Japanese newspapers, listened to Japanese radio, and did not own a television. This lack of visual information seems to have delayed his understanding of the devastation caused by the disaster further north. He did consult online French news websites, and
received a lot of information by email from his clients and members of his national community in Japan. A recurring theme in his account was the contrast between the panic and sensationalism of this overseas information compared to the relatively calm tone of the Japanese information. His focus in the disaster quickly came to be about how he could make a contribution to the response. An email from his embassy recruiting volunteer interpreters to go to Sendai the second day after onset provided him with such an opportunity to contribute. He accompanied an overseas search and rescue team up to the disaster zone by bus and interpreted for them for about 72 hours. The mission was cut short over concerns about radioactivity. The interpreting that he did was basic mediation of instructions from the local government officials in charge of the response to the members of the foreign search and rescue team. He highlighted, though, that little linguistic mediation was required because the team was underemployed and had clearly been sent there as a result of political rather than practical need. His account illustrated how little support volunteer interpreters got in terms of explanation of their duties, the hazards they would face, and care after the event.

4.4.2.3 The foreign resident confident in Japanese

(Participant 5: medium Japanese ability; resident in Tokyo; from Ireland; age 20-29; living in Japan for 3 years when the disaster struck; engineer)

This participant worked in a Japanese company, had a Japanese partner, and was confident in his Japanese abilities as a result of the three years he had spent living in Tokyo by the time of the onset of the disaster. In his account, he underlined how minimal the effect of the disaster had been on him personally. His focus on the day of onset was simply getting home to the suburbs of Tokyo, so he was interested in the information being provided by Japanese-language television and the information that was available on Japanese-language websites that he could check using his mobile phone. Overall, Japanese television and various Internet sites were the main methods of information gathering to which he referred in his account. As for communicating, he was able to use Facebook initially to let his family in his home country know that he was safe and to see how his foreign friends in Japan were experiencing the disaster. However, after March 11, he returned to using the same methods of phone and email that he always used to keep in touch. It was only in relation to the nuclear disaster that he expressed any real stress or change in behaviour. He felt conflicted by the different messages about the disaster that he was receiving from sources in Japan and from sources overseas. In trying to understand what was going on with the nuclear disaster, he became dependent on English-language sources, and he expressed surprise at how poor the standard of multilingual communication of Japanese experts was in relation
to the nuclear issue. It was clear from his account that his strong feelings of belonging to the Japanese company for which he worked guided how he responded to the disaster, and he saw his position as no different to that of his Japanese colleagues.

4.4.2.4 The foreign resident with no confidence in Japanese

(Participant 16: low Japanese ability; resident in Sendai; from Bangladesh; age 30-39; living in Japan for 18 months when the disaster struck; student)

This participant was doing research in a Japanese university in the disaster zone at the onset of the disaster. He was working at the university when the earthquake struck, but his pregnant wife – who had accompanied him to Japan – was home sick in their apartment several kilometres away. Getting back to her and knowing that she was safe were his main goals at the outset of the disaster. It turned out that she had evacuated to a refuge centre along with friends from the foreign community in Sendai. As a result, the participant’s first communication was all face-to-face and took place either in English (with his Japanese co-workers and with other Japanese and foreign nationals in the refuge centre) or Bengali (with the other members of his community). Once the participant had been reunited with his wife and friends, his communicative focus shifted to using his mobile telephone to lobby his embassy to send a car to collect him, his wife, and other fellow nationals from the disaster zone. He thought to charge his phone at a power point in a local hospital. With almost no confidence in his Japanese ability, the participant was completely dependent on the help of other foreign nationals who were more fluent in Japanese. He managed to gather information about the disaster largely by having television broadcasts in Japanese received through a car navigation system translated for him by a friend, by contacting his embassy, and by telephoning a fellow national located in a safe part of the city who would access online news websites on his behalf and report back. While the participant was complimentary about how the Japanese government responded to the disaster overall, he showed surprise at the fact that Sendai, a city which claims to be an international city and which has a large number of overseas university students, offered so little information in other languages, especially through television broadcasts.

4.4.3 How participants experienced Japanese disaster culture

One final element of contextual information that is useful to understand before proceeding to the findings in the second half of this chapter is the idea that Japan has a unique way of responding to disasters. Twenty of the twenty-eight participants in the study chose to talk about this unique culture in their accounts. They underlined that response to disaster in
Japan is community- or group-based. Room is generally not given for individual response strategies, and Japanese people are socialised from a young age into how to respond as part of a group. Aside from this leading to the efficient rationing of limited resources in a disaster, there was a feeling that responding in this ‘one correct way’ was restrictive, inflexible, and sometimes alienating in their eyes.

The feeling in participants’ accounts was that, even though this was a disaster on an almost unimaginable scale, Japanese people are used to disaster and are used to the idea that they will likely one day have to cope with one. Foreign residents are not always in touch with such feelings and do not necessarily share this Japanese sense of fatalistic stoicism. Some participants highlighted that this national character in response to disaster was conveyed in the Japanese ideas of 我慢 (gaman) and しょうがない (shōgai), which are used to talk about how certain things must be endured or about how certain things cannot be helped.

The participants also made clear that the discourse surrounding Japanese disasters tends to centre on not showing panic and remaining calm. They also suggested that disaster discourse in Japan is not particularly open, and they suspected that elements of this discourse are suppressed if they are deemed likely to induce panic.

In practical terms, participants talked about how they struggled with the standard Japanese instruction to stay inside a building following an earthquake. This seemed counterintuitive to many and was often ignored. Participants also struggled with the typical Japanese response strategy that you should continue with your responsibilities and return to normal operations as soon as possible. This focus on getting back to work seemed callous and pointless to some foreign nationals, but was, on the other hand, admired by some others.

In short, it was determined by foreign nationals who participated in this study that a group-based, well-rehearsed way of responding to disaster was characteristic of Japanese culture and that this led to a fatalistic stoicism and a focus on calm recovery at all costs that created some alienation and suspicion in foreign nationals who were confronted by this disaster culture.

The chapter so far has delimited what this thesis aims to study and demonstrated what it was like to experience the 2011 disaster and how issues of communication and information gathering impacted on these experiences for foreign residents. The next section will build on this contextual information by discussing in detail how the participants in this study communicated and gathered information.
4.5 Communication and information gathering by foreign residents

Communicating and gathering information were vital tasks for official responders to the 2011 disaster. The Cabinet Office – the branch of the Japanese government responsible for coordinating the national emergency response – listed the provision of means of communication as third in its list of main activities after the restoration of roads, and the distribution of relief goods (Cabinet Office Government of Japan 2012: 10). Were communicating and gathering information also important tasks for foreign residents? One indication of the significance of these acts to the experiences of some foreign residents can be seen in the milestones chosen by the participants in this study to mark the end to the disaster. From Table 4–2, we can see that 7 of the 23 participants who felt that the disaster had ended defined this end point by a change in their communication and information-gathering activities.
Proceeding, then, on the assumption that communicating and gathering information were likely important to foreign residents, why have these activities been examined as separate categories in this research?

4.5.1 Communicating and gathering information as separate categories

It has been established in the disaster studies literature that gaining `situation awareness’ is a key goal in communicating during a disaster. Situation awareness is a concept used in the study of emergency response to talk about how people individually and collectively gather and analyse information in complex and changing circumstances in order to understand and cope with a situation (Endsley and Garland 2000, Vieweg 2012). In this thesis, this type of communicative act has been termed ‘information gathering’, while all other communicative acts have been referred to simply as ‘communicating’. Another reason behind the functional separation of these two communicative categories came from an

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**Table 4-2. Milestones chosen by participants to mark the end of the disaster**

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<tr>
<th>Participant identifier number</th>
<th>Defined end point by a change in their communication and information gathering activities</th>
<th>Functional definition of ending</th>
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<td>When information seemed more reliable and Fukushima seemed less of a risk</td>
<td>Did not feel the disaster had ended at the time of interview</td>
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<td>When community bonding (e.g. the positive atmosphere, information sharing, and communication when lining up together for supplies) ended</td>
<td>Did not feel the disaster had ended at the time of interview</td>
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<td>When he could purchase items without lining up for a very long time and when he could meet friends and contact anyone any time (but he does not think that Fukushima has ended and thinks the situation is not under control)</td>
<td>Did not feel the disaster had ended at the time of interview</td>
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<td>When his ‘tight or flight’ reaction eased and when he was no longer sharing information back and forth with people non-stop</td>
<td>Defined end point by a change in their communication and information gathering activities</td>
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<td>When he lost the voracious need to have up-to-date information (e.g. when he was no longer checking Twitter on waking or after leaving a room) (but he still considers that the disaster is not over in terms of Fukushima)</td>
<td>Defined end point by a change in their communication and information gathering activities</td>
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<td>When Japan was no longer the top story on CNN</td>
<td>Defined end point by some other milestone</td>
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<td>When he and his colleagues in local government changed from reacting to the disaster to asking `how can we use what we have learned to prepare for the next disaster?’</td>
<td>Defined end point by some other milestone</td>
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**Did not feel the disaster had ended at the time of interview**

- Not applicable (because there are cracks still in the streets of his hometown and the local community is still divided over the nuclear issue)
- Not applicable (because he is still constantly worried about the threat to Fukushima from aftershocks, so much so that he has sold business and moved away from disaster zone)
- Not applicable (because she still thinks about disaster all the time, defines life events as pre-earthquake and post-earthquake, and is still fundraising)
- Not applicable (because he is still worried about possible radiation poisoning)
- Not applicable (because he is still running a daily disaster blog - however by August 2011 [5 months] the main issue on the blog had become long-term food safety not disaster response)
initial intuition in this research; it was assumed that, when foreign nationals were communicating with people they already knew (e.g., making calls to confirm their safety, getting emails from their employers on how to respond, using social media to give moral support to their friends), there was a high chance that these acts would have been carried out in a familiar linguistic and cultural context, whereas when trying to gather information about the disaster, there was more chance of them coming into contact with Japanese – the dominant linguistic and cultural context of the disaster – and that this might not have been as familiar. It will be shown in subsequent sections that interesting differences have been found in the data between these two functionally-separated categories of communicating and gathering information to gain situation awareness.

4.5.2 Methods used to communicate and gather information

The word cloud at the beginning of the chapter gave some indication of the ways in which participants in the study communicated and gathered information in the 2011 disaster; ‘news’ (21st), ‘Facebook’ (41st), ‘phone’ (50th), ‘TV’ (64th), and ‘media’ (90th) all appeared in the hundred most frequently occurring words in the set of codes analysed in this chapter. Looking at the number of participants in the study who chose to mention certain methods of communicating or information gathering in their accounts, we see eight broad methods emerge:

- Internet
- Face-to-face
- Telephone
- Television
- Social media
- Specialised disaster communication methods
- Print
- Radio

Of these, only the category of Internet was mentioned by all participants. Face-to-face and telephone were mentioned by all but one, and the remainder – except for radio – were mentioned by more than half of participants. An early pattern, then, is that some methods of communicating and information gathering were more prominent than others in participant accounts. One of the striking features of participant accounts, however, was the diversity of methods that were relevant to their experiences, and the broad categories listed above hide some of this detail. Table 4–3 allows us to see that email on a desktop machine,
Thus, the chapter so far has begun to provide an answer to the first research question in this thesis: how did foreign residents communicate and gather information during the 2011 disaster? However, the chapter has not yet told us anything about the quality of participants’ experiences of using these communicative and information gathering methods. Let us look first at communicating.

Table 4.3: Specific methods of communicating and gathering information mentioned by participants at interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of communicating or gathering information</th>
<th>No. of sources</th>
<th>Participant identifier number(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internet</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email (not on mobile)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas news online</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2 3 4 6 7 8 10 12 13 14 15 16 17 19 20 21 22 23 25 26 27 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website (non-news)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2 4 5 6 7 11 12 13 15 17 19 20 21 23 24 25 26 27 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese news online</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4 5 6 11 12 13 14 16 19 22 23 27 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online forums</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 6 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Face-to-face</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1 2 3 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meeting</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6 20 27 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1 27 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Telephone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone (call, email, SMS)</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landline phone</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1 2 5 9 10 12 13 14 16 17 21 25 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helplines</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satellite phone</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What's App</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public payphone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Television</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese TV news</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1 2 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 18 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas TV news</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1 10 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 20 21 22 23 25 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car navigation TV</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social media</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7 9 10 12 14 15 19 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>2 4 7 8 10 13 21 25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3 6 12 13 19 20 25</td>
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<td>Blog</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mix</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QQ &amp; WeChat (Chinese only social media)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Specialised disaster methods</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA announcement</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1 2 4 5 7 8 9 10 11 12 14 17 18 19 20 22 23 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated message boards</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3 5 12 18 19 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated warning</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 8 12 18 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Print</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters pamphlets</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1 3 4 8 9 12 20 21 23 25 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese news print</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13 16 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noticeboards</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14 34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radio</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese radio news</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 3 13 14 17 24 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas radio news</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.3 Qualitative assessment of methods of communicating

Table 4–4 summarises various units of meaning coded in the interview data to give an overview of the quality of participants’ communicative acts. It summarises how participants connected the use of a method of communication (explicitly or implicitly) with a positive, negative, or neutral experience.\textsuperscript{12}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{12} Definitions of the codes used in the creation of Table 4–4 (How the communicative act was carried out, Communication positive, Communication negative, and Communication neutral) can be found in Appendix F.
Examining the transcripts in this way reveals the great variety in communicative methods used (participants talked about 19 different methods in total) and indicates that mobile phones (call, email, SMS) and word-of-mouth were the most commonly used forms of communication. The table below provides a breakdown of the methods used, categorized by their association with the disaster event.

Table 4.4: Methods of communicating (includes qualitative associations)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone (call, email, SMS)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email (not on mobile)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landline phone</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters, pamphlets</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated message boards</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA announcement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skype</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automated warning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fax</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blog</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QQ &amp; WeChat (Chinese only social media)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>What's App</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The table also shows how the communicative act was carried out and its connection to a positive or negative experience. For example, communicating through mobile phone calls, emails, and SMS messages was found to be associated with positive outcomes such as allowing a person’s safety to be confirmed and providing useful advice, whereas it was associated with negative outcomes such as induced panic or stress and lack of clear instruction.

Table 4.5: How the communicative act was carried out

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 4.6: How the communicative act was connected to a positive or negative experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

POSITIVE association with communicating

| | Name | Sources | References |
| | Allowed a person’s safety to be confirmed | 11 | 21 |
| | Reduced panic or stress | 8 | 11 |
| | Reduced feelings of isolation | 7 | 9 |
| | Access to power where it might not have been expected | 6 | 7 |
| | Improved response | 6 | 7 |
| | Increased community bonds | 5 | 8 |
| | Provided useful advice | 5 | 6 |
| | Provided useful linguistic mediation | 4 | 4 |
| | Facilitated the sharing of gathered information | 3 | 4 |
| | Allowed a person to express their ideas about the disaster | 2 | 2 |
| | Provided useful linguistic mediation | 4 | 4 |

NEGATIVE association with communicating

| | Name | Sources | References |
| | Connection | 21 | 26 |
| | Language | 13 | 21 |
| | Induced panic or stress | 12 | 26 |
| | Lack of communication where it might be expected | 12 | 17 |
| | Lack of clear instruction | 7 | 11 |
| | Time | 6 | 7 |
| | Emotion | 5 | 7 |
| | Negative aspects of the method of communication itself | 4 | 7 |
| | Culture | 3 | 3 |
| | Increased the danger of the situation | 2 | 2 |
| | Politics | 2 | 4 |
| | Legal issues | 1 | 1 |

Communication and gathering information are integral to the recovery process, and understanding the methods and their effectiveness can help in planning future disaster response efforts.
phones, email, word-of-mouth, and Facebook were mentioned particularly frequently. Table 4–4 also summarises the qualitative associations that participants made with these acts of communication, and variety was once again evident. To explore the connections (either explicit or implicit) that participants made between each communicative method and a positive experience, Table 4–5 and its graphic representation in Figure 4–4 present the numbers of participants who talked positively in their interviews about certain methods of communication cross-referenced with how they connected this method of communication to a positive experience. Some clear patterns emerge:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Communication</th>
<th>Access to power when it might not have been expected</th>
<th>Allowed a person to express their ideas about the disaster</th>
<th>Allowed a person’s safety to be confirmed</th>
<th>Facilitated the sharing of gathered information</th>
<th>Improved response</th>
<th>Increased community bonds</th>
<th>Positive aspects of the method of communication itself</th>
<th>Provided useful advice</th>
<th>Provided useful linguistic mediation</th>
<th>Reduced feelings of isolation</th>
<th>Relieved panic or stress</th>
<th>Robust connection where one might not be expected</th>
<th>Showed the value of Japanese ability</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Landline phone</td>
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<td>Letters/pamphlets</td>
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<td>Mobile phone (call, email, SMS)</td>
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<td>Public payphone</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4-5. Numbers of participants who talked positively about a method of communication cross-referenced with how they made this positive association

![Figure 4-4](image-url)
At a glance, we can see that the participants viewed word-of-mouth, Facebook, and mobile phones positively (the top three methods talked about by the largest number of participants) for slightly different reasons. The big advantage presented by Facebook as a method of communication was the ease with which it allowed someone to confirm another person’s safety:

Luckily, {my wife} was able to get on Facebook, and let my family know that I was okay, because obviously they were pretty worried about me. Because everyone here [Note: in Christchurch] just saw Sendai, tsunami, and, you know, put two and two together, I lived in Sendai so I was probably dead, basically [laughter] which is kind of horrible to think about. But yeah, luckily she was able to get on Facebook for me and let people know that I was okay. Facebook was really good for that purpose. It was a really good way to get in touch with people. (Participant 28)

Mobile phones proved to be a good way to communicate because they were portable and battery-operated and could be recharged in ways that might not have been possible for other electronic methods:

So, the battery ran out of the phone that morning, so I had the charger inside in the car, so I went into the car. I was able to charge away, and I rang them on Skype, just told them, “Look, there’d been an earthquake. It was all grand.”
(Participant 2)

For many participants though, it was clear that word-of-mouth – in other words direct, face-to-face interaction with another human – was the best way to communicate, especially when it came to responding more effectively to the disaster:

I remember one of my colleagues shouting, foreign guy was shouting, “Ah, Japanese, what are we supposed to do?” Anyway, I thought that was good. I just followed. (Participant 8)

In addition, word-of-mouth was valorised by participants for the bonding it allowed them with members of the broader community:

People I didn’t really know in my community, I would just have passed, you know, we’d nod or whatever, would say, “Oh, are your parents worried? Are you going to go back home or are you okay? And she was like, “If you ever need rice or dahdahdahdahdah, please let me know.” So I felt part of the community. And I really think, having been here and having Japanese language, Japanese language ability really was so helpful, because I can’t imagine people living in areas where there’s only foreigners who, you know, expat housing and all that kind of thing. (Participant 25)

According to participants, word-of-mouth was also a quick and easy way to get advice in the disaster:
You know, there’s a colleague that I work with who has a background – well, while he works in advertising – he has a background in nuclear physics, so his Undergraduate slash PhD/Masters kind of understanding of stuff just became, one of those people that you went to, “So what is a millisievert exactly?” and, “So how am I supposed to interpret this?” (Participant 20)

It should not be taken from the above, however, that the story of communication in the disaster for foreign residents was a purely positive one. More participants spent more time talking about the negative aspects of communication. Table 4–6 and its graphic representation in Figure 4–5 now present the numbers of participants who talked negatively in their interviews about certain methods of communication cross-referenced with how they connected this method of communication to a negative experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method of Communication</th>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
<th>Increased the danger of the situation</th>
<th>Induced panic or stress</th>
<th>Lack of clear instruction</th>
<th>Lack of communication where it might be expected</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Legal Issues</th>
<th>Negative aspects of the readiness of communication itself</th>
<th>Politics</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Automated message boards</td>
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Table 4-6. Numbers of participants who talked negatively about a method of communication cross-referenced with how they made this negative association
Two things become clear about what led participants to feel negatively about how they and other foreign nationals experienced communication in the 2011 disaster. Firstly, they could not use their mobile phones because of problems with connectivity and power as a direct result of infrastructural damage and overload:

I tried to call my wife to the mobile, but at the time the network was collapsed, there was no network around here. I tried to call my friends or other friends around (the area where the university accommodation was located), but there was no network. (Participant 16)

Secondly, language now emerged as a factor to be taken into account. When looking at the positive aspects of communicating above, language had not really been part of the story, but now language issues were preventing smooth communication for the foreign residents in this case study, especially when they were trying to receive communication from the PA system or, to a lesser extent, by word-of-mouth:

I remember the tsunami warning, which I didn’t understand but was translated for me. I do remember it being broadcast that there was the possible risk of a tsunami up to two-metres coming to Tokyo. That never materialised. It did hit parts of Chiba, but we were in that little inlet, the Tokyo Bay inlet, like, it was, where the earthquake happened, I don’t think it could have come in there. I remember that. I remember it being broadcast loud. I think some came in the
coming days, like, maybe once or twice, but, it’s possible I’m confusing that with those loud vans going around. I don’t know, I can’t say. There definitely were some PA announcements, and they were impossible, utterly impossible for me to understand, because it was, kind of, static-y, you know, like, crackly [Note: the participant then covers his mouth with his hand and produces some incomprehensible sounds] over the system so, but the Japanese people around understood. (Participant 12)

When I got to the supermarket, it was, they were, like – yeah, I’ve forgot even the term, I forgot it already – it was like kigen or ki [Note: the participant is probably referring to the term seigen which is used to talk about restrictions on something], it was, you couldn’t get two bottles of this and I didn’t know at first what they were saying and then my wife had to tell me or I asked somebody behind us it. (Participant 9)

In summary, this section has illustrated the qualitative detail of how participants communicated in the disaster and shown some of the reasons behind why such communication went on in the way it did. A diverse range of some 19 methods was used to communicate, and mobile phones, word-of-mouth, Facebook, and email were predominant among these. Mobile phones were portable and could be recharged in multiple ways. Word-of-mouth helped foreign nationals to respond more effectively to the disaster, bond with the immediate community, and get advice in the disaster. Facebook provided an easy method to confirm another person’s safety, and email seemed to be a method of communication that was certainly used by participants but elicited few qualitative associations. At the same time, two clear problems arose in all this communication; mobile phones could not be used as much as people wanted to as a result of problems with connectivity and power, and language issues prevented smooth communication, especially over the PA system and by word-of-mouth. Let us now move on to show how the way foreign residents gathered information in the 2011 disaster painted a different picture.

4.5.4 Qualitative assessment of methods of gathering information

Table 4–7 summarises various units of meaning coded in the interview data to give an overview of the quality of participants’ information gathering acts. It summarises how participants connected the use of a method of information gathering (explicitly or implicitly) with a positive, negative, or neutral experience.  

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13 Definitions of the codes used in the creation of Table 4–7 (How the information gathering act was carried out, Information gathering positive, Information gathering negative, and Information gathering neutral) can be found in Appendix F.
Once again, great diversity in the methods mentioned is evident (participants mention 23 different methods of information gathering), and word-of-mouth is once more prevalent. However, this time, television news (delivered both traditionally and online) and websites appear as dominant methods. To explore the connections (either explicit or implicit) that participants made between each information gathering method and a positive experience, we have used a combination of open-ended questions to build a table showing the associations of positive and negative experiences with each method of information gathering. The data was then organized into a table for easy analysis.

### Table 4.7: Methods of information gathering (includes qualitative associations)

#### How the information gathering act was carried out

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese TV news</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website (non-news)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Word-of-mouth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas news online</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile phone (call, email, SMS)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas TV news</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Japanese radio news</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese news online</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public meeting</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skype</td>
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<td>Car navigation TV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online forums</td>
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<td>Twitter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Landline phone</td>
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<td>Japanese news print</td>
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<td>Noticeboards</td>
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<td>Skype</td>
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</table>

#### How the information gathering act was connected to a positive or negative experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive association with information gathering</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved awareness of situation on a broad scale</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved awareness of situation on a local scale</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved technical knowledge</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved response</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access to information where it might not have been expected</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could give useful information to Japanese people</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chance to contribute to response and recovery</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provided trustworthy information</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provided accurate information</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative association with information gathering</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved panic or stress</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contradiction between Japanese sources and overseas sources</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distress of information</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repetitious</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflicting information</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suppression of information</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of awareness of the situation where it might not have been expected</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Too much information</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information changed continuously</td>
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<tr>
<td>Technical nature of information</td>
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</table>
Table 4–8 and its graphic representation in Figure 4–6 detail the numbers of participants who talked about various methods of information gathering in a positive light cross referenced with how exactly this information gathering act was related to a positive experience in their minds.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4–8</th>
<th>Numbers of participants who talked positively about a method of information gathering cross-referenced with how they made this positive association</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to information where it might not have been expected</td>
<td>Provided accurate information Provided trustworthy information Relieved panic or stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improved communication</td>
<td>Improved technical knowledge</td>
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<td>Improved awareness of situation on a broad scale</td>
<td>Improved awareness of situation on a local scale</td>
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<td>Improved technical knowledge</td>
<td>Language</td>
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It immediately becomes clear that there was less agreement among participants here than when the topic was positive communication. This could simply indicate that a wider variety of information gathering options brought a wider array of benefits to those who made use of them than was the case for other communicative acts. There was some agreement between participants evident in the data. One repeatedly mentioned benefit centred on
being able to gather information in multiple languages. In particular, certain websites and translated Japanese television news broadcasts seemed to be associated with this benefit, and this seemed to help participants become more aware of what was happening on a broader scale:

The information is there, like, even before the earthquake there is always, like, drill, there’s always, like, they sending, the website of the city government or the local government, there are all the information necessary in Japanese and English as well. Probably in other language. I’m not sure. Like where to go in case of the earthquake, and what to do. (Participant 7)

NHK English was very important for me, definitely. (Participant 6)

In addition, word-of-mouth was once again seen in a positive light by participants as a way to improve how they responded to the disaster. But this time, instead of communicating to get instructions to follow, they used direct, face-to-face contacts with people to access useful information about the disaster on which they would base their own response decisions. Participant 18 explains how people like himself who were in a theme park when the disaster struck gathered information from theme park staff to decide what to do:

Now, I think a lot of people stayed because they were also telling us that, if you leave, there’s no trains, the roads have been shut down, there’s no way to basically, unless you walk or were staying in some of the nearby hotels, so they were giving information, which was useful information, especially if you were there with young kids, and there’s a lot of people there who said, “Well, if I get out, what am I going to do?” (Participant 18)

When dealing with the negative views on gathering information in the disaster, it is clear that news delivered through television broadcasts and online both in Japan and overseas came in for the most criticism. (See the data represented in Table 4–9 and Figure 4–7.)

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Table 4-9. Numbers of participants who talked negatively about a method of information gathering cross-referenced with how they made this negative association
News media dominated how foreign nationals gathered information to improve their awareness of the disaster situation, so it seems reasonable that the most frequently talked about method of gathering information would also incur the most criticism. It also explains why news and media featured so highly in the word frequency of the units of meaning being considered in this chapter. The big complaints about news were the sensationalism of overseas news reports on the disaster and the contradiction that participants saw between Japanese and overseas news sources:

Here’s the thing that was hard for foreigners, because the foreign media, the way that they covered it, and the way that the Japanese covered what was happening were just so completely different, you know, and, it was just hard in a situation where you’ve, you know, you don’t have power, you don’t have electricity in your flat, or you don’t have food, to be able to look at these two different sources, multiple sources and interpret for yourself what’s happening and what’s your best bet for behaving, you know, as to what to do, it was pretty stressful for a lot of people, myself included. (Participant 14)

In addition, though, language proved to be a reason why foreign residents viewed their efforts at gathering information from Japanese news broadcasts and from websites in the disaster in a negative light:
So then the reactor exploded [Note: participant sighs deeply] and so that’s when, that’s when I realised – this is probably where the translation stuff comes in – that’s when I realised I was completely alone, and listening to Japanese news and had no idea what was going on, like, none at all. So it was like, “What? The building just exploded?” (Participant 21)

So from my perspective, it wasn't even a question of whether information was available in English or not, what was available where it was directly translated made absolutely no sense. So I think Kyodo and NHK are exceptions to it because they have pretty savvy reporters who understand that you need to take a different approach, I mean, NHK obviously has its international arm which is all foreign, or the majority are foreigners, they take a different approach to reporting which is part of the reason they were particularly valuable. But the Japanese government in particular, they were producing difficult to understand direct translations because they are all focused on approvals and avoiding risk, and “it has to be exactly the same as the Japanese” was the mandate, right. (Participant 6)

To summarise the findings in this section, we can say that foreign residents behaved differently when they were gathering information to improve their awareness of the disaster situation than when they were carrying out other types of communicative act. Television news (delivered both traditionally and online) and websites proved beneficial methods because information could be gathered from them in multiple languages. Word-of-mouth was as useful for information gathering as it had been for communicating, but this time it was because it allowed foreign residents to access useful information on which they could base their own disaster response decisions. One consistently negative aspect to information gathering in the participants’ accounts was the contrasting tones of forced calm in Japanese news and of sensational panic in overseas news. Neither of these tones seemed to correspond with participants’ lived experiences, and participants were left confused, angry, and hungry for information that they could trust. In addition, though, language proved to be a factor worthy of further analysis, and linguistic barriers caused foreign residents to experience some information gathering acts negatively.

The chapter so far has provided a sense of the environment in which communication and information gathering were being carried out in the 2011 disaster, the types of foreign resident who were involved in these acts, the methods that these people used to communicate and gather information, and some of the reasons behind how they made these choices. All that remains is to provide an illustration of what some of the content of these communicative and information gathering acts looked like.
4.5.5 Illustrative examples of real communication from the 2011 disaster

There were 354 references to instances of communicating and 281 references to gathering information coded in total to the transcripts of the 28 participants who agreed to be interviewed for this case study. Such multiple references, while varied, presented enough common characteristics for the researcher to summarise them into five main types of act:

- Warning about the disaster
- Instructing people how to respond
- Developing situation awareness of the disaster
- Administering the disaster
- Supporting others through the disaster

This section uses a small corpus of real communication from the disaster compiled by the researcher to provide one illustrative example for each of the five communicative acts in the above typology.

4.5.5.1 Warning about the disaster

The following is an English translation created by the researcher of the transcript of a televised early warning that was broadcast about one minute before the first tremors were felt in Tokyo. The original Japanese transcript is available in Appendix J. This warning was made by the Japanese national broadcaster, NHK, and interrupted live proceedings of a parliamentary debate. The warnings were in Japanese only. Some background information and contextual information not provided in the original transcript has been added to the English translation. This extra commentary on the transcript is represented by the italicised, bracketed sections.

(An alarm sounds and a pre-recorded warning is played)
This is an earthquake early warning. Be prepared for strong tremors.
(The prefectures thought to be at risk are shown on screen on a map)
(The same alarm and warning are played again)
This is an earthquake early warning. Be prepared for strong tremors.

(A human announcer now speaks over the live broadcast of a parliamentary debate that the warning interrupted)
This is an earthquake early warning. Be prepared for strong tremors in the following areas: Miyagi, Iwate, Fukushima, Akita, Yamagata. There is little time before the tremors will start. Protect yourself so as not to get hurt. Stay

14 The transcript of the original Japanese broadcast is also available here: http://sekihi.net/stones/19338
[Accessed 12 June 2015]. The broadcast has been archived here: http://www.nicovideo.jp/watch/sm13889097
clear of furniture or other items that could fall on you. Also, be careful of things falling on you from above. An earthquake early warning has been issued. The warning is for Miyagi, Iwate, Fukushima, Akita, Yamagata. Ensure your personal safety to avoid injury. Stay clear of furniture or other items that could fall on you.

(It took about one minute from the automatic warning being issued to the tremors being felt in Tokyo)
The tremors are now also being felt here in the parliament building. Earlier (the announcer pauses and then changes what he was about to say) the tremors are still continuing even here in the parliament building. More than 10 seconds have passed since the beginning of the tremors (most earthquakes in Japan only last a few seconds). Gradually…

(A chime announces the sudden switch to a live broadcast from the NHK news studio in Shibuya in the centre of Tokyo)
We interrupt this live broadcast of parliamentary proceedings to bring you earthquake and tsunami information. Now, our Tokyo studio is also shaking. Our Tokyo studio is also shaking. An earthquake early warning has been issued. The earthquake early warning is for Miyagi, Iwate, Fukushima, Akita, Yamagata. And the tremors are also being felt here in our Shibuya Studio in Tokyo. Our studio in Shibuya, Tokyo is also shaking.

(From off camera we hear, “[The building is] swaying!”) To all those people in areas that have experienced strong tremors: Please keep calm. Once the tremors have subsided, extinguish any open flames. (Fires can be one of the biggest dangers when an earthquake hits)

(From off camera we hear, “[It's] really swaying!”) First, watch out for falling objects.

(From off camera we hear, “[It's] really shaking!”) Currently, our studio in Shibuya, Tokyo is shaking violently. Our studio in Shibuya, Tokyo is shaking violently.

(From off camera we hear, “[It's] really shaking: [this is] crazy!”) There is a danger of collapsing buildings and landslides.

(From off camera we hear, “…because it's shaking!”) Protect yourself from falling objects. Currently, our studio in Shibuya, Tokyo is shaking extremely violently. Our studio in Shibuya, Tokyo is shaking violently.

(From off camera we hear, “Shoot footage of Tokyo!”) Protect yourself from falling objects. (the sound breaks up slightly during this sentence) Stay in a safe place until the shaking has subsided.

(From off camera we hear, “Shoot footage of Tokyo!”) Once the tremors have stopped, extinguish any open flames.

(From off camera we hear, “Tokyo is swaying!”) We will pass on any new information as soon as we receive it here at NHK. Please do not switch off your TV or radio. A strong earthquake struck the Tohoku region at about 2:46 this afternoon. The seismic intensity was 7 in
northern Miyagi Prefecture. (7 is the strongest level on the Japanese seismic intensity scale.) Northern Miyagi recorded a 7 on the seismic intensity scale.

(From off camera we hear, “7! It was a 7!”)

In addition, an intensity of lower-5 was recorded in Yamagata. (The announcer stutters as if updated information is being given to him.) An intensity of upper-6 was recorded in central Miyagi, Fukushima Chuodori, Fukushima Hamadori, northern Ibaraki. Lower-6 was recorded in the southern part of the Iwate coast, the northern part of Iwate inland, the southern part of Iwate inland, and the southern part of Miyagi.

(From off camera we hear, “Change! Change!”)

(The screen changes to a fixed camera shot of Sendai Train Station with the sound of car alarms going off in the distance)

(The screen changes again to a map of Japan with a flashing tsunami warning graphic)

This illustrative example of a televised earthquake early warning shows that foreign residents who had access to a television and who could speak Japanese would have had access to detailed information about the disaster and to useful advice on how to respond, with an emphasis on repeating calls to keep calm and on repeating practical advice that can easily be forgotten in the midst of a disaster. However, this information and advice would not have been available to foreign residents who did not speak Japanese and, while some visual clues were given onscreen with maps and live feeds, knowledge of Japanese would have been needed to make sense of them.

4.5.5.2 Instructing people how to respond

The next example from the corpus changes the mode of delivery of information from a television broadcast to a website. The site from which the sample text is taken is the portal site for foreign residents provided by the Japanese Cabinet Office. (As explained in 4.5 above, the Cabinet Office is the branch of the Japanese government responsible for coordinating national emergency response.) The site went live four days after the onset of the disaster. This possibly explains its rushed and amateurish quality. It has a design that is not user-friendly, and presents information in only Japanese, English, Portuguese, and Spanish. (Only the English translation created by the Cabinet Office has been included here, but the Japanese original is available, once again, in Appendix J.) Korean and Chinese versions – the languages of the two largest groups of foreign residents in Japan – are not provided on the website. The purpose of the website is to give initial instructions to foreign nationals in Japan on how to respond to the disaster:

An extremely severe earthquake centered in the Tohoku district struck on Friday, March 11. Official information on the earthquake is available on the following websites. Please stay calm and act on correct and accurate information. (A list of links to seven other websites followed.)

Please be warned about chain emails. Incorrect information concerning Great East Japan Earthquake in the form of chain emails, electronic bulletin boards and mini blogs is being circulated. Please check to see whether this information is correct by checking reliable sources of information such as the websites of government agencies or of reliable media, and please do not panic through these chain mails, etc. Moreover, forwarding these chain emails results in creating more panic. If you receive one of these chain emails, please delete it immediately and do not forward it to anyone else.

We ask for your cooperation with electric power saving. Due to the earthquake, severe damage has been caused to the power supply equipment of Tokyo Electric Power Company and Tohoku Electric Power Co., Inc. We ask everybody to cooperate in saving as much electric power as possible when using electrical appliances.

From these instructions, we can see that foreign residents without Japanese ability or with only limited Japanese ability or who could speak English, Portuguese, or Spanish may have been able to access these instructions. However, to have done so, they would have had to have thought to access the Cabinet Office website and then been able to connect to it. We can see that the focus of information provision from official responders in Japan to foreign residents at this stage was to instruct them to keep calm and to save electric power. However, more than anything, the instruction being given was for foreign nationals to avoid spreading misinformation.

4.5.5.3 Developing situation awareness of the disaster

With the passing of a little more time, foreign residents would have been trying hard to understand what was happening in the disaster as a whole and trying to figure out their relation to these events so that they could make decisions on how to respond. To illustrate this type of communicative act, the mode has been changed from a website to an email. The first email to be sent to all Irish citizens in Japan to help them to understand the disaster situation (arriving five days after the onset of the disaster) has been included below:

16 March 2011, 12:30 JST

To all Irish citizens in Japan

The Embassy of Ireland is actively monitoring the aftermath of the recent earthquakes and aftershocks and is paying particular attention to the situation regarding the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. We are liaising closely with the Japanese government and EU/international partners in this regard.
Given the current situation, we are encouraging Irish citizens to consider the necessity for their presence in the north east of Japan and the Tokyo region (this is particularly the case for people with small children or women who are pregnant). Those seeking to leave these areas should make a travel reservation as soon as possible. We are not specifically advising people to leave Japan.

The Embassy’s website is updated with the latest information as it becomes available to us as well as appropriate travel advice. This website will remain the primary method of conveying information on the situation to Irish nationals in Japan. The website may be accessed via the following link: www.irishembassy.jp.

We are also advising Irish nationals to closely monitor the advice provided by their local authorities.

If you are in an affected area, please contact the Embassy (if you have not already done so) to confirm your status and location or if you require consular assistance.

The Embassy can be reached as follows:
Landline: +81 3 3263 0695
Mobile: +81 80 1076 0103
Fax: +81 3 3265 2275
Email: tokyoembassy@dfa.ie

We can see here that strongly directive information was not being given by this embassy at this time in the disaster. Irish citizens were being encouraged to gather their own information about the disaster where possible and to make themselves aware of the situation. Some advice was given to them by the embassy on how to do this. What is clear from this communication, though, is the central role that the Internet played as a way for some foreign residents to gain situation awareness in the 2011 disaster.

4.5.5.4 Administering the disaster

Once the first month after onset had passed, foreign residents would have started to think about how they were going to recover from the disaster and begin to rebuild their lives. At such a time, communication related to the administrative steps needed to go about this recovery would have started to become important. Dated May 1, 2011, the following is an English translation created by the Sendai International Relations Association of an announcement by the Sendai City Government on the documentation needed to claim disaster-related assistance. The Japanese original of this document is available in Appendix J. These forms and information about them would have been available in hard copy at the offices of the local government and the mode of communication would have been
newsletters and pamphlets circulated to residents of the city.  

A Disaster Victim Certificate / Disaster Victim Report will be issued to those with a damaged house or building (apartment/company) resulting from the Tohoku Pacific Ocean Earthquake and the following tsunami. These documents are essential when applying for various disaster assistance services offered by the City of Sendai.

- A Disaster Victim Certificate shows the degree of damage to houses and buildings and will be issued upon assessment.
- A Disaster Victim Report shows that the applicant has filed a claim for damage to their house, building and personal property.
- There are some disaster assistance services that only require a Disaster Victim Report and not a Disaster Victim Certificate. The Disaster Victim Report will be issued on the day of application. Please contact each organization that provides assistance services directly.
- Application Hours: 8:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. on weekdays
- Things to bring when applying: Identification card (resident registration card, driver’s license, passport etc), photographs showing the extent of damage
- Please contact us when you cannot prepare these.
- A letter of proxy is necessary when you ask someone outside of your family who lives at the same address to apply on your behalf.

What we see here is that the procedures to claim disaster-related assistance from the city government were complex. An English translation of the necessary procedures is, therefore, extremely useful, but what was the situation for foreign residents who had difficulty reading either Japanese or English or who did not receive one of the above pamphlets or newsletters?

4.5.5.5 Supporting others through the disaster

The final mode of communication shown here is social media. It illustrates the way in which, one month after the onset of the disaster, foreign residents were supporting each other and trying to help each other through the disaster. Specifically, this example is of an anonymised Facebook exchange taken from one of the many publicly open groups on Facebook that were created by foreign residents to help each other to get through the disaster. The details of the particular group have not been given here to attempt to protect its members’ privacy. In the exchange, the members of the group try to figure out how seriously to take the rumour that a massive earthquake was going to hit Tokyo and try to encourage each other to think positively:

GROUP MEMBER 1 Tokyo earthquake expert says Tokyo is expected to have a 7+ earthquake to balance out so called tectonic plate forces. Does anyone have more info on this?
12 April 2011 at 00:25 via Mobile

GROUP MEMBER 2 Do you have the link or article for this expert to share with us, please:
12 April 2011 at 00:26

GROUP MEMBER 1 No, heard a "rumor" that an expert made this comment on tv so wondered how credible it might be.
12 April 2011 at 00:30

GROUP MEMBER 3 JMA isn't saying anything...
12 April 2011 at 00:40 • 1

GROUP MEMBER 2 I heard this rumours too, but hear that the chances was decreasing with the weeks. In NHK TV, they always say that after shocks with 6+ has great probability to occur in the areas affected by the 3/11 earthquake. In the last hours, I heard this many times, after the shakes. I don't forget that Tokyo is waiting for the Big One since the 90s.
12 April 2011 at 00:43

GROUP MEMBER 2 i wonder how many hours or days it takes to JMA upgrade informations in English.
12 April 2011 at 00:48

GROUP MEMBER 4 well, they've been waiting for the Big One (Tokai) since the 70s - at least, that's when the theory was proposed. The epicentre is expected to be around Shizuoka city, so of course Tokyo would be affected pretty badly... not as badly as Shizuoka-ken though, I imagine. I'm in Hamamatsu... about 9km from the shore. The bright side is that it's the most earthquake-prepared prefecture in Japan (so I guess that makes it the most earthquake-prepared place in the world)...
12 April 2011 at 01:19

GROUP MEMBER 3 @GROUP MEMBER 2, why? What does it say in Japanese?!!
12 April 2011 at 01:42

GROUP MEMBER 2 @ GROUP MEMBER 3 I am wondering, because I can't read Japanese and as can see by NHK Japanese TV and NHK World(They are 24h turned on at my home) there is a delay to release English Information. Not always they broadcast JMA or TEPCO's conference with English translation.
12 April 2011 at 01:50

GROUP MEMBER 3 Oh. Well, the JMA is pretty snappy with the info when an earthquake actually happens. And I think the "Prediction of the Tokai Earthquake" is more a longer-term warning thing anyway, right? I mean, its not gonna be like "run for your life NOW" or anything...at least I hope...
12 April 2011 at 01:55
We can see from this exchange that Japanese television played a central role in the information gathering of foreign residents, even when they could not speak Japanese. We see, too, how other foreign nationals acted as informal translators and mediators of such information. The exchange also alludes to the role that rumour may have played in the experiences of foreign residents when attempting to communicate or gather information in the 2011 disaster.

4.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, what this chapter has attempted to argue is that the context of the 2011 disaster is important to an understanding of the issues dealt with in this case study, but that the scale and complexity of this contextual information could overwhelm the research. For this reason, the boundaries of what is being examined and what is not being examined in this study have been explicitly established. Though the study is an exploration of the phenomena of translation and interpreting, it is exploring these issues by focusing on people, and so ethnographic techniques to incorporate people’s lived experiences of the disaster have been employed. The intention of setting up tightly bounded contextual and experiential information in this way has been to enable the reader to better interpret the findings and illustrative examples of real communication described in the second half of the chapter.

The main findings were that a diverse array of methods was used by foreign residents to communicate and gather information in the 2011 disaster and that the methods used, the issues encountered, and the qualitative assessments made by these foreign residents differed depending on whether they were communicating or gathering information (taken to mean only those communicative acts designed to improve a person’s awareness of the disaster situation). Mobile phones, Facebook, and word-of-mouth were the predominant methods of communication, while television news (delivered both traditionally and online), websites, and word-of-mouth were the main methods of information gathering. Mobile phones were portable and could be recharged in multiple ways, and Facebook provided an easy method to confirm another person’s safety. Television news and websites enabled foreign residents to gather information in multiple languages. At the same time, word-of-mouth helped foreign nationals to respond more effectively to the disaster, bond with the broader community, get advice in the disaster, and access useful information on which they could base their own disaster response decisions. Despite all these positive points, communicating and gathering information in the 2011 disaster proved problematic for the participants in this study. Problems with connectivity and power meant that mobile phones
could not be used as much as people wanted. Also, the conflicting impressions given by an overly calm Japanese news media and an overly sensationalistic overseas news media caused great confusion and stress for foreign residents. In addition, language issues appeared in the data as a barrier to smooth communication, especially over PA systems and by word-of-mouth, and as a barrier to accessing the information that was being distributed through Japanese news media and websites.

Some questions, then, begin to arise from these findings. How, in fact, did translation, interpreting, or any other form of linguistic or cultural mediation fit in to this communicative scene? If we can show that mediation of some sort existed, how can we properly define translation and interpreting in this disaster? Seeing as how language and culture came up as problems more than as solutions in how foreign residents communicated and gathered information, what exactly were the linguistic and cultural barriers that they faced? Aligned to this, what were the topics that required translation or interpreting? Who carried out this translation and interpreting and who were the other parties in such acts? Where were they translating or interpreting, and what supports did they have available? Do we need to look at the influence of Japanese ability on people’s experiences of translation and interpreting? Then, what about diversity? Seeing as diverse methods of communication and information gathering were used, were the translation and interpreting solutions offered also diverse? These are some of the questions that will be addressed in the following chapter.
‘It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained.’

Salman Rushdie, Writer (1947-Present)
Chapter 5 – Translation in the 2011 disaster

Interpretive analysis:

Beginning to answer the following research question:
• How did translation and interpreting form part of foreign residents’ communication and information gathering in the 2011 disaster?

Figure 5-1. Word cloud from coded data used primarily in the creation of Chapter 5

This word cloud has been created (using NVivo 10 software) from text contained under the following codes: Culture; Language; Relationship negative; Relationship neutral; Relationship positive; Topics needing cultural mediation; Topics needing linguistic mediation. The word cloud displays the 100 most frequent words with a minimum length of 1 character. Only the default stop words for US English pre-set in NVivo 10 software (generally articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions) have been applied to this list.
5.1 Introduction

This chapter will show how translation and interpreting fitted in to the communicative scene that foreign residents experienced in the 2011 disaster. The main aim of this chapter, therefore, is to explain the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’, and ‘how’ of these phenomena in this one disaster context. The ‘why’ of translation and interpreting in this disaster – why translation and interpreting might have been significant or important – will be dealt with separately in Chapter 6.

The content of this chapter moves away from largely participant-led analysis toward interpretive analysis. In the previous chapter, the statements of the participants at interview were analysed. In this chapter, their statements at interview are still analysed, but inferences about translation and interpreting based on what they said are also made, and further systematic interconnectedness between key ideas in the interview data and observations in the secondary data is also shown. This change of focus is in line with the thematic analytical strategy adopted in the methodology for this research (see Section 3.6.7), but the change was also necessitated by the fact that participants mentioned the terms ‘translation’ and ‘interpreting’ relatively infrequently. Notice, for example, how neither term appears in Figure 5-1, the word cloud created from the codes used mainly in the analysis of this chapter. Nevertheless, references to linguistic and cultural barriers and their mediation peppered the accounts of the participants, as will be shown throughout this chapter.

As a result, before positioning translation and interpreting within the 2011 communicative scene, the chapter begins by showing that core ideas related to translation and interpreting were evident in participant accounts. Then, a definition of translation and interpreting for this study is operationalised based on how participants viewed these concepts. The remainder of the chapter discusses in detail who performed translation and interpreting activities in the 2011 disaster, who the other parties to these acts were, the topics that required translating and interpreting in the disaster, when and where this all took place, and how precisely translation and interpreting were carried out.

5.2 Evidence for translation and interpreting as categories

Chapter 2 of this thesis showed that translation and interpreting in disaster settings are relevant categories that are worthy of academic exploration. This section will show that these same categories are relevant objects of enquiry for this case study.
Participants referred to the terms ‘translation’ and ‘interpreting’ relatively infrequently. Figures 5–2 and 5–3 display references made by participants to these terms and their derivatives (such as translator, interpretation, etc.) during their interviews:

Figure 5-2. References coded to the wildcard term ‘transl*’ broken down by participant

Figure 5-3. References coded to the wildcard term ‘interp*’ broken down by participant
These figures illustrate that participants spent more time referring to the term ‘translation’ (and its derivatives) than they did to the term ‘interpreting’ (and its derivatives). Additionally, two participants dominated the discussion of these terms; this is understandable in that Participant 24 (see Figure 5–2) worked as a translator in the disaster and Participant 13 (see Figure 5–3) worked as an interpreter in the disaster. From a qualitative perspective, the significance of all these participant references needs to be moderated: many of these references only came about as a result of prompting from the researcher’s line of questioning/commenting; many references were short and lacked detailed content; in several references, the terms were used to denote a process of understanding and not interlingual transfer. On the surface, then, it might seem that translation and interpreting were not relevant objects of enquiry for this case study.

However, a different story emerged by looking at the units of meaning that related to the concepts of translation and interpreting rather than at the specific terms themselves. Four units of meaning – linguistic barriers, cultural barriers, linguistic mediation, and cultural mediation – were thought to be central to conceptualising translation and interpreting, and participant accounts were explored for such meanings. Table 5–1 illustrates the number of participants who made reference to these units and who, therefore, may have been talking about the concepts of translation and interpreting. For instance, there were more than 200 passages in the participants’ transcripts that were identified by the researcher as being related to linguistic barriers and their mediation, and more than 50 passages identified as being related to cultural barriers and their mediation.

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18 For instance, one participant uses *translate* to refer to how he understood the various foreign communities in Japan: ‘There is, of course, something which *translate* into associations of residents’ (Participant 13, emphasis added). In another example, a participant used *interpret* as a way to describe how the actions of the US government were understood: ‘Had the Americans actually said, “Okay, everybody get out,” then that would have been a sign of, then people would have been *interpreting* that, “Okay, right, got to go.”’ (Participant 20, emphasis added).
In Table 5–1, the participants are ranked in terms of their self-reported confidence in using Japanese, and a tick mark is used to indicate that they mentioned the relevant unit of meaning during their interview. As the table shows, all participants talked about experiences of linguistic barriers in the 2011 disaster, and many talked about experiences of cultural barriers. In this discussion, participants did not restrict themselves to their own personal experiences of barriers and talked, at times, of the experiences of other foreign

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant number</th>
<th>Self-reported confidence in Japanese</th>
<th>Bars of linguistic or cultural barriers or their mediation</th>
<th>Mediation by other participants</th>
<th>Cultural mediation by another</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Linguistic barrier present</td>
<td>Cultural barrier present</td>
<td>Linguistic mediation by the participant</td>
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Table 5-1. Participants who talked about linguistic or cultural barriers or their mediation

19 Before each interview, participants were asked to give themselves a mark out of a possible total of 40 to represent their confidence in using the Japanese language as a tool for speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Thus, the higher the mark, the greater the overall confidence of the participant. See Section 3.6.5 for further details.
nationals in Japan for the disaster. For instance, to illustrate some discussion of linguistic barriers, one participant spoke of the challenges faced by Assistant English Teachers (AETs) working in the rural Ibaraki school system who could not speak Japanese and who were stranded in their homes in the disaster, unsure of what was going on:

They were just left in their apartments, and if food was out, they were like, “Where do we get food? Where do we get water?” [Laughter] No one came around to help, they said. I mean, they, someone came around and just said something, and that was it. They didn’t really understand what they said…(Researcher: Because it would have been in Japanese?)...in Japanese. Because a lot of these schools that have the AETs don’t, you know, you’re lucky to have anybody who speaks English, and if the teacher is commuting from {nearby large cities in Ibaraki}, the one that does speak English, they’re not going to come in. (Participant 11)

Furthermore, it was not just the Japanese language but the Japanese culture that participants felt acted as a barrier or somehow caused complications in how foreign residents experienced the 2011 disaster. One participant highlighted how a reticence about intruding on a stranger in Japanese culture prevented her from calling on the support of Japanese neighbours in Tokyo during the crisis and how she felt that this would not have been the case in her native culture:

Because of the culture, because of the Japanese culture and the way they interact with people, I think there’s this thing where you don’t want to intrude. And then, there’s another thing that’s, kind of, not an embarrassment, but just different from just going to talk to people you don’t know. And therefore when it’s not quite at the point of extreme crisis, everybody just carries on, everybody just tries to carry on as they did before. So people were still trying to go to work and carry on completely normally, but trains were down, and there was no water, and I think, you know, in {the participant’s home country}, it would have just been like, “Look, stay home, look after your families.” Or people would have been knocking on their neighbours’ doors saying, “Look, we’re around here.” (Participant 1)

Table 5–1 further illustrates that the interviews of all participants but two (Participants 17 and 25) contained passages that explicitly mentioned acts of linguistic and cultural mediation. To give an example of one such mention of linguistic mediation, note how one participant who could not speak Japanese explains how her Japanese neighbours used English to help her respond to the disaster:

The chairman of the group who takes care of all the things in the, eh, how would say, call it? Apartment community? He can speak English, so I have in

20 The definitions for these codes (available in the codebook in Appendix F) illustrate this point: Linguistic / Cultural barrier present - reference made by the participant to the presence of a linguistic / cultural barrier relating to Japanese in the context of the disaster. This is an a priori code.
my building, a few people who lived, maybe abroad, and some retired but, one time, they grabbed me and said, “Oh I need to explain to you all the emergency things.” (Participant 8)

With respect to cultural mediation, note how another participant focused on the work done by the company he worked for to mediate the communication style (not the language) used by Japanese media outlets in the disaster:

Communication in general in Japan, I find, is all about providing all [Note: this last word was said with great emphasis] of the background and detail, you know. It’s context as opposed to content, and that was really clear with the news reporting. They give you all of this information but not explain what it actually means, and people just wanted to know, “Am I safe?” and “Am I not safe?” “Well, becquerels are at this level?” Well, what the hell does that mean?” It was not helpful to be reported in that way. So again at work, a lot of our focus was to try and put things in context. “This is what becquerels are. This is what you are exposed to in daily life. Every time you fly, this is what you are exposed to, and it is perfectly safe.” And explain it in those terms so that people could understand, “Okay, maybe we’re not at risk here.” (Participant 6)

Finally, an idea that Table 5–1 also suggests is that, while both language and culture were being mediated in the disaster, confidence in Japanese did not seem to be a necessary condition for mediating the disaster linguistically; in some interviews, participants with relatively low confidence in their Japanese abilities still talked about how they mediated language aspects of the disaster for another foreign resident. For example:

I had a friend who injured his leg maybe one or two months prior and he was in a hospital in Japan…and well, so he experienced the earthquake in the hospital, but his Japanese is pretty much non-existent, so he didn’t really know what was going on, and he couldn’t really reach anyone to tell him. He was stuck in a hospital bed without really knowing anything so I chatted to him a bit. He was, was a French guy I work with. I don’t really remember exactly what we chatted about, like, I guess, actually I think I chatted to him a bit later about Fukushima and so on. (Participant 26)

In short, this section has shown that, while the terms ‘translation’ and ‘interpreting’ may not have been used frequently by participants, they did discuss linguistic and cultural barriers and their mediation. What is not yet clear, though, is how strongly participants related these ideas to other units of meaning found in standard conceptualisations of translation and interpreting. In other words, by talking about linguistic and cultural barriers and their mediation, how sure can we be that participants were talking about what we in translation studies might recognise as translation or interpreting? To answer this question, the next section will work to operationalise a definition of translation and interpreting for this case study based on how the participants perceived these concepts.
5.3 Defining translation and interpreting in the 2011 disaster

This is a case study into the phenomena of translation and interpreting, and yet these phenomena have meant different things to different people at different times in different places for different reasons. This section seeks to make clear how the participants in this study perceived and conceptualised translation and interpreting. That is to say that the aim of the section is to operationalise a definition of translation and interpreting for this research based on what was expressed by these participants at this time in this place.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to review the many different definitions of translation or interpreting that have been used over the years. However, it is possible to identify recurrent categories that have featured and continue to feature in how translation scholars conceptualise these phenomena. With these recurrent categories as a background, then, this section will pinpoint the ideas that this case study’s participants chose to focus on. To begin, let us establish the categories that have commonly been used to talk about the concepts of translation and interpreting in the domain of translation studies.

5.3.1 Areas of interest when making a study of translation or interpreting

Translation and interpreting are studied from linguistic, technological, cognitive, behavioural, social, cultural, and ideological perspectives, among others (adapted from Bartrina 2005: 178), and, as such, ‘[a]lmost every aspect of life in general and of the interaction between speech communities in particular can be considered relevant to translation’ (Baker 1992: 4). Even so, this thesis argues that, whatever the perspective used, the main thrusts of enquiries into translation and interpreting revolve around three major categories: the act of translating or interpreting; the products of translation or interpretation; the roles and profiles of the translator or interpreter. Also, certain key themes appear frequently in relation to these three major categories. These themes include (in no particular order): equivalence; shifts; translatability; technology; ethics; globalisation; power relations; corpora; genres and contexts; reception; professionalism; gender and sexuality; community; hermeneutics; minority; domestication and foreignisation; metaphor; (in)visibility; centre and periphery; different cultural, historical, and geographic traditions of translation (Baker and Saldanha 2009: xiv-xxii). Other major concerns are said to be: fidelity; quality; functionality/Skopos; norms; language interference; tactics/strategies; responsibility (Gile 2010: 256-257). If it can be accepted that the above themes represent some of the major concerns of translation studies with respect to the phenomena of translation and interpreting, can it be shown that the participants in this case
study held similar concerns when discussing their experiences of these phenomena or did they associate translation and interpreting with other significant ideas?

In fact, this section will show that participants in this study did talk in general about the acts and products of translation and interpreting and about the roles and profiles of the translator and interpreter. More specifically, they associated the phenomena of translation and interpreting with ideas of globalisation, power relations, reception, professionalism, community, and quality, all of which were identified above as typical concerns in the domain of translation studies. In addition, though, the participants in this study also focused on the issues of timeliness and of trust.

5.3.2 The act of translating or interpreting

The first point to consider when looking at how participants talked about translation and interpreting in their interviews is to note that they did not make a distinction between translating and interpreting; between written, textually-mediated interlingual transfer and between an oral mode of interlingual transfer. Acts that we in the domain of translation studies would refer to as ‘interpreting’ were routinely termed ‘translation’ by participants.²¹

For instance, notice how one participant describes the work of an acquaintance engaged in mediation for a team of foreign reporters in the disaster zone:

Actually, my old boss, he’d resigned maybe like, it turned out to be two or three weeks before the earthquake and, he’s from Israel and he speaks very good Japanese…and so he’d actually gone up with NBC as a translator, and so they were, kind of, going around and he was riding around in a van, so his stories are pretty interesting…And he’s up in Fukushima, he’s up, like, they’re up in Tohoku, they’re up in, like, they were on, like, he was part of the, eh, animal retrieval, and all these different things, going with different news crews, ehm, getting scanned for radiation any time he was allowed in any facility, but I mean the GE guy that helped advise building it was saying ‘Get out.’…so basically, they said to him as well, “Come with us.” And so, he was gathering his stuff, and they were at, they were on their way to the airport and basically two or three of the news people were like, “The story’s here.” And so, like, ninety percent of them went back, but a handful of them stayed on, so he stayed on to translate with them. (Participant 21)

In Participant 21’s account, there was no mention of this Israeli acquaintance mediating any texts for the reporters, and the contexts of the encounters that she goes on to explain in the interview were clearly mediated in an oral mode. While such an act would be classified

²¹ It should be noted here that taking translation to mean the transfer of written texts only is characteristic of the Western or Euro-American tradition of translation scholarship; oral aspects of the transfer process within the translation phenomenon are recognised and examined by scholars working in certain Asian translation traditions (Hung and Wakabayashi 2005: 4).
as ‘interpreting’ in the world of the translation studies scholar, it was clearly defined as translation in the participant’s world view. Passages in the accounts of Participants 1 and 16 illustrate this point in a similar way.22

A second point to consider is that, when participants were discussing the act of translating (now and hereafter understood to include both translation and interpreting), they associated it clearly with issues of globalisation and the relative power of languages and cultures in different locales. That is to say that there was a clear assumption in the dataset that the target language of translation in this disaster would have been English. Many participants mentioned only Japanese and English as languages of relevance to the 2011 disaster. To quote an illustrative example, one participant said:

I live in [a part of Tokyo known for having a high population of foreign residents], and I did live there at the time and still do so, and they, whenever they give out documents, I think they always do it in both languages, in English and in Japanese, so, even like for earthquake readiness things, they give it out in English, so that was one good thing. (Participant 26)

This was as true for many of the native speakers of English (for instance, Participants 3, 4, and 24) as for many of the non-native speakers of English in the dataset (for example, Participants 8, 15, 16, and 22).23

Having said all this, one participant – a non-native speaker of English and fluent speaker of Japanese – reacted strongly against this assumption:

I don’t think we should blame the Japanese government for not giving information in, because people say English, why English? Why not Swahili, for example? I think it’s translation, okay, it’s not feasible that they can translate it in every language and I don’t think we should prefer some community to others. We are all foreigner here. Of course, there are community or people from certain country that are more, in terms of number, than other communities, but even the community where there is only, like, few dozen people, they have the right also to get information, same as the other people. And again, translating the information in English or in French or the other thing, it will not help the, the, there will be other people that really feel that they are left behind. And we can not also ask every foreign here in Japan to learn Japanese. Of course, if people are thinking to stay for a long time here, they should because it help for everyday life to speak the language. (Participant 7)

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22 To verify the relevant passages, see Appendix E: Participant 1/Lines 146-149; Participant 16/Lines 561-578.
23 To verify the relevant passages, see Appendix E: Participant 3/Lines 608-622; Participant 4/Lines 1326-1330; Participant 24/Lines 146-158; Participant 8/Lines 467-475; Participant 15/Lines 364-371; Participant 16/Lines 1020-1039; Participant 22/Lines 275-290.
Indeed, the forcefulness of this participant’s reaction goes to show their frustration with the dominant position of the Japanese-English language pair in the discourse on translation in this disaster. Putting aside ethical issues of whether such dominance was right or wrong for the moment, it is clear that many participants associated the Japanese-English language pair (and not other pairs) with translation in their experiences of the 2011 disaster.

A final point to consider in relation to how participants viewed the act of translating is that they did not restrict their conceptualisations to interlingual transfer alone; cultural mediation was associated by several participants with translation in different ways. In Section 5.2, it was shown that cultural barriers existed for participants in the case study, but this section shows how several participants associated interlingual transfer with cultural mediation to overcome these barriers. One participant – a professional interpreter who volunteered his services in the disaster zone immediately after onset – states explicitly that his approach to interpreting was not only about interlingual transfer:

> The law tell that the role of the interpreter is just to transfer the meaning back and forth and that’s it. The problem is that there are situation where that’s, it is an invitation to catastrophe because it’s not only a matter of words [laughter]. Words is just a tiny factor in the full relationship, okay? (Participant 13)

Furthermore, a number of participants told of how they relied on native Japanese speakers to use another language to help them navigate the Japanese culture of disaster response. For instance, one participant who could not speak Japanese well explained how he fell back on the assistance of English-speaking Japanese colleagues when the disaster struck:

> Luckily there were some of my English teaching colleagues, Japanese teachers, in the staff room, so I asked one of them, “What do we do now?” So we all did the usual disaster routine. (Participant 28)

Participants 1, 8, and 15 made similar comments. Even one participant with advanced Japanese abilities was helped to respond to the disaster via cultural mediation through another language:

> And then I looked around and I could see some people were squatting down and, kind of, like, “Uh, uh, uh.” [Note: the participant gestures looking worriedly above his head] You know, “Jishin da!”, like, “it’s an earthquake!” And, with that, I thought, “Whoa! I’m in the subway. I want to get out of the subway.” So, through the turnstile, I looked around at my boss, I said, you know; “Let’s go.” And, this older gentleman, my boss, put his hand on my

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24 To verify the relevant passages, see Appendix E: Participant 1/Lines 144-151; Participant 8/Lines 33-47; Participant 15/Lines 21-24.
shoulder, and he said, “No, let’s wait here. It’s safer to be here.” And just because he was so decisive, I thought that was a good thing. He said that to me in English, by the way. I’m remembering now. (Participant 19)

However, it should be remembered, too, that foreign residents themselves also used a common language to explain and assist other more recently-arrived foreign nationals in how to respond. For example, one participant explains how he invited a recently arrived foreign colleague who did not seem to know what to do to join him and other foreign nationals in a makeshift emergency shelter that they had established in the participant’s car:

Then {another Irish co-worker} was only after coming out, he was only there maybe two months...so he was new, and he was kind of a bit lost and that, so I was like, “{new co-worker’s name}, jump in there as well.” (Participant 2)

In sum, so far we can say that any conceptualisation of translation in this disaster needs to include both written and oral interlingual and intercultural transfer and needs to note the dominance of the Japanese-English language pair in the discourse on translation in the disaster. Still other elements of an operational definition remain to be considered, though.

5.3.3 The products of translation or interpretation

Participants spent time talking about certain characteristics of the products of translation (once again, from now on understood to include interpreting) in the 2011 disaster. In particular, they associated translation products with ideas of timeliness, quality, trust, and reception. Various participants talked about how translated information became available much more slowly than Japanese information, but also about how volunteer-created, gist translations acted as important stop-gap measures until official translations came to hand. From either perspective, one idea that came across strongly in participants’ accounts was that translated information was needed as fast as possible and that the need for speed may have surpassed the need for quality at times. To illustrate this, one participant who worked in an embassy and whose job it was to ensure that information was available to both that country’s citizens in Japan and to concerned relatives and friends in the home country strongly associated the concept of translation with the idea of timeliness:

Translation issues only really arose in the immediate aftermath of it when we were listening to the Japanese news and trying to pick up what was happening before the ministries had actually activated themselves, so in the immediate aftermath, that’s where translation issues would have kicked in. Our local staff would have been our main conduit, so they looked after that. (Researcher: And those local staff, would they have been Japanese people?) Japanese nationals. (And professionally trained in translation?) Some, yeah, some
would have had professional translation experience, and others would have been with the embassy for a long time. (Participant 3)

Other participants, such as Participants 9, 14, 20, 24, and 26, also underline a connection in their experiences between translation and timing.25

Another important experiential link made by participants was between translation and the idea of the quality of the information provided. In general, participants seemed to hold a fairly low opinion of the quality of the information that they recognised as being the results of acts of translating, and they seemed to blame some of these quality issues on the types of production process that would be characteristic of Japanese institutional translation:

The Japanese government in particular, were producing difficult to understand direct translations because they are all focused on approvals and avoiding risk, and “it has to be exactly the same as the Japanese” was the mandate…“The Japanese has been approved. If we are going to do anything in English, it has to be as close to the Japanese as possible otherwise it is a separate document that has to go through approvals again.” (Participant 6)

Nonetheless, it was clear that participants struggled with the idea of whether receiving high-quality, accurate translated information was as valuable as just having some translated information available, even if that translated information was not as precise as they would have liked. This was a tension that was not resolved at interview, but it might be interpreted that ‘adequate’ rather than ‘high-quality’ translation was what participants valorised:

Because, [my co-worker and I], we were the only two native speakers that worked at the {redacted} centre, all of the information usually came through us, and so it was easy for us to get that information out. When other people had to take over for us, we would still have to come back and check that English, and then it would have to go up again. So it really depended on what information they want to get out there. If it’s in English and they don’t mind, then that’s perfectly fine, and I guess you can only do so much, so having the information in English is better than not having it in English, but at the same time, if you get something wrong, then that’s when problems start to occur. (Participant 24)

Another significant association with the products of translation made by participants was an association with the idea of trust. Here again there were conflicting tensions in participant accounts around how trust related to the phenomenon of translation. At one point, a participant said that information available in their native language, but that had been provided by Japanese sources, was more trustworthy:

25 To verify the relevant passages, see Appendix E: Participant 9/Lines 255-261; Participant 14/Lines 384-395; Participant 20/Lines 583-598; Participant 24/Lines 578-593; Participant 26/Lines 309-313.
What I started doing is reading a lot of, obviously English-only information, because Japanese information, I didn’t trust and not only that, I can’t read Japanese very well. So I started listening to, you know, NHK [Note: the Japanese national broadcaster] in English, because I think they built a lot of credibility during the crisis, and I knew some of the people who worked there. (Participant 27)

However, later on in the interview, that same participant said that the very recognition that the information had been translated made it somewhat suspect and harder to have complete confidence in:

So I think the, the story for what you are talking about and the fact that I am not doing Japanese media except the English version of it. I’m doing Jiji and Kyodo and NHK, you know, I’m going off the wires every day. But that’s just a translation, and I don’t know if it’s a good translation. (Participant 27)

Another participant displayed a similar uncertainty about whether knowing something was a translation or clearly receiving it as a translation might change the trust that would be put in the information:

There are more and more foreigners living in Japan these days, and a lot of them don’t speak Japanese, and emergency announcements, if you don’t understand the language of the announcements, you’re pretty much, you have to rely on a transla, you have to get the information second-hand. And even if you have someone who is fluent in English translating for you, to get something first-hand immediately gives you a little bit more, I don’t want to say comfort, but gives you a little bit more security. (Participant 14)

What consistently came through as a guarantee of trust was less the informational product itself than the source of that information. If the source was trusted, the information was more trusted, whether received by the foreign resident as a translation or not:

I think not being a bilingual, fluent Japanese speaker, I think information was still accessible. I think the Internet played a big role. I think Twitter played a big role. Personal connections and connecting with those people through digital technology was important…Maybe because I was discounting the official word, I didn’t feel like, “Oh I’m not listening directly to this. That’s not a problem.” And again, I would get it filtered through people that, whose opinion I trusted, so it was okay. (Participant 20)

Participants 17 and 23 also made sure to highlight the importance of the source of the information in establishing whether a translation could be trusted.26

As a final point, despite the fact that participants related translations with important

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26 To verify the relevant passages, see Appendix E: Participant 17/Lines 423-437; Participant 23/Lines 1016-1018.
categories like timeliness, quality, and trust, it must be remembered that, in many cases, participants did not recognise (nor were they interested in) the fact that important pieces of information in the disaster were likely to have come to them as a result of translation. Therefore, reception is also an important category to consider when defining translation for this research. For instance, many important pieces of information used by participants during the disaster would likely have been pseudo-originals. Pym (2012) defines pseudo-originals as:

...texts that have been produced according to translative processes but which are not recognized as translations in the space of the receiver – they are not completely translational. Much of the televised information that we see every day has been translated, but is not received as a translation. (Pym 2012: 75)

Thus, in addition to the multiple references to information broadcast on television in all participant accounts that likely came about as a result of translative processes, the following dialogues between two participants and the researcher highlight the strong possibility that many other products of translation in the disaster were not recognised as such. These dialogues also suggest that whether a piece of information was clearly perceived as a translation or not was not very important to the participants:

There’s a fantastic guide for the Japanese shindo [Note: Japan’s seismic intensity scale] system on Wikipedia in English which I probably read after the earthquake which explains the shindo 1 through 7...But basically, the Wikipedia article for the Japanese shindo explains it like that and so, em, if you go and read the shindo 5 entry, like, well, pretty much what happened in Tokyo, you know. (Researcher: Okay, that’s really interesting. Well, definitely I’m going to check that out because that’s probably a translation.) It probably is a translation, yes. (Participant 12)

(Researcher: for me, the interesting point is if you’re trusting, let’s say, an English-speaking journalist who is getting their information through some form of mediation, how much do you know about the mediation? I’m interested in that whole topic, though, if I guess, if you’d like to call it news translation as well...) I don’t know much about that. (Researcher:...it’s just interesting to me because, as you said, trust was a key word that came up, I think, if you’re familiar with the language of the place you’re reporting on, that maybe gives you the ability to access certain things.) Well for me what’s more interesting is some of the blogs that were coming out with information. You know, women’s groups, mothers’ groups, that kind of thing. (Participant 27)

To summarise, if we are to define translation for this research, this section has argued that, in addition to thinking of the concept as written and oral interlingual and intercultural transfer dominated by the Japanese-English language pair, we must also consider ideas of timeliness, quality, trust, and reception in our conceptualisation.
5.3.4 The role and profile of the translator or interpreter

The final two frequently-occurring themes related to the concept of translation that participants touched on in their interviews were the concepts of professionalism and community. In particular, it was clear that participants positioned the people who were translating (again, now understood to include written and oral modes) largely toward the volunteer end of a volunteer-professional cline. Moreover, many of the volunteer translators that they interacted with were tied to them by bonds of community. Participants such as the two quoted below described how it was friends and work colleagues who spontaneously translated for them in the disaster:

I have a good friend, {redacted}, from that group who, she and a couple of her friends threw together a Wikipedia of all the, the information and they did their best to translate it after the earthquake in fact. It’s gone now. I was, I was trying to find it for you a couple of days ago, but, eh, obviously, it’s come down….(Researcher: So, like, they were just basically as Japanese people, they were taking?) Taking, I think, just the Japanese government sources, I suppose. The newspaper headlines, articles, anything I suppose they could get their hands on, just translating it, safety information. And these were just college students. They were just, kind of, doing their best to, because they were part of this international club and because they had a lot of friends. It was really nice. (Participant 23)

I remember the tsunami warning which I didn’t understand but was translated for me. I do remember it being broadcast that there was the possible risk of a tsunami up to two-metres coming to Tokyo. That never materialised…There definitely were some PA announcements, and they were impossible, utterly impossible for me to understand, because it was, kind of, static-y, you know, like, crackley, kind of [Note: the participant then covers his mouth with his hand and produces some incomprehensible sounds] over the system, but the Japanese people around understood. (Researcher: Yeah, this is interesting for me. You said, “It was translated for me.” Can you be more specific?) …Oh, the company. Again, it was people from the company. I was with, we were standing outside the company for a while. (Participant 12)

Other participants, including Participants 15, 16, 20, 21, and 26, also talked about how they relied on friends, acquaintances, and loved ones to translate for them.27

It must be emphasised, though, that placing the people who undertook the role of translator on the volunteer end of a volunteer-professional cline is not to say that they were not language professionals. In support of findings in other research that not all volunteer translators or interpreters are untrained (see, for example, O’Hagan 2011), the data in this case study show that professionals did translate in the 2011 disaster but that they mostly

27 To verify the relevant passages, see Appendix E: Participant 15/Lines 131-150; Participant 16/Lines 354-384; Participant 20/Lines 434-460; Participant 21/Lines 2284-2290; Participant 26/Lines 233-237.
did so in a voluntary capacity. One participant – an interpreter by profession – describes a situation where professional experience in interpreting was a feature of the role in the disaster:

I quickly wanted to do something. But what was, I had no, I was not ready to define what would be that something I could do. But just stressing morning till evening was frustrating. Kind of, “Isn’t there something to do?”, but I didn’t know what. And I told my wife that I would ask to do something, you know, a contribution, volunteerism, whatever, but I don’t know what. And then it was the 13th, I think, 12 or 13, not exactly, which was almost next day. All of sudden there came an email from the French Embassy. French Embassy was recruiting interpreters to go – and this was unclear – to go to Sendai, to go North. (Participant 13)

Another participant – whose company began to collect Twitter messages of support from all over the world for the people in Japan suffering from the disaster – tells of how he called on a professional network of translators to help translate these messages:

We had all these amazing messages coming out, but of course they were all in English or Spanish or German, most of them were. And we had thousands of these messages coming through just short little tweets…and I said, “Listen, we’ve got this thing going, would your guys be interested in translating these messages?” And they were so quick to get back on. They asked around and every translator on their books said yes they’d love to do that for free, absolutely. (Participant 19)

In short, the above allows us to argue that the final elements required to operationalise a definition of translation for this disaster are ideas of working in a voluntary capacity and bonds of community.

5.3.5 An operational definition of ‘Translation’ for this research

We can now synthesise the elements outlined above to propose the definition of translation that guided the analysis in this research. Even though it is now not unusual in the language industry to avoid using the term ‘translation’ and to focus instead on alternative terms to describe special issues of concern with relation to the concept (see Koskinen 2010: 15), it seems appropriate that a thesis in the domain of translation studies should use the term. Nonetheless, in the remainder of this analysis, the convention will be adopted to use an upper-case T whenever referring to the definition operationalised here. Additionally, an
upper-case T will be used whenever referring to derivative forms of the noun defined in this section.\textsuperscript{28} The definition is as follows:

\textit{Translation} in the 2011 disaster was a process of written and oral interlingual and intercultural transfer, dominated by the Japanese-English language pair, carried out mostly by volunteers known to the user, to create products that were not always received as translations, but that were valorised when seen to produce timely information of adequate quality and when seen to come from trusted sources.

This definition goes some way to illustrating how Translation fit into the communicative scene for foreign residents in the 2011 disaster. However, it also prompts further questions that need to be answered in the rest of this chapter. While it has been shown so far that the providers of Translation were mostly at the volunteer end of a volunteer-professional cline, who precisely were these volunteers? Also, while we now know that timely, adequate, trustworthy Translations were valorised, what exactly were the topics of the information being Translated? Moreover, when and where was all this Translation work being carried out, and how were Translations actually produced? The subsequent sections will propose answers to these questions.

\textsuperscript{28} These conventions have been used in other research into the phenomena of translation and interpreting to denote a special use of the term (e.g., Gile 2010: 251).
5.4 Who Translated for whom?

The first step in establishing who Translated for whom in this case study is to establish the parties that were involved when foreign residents communicated and gathered information. Participants talked about being involved in relationships with the following parties in the 2011 disaster:

- Foreign national friends or acquaintances in Japan
- Family or friends overseas
- Japanese national work colleagues
- Embassies
- Foreign national work colleagues
- Japanese national friends or acquaintances in Japan
- Family or partner in Japan
- Unknown Japanese nationals in Japan
- Disaster responders
- Overseas media
- Unknown foreign nationals in Japan
- Unknown foreign nationals overseas
- University in Japan
- University overseas

5.4.1 Assessment of participants’ relationships

Tables 5–2 and 5–3 present more detail on these relationships. First, Table 5–2 describes the numbers of participants in the study who talked about communicating with certain parties during the 2011 disaster. Then, Table 5–3 describes the numbers of participants who talked about gathering information from certain parties in the disaster. All these references have then been categorised according to whether the participant viewed the relationship in a positive, negative, or neutral light, and according to whether the participant associated the interaction with something positive, negative, or neutral.

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29 The definitions of the codes that have been cross-referenced in these two tables (Relationship positive, Relationship negative, Relationship neutral, Communicating positive, Communicating negative, Communicating neutral, Information gathering positive, Information gathering negative, Information gathering neutral) can all be consulted in the codebook in Appendix F.
POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS:

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<th>Communicating NEUTRAL</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Embassies</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family or friends overseas</td>
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<td>Family or partner in Japan</td>
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<td>Japanese national friends or acquaintances in Japan</td>
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<td>Overseas media</td>
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<td>University in Japan</td>
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<td>University overseas</td>
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<td>Unknown foreign nationals in Japan</td>
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Table 5-2. Parties with whom participants communicated and the qualities associated with these interactions
What becomes clear from these two tables is that participants were communicating with a wider variety of parties than they were gathering information from, but that, nonetheless, they were seeking information from a wide array of sources. Additionally, we can see that, while both communicating with and gathering information from these people seemed to be

Table 5.3. Parties from whom participants gathered information and the qualities associated with these interactions

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N.B. Any cell with a count of 4 or greater (indicating that the relevant unit of meaning was referred to by 4 or more participants) has been shaded grey in the table below:
broadly positive experiences for the participants, there were significant numbers of participants who associated these interactions with something negative. A deeper qualitative exploration of these data reveals further insights.

Looking first at the positive instances of communication and information gathering that took place within the context of a broader positive relationship (indicated by the green rectangles superimposed on Tables 5–2 and 5–3), we can see that several participants in this case study singled out their foreign national friends or acquaintances in Japan, their Japanese national friends or acquaintances in Japan, as well as their Japanese national work colleagues as categories of relationship that held some sort of positive association for them and that involved instances of communicating or gathering information that were in some way positive. For example, one participant talked with great appreciation about the efforts that his company made to communicate with him and to confirm his safety throughout the disaster:

> They do check up, like, as you, the anpikakunin system [Note: automated system over ICT where employees must confirm their status after an emergency], it checks you. It asks: How are you? How is your family? How is your home? There’s a fourth question which I can’t remember. Oh, can you come to work?...Like, I felt like part of the work community. People were checking on me, you know. (Participant 12)

Another participant underlined how useful it was to be able to call on specialists in the international community to gather and disseminate understandable information about the nuclear disaster:

> I turned to friends in the international community. I worked with an international chamber to help set up a panel discussion with a specialist from a major overseas academic institute. So he had just written a book on radiation, and we invited him in to speak. It got a huge crowd, and it was all, it was the international community, and many of the participants were mothers who were concerned about radiation and, for their children, they didn’t really know where else to go for information, so it was very helpful for a lot them. (Participant 6)

Despite such positive experiences, we should not ignore the negative instances of communication and information gathering within the context of a broader relationship that were seen by the participant in a negative light (indicated by the red rectangles superimposed on Tables 5–2 and 5–3). Here several participants in this case study singled out their embassies and their families and friends overseas as categories of relationship that held some sort of negative association for them and that involved instances of communicating or gathering information that were in some way negative. As an illustration, one participant pointed out how repeated communications via social media
from friends and family overseas giving their opinion on the disaster and how the participant should respond to it were not helpful to him:

(Researcher: you also mentioned about social media being not that useful to you really, in fact it might have been counterproductive.) Oh, counterproductive because the people on Facebook was kind of going crazy. (Researcher: And when you say the people on Facebook, were they people that you knew here in Japan?) No, no, no, mostly friends or not necessarily people very close but rather, well, I mean, it’s always like this, “Oh, something happened in Japan. Oh my god. I think my neighbour’s daughter-in-law’s son is currently there, so we need to check.” Fair enough, I mean, so people I have had no contact with for ten years, fifteen years or so, I mean, all of a sudden, they come on, “Oh, are you still in Japan?”, and I think that is a positive because it’s like, “Oh, right, great. They, they actually do care although you’re not best friends or whatever. But because Germans are so paranoid about nuclear things. Nuclear is really, everything goes into irrational mode, really it does go into irrational mode. (Participant 22)

Additionally, while some participants viewed their relationship with their embassy in a positive light, others viewed it more negatively, and a common complaint was that, rather than the embassy providing information to the participant, it seemed to be working the other way around:

(Researcher: And the information that you received from your embassy, was it useful for you?) No. It was not. It was not. Because, like, I had more information than them at that time [laughter]. So they were asking, “Are you okay?” and “Is the situation okay now?” or “Will you stay or go back?” “Is the level of radiation is okay now, or not?” So they were just asking, but not providing information. (Participant 15)

Finally, the data indicated by the yellow rectangles superimposed on Tables 5–2 and 5–3 remind us of the complexity of human relationships and highlight that it was possible in the disaster to experience an act of communication or information gathering negatively in the context of a broadly positive relationship and vice versa. To illustrate this point, one participant talked about how he was happy to have his Japanese partner by his side to Translate Japanese TV news about the Fukushima meltdown but, at the same time, how he was frustrated that the message that she Translated was a message not to panic:

I turned around to {my girlfriend} and I go, “{redacted}, did you ever hear of Chernobyl? ” And she said, “No.” “You never heard of Chernobyl?” She said, “No.” I said, “Well, we know about Chernobyl and this is very, very serious. Like, what’s the news actually telling you? What are the experts saying?” Because we just couldn’t understand, it was all these new words that we were hearing. So we had to get her to try and tell us, and, like, “No, they’re just saying you’re okay, kind of thing.” We were getting all this, sort of, “Don’t worry about it. They are going out. It’ll be okay,” and all that kind of thing. (Participant 2)
In sum, what has been shown in this section is that relationships in the disaster were diverse and complex. Relationships with friends and acquaintances who were either Japanese nationals or other foreign nationals seemed broadly positive, as did relationships between the participants and their Japanese work colleagues. At the same time, the participants’ relationships with their embassies and with their family and friends overseas seemed to be more problematic. Some of the data in this section also indicated that Translation was a feature of at least some of these relationships. The next section will make clear the extent to which Translation was involved in participants’ relationships with the various parties outlined above.

5.4.2 Assessment of participants’ relationships involving Translation

Table 5–4 cross references the same positive, negative, and neutral relationships detailed in the previous section with any references made by the participants in their interviews to linguistic and cultural mediation in the 2011 disaster; mediation that was carried out either by the participant themselves or by another person.30

30 The definitions of the codes that have been cross-referenced in this table (Relationship positive, Relationship negative, Relationship neutral, Linguistic mediation by another, Linguistic mediation by the participant, Cultural mediation by another, Cultural mediation by the participant) can all be consulted in the codebook in Appendix F.
Firstly, what we see from the data is that Translation did indeed involve both interlingual and intercultural transfer for participants when viewed from the perspective of how they related to other categories of people in the disaster. Secondly, it would appear that the

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Table 5-4. Relationships in the disaster that included elements of Translation
relationships that involved Translation were experienced mostly positively by the participants. Finally, when we are talking about who Translated for whom in the 2011 disaster, Table 5–4 indicates that we are broadly speaking about foreign and Japanese friends, acquaintances, and colleagues on-the-ground in Japan Translating for other foreign and Japanese friends, acquaintances, and colleagues there. Nevertheless, it would appear that the efforts of Japanese national Translators may have been favoured slightly over the efforts of foreign national Translators by participants in this case study. These points can be supported by some illustrations in the participants’ own voices. Here two participants describe how Translation featured positively in their relationships with Japanese acquaintances and colleagues:

I recruit for, mainly find Japanese people. How many people reached out to me and said, “Do you need help with anything?” There’s a woman, I don’t know like, in her forties, that emailed me out-of-the-blue and was like, “Oh do you need help with translation or anything?” Or like, people that I didn’t, weren’t close friends or anything, but reaching out, you know, like, “Okay, I know you’re alone in Tokyo, do you need any help? Do you need translation?” (Participant 21)

We were lucky at {the city government in the disaster zone}. They have two Japanese workers that had studied overseas. So their jobs were to translate into English. So, not only did we have the native speakers, we also had them as well and they would be translating a lot for City Hall, so it was a lot of the technical English, and we would also check their English. But, I guess we were lucky to have that help as well. Because City Hall is completely different, because once the earthquake had been 6 months to 7 months, that’s when the information on how you go about getting, like, subsidies and (Researcher: Yeah, very technical stuff)...that type of stuff. (Participant 24)

Other participants underscore that it was in their relationship with other foreign nationals in the disaster that the benefits of Translation could be felt. The first participant quoted below points to the benefits of having members of his national community who could speak Japanese in the same refuge centre (termed ‘camp’ by the participant) during the disaster. The second participant points to the benefits of being visited by foreign national friends who could speak Japanese at a time when the participant was taking refuge in his apartment:

(Researcher: And what was the language in the camp?) Mainly Japanese, but one or two peoples could comment in English, and, to use Japanese, it was not difficult for us, because all peoples were the same place and many of them know Japanese. Because in our community, three or four peoples I said about, all of my friend that know Japanese, because if there is an announcement instantly he translated, “Oh, this like this.” (Participant 16)

We were lucky because two of our American friends who were staying with us had been there for about six years, I think, so they were quite good at speaking Japanese, which was, you know, we’d only been there for a year-and-a-half, so we weren’t the best speakers. We hadn’t studied Japanese
before, or anything like that…because they had a car as well, they were just driving around, they were living in the area, and just to see how we were, and I think we turned on the radio in the car because they were the more fluent Japanese speakers that, sort of, gave us a rundown. (Participant 28)

Secondary sources of data compiled for this case study support the assertions that foreign residents who were affected by the 2011 disaster fell back on local communities of Japanese colleagues or other Japanese-speaking foreign nationals for Translation. For instance, the National Diet Library (the library of the Japanese parliament) has compiled archives of texts, maps, video and audio recordings, photographs, and other mostly Japanese data produced at the time of the 2011 disaster. Twenty minutes of television documentary reports by the national broadcaster, NHK, featuring a Chinese, an American, and two Filipina nationals who experienced the disaster in some of the worst-hit areas have been added to these archives.31

In addition to providing further evidence for who was Translating in the disaster, these reports strongly echo other themes identified in this thesis. Specifically, despite the fact that these foreign residents were not all the same – they differed widely in period of residence, linguistic ability, age and other demographic factors – a discourse of community ran through their accounts of the disaster, especially in terms of the strengthened bonds of community that they enjoyed with other Japanese and foreign nationals as a result of experiencing the disaster together. These reports also attested to the significant linguistic barriers that some foreign residents came up against in the disaster, but also pointed to cultural barriers, particularly in terms of the tension between responding more communally or more individually to the disaster. Finally, the reports also underlined the extra support that foreign nationals may need in disaster in Japan, while at the same time showing the asset that foreign residents can be in contributing to disaster response, especially in helping other more vulnerable foreign nationals.

While negative associations between Translation and the relationships that participants were engaged in during the disaster were limited, some examples from the data are indicative of some problem areas in the Translation that took place in the 2011 disaster. In particular, there were not enough Translators to go around, and those that were Translating were being asked to perform outside the scope of their normal capacities:

Some volunteer, English-speaking volunteer, like Japanese people, they tried to translate what, what is going on, but not all time, just, like, sometimes. (Researcher: And those volunteers, were they other people inside the [refuge] centre or did they come from another place?) No, no, other people inside the centre, yeah, yes. (Participant 15)

There were times, like, for example, where I had to, on the spur of the moment - I wasn’t given any notice - but I had to go and interpret for the mayor that was talking to the US Army, and I don’t know, like, words, like the specific words that are going to come up and the vocab that they are going to use, so, I cringe thinking about that now. (Participant 24)

Another area for Translation in the disaster that may have been problematic relates to the fact that Translators were sometimes a bridge between different groups of local and foreign disaster responders in a highly politicised and culturally-bound space of interaction:

But basically, the Japanese police would say something like, “This is the territory that you check.” Well, look for survivors, look for cadavers. There were rules. Rules, for people that come far away to help people, which was totally, disturbing, like, “If you see a corpse, contact the police, do not touch it.” Basically, it’s: do not touch Japanese people. It was not written like that, but it was something like that. And also a lot of frustration because before we went on site in day time, we waited almost a day doing nothing, and the rescuers get frustrated because time is key. (Participant 13)

To conclude this section, what has been shown is that participants in this case study were engaged in a wide variety of complex relationships to communicate and gather information in the 2011 disaster. When focusing in on the relationships that involved Translation, it became clear that the majority of interactions were between foreign and Japanese acquaintances on-the-ground in Japan Translating for other foreign and Japanese acquaintances. These relationships proved to be mostly beneficial for the participants, but they also highlighted some of the problem areas for Translation in the disaster, notably a lack of sufficient resources and a strongly culturally-bound space of interaction. These themes were also shown to interconnect systematically with secondary data.

By now, we are starting to form a more detailed picture of the part that Translation played in foreign residents’ communication and information gathering in the 2011 disaster, but there are still aspects that remain to be explored. Having established that acquaintances were often Translating for other acquaintances in a voluntary capacity, what sort of information were they actually Translating?
5.5 What was Translated?

Table 5–5 collates the references in the participants’ interviews to the different topics that they felt needed Translation. This, of course, is likely an incomplete representation, and other categories of information may have needed Translating in the 2011 disaster. The purpose of this section is not to come up with an exhaustive inventory of topics, but rather to be able to speak with some confidence about patterns that were found in the data.

32 The definitions of the codes used to create Table 5–5 (Topics needing linguistic mediation, Topics needing cultural mediation) are available in Appendix F.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics requiring LINGUISTIC mediation</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Topics requiring CULTURAL mediation</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News broadcasts or articles</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>The character of typical Japanese disaster response</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explaining response procedures</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>The lack of locally-specific knowledge</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear technology, radiation, and details of the nuclear disaster</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>The character of Japanese-style communication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency warnings over PA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cultural differences within foreign populations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster preparedness advice</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>The unusual character of this disaster</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to evacuate (transport options, schedules, conditions, controlled evacuations)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where, when, and how to get food, water, power, other essentials</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of damage and status of recovery (incl. locations, fatalities, missing, transport, etc.)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official stance on the disaster</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation of an individual's safety</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food safety (especially places of origin, radiation tests)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How to interact with Japanese people as a foreign responder or journalist</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency radio broadcasts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to interact with Japanese people as a foreign volunteer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Links to websites</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency warnings on TV</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions on how to be a volunteer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures to claim insurance, rebuilding subsidies, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions from Japanese authorities to foreign responders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to interact with Japanese people as a fellow victim</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Messages of support and sympathy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Counselling for foreign nationals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.5: General list of topics requiring Translation in the 2011 disaster
Table 5–5 indicates that news, response procedures (especially typical Japanese procedures), nuclear-related information, and warnings over public address systems were topics that large numbers of participants chose independently of each other to talk about. The passages referred to in the table include instances where participants were talking not only about their own experiences but also about the experiences of other foreign nationals that they knew. To focus in more precisely on those topics that were important to the participants in this case study, we can cross-reference the above topics with some other useful units of meaning that were coded separately: ‘Linguistic barrier present for the participant’ and ‘Cultural barrier present for the participant’. Table 5–6 summarises these intersections in the interview data.

Here again we can see that the same four topics proved particularly troublesome for participants from a linguistic or cultural perspective in the 2011 disaster:

- News broadcasts or articles
- Emergency warnings over PA
- Nuclear technology, radiation, and details of the nuclear disaster
- The character of typical Japanese disaster response
Once again, further qualitative exploration of these data allows for deeper insights to be gained. Talking about news broadcasts, one participant referenced in Table 5–6 shows how knowledge of Japanese (especially an ability to read the complex Japanese writing system) was required to understand news headlines:

We were walking past, I think, a car dealer’s. Every shop on that road had their televisions turned out to face the windows so that people could see what was happening, and that was the first time that we saw anything. But then again, we weren’t really getting that much information because all these headlines were in Japanese and *kanji* [Note: the Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system]. (Participant 23)

With respect to emergency warnings, another participant, who had accepted a new job in Fukushima just before the disaster, partly based his decision not to take up the position on the fact that emergency PA announcements there were unlikely to have been in a language that he would have understood and that this would have left him extremely vulnerable:

Not getting the information there, not being really able to, and that was partly my decis, why I decided not to go up to Fukushima, because I thought, “If something happens, even if they drive with an announcement, those are not going to be in English.” And there, language would have been an issue. So I would be totally reliant on others ringing me, thinking of me “Oh, he’s ringing, he’s ringing because something has happened.” And that’s, so, I wasn’t in a very vulnerable situation, at least not in every respect, but I also chose not to put myself in a situation where I would have been worse, at least that was my reasoning. (Participant 22)

The nuclear disaster created large volumes of highly technical, highly specialised information, and foreign residents needed this information Translated. This was true even for those foreign residents who were confident in their Japanese abilities. Unfortunately, it would seem that the quality of the scientific and technical translations that were on offer may have been lacking:

Yeah, it’s funny because there was, experts they have on TV are always certainly, at least, they’re fluent in their fields in English, I would imagine, and they would be quite good at explaining what was going on even in English, even on paper. And yet, for the first few days or for the first few weeks, the explanations that I found in English of what was going on were terrible. They were a mess. (Participant 5)

As has been established earlier in this chapter, intercultural transfer was also an aspect of Translation in the 2011 disaster, and some cultural ideas may also have needed to have been Translated for foreign residents. For instance, certain slogans, such as ‘*Gambare Nippon*’ or ‘*Gambarou Tohoku*’ were ubiquitous following the disaster. These slogans might be translated in many ways, ranging from ‘Let’s get on with it’ or ‘Let’s move
forward’ to ‘We are with you, Tohoku’. The choice of how to translate these slogans would have involved some cultural considerations, as one participant explained, and these considerations indicate that the culture of how Japan responds typically to disaster probably needed to be translated at times in 2011:

(Researcher: Would translating those type of slogans into other languages have any effect?) On the foreign population in Japan? I’m not sure. I think it loses, it doesn’t really translate into our parlance, you know. It’s more of a cultural thing than a language thing, and if you were to tell, if a similar disaster had happened in {my home country}, I’m not sure the population would react to “Okay,” you know, “get on with it!” There would be a period of moping required. But, you know, they’re different mind-sets, so. (Participant 3)

In this chapter so far, we have established that Translation is a worthwhile object of enquiry for this study and have operationalised a definition for Translation in this research. We have shown that participants were engaged in diverse, complex relationships, and that, from a Translation point of view, interactions between foreign and Japanese friends, acquaintances, and colleagues were extremely important and mostly beneficial. At the same time, we have shown that a lack of sufficient resources and a strongly culturally-bound space of interaction also created problems for the relationships that involved Translation. Then, in this section, we have established that news, warnings over public address systems, nuclear-related information, and typical, Japanese disaster response procedures were the types of information that participants in this case study needed to have translated. It would be useful moving forward to know how elements of this picture fit with some of the other contextual ideas that were established in the previous chapter. Specifically, it would be useful to discuss the temporal and spatial features of this Translational scene.

5.6 When and where did Translation take place?

We can now use how the disaster was defined in time and space in the previous chapter to interrogate in more detail the topics that needed to be translated. Table 5–7 aggregates the topics from the previous section into the five main types already categorised in Section 4.5.5 (warning about the disaster, instructing people how to respond, developing situation awareness of the disaster, administering the disaster, and supporting others through the disaster) and follows the same temporal progression mapping onto the recognised phases of a disaster discussed in Section 4.3.3 (pre-event, event, response, and recovery).
Table 5–7. When Translation was needed in the 2011 disaster

From Table 5–7, we can now say that, generally speaking, the need to Translate emergency warnings, response procedures, and instructions for how to interact with other parties to the 2011 disaster came in the early phases. The Translation of topics related to the development of situation awareness – such as safety confirmations, news broadcasts, status reports, or evacuation procedures – was intensively required for the first month or so after onset. Then, the need to Translate administrative procedures and messages of advice, support, and counselling became greater once the emergency had moved into the recovery phase. The data in Table 5–7, therefore, underscore that Translation was required at all phases of the 2011 disaster. Additionally, the data seem to suggest that, of these five types of information requiring Translation, the need to Translate information used to develop situation awareness was required most of all. At the earlier phases of the disaster, participants – especially those who had little Japanese ability – spoke of being able to get by using sign language and pictures or by copying the actions of those around them:

(Researcher: How did you find the evacuation centre? How did you know that information?) How did I know it? Actually just by, like, seeing most of people were going and, like, carrying their items and so on, and so I followed them [laughter]. (Participant 15)

Thus, it was in trying to find out more complex information about what was going on and
to make decisions on how to respond that the participants seemed to require Translation, and this was true even for those with advanced Japanese ability:

Until, March 11, I had no knowledge about what nuclear was about, you know, the plug, the whole thing about the origin of the juice. As long as you get the juice, so what? You know, unless you are knowledgeable about that, they start using words about stuff you never heard. When something like that happen you have a whole chunk of what used to be technical vocabulary that falls into public speech. Kids started talking about cesium. 24 hours ago, nobody knew what cesium was. Well, when it started I, even me, nobody knew what cesium was except that cesium is bad for you [laughter]. (Participant 13)

Of course, it should be remembered that the various elements of the above typology may not have followed such a smooth progression and may have occurred simultaneously or overlapped. Nevertheless, the point of presenting the typology, even if it is not a perfect map, is to suggest that there seemed to be a relative relationship between the various needs for Translation in the disaster.

The data in Table 5–7 can be elaborated on even further to begin to make some claims about where the work of Translating these various topics was taking place as the disaster progressed in time. In other words, by qualitatively studying the references that participants made to these various topics, it was possible to create Table 5–8 which establishes the loci of Translation for each topic.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOPIC NEEDING MEDIATION</th>
<th>LOCUS OF MEDIATION</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Warning about the disaster</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency warnings over PA</td>
<td>● Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Municipal networks subscribing to JMA’s Earthquake Early Warning System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency warnings on TV</td>
<td>● TV networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructing people how to respond</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General response procedures</td>
<td>● Municipal offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Train stations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Office buildings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Shopping centres</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Large public spaces</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Embassies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions from Japanese authorities to foreign responders</td>
<td>● Transportation to disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to interact with Japanese people as a foreign responder or journalist</td>
<td>● Disaster zone search and rescue sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to interact with Japanese people as a foreign volunteer</td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CULTURAL MEDIATION) The character of typical Japanese disaster response</td>
<td>● Municipal offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CULTURAL MEDIATION) Cultural differences within foreign populations</td>
<td>● Disaster zone search and rescue sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Municipal offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing ‘situation awareness’ in the disaster</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmation of an individual’s safety</td>
<td>● Disaster zone evacuation centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Disaster zone municipal offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Embassies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News broadcasts or articles</td>
<td>● TV networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Homes of volunteer interpreters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency radio broadcasts</td>
<td>● Radio networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Municipal offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation of damage and status of recovery (incl. locations, fatalities, missing, etc.)</td>
<td>● Government offices</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Offices of non-profit organisations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Embassies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where, when, and how to get food, water, power, other essentials</td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Embassies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to evacuate (transport options, schedules, conditions, controlled evacuations)</td>
<td>● Municipal offices (helpdesks and helplines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official stance on the disaster (e.g., content of press conferences)</td>
<td>● Government offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Embassies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Links to websites</td>
<td>● Government offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Offices of non-profit organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Homes of volunteer translators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear technology, radiation, and details of the nuclear disaster</td>
<td>● Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● TV networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Public meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food safety (especially places of origin, radiation tests)</td>
<td>● Offices of news agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Homes of volunteer translators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CULTURAL MEDIATION) The unusual character of this disaster</td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CULTURAL MEDIATION) The lack of locally-specific knowledge</td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(CULTURAL MEDIATION) The character of Japanese-style communication</td>
<td>● Disaster zone search and rescue sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administering the disaster</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructions on how to be a volunteer</td>
<td>● Municipal offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedures to claim insurance, rebuilding subsidies, etc.</td>
<td>● Municipal offices (helpdesks and helplines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting others through the disaster</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster preparedness advice</td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to interact with Japanese people as a fellow victim</td>
<td>● Homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling for foreign nationals</td>
<td>● Offices of non-profit organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages of support and sympathy</td>
<td>● Homes of volunteer translators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5-8. Where the acts of Translation were carried out in the 2011 disaster

150
These are just the locations that were mentioned by participants in this case study, and clearly there would have been many other places where Translation was taking place. Nonetheless, Table 5–8 does allow us to claim that Translation probably took place in a wide variety of locations during the 2011 disaster, but that much of the Translation effort was likely to have been concentrated around municipal offices, homes, businesses, and streets in the disaster zone. Of course, it would seem that locations that may have been outside the disaster zone (such as the offices of TV networks, the homes of volunteer interpreters working at a distance, and embassies) were also significant places of Translation, but in terms of where Translation was taking place, it is safe to assert that it was mostly taking place in the disaster zone with all of the hazards and vulnerabilities that such a location entailed; those who were Translating in the disaster zone were also living with the same dangers that the people they were Translating for faced. One participant who was volunteering in a multilingual support centre and translating information to disseminate to other foreign nationals in the disaster zone described his situation in these terms:

I was, sort of, in the position of giving people information to make them feel more comfortable, but the fact is, that was quite stressful at the time. At the time, hearing people ask questions about things that you are concerned about yourself is, that’s stressful information, you know. Like, people would ask, “We just saw an explosion on the TV. Is it safe to live here?” And I’m just like, [laughter] That’s a really good question.” And having to go by the information you have and stand by that, you know, and when you are somewhat dubious of the content or the veracity of that information, then it’s a little bit stressful, you know. (Participant 14)

In addition, secondary sources compiled for this case study support the idea that Translators were often found to be working in vulnerable, damaged locations in some of the worst-hit areas of the disaster (see photograph from Government of Japan Public Relations Office [2011] in Figure 5–4).
In an interview in a Japanese government publication, one Chinese national who volunteered as a Translator in the disaster zone explains her experience thus:

There was no electricity the night after the earthquake and we had to rely on the light of flashlights. When I received training in disaster preparedness before the quake, I didn't fully understand why they said that radios and flashlights were so important. Because of the blackout I experienced first-hand their necessity because not only did we not have light, there was no way of getting information either. In the days following the quake, I stayed in Sendai for several days to translate information about the disaster, record disaster information in Chinese for broadcast on FM radio, and visited shelters to provide information to foreigners there. (Government of Japan Public Relations Office 2011)

To conclude, this section has shown that Translation was needed throughout all the phases of this long-running disaster and that the relationship between the various types of need was relative across time. (That is to say that the need to Translate warnings probably preceded the need to Translation instructions, which came before the need to translate reports and explanations, which was required in advance of administrative Translation, which was carried out prior to Translating messages of support.) Moreover, of the types of information requiring Translation, the greatest number and variety of needs seemed to come about when foreign residents were trying to develop situation awareness in the 2011 disaster. Furthermore, Translation was shown to have been taking place in a variety of...
locations, but that much of the Translation effort was likely to have been concentrated around municipal offices and on-the-ground in the disaster zone with all the attendant risks and stresses that operating in such a location would entail. Again, some of these claims were shown to be supported by data from secondary sources.

5.7 How was Translation carried out?

In an effort to show how Translation formed part of foreign residents’ communication and information gathering during the 2011 disaster, the chapter so far has defined Translation, and discussed the ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, and ‘where’ of Translation. This section will treat the ‘how’ of Translation and will look at the communicative and information gathering methods that were used by Translators and the users of Translation products and services. In addition to detailing the methods themselves, the section will try to determine which of these methods worked well and which of these methods did not work well with regard to Translation. These determinations are provided in the hope that they can be informative when preparing Translation services and products for future disasters in Japan.

Table 5–9 cross-references the communicative methods mentioned at interview by participants with mentions of linguistic and cultural barriers and their mediation. Table 5–10 then displays a similar cross-reference, but this time for the information gathering methods that participants mentioned at interview.
Communicative method with NEUTRAL association

Automated message boards
Automated warning
Blog
Email (not on mobile)
Facebook
Interview
Landline phone
Letters, pamphlets
Mobile phone (call, email, SMS)
PA announcement
Skype
Twitter
Word-of-mouth

Communicative method with POSITIVE association

Automated message boards
Email (not on mobile)
Facebook
Interview
Landline phone
Letters pamphlets
Mobile phone (call, email, SMS)
Public payphone
QQ & WeChat (Chinese only social media)
Satellite phone
Skype
Twitter
Word-of-mouth

N.B. Any cell with a count of 3 or greater (indicating that the relevant unit of meaning was referred to by 3 or more participants) has been shaded grey in the table below:

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<th>Communicative method with NEGATIVE association</th>
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Table 5-9. Methods of communicating used in Translation
N.B. Any cell with a count of 3 or greater (indicating that the relevant unit of meaning was referred to by 3 or more participants) has been shaded grey in the table below:

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<th>Information gathering method with NEGATIVE association</th>
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Table 5-10. Methods of information gathering used in Translation
The two tables show that more Translation using a greater diversity of methods was involved in gathering information than in communicating. They also underscore the overall diversity of methods used to communicate and gather information via Translational processes in the 2011 disaster. In terms of making an assessment of these methods, word-of-mouth and non-news websites were broadly associated by several participants with positive experiences. Email, Facebook, and helplines also featured more consistently in the positive parts of participants’ accounts of Translation in the disaster. Then, the associations made with Japanese TV news and overseas news viewed online as ways to propagate Translations were more mixed; while some participants associated them with positive or neutral experiences, others saw them in a negative light. Finally, the use of overseas TV news for Translational purposes was broadly viewed in a negative light by participants in this case study. Secondary sources compiled for this case study once again provide some support: a survey of 282 foreign residents in Sendai (including Chinese, Korean, Indonesian, American, Vietnamese, and Malaysian nationals) carried out by Sendai International Relations Association in 2011 found that the most useful methods to gain information among their respondents were the Internet, word-of-mouth from an acquaintance, television, newspapers, and radio, in that order. See Sendai International Relations Association (2011) for the survey.

5.7.1 Word-of-mouth

One notable trend in the data relating to word-of-mouth is that it was used mostly by people in close proximity to and usually known by the user of the Translation. Loved ones, friends, colleagues, and institutional supports on site were providing valuable Translation by word-of-mouth:

I went to University dormitory called [redacted] a big kaikan or big dormitory [Note: in this case, kaikan would mean ‘hall’ but the function is probably more like a centre for international exchange.]. So I went there and asked in the office about information and they gave me a lot of information. This was the second day at night. Second day. I went with some of my friend, so we went to ask about, the information about, for example radiation, and this happened before the electricity came. (Researcher: So, what type of information could they give you?) The level of radiation, when the electricity will come to Sendai, and gas, when it will come to Sendai, when they will repair it. (Researcher: And this was all just face-to-face?) Face-to-face, yes. And they tried to give us as much information as they could at that time. (Researcher: In Japanese?) In English. (Participant 15)

I think the general impression was that trains wouldn’t start that day, but I’m not sure where, where I got that information. (Researcher: Yeah, that’s what I was about, just about to ask. Did you check websites or did you ask colleagues or?) Yeah, I think it was more of a word-of-mouth thing. Other
colleagues probably checked somehow, maybe Japanese-speaking colleagues. I guess the conclusion was the trains weren’t running and they weren’t going to start any time soon. Maybe also people speaking to their relatives over the phones, and so on. (Participant 26)

Word-of-mouth was a fast and flexible method for propagating Translations. It could provide tailor-made context for the user and could allow for the user’s understanding to be checked. However, it demanded Translators being on-the-ground. This explains why people physically closest to the participants at the time became word-of-mouth Translators. Additionally, though, ‘on-the-ground’ often implied being in some of the worst-hit areas, and getting Translators from outside the disaster zone to these areas was highly problematic at first: roads were blocked or unusable for long periods after the onset of the disaster, and motor vehicles in the worst-hit areas were reserved for first responders in the first few days (Machimura 2011, WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific 2012). Moreover, some evacuation centres had to refuse offers from volunteer Translators as the centres lacked the resources to support any additional mouths to feed (Kelly 2011). This further goes to explain why those closest to the participants with any sort of language ability were called on to Translate using word-of-mouth and why a common complaint in participant accounts was that there were just not enough Translators nearby to help them when they needed it.

The above is not to say that Translation using word-of-mouth as a communicative method was an entirely untrained phenomenon. As has already been mentioned in this thesis, one participant was a professional interpreter who volunteered his services to Translate for an overseas search-and-rescue team. He used word-of-mouth communication mostly to be a bridge for instructions between the local forces in charge of disaster response and the overseas team:

So, communication was needed in order to get directions, directives from the local authorities, the Japanese police mostly and army. “Okay, tell us what to do, where, what to do and we’ll do it.” So that was our role as interpreters. (Participant 13)

It should not be assumed, though, that a trained Translator from outside the disaster zone would necessarily have been of more benefit to a foreign resident than an untrained local using word-of-mouth. It is asserted in disaster studies that Translators need significant knowledge of the local area – especially concerning place names and geographic conditions – to be truly useful in an emergency (Valuch 2011). Data from this case study would seem to support this assertion. Though the following quote from a participant is not strictly speaking about Translation using word-of-mouth communicative methods, it does indicate how important it could be for a Translator to understand the local geography and context.
of the disaster to be able to explain in useful terms the likelihood that a foreign resident had been exposed to a certain hazard:

The way it was broadcasted abroad was that Sendai was hit by the tsunami and Sendai, there was a nuclear meltdown by Sendai, and that’s all the information they had. But it sounded like, that everything had been hit. Well, the earthquake happened everywhere, but the destruction was only, the mass destruction was only on a part of Sendai. It wasn’t all of Sendai. But if one of your friends is living in Sendai, even if you don’t know that they don’t live by the sea, you hear Sendai is hit by an earthquake, you’re going to worry. (Participant 14)

Secondary sources of data in this case study also support the strong need for word-of-mouth as a method to facilitate Translation in the 2011 disaster. For instance, the searchable archives of one professional translation forum, Honyaku Mailing List, show that calls for interpreters outweighed calls for other types of Translation in the early stages of the disaster.33

Thus, to summarise, word-of-mouth was a fast and efficient method to facilitate Translation, but it called for Translators on-the-ground, meaning that it was used by Translators in close proximity to the users, either nearby locals or specialist Translators who could make it into the disaster zone. The main problem was that there were just not enough Translators available to satisfy demand for the word-of-mouth communication and information gathering that required Translation.

5.7.2 The Internet and translation technologies

The Internet was also a place where many participants encountered Translation in a broadly positive way in the 2011 disaster. As one participant put it:

Look, if you’re going to be looking for information in your native language, you’re going to look for information, I suppose, from, in my case, from websites from English-speaking countries, you know? (Participant 4)

While much Translated information in the disaster was provided via the websites of news organisations both in Japan and overseas, the participants often found the information provided by these websites to be untrustworthy or otherwise problematic, as will be explained in more detail later. However, certain non-news websites, such as speciality community forums or video-sharing sites, were singled out by some participants as methods that facilitated valuable Translated communication and information gathering:

33 The archives can be consulted here: http://tinyurl.com/njtljye [Accessed 5 June 2015].
There’s actually a website, forums and things like that. I have an interest in technology, so there’s a couple of English-language technology websites that I’ve subscribed to, or, part of these little communities. And a lot of these guys are people that have been in Japan for a long time and have educational backgrounds – they’re professionals but not necessarily, kind of, expats, but people that are all fluent in Japanese, but we have a shared interest in technology. So, on one of those sites, one of the guys was a professional translator and he actually does a lot of technical translations, and a lot of the people did. So it happened that this guy actually had done some of the technical translations for, I believe, G.E. when they were building the reactors. So his background was also in sciences, and there was another guy who was a Tōdai guy [Note: this means a graduate of Tokyo University, Japan’s most prestigious academic institution]. And there was some very active discussion on the these boards about ‘how do you see this?’ or ‘what do you think about this?’ and ‘what about this?’ or ‘I read this thing. What do you think about that?’ And, you know, broadly speaking, we are like-minded which is why we are in the group already, but I think there was a steadying influence about that. (Participant 20)

They had some programs where they showed the disaster preparedness resources they had, because apparently this massive underground facility in one central area, it has blankets and clothes and food and water, so it was reassuring to know that’s there. If that earthquake had not hit, it wouldn’t have been promoted in the way they did. And that, that kind of promotion, was that all through Japanese or was it provided in a variety of languages? That’s actually a video I saw on YouTube, but it’s one of those things, you know, that came from a news program, it may have been Japanese originally, someone took it on themselves to dub it and then spread it around, so there was so many cases where people just couldn't find the information, so they were doing their own homework and sending it out. (Participant 6)

The Internet was a successful method for facilitating Translation for technical reasons, too. While phone networks were jammed or damaged and while electric power was limited in much of the disaster zone, participants could use battery-operated, mobile devices and wifi networks to access the Internet, even in some of the worst-hit areas. For instance, the following participant was located in a part of Sendai that was very badly damaged by the first earthquake, but he explains how he was able to access the Internet on his mobile phone:

You couldn’t get signal where we were. Couldn’t get it. It was all over, there was wireless, but that was there was no, let’s say, phone lines or maybe the masts were down or the power from Docomo [Note: a Japanese mobile carrier], or whatever. So anytime I would turn on the phone, I used turn on the wifi login and that’s how. 3G was working, so that’s how. (Participant 2)

Of course, not all non-news websites proved to be such successful methods for propagating Translations. As explained in Section 4.5.5.2, the Japanese government created various multilingual information portals for foreign residents and other interested groups of foreign nationals; in addition to the Cabinet Office website already discussed, the example of
Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs can be cited. This website (provided in Japanese and English only) was launched on March 28, 2011 (more than two weeks into the disaster) and promoted the multilingual services of the main mobile telephone operator, the national broadcaster, the Red Cross, and the Japanese National Tourist Office. It is worth mentioning here that only 1 participant out of 28 in this case study even thought to try to access Translated disaster information from a Japanese government website. Worse still, that one participant who did check the website did not find it useful:

(Researcher: did you check any government websites yourself?) Eh, MOFA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had some stuff in English but it was pretty poor. Not great anyway, from what I can remember. It was all, it was stuff that you could get anywhere else really. It had those emergency pages up with the information and the picture of Japan, like, the little colourful earthquake epicentre and the little rings of earthquakes, but it was all in Japanese, I was like, “I can’t do this, I’m, I’m too.” I was too stressed, I think to, to, to make sense of it so. (Participant 23)

It should be noted here, too, that mention of translation technology was almost entirely absent from the primary interview data in this case study. One participant briefly mentioned using online translation tools, pop-up dictionaries, and kanji readers to supplement his Japanese reading ability online:

So my Japanese wasn’t terribly bad. I also used language tools online to understand things better. So, for example, one tool I really like is Jim Breen’s Language Tools. There’s several mirrors of that website, and, for example, with the text glossing feature, you can just copy and paste a paragraph of text and for the kanji [Note: Chinese characters] you don’t understand it gives you an explanation of what it is. So that’s something very useful. I still use it today sometimes. I also liked using the Excite’s Japanese-to-English translation. You can translate URLs there. And also the Google Translate tools. (Participant 26)

The participant emphasised, though, that these tools were only useful for small pieces of text – e.g., lists of geographic radiation levels – and did not produce good results for larger pieces of text like news reports; as a result, the participant explained how he tended to ignore news not in one of his languages. Most participants were unaware of the existence of translation technology and of its potential benefits. (For more detail on the potential of translation technology in disaster settings, see Cadwell [2015].) For instance, the following participant worked as a translator throughout the disaster without considering even basic technological assistance:

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Secondary data support a limited presence of translation technology in the 2011 disaster. Technology companies such as Google and Yahoo! used human-aided MT to make their Japanese crisis information pages available in English, Korean, and Chinese (see Google Crisis Response [2012] for detail).\(^35\) In another effort, volunteers collaborated to create a map called sinsai.info that took social media messages – mostly via Twitter – translated them using the Google Translate API, and displayed them using the GPS information contained in the messages.\(^36\) Translation technologies were also used to enable interpreting at a distance; one online interpretation service called Babelverse provided its platform for free to crisis workers and bilingual volunteers, and more than 100 volunteers provided about 400 hours of interpreting in the first two days of operation.\(^37\)

A possible reason for the limited presence of translation technology in the 2011 disaster was the preponderance of word-of-mouth. Translation needs detailed in Section 5.7.1. Word-of-mouth produces no text or recording, is often spontaneous, unplanned, and face-to-face, and, therefore, is not dealt with well by technology. Another reason was that any technology in a disaster setting is dependent on functioning infrastructure and ample power supplies, but these were problematic (see Section 4.5.3). In addition, as several participants pointed out in their accounts, implementing specialised technology requires investments of time, money, and specialised skills that may not be a priority in high-stress disaster situations where resources are already limited and where the needs of foreign residents may be relatively small compared to the needs of the overall affected population.

We can now draw some conclusions about the Internet and translation technology with respect to Translation in the 2011 disaster. Firstly, their usefulness was dependent on access to power and network connections, but creative ways could be found to access power and networks even in the worst-hit areas when the need was strong. Secondly, foreign residents were more likely to turn to Internet sites and technologies that they already used and trusted.

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\(^{36}\) See https://www.sinsai.info/ [Accessed 20 March 2015].

before the disaster to find Translated information than to seek out new sources. Finally, as the Translation of government sites indicated, it was not enough to merely Translate information in the 2011 disaster; it was just as important to let potential users know where that Translated information could be found.

5.7.3 E-mail

It was shown in Section 5.7.1 that there were not enough Translators in the direct proximity of participants and other foreign residents to satisfy their needs for Translation at all times. However, e-mail was used to enable Translation at a distance. One participant spoke about how he Translated for an acquaintance by e-mail in the first few hours following the onset of the disaster. Even though he was confident in his Japanese abilities (he scored himself 28 out of 40 in his self-assessment at interview) and had lived in Japan for more than 15 years, Translation under such stressful conditions was a challenge for him:

It was probably about that time I got my first email or Tweet from a friend of mine in Japan, a guy that I knew in Japan that doesn’t speak Japanese. And he said, “[Participant’s name], what’s going on?” And I told him what I knew, and he was saying, “Okay, this is what we’re seeing in the foreign press. What are the Japanese media saying?” And I do read Japanese, but I found myself more often than not, in that panicked time, I was looking at the English, for the context, then going to the Japanese to compare. (Participant 19)

Another participant indicated how e-mails in English from a close Japanese friend helped her to navigate one of the most confusing and stressful incidents that she experienced in the disaster – watching the hydrogen explosion at the Fukushima nuclear power plant live on television alone in her apartment:

Then, I get an email from {my Japanese friend} that’s like, “Everything is okay. It exploded, but that was a good thing. Like, it released the pressure.” And I was like, “Okay?” [laughter]…So for example, my {Japanese friend}, it’s not like I asked her to help me translate, she is just the type of person that looks out for people. Like she, it’s just that kind of Japanese character. (Participant 21)

Again, the usefulness of e-mail as a method for Translating was dependent on access to power and network connections. Nonetheless, Translation was needed by foreign residents throughout the long-running disaster (see Section 5.6), and needs still existed long after damaged and jammed power and telephone networks had been restored. It should also be noted here that the use of e-mail as a method for facilitating acts of Translating implied an existing relationship between the user and the Translator, showing once again that foreign
residents seemed to fall back on communities of Japanese and foreign friends, acquaintances, and colleagues when they needed Translation.

5.7.4 Facebook

Facebook was mentioned so frequently by participants in this study compared with other online environments that it has been presented here as a separate category for discussing Translation. There was a sense in some participant accounts that they saw Facebook in a new light during the disaster. They prefaced their discussion of the tool by underlining that they had not been frequent users before the disaster, but that they saw how it could be used as a way to effect Translation:

Foreigners then started to come up with things like Facebook. I wasn’t a huge Facebook user at the time really, but there’s a [a city in Ibaraki’s] International Association, they posted quite a lot of things and then, even to this day they still get, do pretty well on informing you what’s happening in Ibaraki and the area. (Participant 10)

However, more participants – especially younger participants in the dataset – were frequent Facebook users and fell back on this familiar method of communicating and gathering information when looking for Translated information. One participant who worked in an embassy in Japan during the disaster underlined the importance of demographic factors when discussing Facebook:

There are two different demographics there. So there would have been a portion of our, I suppose, clientele that would have been very social-media orientated and another part which wouldn’t really have had a presence…There were definitely people who would have just, a lot of JET students [Note: government-sponsored Japan Exchange and Teaching Program], for example, wouldn’t have come near us with an email but would have sent us a message on Facebook. (Participant 3)

One participant spoke of how a network of Japanese Facebook friends kept him informed in English of when power and network supplies would be restored in his hometown:

Even before the electricity came, they uploaded some information that there are some places in Sendai in which there is electricity. So even you can go there and charge your mobile phone. So all this through Facebook. (Researcher: And these were your friends or?) Yes. My friends…They were Japanese, but they sent the information in English at that time. They were very kind, at that time [laughter]. (Participant 15)
For another participant, Facebook surpassed other Translated sources of information because of the access it provided to networks of friends who held useful information while also providing useful extra functionalities:

To be honest, I didn’t watch too much English news. I didn’t really check it. I don’t know why when I think back now. It never occurred to me to bother looking at it. I got everything I needed from friends, I suppose. Just asking. Facebook was a big source of news. And shortly after that Facebook introduced some sort of, emergency, what was it, I forget the, you know the anpi shisutemu? [Note: automated safety confirmation system] (Participant 12)

Here again, secondary sources compiled for this case study can provide extra insight into how this method of communicating and information gathering was used with respect to Translation. The screenshot in Figure 5-5 shows a scene from the vlog of a native English-speaker who was living just outside the disaster zone but who was in the disaster zone when the earthquake struck. The vlogger has superimposed a still from his Facebook page captured on March 14, 2011 (three days after onset) onto the image. This image shows us that Facebook was providing Translations of important disaster-related information (the scheduling of the rolling blackouts by Tokyo Electronic Power Company [TEPCO] and the operation of major train services) much quicker than the official government websites mentioned in Section 5.7.2. Also, Facebook makes clear that the external link to the TEPCO website was still only providing information in Japanese on March 14; official sources, once again, seemed to be slower with multilingual support for foreign residents than Facebook.

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38 The vlog has not been referenced here and the screenshot has been cropped in an effort to protect the vlogger’s anonymity.
In sum, not just power and connectivity, but demographics and familiarity with the method of communication had an influence on the use of Facebook for delivering and receiving Translations. Furthermore, it seems that the positive views of Translations communicated and gathered via Facebook resulted from the fact that Facebook allowed access to trusted friends and acquaintances and provided needed information quicker than other communicative methods.

5.7.5 Helplines

Local community centres and volunteer-staffed help lines are given a central role as information points for foreign nationals who experience a disaster in Japan. Japan’s Fire and Disaster Management Agency (2007: 49) underlines the importance of a local community remembering its foreign members in a time of emergency and suggests the use
of local radio broadcasts, fliers and DVDs and, especially, multilingual support centres. Many multilingual centres already existed in the disaster zone prior to the 2011 disaster. These associations usually operated at the city or town level and were run by special charitable foundations and cultural exchange associations. Their missions were to increase tourism and promote cultural exchange and education. Almost every centre ran a multilingual helpline staffed by volunteers with foreign-language ability. These multilingual helplines were greatly promoted by the national authorities in the disaster. For example, the Cabinet Office website (see Section 4.5.5.2) directed foreign residents to twenty-one such multilingual support centres and helplines spread throughout all the prefectures in and near the disaster zone. Two participants in this case study worked in such a centre: one as part of his official employment; one as an English-speaking volunteer working the helpline during the first week of the disaster. Their accounts explain much of the Translation work that went on over these helplines:

So, yeah, a lot of the time was translating, we were also getting calls from overseas to see if we knew of people that were okay. A lot of those calls were in English, and then, yeah, just providing information for the consulates, the embassies, and, I think a lot of the foreigners that know of the [multilingual support centre], they would come for information...We had to have had tourists as well, but I'm assuming with tourists, I think, their first, main important thing is to leave. And I think provide, if we, because we had an English hotline, so I'm hoping that people knew of that hotline and they would ring up, because it was just asking for information: “How do I get out of here?” (Participant 24)

What it was was the official information we had about the buses running and anything that was provided by the city or local information, we would translate it and make it available to the foreigners. We had a bulletin board there, and one of the jobs was to answer the phones which I was doing, so, had all these phone calls coming in. (Participant 14)

Secondary sources of data confirm the participants’ assertions. In an interview in a government publication, one Korean national who volunteered as a Translator in the same centre as the participants above explains her experience thus:

Things are expressed differently in the Japanese and Korean languages, so I did my best to translate using words that anyone could understand. Also, when I spoke directly with Koreans on the phone or at the shelters, to people who wanted to check on the safety of others, or to disaster victims, I always tried to do so by empathizing with them. For example, I would listen earnestly to those with questions, and do my utmost to accurately communicate the information I had received at the Center or from the TV news. I would also try to make them not feel isolated by saying, "Whenever you feel anxious, give us a call." (Government of Japan Public Relations Office 2011)

Here we notice that the information to be Translated for delivery through these helplines
was coming not just from official sources, but from TV news as well. This hints at an important emerging feature of all these methods for delivering and receiving Translations – they were rarely used in isolation. Rather, it would seem that Translation took place in the disaster through a complex ecosystem of multiple and diverse methods of communication and information gathering. We can easily imagine how some information may have originated on a Japanese TV news broadcast or local government bulletin board and then been quickly Translated, passed on, and re-Translated through a network of helplines, word-of-mouth interactions, email, social media, and Internet forums.

Helplines were also important channels to provide mental health and psychosocial counselling in multiple languages to foreign residents in the disaster. Tokyo English Life Line (TELL) is a Japanese NPO that was established over forty years ago and is well known in the foreign community in Japan as a resource for counselling and advice in multiple languages. Tokyo English Life Line (2011: 5) states that hits to the TELL website increased 10-fold after the onset of the 2011 disaster and underlines that ‘…the events of March 11 meant an even greater demand from English speakers across Japan experiencing intense emotional distress, caused partly by a lack of accurate and reliable information.’ One participant in the case study singled out the work of TELL for special mention as a charity that she and her associates are making sure to support:

TELL, Tokyo English Life Line which has, you know, after the earthquake just not only English speakers, but, you know, they need speakers of all sorts of languages now, and they really need help because I’m sure their resources are just overstretched. People are still, I suppose have post-traumatic stress disorder, or something like that, I don’t know. (Participant 25)

Translation offered through these helplines was not without problems. A major challenge was the high turnover of information and the multiplicity of channels through which source text information was coming in:

Getting information out was a key thing but, I don’t know whether it could have been faster. I mean, there was so much information going out, and so making sure that it was always up to date, because it was constant. And we would have to get information from City Hall which would be in Japanese, sent to the {redacted} centre, and then they would have to be like, “Okay, time to translate it all.” And then all of that had to go up on the website. And, so that everyone had that information available, and then to the radio station, and then it would all be printed out and put on boards so that people coming to the information centre had that information. But it would be forever changing, like where to get water from, like what to do if you don’t have gas. That type of stuff. (Participant 24)
In addition, the people staffing the helplines were foreign volunteers. This meant that they could easily empathise and identify with the concerns of other users of the Translations, but it also meant that they were stressed and vulnerable and working under difficult conditions:

As it progressed from the earthquake to the nuclear disaster, we got more and more questions involving transportation and how do I get out of Sendai. “What can I use?” And the fact is that a lot of the transportation systems were down and that was, sort of, stressful, realizing that you were here and, you were, [laughter] kind of, stuck here in some regard if something really bad were to happen. Really bad, I mean, on the scale of, you know, like, a nuclear, not a meltdown, but something even worse like an explosion that put us into immediate danger, you know. That was my main concern at the time. (Participant 14)

In conclusion, we can say that the Translation offered via helplines was an established and well-publicised method in the 2011 disaster. This method showed the complex networks through which Translation was disseminated among foreign residents and highlighted the constant turnover of information and the need to regularly update Translations. Staffed by foreign resident volunteers, the helplines were a source of empathy and counselling, but these volunteers were often as stressed and vulnerable as those they were setting out to help.

5.7.6 Japanese TV news

In the chapter so far, we have seen that Japanese TV news was at the heart of many Translational interactions in the disaster. Participants who were confident in their Japanese abilities and who were happy to have it as a direct source of information also recognised that many other foreign residents were not in the same position. One participant who gathered around a television with foreign and Japanese colleagues in the first moments after the earthquake hit recognised that the usefulness of Japanese TV news depended on the foreign resident’s Japanese ability and on the presence of Translators:

So I was understanding completely what’s happening on the television, but there would have been government staff that didn’t speak any Japanese, but there was also Japanese staff, so there was a little bit of translation happening at that time. (Participant 1)

Another participant underlined that English-language simultaneous interpreting offered by the Japanese national broadcaster (NHK) for a selection of its TV news broadcasts was another form of Translation going on around Japanese TV news:
Of course, on the NHK news they have this *fukikaeban* [Note: this means dubbed version] where they do have simultaneous interpretation going on. I’m pretty sure during the disaster time as well there would have been, if you changed that sub-channel, you could hear information in English, translated information. (Participant 4)

In line with the arguments earlier on in this section, even if a foreign resident could not speak any Japanese, they could often benefit from the information on Japanese TV news as a result of friends and colleagues Translating and passing on what they had heard or seen:

And they were telling me things which would be important for me to know because like, for example, the emergency kit, what to have in there and that I would need to have, well, if it was raining, better to really cover myself because Fukushima may be, with all these uncertainties, the things they heard in the news, they would tell me. (Participant 8)

Nevertheless, this broadly positive experience of Translation with respect to Japanese TV news was tinged with negativity for some participants who did not trust the content of what they were hearing:

Frankly speaking, I had no illusion to get the real information from the normal TV channels, for example. I know that’s not the truth. I know that every TV channel have its own agenda for whatever. I don’t know - it’s another topic or not - I don’t believe in getting information or the truth or what really happened from listening to the news. (Participant 7)

Another participant expressed similar reservations over the effectiveness of Translating the official line that was being disseminated widely through the Japanese TV media:

Even if the information in Japanese had been translated, I might not have considered it because I had lost trust in the official Japanese line and just did not believe what official sources were saying. (Participant 23)

In short, what we can say about the Translation surrounding Japanese TV news is that it was at the root of many other acts of Translation, that it was clearly recognised and received as Translation, and that, while it seems to have been broadly experienced positively by foreign residents, there is a sense that a lack of trust in the source of the information being broadcast on Japanese TV news meant that Translations, even if they had been made available, would have been disregarded by some foreign residents.

5.7.7 Overseas news viewed online

In contrast to the Translation surrounding Japanese TV news, the Translation surrounding
overseas news viewed online or on TV sets in Japan was less clearly received as a Translation and fell more clearly into the category of pseudo-originals explained in Section 5.3.3. Williams (2013) illustrates the lack of visibility of Translation in the global mass media’s response to the 2011 disaster well:

By receiving global news reports directly in local languages, viewers and readers are persuaded that cultural and linguistic diversity either does not exist or that it is unproblematical. The resulting fabricated transparency is only rarely breached. A recent example of such a breach occurred on Today, one of BBC radio’s early morning news and current affairs programmes, shortly after the earthquake and tsunami which struck Japan in March 2011. The BBC correspondent explained that he could not provide much information because there was a major communication problem, namely that no one spoke English. This moment of non-communication revealed that Japan was a foreign country where communication had to be mediated by translation. In the circulation of global news, translation is invisible. (Williams 2013: 102)

What came across strongly in the participant data was that participants seemed to view much of the news online – whether they considered that it came about as the result of Translational processes or not – as being so far removed from their own experience and from the news they were seeing (often via Translation) on Japanese TV that it was better to discount it entirely:

They would fly these reporters in and they would stand on top of buildings and try to say something for five minutes but they didn’t know what was going on and so, you know, it wasn’t much use to pay attention to CNN or BBC. (Participant 20)

And then you had tabloid papers, like The Sun and that kind of stuff and they were like, “Get out of Tokyo,” and all this kind of stuff, and ‘Tokyo is starving’ was another headline, and I was, “have you ever even been to Japan, like?” And you had that kind of stuff, but I’d take all that with a pinch of salt, to be honest. (Participant 2)

Several participants pointed out how they were left in the disaster in a position where they could not trust either the Translations they were receiving from overseas news sources or from Japanese news sources:

I felt like the foreign media covered it a lot but there was just so much, there was too much information about that, and there was too much opinion. There was a lot of loud opinions going around, like about how bad that was. The Japanese penchant for understatement just left me with, like, where the hell do you draw the middle line. You don’t know how far to one side or the other it should have been. I didn’t trust it. (Participant 12)

Secondary sources compiled for this case study help us to show that – this time with respect to the Translation acts involved in the dissemination of overseas news online – Japanese
TV news once again played a central role. The following is an extract from the first full article on the disaster available from the archives of the online version of *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK. This article was posted on the day of onset of the disaster and essentially passes on descriptions of images from Japanese TV news reports, showing how central this TV news was in the whole production of Translation. As an aside, the importance of locally-specific knowledge can once again be seen here in that the city in Miyagi prefecture referred to in the extract is misnamed and should read Kesennuma city:

Television footage showed a 4-metre tsunami sweeping over embankments in Sendai city, bearing cars and houses – some on fire – across farmland, before reversing course and carrying them out to sea. Public broadcaster NHK showed images of a large ship ramming into a breakwater in Kesennuma city (sic), Miyagi prefecture...Television footage showed a building on fire in the Odaiba district of Tokyo, although it was not immediately clear if the blaze was connected to the earthquake. Another fire was seen burning out of control at the Cosmo oil refinery in Ichihara, in Chiba prefecture near Tokyo...TV news presenters repeatedly warned people along the Pacific coast to head for higher ground. (McCurry and Branigan 2011)

To sum up, what we can say about the Translation acts surrounding overseas news online is that they were largely not recognised as Translations, that they were mistrusted and discounted by foreign residents, and that they were dependent on Japanese sources which may not always have been accurately Translated.

5.7.8 Overseas TV news

The previous section spoke about the negative association surrounding Translation delivered and consumed via overseas newspapers online and via the online services of various television networks. This section shows that participants viewed the Translation via overseas subscription television channels in Japan equally negatively. Here multiple participants point out how viewing only overseas television news without an ability to speak Japanese and in the absence of Translators led some foreign nationals to respond to the disaster in extreme ways:

I mean there was some companies were evacuating the whole, the company and their, I think the French moved their embassy to Osaka temporarily, and none of that helped the foreign community. But, again, they were listening to the CNN news so the foreigners that really couldn’t communicate on the Japanese, they were communicating from CNN and BBC, or some of the local embassies who would have got their information probably from, you know, BBC and, CNN then as well, so I felt that, I don’t think they had the correct information about, especially about the earthquake. (Participant 18)

Another participant talks about how the foreign clients he was with in Japan on March 11...
were much more panicked about Fukushima than he because they had watched overseas TV news while he had not:

They were probably more hooked than I was to news sources, and as they do not rely on Japanese language, they were relying, I assume, on everything which is non, which was non-Japanese: French, they were French, maybe English news sources. And probably they were more aware than I about the matter of Fukushima. So, they were in a total panic and they asked me, they told me that they wanted to go to Osaka and that they would pay any means of transportation because they were in that, they were thinking that everything was stopped. And, I was not in a panic, well, I was not shaking. Worried, but not shaking. (Participant 13)

One other participant, who acted as a Translator for some overseas reporters in the disaster zone, feared that such reporters were actively warping how they presented the information to make it more sensational:

I showed a French reporter around, a French and a Spanish reporter around down at the harbour, but I did see a CNN reporter down there and I actually did catch it on TV, it was laughable…So I mean, they were doing their best to, on the international news, to make it sound like we were falling apart here. (Participant 10)

Thus, we can say that, in the absence of sufficient Japanese ability and in the absence of Translation, watching overseas television news led some foreign nationals to respond in extreme ways to the disaster. Also, it should not be forgotten that these overseas news crews sometimes called on the help of foreign residents to act as Translators in compiling their reports in the disaster zone, but that this still did not prevent some reports becoming warped, sensational, and far-removed from the reality that many foreign residents were living.

Then, to summarise all the conclusions drawn in Section 5.7 with respect to how Translation was carried out in the 2011 disaster, we can say that this section has shown that Translation took place as part of a complex ecosystem of information gathering and communicating in which communicative methods were rarely used in isolation. It found that the methods used were multiple and diverse, but that word-of-mouth, the Internet and translation technology, E-mail, Facebook, helplines, Japanese television news, and overseas news viewed online and on television sets in Japan were worthy of deeper qualitative exploration.

This exploration revealed important insights about each method. Word-of-mouth was fast, and used by Translators in close proximity to the users, but the supply of Translators did not meet the demand for Translation. The Internet and e-mail were useful when access to
power and networks was possible. Tried and trusted websites were favoured over new sites to facilitate Translation, and it was found that advertising Translations to potential users was as important as creating the Translations themselves. Technological uptake varied; for instance, talk of translation technology was largely absent from the disaster discourse, but the use of e-mail was widespread to facilitate Translation and reinforced how foreign residents fell back on existing bonds of community with respect to Translation in the 2011 disaster. The use of Facebook to propagate Translations highlighted the importance of demographic factors when thinking about Translation in this disaster and once again proved that any method that allowed speedy access to Translations by trusted friends and acquaintances was highly valorised. Helplines were an established and recognised method for facilitating Translations in 2011. They underlined the complex networks of communicating and information gathering that Translation was part of in the disaster and the potential vulnerability of the foreign volunteers who staffed them. Finally, the Translation surrounding television news – both Japanese and overseas, seen online and on regular sets – proved to be the most problematic of all the categories. While Japanese TV news was at the root of many acts of Translation in the disaster, news in general – whether originating from Japan or overseas and whether received or not as a Translation – was widely mistrusted by foreign residents and had some negative effects on their experiences of the 2011 disaster.

5.8 Conclusion

Having reached the end of this chapter, a clear picture should now have emerged of precisely how Translation fitted in to the communicative scene in the 2011 disaster for foreign residents. By interpreting participant interview data and by linking it to secondary sources compiled for this case study, the chapter established that the phenomenon of Translation was worth the enquiry in this research, and an operationalised definition for the concept of Translation was made possible. The chapter showed how participants were engaged in diverse, complex relationships, and that, from a Translation point of view, interactions between foreign and Japanese friends, acquaintances, and colleagues were extremely important and mostly beneficial. Crucially, too, it showed that participants fell back on bonds of community and trust when seeking Translation in the disaster. At the same time, the chapter showed that a lack of sufficient resources and a strongly culturally-bound space of interaction also created problems for the relationships that involved Translation. Furthermore, it showed that news, warnings over public address systems, nuclear-related information, and typical, Japanese disaster response procedures were the types of information that participants in this case study needed to have Translated. It was
found that the need to Translate these topics was temporally relative and that the Translation of information used to develop situation awareness was required most of all. Moreover, while Translation likely took place in a variety of locations, it was found that municipal offices and areas on-the-ground in the disaster zone were major loci of Translational action, with all the attendant risks and stresses that such an environment entailed. Finally, the chapter found that Translation took place as part of a complex ecosystem of information gathering and communicating in which communicative methods were rarely used in isolation and in which translation technology played only a very limited role. It found that the methods used were multiple and diverse, but that word-of-mouth, the Internet, E-mail, Facebook, helplines, Japanese television news, and overseas news viewed online and on television sets in Japan were particularly significant. Further qualitative exploration of these methods revealed the importance of diverse networks, community, and trust to how participants experienced Translation in the 2011 disaster.

Indeed, it is clear now that throughout the whole chapter and throughout large sections of the previous contextual chapter, the theme of trust has appeared repeatedly when looking at Translation in the disaster from a variety of perspectives. It is this theme that will now be used in the following chapter to answer the final major question in this research: why might Translation be considered important or significant in any way to this disaster or to other disaster contexts?
一寸先は闇 (issun saki wa yami)
The future is a closed book.

Japanese proverb
Chapter 6 – Translation examined within a theory of trust

Abstract analysis:

Beginning to answer the following research question:
• Why are issues of translation and interpreting important to the 2011 disaster or to other disaster contexts?

Figure 6-1. Word cloud from coded data used primarily in the creation of Chapter 6

39 This word cloud has been created (using NVivo 10 software) from text contained under the following codes: ‘Believe’ type trust; ‘Confidence in’ type trust; Instances of belief; Instances of confidence; Instances of faith; Instances of reliance; Instances of trust; Instances of trust model; Trustworthy information absent; Trustworthy information present. The word cloud displays the 100 most frequent words with a minimum length of 1 character. Only the default stop words for US English pre-set in NVivo 10 software (generally articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions) have been applied to this list.
6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to examine the phenomenon of Translation through the experiences of foreign residents of the 2011 communicative scene. In pursuing this aim, trust, trust-like concepts, and other concepts related to trust appeared repeatedly in the data. This occurred to such an extent that trust was even selected as a component of the definition of Translation operationalised for this research (see Section 5.3.5). Furthermore, trust was also shown to be an important category in the methodology of this case study (see especially Section 3.7). All of this suggested that it would be worthwhile to explore the relationship between Translation and trust in a more systematic way. If it could be shown that trust was important in the 2011 disaster and that Translation was an element of that trust, it would work to answer the first part of the final research question in this project; why are issues of Translation important to the 2011 disaster? Then, if it were possible to abstract and generalise from these data in some way, an answer to the second part of this research question could be proposed; why are issues of Translation important to other disaster contexts? Consequently, this chapter combines participant-led and interpretive data from the 28 participant interviews in this study with abstract analysis to argue that: trust was an important aspect of the 2011 disaster; Translation was a significant to some of that trust; Translation can be shown to be a theoretical component of certain types of trust and is, therefore, theoretically relevant to other contexts.

This argument begins in Section 6.2 with data from the case study illustrating the importance of trust to the experiences of foreign residents of the 2011 disaster. Section 6.3 introduces the socio-cognitive theory of trust chosen over other theories to carry out the chapter’s abstract analysis. In Section 6.4, in-depth analysis of observations from the case study data is used to show that this theory of trust provides tools to holistically and systematically describe and explain how trust was experienced by some in the 2011 disaster. With the theory shown to be robust and useful, Section 6.5 posits an important theoretical role for Translation in this theory of trust, supports this theoretical position with observations from the case study data, and argues that viewing Translation through a lens of trust could, indeed, be theoretically useful in other contexts.

6.2 The importance of trust in the data from this case study

Section 2.4.1.2 showed that there is wide consensus in the literature on trust on two ideas: the idea that trust is a vital component of the social world; the idea that trust requires the presence of risk, uncertainty, or vulnerability. It is not hard to imagine that the 2011 disaster was a time of great risk and uncertainty and that trust, therefore, was vital to the people
who experienced the disaster. This section will explicitly illustrate how trust was experienced by the participants in this case study and will argue for its importance to those experiences.

General-purpose definitions of trust conceptualise it in terms of reliance, confidence, belief, and faith. For example, one dictionary defines trust as ‘reliance on and confidence in the truth, worth, reliability, etc., of a person or thing: faith’ (Collins English Dictionary 1994: 1651, emphasis added), while another explains it as a ‘firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something’ (Oxford University Press 2015, emphasis added). Thus, it is reasonable to assert that the terms ‘reliance’, ‘confidence’, ‘belief’, and ‘faith’ can all also be used to talk about the concept of trust. Table 6–1 indicates the terms used by participants to talk about trust, and provides a snapshot of how the concept was discussed during the interviews.40

40 A tick mark in Table 6–1 indicates that the participant used the respective root term or one of its variants at least once in their interview to talk about trust in the 2011 disaster. For instance, for the root term ‘trust’, instances involving ‘trusted’, ‘trusting’, ‘trusts’, ‘trustworthy’, etc. would all have been coded. However, for the term ‘belief’, any use where the participant was addressing the researcher or expressing some uncertainty about an assertion they were making was not coded. For example, passages like, “I believe that it was ten minutes before the first tsunami hit” or “Believe me, it was difficult” were not coded.
This simple quantitative indication is not intended to be an evaluation of whether or how participants trusted during the disaster. It is merely included to show that trust and trust-related terms were a feature of the talk of all participants except Participants 15 and 26. More detailed qualitative examination of how the participants used these terms would show more convincingly that concepts like trust, failed trust, or insufficient trust were significant.

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Table 6-1. Use of trust or trust-related terms by participants at interview
categories in how the participants experienced the 2011 disaster. The next section undertakes this examination.

6.2.1 Data relating to trust using the term ‘trust’

Of the 28 participants in this research, 10 chose to talk about their experience of the disaster using the term ‘trust’ or some of its variants. Some participants used the term to talk about when trust failed, was lacking, or was absent, but more used it in a positive sense, with some even indicating that trust was a factor that helped them to make decisions or guided some of their information-gathering activities in the disaster:

Because I never really thought of leaving at all, and I know that there was that information coming from overseas and from Japan. I trusted in the New Zealand Embassy. I knew that if they wanted me out of Japan, they would tell me to leave. (Participant 24, emphasis added)

[This participant had been talking about staying in a hotel in Tokyo the night of onset of the disaster] It was a terrible night because every hour there were huge aftershocks, no gas, no water. It was just a place to sleep, and that was fine with me. The first train home in the morning – that was at 6am – as soon as I got home, I turn on the Internet, and started reading the New York Times, because I trust the New York Times for information. (Participant 27, emphasis added)

All this sort of misinformation started pouring out, so it was a very strange time. I remember looking at these, trying to piece it together for yourself and with people that you trusted, you relied on the judgment of people that kind of knew what they were talking about a little bit. (Participant 20, emphasis added)

Yet when talking about ‘trust’, it was not usual for participants to highlight that different people held very different levels of trust or to underscore that trust still occurs in an environment of uncertainty and risk. For instance, many foreign residents had concerns about the safety of drinking tap water in the aftermath of the disaster, but some people, like Participant 18, accepted the risk and trusted the authorities:

Sometimes I was going for a run around the palace there, and I’d stop and have water, so I, maybe I’m just too trusting in nature, but some people weren’t. (Participant 18, emphasis added)

Moreover, in their talk of ‘trust’, some participants indicated that creating trustworthy information for a foreign resident in the disaster was a more complex task than merely providing information for them in a language that they could understand:

I wouldn’t have necessarily implicitly trusted Japanese sources even through English, but the lack of them was ominous and perhaps did impact my feelings
of isolation and danger after my other foreign friends had left Japan.
(Participant 23, emphasis added)

6.2.2 Data relating to trust using the term ‘reliance’

The term ‘trust’ is not the only way to talk about the concept in general-purpose English. 12 out of the 28 participants in this research chose to talk about their experience of the disaster using the term ‘reliance’ or some of its variants. Several participants used these terms to highlight that their ability to trust depended on the context:

Obviously, the media is getting it from different sources as well unless they have a crew on-the-ground, you can’t really rely on it. So we took the decision that our information for the most part would have come from official sources.
(Participant 3, emphasis added)

They also used the term ‘reliance’ to indicate that, not just the presence of trust, but also its absence or its insufficiency sometimes spurred on their decision-making:

[This participant was talking about the decision he and his wife made to temporarily leave Tokyo after the disaster struck] My decision was based on the uncertainty, really. There wasn’t enough solid information coming from Fukushima. I mean the reason that we decided to go there was that, because of concerns of radiation, and there just wasn’t any reliable information coming through.
(Participant 4, emphasis added)

Participants also used ‘reliance’ to underscore that, while depending on others might have been a feature of the disaster for some foreign residents, depending too much on anyone or anything might not be a good idea:

If you’ve come to live in – this doesn’t apply just for Japan – if you go to live in any country, and because it is Japan, you should know that there is a possibility of an earthquake happening or a typhoon or a tsunami, and you should basically know if that happens where to go and what to do, and you should, it’s up to you, and you shouldn’t rely on the government to do it.
(Participant 18, emphasis added)

6.2.3 Data relating to trust using the term ‘confidence’

The term ‘confidence’ and some of its variants were also used by participants to talk about the concept of trust in 3 out of the 28 interviews. Again, the ideas of sufficient thresholds and of using these thresholds to guide decision-making in response to the disaster arose. In addition, though, ‘confidence’ was also used to indicate that trust in the built and natural environments really became a big question for certain foreign residents during the disaster:
The only issue for me was the nuclear fallout, I think, and I felt confident enough in the information we were getting that it wasn’t a problem where we were in Sendai. (Participant 28, emphasis added)

But as it turns out, Japanese buildings are actually very, very, very good at withstanding earthquakes. Shockingly good at it. So I have a lot of confidence in that now. Except for the building where I work, where you worked, because it does feel a little bit old. (Participant 12, emphasis added)

6.2.4 Data relating to trust using the term ‘belief’

Of the 28 participants in this research, 15 chose to talk about their experience of the disaster using the term ‘belief’ or some of its variants. Many participants used these terms to emphasise how they were constantly required to evaluate the sources of the information that they were gathering about the disaster:

And there’s two kinds of foreign sources that I read [Note: the past tense of the verb]. One which is experienced experts and one is, let’s say, the outrageous, over-the-top, “there’s no food in Tokyo”, like, do you know that way [laughter].And one of the reasonably believable experts abroad that I did hear said, “There’s radiation going as far as California.” They had measured it, like. (Participant 5, emphasis added)

Some other participants underlined that, in the end, these evaluations came down to their own individual reasoning or instinct:

Like, there are certain country who just send airplane to, for people to go out from Tokyo, from Japan for free even, where other country were, “Oh, don’t worry. It’s okay. There is no, the situation is under control,” and so on. Who to believe? Again, you just have to rely on my inner, I don’t know, radar [laughter]. (Participant 7, emphasis added)

It can also be seen by examining the use of the term ‘belief’ that views on the concept of trust among foreign residents were far from uniform. These views may have depended on the participants’ particular situations, their personalities, or other contextual factors. For instance, compare the views of Participant 8 with Participant 2 below with respect to the type of information that was being provided by the Japanese government about the nuclear disaster:

Well, it was difficult, you know, in a way that, “Ah, maybe they are not telling everything.” At the same time, I still believe, it’s a democratic and open transparent country. (Participant 8, emphasis added)

And I was like, “Aw, I don’t believe one word, now, that we’re being told by the Japanese government.” (Participant 2, emphasis added)
6.2.5 Data relating to trust using the term ‘faith’

Finally, ‘faith’ and some of its variants were also used by participants to talk about the concept of trust in 3 out of the 28 interviews. ‘Faith’ was used by some participants to discuss the idea that other people occasionally take charge in a disaster. It would appear that this attitude of leaving things to someone or something else was not universal; indeed, elements of the concept of trust may be culturally- or at least contextually-bound:

I’m not concerned with radiation levels. I mean, you cannot escape radiation in the world. And it’s Japan. I’m sure if it were China or somewhere like that, I’d be out of there, and maybe this is silly in a way, but I think in Japan – I mean a lot of things have been covered up, and whatever, but – people do their job, except Tepco people, but people, you know, I have faith in the people trying, doing their best to deal with that situation and I’m not into sharing horror stories about what’s going on. (Participant 25, emphasis added)

From my point of view, the Japanese have much faith in their government. [Laughter] On the contrary, so, Chinese, we don’t have much faith in the government. So we have to save ourselves. That’s also very different thing. From the very, very beginning, our thinking is different. (Participant 17, emphasis added)

In sum, this section has shown that trust was important to the experiences of the foreign residents in this case study and that, therefore, trust merited further abstract analysis. However, it has also shown the terminological and conceptual complexity involved in choosing to use trust as an analytical category. For this reason, before being able to systematically analyse whether Translation was relevant to trust in the data (and, therefore, begin to answer the final research question in this thesis), a robust and well-delimited theory of trust was needed. Such a theory was found in the work of Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010), and this theory will be described in the following section.

6.3 A socio-cognitive theory and model of trust

Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) side with the general consensus in the literature about the antecedents of trust in social life already reviewed in Section 2.4.1: the future is difficult to predict, making predictions about the future can carry risks, and, in such an environment of risk and uncertainty, social beings recognise their inability to fulfil all their needs alone and somehow must come to trust. The authors argue that social beings feel the need to accept some of this risk, to reduce this uncertainty, to count on their predictions about the future, to act with more confidence, and – crucially – to cooperate with each other and exploit each other’s abilities and talents in order to achieve their individual desires
(Castelfranchi and Falcone 2010: 265-266). This is what makes trust vital in our social lives.

From these foundational arguments, the authors adopt a socio-cognitive approach to theoretically explain the phenomenon of trust by identifying and formalising the conceptual components and relationships that are necessary and sufficient to this explanation. Their theory categorises trust as a mental state in socially situated agents and is based on social context (ibid.: 147). The objective in their work is to provide ‘an explicit anatomy of trust, an integrated and justified model of its ingredients, of their integration, and of how it works’ (ibid.: 359); essentially, they aim for a universal theory of the concept that could be applied in multiple, diverse contexts.

6.3.1 Why Castelfranchi and Falcone’s theory was chosen

Section 2.4.1 showed that there are a number of influential theories of trust. Many of these theories limit their explanatory power to their domain; Nooteboom (2002), Sztompka (1999), and Hardin (2002, 2006) do not claim that their theories can be usefully applied beyond the realms of organisational studies, sociology, or politics respectively. Other theories – though still domain-specific – are frequently applied more widely. In particular, the work of Deutsch (1958, 1973), Luhmann (1979), and Gambetta (1988) can be seen in a broad range of fields. Even so, the focus of each of these works is still specific: Deutsch mainly discusses calculations of probability; Luhmann emphasises the relation between trust and power; Gambetta mostly investigates the causality of cooperation. Thus, the first reason for choosing Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) was its claim to broad applicability or even to universality. The second reason, though, was that the socio-cognitive disciplinary heritage of this theory is not uncommon in translation studies. While trust is used as a category in some theories of translation (see Section 2.4.2), there was no theory of trust available in translation studies at the time of writing, but applying a theory using a sociological or cognitive approach would not be unusual.41 The third reason to select Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) was its claim to being holistic and context-based. This suited the ethnographic frame in which this case study was situated better than many of the other influential theories that were already discounted for their domain-specificity; as shown in Section 2.4.1, many of these theories adopt a reductionist and linear approach. Despite the fact that Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) was more appropriate for this research than other theories of trust as a result of its broad applicability, disciplinary

heritage, and holistic approach, their theory came with several limitations.

6.3.2 Limitations of Castelfranchi and Falcone’s theory and of its application in this thesis

The Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory of trust is limited in its scope largely because it adopts a limited viewpoint on the phenomenon of trust and because it describes only a limited range of trust phenomena observed in the world. It almost exclusively explains trust from the point of view of the trustor, and attempts mostly to describe and explain how the trustor comes to trust or not.\(^{42}\) For instance, in a scenario where a client employs a new translator for the first time, their theory would explain the trust from the perspective of the client (trustor) and not the translator (trustee). The authors admit that it could be equally useful to model trust from the opposing point of view and to theoretically describe and explain being trusted, but they recognise that this is not the focus of their theory (ibid.: 282).\(^{43}\) In addition, their theory only deals with a limited range of trust phenomena in the world; it models an explicit, reason-based form of social trust. However, some forms of trust can simply be procedural and grounded in perceived regularities in our experience of the world:

> Trust in our own natural information sources (our memory, our eyes, our reasoning) and trust in some social information sources that do not need additional justification and meta beliefs are examples of this default-trust…(ibid.: 63)

Other forms of trust can be implicit; ‘[t]hey can be just presupposed as logical conditions or logical entailment of some (explicit) belief’ (ibid.: 63). For instance, if you are told that a potential trustee is a professional translator, you may implicitly trust that she is linguistically competent, knowledgeable in certain domains, technically able, and so on. Still other forms of trust can be irrational or intuitive, and come based in faith (ibid.: 107) or can derive in part from the personality of the trustor or the culture in which they experience trust (ibid.: 174). Finally, of course, the authors recognise that trust need not be social; trust can equally be the trust we hold in artefacts or unanimated processes (ibid.: 84). Take, for example, the trust we place in the ground or gravity. None of these trust phenomena – procedural trust, implicit trust, irrational trust, personality- and culture-based

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\(^{42}\) Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) use the terms ‘trustor’ and ‘trustee’ to describe one social agent (the ‘trustor’) potentially trusting another social agent (the ‘trustee’).

\(^{43}\) The authors propose a model for trust as capital that adopts the point of view of the trustee briefly in Chapter 10, but they recognise that this is not representative of their overall socio-cognitive model (Ibid.: 281).
trust, or trust in inanimate objects – is dealt with in the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory.

There are also limitations to how the theory has been applied in this thesis. The reason for employing this theory was not to provide a complete and adequate account of trust in the 2011 disaster. Rather the purpose was to apply the theory to systematically examine whether Translation was significant to the trust observed among the case study’s participants. As a result, there are many topics covered by Castelfranchi and Falcone in their ‘explicit anatomy of trust’ (2010: 359) that are not dealt with in this thesis. This thesis does not consider: their quantitative evaluations of degrees of trust and trust thresholds (ibid.: Ch. 3); their examinations of negative forms of trust, like mistrust, diffidence, suspicion (ibid.: Ch.4); their attempt to cohere affect-based trust with their model (ibid.: Ch. 5); their explorations of how trust evolves in time or transfers from one agent to another or between similar agents (ibid. Ch. 6 & 9); or their study of how their theory relates to control and monitoring, to social capital, or to technology (ibid. Ch. 7, 10 & 12). These arguments have been omitted from this thesis because they were surplus to the central model and because they involved a level of abstraction that did little to help answer the research questions of this thesis. The conceptual tools that have been taken from the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory for application in this thesis are explained in the following section.

6.3.3 Theoretical components and relationships in the model

This model describes how a trustor moves from an attitude of trusting a potential trustee towards a decision to trust that trustee, and then finally towards the act of trusting that trustee. For the authors, trust as an attitude (an evaluation, a belief, a disposition) is just one part of the picture. The other fundamental interrelated notions are trust as a decision and trust as an act: that is to say, taking the risk to count on somebody (Castelfranchi and Falcone 2010: 250). Formulated within a socio-cognitive frame, as explained above, the model is based on goals, predictions, context, and actions, and is designed to be holistic; i.e., the individual components of the model are all interconnected and can only be fully explained with reference to the whole.

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44 Such a subjective application of theory is consistent with the constructivist philosophical goal of viable explanation adopted for this research and is a valid strategy in a case study once these subjectivities are made explicit, as is being done in this section. (See Sections 3.3 and 3.5 for further argumentation in this regard.)
6.3.3.1 Goals

The Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory of trust derives its explanatory power initially from a category taken from cognitive psychology – the concept of the ‘goal’. They argue that when a trustor evaluates a potential trustee, the trustor does so in terms of motives, needs, desires, projects, preferences, objectives, and so on. In cognitive psychology, a ‘goal’ is defined as a mental representation against which we evaluate the world, and, thus, subsumes all these evaluative terms (ibid.: 46). The key point about the goal is that, in a situation of trust, the trustor perceives that the potential trustee will adopt the trustor’s goal and that it will prevail over other goals that the potential trustee may have (ibid.: 82-87). In other words, if I trust you, I predict and expect that you will be good for achieving my goal (ibid.: 43). But how can the trustor evaluate the potential trustee to make this prediction or to hold this expectation?

6.3.3.2 Predictions about internal trust

The authors argue that there are three necessary dimensions internal to the potential trustee (dimensions which they categorise as ‘internal trust’) along which the trustor evaluates this potential trustee. Firstly, the potential trustee should be perceived as being sufficiently non-threatening. The trustor evaluates the benevolence, moral reasons, or external sanctions preventing the trustee from causing her/him harm (ibid.: 60-61). With a sufficient evaluation, the trustor may begin to think that the potential trustee could be disposed to adopt and realise the trustor’s goal (ibid.: 61), but will s/he be able to do so? Secondly, then, the potential trustee should be perceived as being sufficiently competent to realise the trustor’s goal. The trustor evaluates the potential trustee’s skills, knowledge, abilities, know-how, techniques, expertise, and so on (ibid.: 48). In this way, the trustor has so far evaluated that the potential trustee is sufficiently free of harmful intent and sufficiently competent to realise the trustor’s goal, but will s/he really have the intention to do so and persist with this intention (ibid.: 48)? Thirdly, therefore, the potential trustee should be perceived as being sufficiently willing to realise the trustor’s goal. The trustor evaluates how the potential trustee is likely to behave, and evaluates how predictable s/he is, as well as the extent to which s/he can be counted on (ibid.: 48). On the basis of these three beliefs that the potential trustee is sufficiently harmless, competent, and willing, the trustor predicts, believes, and wants that the potential trustee will realise the trustor’s goal (ibid.: 43-53). For example, if I hire a professional interpreter to accompany me to a business meeting, I want her/him to help me communicate with my business contacts and to win their business (my goal), and I believe that s/he has no intention to reveal my trade secrets (is harmless), knows how to interpret at a sufficient level (is competent), and will show up
on the appointed day (is willing). In other words, we can say, then, that internal trust is in place. This internal trust is the ‘cognitive kernel’ of trust as a concept (ibid.: 48). However, it is a necessary but not sufficient kernel to fully explain trust because social trust does not exist in a vacuum.

6.3.3.3 Predictions about external trust

The authors argue that the trustor trusts a potential trustee only within a specific context: changing the context may present new opportunities and obstacles that may go on to change the trustor’s evaluations and predictions of the trustee and, by corollary, their final decision to trust or not (ibid.: 84). The authors categorise these opportunities and obstacles as the external conditions favouring, allowing, inhibiting, or impeding the realisation of the trustor's goal (ibid.: 149), and so the trustor will also evaluate this ‘external trust’ before fully evaluating the potential trustee and deciding whether to trust her/him and to act on this trust. The types of contextual opportunity and obstacle that the trustor may evaluate include the factors directly affecting the possibility to really achieve the goal in a good way, as well as the information and sources available to the trustor, her/his mood and basic social disposition, and her/his risk perception and acceptance, among others (ibid.: 83). In short, trust is context-dependant, and there can be different trusts about a potential trustee in different social contexts (ibid.: 84). For example, a professional interpreter may be trusted by her clients but not by her boss for the same job. Furthermore, the authors assert that a contextual component is vital to any theory or model of trust because trust can migrate from one task to another, from one trustor to another, from one trustee to another, and from one social context to another (ibid.: 84). Similarly, a special event could be considered by the trustor as crucial for trusting (ibid.: 84). For instance, I might not normally trust a trainee translator to translate my company’s report, but I might do so if the document type was one they had translated before and was intended for internal use only.

6.3.3.4 Predictions about dependence and the delegation of an action

Even at this point, we still do not have the full picture. Trust is not just an evaluation or attitude about how good you are for my goal or about how opportune the circumstances for trusting you are. Any act of trusting must imply some risk (ibid.: 74), as has also been supported in Section 2.4.1. In Castelfranchi and Falcone’s model, the trustor makes her/himself vulnerable and open to some risk only when s/he delegates an action; this is an action that s/he cannot or will not fulfil independently in order to realise her/his broader goal, and, thus, s/he becomes in some way dependent on the trustee (ibid.: 53). The reasons why I may predict a situation of dependence on a potential trustee could be that I lack the
skills or resources to achieve the goal by myself, or it could simply be that having someone else help achieve my goal will cost me less effort or produce a higher quality result (ibid.: 79). With a sufficiently trusting attitude and context in place, I now count on the trustee, and make myself dependent on her/him (ibid.: 61), and I, thus, risk that s/he will fail to fulfil the action and bring me to my goal, that s/he will waste my time or other resources, or that in delegating the action to her/him, s/he will bring some unexpected harm on me (ibid.: 76). In sum, the authors argue that it is when a prediction of dependence and the delegation of an action take place that the trustor opens her/himself up to some risk and that trust moves from being an attitude to being a decision and an act.

6.3.3.5 Summary

Figure 6–2 reproduces the model used by Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010: 91) to represent all the conceptual components and relationships outlined above. Figure 6–3, then, presents a simplified version of this model created by the researcher for use in this thesis in which some subcategories have been removed or renamed to improve readability and simplify explanation.45

45 This adaptation was made on the basis that the authors themselves describe their representation of the model only as a potential frame (Castelfranchi and Falcone 2010: 92). Furthermore, the adaptation in this thesis is entirely consistent with the theory described in their entire 2010 work.
Figure 6-2. Original Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model of trust

Figure 6-3. Adapted Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model of trust
In these models, trust exists as an attitude, a decision, and an act in a recursive structure. The trustor wants to achieve a goal and is trying to reason whether or not to delegate an action to a potential trustee to work towards the realisation of this goal. If the trustor predicts that the potential trustee is sufficiently willing, competent, and free of harmful intent (internal trust) within a given context of opportunities and obstacles (external trust) to be counted on to accomplish the action, the trustor will expose her/himself to the risk of being dependent on that trustee, and we can say that the trustor trusts the trustee.

6.4 Observations supporting Castelfranchi and Falcone’s model of trust

This section describes how an in-depth analysis of observations in the participant data for this research supports the usefulness of the theoretical model of trust put forward by Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010). As was shown in Section 6.3.2, their socio-cognitive, reason-based model of trust uses goals, predictions, actions, and context to explain the components and relationships relevant to the theory. It cannot be argued that the methodology used in this thesis (ethnographic interviews supported by secondary data within a case study framework; see Chapter 3) provided access to the goals or the predictions of the participants; it cannot be claimed that this research possesses data relating to their beliefs, their affective states, or their deeper motivations at the time of the disaster, nor to how they might have evaluated potential trustees at this time. However, it can be argued that this methodology provided some access to what the participants in the case study reported to be their actions at the time of the disaster, to their reasoning behind some of these actions, and to the context in which these actions took place. As a result, it is claimed here that direct observations in these interview data were able to be combined with interpretations, inferences, and educated guesses to paint a picture of the trusting attitudes, decisions, and acts of the participants in this case study.

Specifically, with the aforementioned methodological limitations in mind, the interview data were examined to look for passages which corresponded to the model of trust proposed in Section 6.3.3. To do this, any instances where participants spoke of some risk, uncertainty, or vulnerability were first identified; this was done because of the broad consensus in the trust literature that trusting necessarily involves some form of risk (see Section 2.4.1). At this first stage of coding, 149 passages were found across all 28 transcripts that related to some sort of risk, uncertainty, or vulnerability, and it was assumed that these passages might be meaningful to a concept of trust and could potentially fit Castelfranchi and Falcone’s (2010) model. To confirm whether or not this was the case, each of the 149 risk-related passages was re-examined to confirm the presence of a clearly
delegated action. At this second stage of coding, it was found that 51 passages could be shown to relate to a clearly delegated action and so might be usefully described and explained by the trust model. It was necessary, though, to delete 2 passages here because they described incidences in which no foreign resident was involved as trustor, as trustee, or within the broader context.\textsuperscript{46} As foreign residents are the case being studied in this research, it was felt that only incidences of trust involving a foreign resident should be included in the analysis. At this point, then, there were 49 instances where a delegated action and its context could be found in the participant data, and these 49 instances came from 24 of the 28 interviews.\textsuperscript{47} These 49 passages (fully described and categorised in Appendix H) represent the concrete support for the trust model as a way to systematically describe and explain the trust observed in these data. From this action- and context-related information, then, it was possible to infer: the broader goals that the participants might have held with respect to these delegated actions; the predictions that they might have made about the person to whom they were delegating; the predictions about the context in which the delegation was taking place; the predictions about the dependence and vulnerability they were opening themselves up to by delegating in this way. This is more abstract, logic-based support for the trust model, but it is still useful for making the arguments that will follow in the subsequent sections of this chapter. These inferences are also fully described and categorised in Appendix H, but the major patterns in this dataset will be outlined in the next section.

\textit{6.4.1 Major patterns in the trust dataset in Appendix H}

Before describing the major patterns present in the dataset, it is worth highlighting that, while this thesis argues that the data show 49 instances in which trust existed in a way corresponding to the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model, it is not arguing that these 49 instances of trust were well placed or that they all ended in success; trust ending in failure was still trust and was included in the dataset. To give an overview of the data in Appendix H, the following elements of the data will be summarised in the subsequent sections: who the trustors and trustees were; what actions were being delegated; what type of context these delegated actions were being performed in; the broader goals of the trustors that can be inferred from what the participants said; the likely predictions that the trustors made.

\textsuperscript{46} Specifically, a passage described by Participant 14 in which Japanese parents were shown to have trusted Japanese teachers and a passage described by Participant 27 in which residents of a Japanese village in Fukushima were shown to have trusted the Japanese authorities were excluded from this analysis.

\textsuperscript{47} No passages matching the model were found in the interviews with Participants 4, 7, 23, or 25.
6.4.1.1 The trustors and trustees

Tables 6–2 and 6–3 show the number of incidences of the trust model in which a participant mentioned a particular category of trustor or trustee. From these tables we can see that the incidences of trust that corresponded to the model were largely cases in which a participant or some other foreign national in their acquaintance trusted another foreign national, a Japanese local, or an embassy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY OF TRUSTOR:</th>
<th>Participants in this study</th>
<th>Other foreign acquaintances</th>
<th>Employers in Japan</th>
<th>Embassies</th>
<th>Japanese authorities</th>
<th>Other Japanese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO. OF INCIDENCES:</td>
<td>36/49</td>
<td>7/49</td>
<td>2/49</td>
<td>1/49</td>
<td>1/49</td>
<td>2/49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-2. No. of incidences of the trust model in participant data broken down by category of trustor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY OF TRUSTEE:</th>
<th>Japanese locals</th>
<th>Other foreign residents</th>
<th>Participants in this study</th>
<th>Embassies</th>
<th>Scientific and technical experts</th>
<th>Japanese authorities</th>
<th>Foreign nationals outside Japan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 6-3. No. of incidences of the trust model in participant data broken down by category of trustee

6.4.1.2 The delegated actions

Table 6–4 shows the number of incidences of the trust model in which a participant mentioned a particular category of action to be delegated to the trustee. Essentially, instead of carrying out the actions themselves or instead of doing nothing, the trustors delegated the actions below to a trustee in an effort to realise a particular goal state. The data show that most incidences of the trust model revolved around finding and handling information and making decisions; rather than find or handle the information or make the decision themselves, the trustor delegated this to someone else. This pattern in the data is not surprising considering the focus of the research on how foreign residents communicated and gathered information. It works to further illustrate the importance of trust in the communicative scene during a disaster.
6.4.1.3 The contexts

The above actions were, of course, mostly delegated in a context and set of special circumstances broadly relating to the outbreak of a disaster. However, some finer analysis of this broader context was made possible by the interview data. In particular, it was possible to categorise some of this contextual information as either an opportunity for or as an obstacle to the existence of trust. While the disaster sometimes presented great obstacles to trust existing for the trustors – especially as a result of linguistic and cultural barriers, of problems with infrastructure not working as it should, or of disruption to people’s standard routines – overwhelmingly the context in which the trustors came to delegate the above actions in this disaster was one of opportunity: it was sometimes as a result of having friends, acquaintances, or colleagues with certain abilities, contacts, or information that the trustor came to delegate the action; it was also sometimes as a result of the trustor’s own particular status as a citizen of a particular country, as an employee of a particular company, or as a result of the trustor’s own particular resources in terms of language ability that it proved opportune to delegate the action. Tables 6–5 and 6–6 summarise how frequently such contextual information was observed in the interview data.48

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48 Note that these incidence counts do not total 49 (the number of passages believed to correspond to the trust model in the interview data). This is because not all passages contained an obstacle to the existence of trust and not all passages contained an opportunity for the existence of trust.
So far, this section has summarised the relevant data in Appendix H to describe those involved in these instances of trust, the actions involved in the trust, and the type of circumstances in which the trust existed. The next section will now summarise the goals and predictions in Appendix H that could not be observed in the interview data but that could be inferred from what the participants said.

6.4.1.4 The goals

It was inferred from the above actions and contexts that the trustors most likely had the goals of being kept safe from worse harm, of responding in an appropriate manner to the disaster, and of ensuring that communication was possible during the disaster. More detail on the goals inferred from the relevant passages in the interviews can be seen in Table 6–7.
6.4.1.5 The predictions

It was further inferred from what was observed in the interview data that participants were probably making certain predictions about the potential trustee (internal trust), and about the obstacles and opportunities in the environment (external trust), as well as predictions of how dependent they could be on the potential trustee. Summarising all of these predictions is beyond the scope of this section (though all this in-depth analysis is detailed in Appendix H). Instead, only the one prediction that is most relevant to the chapter’s subsequent arguments will be summarised here; the prediction of dependence. It is likely that the trustors counted primarily on the ability, contacts, and information that the trustee possessed, as well as on their relationship with the trustee. Furthermore, it is likely that they predicted that they were risking their personal safety, their ability to respond appropriately, and their reputation in counting on the trustee in this way. This meant that participants predicted that they would either strongly or weakly depend on the trustee. A prediction of strong dependence meant that, having made all the above evaluations, the trustor predicted that s/he lacked some essential resources to achieve her/his goal. In contrast, an evaluation of weak dependence meant that, while the trustor predicted that s/he had sufficient resources to achieve the goal, depending on the trustee would cost less effort or assure higher quality. Having satisfied her/himself that these predictions and all others not mentioned here met the threshold for the potential trustee to be depended on, the trustor likely felt satisfied to be open to the risk or bet that delegating to the trustee would entail. Table 6–8 breaks down the strong and weak predictions and shows that more trustors in the dataset predicted weak dependence; i.e., they had sufficient resources to achieve the goal, but chose to depend on the trustee because it cost less effort or assured a higher quality realisation of the goal.
Table 6-8. No. of incidences of the trust model in participant data broken down by inferred dependence prediction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INFERRRED DEPENDENCE PREDICTIONS</th>
<th>STRONG:</th>
<th>WEAK:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO. OF INCIDENCES</td>
<td>15/49</td>
<td>34/49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.4.2 Illustrative examples of the trust model found in the data

While the previous section gave an overview of the dataset on trust in this thesis, this section will provide two concrete illustrations to exemplify how trust in the dataset existed in a way that could usefully be described and explained by the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model. (The detail of all other examples can be consulted in Appendix H.)

As a first example, we can say that Participant 9 trusted his acquaintances in the nearby nuclear power plant in a way that corresponded to the model. Here is what he had to say in his interview:

> After three months, I went surfing one time. The people at the power station were testing the water every day. They said it was fine, but on the news they said it wasn’t fine. Different information here and there, but those workers at the power station are sending their kids here [to my school] to learn English, I mean. They were saying the water was okay. I mean, it was higher than usual, but not going to grow a third eye [laughter], but I, we won’t know, actually, until, in the fu, twenty years or whatever, but. (Participant 9)

Let us first remember that, in this model, trust exists as an attitude, a decision, and an act in a recursive structure. Participant 9 wants to be safe from damage by nuclear radiation when he goes out surfing. This is his goal. To achieve this goal he wants to know the levels of radiation in the water off the local beaches. He does not have the skill or expertise to measure the radiation himself, so he delegates the action of measuring to the workers at the nearby nuclear power plant. He probably predicts that these workers are sufficiently willing, competent, and free of harmful intent (internal trust) because they are nuclear professionals in his acquaintance who send their children to study English at the school run by him. Having people he knows and who know him with this specialised skill presented Participant 9 with a special opportunity to trust (external trust) that someone who did not have this contact might not have enjoyed. But let us not forget that he is still taking a risk in counting on these nuclear workers – the future is still uncertain – and Participant 9 is probably betting his personal health and safety on their ability to measure accurately, communicate the information honestly, and so on. As Participant 9 says, he will not be able
to tell whether trusting these nuclear workers was a success or failure until some twenty years into the future.

In a second illustrative example, we can say that a certain Japanese government office trusted Participant 6 and his colleagues in the PR firm for which he worked to create the government office’s English-language Twitter feed during the disaster:

And we were feeding the {Twitter feed of the Japanese government office that was our client} so we were picking up information generally off of NHK and Kyodo in English and feeding that out through {the Japanese government office that was our client} so that foreign nationals could get access to information. (Participant 6)

This particular Japanese government office wants to be able to provide information about the disaster to interested parties inside and outside Japan. One part of achieving this goal is having information available on Twitter in English. The ministry does not have the resources to carry out this action alone, so they delegate it to the PR firm for which Participant 6 works. The government office probably predicts that the staff of this firm, including Participant 6, is sufficiently willing, competent, and free of harmful intent (internal trust) because they have previous experience of their work as existing clients and know that the firm has international staff. Having an existing relationship with a firm with such expertise presented the Japanese government office with a special opportunity to trust (external trust) that other government offices who did not have this contact might not have enjoyed. But let us not forget that the government office is still taking a risk and is probably betting their ability to communicate effectively with interested English-speakers on the PR firm’s expertise at gathering and selecting appropriate information to disseminate and its know-how in ensuring that it is linguistically and culturally appropriate.

In sum, it can be shown that, with the dataset in Appendix H, the theory of Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) allowed for the creation of viable, robust, and convincing descriptions and explanations of trust phenomena in the data. Therefore, this theory of trust was a good candidate to use in suggesting a role for Translation. Examining the role of Translation within this theory is the topic of the next section.

6.5 The role of Translation in Castelfranchi and Falcone’s theory of trust

In addition to supporting the usefulness of the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory of trust, in-depth analysis of the dataset in Appendix H showed that Translation was, at times, one or more of the components of how trust was conceptualised in the 2011 disaster. Several clear patterns in the data worked to make this argument.
6.5.1 Major patterns in the trust dataset in Appendix H

Of the 49 passages that were identified as corresponding to the trust model put forward by Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010), 25 passages presented no real evidence of a role for Translation in bringing that trust into existence. However, this left 24 passages in the dataset which suggested a possible role for Translation. As Table 6–9 shows, 19 passages indicated that considering Translation as a component in the theoretical model would help better describe and explain the trust phenomena that were being observed. As for the 5 other passages that also pointed to a role for Translation, these passages pointed to a role for ‘news translation’ – a definition of translation that considers its function in the production of global news reports, especially surrounding major international events (see, for instance, Doorslaer [2010] or Schäffner [2010]). ‘News translation’ falls within the scope of the definition of Translation operationalised for this research in Section 5.3.5. However, as there was not enough contextual information in the interviews relating to news translation to make defensible inferences about how exactly it featured in the instance of trust, the passages relating to news translation have not been considered in any subsequent analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of evidence</th>
<th>No. of incidences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence for Translation in the incidence of trust:</td>
<td>19/24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation by a Japanese resident:</td>
<td>8/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation by a foreign resident:</td>
<td>8/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation, but unclear whether by a Japanese or foreign resident:</td>
<td>3/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence for ‘news translation’ in the incidence of trust:</td>
<td>5/24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-9. Summary of trust incidences suggesting a role for Translation

The 19 passages containing some clear evidence for Translation were then analysed in more detail and certain significant patterns could be discerned. These patterns suggest a role for Translation in relation to the ‘competence’, ‘context’, ‘dependence’, and ‘delegated action’ components of the trust model described in Section 6.3.3.

It can be inferred from the data that, when evaluating the competence of a potential trustee (a component of internal trust), trustors may have predicted that the trustee in question would have had a sufficient level of Translation skills available to them to fulfil the delegated action before fully moving to a decision to trust. In addition to these specialised skills, though, it can be imagined from the data that the potential trustee’s local, cultural,
and technical know-how may also have been considered when reasoning whether to trust the trustee or not.

Translation seems to have also strongly impacted on trust in these data as an element of the context (external trust). Happening to be around someone in the disaster or having someone in your network who spoke another language or who had Translation skills often presented an opportunity that encouraged the trustor to move towards a decision to trust, once the other components of the trust model met their required thresholds. Translation only seemed to be a contextual obstacle that the trustors likely considered in their evaluations in relation to the cost of resources; it is likely, at times, that the cost of finding another Translator alternative to a Translator who was already available was considered too costly and could have helped move the trustor towards a decision to trust.

Furthermore, these data would suggest that Translation impacted on trust when participants were trying to predict how much they would depend on the trustee. In a large number of instances, the trustor lacked a skill or resource necessary to achieve her/his goal, and it was only with the help of Translation that this lack could be addressed. In such instances where the trustor’s options were limited, s/he likely felt strongly dependent on a trustee with the Translation skills, linguistic ability, or cultural know-how s/he lacked. However, in a small number of instances, the trustor likely only predicted her/himself to be weakly dependent on the trustee; s/he may have had alternative channels through which to receive the Translation that would have helped realise the relevant goal, but s/he predicted less effort would be expended or a higher quality result achieved by delegating to the trustee.

Of course, Translation was also, in a few instances, the action that was to be delegated to a potential trustee, and this was another way in which Translation was involved in the trust in the 2011 communicative scene. Here the trustor may have reasoned that delegating the action was preferable to doing nothing or to trying to accomplish the Translation themselves, and so finding a potential trustee who could Translate became a component of their reasoning around the decision to trust. Table 6–10 presents an overview of the instances from Appendix H described in this section.
Impact of Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Translation</th>
<th>No. of incidences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Translation impacted on the trustor’s prediction of trustee competence:</td>
<td>18/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills:</td>
<td>15/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know-how:</td>
<td>7/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation was a feature of the context:</td>
<td>17/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities:</td>
<td>17/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles:</td>
<td>2/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation impacted on the trustor’s prediction of dependence on the trustee:</td>
<td>11/19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong:</td>
<td>8/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weak:</td>
<td>3/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation was the delegated action itself:</td>
<td>5/19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6-10. Summary of evidence for Translation acting as a component of the trust model

Based on the patterns summarised here, and with the further support of the detailed analysis available in Appendix H, Figure 6–4 represents how considering Translation as components of the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model helps to describe and explain how certain people who experienced the 2011 disaster trusted.49

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49 The roles for Translation in the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model of trust are shown in red in Figure 6–4.
In sum, Figure 6–4 illustrates that Translation was a part of certain people’s reasoning about trust in the 2011 disaster in various ways. Translation sometimes needed to be evaluated as a component of internal trust; specifically, it was one of the competences of a potential trustee for which a certain threshold needed to be met in a given context before sufficient internal trust in the potential trustee could be established. Translation was also a feature of the trust context, especially in presenting opportunities to come to trust potential trustees who might not otherwise have featured in the trustor’s reasoning. Moreover, Translation was sometimes a factor for trustors in evaluating how strongly they would have to depend on the trustee and in evaluating how much they would risk by delegating to them. Finally, Translation was sometimes a component of the trustor’s reasoning in that Translation was the very action s/he wished to delegate, and this influenced the selection of individuals that
s/he could potentially trust with the task. It would be instructive at this point to move from these generalised and abstract assertions to some concrete illustrations from the dataset.

### 6.5.2 Illustrative examples for Translation acting as components of trust

To cite a first example, we can say, from the data in Appendix H, that certain French business visitors decided to trust and trusted Participant 13 (a foreign resident of Japan employed as a professional business interpreter) in part because of Translation. The following is the passage in Participant 13’s interview that suggests that this was the case:

> Also, I started being busy with my customers who were in a big hotel in Tokyo. So I got in touch with them, I think we used Skype. Yes, they explained me that, we parted five minutes before, they explained me that it started shaking while they were boarding a taxi and it’s shaking like hell in the taxi. And so they were in a panicky mood […] They, they were probably more hooked than I was to news sources and as they, they do not rely on Japanese language, they were relying, I assume, on everything which is non, which was non-Japanese: French, they were French, maybe English news sources. And probably they were more aware than I about the matter of Fukushima. So, they were in a total panic and they asked me that they wanted to go to Osaka and that they would pay any means of transportation because they were thinking that everything was stopped. And I was not in a panic, well, I was not shaking. Eh, worried, but not shaking. And they said that the trains are not running. Tokyo-Osaka is something like, let’s say, two hours, okay? Bullet train. So, I told them, “Okay. I’m going to check. The Internet is working.” (Participant 13)

The goal of the French business people was to be safe from worse danger – particularly, the danger of nuclear radiation – by getting out of Tokyo and Japan as quickly as possible. They needed to arrange an evacuation to achieve this goal, but the context of them being in a foreign country (where a language they did not know was spoken and where they lacked locally-specific knowledge) put obstacles in the way of them arranging the evacuation by themselves. For this reason, they delegated the action. We can imagine that they could have tried to delegate the action to a variety of potential trustees: the staff of their embassy, their hotel, Japanese people nearby. However, it is likely that they already had sufficient internal trust in Participant 13; they likely predicted that he would have the Japanese and French language skills, the local knowledge, and the Translation techniques to be able to plan and explain their evacuation. Furthermore, they probably predicted that he would be concerned to ensure the safety of potential future clients and may have felt morally obliged to help them, seeing as how he had been hired previously as their professional interpreter. Therefore, it is likely that the French business people reasoned that trusting Participant 13 and delegating the evacuation planning to him would risk them less wasted effort or harm than pursuing another potential trustee, than trying to achieve the
goal by themselves, or than simply doing nothing. Here, then, we see how Translation influenced the existence of trust as an attitude, as a decision, and as an act in this instance, and we see how useful the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model is in explaining the role of Translation in the existence of this trust.

In another example, Participant 10 was trusted by other foreign residents in his community to find and communicate to them in English disaster-related information from Japanese sources. Here is what Participant 10 said in his interview:

I’ve been here a long time. Once I was back, I was inundated with the locals asking me for information and what to do. And luckily for me, I do have a lot of Japanese friends, so I could help most people. If not, they could come here and I could feed them and look after them and whatnot. But, yeah, that would be very helpful, I think, someone knowledgeable in the area, knowledgeable in the language and that interacts with that source of information would definitely help the foreign community. (Participant 10)

Here, having in their acquaintance a long-term foreign resident with Japanese and English ability – that is to say a Translator – presented the foreign residents in this part of the disaster zone with a great opportunity and likely helped to move them towards trusting Participant 10. They may have predicted that Participant 10 would have had access to privileged information about the disaster due to his long time living in the city, his many Japanese friends, and his central position as a well-known pub owner. They also may have predicted that he would try hard to find relevant information for his own safety and that of his family, and that he might be willing to share this information with other foreign residents out of his own benevolence or as a result of sympathy for their shared experience and vulnerability as foreign nationals experiencing a disaster overseas. Delegating at least part of their information gathering to Participant 10 was likely preferable to the effort of seeking out other sources or trying to find and understand Japanese information by themselves. Nevertheless, there was still a risk for these foreign residents in trusting Participant 10. For example, his abilities as a Translator might not have been up to the task of understanding and communicating complex nuclear information or, more cynically, the continued presence of foreign customers for his businesses in the city might have caused him to hide the dangers he was hearing about in Japanese. But, as Participant 10 said, he was inundated with requests for help from foreigners, so all the other elements of their trust calculations likely told them that this was not the case; trusting Participant 10 was worth the bet, and here once again, Translation was a central component in how these foreign residents came to this decision.
At this point, it is worth re-emphasising that the definition of Translation operationalised for this thesis involves not just interlingual but intercultural transfer, too, and that this form of cultural mediation may also have influenced the decisions of foreign residents to trust. Let us take one such example from the dataset in Appendix H.

The data suggest that Participant 8 and her foreign colleagues trusted their Japanese colleagues to lead the disaster response initially and that Translation – particularly in the sense of intercultural transfer – was a factor in their reasoning:

I thought, “Okay, I look at my Japanese, eh, colleagues and see what they are doing and they wait a bit, of, of course everyone was quiet and they waited until the announcement came that we could go out of the building, because apparently after earthquake there will be, eh, eh, aftershocks and then you just have to wait until, em, there is no aftershocks so that it’s okay to go downstairs. So that was maybe five minutes later. I remember one of my colleagues shouting, foreign guy was shouting, “Ah, Japanese, what are we supposed to do?” [laughter] Anyway, I thought that was good. I just followed.

(Participant 8)

The goal of Participant 8 and her foreign colleagues was to keep themselves safe from worse dangers after the earthquake first struck. To achieve this goal they could have done nothing or they could have led the response themselves, but instead they delegated this action to their Japanese colleagues in the same office. Internal trust in their English-speaking Japanese colleagues may have been sufficiently high that Participant 8 and her foreign colleagues predicted that these potential trustees would know how to respond to a disaster and would be able to instruct them how to do so in English. In addition, they may have predicted that their relationship as co-workers and shared experience of the disaster would make the potential trustees concerned for their welfare and would have prevented them from leading them into greater danger. Having the disaster strike when English-speaking Japanese colleagues were around presented Participant 8 and her foreign colleagues with an opportunity to access greater disaster experience and local knowledge, and this external trust also likely moved them towards a decision to delegate decisions on how best to respond to these others. Nonetheless, trusting does not eliminate risk, and there was still the chance that the Japanese colleagues would not, in fact, know how best to deal with a disaster of this scale and complexity.

In the chapter so far, trust has been shown to be important to how foreign residents communicated and gathered information in the 2011 disaster (see Section 6.2), the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory of trust has been shown to be a useful tool for holistically and systematically providing convincing descriptions and explanations for trust phenomena in this disaster context (see Sections 6.3 and 6.4), and this theory has been
shown to be an appropriate lens through which to view the data to argue that Translation was a part of certain people’s reasoning about trust in the 2011 disaster (see this section). Thus, an answer to the first part of the final research question in this thesis has been given: issues of Translation were important to the 2011 disaster because Translation was sometimes a component of trust, and trust influenced some of the decisions and actions made by foreign residents in the disaster and was highly significant to how they experienced communication and information gathering.

Up to now, though, the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory has only been used to describe and explain what has already happened. Can it be used to talk about how trust might change in the future? If it can, and if Translation can be shown to be relevant to this change, an answer can be proposed to the second part of the final research question in this thesis: why are issues of Translation important to other disaster contexts? The next section will show how the theory deals with an element of future trust and how it can be argued that Translation is relevant to the trust dynamics involved.

6.5.3 Translation and future trust in Castelfranchi and Falcone’s theory

In their theory of trust, Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) argue against the view that there is a confirmation of or increase in the perceived trustworthiness of the trustee involved when trust succeeds or that the trustee’s perceived trustworthiness is correspondingly reduced when trust fails (ibid.:150). Because their theory separates the internal and external components of trust, they argue that it is only when the trustor attributes the success or failure to internal trust that the perceived trustworthiness of the trustee is affected. Otherwise, the causes for the success or failure will be attributed to the environment or context of the instance of trust (ibid.: 52). For the authors:

[T]he important thing is not only the final result of the trustee's performance but in particular the trustor’s causal attribution to all factors in producing that result. It is on the basis of these causal attributions that the trustor updates her beliefs about the trustworthiness of the trustee, of the environment, and of their reciprocal influences. (ibid.: 154).

To understand and evaluate the individual role of each component involved in the instance of trust and, therefore, to appropriately attribute the causes of success or failure of that trust requires a well-informed trustor (ibid.: 152). In a multilingual and multicultural context, Translation might be expected to be a factor in how or how well the trustor becomes informed. It could be argued, therefore, that Translation is important to some instances of trust in that it can assure that causal attribution is done appropriately and can be used as a tool to foster better trust in the future. With these ideas in mind, Figure 6–5 describes the
way in which the researcher has adapted the Castelfranchi and Falcone model to describe and explain how the Translation of the causal attributions of success or failure affect future trust in a multilingual, multicultural setting.

Figure 6-5. Adapting the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model for the Translation of causal attributions

In this model, once a decision to trust has been taken and acted upon (sometimes under the influence of issues related to Translation), Translation once again can feature in how the trustor comes to understand and evaluate the causes for the success or failure of that trust. As a consequence of this, Translation influences whether s/he attributes these causes to things internal or external to the trustee.

Accepting this as a theoretical proposition, then, the question becomes whether or not there is any support for it in the data of this case study. In fact, only one example of a relationship between Translation and causal attributions could be found in the data, but it is a compelling example that supports clearly and directly the influence that Translation had on the attribution of causes in one instance of trust. It involves the example of the French disaster responder team for whom Participant 13 was a volunteer interpreter.

Participant 13 – an interpreter by profession – volunteered through his embassy to Translate on-the-ground for a team of international disaster responders who were flown in to Japan
and transported up to the disaster zone. The team’s goal would likely have been to carry out their usual professional mission of saving as many lives as possible as quickly as possible. Politically and legally, responders from overseas had to wait for instruction from Japanese local authorities before doing any rescue work and could not proceed without direct instruction, and initially it would seem that the responder team trusted the Japanese local authorities to assign them useful, life-saving tasks. However, Participant 13 recounts how the team’s trust in this instance failed, and they were left without anything to do during a crucial phase of the initial disaster response:

We waited almost a day doing nothing, and the rescuers get frustrated because time is key. But, of course, they know how to behave because they are military people, but while joking, of course, “What are we doing there? People must be dying somewhere and what are we? (Participant 13)

Now that their decision and act of trusting had failed, the team tried to reason out the causes for this failure. It is possible that they could have attributed the causes of this failure to some contextual factors like logistical pressure or poor communication infrastructure and updated their beliefs about the Japanese local authorities accordingly. Alternatively, it is possible that they could have attributed the causes of this failure to some set of factors internal to the local authorities, such as ineptitude or a lack of willingness. However, what is really interesting in this case is how Translation through Participant 13 was used by the team to attempt to appropriately carry out their causal attribution for the failure of their trust:

One of the most disturbing, or if you get cynical, funny, but it was not funny, single situation was, I remember there was a little kind of a, not even a hill, a kind of turfy kind of place, which was probably a holding spot, kind of shrine or something […] we climbed there and there were Japanese, a group of Japanese rescuers there, and there I seriously interpreted for a brief ten or fifteen minutes. The French felt that they were manipulated, in a sense. They couldn’t find a corpse. We couldn’t find nothing, so they, they asked me, “Tell them, ask them about this territory. Have they already covered it?” And they genuinely answered, “Yes.” So, we were looking, we were searching for casualties on a territory which had already been search. And there were signs, poles and, kind of, things which suggested that people already came here, it was already searched, but anyway, there’s, eh, international relations behind that. (Participant 13)

By asking other Japanese rescuers – through Participant 13 – the responder team was able to establish that it was not logistical pressure, poor infrastructure, ineptitude, nor a lack of willingness, but rather politics that caused the failure of their trust; they were unable to achieve their goal of saving as many lives as possible as quickly as possible because of the politically- and diplomatically-charged atmosphere of being international responders in an
already well-resourced disaster zone in a country with a particular culture of disaster response and a wealth of response experience. Thus, when making future calculations about the trustworthiness of Japanese local authorities or other similar classes of potential trustee, it is likely that the contextual factor of international politics would be taken into account by the international responder team in their reasoning. In short, for the purposes of this thesis, it can be seen that Translation worked to help these trustors more appropriately decide trust in future contexts involving the same or similar potential trustees.

This idea of causal attributions and future trust in the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory is significant because it suggests the possibility of interventions to actively and strategically increase the likelihood of trust being established in future contexts (ibid.: 249). As a result of the arguments put forward in this section, it could also be claimed that Translation could be a useful tool in improving the chances of future trust after the failure of an instance of trust in a multilingual and multicultural context. For example, if trust failed not because of internal trust (the trustee’s willingness, competence, and freedom from harmful intent) but because of some adverse external trust (some obstacle working against the realisation of the action), the trustee could use Translation to make sure this was understood by the trustor. Similarly, if trust did, in fact, fail because of something internal to the trustee, Translation could be used to highlight to the trustor the other internal components of trust that did not fail or to communicate improvements that the trustee has made. An understanding of these theoretical components and relationships of trust and Translation could potentially be useful to government authorities, disaster responders, or volunteer Translators in future disasters who want to ensure that their trustworthiness among the foreign residents they are helping is not damaged when trust fails or to ensure that the information they create for these foreign residents is trusted and acted upon.

In sum, then, an answer has been proposed to the second part of the final research question in this thesis. Issues of Translation are important to other disaster contexts because the theoretical model described in Figure 6–5 shows that Translation can be a useful tool in a multilingual and multicultural context in improving the chances of future trust after a failure of trust and can be used strategically by government authorities, disaster responders, or volunteer Translators in future disasters to improve their own trustworthiness or to help ensure that the information they create for foreign residents is trusted and acted upon.

As was indicated in Section 3.3.4, generalising from case study data is a contentious issue; see, for example, Gomm, Hammersley, and Foster (2000). However, other authors (e.g., Mitchell, 2000) point out that, if rigour has been demonstrated in the development of a theory from case study data, then it is fair to claim ‘theoretical generalisation’, and such
theoretical propositions can be tested and expanded on in other contexts. Theoretical generalisation specifies ‘the necessary connections among a set of theoretically significant elements manifested in some body of empirical data’ (Mitchell 2000: 178). This is the type of generalisation being claimed in this thesis. Thus, rather than predictive or causative insight, this case study aims to achieve some normative insight; the highlighting of significant categories in the data and the proposing of relationships between them in order to guide further enquiry. At the very least, it is hoped that other researchers will now have a list of categories to consider when analysing trust and Translation in other contexts and will have a new lens, in Figure 6–5, through which to view their data.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the aim of this chapter was to describe the abstract analysis that was carried out in this research project in order to create a convincing explanation for why issues of Translation were important to the 2011 disaster and why Translation issues could be important to other disaster contexts. As a first step in this abstract analysis, trust phenomena were observed in the case study data, and trust was shown to be important to how foreign residents communicated and gathered information in the 2011 disaster. Then, these phenomena were described and explained using the socio-cognitive lens of Castelfranchi and Falcone’s (2010) theory of trust. To perform this description and explanation, a detailed dataset was created (Appendix H), and analysis of this dataset showed the usefulness of this theoretical tool. Further analysis of this dataset went on to show that Translation, at times, could be considered as one or more components of that model. A further aspect of Castelfranchi and Falcone’s (2010) theory of trust – that of causal attribution and its relationship to future trust – was also introduced in the chapter. Translation was argued to be an important component in how well-informed trustors attribute the causes of success or failure of trust in a multilingual and multicultural context, and that Translation could, therefore, be used as a tool to ensure more appropriate causal attributions and to foster better future trust and trustworthiness.

In short, from all of the above, we can say that issues of Translation were important to the 2011 disaster and could be important in future disaster contexts because trust was highly significant to how foreign residents experienced communication and information-gathering in the 2011 disaster, because Translation was sometimes a component of that trust, and because Translation has been shown to be theoretically important in how reason-based trust is formed and improved on in contexts of communication and information gathering in which more than one language or culture are involved. Furthermore, in addition to
providing an answer to the research question, this chapter has demonstrated a theory that will allow researchers to systematically interrogate how people come to trust and continue to trust translators and interpreters, and the usefulness of this theory can now be tested and empirically verified in other contexts.
'There is one language that all languages speak, it is called translation.'

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Writer (1938-Present)
Chapter 7 – Conclusions

Identifying the contribution of this thesis to academic knowledge and the prospects for further research that this contribution has created

This final chapter begins, in Section 7.1, with an overview of the entire thesis; a summary of everything a reader needs to know to follow the arguments and narrative thrust of this research. This is followed, in Section 7.2, by a presentation of the contributions of this thesis to knowledge in empirical, methodological, and theoretical terms. Section 7.3 underscores that these contributions need to be understood within the context of their limitations, while Section 7.4 discusses the rival explanations to the final research question in this thesis that were at one time considered but then refuted in favour of the more viable explanation presented in the previous chapter. The thesis then finishes in Section 7.5 with some proposals for future research arising out of this thesis and an explanation of what will happen next in this research project.

7.1 An overview of this thesis

This thesis attempts to describe, understand, and explain the social phenomenon of Translation using the case of the community of foreign nationals resident in East Japan – a social system in which the phenomenon manifested – during the first year of the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (the 2011 disaster). In doing so, the thesis illustrates how foreign residents communicated and gathered information and how Translation formed part of these activities during the disaster and, therefore, answers the first two research questions. It also uses a socio-cognitive theory of trust as a theoretical lens to show that Translation was, at times, relevant to how these foreign residents reasoned about trust in the disaster and could be relevant to how they decide to trust in the future. As trust can be shown to be an important category in the 2011 disaster and in other disaster contexts, this proposes an answer to the final research question in this thesis; the argument advanced is that Translation was important because of its relationship to the concept of trust.

The scope of this thesis is limited largely to the 2011 disaster. This context was chosen because of the researcher’s own experience of the contextual setting; he was resident in Tokyo for the disaster. An ethnographically-informed case study, adapted from the work of Kaisa Koskinen (2008) and situated in a constructivist philosophical frame, was designed to explore the objects of enquiry within this context. Face-to-face, individual

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50 The phenomena of translation and interpreting being examined in this thesis have been operationalised from Section 5.3.5 onward as Translation with an uppercase T.
interviews with 28 participants from 12 nationalities made up the core primary data gathered using this methodology. These data along with other secondary data were analysed using a form of thematic analysis operationalised from Braun and Clarke (2006).

A review of the literature on the topic of Translation in disaster situations indicated that several themes would need to be addressed in this thesis. These themes centred on the profiles of translators and interpreters in disaster settings, the practical and ethical issues that they encounter, the ways to support and improve their work, and the voluntary capacity of much of these efforts. Themes also covered the methods of communication used in disasters – especially information and communication technology (ICT) – and how they correspond to collaborative translation, machine translation (MT), and translator and interpreter training.

The main findings from the thematic analysis of the gathered data addressed these themes and showed that Translator roles and their communicative methods were, indeed, significant to the experiences of foreign residents in the 2011 disaster. Mobile phones, Facebook, and word-of-mouth were the predominant methods of communication, while television news (delivered both traditionally and online), websites, and word-of-mouth were the main methods of information gathering. Mobile phones were portable and could be recharged in multiple ways, and Facebook provided an easy method to confirm another person’s safety. Television news and websites enabled foreign residents to gather information in multiple languages. At the same time, word-of-mouth helped foreign nationals to respond more effectively to the disaster, bond with the broader community, get advice in the disaster, and access useful information on which they could base their own disaster response decisions. However, problems with connectivity and power meant that mobile phones and other ICT could not be used as much as people wanted, and the conflicting impressions given by an overly calm Japanese news media and an overly sensationalistic overseas news media caused great confusion and stress for foreign residents. At the same time, language issues appeared in the data as a barrier to smooth communication, especially over public address systems and by word-of-mouth, and as a barrier to accessing the information that was being distributed through Japanese news media and websites.

The thesis also provided empirical evidence to show that Translation was not just present in this communicative scene, but that it was needed and, at times, beneficial. The thesis showed that Translation was a process of interlingual and intercultural transfer, dominated by the Japanese-English language pair, carried out mostly by volunteers known to the user, to create products that were not always received as translations, but that were valorised
when seen to produce timely information of adequate quality and when seen to come from trusted sources. The thesis showed that news, warnings over public address systems, nuclear-related information, and typical, Japanese disaster response procedures were the types of information that participants in this case study needed to have Translated. These topics were temporally relative, and information used to develop awareness of the disaster situation was the type of topic required most of all. These Translation efforts took place as part of a complex ecosystem involving a variety of actors – in particular, foreign and Japanese friends, acquaintances, and colleagues on-the-ground in the disaster zone working in a voluntary capacity – and in which communicative methods were rarely used in isolation. Nevertheless, translation technologies were found to be notable in their absence from this ecosystem.

The final argument of the thesis was to show, through abstract analysis, that Translation was important because of its relationship to the concept of trust. It argued that Translation was a part of certain people’s reasoning about trust in the 2011 disaster. Using Translation as an analytical category helped to better describe and explain how foreign residents came to trust in 19 separate instances observed in the case study data and could be used to help trustors more appropriately attribute the causes of success or failure of trust in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

7.2 The contribution of this thesis to knowledge

This thesis contributes to knowledge in three ways: empirically, methodologically, and theoretically. Along each dimension, it supports and develops existing knowledge as well as contributing new knowledge to the study of Translation in disaster situations. These contributions are summarised in Table 7–1 and discussed in detail thereafter.51

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51 The format of Table 7–1 has been adapted from Farndale (2004).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains of contribution</th>
<th>What has been supported?</th>
<th>What has been developed?</th>
<th>What is new?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Empirical evidence      | * The diversity and complexity of the methods of communication and information gathering in the 2011 disaster  
* The usefulness of pre-event, event, response, and recovery as ways to map the 2011 disaster in time  
* The importance of trust in disaster-related communication | * The testimony of disaster-affected communities in the 2011 disaster by adding the voices of foreign residents  
* The academy’s understanding of the 2011 communicative scene through a detailed presentation of how participants in this study communicated and gathered information | * Evidence that Translation was not only present as a phenomenon in the disaster but, at times, needed and beneficial  
* Evidence that foreign residents were not just receivers but producers of Translation in the disaster and were involved in these acts through a variety of channels in a largely voluntary, ad-hoc capacity on-the-ground  
* A 280,000-word corpus of anonymised, member-checked disaster-related interviews and a dataset of 49 passages attesting to the viability of the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model of trust; this corpus and dataset are available for future use once the participants’ ethical approval has been received | 
| Method                  | * The usefulness of the methodology outlined in Koskinen (2008) for applying an ethnographic frame to present a case study of a particular group of people | * The application of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, the use of vignettes to present data, and detail on ethnographic interview techniques | * Learning points on the importance of trust and on the value but occasional impracticality of the ethnographic interview method | 
| Theory                  | * The usefulness of the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) socio-cognitive theory of trust to describe and explain the phenomenon of trust | * The application of the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory to research questions in translation studies | * The idea that Translation can be proposed as a conceptual tool in the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model to create future trust in multilingual and multicultural contexts  
* A novel definition of Translation that can be used to interrogate other disaster contexts | 

Table 7.1: Contributions to knowledge made by this thesis
7.2.1 Empirical contribution

The thesis provides further empirical evidence to support the findings in other research that the methods of communication used in the 2011 disaster were diverse and interrelated in a complex ecosystem. (See, for instance, Jōhō shien purobono purattofōmu [2012], Sendai International Relations Association [2011].) It also provides empirical support for the usefulness of the way a disaster is mapped in time by WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (2012: 58). Though the precise temporal cut-offs are arbitrary, the broader categories of pre-event, event, response, and recovery were shown to represent well the experiences of the participants in this research (see Section 4.3.3). It also underlines with its evidence from participant data that trust is an important consideration in disaster-related communication (see Section 2.4.3). By conducting face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 28 foreign residents who experienced the disaster, in addition to the researcher’s own autoethnographic account of the disaster, this research documents and gives voice to the experiences of those who were affected by the 2011 disaster. Indeed, this thesis develops the overall body of Japanese disaster testimony because the voices of foreign nationals experiencing disaster in Japan are traditionally under-represented (see Sato, Okamoto, and Miyao [2009] or Takashima [2015]). The thesis also develops the academy’s understanding of the 2011 communicative scene by providing detailed empirical evidence for how participants in this research communicated and gathered information and for how they evaluated these methods (see Section 4.5). The contribution of this research is novel in that it is one of the first studies of the 2011 disaster to provide empirical evidence specifically of a role for Translation in the disaster and evidence for the fact that Translation was not only present as a phenomenon in the disaster, but that it was, at times, needed by and beneficial to those who experienced the events (see Sections 5.2 and 5.5). It also provides new evidence not currently available in other literature to show that foreign residents were not just receivers but producers of Translation in the disaster, and that they were involved in Translation through a variety of channels in a largely voluntary, ad-hoc capacity on-the-ground in the disaster zone (see Sections 5.4, 5.6, and 5.7). Finally, this thesis also contributes an anonymised and member-checked corpus of interview data on the 2011 disaster (totalling more than 280,000 words) as well as a new dataset of 49 passages of anonymised interview data that represent new empirical evidence supporting the viability of the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model of trust. This corpus of disaster-related interview data and dataset on trust will be available for use in other research projects once a request for the participants’ ethical approval has been made via the researcher.
7.2.2 Methodological contribution

By attempting to replicate the methodology set out in Koskinen (2008), this thesis supports the idea that applying a selection of ethnographic methods and being guided by an overall ethnographic ethos to present a case study of a particular group of people is useful. In particular, the work in this thesis supports the viability of many of the ethnographic methods and practical steps applied by Koskinen, the multiple levels at which she analysed data, as well as her understanding of the roles of the researcher, the contextual dependence of the work, and the final research product (see Section 3.4.1). However, the different context and objects of enquiry in this thesis also led to some developments of Koskinen’s method being made here. Specifically, this thesis showed how Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis could be applied as an analytical strategy, how vignettes could be used as a tool to present case study data, and how the ethnographic interview differs from other interview techniques (see Sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3). The implementation of Koskinen’s (2008) method in this thesis also presented an opportunity for new learning; it showed the importance of trust to the method and to its relationship to the emic and etic tensions inherent in any ethnographically-informed project, and it showed the value but occasional impracticality of the ethnographic interview method (see Section 3.7).

7.2.3 Theoretical contribution

In terms of a contribution to theory, this thesis gives support to the idea that the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) theory of trust is a useful way to describe and explain the phenomenon of trust (see Section 6.4). Furthermore, it develops the application of this theory by demonstrating that its conceptual tools and theoretical model are useful in the domain of translation studies for examining the role of Translation in multilingual and multicultural contexts of trust (see Section 6.5.1). Finally, this thesis proposes a new conceptual tool within the model; specifically it suggests a role for Translation in multilingual and multicultural contexts in creating informed decision-makers capable of accurately attributing the causes of success or failure of instances of trust and, therefore, generating appropriate future trust (see Section 6.5.3). In addition, this thesis creates a new definition of the phenomenon of Translation in the 2011 disaster (see Section 5.3.5) that could be used as a reference for interrogating translation or interpreting in other disaster contexts.

These contributions are significant for academic and practical reasons. Academically, the contributions listed above address many of the dominant themes present in the literature on translation, interpreting, and disaster (see Section 2.3). They centre on the roles of
Translators in a disaster setting, on some of the practical and theoretical issues that were encountered in this Translation work, and on how communicative methods were used to carry out this work. As such, these contributions are likely to be of interest to those academics engaged in ongoing conversations on these topics.

Practically, a thesis which contributes to knowledge by telling us more about the communicative behaviour of a particular group of people in a disaster setting and which suggests ways in which this behaviour might be improved is going to be of value to future disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. A large-scale earthquake disaster is likely to affect Tokyo soon: researchers at Japan’s Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology estimate a 70% probability of Tokyo being hit by a destructive magnitude-7-plus earthquake in the next 30 years; in contrast, researchers at the University of Tokyo’s Earthquake Research Institute estimate a 70% probability for such a disaster hitting Tokyo by 2016 and raise the probability of it happening within 30 years to 98% (Tōkyō Daigaku Jishin Kenkyūsho 2012). Regardless of the accuracy of the calculations themselves, it is clear that the threat to Tokyo in the near future is high. In terms of an impact on foreign nationals, the impact of a large-scale disaster hitting Tokyo is predicted to be much larger than the one described in this research, bearing in mind that the 2011 disaster most strongly affected a less-populated, rural area of Japan. More than 400,000 foreign nationals were recorded as being officially resident in Tokyo during the 2011 disaster (E-Stat 2011), and it is estimated that some 250,000 undocumented foreign residents are not included in these figures (Takashima 2015: 33). Thus, a large-scale disaster in Tokyo will likely impact on well over half-a-million foreign nationals from more than 100 countries of origin. The significance of this issue is further increased by the fact that Tokyo will host the Olympic Games in 2020. Despite all this, a major piece of research on disaster in Japan recently translated into English, Megaquake: How Japan and the World Should Respond by Tetsuo Takashima (2015), claims that sufficient preparations for how to deal with these foreign nationals in Tokyo, with their embassies and consulates, and with their families and concerned loved ones during a disaster are lacking. It is hoped that the contributions to knowledge of this thesis will be used by government authorities, disaster responders, or volunteers in Japan in advance of future disasters to better imagine how foreign nationals will communicate and gather information, to envisage a more effective role for Translation in these processes, and to ensure that the information that they provide is understood, trusted, and acted upon. (In an effort to encourage such a use, this thesis will be shared with the researcher’s contacts in Japanese government, in embassies in Japan, and in organisations working in the volunteer and humanitarian space; see Section 7.5.)
7.3 Limitations of the thesis

Of course, these contributions to knowledge need to be understood within the context of their limitations. This thesis is vulnerable to some criticisms. Firstly, this thesis contains no real predictive insight. Secondly, it is a small study that took place more than two years after the onset of the disaster, and the empirical support for the theoretical arguments being advanced in the thesis is even smaller. Thirdly, though ethnographically-informed, it does not include participant observation or the study of a culture. To a certain extent, each of these criticisms is valid, and each limits the significance of the overall contribution to knowledge. However, while the claims being made in the thesis must be moderated, these limitations do not prevent the thesis from advancing knowledge, as will be argued below.

7.3.1 Predictive insight

It is true that this thesis does not attempt to predict what may happen in a future disaster in Japan or elsewhere. As was indicated in Sections 3.3.4 and 6.5.3, this research was designed as a case study to increase experiential understanding and not to represent samples or extrapolate probabilities about cause-and-effect relationships. The only generalisation it aims for is the theoretical generalisation in which its theoretical propositions and arguments can be tested in further contexts. Moreover, claims of prediction from large-scale disaster contexts need to be treated with caution. Disasters are typically non-linear, extreme events; they are outliers containing complex causal relations that cannot be understood and represented easily. Looking at just three large-scale disasters in Japanese history – the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake, and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake – we can see the difficulty involved in predicting earthquake outcomes. In the first instance, most people died in fires. In the second, most people were killed by collapsing buildings. In the third, most people were lost by drowning. Lessons were learned after each disaster and preparedness measures were improved, but still each context brought with it new threats. Thus, rather than predictive insight, prescriptive insight may be better suited to the study of disaster. This thesis is philosophically or methodically equipped to try to understand the events and their contexts deeply, to prepare categories for consideration in future disasters, to shed empirical light on important phenomena, to draw conclusions, and to give advice, but, indeed, it does not make any claims to knowing what will happen in the next great Japanese disaster.
7.3.2 Study size and timing

This study is small. This was a function of the time and resources available, as well as of the aims and philosophical underpinnings of the research. It was shown in Section 3.6.5, though, that interviews with 28 research participants were suited to the study’s ethnographic aims and that holding these interviews two years after the onset of the disaster was within the bounds established in other disaster studies. Of course, a small study produced small empirical support for the theoretical propositions put forward in this study: only 19 passages of interview data indicated that including Translation as components in the theoretical model would help better describe and explain the trust phenomena that were being observed (see Section 6.5.1), and only 1 passage of interview data indicated a relationship between Translation and causal attributions for trust (see Section 6.5.3). Certainly, then, these theoretical relationships can only be claimed to be tenuously supported in the data. Nevertheless, it is still claimed that the empirical and theoretical findings of this thesis have value. In the common trade-off between broad and deep research, this thesis aimed for depth. Thus, it is not the claim that this thesis represents an understanding of the experiences of all the 670,000 foreign residents who experienced the 2011 disaster. However, this thesis does claim that the one year the researcher spent analysing this small body of data that was then member-checked by the participants led to a detailed and intimate understanding of the experiences of 28 foreign residents (29 including the researcher’s experience) and that this intimate understanding allowed the creation of a robust framework of analytical categories and some interesting theoretical propositions that can now be used as a basis for other research.

7.3.3 Participant observation and culture

This case study has been informed by ethnography, but its methodology did not include a period of participant observation in the field and it did not aim for the study of a culture. Do these missing points invalidate its claim to being ethnographically-informed? As was shown in Section 3.2.4, to answer ‘yes’ to this question would be to take an impoverished view of the possibilities and potential of an ethnographic approach, and Section 3.4 showed the many ways in which this thesis has called on ethnographic methods and an ethnographic ethos. Also, while the thesis did not study a culture, it did study a social group and this was shown to be a valid type of enquiry in ethnography’s social tradition. Moreover, in making these methodological explorations, this thesis has contributed to the academic discussion of how case study and ethnographic methodologies can be used to answer research questions in the domain of translation studies.
7.4 Rival explanations

The narrative thrust of this thesis came to be that trust was an important part of the communicative scene in the 2011 disaster for the foreign residents in this study and that, as Translation had a role to play in that trust, the phenomenon of Translation could be said to have been important, too. This explanation has been shown in this thesis to be a viable one but – working in a constructivist paradigm (see Section 3.5) – this should not be seen to be the only possible explanation. Other rival explanations were considered but were deemed to be less viable. These other explanations stemmed from some of the other dominant themes that were developed over the stages of analysis in this research and will be briefly outlined here.

7.4.1 News translation

News appeared regularly as a theme in the interview data. This can be seen especially in the early phases of coding, when units of meaning relating to framing and sensationalism were valued (see the thematic map represented in Figures 3–2 and 3–3.). News media were significant to these meanings, and an idea at these earlier phases could have been to argue for the importance of Translation by showing the role that it played in the news cycle or in how news was received or created during the 2011 disaster. The topic of news translation is relatively developed in translation studies (see, for instance, Davier [2014], Doorslaer [2010], Schäffner [2010], or Van Rooyen [2013]) and it is likely that conceptual tools and theoretical frameworks to perform abstract analysis around this theme would have been available. However, while there were ample data in the interviews concerning the reception of news and some of the issues brought about by the presence, absence, or quality of the Translation of this news, there were no data available to the researcher on the process of creation of news in the disaster. In addition, as the codes around news related to meanings such as sensationalism and framing, it seemed as if the theme of trust overarched news translation and would be a more viable way to answer the final research question.

7.4.2 Ethics

Another strong theme that could have contended to be a rival explanation for the importance of Translation was ethics. Ethics is a lively topic in academic debate in translation studies (see, for example, Pym [2012] or Venuti [1998]) and there would have been theoretical concepts from these debates that could have been drawn on in the abstract analysis in this thesis. With this in mind, then, would it have been viable to make an ethical argument that Translation was important in the 2011 disaster because it is right that all
people affected by a disaster – whatever their linguistic or cultural background – should have equal access to communication and information? Certainly, an ethical question arose from the fact that foreign residents in this study experienced linguistic and cultural barriers (see Section 5.5). If a basic principle of emergency information is that it should be delivered in terms clear to the recipients (Auf Der Heide 1989), then it would seem that this ethical principle was being contravened. Further coding relating to units of meaning such as the relevance of polyglotism or pictorial rather than verbal communication to some of the participants’ experiences (see the thematic map represented in Figures 3–2 and 3–3) began to put into question whether Translation was the only means by which to make emergency information clear to the recipients. Would encouraging foreign residents of Japan to learn Japanese or would using pictures, icons, or other non-verbal communication tools be better ethical choices? In this research project, the answer to this question turned out to be ‘no’. Firstly, even those who could speak Japanese well still experienced linguistic and cultural barriers (see Tables 5–1 or 5–6 where participants who evaluated their Japanese abilities highly still experienced barriers). Secondly, while pictorial representations of disaster-related information were praised as effective by some (e.g., Participants 2 and 5), they were criticised by others for being unclear (Participant 15), disturbing (Participant 13), or interculturally ineffective (Participant 24). Once again, then, using the concept of trust appeared to be a more viable way to answer the final research question.

7.4.3 Translation ecology

The final dominant theme whose explanatory power for this thesis came to be refuted revolves around the emerging concept of translation ecology. Proposed by Cronin (2003) as a way for translation to protect the indigenous knowledge and conceptual tools of minority languages, it was taken up as a theoretical construct by scholars mainly in China, and in particular by Xu (2009) in his book of the same name. This Chinese scholarship moved the concept more toward a study of how the mechanisms of translation interact with their surrounding environment and how ecological processes can be used as ways to analyse translation phenomena (see Cao [2011] for more on this). The analogy of an ecosystem appeared in the interview data (see Participant 13) and was taken up again in subsequent analysis, especially in relation to the complex ways in which foreign residents communicated and gathered information in the disaster and the complex ways in which

52 Specifically, from Table 5–6 we can see that Participant 12 (whose self-evaluated Japanese skill was 27/40), Participant 5 (whose self-evaluated Japanese skill was 26/40), Participant 6 (whose self-evaluated Japanese skill was 24/40), and Participant 2 (whose self-evaluated Japanese skill was 23/40) all still spoke in their interviews of experiencing linguistic or cultural barriers.
these communicative methods interrelated (see Section 5.7.5). Thus, a potential answer to why Translation was important in the 2011 disaster could have been that it was important because, when it was absent, the communicative ecosystem for foreign residents in the disaster broke down. There were two problems, though, with pursuing this argument. Firstly, the conceptual tools with which to make it were, at the time of writing, largely available only in Chinese, a language the researcher does not speak. Secondly, and more significantly, units of meaning relating to ecosystems or other ecological mechanisms appeared much less frequently and much less compellingly in the data than meanings related to trust. As a result, an answer to the third research question using the concept of translation ecology was refuted in favour of one centring on the phenomenon of trust.

In conclusion, while this section showed that these other major themes in the data were not appropriate ways to answer the research questions at this time in this thesis, they do suggest avenues for future research. Identifying potential trajectories for future work arising out of this research involving these and other themes will be dealt with in the following final section.

### 7.5 Future work

A first proposal for future work is to test the theoretical relationship between Translation and trust in another context to see if it is a viable way to describe and explain the phenomena observed in another disaster. As was explained in Section 3.6.5, the researcher travelled to New Zealand in the course of this project and, therefore, the 2010/2011 Canterbury Earthquakes would constitute a logical next case and could provide interesting comparative data.

A second proposal arises out of the finding in this study that those people engaged in Translation were often volunteers on-the-ground working in an ad-hoc capacity. This suggests a need for translation scholars to think of ways to better support Translators working in ad-hoc capacities without the usual professional supports. For instance, simple improvements like the greater availability of multilingual disaster-related wordlists, term bases, or translation memory and MT tools at local governments and linked NPOs in Japan would likely be effective. Similarly, a greater awareness of technologies to allow Translators to work and collaborate at a distance might also allow for more Translation on-the-ground in disaster situations in Japan. More importantly, though, there is a need to make disaster response teams and other officials more aware of the importance of Translation to the work that they do and to train them to work more effectively with Translators. This is a contribution that the discipline of translation studies could make in
preparation for a future large-scale disaster in Japan. Indeed, including Translators in the planning of international interventions in Japan and elsewhere could help to mitigate some of the linguistic and cultural barriers that have been highlighted in this research.

A third proposal is to look in more detail at the process of news translation in Japan with respect to disaster. This study has revealed that the reception of television and radio news was problematic in the 2011 disaster. An ethnographically-informed study of a Japanese media outlet’s disaster response procedures (or, equally, the response of an overseas outlet based in Japan) could reveal important information about the role Translation plays / could play / should play in disaster situations. Linked to this, the present research has shown that emergency warnings delivered over television and public address systems in Japan were significant but, at times, linguistically or culturally lacking. Studies on the intercultural reception of warnings (especially in relation to culturally-bound features such as the use of sound, colour, and image) could be beneficial. One suggestion is to use eye-tracking technology or human-computer interaction studies to better understand how existing Japanese emergency warnings are received by foreign nationals and to understand whether or not they could be improved.

A final proposal for future research is to attempt to establish on a broader scale whether Translation is, indeed, more ethically appropriate than polyglotism or than pictorial and other non-verbal forms of communication in disaster settings. This study was small and was not philosophically or methodologically equipped to generalise to populations or universes. What it did do was to create frames for questioning and interrogating data. Within this frame, it could be shown that Translation was preferable to learning Japanese or to using non-verbal forms in communicating with the foreign residents in this case study. However, future studies of Translation in disaster settings would hold greater weight if it could be shown on a broader scale that, indeed, Translation is to be preferred to other solutions in multilingual and multicultural disaster communication.

In practical terms, one final step in this research project remains: to distribute the findings of this research outside of the academy. The findings of this research could be used to build on the steps that have already been taken since 2011 to improve the linguistic and cultural support available to foreign residents of Japan during disasters. Such improvements include: the research being undertaken at Hirosaki University into a form of controlled language called ‘Easy Japanese’ for use in disaster-related communication; the disaster-related information being made available in multiple languages through the collaborative translation facilitated by the ‘Minna no Hon'yaku’ platform; the free interpreting services over a dedicated helpline targeted at foreign residents in times of disaster being sponsored
by the Japan National Tourism Organization. To add, then, to such efforts, English-language and Japanese-language executive summaries of the present thesis will be prepared and shared with the researcher’s contacts in Japanese local government and NPOs (in Tokyo, Sendai, and Nagoya), in embassies in Japan (currently the embassies of the 12 nationalities represented in this study), in the Japanese National Tourist Office, the Japanese National Institute of Information and Communications Technology, and the Japanese Fire and Disaster Management Agency. These documents will briefly present the thesis and its findings in an effort to convince these parties that Translation was needed and beneficial in the 2011 disaster and that it could help better support Japan’s growing population of foreign residents in future disasters. More importantly, the summaries will provide practical recommendations on how to better communicate with and provide information to foreign residents in a disaster. The summaries will include the following main recommendations:

- **Use long-term foreign residents as a resource in your strategies for disaster-related communication.** Newly- and recently-arrived foreign nationals looked to long-term foreign residents for support in the 2011 disaster. They did so because these long-term residents were regarded as trustworthy, possessed linguistic, cultural, and locally-specific knowledge, and were on-the-ground in places where other mediators were unavailable. See long-term foreign residents as a network of first contact points; coordinate with embassies or consulates in Japan to provide these long-term residents with disaster-related information that they can distribute in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways to the wider foreign community.

- **Do not focus your communicative strategy on optimising only one or several methods of communication.** Information in the 2011 disaster passed through a complex ecosystem of multiple and diverse communicative methods, and some well-established methods like radio programmes and government websites were not used by participants in this research. Rather than expending resources to optimise one method for communicating information to foreign residents, ensure that messages can be tailored easily to simultaneous distribution through multiple channels and ensure that redundancy is built into the strategy; if one method fails or becomes blocked, another method should be in place to take up the slack.

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• **Ensure that embassies in Japan, Japanese local authorities, and local multilingual support centres have necessary disaster-related information.** Publicising and ensuring access to information in a disaster is as important as its production. Many useful Translated resources were not known about by foreign residents in the 2011 disaster. If Translated information is made available to the three parties listed here, and if these parties cooperate and share information with each other, the chance of foreign residents experiencing linguistic and cultural barriers will be reduced.

• **Put measures in place to support the work of volunteer Translators.** Much Translation in the 2011 disaster was carried out by volunteers working in ad-hoc capacities without the usual professional supports. Prepare multilingual disaster-related wordlists and term bases – especially including relevant scientific and nuclear terminology – as well as manuals on how to use free, online translation memory and MT tools. Store these resources at embassies, local authorities, and local multilingual support centres. These resources will then be available to help volunteers work more speedily, consistently, and collaboratively. Furthermore, train disaster response teams and other officials on how to work with volunteer Translators, and prepare mental health care for these volunteers, who will be as stressed and vulnerable as the people they are setting out to help.

• **Focus on adequate rather than high levels of quality in Translation.** The need for speedy Translated information surpassed the need for quality Translated information in the 2011 disaster. Focus on reducing institutional impediments to the fast production of Translated information (e.g., multiple checks before publication) and consider the implementation of the technologies listed in the prior bullet point to increase speed, improve consistency, and facilitate collaboration in Translation.

• **Consider the importance of trust when developing your strategies for disaster-related communication.** Trust was extremely important to how foreign residents experienced the 2011 disaster, especially in guiding their information-gathering activities and their decisions on how to respond to the disaster. Moreover, Translation was found to be an element in their reasoning about whether to trust people and information or not. When developing your disaster-related communication for foreign residents, Translate not only the message but also include the source of the information and why it should be trusted; this will better inform the foreign residents and help move them toward a decision to trust you.

• **Make provision for Translation over all the phases of a disaster from pre-event, to event, to response, and then on to recovery.** Translating emergency warnings and instructions is important and beneficial and receives a relatively large amount of
attention. However, foreign residents continued to experience linguistic and cultural barriers long after the 2011 disaster had moved into the recovery phase, especially in terms of understanding the overall disaster situation, carrying out various important administrative procedures, and accessing support.

- Include reasons when giving foreign residents instructions about how to respond to a disaster. It was not only linguistic barriers that impacted on the experiences of foreign residents of the 2011 disaster. Cultural barriers were a significant feature, too, and this was true even for long-term foreign residents. Do not assume that foreign residents will approach disasters with the frames of reference or manners of response that would be characteristic of Japanese nationals. Basic instructions (e.g., to stay indoors during an earthquake) may be culturally unfamiliar or counterintuitive to foreign residents. Including reasons for these actions (e.g., to stay indoors because modern Japanese buildings can withstand shaking up to X threshold and because the risk of injury increases outdoors) may help to convince foreign residents of the appropriateness of the instructions.

- See any community-building activity as an element of disaster preparation. Trusted friends and colleagues carried out much of the Translation in the 2011 disaster and supported other foreign residents in their response and recovery. Thus, any efforts made to strengthen the bonds of community or to forge the links between foreign and Japanese residents and among foreign residents themselves will benefit disaster preparation and response.

Distributing these executive summaries outside the academy is important to this research because, to quote Koskinen (2010):

No matter how interesting [the] findings scientific Translation Studies can unearth, no matter how sharply critical Translation Studies reflects on the foundations of TS research programmes and on the state of the art in the professional world, none of this is of much value unless we are able to communicate these beyond our own small cadre of TS scholars. (Koskinen 2010: 23)
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NHK report on another Philippine national who experienced the 2011 disaster in Miyagi.
The interview transcripts and all other datasets in these appendices may only be re-used in further research with the express permission and ethical approval of the relevant research participants.

Please contact the researcher at

patrick.cadwell2@mail.dcu.ie

to make the necessary arrangements.

Thank you.
APPENDIX A: Research Ethics Committee letter of approval
Dr. Sharon O'Brien
School of Applied Languages & Intercultural Studies
3rd July 2013

REC Reference: DCUREC/2013/148
Proposal Title: Translation in Crisis: an Ethnographically-Informed Study of the Linguistic Needs of Foreign Nationals in the Great East Japan Earthquake
Applicants: Dr. Sharon O'Brien, Mr. Patrick Cadwell

Dear Sharon,

Further to review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Dr. Donal O'Mathuna
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee
APPENDIX B: Topics sent to participants prior to interview
Below are the four main topics that I hope to cover in our talk together. I have included some questions for each topic to illustrate how our conversation might develop.

**A. Your experiences of communication and information gathering:**

1. Tell me about your experience of the 2011 disaster in Japan.
2. How did you communicate with the important people in your life during the disaster?
3. How did you find out information about the things you needed during the disaster?
4. How did power and connectivity affect your ability to communicate?
5. What websites provided information specifically to foreigners in the disaster?
6. What were your thoughts on social media before the disaster? Did that opinion change following the disaster?
7. Were there aspects of the disaster that you feel you did not get enough information about?

**B. Your links to your local community in Japan**

8. Did you feel part of your local community in Japan before the disaster?
9. Were you aware of any slogans designed to build community response after the disaster?
10. Were you aware of any other efforts to build community response after the disaster?
11. Before the events of 2011, how prepared did you feel for a natural disaster?
12. What disaster information had your local authorities (neighbourhood association, ward office, city office, etc.) given you before the disaster?
13. What contact did you receive from your local authorities (neighbourhood association, ward office, city office, etc.) after the onset of the disaster?
14. Is there anything that would have made you feel better-prepared for the disaster in 2011?

**C. General:**

15. Is there anything else you’d like to mention in relation to experiences or needs in 2011 or your feelings of community in Japan?

**D. Your feelings on the research process:**

16. How did talking about your experience of the 2011 disaster today make you feel?
17. What benefits or burdens do you think talking about your experience of the disaster could bring to you, if any?
APPENDIX C: Anonymised and abridged log of data gathering
2013/7/1
Made first request for interviews [to pilot participants] today. Was nervous to push the send button. Need to rethink how to say I am only interviewing people over the age of 20. Feel afraid that I will only get participants in Tokyo and tried to send signal to [redacted] that I’m looking to meet people who were farther north. [redacted] I found myself editing the emails I sent - wherever I put ‘interview’, I changed it to things like ‘speak to’ or ‘talk with’. [redacted] This could be interesting to talk about in terms of methodology.

2013/7/2
I messaged [redacted] (administrator of a Facebook Group) to ask his permission to directly message members of the group to ask for interviews. I have realised that the only way I will have to guess who might still be based in Japan is by the information open on their Facebook pages. I have been quite surprised at how much information people share publicly. I was also struck by how many Japanese names there are on the list of members. I will have to avoid these and possibly use only when another bicultural name appears or by their avatar. This could be an interesting point for my definition of foreignness.

2013/7/3
Received my first pilot interview confirmation today. [redacted] will meet me [redacted]. Her email said, “I was based in Tokyo so won't have been as affected as people in the immediate area (I looked at your questions), but am happy to meet with you.” This indicates that she is already making some assumptions about what I am looking for and what will be useful to me, based on how I have phrased my interview topics. I may need to think about what it is in the list of interview topics and questions that is causing this, and prepare to nudge her to consider whether her situation might have been more relevant to my research than she thinks. I told her that I was interested in talking to people based in Tokyo as a comparison with those further north. I also made another request for interview to [redacted]. I found that I wanted to take charge of the location because I was going to another city. I also wanted to try to get somewhere quieter than the cafe suggested by [the first pilot participant].

2013/7/4
Received my second pilot interview confirmation today. [redacted] will meet me in hotel in [redacted]. So happy he has confirmed as he was right in the disaster zone in Furukawa. He happens to be in Japan right now, so I said in my mail about him introducing me to other foreigners in Japan in the hope that he may mention my project while he is over there. I am really nervous each time I ask some sort of favour like this from participants. I feel that the whole project is so fragile at this stage that if I annoy even one person with my demands, the whole thing could fall apart. [redacted] came back to me saying that his contacts would all be Tokyo-based, but he also suggested contacting a former DCU student, [redacted], who is now in Iwate. This could be a really good gatekeeper for me, so I mailed him immediately at his old dcu address. I am concerned he won't get my mail at this address, but I will tweet him if I hear nothing in a few weeks. I am again a bit shocked at how much private information you can quickly find about people online - one google search and I had his whole CV. Again, I was concerned that I might be pushing too hard, but I feel I need to overcome this natural tendency not to want to ask for help. I am going to need lots of help to get these interviews done, so I had better get used to asking. Still no word from [redacted] over Facebook. If I hear nothing from him by mid-July, I will start messaging other members of the group even though he, as administrator, will not have given his permission. I feel this is all a bit ethically grey, but the people I will message all have open facebook profiles and I will not force anyone to answer and they will be able to drop out at any time. I also tried to track down [redacted] in Sendai was at the time. I found him and he still works for [in Japan]. I felt like a real stalker trying to get his contact details. I will write a physical letter to him directly as the email addresses all seemed to be some central destination. I was afraid my contact would not get to him or would be filtered
through institutional rules and regulations. I hope to talk to him in a private capacity.

2013/7/5
As I have not received any response from [redacted] (two cold-call contacts), I am considering opening up my Facebook profile more, using my real name and photo and including some DCU-related information as a way of perhaps bartering trust. I am wondering if they are having difficulty establishing any sort of credentials for me because I have such a guarded online presence. I am thinking that I need to give a little more if I am expecting to receive. I am also struggling with writing the physical letter to [redacted] - I want to use DCU official logos etc to make my request for an interview look more formal, but I am afraid that this will misrepresent my intentions or make him more reluctant to commit to talking to me. I cannot yet imagine where on the official-to-personal clime my approaches will turn out to be most effective.

2013/7/8
I posted the letter to [redacted] in Sendai. I am really holding out a lot of hope that he will agree to speak with me. I think he could be a great gatekeeper to other foreigners in Sendai and to the local government and NPOs based there. I think the fact that he has given seminars and done interviews could go either way for me - he may be tired of talking about his experiences. Also, contacting him directly at work could be seen as an intrusion, but I have no other way of contacting him. I hope that the letter will look formal but inviting and that the inclusion of a reference to developing new translation tools as an aim of the project might help it seem that talking to me could be useful and different (even if this aim is really a far off, abstract one at this stage - though I made it sound more concrete purposely). I contacted all my [old work colleagues]. I really didn’t want any link between my former life and this project, but I am truly afraid that I will not get any interviewees to speak to. I know that some of the people [redacted] may have appropriate contacts. The cost to me is that they will probably tell others in [redacted] about my trip. [redacted] I’m still struggling to think how I might get access to the US military. Think the American Forces Network might be a better target, but it is hard to find contact information, bearing in mind that the offices and websites are run from government departments in the US - the walls seem pretty high and the likelihood of reaching a Japanese representative pretty low. [redacted] My trip to New Zealand to work with [redacted] was confirmed. [redacted]

2013/7/9
I got two responses to my requests for introductions: [redacted] sound really interesting - in Tokai, Aussie and Hawaiian. They might have really interesting things to say. Both guys are married to Japanese women, live in Japan, and have been there for ~20 years and ~10 years respectively. They are both fluent in Japanese. I really hope these interviews take place. I’m more taken now with the idea of trying to meet people in a variety of locations throughout East Japan to get multiple perspectives. [redacted] Reworked my interview topic and question sheet. Found myself making them much more explicit and full of prompts. I guess that as the time approaches, I’m more afraid that the participants will not talk about what I want them to talk about, so leaving the topics vague and the control of the research setting so much in their hands is becoming more difficult for me. I am trying to compromise by leaving the main topics as is, but adding notes to myself for follow-up questions or prompts. In addition, I added questions more specifically about social media now that a trip to New Zealand has been confirmed. I found myself getting really stressed trying to book flights to Japan and New Zealand. The stress is coming from not wanting to spend too much money, not wanting to be in the field too long, but still trying to keep flexibility so that I can respond to spontaneous chances. [redacted]

2013/7/10
I booked my tickets for Japan and New Zealand today. It was a frustrating experience. I was trying to accommodate so many agendas (the need to have sufficient data before going to New Zealand, the need to be in New Zealand enough working days to make it look like I’m going there to work not holiday, trying to get a ticket that was not outrageously expensive and that I would be able to afford if my funding falls through). [redacted]

2013/7/11
Only word on potential interviewees today was from [redacted]. Though she will try to help me, she feels she does not know many foreigners who were in Japan in 2011. I mentioned how even one extra person could snowball into other introductions in the hope that she will try. [redacted] I made up meishi in English and Japanese today. I found myself trying to put the focus on me as an individual researcher and not representing the university officially. I do not want people to think I am employed by the university, though I do want my cards to look professional and somewhat official.

2013/7/12
[redacted] came through and has introduced me to [redacted] in Tokyo and [redacted] (who is Australian[redacted] in Katsuta and Mito. [redacted] I spent almost the whole day trying to word an e-mail to [redacted] in [redacted] University to arrange a meeting and get introductions to more potential participants and to try to get an introduction to Miyagi International Association. I was going to write directly to MIA, but I feel that my contact might have a better chance through some gatekeeper in Sendai as MIA is under a government umbrella. I hope that [redacted] knows someone or can help in some way. I really want to get to talk to MIA now as they have published a detailed report of all their activities in the disaster and it features lots of feedback from foreigners themselves - more so than some of the other reports I have read. But what took all the time in the e-mail was trying to come up with the right wording for the conditions I need the interview participants to meet. I wanted to say 日系人 but I was afraid that it might have a derogatory or negative feeling like 在日. In the end I got [redacted]’s advice and settled on cumbersome but neutral expressions. I did not get a native Japanese speaker to check my final e-mail because I feel if there are mistakes or odd expressions, it will remind them that I am a foreigner trying to speak their language and they might see me more kindly. However, I don’t want to risk major miscommunication or offence, so not getting things proof read is a risk.

2013/7/16
[redacted] and [redacted] from [redacted] University came back to me. [redacted] seemed to have no help to offer but still wants to meet with me. [redacted], however, said he should have a few foreigners to introduce to me and asked me to give him some time to sort out a possible introduction to MIA. I am really glad I asked now as I had wondered whether I was being too forward. But I feel he could be a possible entry point to talking to someone in MIA. Still no response from [redacted]. I think I will change my Facebook profile to my real name and photo and try contacting [members of the Facebook group] once my profile is more open. [redacted] I am finding it hard to keep asking for help and favours but it is likely to be through the favours that I get the best / most results.

2013/7/18
[redacted] in Sendai agreed to speak to me and introduced me to his colleague in Sendai with a view to introducing even more potential participants. I feel this is a big win for me and gives me more confidence that I will have data from people who were right in the thick of things, not just in Tokyo. It shows the value of cyber stalking as I found [redacted]'s work address to send him the letter by following down various threads of his online presence. Otherwise, I would have had no way of contacting him directly and would have missed out on this opportunity. I'm meeting with my first pilot interview participant [redacted] today. I'm nervous. I'm particularly worried about running over time as she has scheduled the interview during her working day. If possible, I should try to meet people
outside office hours to feel more relaxed about how long the interview will run. I will have a post-interview evaluation sheet of how I think things went in a separate document.

2013/7/19
I woke to find that [redacted] had mailed me back via Facebook. This again feels like a big win. I am so glad that I waited and didn’t contact others in the group without his approval. He said that my mail had gone into Facebook’s secret ‘other’ folder that no-one seems to look at. I was taken aback by his strong caution about contacting people who had experienced the disaster. “As for me, I don’t mind. I was here and I also volunteered up north. I’d be glad to talk about anything you’re interested in. Mind you, quite a bit of it (for anyone who went through it and saw the worst of it) is extremely emotional, even now, and not easy to talk about. For some people it is inappropriate to ask too many questions. I myself might find it very difficult to talk about certain aspects and might refuse to open up about those things. It was an awful experience, something that a lot of us would prefer to forget. Please do keep that in mind, especially since you won’t see any of the damage anymore and it might physically seem as if everything has returned to normal. But the emotional damage is still very much there.” Along with the emotional aspect to yesterday’s interview with [redacted], it makes me even more grateful to the REC for making me think deeply about the mental health aspects of this research project. I think I may have taken it lightly at first, but now that it has started I am starting to see that it was a damaging experience for many people. It was interesting how being able to then say in a further email to [redacted] that I myself experienced the disaster and was trying to be aware of people’s boundaries and emotional health changed the tone of our interaction. “To give you some background, I was living and working in Tokyo at the time of the 2011 disaster, and it had a significant impact on my personal and professional life. Based on this experience, I will do my best to be sensitive to the well-being and conscious of the boundaries of any person who agrees to speak with me. But I am very grateful to you for taking this care and giving this caution to a researcher that contacted you out of the blue. I have tried to put in place a few mechanisms to be respectful of the people who speak with me. The interviews that I have done so far (with people who experienced the earthquake but are now home in Ireland) have been conversations where the interviewee has had a lot of control over the direction of the conversation. I have attached a list of topics that I use as a guideline, but really I usually only manage the first question and then just occasionally follow-up or probe about some of the other topics on this list related to communication, information and community. Also, all participants in the research will be kept anonymous to the best of my ability and can drop out at any time up until I submit my thesis. Finally, all participants will receive a near-to-final version of the document to read before I submit to ensure that they are comfortable with how I have represented their voices.” It is very interesting how valuable being able to include my own lived experience has been to breaking down some barriers and building trust with participants has been. I am feeling guilt, however, at how much more my participants have done to volunteer and be part of the response that I did. [redacted]

2013/7/24
I spent the last three days transcribing my interview with [the first pilot participant]. It took much longer than I thought. However, despite being slow going, I felt it was productive because I was already making initial reflections on the data as I went along. I think these first impressions could end up being very useful. I added these first reflections to my interview record sheet. I tried a variety of methods: reading the slowed audio that I listened to over earphones to the Dragon Dictation free voice recognition app and then tidying up; listening to the slowed audio and typing with no stopping; listening to the slowed audio and starting and stopping every few words. Whichever I did, I seemed to take about 1 hour to transcribe 5 minutes of audio to a level of formatting etc that I was happy with. I feel the typing as I listen, stop, start will work best when I’m at my desk, and the voice recognition app will be best in the field - I will be able to do it on my phone and use the down time I
will have waiting for trains, etc. I am getting nervous now that fewer people than I hope will interview with me. After all those big wins where people expressed a willingness to be interviewed, I have since not had any contact from any of them confirmed a day to meet. Maybe it is still too far off. But after the euphoria of last week thinking I’d get 20 or more participants, I’m now downgrading my expectations to 10, if I’m lucky. [redacted]

2013/8/6
The transcription was time-consuming and draining again for the interview I did with [the second pilot participant]. More so because it was nearly double the length of [redacted]’s interview. Still I think I got some interesting data, and listening intently as I typed did help me spot some points I had missed initially. I feel that the ethnographic-interview style of leaving so much control in the participant’s hands is a gamble, but it means I have a much richer context to their answers, and they give me data that I wasn’t even expecting but that I think will be useful. I put a few more feelers out for potential participants today. I met [redacted] for lunch and he said he might know someone who was in Tokyo for the disaster and who is now back in Ireland who might be interested in speaking to me. Also, [redacted] put a message out on Facebook to former DCU students saying that any appropriate candidates should contact me. Finally, I contacted two people on the [redacted] Facebook Group: [redacted] I contacted only these two because they were the only members of the group for whom I could use their profiles to establish that they were in Japan at the time of the disaster and now appear to be in East Japan (further north than Tokyo as I think I will have enough Tokyo participants).

2013/8/8
[redacted] (formerly of the [redacted] Embassy) got back to me and agreed to meet. I was very surprised at this and feel like it’s a big bonus. I’m interested in hearing his more institutional perspective. It was interesting, though, that he said he was happy to meet and talk about his “personal experiences” of the earthquake. Wondering if this was a signal that he could not / would not talk policy, I made sure to highlight in my return mail how much control I want to give participants of the conversation. [redacted] So many of my results so far have come from a mixture of luck, good timing and following up on potential leads quickly.

2013/8/12
Came in today to a surprise reply on Facebook from [redacted] (in Ibaraki). As happened with [redacted], because we aren’t friends on Facebook, my message to her went in to her “Other” folder and was not noticed by her for a long time. This is a disadvantage of trying to contact people out-of-the-blue via Facebook and may be a reason why [redacted] never got back to me. [redacted]

2013/8/14
I had a Skype call with [my contact at the University of Auckland] today (9pm my time). It was really useful in the sense that he will organize a seminar for me and introduce me to people in Christchurch who may have interesting views on translation and disaster. However, I definitely felt deflated after. I thought I had my methodology down pretty well, but I did a bad job of explaining it to him. [redacted]

2013/8/19
[redacted] my friend from Japan was in Dublin for one night. We would have had time to record an interview for sure, but I did not want to ask him when he was tired after a day of meetings. I would prefer to talk to him at ease and get as much detail as possible in an unpressured way as I can when in Japan. It was funny, but I told him that I would not speak to him casually about the research as I did not want him to start talking about his experiences while I was not recording. This is a definite issue for ethnography - especially
when you start to know your participants in other ways outside the research setting.
[redacted]

2013/8/25
[redacted] forwarded me a mail from one of the DCU graduates that she had put the call out to on Facebook. This person, [redacted], seems willing to speak with me. My concern is that I do not know where she was located during the disaster, nor do I know where she is now. I hope that she will have been somewhere that is in my target area and not in the west of Japan. I have contacted her with these questions and will arrange to meet her once she meets the criteria.

2013/8/27
I am starting to feel nervous that the Sendai interviewees will not transpire and that my study will end up being weakened by its bias outside the worst of the disaster zone. [redacted] As it happens, the very day I get nervous about Sendai, I get an e-mail from [redacted] in [redacted] University just asking about the dates of my trip and offering help. I quickly replied that I hope to see him while I am in Sendai and sent out the hint again that I would love introductions to more foreigners.

2013/8/29
[redacted] got back to me and said he could introduce me to 5 foreigners in Miyagi: 3 from Mongolia, 1 from China and 1 from Bangladesh. I am really interested to hear an Asian perspective on the disaster and I think having Asian voices will strengthen my aim of representation. However, it is a sign of my own bias (and perhaps of my view of the demographics of the foreign community in Japan) that I am worried that these people will not be able to speak English. I must prepare questions in Japanese just in case. (However, ideas of accuracy and correspondence with the English versions could be a problem. Perhaps an ethnographic-style interview with the interviewee in control could mitigate this.) [redacted]

2013/8/31
Presenting a poster at EST 2013 in Germersheim turned out to be really useful for my project. I really believe that many of the people who ended up looking at my poster and talking to me would never have come to a full presentation of mine with all the competing parallel sessions going on that would likely be more related to their disciplinary interests. In the end, I think a poster was the best possible form of communication for me and such a wide-ranging conference. As it turned out, too, I was able to get introductions to two new research participants [redacted] in Japan just by having people with no link to Japan or disaster studies, etc. just coming by and saying, “Oh I have a friend who was in Japan at the time - I’ll introduce you.” And then they did follow through. This experience has made me aware again of the benefit of talking to anyone and everyone about your research - you never know where a potential contact or some inspiration could arise. It has also made me see the great positive effect of follow-through. I have made a vow to send on things or make introductions from now on whenever I promise to.

2013/9/6
I had an interesting experience today while booking hotels for my trip in Japan. Up till now, I have pretty much been booking the cheapest places I could find. But then when I was looking in Sendai, I had found a place that seemed good, but then I noticed from the map that it was near the water. And suddenly, I didn’t want to stay there anymore. It really was an almost subconscious process - I saw the blue on the Google map and something said, “Stop! Think!” I then tried to get past this somewhat emotional reaction and thought calmly about the real chance of there being a problem staying near the water when in Sendai. But I guess I have just read so much about how destructive the tsunami was that I just couldn’t think calmly and ended up booking a hotel nearer the centre of town.
2013/9/10

[redacted] came back to me with two friends of his who might be willing to answer my questions. I was especially eager to talk to one guy who was in Fukushima at the time with a group of German students. I really think he could have an interesting perspective that could really shed light on translation issues. I also signed up to volunteer for two days in Ishinomaki with the charity [redacted]. I think this will be a real chance for me to make some small contribution to the recovery effort, but it will also allow me to experience one of the worst-affected areas first hand and may even allow me to meet more potential research participants. [redacted] I am starting to wish that I had not told so many people that I may have up to 25 or 30 participants now. I feel I may have created expectations in those around me that such a large number will end up actually talking to me. I think it would be quite natural if not all the people who have expressed in or agreed to an interview turn up on the day. There are just so many other factors to take into account - scheduling problems, their motivation, the weather, etc. Anyway, I am trying to remain positive and will not turn down any possible interview chance, even though I am also starting to wonder how I will fit all these people spread around the country in. [redacted] I decided to contact the AFN as well as the Tokyo Metropolitan and Aichi Prefectural Governments to request a language-provider side viewpoint. I also found out that [redacted] had tried to inform me of a potential interviewee via the [redacted] message board. I hadn’t checked the board since early August so I was annoyed with myself for missing this. But it all worked out as she still sent me the person’s e-mail address and I apologized for my oversight.

2013/9/17

I arrived in Japan on time. I did think that if I had not had previous experience of travelling a lot in Japan and did not speak Japanese that this data gathering trip would be almost impossible. So much time would be wasted on the practicalities of travelling in Japan that no time would be left for interviews!

2013/9/18

I felt very calm about meeting [redacted] as my first interview in japan and it was great to have something to aim for the first proper day in Japan. I arranged to meet [redacted] at the Starbucks at the Shinjuku Southern Terrace and used the time waiting to check my e-mails. We went to another indoor Starbucks for our interview in the nearby Meads Building. I noticed in the building that the bousai centre sign was only written in Japanese, so I guess my eyes have switched from sightseeing to researching. [redacted] I made phone calls to the people I was hoping to meet in the coming days. Again, it takes way more contacts to schedule and tie people down than I thought it would and this needs to be put in future methodologies. Be ready for lots of work and lots of trying to just get people to confirm a time and place and try and make it as easy as possible for them while also trying to ensure a good time and location for your interview. I walked to Shibuya to scope out where I was due to meet [redacted]. I prepared the documents for the interview in a nearby Veloce and went to Hachiko in Shibuya to wait for [redacted]. There were many foreigners waiting there too. I had told [redacted] by mail what I was wearing, but I had no idea what he looked like. I thought a few people standing around could have been him and I started to worry that we had missed each other when it got to about 10 minutes past our meeting time. [redacted] I took [redacted] to the same coffee shop I had been in earlier for our interview and it turned out to be a bit of a disaster. I was also starting to feel quite jet-lagged by now. (See Participant 5’s interview record sheet for more detail.) After the interview, I felt I had a lot of adrenaline to release. I underestimated how much of a strain it would be meeting a complete stranger, trying to get them to like me quickly, then trying to get them to speak about quite personal things all in just a few minutes. I think I have been very lucky so far, but I can assume that this will not bear fruit on each occasion. I was sleepy on the train getting back to the hotel, but after I shower I tried to sleep and sleep just would not come. For only the second time in my life that I can remember, I did not sleep a wink. Like zero
sleep and this with three interviews scheduled for the next day. It was so, so frustrating, and is an experience I hope will be a one off.

2013/9/19
I felt a bit groggy and had tired eyes over breakfast, but apart from that I was surprisingly alert. I decided to just not think about having not slept and just focus on putting one foot in front of the other and getting through each step of the day without worrying about what was to come next. I relied on little notes to myself to ensure I mailed people when I needed to, checked train schedules when I needed to, and so on. I got to the train station at [redacted] and found there had been an accident which had delayed the service and that the station was thronging with delayed passengers. I was really starting to feel that nothing would go right that day. I decided to walk to another station. [redacted] I got to Tokyo Midtown very early and used the hour or so before my meeting to check emails and plan the next days trains, interview schedules and hotels. I had definitely underestimated how hard this operational stuff would be without 24/7 connectivity. I met [redacted] without difficulty outside the Starbucks. We went to a Thai restaurant. The interview was mostly a disaster because of the noisy location and the fact that it was during his lunchtime when he was restricted for time and needed to eat. [redacted] The next interview with [redacted] was in his office. It was very Japanese going to the meeting room and exchanging business cards but I actively avoided doing the rituals and speaking Japanese. I am not sure whether this is because I was tired, or because I wanted to play the foreigner card. It was probably a bit of both. This interview while friendly and smiling seemed slightly (only very slightly) hostile as if the participant did not agree with the thrust of my thesis or felt I was critical of the Japanese. [redacted] I was feeling really quite tired but I knew I had one more interview that evening and just thought about powering through. The rooftop Starbucks location seemed a pretty good one, and again I was there early to scope things out. We were able to get a seat which was still in the light but not too near other customers. Again, I worried that I did not know what [redacted] looked like, nor she me, but we met easily. I was very nervous getting back to the hotel. I was so afraid I would not sleep again. After a bad first hour or two I finally drifted off. There was a fairly sizeable earthquake at about 2.30am but luckily I was so exhausted that I just opened my eyes briefly to the shaking and then closed them again quickly. I actually slept pretty well and kind of imagined I'd dreamed the earthquake until I checked the newspaper the next morning.

2013/9/20
I felt pretty refreshed, checked out, had a quick breakfast, and headed to Ueno station with plenty of time to spare before my Fresh Hitachi to Mito. I was so early because I was worried there would be another accident or delay of some sort on the trains - not something I ever expected to have to worry about. I felt under great pressure that these Ibaraki interviews needed to go without a hitch because I would have no problem getting more Tokyo participants or rescheduling for Tokyo, but anything in Ibaraki felt like a one-time chance. The location of the first interview was easy to find, and the interview went well. I was concerned about running over time as this was scheduled during a break in lessons and [redacted] had clearly said that he needed to finish by 12:45 but I finished with 5 minutes to spare. I quickly headed back to Mito. I had time for some food and then went to find my next interview destination. I had a lot of mails back and forth with [redacted] trying to settle on a time for the interview in Tokai tomorrow. The next interview with [redacted] went really well. He had some great advice and suggestions and was so open. I was really surprised (as was he) with the emotion of the interview at the start. He was a really big, Aussie bloke bar owner so I was not expecting the tears. Again I am so glad that the REC made me take emotional and mental health considerations seriously and especially taking my own feelings into account too. I felt a bit icky after the interview that I am blasting up, stirring up these emotions and memories in people for an hour or so, and then leaving again as quickly as I came. It goes from stranger to intimacy in such a short time frame that I am afraid I am not doing enough to respect and honour what people are doing for me by sharing
their personal stories. Having said that, everyone so far has been quite direct in saying that they are okay with taking part and I really do give them control of what to talk about as the transcript records will show. I do not think I force any issue. It was a privilege too to have the interview in the location (one of his bars) where so much of his account took place. It gave me a real feel for his experiences, more so than meeting in a neutral location. Perhaps, too, he felt freer to speak and show emotion because he was ‘at home’ so to speak. Still, I think I would have much more difficulty accessing other people's private spaces and I think on balance a neutral coffee shop is best in terms of my safety, and in terms of not being seen to be too pushy and ask too much of people. I then went and checked into the hotel. I was put on the top floor which made me wonder about safety in a quake - my thoughts are now focused at almost all times on the topic! Then again, a high floor would be better in a tsunami.

2013/9/21

I tried to write up some interview record sheets and catch up a bit on paper work in the hotel after breakfast, but I am finding it so hard to find the energy and power of concentration to work on these desk jobs. I feel like I need to be focusing on arranging more meetings or planning transit and accommodation during this down time between interviews instead. I hope I will have some time to just sit and think about what has happened to me so far and what I have heard in the interviews. At the moment, it is all a bit of a blur - a flurry of activity without any time to process. I reserved my trains to Sendai and Kashiwa and took the train back to Tokai. (I am certainly getting value for money from this JR Rail Pass). I feel like I have been either thinking about train schedules, booking train tickets, waiting on a platform or sitting on a train so far - those are my over-riding memories of the trip up to now. I was a bit anxious about how the meeting with [redacted] would go as he had changed times on me a couple of times and I was starting to wonder if he would show at all. He picked me up at the station in his car. I had not planned on this - I thought we would either meet at his school or find a coffee shop near the station. This was the first time so far I even slightly thought about my own safety - here I was getting in a car with a complete stranger being driven somewhere I did not know with no-one knowing where I was going. But this was just a small concern that momentarily flashed in my mind and I put my worries aside based on the fact that [redacted] had been introduced to me by [my friend] - so I felt [redacted] was not a complete stranger. It did make me think that I must take more control of the interview locations. This interview was also a bit of a procedural disaster because [redacted] wanted to start the interview in the car before I had any chance to go through the informed consent or switch on the Dictaphone. However, to compensate for this, I got the bonus of being driven around the coastline and being shown exactly where and how the tsunami had hit. I had not realized how badly the tsunami had affected this part of the coast. My image was that it was all in Iwate or Miyagi. We did eventually get to a coffee shop and I tried to recap some of the topics he had mentioned in the car so that I could get them on audio. The interview definitely had a theme of conspiracy, mistrust and even perhaps paranoia about the nuclear situation. This is probably understandable based on the fact that it was the second accident he had been through. It did affect me though. Hearing [redacted]’s stories about the seriousness of the nuclear situation definitely changed my behaviour. I became nervous to drink the tap water even though I had not even considered it an issue beforehand. I am now also wondering about the food I am eating. As I am eating out all the time, I have little control over where the food I eat comes from. I can see how an atmosphere of paranoia and fear could easily be fostered while wondering about this long-term invisible threat. I should not be as surprised as I am that the nuclear issue has been such a major focus of so many of the interviews. Even though I think I got some really useful information from [redacted], it was the first time I felt uncomfortable in the interview just because he was a very intense character and I did not know what to make of him. I was very glad to part ways. I got a train back to Tokai from Omika where we had had coffee and seen the coast, and I met up with [a friend]. It was nice to catch up. [redacted] I think I really needed this change of pace as I was starting
to feel a bit blue having listened to the fairly heavy experiences of the people in Ibaraki. There is no way that Ibaraki cannot be considered official disaster zone that is for sure.

2013/9/22
At breakfast this morning, I was wondering now about where the breakfast veggies are coming from. How do they make the price so cheap? Am I eating completely nuked food and drinking nuked water and coffee? To be honest, I thought these things but did not let them stop me from eating and drinking. I feel foolish that I am worrying about these things as a tourist only temporarily here when the people I am talking to will be faced with such considerations for an indefinite period to come. I needed to think happy thoughts as I was getting a bit blue again, so I took a walk around Mito lake in the beautiful sunshine. It was strange to see these kind of blissful scenes of joggers and stroller and kids playing in the lake water and just imagining what would happen if an earthquake or tsunami hit now or whether or not the water was radioactive. I made a conscious effort at this stage to focus on positives and stop worrying as I do not want to let this experience affect me in a negative way mentally. I sat in the Starbucks and booked hotels, checked train times and tried to schedule more meetings by email. This stuff really takes more time and effort than I was expecting. For my next interview, I met [redacted] at the station and we walked back to his apartment. His interview actually went really well and he had one or two excellent ideas and recommendations that I will definitely follow up and think more about. I got a bit of a shock when I got back to the Starbucks in Mito and mailed [redacted] to see if he was still on for meeting. He suggested 8.30am at Sugamo (he did not know I was now in Mito). This meant I would have to leave on the express train at 6.27 the next morning.

2013/9/23
I arrived early at Sugamo and scoped out a coffee shop near the station. Again, I had no idea who to look for when meeting another complete stranger and did total racial profiling expecting to see a white male. That was the case, but [redacted] could just as easily have been a French man of African or Asian heritage. I must not forget my own racial frameworks when being so aware of Japanese ones. This turned out to be a really excellent interview and will probably be one of my key data sources, based on [redacted]'s experience as an interpreter. It was interesting how quickly intimacy built up and how he showed his more cynical and critical side once he knew I had lived in Japan 9 years. He even said 'at least you won't write crap' or something to that effect which shows the value of leveraging my own experience in this process. The interview went way longer than I intended it to, but [redacted] reassured me multiple times that he was happy to keep talking.

2013/9/24
Today I had to get to Sendai. One of the constant reminders of the disaster is the fact that you can no longer go directly as this route used to pass through Fukushima in the exclusion zone. So I had to get a train back to Tokyo and then another super bullet train up to Sendai. Even with all this, I was still in Sendai in just a few hours and without any real trouble. I have been thinking though that if I had not had my prior experience in Japan I would not be able to run so many interviews in such a tight period. I have no time in the schedule for mistakes. Everything has to run smoothly and, if I were less experienced at travel in Japan, I know I would be making a lot more mistakes. This, again, is an advantage I can claim from using my experience: I can see more people in less time. As I had now been a week in Japan, I sent a summary report to [my supervisor] by email. By 3pm I still had had no word from [redacted] even though he had agreed to an interview later today. I was troubled about how hard to push. I had decided that I would just send a text to his phone tonight if I heard no word by evening but that I would emphasize that he should feel absolutely no obligation to talk to me. In the end, he did mail me by late afternoon. The lack of a reliable and constant internet connection is a continuing pain. I feel cut off and unable to act on things as quickly as I would like. As a result, I am continuing writing notes to myself to remind myself to check things or do tasks (like book hotels, etc.) when I am next online. I
feel this could lead to me forgetting to do something really important. I must say it was
great to meet [redacted]. We met at a coffee shop near his work, and because he was in
Sendai he had a much rougher experience to talk about than the people I have been speaking
to in Tokyo. I feel I really need these 'disaster' accounts in my thesis to validate that I am
studying an actual disaster experience and not just the threat of disaster which was more
the case in Tokyo (even though I think the threat of disaster is still a very important frame
to consider). The interview was very productive. [redacted] Again, I felt a bit icky after this
interview because it had been traumatic for him and I felt I was flying in and out and kind
of using him (which I am). But he even said that he was happy to talk about most things as
I am trying to help people. This was one interview, though, where it was very clear (and
even [redacted] said so) that he was not talking about everything and he was just allowing
me to see a section of his experience. I got a bit lost on the way back to the hotel, but
considering how much travelling around I have done in a short space of time, I am pretty
proud of myself.

2013/9/25
I finally had no interviews scheduled for today, but it did not become a day off. I tried to
get money out of the ATM using my credit card and this turned out to be my biggest
problem so far - I had not informed the credit card company before leaving that I was
touring to Japan China and New Zealand. I am so annoyed with myself. I have enough
Euro cash to probably cover the rest of the Japan leg but I need to get this sorted before
New Zealand. At least I still have time but just trying to call a foreign number is such a
pain with time difference and cost. I should not have left the country without checking with
my credit card company and this will be a real learning point for me. I also had a lot of
work to prepare for the volunteering in Ishinomaki.

2013/9/26
I walked around Sendai a bit after confirming at the bus station how to pay for the bus, how
much it would cost and how long it would take. The systems for buses in particular can be
so complex in Japan. And there was no information other than Japanese on all the signs,
even though Sendai is said to be a pretty international Japanese city with several
universities. In fact, I saw two South East Asian people at the bus stop looking very lost
and confused. They asked a Japanese person for help to tell them where they needed to be
to follow the directions they had on a printed out sheet, but even the Japanese person looked
really confused and couldn't seem to help them despite spending some time looking at the
posted timetables and maps. I'm not sure I really like it here in Sendai, but that could also
just be my tiredness of not having my routines and of living out of a suitcase and the
background worry about my credit card. I am probably just in a bit of a negative head space
and will be until I have found a solution to my credit card problem. The bus journey was
about 25 minutes into the mountains. [redacted] University has several large campuses
along the way and there were two or three non-Japanese faces on the bus. [redacted]
University is smaller and less prosperous looking than the famous [redacted] University. It
is definitely in the mountains surrounded by woods so I can imagine that the tsunami was
not even on people's minds here on 3.11. I did not feel too out of place while walking
around and saw one other Caucasian face. I met Prof [redacted] in his office. We talked
for a few minutes as he made tea. I really wasn't sure what he had planned for the foreigners
I was supposed to meet so my strategy was just to go with the flow and not worry about
the arrangements. In the end, only one student the Chinese student was from [redacted]
University the other two - the Sudanese and the Bangladeshi - were from [redacted]
University. The interviews went really well. I feel especially lucky that I got more
interviewees right in the disaster zone (I feel this will add weight to my thesis) and that the
diversity of my participants has now increased greatly. I owe Prof [redacted] a great debt
for this. I am starting to feel that if I can reach 20 participants I can kind of relax a bit and
try to enjoy being back in Japan. I cannot say I am really enjoying most of the experience
yet, though I am finding it fascinating. The interviews really took it out of me - one in particular was very emotional at times and so I felt drained.

2013/9/27
I had no interviews scheduled today and I really needed that break after doing three yesterday. I woke early to get breakfast and noticed two other non-Japanese faces. Sendai is definitely more international than I expected. I checked emails and found that plans were coming together for Ishinomaki tomorrow. The credit card business is still weighing far too heavily on my mind. I know it will all be fine after a phone call and if not I still have time to put other measures in place. I took photos of the city to show where the tsunami had hit. The skyline is built up, built up and then flat once you look toward the sea. It was eerie seeing and hearing helicopters over the flattened area after what my participants had talked about in their interviews yesterday. I hope I will make time to let all this stuff just sink in a bit. I am trying to write notes to myself every time I get a thought about the data. I also took some photos of gambarou tohoku and sendai signs still up. I did more mail thank yous and arranging future interviews.

2013/9/28
I was up and out at before 6am to make my train to Ishinomaki. At the station, I was moved by the maps which had whole sections blacked out - these were the stations that were worst hit by the tsunami and the parts of the track that are still not in operation these two years later. In fact, if you want to go to Ishinomaki by train, you have to get on a replacement bus to go through those towns. This is what I did. I was looking out the window and thinking about how beautiful Matsushima Bay is as the sun rose (one of Japan's three great beauty spots) and could understand in some way how families would not want to leave this place or might want to return and build new homes here even though they experienced the tsunami and would have to live with a future threat. I am still not sure I understand their feelings, but the beauty of the location could lead to a strong connection to place, I guess. The most moving thing for me was the sight around Tona 東名 and Rikuzen 陸前 of these huge straight pines completely stripped bare except for some strange leaves and branches at the top that had not been below water level. These trees were huge and thinking about such a wall of water really scared me for a bit. I arrived at Ishinomaki Station and met the volunteer organiser. After a brief word with him, he left and nobody else spoke to me - they all clearly had tasks and were just getting on with things. If anything, I felt I was just in the way. I imagine that this may have been the case for many volunteers (both Japanese and foreign) when they first came up to volunteer in the very bad times. Eventually it became clear that I could just follow some simple tasks but there was never any instruction. You have to be a self-starter. And again (as has come up in interviews) I was hit with the sense that there is just one correct way of putting up a tent that the Japanese seemed to just know! These cultural differences may have been barriers that foreign volunteers had to overcome. I was briefly introduced to [redacted] (US) and [redacted] (Swiss) and had the awkward feeling of explaining that I was in Japan as a researcher, and generally feeling that I was being viewed with some suspicion. Maybe it was good for me to experience and to feel this ethnographic awkwardness. I volunteered to do manual work moving tables and chairs. I had the feeling that from the start I would try to show that I was here to earn my keep. About five Japanese and I went off in a van with the local Ishinomaki organiser to move chairs and tables to be used at the festival tomorrow. It was sweaty work in nearly 30 degree heat. We worked for a while and then were driven back to the community centre. As we were driving, I listened to all the other Japanese who had been here many times talk about the changes they had seen in Ishinomaki, the businesses restarting, the landmark places now torn down to be rebuilt, etc. There was a feeling of closing the circle with this being the last regularly scheduled trip and with [the NPO] closing its books at the end of September. We then worked to carry items from the old volunteer HQ (a dilapidated rental house) to the community centre. The rental house was being cleared and shut up by another team. A notable thing was the smell - it was pungent and fishy. [redacted] attributed it to
the fish processing plant and described it as a healthy sea smell. [redacted] attributed it to the tsunami mud that they spent so much time clearing in the first trips. I do not know which is true but it was not a pleasant smell nor was it awful. [redacted] and [redacted] talked separately about how bad the smell had been in the first trips and how you had to put menthol at your nose to prevent vomiting. One of the most important tasks at the beginning was to clear this dreadful mud from under the houses so that they could become habitable. I found myself getting cagier and cagier about who I was and why I was here. Ethically, I had originally wanted to be completely open. But I still found myself being vaguer and strangely heard myself introducing myself not as a researcher here in Japan to do a study but as a "friend of [redacted]" or "a translator". I was a bit surprised at my own dishonesty and it kind of crept up on me. It was one of those things where I did feel a slight surprise at all the things I talked about in my methodology went a bit out the window once in the field. I volunteered to do more manual labour after lunch. I was paired off with [redacted]. He kind of took me under his wing, though he started speaking to me mostly in English from then on. I feel like he was key in getting me a bit accepted in the group. It was heavy, sweaty work but I was glad to do it because I felt it built my social capital with [redacted] and with the group and helped me out in the end. I also got to be driven to the huge processing centres where all the tsunami and earthquake waste was being processed. It was in the docklands and as we drove they talked about nearby Onagawa and other infamous names that were wiped out. It was very Japanese. There were forms to be filled out and we had to all wear helmets and masks. It smacked of the performance of ritual rather than of a real health or safety benefit. Driving over bridges where people who had decided to go and check on their families and were swept away brought it all home. I should be very thankful for having had the chance to see and hear things like this that I would never have been able to do just travelling by myself. We all regrouped and went to an onsen as one large group of about 40 Japanese and foreign volunteers on a big tour bus. Alcohol came up time and again with my interactions with the [redacted] volunteers. It was about the hard work and then the booze. This I think is a key point though. They needed a way to keep motivation up to be able to travel up to Ishinomaki at least once a month for two-an-a-half years in sometimes very inhospitable weather conditions. This social bonding through booze helped them integrate into a community and helped bond their team identity. I found myself kind of avoiding the foreigners and hanging with the Japanese participants more. I think I did this partly to show the foreigners I was here to volunteer and not get interviews, but also (if I am honest with myself) because I did not want to touch on really interesting topics of conversation without an audio recorder there and the ability to use their 'informed' data in my study.

2013/9/29
I woke up at about 5am when the other teams were heading out. I didn't have to head off until 7.30 but I really couldn't get back to sleep so I just got up and had my breakfast sitting on the swing in the small park outside the minkan. It was actually really nice just to have a bit of time alone. I took a walk around the neighbourhood. What stuck out was the steepness of the cliffs at the back of the houses. I remember seeing videos of people scrambling up on to them, but seeing them for real I realized how this would not have been easy at all. Apparently there are now ladders and steps at various points on the cliffs. I also noticed how the post office in Ishinomaki was still a prefab and that it had been painted with murals as had many shops and business as part of volunteer efforts to show that life was returning to the town. I went and got a coffee at the 711 convenience store. It was really sparkling new and fresh. Apparently for a very long time this was the only shop around and was a really central point for the community. I walked around a bit more and paid special attention to the very tall mansion building that seemed undamaged. Again my thoughts turned dark and I figured I would run up there if a tsunami warning came. We got driven out to Senshu University where we would be helping with the running of a sports day for the various communities still living in temporary accommodation. It was co-sponsored by the Japanese Olympic Committee. We met up with the other teams. They all said that they
need not have come so early as nothing was ready for them - the place was not even open. But this was probably a feature of organizers saying that the 'foreigners' would show up any time and do anything. There was always a need to prove that you could be trusted and that you were there to help. We spent most of the morning just sitting around to be honest. As we were just sitting around, I could have asked for lots of interviews, probably, but I did not ask for any interviews for a few reasons. First, I felt an hour interviewing with me was an hour they were not helping the people of Ishinomaki, which is why they had come here. I also felt that as this was their last scheduled trip I would be taking time away from important memories for them. Also, very practically, the conditions felt all wrong. I couldn't just whip out the plain language statements and naturally turn to a formal recorded conversation - plus there was little privacy and lots and lots of ambient noise and distraction. Furthermore, because I had felt under some suspicion from some of the foreigners about my motivations for being on this trip (whether they really suspected me or whether my insecurities created those feelings, I don’t know, but I felt it) I kind of did not want to prove their suspicions right and look like I was only here to get a few interviews out of it. Once the afternoon rolled around and after we had had a bento lunch there were actually lots of tasks to be involved in. The JOC had invited a few Japanese medal winners to come and lead teams of the old folks in games like jump rope, ball push and tug of war. I did have chances to talk informally with many of the foreigners but I pretty much avoided any disaster topics because it just did not feel right to me. I agreed with [redacted] to meet for the interview when we get back to Tokyo. I may also ask [redacted], even though he seems less than interested and was one of the most openly negative and suspicious toward me. I feel though that I should probably try to get such negative views in my data set for balance. I'll see how I feel about it all later on. We got the bus back to Tokyo together. I'm glad I went this way and not by train as it kind of cemented me as one of the team.

2013/9/30
I caught up on some emails for a few hours. I had hoped for a mail from [the Facebook group administrator I had cold called from Ireland] to say he was okay to meet but there was nothing. I also booked my hotels and trains for almost all of the remainder of the trip. This was all quite stressful as I do not want to make huge mistakes like booking trains to the wrong places or hotels for the wrong dates. So far, everything has gone really smoothly though and I need to give myself more credit for that rather than always seeing the downside of things. I finally phoned Bank of Ireland. The attendant was not very helpful but I managed to get out of her that there should be no problem with my card and that the ATM should work once I tried to take out only 100-200 euro per day. I went straight to the nearby post office ATM and was able to successfully get out 20,000 yen. It was such a relief. I really blame this financial worry in the back of my mind as the cause for so much of my negativity on this trip. I intend to take out the maximum every day and ensure I have cash for NZ in NZ dollars before I leave Japan. I feel exhausted a lot of the time here. I am walking a lot, but I think it is also from low-level stress and anxiety about all the arrangements I have to make and hope that people will show, and tiredness and being exposed to so much Japanese again and trying to read and listen and understand things.

2013/10/1
I woke half hoping for a call or text or something from [the Facebook group administrator I had cold called from Ireland] but to no avail. I am disappointed that he was a no show and gave no explanation. I would have really liked to speak to him and I would have liked to be able to show more evidence of me finding participants through my own efforts, not just by introduction. But it wasn't to be and I will just have to get on with it. I knew I would not contact him again. He had my mail address and my rental phone and the last thing I want to do is antagonize someone, especially someone who has signalled to me that the earthquake is a sensitive topic for them. I am really only half way through data gathering here but mentally I feel I am finishing up now that I have a good number of interviews under my belt and the Ishinomaki stuff done.
2013/10/2

I woke early in Kanda to lashing rain. It seems like the days when I have the most scheduled (three interviews in one day again today) seem to be the days when I face the most challenges. As I had not originally been planning to be in Tokyo at this time, I was late making a reservation and was only able to get a place in Akabane. It meant I had to lug my heavy bag in the rain in my suit (I decided to go formal based on the fact that I was visiting an embassy and a swanky advertising agency) to a new hotel in a town I had never been to before and then be back in the centre of town for the first of my three interviews. I was not in a chirpy mood to say the least. My first interview was [redacted] in [a certain embassy building]. The rain actually really helped me out. [redacted] had been trying to arrange an interview over lunch. I knew from my experience with [redacted] that this was not good for my methodology. Luckily I played the card of ‘do you mind if we just talk here as it’s really coming down outside’ when I arrived. It meant I got a good hour with [redacted] in a quiet board room with no distractions. I was most interested in his experience at Disney Sea - a major tourist attraction and the insight he could give me into what it was like to experience a major earthquake in such a place. I was very conscious of the time. I wanted to make sure I wasn’t eating into too much of [redacted]’s work day and I knew I had to be in Kachidoki by 2pm. I was glad I had scoped out the office building the day before as I felt much calmer going. [redacted] and [redacted] both came to greet me and then just [redacted] and I both went down to the Italian coffee shop in the lobby where we sat at a small table just outside the door. It was pretty quiet and we felt undisturbed. After [redacted] finished up rather abruptly to go to a conference call (I had been conscious of the time for all the participants today as I had really said to each I would only take thirty minutes of their time but they were the ones who talked on, not me) he called [redacted] to come down and talk to me. I really barely had to say anything to either of these two and I think it shows the advantage of pre-sending an outline of what I want to talk about in that it gives them an opportunity to construct a narrative around what is important to them and around what I have declared an interest in. I think it is a good compromise and gives them the freedom to tell their story while hopefully directing them to highlight or foreground parts that I am interested in. By the time I finished up it was nearly four and I still hadn't had lunch or checked in to the hotel or anything. I was tired but full of adrenaline as usual. I decided to walk to Ginza and get some lunch in Ootoya (for like the fiftieth time). On the way as I was crossing the bridge up to Tsukiji Market I saw lots of people stopped in their tracks with their cameras out. Strangely my first thought was something negative like oh no there has been some sort of disaster. I think this shows that I am now in a bit of a negative head space. They were taking photos of a beautiful rainbow that had appeared in the sky now that the rain and effects of the typhoon had passed. It was beautiful and I joined them in the act. I need to force myself to be more positive. Maybe this research has had a bit of an influence on my mental state contrary to what I reported to Sharon. I don't feel bad, but nor can I say I have felt hugely happy a lot of this trip. I actually feel very spoiled saying that when this is an opportunity many would kill for, but I have found scheduling and running these interviews mostly tiring stressful and overall very hard work, especially as someone who finds meeting new people a challenge! But I think I passed some kind of psychological barrier today. Now that I have interviewed 20 participants I feel I can stop worrying a bit. This has been mentioned so many times in the literature as a kind of benchmark number that now that I have achieved it I feel I have justified my trip to some extent. If no one else shows up, I'll have enough to work with, I think; or at least to move forward with and start analysing.

2013/10/3

I met [the person with whom I had volunteered in Ishinomaki] in an Excelsior café. I was really not sure how her interview would go. I could tell she was really nervous. This is so odd to me as she is such a forthright person. But I guess she might not normally talk about personal matters. It actually ended up being a good interview with some really useful data;
some of the best of which she will not let me use, of course! Another one for the methodology. After we finished the interview, she suggested going for a beer together. I really felt I couldn't say no. One thing that surprised me was her confessed high level of mistrust for me before meeting. She also mentioned how she wanted to know my earthquake story - I had never really thought to tell it, I guess. I also feel conflicted by the idea of being friendly and social with people I am still researching; I find myself not lying but not being as forthcoming as I could. I think she would have kept the night going even later but I really couldn't and used the excuse of going to Nagoya in the morning.

2013/10/4
My first interview was with [redacted]. I walked around the suburban neighbourhood where I was due to meet him and was surprised by the many non-Japanese faces I bumped into in just 30 minutes or so (about 6!). So I guess Nagoya is an international city in Japanese terms. I found [redacted] was quite different in person to the image of his emails - more cynical, less warm. He also talked about a lot of stuff I wasn't interested in. Maybe because I have now done so many interviews and feel I already have some good data I am getting less patient with the ethnographic style and want to just get down to business and confirm or deny the major themes that the other interviewees have presented. I also feel that whether or not you sort of like the person can affect how ethnographic I want to go. I feel when I like the person I want to know more of the context and am happy to listen to the asides. When I do not feel so comfortable in the person's presence I want the interview to be over quicker and am less interested in the asides. This may indicate problems with identification with the participants or blurring lines of researched and friend. Another methodological specificity for this interview is that I knew beforehand that it would be in a restaurant. From my experience with [redacted], I knew some of the pitfalls of this style of interview and tried to counteract them. For example, I made sure the conversation was about stuff I was not very interested in for most of the 'meal' so that he would have time to eat and I could talk and let him do so about other rubbish topics. Then by the time the eating was done, I could go on to the topics I cared more about. Overall, I think the interview went okay, and yet again the most interesting thing he said was probably in the last minutes when I said, 'is there anything else you want to add' kind of thing. This time I had not switched off the tape - I am learning. It was nearly three when we finished. I had to high tail it back to the big Kokusai Center tower in which the NIC offices were located. I met with [redacted] [redacted]. I was there to find out about how they support foreign residents in disaster, but I was shocked at how much information they wanted to know from me (about Ireland, foreigners experiences, foreigners views). I had thought the questioning would be all one way and I really didn’t have answers to all their questions.

2013/10/5
Today I moved on to Hiroshima. I am tired of all the travelling and feeling a little over the whole meeting-new-people thing. I think it has been a lot harder work than I thought it would be. But when I get home and stop, I will probably start to appreciate more how good an experience it has been and how well it has gone. Perhaps I am too close to everything right now.

2013/10/6
On the way to my next interview, I dropped by the peace park and genbaku dome. I thought about how it is another representation of the Japanese gaman and gambare spirit and how this could feed in in some way to their response to the 2011 disaster in terms of we will rise again we will not be defeated by the nuclear etc. I took an early train to Kure and arrived feeling sweaty and dishevelled. This would normally bother me, but I have met so many new people in such a short period of time that I think I have become slightly desensitised to what people think of me. [redacted] turned up a little early which was great. We walked about 10 minutes from the station to a cool old fashioned coffee shop. I liked [redacted] instantly and I think this really helps at the start of the interview anyway. She told me some
really good stuff. I got the train back to Tokyo and realised that I may have had some feeling of relaxation at being in west Japan - not thinking anymore about food and water safety and not even really imagining disaster scenarios any more. This is completely irrational as there is just as much chance of a quake happening out this way as anywhere else in Japan really. It goes to show how our fears and senses of threat are often based on emotion and mood and the discourse going on around you. The trains were smooth and on time but it took a long time to get back to Tokyo. My jr pass runs out tomorrow and I am kind of glad because it indicates I will be mostly based in one place for the next while. Still no word from [redacted]. I'm hoping he won’t be another no-show. I am trying to think positively - even if he doesn't show (which I still really hope he does) I can put in my methodology quite strongly about the importance of a personal introduction of some sort for this type of research.

2013/10/7
Luckily [redacted] contacted me this morning so I quickly arranged to meet him near his office. Once again there was the problem of neither of us knowing what the other looked like and I ended up approaching the wrong guy who was just sitting down for a coffee. It was a great interview. Definitely another key informant as a result of all the translation work he did in the disaster. I am so happy I got to speak to him. And this was one of the interviews that I managed to create myself – no introduction – just a cold call over the Internet.

2013/10/8
I woke feeling refreshed and really happy. Maybe it was because my interview with [redacted] the day before had gone well, maybe it was because I have completed more interviews than I dared hope, maybe it is because I am settled in one place for a few days and not rushing to make trains, and find hotels and meet strangers. Anyway, I felt happy and spent the day working on my upcoming presentation at the seminar in Toyo University. Kind of unbelievably [redacted] mailed to suggest meeting at 8pm the following day, so after my relaxing day today I will be fairly busy tomorrow preparing for the presentation and now interviewing both [redacted] and [redacted]. I am feeling a bit tired of all the interviewing at this stage. I feel I have reached a critical mass where if the remaining interviews go crap or don’t happen at all it's not the end of the world. It's quite a comforting feeling.

2013/10/9
[redacted] had arranged to meet me inside the Metro station at Aoyama, and even though I had gotten back to her asking for more precision about the exit to meet at, I was still nervous we wouldn’t find each other or would waste precious time (I knew I had to peg it to get to my next meeting at Daimon). Again, I had made the mistake of not getting any idea of what this participant looked like. This is definitely a learning point - when meeting strangers, have some way of knowing who to look for. We had good interview. Then I high tailed it to the metro to make it in time to meet [redacted]. I had planned the train times precisely but it was going to be tight. I got a bit stressed because I didn’t know the station and got a little lost. In the end, I was on time and waiting for [redacted] outside the Denny’s when he arrived. We had a better interview than I expected although the location was so noisy. It’s really hard to choose between quiet and tucked away versus noisy and easy to find.

2013/10/10
Today was my presentation to the seminar in Toyo. It went better than I could have hoped and was my first time presenting my work only in Japanese. I did make a cultural misstep. I had forgotten to print out copies of the slides as handouts which is standard in Japanese presentations. Oh well.

2013/10/11
Today was just a day spent getting ready for my upcoming trip to New Zealand and making a lot of various arrangements, writing lots of emails, etc.

2013/10/12
Today I first had a meeting with a Korean university professor from Keio whom I had met at a conference earlier in the year. We had a good talk about our research interests. Then I had lunch with friends. I talked non-stop (which is not like me). Maybe I'm tired of listening! Then, I had more preparations to make for getting to New Zealand. I'm starting to feel nervous about that trip now. I guess before now I just haven't been able to think about it. I realised today that, at 1 hour for 5 mins of audio, transcribing is going to take me two months of solid work - crikey! I definitely underestimated how much of a job transcribing was going to be.

2013/10/13
In my abundant time spent on trains and in coffee shops of late, I have started to feel that Japanese people always seem to be looking at their diaries. Does this have some cultural significance? Are they focused on the future? Is it a sign that they are fixated on scheduling and planning and that they may be a bit inflexible and not good at spontaneity? Today was my last interview in Japan. I met [redacted] in Shinjuku pretty easily - he was early and so was I. My own mental state as an interviewer before the interview may have had an impact on the style of interview. Like the literature says, the researcher is the main instrument. I felt that because I was now busy thinking about New Zealand and all that I needed to do to prepare for that trip that I did not want a long interview and was happier to be more direct, cut answers shorter, etc. Also, because I have a feeling that I have reached some sort of critical mass, I have less feeling of the need to capture whatever data I can (even if seemingly irrelevant) in case it turns out that I get no more. I think the interview went well, but he had a very definite agenda for talking to me and so he did not talk in many ways directly about topics that I was interested in. Overall, the interview with him left me feeling more and more convinced that the radiation damage after the disaster was probably more severe than I have considered and that long-term health effects may turn out to be serious. I had an interesting experience when considering what souvenirs to buy for the people I was going to be meeting in New Zealand. I was going to get tea, chocolates or biscuits of some type. But then I got concerned that giving food could be bad if anyone concerns about food safety. This was a pretty big aha moment for me and showed me how much I had been affected by the stories of some of the people I have talked to.

[I then travelled to Auckland and Christchurch in New Zealand. On that trip, I had one interview with a person who had been in Sendai during the disaster. I will only include the log of the days around meeting this participant as the other entries do not relate to this thesis project.]

2013/10/20
I was staying at the Ibis Hotel right in the centre on Hereford Street around the corner from Cathedral Square. I was not prepared for how post-apocalyptic it would feel and the hotel was flanked on either side by half destroyed buildings and face rubbly carparks where tall high-rise buildings would once have stood. This was no Sendai, and I really felt the difference between the effects on an earthquake on a CBD and of a tsunami on a rural area. The two contexts are vastly different and make me wonder if it will ever be possible to generalise anything about the experience of a disaster. I spent the afternoon walking around the centre and taking photos. There was a bit of a commotion at Cathedral Square with a woman shouting at other onlookers about politics or something. It made things a bit uncomfortable and showed how social divisions and problems do not go away just because a disaster befalls you. The war-like feeling – you kind of imagine Srebrenica or somewhere – really took it out of me. Christchurch had been called the England of the Southern
Hemisphere with punting on the Avon river and Agatha Christie like Victorian stone buildings and so on. But now it really feels desolate in parts. [A contact from the University of Auckland] was due to give me a guided tour of Christchurch the following day. She had experienced the disaster and is researching it herself. You couldn't plan better than that.

2013/10/21

[My contact] drove me around the centre and pointed out places like Colombo Street, where her husband had been thrown around in his car and surrounded by ash, or where a young guy on a bus into the CBD saw the city disappear into rubble before him. She showed me the 185 white chairs which are acting as a memorial to all those who died and talked about the great artistic energy and revival and the spirit of creativity, such as gap fillers and the pallet cafe, and so on - that is existing alongside this war-like scenery. I did not feel this youthful creative energy in Tohoku but then nor did I seek it out. [redacted] got emotional talking about all the people who had died and was a bit surprised that it still affected her so strongly – something I have heard again and again in my interviews. She told me about how she had seen the rubble of the building she worked in appear on tv and not being able to believe that she was seeing colleagues being pulled out. She was already traumatised by the experience of the earlier September earthquake which had been centred on her hometown and which had had a great impact on her family (no water and power for ages etc). We parked the car and dropped in at the controversial cardboard cathedral designed by Shigeru Ban. I liked its aesthetic and the idea that it gives people somewhere to worship and have a centre. But it is controversial because it represents the debates about whether to rebuild the original cathedral and who should fund it and whether the money would be put to better use in other ways and whether it is just the church's heritage or the whole communities. Every aspect of disaster seems to come with layers of complexity. We then drove out to the hills where she was working on a project with a school. I got to see views of all Christchurch and to see how close the sea is – it raises the possibility of a future tsunami and the poorer suburbs tend to be out near the shore, unusually. I also got to imagine how traumatic it must have been for the kids on their lunch breaks to see all the high rise buildings just disappear in a cloud of dust. [redacted] made interesting points about how the high-income families seem to be cotton-wooling their kids and not dealing with the trauma whereas the kids in the lower income schools seem to have better tools for dealing with the aftermath. I just felt that this whole day was such a lucky experience for me as it got me to see things I would never have had a chance to see and to hear insight from someone who was deeply implicated in the whole disaster. We drove on then to a school she was working with out in the poorest suburbs. You really noticed the difference here in terms of how poor the conditions of the roads were. There were also lots of open spaces where the homes had been demolished and the land repurchased by the crown. There is anger about how much slower the pace of rebuilding has been for the poorer suburbs, but a lot of that has to do with social capital, the confidence to badger local representatives, the knowledge of who to call and of networks of people in the know. There is a big problem of schools being closed down and merged. Part of this is right-wing government opportunism but also due to the fact that so many people have moved away from the suburbs to other rural towns in Canterbury. This is making ghost towns out of these suburbs and of course this will have strong impacts on the new host towns, with some suddenly doubling in size. It reinforces the idea of the fallout from a disaster being so long term. When is it really post disaster when a community losing its school and heart of its community is happening two to three years after the event? We visited one such school that is being closed. By chance, we got to experience a 'controlled earthquake' being done over the river from this school as part of a liquefaction experiment. There had already been two previously that had really shaken the already damaged school buildings and this would have happened in school hours and re-traumatized the kids had that principle not been there fighting their corner. Again this speaks of social capital and resources and how they impact on recovery and how things which are attempting to do good (like liquefaction experiments) are not without cost (re-traumatizing and further damaging weakened
communities and structures). The experiment itself was like a machine gun firing leading to the rumble of an earthquake. They call it 'a blast' but really it's lots of charges going off in quick succession. It was so weird that even though they had told us exactly when the blast would go off and to be prepared for it, there was still a small part of our brains that thought 'hang on, what if this is a real earthquake'. The windows really shook a lot and [redacted] got a little bit upset. Again, though, I feel I have been having this amazing run of luck to just happen on to this experience – none of this had been planned – [redacted] was just dropping in to this school to give her contact a magazine. This sums up the whole research experience for me. Its success has been based on huge amounts of pure luck, but also on being open to people and accepting any offer from people and on trying to be warm and responsive to any offers of help and information.

2013/10/22
I still had not got a promised text from [redacted] to specify exactly when and where we should meet. It was really weighing on my mind what to do. I did not want to hassle him, but I also felt that this was probably my one time ever being in Christchurch and I would hate to leave without at least pushing a little to meet him. So I rang [redacted] (which I would probably not have done under other circumstances) and he agreed to meet me in a coffee shop about ten minutes from my hotel on foot. I had no idea what [redacted] looked like and did not have the visibly foreigner card to play. So I actually went up to someone who wasn’t the participant and asked if he was here to meet me. The setting was not ideal - a little noisy and quite busy with other customers. But they ignored us and it felt like we could talk relatively privately. It was a good interview - better than expected - and I was so happy to have more data from someone up in the disaster zone - especially someone who couldn’t speak much Japanese. Initially I was a bit disappointed that I couldn’t also speak to his wife to broaden my gender scope a little, but it was better to focus on a quality interaction with one person than a divided interaction with two people. I think 6 weeks was just right in terms of trip length. I have gotten so much done in my time - I think I could have stayed two or three months and probably only achieved the same amount just with more down time.
APPENDIX D: Anonymised interview record sheets
2013/7/18 Record of interview with Participant 1

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in [a café in central Dublin]. We sat at a small table and drank coffee. The interview lasted about 90 minutes (15 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 75 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

Differences with other interviews

Problems
- The cafe was quite busy and there was background music.
- I felt too close to neighbouring tables before the interview began, but I forgot about them as soon as we started.
- Explaining the informed consent and filling out the profile information took longer than I expected (about 10 minutes for the explanation and then 5 minutes for filling out the form).

Implications
The background music will prevent me from using voice recognition software. I will try to have more control over selection of the interview location in future. (Participant 1 suggested this place.)

What questions worked well or didn’t
- The question in the profile about experience of translating did not work - she said it was too broad and unclear to answer. I am not sure what value the question was adding, anyway. It is also worth noting that this is a question Sharon had pointed out as being problematic - the value of an experienced eye!
- I basically only raised the first topic “Tell me about your experience of the 2011 disaster” and then did not ask a direct question from my pre-prepared list after that. However, I did interject and probe at times based on what I wanted to know from these other questions. I sometimes also asked directly “What language was that in?”
- The idea of asking in the profile where the participant was in the first week, first month, and first year after the disaster worked well.
- I think sending the topics beforehand and giving the participants a chance to think of answers beforehand if they wanted was good and helped them to build a narrative, even though Participant 1 apologised to me before we started recording that she had not looked at the topics again since I had sent them to her.

How participants seemed to be feeling
- She seemed to be at ease for most of the time, but at some points I did notice some reddening (in turns out the disaster has brought on a serious autoimmune condition) and her eyes watered a little at recalling the affect the disaster had on her parents. She marked a 6/10 for anxiety at the end of the interview which was much higher than I was expecting. I think, though, that she found it helpful to talk and mentioned that it was good to share with someone who had been through a similar experience and also it was good because she had not had had any other opportunity to talk about her experiences so much. This could be shown as a benefit of this research and its
methodology. She also quickly provided me with eight more friends of hers in Tokyo to interview, so she would probably not have done this if it had been a bad experience.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- She seemed open (arms unfolded, forward leaning) and kept eye contact strongly throughout. Occasionally, when telling a funny or embarrassing anecdote, she would look down at the table quickly and then look at me, as if questioning whether to tell me or not.

**What I felt surprised by**

- I was surprised at how much the conversation came out as a narrative - as a story with her as the protagonist with humour, emotions, a timeline, episodes, etc. Could narrative analysis be useful for this project?
- I was surprised by how often emotions and stress came up. I guess I imagined someone in Tokyo wouldn’t have had such a large impact on their lives (even though it caused me to quit my job and leave Japan!!!).
- I was surprised by how much of Participant 1’s experience resonated with my own (the loneliness, the reaction to aftershocks even back in Ireland, the guilt at what the disaster did to family, and guilt at being upset though Tokyo was not hugely directly affected).
- I was a little surprised at how many times she used expressions like “as you know” meaning as someone who lived in Japan or as someone who experienced the quake. I think it shows the value of bringing my own lived experience to this research process.

**What I'd do differently**

- I need to make sure to give the interviewees chances to drink their coffee. Even though I was focusing on trying not to talk, I will need to interject at times to let the interviewee take a break, regroup, relax. I can use these interjections (as I did today) to try and bring up topics I want to cover (e.g. Facebook and social media use in my own experience) that are not being covered in the interviewee’s narrative.
- I will take out the translation/interpreting question from the profile and just ask about experience with translating if it comes up in the narrative.
- I will try not have the interviews during the participant’s working day, as I felt nervous about how much of her time I was taking (in the end, she gave me 90 minutes - I had said it would only take an hour.)

**What didn't I find out**

- I did not find out about slogans, radio, specific websites, her opinion of social media, or specific needs that were not met (though I can interpret many of these from other answers/dialogue).

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**

- Television was the only information source that she mentioned. This supports the findings from my literature review. It reinforces that we could justify a suggestion to translate television content in some way through social media.
- She said outright that Facebook was not any use to her. The phone was her main communication tool. However, e-mail clearly was significant at certain stages (to have others contact her family or to inform people of her location).
- Power and connectivity were significant issues for her even in Tokyo.
- Even though she was more than 10 years in Japan, her ties to Ireland seemed stronger than her ties to the Japanese community. But, it is worth focusing on the fact that she made a contribution to the community by volunteering. The volunteering may have been important for her mental health, too.
Even though she focused initially on the first few days after onset in her answers, the disaster continued for her in her mind for at least six months and her skin condition means that, in some ways, the disaster still has not stopped affecting her.

Even when back in Ireland, she still felt very involved in the disaster, which could be linked up with ideas about diaspora in times of disaster.

Her Japanese language ability facilitated lots of things for her, so we could point out that where she found it easy, others who don’t speak Japanese might find it difficult.

Despite her linguistic fluency, cultural barriers were important in a disaster. No neighbours in Tokyo knocked on her door after the disaster, but neither did she call on neighbours, even though she used Japanese in multiple other ways in the disaster. Especially when you compare this with her experience in Oshika in the disaster zone: “they all talked to me, nobody in Tokyo talked to me”. Embarrassment in Japanese interactions also comes up a couple of times.

There was an interesting contrast between not knowing anyone in apartment block in Dublin or in Tokyo but imagining different feeling of pulling together in times of disaster. Especially the bit about “if I had foreign people living beside me”. Does this represent some disappointment in her Tokyo neighbours?

There was an interesting point about how she felt Tokyo was a semi-crisis. A kind of grey area of crisis that was extreme enough to cause her trauma but not extreme enough to break down the cultural barrier of caring for those directly around you and pulling together.

She may not have been contacted by her local authority, and if she was, she ignored it, even though she could speak Japanese.

She received most support through her work. Will this be replicated in other interviews? Will work be shown to be the foreigner’s strongest link to community and support?

The nuclear issue was not a big fear for her, but aftershocks and a fear of water were very traumatic. She said she was most afraid of a big earthquake hitting Tokyo.

There is an issue to explore about the function of warnings and threat assessments - she found them upsetting not helpful (unusual subway earthquake warning, likelihood of future earthquake in Tokyo).

She highlights the importance of communication for people in temporary housing after a disaster. She says foreigners were able to play a useful function here as a distraction from the usual. Translators or foreign volunteers could such a contribution in future disasters or if a large number of foreigners were affected by a disaster in Japan.

A major motif was of loneliness - alone, on my own, lonely.

Another really interesting motif was of water (felt like I was drowning emotionally, worried about waves coming in, built on reclaimed land, water not fires were now the fear etc.) - maybe making a parallel between her emotions and the effect of the tsunami.

There is some evidence of increased stress during the interview, but overall the participant said quite clearly that it was good to talk because she had had no other chance to talk about this topic - this could be interesting data for disaster studies literature.

2013/7/27 Record of interview with Participant 2

Information about the interview

The interview took place in the lounge of the bar in [a hotel in a city in Ireland]. I picked this location as I knew it was near his work and I wanted to make meeting me as easy as possible. I also thought it would be quieter than a central cafe. We both sat on two sides of a large, low couch, half facing each other. There was a low coffee table in front of us and the couch was in the back corner of the lounge with windows
behind. All other guests were far away. The interview lasted about 125 mins (15 mins on the explanation and paperwork, 110 mins on the interview).

**Similarities with other interviews**

- There was definitely a narrative in this interview again, which makes me really want to consider getting help with narrative analysis from [my contact in New Zealand where I will be a visiting scholar]. He even said at one stage, "I'm after leaving a bit of the story out." So he saw the interview as a storytelling experience.
- Again a time period of about 6 months (March to September - almost the same as for Participant 1) was mentioned by him as the time it took for him to feel the disaster had passed. This could be interesting data for disaster studies. He talks about need to draw a line in the sand after the 6 months and putting the ordeal to bed mentally.

**Differences with other interviews**

- This was much more of an action-oriented story than an emotional story. This was very different to Participant 1’s emotional focus. Participant 2 even said off tape that working and living with only lads in Japan hardened you and there was never much talk of emotion.
- He received no information and little support from his work which contrasts with Participant 1.
- This interview was much less about establishing shared or common experience with me - very few 'as you knows' etc. I was glad of this because my experience was so tame in comparison to his.

**Problems**

- There will be a difficulty anonymising data for people like this participant because there were so few foreign residents of his small town. I stressed this point when reading the Plain Language Statement to him.
- The interview ran double the length I had expected. When the interview hit the one hour mark I did wonder whether I should try to wrap things up but I knew from the timeline he was nowhere finished. I let him talk on to let his story come to a natural conclusion and it reached nearly two hours (I must admit part of me did think, "this is going to take ages to transcribe!") I was worried he might be upset at how much of his time I'd taken. But then when I switched off the tape, he continued to chat for almost another hour, so I don't think he was in any troubled that I took my than the hour mentioned in the plain language statement.
- You can see that my interruptions increase dramatically once he mentioned the ordeal being over at the 90-minute mark. I had been holding questions and clarifications in my mind that I felt were really important and I was starting to worry that I wouldn’t get a chance to ask them so I was trying to signal that I wanted to speak. This is going to be one of the risks of the ethnographic-style interview where my role is so much to listen and watch, especially if time is a consideration. But I think this potential cost is balanced out by the surprising answers and data I don’t think I would have gotten or gotten as naturally if I asked more structured questions.

**Implications**

- If time is going to be tight in any interview (say meeting someone during their working day) I may have to be more structured in my interview format.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- I am glad I sent the topics beforehand, and I will continue to do so. He mentioned reading them, just as Participant 1 did. I think it helps them to get an idea of how to mould their narratives.
I’m not sure the stress Likert scale worked well here. I wondered if he was a bit annoyed at me asking him to mark his stress level after the interview. Did he find it insulting, or something? I just left it on the table and was going to leave it unanswered, but at the very end he marked 2/10, jokingly asking me if the scale was for my level of stress.

How participants seemed to be feeling
- His eyes watered only once for about a minute, telling of how he thought he was going to die in the initial violent shaking. Otherwise, I did not notice any signs of elevated stress. He ended up marking only 2 out of 10 on the stress Likert scale.
- He took a long time deciding on and justifying his choices on each Likert scale (about English ability, Japanese ability, earthquake experience). I think this may just have been his character, but he seemed to want to represent himself fairly.

How they used non-verbal communication
- He made little eye contact at the start, staring into the middle distance as he told his story. Eye contact increased as time went on. I tried to face him directly and keep open body language. He had legs crossed at the ankles (as did I) but otherwise seemed open. He used a lot of hand gestures and pointing at things in the room to describe sizes, motions, objects, etc.

What I felt surprised by
- I was surprised at how much he talked. I met him once in Japan and remember him being kind of quiet. I raised the first topic and then he talked almost uninterruptedly for nearly two hours.
- I was surprised at how much Ireland and Irishness came up in this interview, too (I thought I’d never see Ireland again, luck of the Irish, what would you expect of a group of Irish, etc.). Will other nationalities I interview focus on their home countries in this way as has been the case in the first two interviews?
- I was surprised by how tired I was again after the interview. I should not schedule many in one day. Even though I barely talked I was listening intently and trying not to forget points to go back to (I didn't want to make any notes as I am trying to keep eye contact and not distract the speaker and try to keep the feeling of a natural chat).

What I’d do differently
- The location wasn’t as quiet as I’d hoped, there were some children running around and a tv was switched on quite loudly near the end. I will try to find quieter places (again there was background music). I think these things will make it impossible to ever play the recording directly to voice recognition software. But I think the casual setting with a bit of noise around may help the participants to relax and talk, so I have to find the right balance.

What didn’t I find out
- I did not find out about slogans or his opinion of social media, (though I can interpret some of these from other answers/dialogue).

What do I need to clarify
- I must clarify whether Participant 2’s friend (who was also in the same town and is now back in Ireland) might like to participate.

First reflections on data
- His main communication tool was Skype phone calls over his 3G mobile phone Internet connection.
• His main information source seems to have been contact with family in Ireland and the news his family was seeing and relaying to him via Skype. Also, he mentioned the usefulness of viewing foreign media outlets over Internet on his mobile. He singled out the BBC for special praise. It was extremely useful. So TV and mass media comes out on top again. He also mentioned watching NHK TV at his girlfriend's house and not understanding the all the Japanese news broadcast, especially releasing to Fukushima. This might be more proof for the usefulness of trying to translate Japanese media content. However, I will have to think about the issue of translating and information sources. Even if the Japanese news information (especially nuclear-related) had been translated, I am not sure he would have believed it. I suspect he still would have gone looking to an English-speaking source. BUT, the only way the English-speaking media could get information was through translation!!! (See Jenny’s quote, UNDAC quote, etc.) So the trust is coming through the medium of translation. I need to think more about this issue. Also, his whole narrative ties in strongly to the general narrative at the time about the trustworthiness of information. Also he says that the foreign radio news is too general - perhaps another argument from translating locally-specific information over radio, as was done by some NPOs.

• He mentioned that the experience made him go back to hunter-gatherer: food, shelter, and fuel were your three priorities. He never mentioned information, even though so much of his story (really a big majority) was about the search for and need for information (by him and others), not the search for food or fuel or shelter. This is a really interesting point to me!

• He only mentioned Facebook and other social media in quite negative terms. He talked about the German passing on rumours from Facebook, how he got annoyed when his phone automatically showed his status when he signed on and he would be flooded with messages that he didn't have the time, inclination or battery power to answer.

• Power and connectivity were huge issues for him, but the power issue was mitigated by his access to fuel and a car where he could charge his mobile. The connectivity was mitigated by the fact that 3G wireless never went down, though phone signals did.

• He made no mention of using radio except when directly questioned by me. It is clear that it did not strike him as a useful communication tool. He said there being nothing worth listening to on the radio and that he didn’t know what they were talking about (implied in Japanese). He talked a little about radio over Internet. This may be important data as Japanese authorities put strong emphasis on radio as a communication tool in the worst-affected areas of a disaster.

• He did not get information from any government websites and the only ones he mentioned were foreign news outlets and the Irish embassy website.

• There is evidence of his Japanese not always being sufficient - misunderstanding the airport announcement, not understanding all the Japanese tv news. But he used Japanese more than I was expecting him to. He could speak very little when I first met him when he arrived in Japan.

• He talks about the severe difficulty two Malaysians who could not speak Japanese and were just on a business trip to Furukawa had - this could be used to reinforce how translation is even more important for such short-term visitors rather than foreign residents.

• He stressed that fuel was the most important resource for him (due to the freezing temperatures and it allowing him to charge his phone in his car).

• His biggest fear was by far Fukushima but the initial violent shaking was the most traumatic. He barely mentioned water or the tsunami. He reveals his fears (nuclear explosion, food, water) when his manager is trying to get him back from Ireland. He also says he would probably not have come home if it had been just the earthquake.
Another piece of support for more translation of mass media content was about the graphs used in a NHK TV news program that he couldn’t completely understand ("They’re really good at explaining stuff on Japanese TV...")

It seems to be that he needed information providers who were quick with answers, presented plans, were somewhat directive, and did not sit on the fences (compare his opinion of the manager in Ireland and the British Embassy staff versus management in Japan and the Irish Embassy staff)

He received no contact from the Japanese local authorities. It was very interesting how he said he wouldn't have wanted it. He didn't want some bureaucrat with a clipboard coming around checking his name off a list when they should be out saving lives. (Where we were was like a war-zone. We were the last of their worries...if we really needed help, they’d have know, they’d have known.) He would see bureaucracy (and possibly nonessential communication) from local government as a misused resource in a huge disaster. I was a bit surprised by this. I thought it would be comforting to know the local authorities were thinking of you.

He and the other Irish actively avoided the Japanese community response (the standard evacuation response of the community staying in a local school together). He even said "they couldn't hack" the Japanese collective behaviour (sitting neatly tip to toe in allotted spaces in the big shared hall). This is another interesting cultural difference / barrier that may need to be considered in future disaster planning where large numbers of foreigners from more individualistic cultures may be involved. Japanese disaster planners may need to rethink their frames for imaging how foreigners will react. It may be different to how Japanese are socialised of react / respond and could have implications.

He seemed to have a troubled experience with the Irish Embassy. He saw them as sitting on the fence and wanted to be directed as to what to do. He mentioned that they seemed unprepared but he underlined that he felt they were doing their best.

He definitely experienced trauma - see his sleeping so much when home in his parents house and his mother’s worry that he had been exposed to radiation. The quake also seemed to have a long term effect in defining his career priorities (changing jobs because of the mental line he drew after the ordeal).

His whole narrative can be linked to the 'fly - jin' narrative in the Japanese media. He even mentions being looked on as a deserter by his company. N.B. A slightly derogatory word for foreigner in Japanese is gaijin (pronounced like 'guy - jing' in English) and 'fly - jin' was used as a very derogatory description of foreigners who left Japan after the earthquake and who were said to have abandoned the country. He uses the term 'jump-ship' a lot in reference to leaving Japan.

He still has ties to Japan as his Japanese girlfriend of that time is now his fiancé and is living in Ireland.

There was more poetry in this interview. When talking about deciding on taking a job in Ireland that would give him a stable routine and income he described the decision as "wanting some steady ground". Are the participants intentionally using these evocative images?

The was a motif of information, chance, luck, destiny, fate, instinct, gut-feeling, odyssey, even adventure (the Top Gear reference) also individual versus collective also being in control.

This interview presented no evidence of an expat culture. He talked about the yank getting supplies and them not, competition with the yanks for making it out of Japan, he compared the Irish to the Germans and Czechs in slightly favourable terms. I must state clearly in my methodology that my use of ethnography does not include looking at a culture, therefore.

I am keeping all of the swear words and grammatical inconsistencies in for now to maintain that quality of his dialogue. I will consider whether they are needed when quoting directly or for analysis later on.
- He makes an interesting allusion to how the divide between affected and unaffected areas in East Japan was noticeable (the difference between Miyagi and Yamagata - neighbouring prefectures but on different coasts - one hit by the tsunami and one not).
- My knowledge and experience of Japan was useful in being able to understand references to things like [the apartment building chain he lived in] and not having to interrupt the flow of his questioning with unnecessary clarifications about these Japan-specific references.

2013/8/16 Record of interview with Participant 3

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in a meeting room at [a set of offices] where the participant now works. He picked this location based on scheduling convenience for him and, I think, because I had asked him to meet somewhere quiet. The security arrangements in getting to the meeting put me more on edge than for previous interviews. Also, the two seats we took at a large boardroom table in a high-ceilinged, decorative room (without any refreshments) made it feel much more business-like. I tried to make it seem more casual by pulling my seat away from the table to face the participant without any barrier in between us. We were alone with the doors all closed, and no-one disturbed us. The room was perfectly quiet. The interview lasted about 47 mins (3 mins on the explanation and paperwork, 44 mins on the interview).

Similarities with other interviews
- There was a similarity with Participant 1’s interview in that Participant 3 felt the disaster had not really finished even now. However, as Participant 3 was routinely transferred (missions are usually 4 years long) to a new posting in July 2011, it was not possible to establish whether he would have felt a similar 6-month duration to the disaster that the other participants had spoken about.
- Again, culture came across in some ways more strongly than language as a barrier to communication in the Japanese context in this interview.
- A lack of connection to the Japanese community (and even a certain cynicism that ex-pats will ever be closely tied to the Japanese community due to the standard length of stay, difficulty of learning Japanese, cultural barriers, etc.) came up again as a feature of this interview.

Differences with other interviews
- This could not so easily be described as an ethnographic interview. The interview started with the participant explaining how he could not talk about his professional role (as the consular secretary at an EU embassy responsible for accounting for citizens in the disaster and liaising with the Japanese government, etc.). He further explained that he could only speak on a personal basis, but that in many cases it would be difficult for him to draw a line between personal and professional at times. Therefore, he started the interview extremely closed (see non-verbal communication below) and gave very brief, clipped answers to begin.
- The interview was much closer to a structured interview where I progressed through the topics of interest to me. I felt in complete control of the interview direction unlike in the other interviews.
- His professional role took up most of his time and energy in the disaster, but he could not talk about these elements of the story. Therefore, unlike in the other interviews, there was no clear narrative structure, no real timeline, no actors, no particular role for him as a main protagonist.
• This interview was not at all about establishing shared or common experience with me - it was just about answering questions that I posed and not giving away anything more.
• In this interview, I tried to model more the types of answers that previous participants had given or the type of things previous interviewees had talked about in the set-up to my questions. I was trying to show him the sort of information I was looking for without being directive.

Problems
• The location was quiet and private but far from ideal. The location really changed the comfort-level and moved the power-balance from a fairly neutral one as in previous interviews to one heavily weighted toward the participant. Also the high ceilings in the spacious meeting room created a bit of an echo which slightly interfered with transcription.

Implications
• As the interviewee was so closed at the outset, I tried to use open questions, I tried to use silence to encourage longer answers, and I tried to include my own lived experience and more details about the research questions I am trying to explore to try to encourage him to speak more at length.

What questions worked well or didn’t
• The first “Tell me about your experience...” ethnographic-style topic raising did not work at all in this interview as it was the participant’s intention not to tell a story and not to reveal anything more than absolutely necessary.
• I do not think he read the topics I sent beforehand, but this was not a problem as he did not take any control of the conversational direction and was not crafting a story for me.
• Because I was trying to make the conversation seem more relaxed and natural than it really was, I did not want to look down at my list of topics during the interview. So I was glad that I had pretty much learned them off beforehand and was able to go through them.
• I’m not sure the question about prior experience of natural disasters worked well in the written profile section. He put ‘no experience’ - the lowest possible ranking - but had lived in Japan for 3.5 years and talked later about how that made him very used to earthquakes. This is an inconsistency that I must take into account. (Note I realise now that this is the problem with the question – a regular, small earthquake is not a disaster.)
• I think open questions and silence did not work at all to encourage him to speak more - he is a professional diplomat used to countering such conversational strategies. But I think sharing my research questions in more detail and saying what other participants had talked about did work to maybe spur his interest and helped to get him to be a bit more forthcoming and reflective in his answers - based on my constructivist view of the research process, I wasn’t worried about this being seen as ‘leading’ him or ‘influencing’ his answers. (Also, I definitely exaggerated the amount of data I had gathered in the way that I phrased these interjections - I’m not sure why I did that. Probably to make it seem like a substantial project worthy of his contribution?)

How participants seemed to be feeling
• He seemed to be extremely closed at the beginning of the interview. Perhaps even slightly defensive.
• He did not exhibit even slight symptoms of stress. He quickly marked a zero on the stress Likert scale at the end of the interview and had mentioned prior to that about
how his job would require him to draw a line under even trying professional experiences once he had been transferred to a new role.

**How they used non-verbal communication**
- He started the interview with both arms tightly crossed against his chest. He faced me directly and made eye-contact, but after a brief answer, he would nod gently, lips pursed and use silence to indicate that that was all he was willing to say.
- As the interview progressed (and as I tried to continually reinforce that I was only looking for his personal experiences) his body language became more relaxed. He put one arm behind the back of the seat and began to laugh and move about more.

**What I felt surprised by**
- I was surprised by how little his nationality came up as a theme in the interview. I was thinking that his embassy role would make it even more prominent than for the other interviewees, but it did not come up at all.

**What I’d do differently**
I will try to avoid meeting other participants at their places of work - I think the quiet gained does not outweigh the more relaxed, neutral atmosphere that is lost.

**What didn’t I find out**
- I did not find out anything about his personal story or feelings at the time of the earthquake and subsequent disasters because it mapped too closely onto the professional role that he was not willing to talk about. I cannot infer in any way how he may have been experiencing stress or fear or frustration or barriers as I could for the other participants so far.
- I did not find out extra detail about some things that I found interesting (for example, I felt I couldn’t ask as many questions as I wanted to about the embassy crisis page on Facebook or about the use of translation in the embassy’s work flow) because I was afraid too much questioning would signal that I was straying into the professional experience and would break the trust with the interviewee and cause him to close up and become more guarded.

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**
- His main communication tool was the embassy secure line and face-to-face communication for gathering information and a Facebook page and email for disseminating information.
- His main information sources were professional so he was somewhat restricted in how much he could speak about. But his main information came from the Japanese ministries (official sources) and, to a lesser extent, Japanese TV and an NHK emergency channel on the Japanese radio (“that would have been something we would have been tuned in to constantly because that was, you know, giving the most accurate, kind of, as-it-happened, you know, “oh there’s an earthquake in X, Y or Z or whatever””).
- He says the diplomatic corps received translated documents from the Japanese ministries (in English) - this speaks of global power relations of languages but also the role of the translators in the ministries - what information was included or left out, what strategies were used, who were the translators, what was their level of expertise, were the original source language documents also included to allow checking independently? Could institutional norms of translation have led to the communicative barriers I have quotes about? Is this something I want to explore more?
• He makes a really interesting point about the importance of translation for translating TV before the Japanese ministries had activated their own translation staff
  “translation issues only really arose in the immediate aftermath of it when we were listening to the Japanese news and trying to pick up what was happening before the ministries had actually activated themselves” - local staff in the embassy were the main translators at this point.
• For his professional role, social media was a very effective communication tool - one that worked right throughout the crisis. Facebook and Twitter, was how they ended up making contact with a lot of friends and colleagues (as well as citizens of his country, but here is starting to get into his professional role and may need to be redacted). But he did not use it in a personal capacity much.
• Power and connectivity were not huge issues for him because he was in Tokyo and because the embassy was equipped with a special secure telephone line that continued to work.
• He seems to differentiate between tremor and earthquake in terms of severity and this could explain the inconsistency about his rating of prior experience of earthquakes as no experience on the profile sheet while speaking about their frequency during the interview. This terminology difference could be worth exploring, too, in terms of warnings and their usefulness (e.g. if say tremor will people see it as a less urgent warning, etc.).
• He seems to differentiate between Westerners and Asian foreigners in Japan (in their reactions to earthquakes, in their abilities with Japanese).
• He seemed to view media reports in Europe as overly sensational - this may speak to the panicked calls from people in his home country that he had to deal with that did not match the reality of what he was seeing on the ground?
• He and his colleagues found the mobile phone system to be incredibly effective, but that wasn’t because of the mobile network, that was because of the data.
• There seemed to be more rephrasing, and stopping and starting to get the right expression with this participant - maybe this comes from professional experience to take care of what he says and how he says it, even though he was only speaking in a personal capacity.
• When talking about the topic of seeking information, the example he gives immediately are of radiation levels, and the risk of further aftershocks and earthquakes. Perhaps I can use this to infer what might have been the main issues of concern for people looking for information in the disaster.
• He points to the importance of having a crew on the ground for reliable media reporting - does this imply translators need to be on the ground too?
• He makes an interesting point about how Japanese rather than expats may have used one-seg more in the disaster - possible back-up for the point that you use the tools you are familiar with in times of disaster (one seg only really broadcasts Japanese language programming, so translating for one-seg may not be useful as expats would be unfamiliar with accessing it in regular times never mind emergencies).
• He makes a similar point about the citizens of his country not using the traditional emergency communication systems (like the automated anpi-kakunin system) designed for Japanese people. He talks about user-unfriendliness and this points to an important cultural difference in communication styles (and especially information density) between Japanese and other cultural contexts that translators may want to consider when developing emergency-communication translation strategies.
• He states that the nuclear disaster directly affected Tokyo and I can use this as support for including Tokyo interviewees in my group of participants.
• He also talks about the difficulty of translating technical nuclear-related information into something that people can use - this is back-up for points I made in my literature review.
He did not think that the standard crisis emergency message boards (171 and Web 171) worked well in the disaster - he feels Facebook and social media may have superseded it - an argument for preparing as many channels as possible for use for communication in a disaster. The danger is that all these tools seem to have a shelf life (see Myspace, Bebo, etc.) that may be highly unpredictable and what could be highly used now may not be used by the time of the next disaster. He also hints somewhat disparagingly about the complicated steps required for this domestic Japanese message board system - not what you need in a disaster, he said. - but the recognises that this might have been useful if mobile communication had gone down completely.

He is one of the people who clearly mentions wind-up mobile phone chargers and battery packs. I should collect quotes from all the people who talk about this to show how mobile power plus Internet really affected the communication of the people I spoke to positively. My recommendation would be to have such chargers included on preparedness lists and in emergency packs in addition to radios.

He hints at the lack of sophistication in how wards communicate with their residents.

He points out that faxes were an important part of ministerial communication to embassies in the disaster - this could be relevant to my idea about information ecosystems.

He points to language being a major barrier to foreigners being made feel part of the local Japanese community “I think, quite frankly, the biggest issue, eh, for expats in Japan in feeling part of the community is language...Because a lot of Japanese people, even though they might have a decent enough level of English, won’t necessarily communicate with you in it...and that’s a big problem. And a lot of expats don’t really take the time. It’s a huge commitment....”

He gives a clear quote about the difficulty for short-term visitors.

He points to the difference between Western and Eastern foreign nationals in Japan.

He has the prejudice that a lot of Chinese people in Japan would speak Japanese but has this been empirically shown.

He makes an interesting point about cultural differences in response in relation to the gambare nippon slogan.

He makes a very interesting remark about the lack of English proficiency of local government in Japan - and it is always local government that is in charge of and has responsibility for emergency response.

2013/9/18 Record of interview with Participant 4

Information about the interview

- The interview took place in a Starbucks coffee shop in the Shinjuku Maynds Tower Building in Shinjuku, Tokyo. The location was a good one. We were at a small table with no other customers nearby. I was worried that coffee shops in Tokyo would be absolutely elbow-to-elbow and noisy with no chance for private conversation but this allayed my fears. I felt that we could speak freely without anyone overhearing and that the recording quality would be good. The interview lasted about 70 minutes (10 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 60 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- This interview reinforced the theme of the lack of community that stems from being in a big city. However, Participant 4 made the excellent point that this is true of life in many big cities. I must be careful not to interpret lack of community as being caused by foreignness. It is just as likely that the natives feel just the same detachment from their neighbours in big cities.
Like with Participant 3, Participant 4 seemed to have no feelings of stress in the interview - he showed no emotion and did not describe any long term trauma or effects.

**Differences with other interviews**
- Memory came up as an issue more here than in previous interviewees. The participant expressed his worry about not remembering accurately and about how difficult it was for him to recall events of more than two years ago. I will need to highlight in my thesis that interviewing people such a long time after an event brings problems but that hopefully the event was significant enough for most people that the important stuff is still relatively clear in their minds even if the minutiae have become fuzzy. But this will be a weakness that I will have to be ready to defend.
- I was more relaxed in this interview than with any previously because this participant is a good friend. I was happy to check my notes and do other things which I would have avoided with an unknown participant for fear of breaking the intimacy I was trying to rapidly create.
- Unlike other participants so far, this participant only measured the disaster in terms of a few weeks (compared to others who talked about months. However, he did agree with others that in many ways the disaster is not yet over because of Fukushima (the nuclear reactor has been in the news for the weeks preceding this set of interviews because reports have come to light that contaminated water has been leaking from the plant and is not being adequately dealt with by Tepco).

**Problems**

**Implications**

**What questions worked well or didn’t**
- The question in the profile about experience of natural disasters did not work great here. He said he had frequent experience of earthquakes, typhoons, hurricanes, etc. in the places he has lived but he would not consider any of these disasters. Looking back at the question now I think I really meant prior experience of earthquakes, typhoons, etc. but didn't want to list all the possible events. I will try and make clear to future interviewees that I do not mean necessarily large scale events only.
- I think sending the general topics I hope to cover beforehand to participants worked well. He mentioned reading the list briefly and apologized for his rambling answers that seemed off topic. This indicates that he was trying to create a narrative that somehow met my expectations as a researcher. This feeds in to my constructivist epistemology. However, the fact that he rambled also shows the advantage to my mind of giving the participant more control of the actual interview itself (as in the ethnographic interview technique). He pointed out how he needed to ramble to help remember things and put things in order in his mind and that the tangents were probably things that were somehow significant to him at the time. I highlighted that the contextual tangents are useful to me in helping me to try and interpret his story.
- I continued to try to use modelling from my own experience to get the interviewee to talk about things I was interested in without directly asking them. I feel this technique is working well to make the setting seem more conversation-like and to balance the perceived power relationship.
- I have never used the handout question to see if the participant picks radio as an important item because nobody is talking about radio at all. I have now decided on four occasions that it would not work well, would just break the intimacy and would probably not tell me anything useful. So I have decided to abandon it and will not try it in future interviews.
How participants seemed to be feeling

- He seemed quite nervous at the start, much more than I expected as we are friends. His hands were trembling slightly as he filled out the profile information sheet. He looked away into the distance a lot and rarely made eye contact at first. But once we got past relaying his experiences to more dialogic conversation, he seemed to relax a lot more. It shows that asking people to participate in research, using a recorder, changing the normal dynamic always changes the conversation, even between friends. I think it is not possible to achieve a completely natural conversation when research is being undertaken unless time is there to break down that researcher-researched dynamic and the trappings of research (dictaphone, informed consent sheets, etc, are lost). The question then becomes do you need a completely natural setting for the information in the persons conversation to be valid. I don't think so.

How they used non-verbal communication

What I felt surprised by

- I was surprised by how nervous he was and by how relaxed I was.
- I was surprised by how little jet lag seemed to have affected me - I had only been in the country 24 hours when doing this interview. But I felt fresh, alert and not tired at all.

What I'd do differently

- I wish I had clarified why he said ‘of course I didn’t turn on the radio’ - maybe I can follow this up in a Skype interview - instead I went on to change the topic to the PA system, and I don’t know why I missed this potentially useful cue.

What didn’t I find out

- I did not find out about radio. I chose not to ask any questions about its significance because he mentioned himself that he didn't use or think of using.
- I forgot to check if there was anything else the participant wanted to add at the end of the conversation, but I think we had exhausted most of the useful topics.

What do I need to clarify

- I could clarify whether the early warning app he mentions (yurekuru call) was available only in Japanese around the time of the disaster. (Note: after checking, it seems that the app was only available in Japanese in March 2011 according to this blog http://www.calvin-c.com/blog/yurekuru/)

First reflections on data

- This participant's story did not seem to have any narrative structure really, so perhaps narrative analysis will not prove to be a useful analytical tool. Out of four interviews, two have had a clear "story" to tell and two have not. I will see how the others turn out.
- This participant mentioned Fly Jin without my prompting so this suggests that it was part of the discourse after the disaster.
- The importance of TV as a prime information source came through very strongly - he mentioned TV several times without my prompting.
- Facebook and other social media were shown to be poor information sources but good communication tools in this interview again. So translation of social media is unlikely to be necessary as a communication tool in most cases because people have been using it to communicate with people they know and with whom they share a common language of communication. This may end up being an important distinction that I will need to make in my thesis. I.e. social media and translation need will differ depending on whether it is being used as a tool for communication with people you
already know or whether it is being used as an information gathering tool from people you do not know. I have little evidence so far of people successfully using social media as an information gathering tool and therefore little evidence that translation was needed. People didn't trust much of what was coming out over social media, it seems, but benefited from using it as a way to effectively and efficiently communicate with their networks.

- This is another account where the participant mentions the sizeable earthquake that struck a couple of days before March 11, and so this might need to be the point from which I define the start of the disaster.
- This participant mentions the noise when the earthquake struck and the loud rumbling that preceded it and the subsequent large tremor.
- This participant spends a considerable amount of interview time stressing how little damage he incurred in the experience. I think this is an account where the participant wants to help me with my research but really doesn’t feel deep down that his experience merits consideration.
- His first communication was email over iPhone with his wife (who was using the office computer).
- His second communication was a Facebook update when he got to the park - he also at this time sent a text to his mother who did not have a social media presence.
- His third communication was a Skype call back in the apartment.
- His first information gathering was to turn on the TV to Japanese channels (broadcasting Japanese). Radio did not seem to come to mind for him as an information source in the immediate aftermath of a quake.
- His second information was checking news sources on his iPhone in the park (mostly Japanese because the information had not yet reached the international media)
- When talking about the details of the TV broadcast, his first statement is related to visuals (the map of Japan) not to audio
- The instinct of this participant seemed to be to get out of the apartment once the shaking had stopped and he had established that his wife was safe. He didn’t feel safe in the apartment and wanted to go to somewhere open.
- Some of the elements of the story he pinpoints in the first five or ten minutes after the earthquake are people not being too concerned around him (e.g. the workmen near his house, the cake shop) as if, by contrast, it was somehow odd or strange for him to be shocked by the experience. This may be a recurring feeling for other foreigners who felt their reaction did not match the (surface) reactions of the Japanese around them. (hon’ne/tatemae stuff?)
- The participant checked not just his own embassy’s website but the websites of other embassies as well.
- His decision to get out of Tokyo and go to Okayama was based on uncertainty - there wasn’t enough solid information about Fukushima.
- The comments in online Forums, emails from friends and messages on Facebook (many from abroad - hence an ecosystem idea) really influenced his decision about leaving Tokyo too. But then at the very end of the interview - when I had spoken about my experience with online comment functions - he seemed to contradict this earlier statement and say that he’s not sure he really did find forums helpful. This might be more evidence for the benefits of the dialogic ethnographic interview style.
- This is another participant who mentions making your own judgment. Maybe I need to make this a code.
- This participant makes a statement about Tokyo not being a disaster zone, but still he felt like he was living in a disaster the first few days after the earthquake - I could use this as a quote to justify the inclusion of Tokyo participants.
- He really struggled to define the temporal dimension of the disaster. He says in one way life has not gone back to normal (watching what he eats, etc.) but the disaster has
ended for him. Temporally, he mentions a couple of weeks, and functionally he seems to mention going back to work (about 9 or 10 days after onset).

- This is another participant who speaks of running out of the house on hearing the warning of a huge earthquake (that never came in the end) - is this a natural reaction for foreigners, even when the received wisdom in Japan is to stay indoors? - might this account also be used as a way to show that people may not fully read such warnings in real emergencies and may just focus on things like intensity rather than location?
- The participant talks on several occasions about turning on the TV immediately after different tremors to see what information was coming through. For him, TV was the main source of information and again he is slightly disparaging about the radio.
- The participant seems to remember information about the rolling power cuts in his area coming through on the PA system. He is also another participant who questions the sound quality/clarity of the communication coming through this PA system.
- I have an example of using my own experience in the ethnographic interview “I know how difficult these questions are because all the questions I’m asking you, I’ve asked myself, and I’m trying to remember about the public announcement system where I lived in, in, in downtown Tokyo”
- This is another participant who brings up the problem of what languages to choose to translate into.
- He doesn’t remember getting any multilingual information from city hall about the disaster, but there was a regular magazine in Japanese that did have information about the disaster after the fact.
- There was another example here in this interview of the benefits of the dialogical ethnographic format “Now, that does remind me alright…”
- His instinct was to visit embassy websites for information so this is more evidence for the central role that embassies played in the experience of the foreigners I spoke to.
- There was an example of me using modelling from my own experience to elicit information when I said about power and connectivity that I was concerned about water.
- I brought up the point (and the participant agreed) that I will have to deal with in the thesis that you if you’ve been in Japan some time and can speak the language it can be difficult to think back to parts of the disaster and ask yourself if it was happening in Japanese or another language. This may be something I need to temper long-term fluent residents’ accounts with.
- This participant brings up the point of how close PM Kan came at the time of the disaster to ordering the evacuation of Tokyo which the participant used to illustrate the idea that it is hard to know how much information is too much or too little. If we had known that at the time, and by corollary, if that information had been translated, what would have happened?
- The participant had a really nice quote that I might use to lead into one of the themes. “You know, I mean, you can just get information from everywhere now, well, as long as you’re able to, to understand it, so.”

2013/9/18 Record of interview with Participant 5

Information about the interview

- The interview took place in a Veloce coffee shop in Shibuya, Tokyo. The location was not a good one. I had been in this coffee shop earlier on in the day to check it out as a possible location and it had been very quiet. But by the time I met Participant 5 and brought him there, it had gotten very busy. The people at the table were very
noisy and I had forgotten that you can smoke inside in Japan and the air was thick with smoke. Luckily the participant did not mind (I asked him) but the transcription will be difficult with all the background noise. However, as the people around us were so involved in their own animated conversations, I felt that we could speak freely. The interview lasted about 44 minutes (7 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 37 minutes interview).

**Similarities with other interviews**
- This interview felt similar to talking to Participant 3 - it was unemotional, focused on short direct answers to my questions, and focused on the events rather than feelings much. He did not seem to see the experience in Tokyo as being very traumatic. His answers focused very much just on the day of March 11th.
- As with Participant 4, Participant 5 mentioned that he had had a brief look at the topics that I sent in advance, but did not read them in detail. He mentioned to at the end of his interview that he did try to think about the topic a bit in advance.

**Differences with other interviews**
- This was the first participant to mention the one-seg television system (TV over mobile phone) without any prompting from me.

**Problems**
- The participant is an extremely softly spoken person. It was quite hard to hear what he was saying face-to-face and now that I have checked the recording, I know that it will be hard to catch all that he is saying first time. Also, he does not appear to be a naturally talkative person, so his answers tended to be shorter than with other people I have interviewed.
- I was starting to feel a bit jet-lagged and tired by the time I met this participant at 5pm, so it is possible that I was not as good at making him feel relaxed and happy to speak as I had been with other participants and I may not have been as on the ball about picking up on things he said or following up for clarification or expansion.

**Implications**
- Because I found it difficult to hear him, because his answers tended to be short, and because his focus on the disaster was just on the very early stages, this was definitely not a narrative-based interview - no real feeling of a story came about and I do not feel I have much contextual information on him to infer much extra about his experiences above and beyond what he answered.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**
- I tried very hard to leave silences as often as possible, especially at what seemed to be the end of answers or after I made a comment in order to try and encourage greater contribution from the participant but it rarely bore much fruit.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**
- He seemed completely relaxed and not at all troubled by talking about this topic. He was not talkative but nor was he particularly shy. He made regular eye contact but held himself together quite tightly. He did mention briefly that the situation with Fukushima was very scary and that his parents were calling him about it, but he did not dwell on it as a topic.
- Overall, this participant did not seem to remember too much about the events - he openly said he didn’t remember certain details and his chronology did not match that of other participants or the general consensus about when events were known about in the disaster - so the overall feeling was that the events did not make much of an impression on him. I need to make sure I point this out to counter any ideas of every
foreigner being panicked and feeling the need for translation, etc. He is a counterpoint that shows that speaking Japanese and being in Tokyo may have left foreigners relatively unscathed.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

**What I felt surprised by**
- I was surprised by how much I had to talk - I think I had been spoiled by the previous talkative participants. It was a little stressful, especially as I was starting to feel a bit tired.
- I was also really surprised by how little realization the participant had of the seriousness of what had happened on the first day - even though he had seen some one-seg broadcasts.

**What I'd do differently**
- I would avoid this coffee shop chain in the future and certainly not sit in the smoking section.

**What didn’t I find out**
- I did not follow up on why he knows his neighbours now but didn’t at the time. What changed? I don’t know why I didn’t ask the question at the time as it seems a very obvious follow up. I think I was just getting tired.

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**
- The participant mentioned going drinking after the earthquake. This is now turning into a bit of a theme. Several participants have mentioned this. This may seem cold or odd, but as the participant underlines, this is because people in Tokyo did not at that stage realize the extent of the damage up north and is proof of the time it took for situational awareness to spread. Many of the foreign people I talked to seemed to indicate that they will act as normal (keep plans, go drinking, etc.) and not panic, until they know how bad a situation is. This is more evidence of the panic fallacy in disaster studies. It may also be a way of dealing with stress. Joking aside, it could be an interesting recommendation to make sure that pubs where foreigners congregate are well served with translated disaster information, notice of evacuation centres, etc., especially for the Olympics where many people will be on holidays / celebrating.
- The participant mentioned the people in his office with one-seg on their phones.
- The participant’s personal timeline is interesting - he feels the nuclear stuff didn’t happen until a week after the quake when in fact it started that evening and certainly that weekend.
- He mentions a couple of times about how there was no realization of how serious the situation was.
- The participant felt that the disaster ended about 4-5 months after onset in July. Functionally he defines the end in terms of parents calming down, activities no longer being cancelled, water and toilet paper no longer in short supply, etc.
- He talks about how his friends around Japan were all using Facebook to communicate in the immediate onset.
- His account speaks of the primacy of the Internet and email as a communication tool in his experience of the disaster.
- The participant mentioned how normally pay online newspaper articles were free during the disaster so you could read what was going on.
- This is an account that mentioned the Japanese skill for presenting information graphically in a skilful way to explain complex topics like the nuclear disaster - could
this be a lesson learned - to focus on my diagrammatic or graphic presentation of information in disasters.

- It was seeing a photo posted by a friend on social media that was the first time he was made to realize how serious the situation was for some.
- I was still interested at the time of this interview in assessing how much foreigners felt part of the response and at the time I was trying to assess how implicated the people I talked to felt in the national response (e.g. slogans, etc.) - this participant seemed fairly implicated and aware - he was one of the few people to mention the Gambari Tohoku campaign slogan, so it could be some evidence that language ability helped feelings of involvement with the national efforts, although he did not go into many specifics.
- His experience resonates with my own in the sense that the only real pulling together was based on the company in terms of response and recovery - perhaps this came from the fact that were both employed by very traditional Japanese companies with few foreign employees.
- His attitude to Japanese media representation of the nuclear accident is that they only presented the positive, upbeat side.
- Talking about the seeming glossing over by NHK in particular of the seriousness of the nuclear incident was the most animated the participant got in the whole interview. He says that the negative sources on the incident were mostly foreign.
- He says that the explanations he found in English for what was going on in the first few days and weeks were terrible - despite the fact that he imagined experts would be quite fluent in English in their fields. What caused this rupture?
- When asked if there was anything he wanted to add he mentioned the push to save energy after the nuclear disaster. This topic may have been something important in his world, but it also shows that he was thinking about issues of interest to the project - he was engaged with the interview process, perhaps more than I thought.
- The participant considered his experience probably bland compared to other people I had interviewed.
- The participant doesn't feel like a separate part of his community in Japan or, or at work.
- Talking to his boss was a calming influence on him - he is more evidence for the rupture in some foreigners of being influenced by panic from overseas and calm from local.
- His explanation of why fly-jin is not to him a derogatory term is because “nobody had the information they really needed”.

2013/9/19 Record of interview with Participant 6

Information about the interview

- This interview was held on the outdoor terrace of a small Thai restaurant near the Tokyo Midtown complex in Roppongi. The interview was a disaster location-wise because of the noisy location and the fact that it was during the participant’s lunchtime when he was restricted for time and needed to eat. Though operationally the interview did not work well, I still think his perspective on governmental emergency communication (he worked for a PR firm that advised a certain Japanese government Office) could be valuable. Also, I got to raise most of the topics I had planned to raise beforehand. I just didn’t get to apply the ethnographic style of interview practice as much or as well as I would have liked. The interview lasted about 35 minutes (2 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 33
Similarities with other interviews

Differences with other interviews

- This was the first interview held over lunch and outdoors and both caused negative implications. I will have to try to control the choice of location better in future interviews and I will try to avoid meeting people during a break from work, if possible.

Problems

- There was a drunken group and later on young children beside us who made a lot of noise and disruption.

- As the interview was held during the participant’s lunchtime at work, he was restricted for time and needed to eat.

Implications

- The background noise will definitely affect the audio quality for transcribing.

- I spoke a lot more time talking than I normally wanted to as per my ethnographic style - but this was to allow the participant time to eat. Also, I was very conscious of time and not making the participant late back to work. I was not relaxed in this interview at all.

What questions worked well or didn’t

- The question that probably worked best was asking the participant if they knew of any other people who fit the profile who might be interested in talking to me. The participant gave me three people to contact. Two never answered me, but one agreed to participate and became Participant 27.

- The disability status question on the profile data sheet seemed to cause some confusion again. I explained that it was to see if issues like hearing or vision problems, for example, may also have explained why people had difficulty communicating or gathering information. The participant answered minimal (as he used corrective lenses) but my intention was to only mark this status if it was a serious, state-recognized disability (e.g., blindness).

- The Likert scale for stress also needed explanation and the participant at first seemed to think I was asking him for his level of stress during the disaster.

How participants seemed to be feeling

- He seemed relaxed and very eager to help me. He worked hard to put me at ease and I enjoyed talking to him. Though I could not really carry out the conversation in the ethnographic style I planned to, I feel there will be some useful information in there.

How they used non-verbal communication

What I felt surprised by

- I felt surprised by how poorly some embassies in Japan supported its citizens in this disaster.
What I’d do differently

- I would not have chosen this location or time if I had the interview to do over. I think interviewing while eating and while someone needs to rush back to work does not create the best conditions. I think I ended up getting good information today despite rather than as a result of the interview conditions. In future, I must make more efforts to control the controllables, as it were.

What didn’t I find out

What do I need to clarify

- I want to follow up with him on differences in information provision styles between Japanese and English that he talked about off mic.

First reflections on data

- This participant would have an interesting view on governmental emergency communication because he was working at the time of the disaster for a PR consulting firm that provided services to a certain Japanese government office.
- The idea of providing a twitter feed off of NHK and Kyodo shows how intertwined information sources were. It also shows that they were mediators (maybe not always translating but at least selecting and editing).
- He underlined that in relation to Fukushima, foreigners struggled, but even the Japanese were not clear on what was going on.
- Even though the participant’s life was not much affected by the disaster, information gathering was central for him because of his job as a PR consultant to foreign firms.
- His account speaks to the importance of trustworthiness - they used news agencies as sources because they have established standards.
- Facebook was the main source of information for this participant on the day of onset because of the lack of phone service.
- He had not really used Twitter before the earthquake.
- NHK English TV was important for this participant personally.
- His communication with the important people in his life was all done through Facebook or email.
- He made the argument that structural factors in the way news is made in the West and in Japan may have helped to cause to content versus context difference (the West looked to create sensationalist content to generate clicks and form public opinion, the Japanese gave loads of information but didn’t explain what it meant). Overall he sees this as a general cultural difference in how you tell stories which I might want to mention as another cultural barrier. This difference impacted on translation “ it wasn't even a question of whether information was available in English or not, what was available where it was directly translated made absolutely no sense”
- He criticises the Japanese government for producing useless direct translations because of systemic and structural reasons where it has to be exactly the same between languages to avoid risk (of being sued of being accused of misinformation).
- He does not feel part of his community and is not aware of any disaster preparation measures in the housing complex he lives in (though he has lived there four years).
- It’s interesting - the Canadian Embassy already has one of the recommendations I
was thinking of making in place (kind of mentor long-term representatives in various places throughout Japan) and yet though the system was there, they didn’t do anything with it. The main reason seems to be because the embassy staff and many of these such contact points left. I could use this in my thesis to underline that it’s not just about providing lessons learned but thinking about how we can ensure that lessons learned or good ideas are applied next time around.

- The embassy did not send him any information even though he was registered.
- This is another account where it was work not the local government that had all of the influence in terms of disaster preparedness.
- In terms of looking for help, his criteria were “who I thought could help me most and who would understand my situation the best” - this seems to point to embassies or work being more natural avenues than the local government or NPOs and this is an argument I can make for where I should try to spread my lessons learned.
- He gives an example of volunteer translation in the translating of the Japanese documentary about Tokyo’s disaster preparedness that was then posted on to Youtube.
- The participant defines the disaster period functionally as the time the Fukushima 50 were front and centre in the news and when he felt he started to get more reliable information about Fukushima. Temporarily, he puts this at about two to three weeks.
- For this participant, though, day-to-day life never changed so he cannot really speak of a return to normal or recovery for himself. (Despite him saying this, he still mentioned the fear of radiation affecting him long term - this is hardly normal.) This is another indication that in the case study part, I perhaps need to deal with the disaster/non-disaster status of Tokyo.
- This participant mentioned some positive aspect to the disaster - he found it exciting and he was being paid to monitor it and respond for high profile clients. This external factor conditioning the participant’s response of improved job chances is another one that I need to take into account.
- He links the fly-jin phenomenon to what he calls legitimate reasons of family and inability to access the information needed.
- Apart from Fukushima, there was no element of the disaster where the participant felt he was lacking information (because he wasn’t really affected).
- The participant was not watching the media very closely through the weekend. He didn’t find out about Fukushima until Sunday.

2013/9/19 Record of interview with Participant 7

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in one of the meeting rooms at the participant's office in central Tokyo located in a quiet back street just off the Shinjuku-dori. It was a completely soundproofed room with a fairly large table in between us. There was a window to the room but it had shutters down, so it felt private and I had no worries about the recording quality. But I did feel extremely formal. It was very Japanese going to the meeting room and exchanging business cards, but I actively avoided doing the rituals and speaking Japanese. I am not sure whether this is because I was tired, because I did not want bad memories from my experience of working for a Japanese company, or because I wanted to play the foreigner card. It was probably a bit of all three. A requirement of my research was that interviews would be carried out in English and I had found it useful in the past to be ambiguous about how
familiar I was with the Japanese language and culture. Before we started speaking the participant said he could only give me a maximum of thirty minutes because he was at work - I since learned that he was a very senior executive of the company and would have had a lot of freedom to arrange his own schedule but also a lot of responsibilities in the working day. So unusually, I kept my watch on the table (as there was no clock in the room) as well as the audio recorded and the profile questionnaire sheets. The interview lasted about 29 minutes (2 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 27 minutes interview).

**Similarities with other interviews**

**Differences with other interviews**
- This was the only participant who identified himself as a foreigner but also pointed out that he holds a Japanese passport for convenience based on his long period of residence in Japan (more than half his life).

**Problems**
- I was really tired in this interview because I had not slept at all the previous night (actually zero hours) due to some delayed reaction jet lag.
- It was quite difficult for me to keep silent when I felt he had not understood the purpose of my research and seemed to be accusing me of research aims I did not have and did not feel I had communicated to him (translate everything into English, criticized Japan for not translating enough) but I knew that I needed to keep silent now more than ever and let him reveal his inner world view more to me. I only fell once where I realized I was about to interrupt him, stopped and apologized.

**Implications**
- This could explain why I felt the participant was a little hostile at times - maybe I was just tired and sensitive.
- Because I was not enjoying the interview, I did not really focus on any of the ethnographic techniques I had been trying to implement in this research - it came out much more like a standard semi-structured interview. (Even transcribing the interview, I did not enjoy listening back to the transcript and found myself again not enjoying the interaction. I must be careful not to let these negative feelings cause me to discount or underestimate the participant’s data.)
- Overall, I did not feel particularly comfortable or engaged with this interviewee as a result of him attributing what I held to be false aims to my research project, so it surely had an effect on me not minding about only getting to spend a short time with him.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**
- His answers seemed so curt to almost all of my questions that I found myself constantly justifying why I was asking him these questions - after many answers, I would say “the reason I’m asking” - maybe not just to justify but also to try and spur on his interest and engagement a little.
- I tried to ask about the slogans again, but I’m not sure if this question is really adding any value and helping me to answer my research questions.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**
- Overall, the participant was very calm but I got a slightly hostile vibe from when it seemed in his mind that I was being critical of the Japanese response or that he wanted to show that he did not agree with the overall thrust of my thesis. It seemed he mostly got angry about the misunderstanding that I was suggesting everything should be translated into English. He pointed out that there are people who don’t
speak English and this could be useful commentary for my thesis to reinforce the idea that Twitter research, etc, is very one-sided at the moment.

*How they used non-verbal communication*
- About 10 minutes from the end, before his slightly hostile comments, he started clicking his projector pen repeatedly and this continued until the end of the interview showing, perhaps, his own irritation with my questioning or what he perceived as the thrust of my research.

*What I felt surprised by*
- I was surprised that he felt the disaster lasted a long time. He seemed to cut himself off from media early on and avoided thoughts of leaving or panic, so I thought he would say it ended very early for him.

*What I'd do differently*

*What didn't I find out*

*What do I need to clarify*

*First reflections on data*
- This participant’s first attempt at contacting important people in his life was mobile phone but the system was not working. But then he soon heard that Skype could be used and he tried it and it worked - so Internet comes across as an important environmental factor in this account.  
- I tried to ask about social media and SNS and his answer was that it was not the only way but the easy way to communicate with everybody else. His account points to the benefit of speed and efficiency of SNS in communicating with multiple people rather than sending personal messages to individuals. So Skype and Facebook were the SNS tools he mentioned.  
- Television is mentioned as his first information gathering tool.  
- He switched off the TV after two or three days of 24-hour coverage. He is particularly critical of the media showing the same footage repeatedly.  
- He did not watch overseas TV news because they were just getting the footage from Japanese TV anyway and he wanted the information first hand. This shows (perhaps) a suspicion of translation?  
- He did not believe that the nuclear information from the normal TV channels was true (he said he had no illusions about it).  
- His account is another strong one for individuality - taking in lots of information from lots of sources, not just Japanese ones, and making his own ideas and not panicking.  
- He talks about having a very strong connection to Japan unlike other people. (I think this may have influenced his data - he explicitly stated that it would not have been the right thing for him to leave.) It was really just time that seemed to bond him so strongly to Japan and he had no other advice for how to build community ties.  
- He underlines that Japanese were probably just as confused as foreigners in terms of what is true so linguistic mediation may not be a factor in alleviating this.  
- He talked about how people from some countries in the foreign community in Japan were more stressed than other people and he indicated again that who to believe was a matter of individual decision making.  
- He was very aware of lots of information on disaster available from the city government in Japanese and English, especially via the website.  
- He underlines that when we talk about foreigners in Japan, the English-speaking community is not the biggest.
• He did not mention anything about helping his foreign friends who could not speak Japanese so well so I must make sure to take this into account - not all foreigners who could speak Japanese well acted as volunteer intercultural mediators and I should not end up giving this impression.

• This is another participant who clearly says he never uses radio - even though he identified so strongly with Japanese culture in so many other ways. He even says that he doesn’t know many people who have radio. Nor does he read newspapers.

• His definition of the end of the disaster was again functional (light back in the street, for example) and temporally he defined it as 3 or 4 months or even longer.

• This participant is another person who talks about finding a new code not based on language for everybody to understand maybe based on pictures. This idea of pictures has come up several times now.

• He very strongly feels it would be wrong to prefer one community over another in terms of information and translation - even where size of community may be noticeably different - in terms of what gets translated but he also recognizes that we cannot expect all foreigners to learn Japanese and that’s why he suggests thinking out-of-the-box in terms of a new code.

• As a long-term resident, he is very clear that in Japan it is not a question of if, but when the next disaster will happen.

• He made a good recommendation about handing some kind of leaflet to every foreign person who arrives in Japan.

2013/9/19 Record of interview with Participant 8

Information about the interview

• The interview took place in the outdoor roof garden of a Starbucks coffee shop in the Tokyu Plaza building on Omotesando. The interview took place in the evening at 7pm after darkness had fallen. It was a balmy late summer evening and very comfortable sitting outdoors. The participant chose this location as it was just a few minutes by bicycle on her way home from work. This was my third interview of the day on only my second full day in Japan. The interview lasted about 65 minutes (10 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 55 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

Differences with other interviews

• It felt different to all prior interviews because of the intimate setting and my extreme tiredness.

Problems

• The cafe was outdoors and it was evening time, so there was little light (just small atmospheric lights here and there).

• I was extremely jetlagged - I had not slept the previous night at all and this was my third interview of the day so I was just running on caffeine by the time I met this participant.

Implications

• I was afraid the participant would be unable to fill out the various forms so I tried to guide us as near as possible to the windows of the indoor part to get the light from there. This meant that we were nearer to some other people than I wanted to be. But it still felt intimate (because of the dark setting) and I felt we could speak freely. The people beside us were on a date and completely ignored us.
• I may not have focused enough on listening during the interview and there were more interjections by me than I would have liked.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

**How participants seemed to be feeling**
• She seemed to be at ease and relaxed. She was warm and friendly and we had a very pleasant time talking to each other.

**How they used non-verbal communication**
• At the initial stages (especially when she was trying to remember details of her experiences) she would often lean back in her chair, cross her arms and put one hand at her chin, staring off in the distance to think. At all other times she leaned in to speak and made good eye contact.
• This may not exactly be non-verbal but the participant had a habit of repeating ‘yeah’ numerous times in a row when listening and I figured that this might cause trouble when transcribing. I have taken the decision to reduce the number of ‘yeahs’ in cases where I feel they would hinder understanding of the dialogue, but keep as many as possible in to try to retain the original quality of the interview experience.

**What I felt surprised by**
• I was surprised that the participant mentioned hoarding of essential supplies that started in Tokyo - this had not really struck me in other accounts and I need to go back and check for it again - it runs counter to the solidarity and group dynamics characteristic of the discourse on Japanese response to emergency.
• I was a bit surprised about how strongly the feeling of community came across in her account, especially as she marked 2/10 for confidence in speaking and 1/10 for confidence in reading Japanese. This seems to make the argument that language need not be a barrier to community but it may also make the argument that volunteer translation (friends etc who translated for her) were key to this integration into various communities.

**What I’d do differently**
• I would try to just let her speak more - even though my interjections were only really yeahs for the first half of the interview, I am concerned that I was not listening as deeply as I should have. I’m not sure how focused you can really be on listening when your mouth is moving.

**What didn’t I find out**

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**
• This participant’s initial reaction was once again to do the same as the Japanese around them as an initial form of response (getting under desk, changing shoes). This perhaps requires no language and I must think about this but not all foreigners think alike. For example she says, “I remember one of my colleagues shouting, for, foreign guy was shouting, “Ah, Japanese, what are we supposed to do? [laughter] [Laughter] Anyway, I thought that was good. I just followed.”
• She highlights different cultural responses right from the beginning of her account - foreigners wanting to get out immediately (which you’re not supposed to do) and Japanese waiting quietly for an announcement before taking action. She, however, was a foreigner who copied the Japanese and later on about how prepared and calm (though still scared) her Japanese friends and colleagues were.
• Her first communication was writing a mail to her family while sheltering under a
desk in her office. Internet continued to be her main communication (wifi outside pub
and news coming in from family in Netherlands) - this could be useful for an
information ecosystem idea. She also gives another good ecosystem example (being
on the computer and watching TV news, colleague sending link to NHK foreigner
news, receiving non-Dutch embassy information from friends of other nationalities)
• A learning point is to have flat shoes in the office.
• There is more evidence here of foreigners creating their own communities “maybe
that’s why it was only the four people who were there because we hang on to each
other”.
• Alcohol features again as a kind of coping strategy.
• This is another account where foreign TV news was deeply criticised for being
disconnected from reality (she stopped watching CNN after first night - but continued
to watch NHK in English)
• There was no immediate direction from her company about whether or not to go to
work - she also says there was a disaster confirmation system that the company had
which didn’t work.
• This is another account indicating some pressure from family and loved ones to leave
Japan (arising she thinks from them being exposed to all the extreme unrealistic
reporting).
• Radiation seems to be her major concern (she was so relieved to be officially allowed
to work from home)
• She talks about the disaster as being a shared experience among people and a way to
say “were you there?” - I think this kind of implies bonding among foreigners. Maybe
I can use this as a quote to introduce one of the chapters “It was, it was a shared
experience, in a way……even now, eh, now and then, yeah, you check, “Ah, were
you there when the earthquake happened?” “Yeah.” “Where were you?” “There and
there.” Yeah, so everyone has his or her story…about it and it’s something I will
never forget.”
• This is another account that seems to say announcements in any language might not
be so effective at the beginning anyway (due to in this case shock or due to noise of
the quake as with Participant 17).
• Perhaps I could use this quote to introduce a section on the disconnect between
domestic and overseas media “I would see a Dutch journalist come here and make a,
em, some reportage and then, “Oh no, this is just sensation…Yeah, so then, I felt like,
“Oh, this is, eh, this is how they make news.””
• This is another account mentioning having a backup plan (like Participant 10 for
example) which could be used to illustrate the independent and non-group dependent
nature of foreigners’ thinking.
• She mentions timeliness as being a big block (how slow information was to come out
about Fukushima).
• Despite not speaking much Japanese this participant seems well integrated into the
community of residents in her apartment building and into their communal disaster
response strategies.
• She is another participant mentioning throwing away or disregarding posted material
coming to her in Japanese. My fear, therefore, for the adoption of Easy Japanese
communication is that foreigners will still just throw it away based on the fact that
they expect not to be able to understand it, even if it has been redesigned so that they
might, and this participant actually pre-empted my comment by taking the words out
of my mouth.
• This is another participant who did not use radio or did know about translated
governmental websites.
• This participant who usually used Facebook a lot did not use it in the disaster much.
2013/9/20 Record of interview with Participant 9

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in the English language school owned and run by the participant. The school is about a ten-minute walk from the station of a village in Ibaraki prefecture. It is on the first floor (2F) of a small commercial complex including some shops and offices. The school consisted of a large open-plan room with some toys and posters for younger students and a table and chairs for conversation with older students. As I was entering the building, two older Japanese women who had just finished their class were coming down the stairs and said hello to me in English, probably assuming I was another teacher. The participant had stressed several times in our prior communication that the interview needed to be finished within 50 minutes as we were talking during a break in his schedule and he had to get ready for another class. For this reason, I was very concerned about timing. The interview lasted about 50 minutes (8 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 42 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews
- This felt a bit like interviews with Participants 3 and 7 because the interviews were being held at their places of work. This meant I had no concerns about disturbances or recording quality, but I did feel some sort of power imbalance at the outset.
- It also felt a bit like the interview with Participant 6 in that I knew from the outset that time was very limited and was conscious of this in how I carried out the interview.

Differences with other interviews
- This participant was the first so far to say that he had taken part in another study about the Great East Japan Earthquake. The study was a Japanese linguistic one about Easy Japanese, which is a topic that is slightly related to my study. However, the prior interview was not on translation or foreigners’ experiences but was about the type of Japanese language used in disasters.
- I didn’t laugh so much in this interview. I think it was because I felt so much on the participant’s territory, I’m not sure I was as relaxed as I had been in other interviews. Nonetheless, it was still a pleasant conversation and that participant relaxed and laughed often.

Problems
- The form filling at the beginning took longer than I’d hoped as I really wanted to focus on maximising speaking time. I was a bit annoyed with myself as I am still not sure how much value these profile questions will add to my study, but I think it is better to have them and then decide not to include them than to stop asking for them and risk losing what could turn out to be useful data.
- I feel like memory may have been an issue for this participant - remarks like “I don’t remember” or “I don’t know when” and “I don’t know if” seemed to come up more frequently in this account that in others.

Implications
• When I know interview time is limited I will try to explain questions on the profile sheet only when the participant explicitly asks for clarification.

What questions worked well or didn’t
• Again I had to explain the disability status on the profile questionnaire so I think it has not added much value and probably just caused confusion.
• Also the question about where you were one week, month, year after the earthquake seemed to need explaining (though the participant did not ask for help) so it could probably be written more clearly as a few participants have struggled to follow my reasoning. However, for me, rather than an accurate measure it is more a way to judge what type of information I might want to push for if they do not explain by themselves.
• The stress scale question needed explanation - I really thought this question would be clearer and easier to fill in. Plus it feels like such a clumsy measure. I should probably have worded it something like, “Assuming that before the conversation with me started, you were at zero, where do you feel now on the scale?”

How participants seemed to be feeling
• The participant seemed pretty tired - I had caught him right in the middle of a busy working day and just directly after a lesson had finished. He yawned slightly a couple of times in the first two or three minutes of speaking and I think it took him a while to get focused on the topic. He also had some slips where he said one word but clearly from the context meant another similar word and had to ask me what my question was again as if he’d lost track which made me think he was tired.

How they used non-verbal communication
• He sat at the top of a large table with about 6 chairs around it. He motioned to me to sit on one chair and I moved it out so that we would not really have the table as a barrier between us. He tended to sit mostly with his arms crossed and the ankle of one foot crossed onto the other knee making his body language seem a little closed, certainly at first. He did not lean in or share intimate space in that way, possibly because he was totally in his environment.

What I felt surprised by
• I was surprised that the participant said the disaster hasn’t finished yet. Based on the focus of his talk on the first day, I thought he was going to have a very bounded, short-term view on the disaster. I am very glad I asked the question explicitly about when the disaster ended because I found out the many long-term effects it had on the participant’s life (gave him the chance to buy the school he now runs).
• I was also a little surprised when the participant asked me personal questions when I was asking he had any other relevant questions or comments at the end of the interview. I wonder if this indicates that I didn’t share enough of my personal experience beforehand. My general rule was to share personal experience only when it would help build intimacy, trust, open people up or model topics of conversation. I guess I hadn’t felt any of these had been necessary in this interview but maybe I was wrong. It ended up leading to an interesting bonus conversation more generally on the experience of being a foreigner in Japan which may prove very useful.
What I’d do differently

What didn’t find out
• I did not ask if he used radio but I think I can infer from several of his answers and the fact that he did not mention using it when I brought up its importance to older Japanese people in Tohoku.
• I have also just given up on the idea of trying to use the handout.

What do I need to clarify
• Why exactly did he not go to a centre for refuge (I can infer that he felt confident enough is his car and he had enough supplies but was there anything blocking him?)

First reflections on data
• This participant seemed to have good experience of disaster preparedness and response (probably as a result of coming from Hawaii) - for example his first action after the earthquake was to try and get gas/petrol - a very wise move, if possible.
• This is another participant who sheltered in his car (he did not go to a communal response centre even though his first action was to go to the preschool to get his son)
• His first communication was a face-to-face (asking the teacher at his son’s preschool what to do) and a quick mobile phone call to his wife as well as a mail by mobile phone to his mother-in-law. He also emailed his friends at the nuclear power station where he worked.
• An email from a friend in Hawaii told him about the tsunami and shows the complexity of the information ecosystem for foreigners.
• Word-of mouth came up in this account really quickly (where to get water) and this was with neighbors who spoke Japanese implying a need for community links and language ability to access word-of-mouth as an information source in this case.
• He was not much interested in information gathering and says so. This is why he did not think to (and had no interest in) checking TV on mobile etc. He knew all he needed to do about what was going on with his family locality and this ties to the “simplicity” of the emergency response life comment he makes at the start of the account.
• This participant’s focus is very local. Once his family was okay that was all he needed to know. He refers back regularly to a nearby nuclear power plant (not Fukushima or the tsunami etc.) even though I explicitly ask about the broader disaster in terms of his concerns and explains that he almost had no interest or didn’t think to search for information on the wider disaster. This counters one of my main assumptions: that foreign nationals in the disaster wanted more and better information. Participant 9 is a counterexample. He seemed to valorise the simplicity of focusing on the local and immediate. This does also feed into a theme of individualism though.
• This participant’s focus is very much on the first day - even the first hours - in terms of how he defines the disaster in his universe. He seems to define the disaster in terms of going back to work (2-3 weeks) and getting back to surfing (2-3 months). But nonetheless, he still says the disaster has not ended for him (it changed his life in giving him a new business but also there are still cracks in his apartment walls and he
has changed some behaviour - everything is ready to run when an earthquake happens in the middle of the night)

- This is an example of one of the positive outcomes for a foreigner in terms of earthquake - he now has his own business. Maybe I should look for other positive outcomes.
- Even though this participant did not focus on communication or information gathering in his account, it was interesting that the first thing he grabbed for in the large earthquake we had had the day before the interview was his cell phone.
- He made a very perceptive comment about how to analyse disaster response. You need to know what is important for a person. For him, it was his family and that dictated how he responded, and how he communicated and gathered information. So perhaps I need to identify what was important for each one of my participants to be able to interpret their response.
- There was a sense that he had no choice but to stay (his wife’s family lives in Tokai) and so this also directed or conditioned his response.
- Though information gathering did not seem to be important to this participant, he does make some comments that show that information was in fact important to him. For example, about getting the information from his friend about the US evacuation planes “It wasn’t a big worry for me…but just knowing that, I felt safer”
- Japanese communities being divided over the nuclear issue came up here.

2013/9/20 Record of interview with Participant 10

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in a pub owned by the participant. The pub is located in a residential district a short walk away from the centre a city in Ibaraki. We sat at a table in the window. It was extremely hot in the window, so not ideal for a relaxed conversation. Also, there was loud music playing in the background so I was afraid this would interfere with the audio recording. But I felt I could not ask for any change of location as he was taking time out of his work day to help me. It was early afternoon so there were no customers in the bar (I think he opened especially for me) but I think his wife was in the background somewhere working to prepare for the evening’s food service. I felt a power imbalance, to a certain extent, being so much on his territory, but he was extremely friendly and welcoming and made me feel at ease. We both had glasses of ice water (because it was so hot) but no other food or drink, so I did not have to worry about that taking away from talking time. The interview lasted about 70 minutes (10 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 60 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews
- This was similar to my interviews with Participants 3, 7, and 9 in that I was very much on their turf. It was a not a neutral location for the interview. But this participant's warmth and welcome meant that I did not feel ill at ease and perhaps he felt more at ease being there than anywhere else we could have talked.
- This was another interview where the participant showed he was aware that I had experienced the 2011 disaster myself - saying things like, “You know yourself.”
- Alcohol and drinking again came up in this interview - fairly reasonably as the participant is a bar owner - but there is definitely evidence for the use of alcohol as a way to deal with the disaster in many of the accounts of my participants.
Differences with other interviews

Problems

- I realized almost as soon as I switched off the audio recorder that I had forgotten to ask the participant about social media. He talked about the topic off mic for a few minutes. So I must add the following to the end of his transcript when I have completed it: He said that social media was very useful for him as a communication tool and as a way to share and spread information with others in his network, especially at times when they were being warned not to leave the house due to the danger of radiation. He mentioned Facebook in particular and said that he felt these tools had gotten better now that you have the ability to manage your connections and rank people you know in different groups, orders of closeness, what content they can see, etc. He did recognize that some people using social media who were panicking did not help, but that these people could be managed as above.

- The loud music playing in the background will possibly make transcription more difficult.

- Overall, I’m not sure this was one of my best interviews - I felt a bit distracted and not on top of the questions in my head (again I think because of the location being so out of my control and inappropriate for my purposes). Also, I know I was tired from a lot of train travel and early mornings and still somewhat jetlagged.

Implications

- In the end, there were some parts of the transcription where I was forced to just write ‘Indistinct’ because of the interference of the background music.’

- I think the participant gave really good information more in spite of me than because of me!

What questions worked well or didn’t

- I am not sure that my idea of having participants mark their stress on a Likert scale at the end of the interview is working well. I feel bad asking for it. It seems a very cold way of trying to make people think about their stress levels and perhaps too direct and clumsy a way for me to bring it up. However, I cannot think of another way to show in the record that I have tried to take the participants' stress levels into account. Moreover, I am not yet convinced that the scale is giving me very useful information. For instance, the two people who have cried in the interviews and showed the most emotion (Participants 2 and 10) have given scores of only 2 or 0. In fact, both of these participants seemed to treat the stress marking task as a bit of an annoyance or a laugh. But then one participant who did not seem to show much emotion during the interview (Participant 1) marked a 6. What I can't decide is whether this means the scale is useless (the marks don't correspond with the outward appearance) or useful (the mark might be able to show stress that I as the researcher would otherwise not have noticed). I will keep using the stress marker for consistency and see if I feel differently about it as time goes on. I still want some way to address stress and anxiety in my interviews. I am not a counsellor but I want to take seriously the fact that I am causing some participants to bring up topics and emotions that they have often not told anyone else about (as both Participants 1 and 10 stated) or that they are surprised to still feel so strongly about even two years later (Participants 1, 2, and 10).

How participants seemed to be feeling

- He seemed to be extremely happy and relaxed which is why I was so surprised by him shedding tears almost as soon as we started the interview (as was he). He had not
talked much previously about the difficulty of not being with his family when the disaster first broke.

**How they used non-verbal communication**
- He spoke confidently and made good eye contact. He used large gestures and sometimes leaned back in his chair or swept his hair back when making a point. He would also point to parts of the building or neighbourhood when illustrating certain points. (His body language was that of someone completely at home.)

**What I felt surprised by**
- I was surprised by the level of emotion expressed in his account - I went into the interview with some prejudice of a closed, tough, Aussie male. This was not the case. He cried for about the first five minutes of his account speaking through tears and sometimes pausing to collect himself or drink a glass of water. I tried not to speak at all at these times and just to show as much sympathy in my facial expression and body language as possible.

**What I’d do differently**
- In one way, I would have liked to have met in a more neutral location that I could have controlled, but as a matter of fact, the location ended up being so central to parts of his account (for example, that he built it himself or that he needed to walk out to hear the PA system) that I was really glad to have seen it.
- I think I did less well on the listening focus and the ethnographic style of interview on this occasion. I feel I may have spoken and interjected more than I needed to. I believe this is because I was a bit thrown by the fairly sudden outburst of emotion at the very beginning of the interview. If I had to do it again, I think I would try to be braver about using silence with this participant to see how he would have filled those silences, if at all. I feel my regular interjections may have encouraged him toward shorter answers.

**What didn’t I find out**
- I didn’t find out about slogans at all, but I am starting to abandon that question as it is not adding much value, I think.

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**
- This participant makes a really interest contrast to the discourse of the fly-jin. He was in Australia from March 11-14 and arrived back in Japan on March 15 (i.e. the fifth day after the onset of the disaster). His struggle to get back to and fears for his family, friends and businesses in Japan contrast starkly with ideas of foreigners abandoning Japan.
- The participant’s wife took in a group of Canadian reporters in the period March 11-15 and the participant helped out other groups of reporters when they came to the disaster zone and wanted to be shown around. This classes him as a volunteer interpreter / mediator / guide in my study.
- His Japanese hometown in Ibaraki was so badly damaged that it featured on the news in Australia - he had seen photos of his home area from abroad - this shows both the spread of information about the disaster and the relative damage that was done to that part of Ibaraki.
- A couple of common motifs in his account are the feeling of not wanting to go outside because of radiation concerns and the impact of the disaster on his business (largely related to people being reluctant to go outside).
• He is another participant that was quite implicated in his community - Japanese and foreign - he liked the spirit of pulling together in the disaster (that may since have gone again) - he even uses the expression “the community bonding together the way they did” - however does his use of ‘they’ and not ‘we’ indicate an underlying sense of separation or is it just because he was talking to me an outsider (perhaps he would have said ‘we’ if he had been talking to someone else in the community and I am reading too much into his words).

• He defines things going back to normal as after about 6 months - functionally he says it was when the community bonding disappeared. The positive image he gives of talking to the locals in this period implies this does not normally happen. However, he is another participant to say it’s not really over and he would still like to get his kids out. He alludes to some disagreements with his wife about the kids staying on and the sense is that this was a big issue for him - he senses more danger than perhaps his wife - this could be used as another example of cultural different cultural perceptions of danger “She’s Japanese - she doesn’t see the same dangers I’m feeling myself”. This is an interesting contrast to the other strong ties to the community he himself displays and his intention not to flee (perhaps the difference where we worry less about ourselves than our loved ones).

• This participant focuses on the aftershocks and the radiation as the threats that were central to his account, but the tsunami was a big fear for him while he was overseas and worrying about his family. So he seems to be a participant who was concerned about all three threats at different stages.

• Here again the issue of dissatisfaction with home media (in this case Australian TV news) and their framing of the disaster came up.

• He highlights how cut off people in his hometown were from other information - like in Sendai - they did not know the tsunami was even happening whereas it was hitting the coast just one town over.

• He was one of the first people to mention the loudspeakers as a possible information source, but he was very critical of their quality and usefulness. It is possible that this is because of the Tokaimura power plant accident in 1999 in the same prefecture which would have made people, perhaps, more aware of the system. There is a negative connotation in the way he describes the communication in 1999 and 2011 as being “pretty much handled the same way”.

• He makes an interesting self-correction when talking about Japanese media not being useful unless you could ‘speak’ which he then immediately changes to ‘read’ Japanese - His self-reported Likert Scale scores for speaking and listening were 6.5/10 but for reading and writing were only 2.5/10.

• It’s interesting that radio comes up slightly negatively here - radios were distributed to many residents in Ibaraki after the 1999 refuelling accident in Tokai and people were supposed to keep the plugged in but most people gave up after a year and radio did not feature at all in his 2011 account and he says even if radio had been used by the local authorities they wouldn’t have broadcasted anything in English (in Mito or Katsuta but there were English announcements in Tokai corroborating the other Tokai participants).

• About the fly jin idea, as a bar owner of many years, he had a good estimate of the size of the foreign community and he feels the report that 70% of foreigners fled Japan might have even been an underestimate, at least in his area.

• His account points to the differences within the foreign community - people that were just on short-term contracts versus those that had been here a long time.

• This is another account where it comes up certain foreigners might have been at some sort of information advantage (he had lots of Japanese friends and could get information for other foreign locals). This is also another example of volunteer translation and the importance of having someone in your network who could speak Japanese. And he makes the suggestion of having long-term foreigners like himself as
being a contact point between the government / official responders and the rest of the (particularly the short-term) foreign community. (Perhaps have a meeting three times a year to confirm evacuation plan, etc. and have some practice drills through the year to check how to get information out to the other foreigners).

- He has concrete experience of complacency and warns against it - he feels two years one most people have gone back to being complacent. Could I use this as justification for publishing research 3-4 years after the disaster - a kind of reminder to be careful?

- He speaks of his pride at being here with the Japanese united in the response illustrating his strong bonds with and identification with the community. The story of how proud he was of the Fukushima worker further emphasises his identification with both the Japanese and foreign communities in Japan.

- The idea of the benefit or bonus accruing to foreigners who did not leave Japan comes up in this account again.

- He alludes to foreigners being much more panicked than the Japanese (which is evidence that foreigners might be more vulnerable in disaster) and how he felt it was part of his job to calm the foreigners down. He also sees the fact that Japanese have to regularly deal with disasters as a factor influencing their calm responses and that many foreigners lack this experience - perhaps I need to contrast this with data on long-term MPSSH ill-effects that Japanese are suffering.

- Here the idea of the uselessness and frustration in a disaster came up again and the benefit of being able to do something with your day seems to be an important element of response. Again, I could make the argument that translation could facilitate here in terms of language and culture.

2013/9/20 Record of interview with Participant 11

Information about the interview

- The interview took place in the car and a restaurant near one of the beaches along the coast of Ibaraki. The participant picked me up outside a train station and had the plan (which he had not told me about in advance) to drive along the coast and show me where the tsunami had hit and what had been damaged. He asked me to start interviewing him in the car as we were driving along before I had the chance to switch on the audio recorder, explain the project, or go through the informed consent. After walking around the beach area a bit we drove to a family restaurant and had coffee. It was a big restaurant with lots of windows and individual booths. Even though it was busy and a little noisy, the booth made it feel like we could talk relatively privately. The interview lasted about 67 minutes (5 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 62 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- This participant had also been in this location for an earlier serious nuclear accident, just like Participant 10.

- This participant also talked about the severe aftershock that had occurred the previous day and what he said about it has been included in the transcript to show that I was in Japan as a researcher when a significant aftershock hit.

Differences with other interviews

- This is the first time I have noticed a participant be really conscious of the
Dictaphone. He kept looking sideways and down at it at several times. He absolutely had no problem being recorded but I felt he wanted to make sure he was leaving a record. I know that his interview also contained significant themes of mistrust, conspiracy and paranoia, so maybe he felt slightly cautious of what he was saying was being recorded. One or two other participants have indicated that they were aware of the recorder by checking whether the environment was too loud, or by leaning in a little once the conversation started, but this time it just felt that he was very aware of the recording device at all times.

- This was the only interview so far where I felt the participant really only wanted to talk about one thing (the nuclear element of the disaster) and I couldn’t seem to get him interested in any other topic.

**Problems**

- I was a bit anxious about how the meeting with this participant would go as he had changed times on me a couple of times and I was starting to wonder if he would show at all.

**Implications**

- This was the first time so far I even slightly thought about my own safety - here I was getting in a car with a complete stranger being driven somewhere I did not know with no-one knowing where I was going. But this was just a small concern that momentarily flashed in my mind and I put my worries aside based on the fact that the participant had been introduced to me a friend, so I felt the participant was not a complete stranger.
- I did not have any chance to go through the informed consent or switch on the Dictaphone before the participant started talking. When we did eventually get to a coffee shop, I tried to recap some of the topics he had mentioned in the car so that I could get them on audio.
- An unanticipated bonus of not going straight to a coffee shop was the he drove me around the coastline and showed me exactly where and how the tsunami had hit, and just how badly the tsunami had affected this part of the coast.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- The disability status question did not work well - the participant seemed slightly angry that I was asking it, so I did my best to explain that it was just related to the idea of layers of vulnerability. I am not sure I will ever even use this disability data, but I feel having it may come in useful if I have to talk about vulnerability at a conference or my viva or that.
- I did not get to try to follow my ethnographic interview techniques mainly because I was put off by how little control I felt of the whole interview and how it ended up transpiring. I was really caught off guard.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- Even though the participant did seem very aware of the audio recorder, he did occasionally answer with a shaking of the head or some other gesture. In such cases, I
tried to verbalize his response in the dialogue.

**What I felt surprised by**
- Even though this participant has lived in Japan more than twenty years and owns a business here, the earthquake (and mainly nuclear disaster) have caused him to sell up and he will leave the area and get some place to live in the south of Japan.

**What I’d do differently**
- I would probably have asked to turn on the audio recorder even in the car and even before explaining the informed consent. I felt ethically I should not switch on any device before the participant had been fully briefed, but now I regret not having the data from the car - even though I tried to note as much down as possible directly after the interview, I know I am missing details from that part of the interview.

**What didn’t I find out**
- I didn’t find out exactly how long the participant spent taking refuge in another part of Japan after the disaster.

**What do I need to clarify**
- I need to follow up on the books that the participant has written on the experience of the disaster - though the books have a sci-fi narrative, the early chapters describe the experience much as it happened to the author.
- Should I ask for the email addresses the Australian Assistant Teacher and the homestay high school student he mentions in his account?

**First reflections on data**
- This participant left Ibaraki for Shikoku (in the far south-west of Japan) as soon as he could get away (about three days after the disaster) and came back subsequently.
- The interview definitely had a theme of conspiracy, mistrust and even perhaps paranoia about the nuclear situation. This is probably understandable based on the fact that it was the second accident he had been through. I can see how an atmosphere of paranoia and fear could easily be fostered while wondering about this long-term invisible threat. I should not be as surprised as I am that the nuclear issue has been such a major focus of so many of the interviews.
- The participant tends to use ‘once’ rather than ‘if’ when talking about the nuclear disaster worsening and has one of the most negative views of all the people I talked to about the future.
- The website referenced by the participant, Fairewinds, has an explicit sentence about translation “The document referenced in this film can be found HERE. If you are interested in assisting in translation please contact us at: contacts@fairewinds.org”
- He stressed how he found his information not in conventional media but in alternative media. But are these trustworthy sources?
- He also mentions a proposed law to protect state secrets that could, in theory, be applied to imprisoning journalists who write about Fukushima or to whistleblowers in the nuclear industry.
They got power back on the Sunday afternoon (March 13).

He talked of the importance of having a network - the people without one (the AT the high school exchange) suffered without that network. They didn’t understand what they people who came around to help said and often only one teacher in the school may speak English and may commute from far away and so may not come in during a disaster meaning there would be no linguistic mediation available to the AETs.

He talked about the need for English-language support in evacuation centres and especially mentioned the need for better quality taped announcements over the PA system.

I think the mistrust caused by the first nuclear accident in Tokai really conditioned the participant’s response to the 2011 disaster - especially when he heard in the 3.11 that the authorities were saying Fukushima was safe, he just did not believe it.

He also reminds me that he knew a lot of Japanese who evacuated and I must be careful not to give the impression that only foreigners were suspicious of the media or evacuated, etc.

He was personally called a fly-jin by one Japanese woman. But he again used to the idea of turning the tables and asking what the Japanese person would do if a similar accident happened to them or their loved one in a foreign country.

A major theme for this account is the lack of trustworthiness and the difficulty of knowing who was telling the truth. He turned to his network of contacts in the nuclear industry in America to get information.

2013/09/22 Record of interview with Participant 12

Information about the interview

The interview took place in the participant’s apartment in a suburb just outside Tokyo. I felt comfortable meeting the participant here because we were friends. It also meant I could be confident that we would have privacy and that the recording quality would be good. We sat on the sofa in the participant's small living room, turned towards each other, with the audio recorder on the coffee table in front of us. The interview lasted about 72 minutes (8 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 64 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

Differences with other interviews

This participant often used Japanese phrases and then re-stated them in English. I am not sure if this was to help me with the audio recording of the interview or because he now thinks of such phrases in Japanese first and then changes them to English in his mind. Also, it’s possible he wanted to show me how advanced his language skills had become in the time since we had last met.

This was the only interview carried out so far in someone’s private home - but as we had been work colleagues and friends the power balance did not seem too skewed.
against me.

Problems

- The participant quite regularly talked about not remembering so for him memory seemed to have been an issue.

Implications

- He is an argument against 2.5 years after a disaster being an okay time to interview - I will have to account for this and perhaps look for extenuating circumstances (e.g. that memory could be linked to how pivotal the experience seemed in the overall scheme of the person’s life as I have read in some disaster studies literature)

What questions worked well or didn’t

- The profile sheet question about self-assessing English language ability seemed to cause suspicion - as if I would see it as some sort of problem if they as a native speaker of English marked all 10/10. I cannot think of how to make this any freer than I have but it seems to be the freedom and me not putting what I consider a subjective frame on it (i.e. 10= native speaker - what does that mean?) seems to cause some people to struggle with answering.

- Some of the ethnographic style of interviewing (‘I’m interested in…’, long pauses, encouraging anecdotes, etc.) did not seem to work well all the time with this participant. On a few occasions, he apologised for having forgotten my question as he told some anecdote and seemed to be looking to me for more boundaries and directed questioning.

- But I think overall my use of silence worked very well in this interview. As I knew the participant, I felt confident using silence quite actively to encourage greater input from him.

How participants seemed to be feeling

- The participant seemed cautious about how to answer the questions. He always took time choosing his words carefully and seemed to want to make sure I understood quite precisely what he was trying to convey. As I knew the participant beforehand, I knew that this was not especially related to this interview - whenever we had talked about something relatively seriously in the past, he would adopt the same tone and approach. I also think he was expecting a much more structured interview (he comes from a hard sciences background) and he seemed to struggle a bit with the free-form, dialogic nature of my ethnographic interview style.

- He was pretty distracted at times, too, for example, suddenly talking about his different coloured socks or the mosquito in the room.

How they used non-verbal communication

- The participant regularly put his hands over his face when answering, and sometimes the audio even became slightly muffled because of this. I have tried to note whenever this happened in the transcript in case it might have some interpretive value. This is another thing I can note in my log of transcribing.

What I felt surprised by
I was surprised that things had been thrown around and broken by the force of the earthquake in his apartment. We only lived a ten-minute walk from each other but my apartment was completely untouched - only one drawer had opened. My building was newer than his, so that may be the explanation.

I was also surprised at how different our two accounts were of the first few hours. He never even mentioned hanging out in the park, going home to my place with another work colleague, and he went directly from the day of the onset (Friday) to the following Monday without explaining anything in between. His timeline was completely off. This reinforces the need for looking for systemic interconnectedness with other data.

I was a bit surprised by how often trains came up in his account - this is something that he perhaps saw as symbolic of Japan? of disruption? directly affected his life?

What I’d do differently

I could definitely sense that I was less respectful and a bit more curt in this interview. I think I was less afraid of causing offence. So instead of saying “That’s fascinating” or “I absolutely agree with you” I’d often just say “Okay” and move on to another topic that interested me. I didn’t really notice it until transcribing, but if I were to do the interview again, I think I’d take more care with the conversation management.

I would not have made the joke about enjoying a long walk home near the end of the conversation if I had it to do over again. It may have derailed the participant’s train of thought and may have caused me to lose useful data about information gathering over Facebook. I think interviewing a friend is harder than interviewing a stranger in some ways.

What didn’t I find out

I didn’t find out if the reason it would never occur to him to go to Japanese government websites is because he would not expect any language other than Japanese? or he would suspect the quality of trustworthiness of the information? or something else?

I forgot to ask about changed behaviours or clarify about radio use.

What do I need to clarify

Participant 12 suggested that he may know a Chinese person now living in the Netherlands who was in Tokyo for the disaster and who went home. He sounds like he may have been just a short-term resident and could be interesting to talk to. I will try to confirm his location and willingness and will consider flying to the Netherlands to talk to him. However, this may be not end up being appropriate as I am trying to look at the experiences of residents.

The early warning alarm sound that the participant refers to can be heard here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KcUWWGuZ6m0

First reflections on data

He starts off his story by saying he never once lost electricity, Internet or water (he also later added gas) - this could be an interesting quote for showing what was important to him and showing the centrality of information now as an emergency resource.
• I was relieved to hear that the participant also thought he was going to die when
sheltering under the desk. I did too, but up to now I had thought this might have been
an overreaction on my part, so it was comforting to hear someone who had gone
through the same experience feel the same way.
• The participant checked the routes of rivers to see if they passed anywhere near
Fukushima for the water supply - this seems like a pretty clever step.
• This is another interview where the participant talked about feelings of guilt at not
being particularly badly affected when others were suffering so much.
• The participant mentions how disturbing the alarm sound was of the early warning
system and how this became a source of stress. This tallies with my own experience.
• This is another participant who mentions the quality of construction and their (new)
faith in buildings to withstand earthquakes except maybe his current office building -
this might be another example of changed behaviours or attitudes. This could also be
used to convince foreigners to stay inside in future earthquakes.
• The participant mentions very quickly that there were lots of charts and graphs and
pictures in the Japanese TV news broadcast which again speaks to my ethics notion
of the transfer of ideas - maybe we should prioritise the use of these images instead of
translation as so many people have mentioned graphic stuff.
• He gives quite a good list of the information he felt was sufficient and was accessible
for him - even without advanced Japanese skills (but crucially perhaps with good
Japanese reading ability): what was destroyed, what was done, who was
missing, where the effects were, who had what, what areas were badly affected.
• He seems to point to a cultural barrier of the Japanese idea of saving face may have
prevented the authorities from taking more foreign expert assistance on Fukushima
which he feels more foreign manpower could only have been a good thing and helped
speed up recovery from the nuclear disaster. He also clearly states that Fukushima is
not just a Japanese problem - this is an interesting point and may be something I
should look for more instances of in other data. Seeing as he went off on a rather long
monologue about this, can I assume that that face saving idea really perturbed him?
• This seems to be more evidence that the efforts to translate government websites
were somewhat wasted because people were not aware of their existence. Moreover it
would seem that it would never even occur to him to go
there - perhaps because he
wouldn’t expect anything but Japanese?
• His suddenly remembering the Irish Embassy emails was another vote for the
benefits of the dialogic unstructured interview process, I think.
• This is another account that speaks to the really crucial role of embassies in
foreigners’ experiences of the disaster.
• The participant suggests a great idea of introducing links to multilingual source so
information in the early warning messages - I think this idea is strong because it uses
existing technology in a simple way to deliver what seemed to be missing - direction
for foreigners (or indeed) Japanese to up-to-date trustworthy information among the
mass of information that became available.
• The participant answers the question of when the disaster ended functionally (rather
than temporally or psychically as almost all people have done): when the trains
started running normally, when Disneyland reopened, when everyone had come back
to work, when our company’s plants and offices in the disaster zone were operating
as normal - temporally he thinks it ended when he came back from the Golden Week
holiday at the start of May or the September or the following June or July (if he takes into account his getting sick and the breakup of his relationship).

- This participant does give evidence of the disaster bringing out some community spirit in the residents of his apartment building with people stopping and talking to him and asking him if he was okay, which they would not have done normally.
- He felt very much part of the company community - this was a major support network for him and he spoke in general about the Japanese sense of community being very different. He saw the company as the main community unit and as he worked for a Japanese company he felt part of the community.
- I think he raises a key theme for me when he says, in relation to disaster information that it’s just a matter of knowing where to look.
- There is evidence at the end of the interview that the interview process could be educational for the participants - one of the benefits of the process that I can show - in a future disaster he now would know to go and check government websites.
- The guide for the Japanese Seismic Intensity Scale in English is a really good way to give an idea of what people can expect to experience. This has already been translated (if not, it should be) and could be useful information.
- The anecdote about the shindo scale and construction techniques seem to show the faith he puts in science to build resilience and this confidence may have helped him to adjust to the disaster and recover sooner than others.

2013/09/23 Record of interview with Participant 13

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in an Ueshima coffee shop near Sugamo Station facing onto the busy Hakusan Street. We sat at a small table in the window, with me facing out. The other patrons sat near us as there was not much space and the busy counter was just behind us. I drank only a coffee but the participant had to pause the interview to buy a sandwich and cake because he had not yet had breakfast. I felt this may have distracted him a little. It was an extremely enjoyable interview - I felt I had a lot in common with the participant - we happen to share various interests in common (city walking, etc.) and I identified with many of his experiences and ideas. The interview lasted about 100 minutes (6 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 94 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews
- This is another participant (like Participant 1) who made several points off record so I must be careful when anonymizing the transcripts.
- This is another participant (like Participant 1) who used the analogy of the tsunami to describe an abstract experience (swirled by the waves of panic created by the French people around her) - should I look for other examples of using comparisons in this way?

Differences with other interviews

Problems
- Really terrible location - noisy coffee machine nearby - small tables too close together so other customers felt very close - the participant needed to eat - lots of background noise and distortion - me facing him with a window behind so trying to
focus and not be distracted by my peripheral vision.

- He had not eaten breakfast (it was an early morning meeting) and he paused the interview to buy some food.

**Implications**

- Transcription will likely be difficult of this audio.
- You can tell that after the pause I was actively trying to speak more to allow the participant time to eat.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- The question about what he meant by neighbours not coming over in Japan produced an interesting effect - suddenly he wanted to know if it was my first time in Japan. I was very ambiguous about how I answered (I just said I’ve been here before) but this was a case where I did not yet want to bring in my personal experience because I wanted him to explain the idea in detail rather than use a shorthand of “Oh, well, you know what it’s like over here.” I then told him at the end of the interview about my long experience in Japan after he had given me really good explanatory, detailed answers. This was an interesting methodological point that I could put in the interview section of my thesis.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

- He was dressed in a business suit and tie as he was going to another job later in the day. This may have influenced my view of his authority but he certainly seemed confident, sure of his ideas and completely relaxed. He was also in good humour and was an extremely entertaining and engaging conversationalist.
- My time management was terrible in this interview. After about 75 minutes, the participant seemed to change his mind about how long he wanted to spend talking with me (I had really not noticed the time passing as he was such an engaging interviewee) and he said he would have to call his wife to let her know he would be late. This indicates he was enjoying our conversation. He postponed an arrangement to meet his family after meeting me to allow us more time to talk.
- He seemed to have a verbal tick of saying Okay? Did this indicate he wanted to be believed, he assumed I didn’t understand, he wanted to be understood in particular at these points? I may need to look in more detail at this.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- He often leaned back in his chair and used his arms with big gestures. He also tended to lean in slightly conspiratorially, especially whenever he wanted to say something that might be perceived as slightly negative of Japan or the Japanese.

**What I felt surprised by**

- The effect of accent was noticeable here - I felt no problem with his accent during the interview but listening back later on that same day now through the interfering medium of the audio recorder, I was surprised at how much more of a strain it was to always make out what he was saying.

**What I’d do differently**

- I would not use this location and would try to avoid a breakfast meeting time - I should have cleared up whether he would eat or not before we met.

**What didn’t I find out**

- I didn’t find out if he actually owns a telly or not (I think most of his answers imply that he doesn’t but sometimes I wasn’t sure. I never explicitly confirmed the fact.)
What do I need to clarify

- Can I ask him to see if he still has the email from the embassy about the volunteering?
- Should I ask him for the address of his blogs?
- The participant suggested reading the book below about belonging. I should check it out to see if it is relevant to my thesis:

  http://www.amazon.com/The-End-Belonging-psychology-relocation/dp/1449534163

First reflections on data

- He said ‘I remember’ a lot at first - was this to convince me?
- His first reaction (and of those around him) at onset is “What am I going to do?”
  Even long-term, competent foreigners (and Japanese) struggle in a disaster to orient themselves at first despite their experience, training.
- This is another interview where the focus of what he is expecting I want to know about is just the first couple of hours of the disaster - after telling me about the first two hours or so he clearly says “Do you want to know more?” - this could be an informative category I could look into - what did participants expect I wanted to hear?
- This participant and his family do not watch TV and this makes him somewhat of an outlier and would surely have had an impact on the type of information gathering he did in normal circumstances and then in the disaster. He talked about how this made him clueless in terms of visuals about the disaster and could be an argument either for or against visual information in such a situation (panic-inducing? or helping to create better situational awareness?)
- I need to be careful of how closely I identified with the participant and think about confirmation bias - not just weighting his answers strongly because his experiences and ideas were so like mine.
- This is another interview (like in Participant 2’s interview) where the plight of short-term visitors, especially those on a business trip can be compared to more long-term residents - he makes an interesting point about how they were more hooked to news than he was, perhaps indicating the importance of overseas news for short-termers.
- He talks interestingly about the pressure he got from his clients to leave Japan and how this was related to their exposure to Western information sources.
- Regarding Fukushima he says for his wife and himself his problem was not the language (he is an interpreter and she is Japanese) but the lack of clarity - this is evidence against confusion being culturally specific as his wife is Japanese and was also confused. Perhaps the difference lies in the reaction to that confusion. “nothing was clear beside message of keep quiet and keep cool and don’t over, eh, react, which was, eh, peppered by reading the foreign news, news sources, where basically Japan was over.
- He is an example I could use of how I let people tell their anecdotes without redirecting them too much as per the ethnographic interview technique (he asked me to tell him if he went too off track).
- He talks about the invisibility of radiation and that makes it a more difficult problem to react to - other participants mentioned this too and it may turn out to be a theme.
- He helps to make an argument that having something useful to do in an emergency can be helpful (just stressing all day is not good) and could be used by me to argue for ways to involve foreigners more in response. He says the recruitment mail arriving came almost as a relief - a chance to be part of something.
- He mentions how the details of the interpreter recruitment by the embassy were unclear - and how this conflicted with the other information they were sending out not to leave Japan - it shows that volunteer interpreters were already put in a conflicted mindset right from the recruitment stage. Also, there was little time to think - the mail arrived in the morning and you had to show up at the Embassy in the
evening.
- He fairly regularly contrasts the impact of relying on audio reports versus visual and this may be able to be tied in with ideas of communication systems.
- His interview provided evidence that not all parts of the disaster zone were without mobile reception and that the highways were closed to all but responders.
- As an example of the fact that volunteers can be suffering while also trying to do their work, I could use the anecdote of his wife calling to say that the embassy were giving her a last chance to fly out while he was en route to the disaster area and they had to make this important decision under those circumstances. Also he recounts how the nuclear specialists in the emergency team were so concerned at the geiger readings. Also he says that he was definitely nuked by going into the disaster zone when and where he did.
- A consistent theme in his narrative is his low opinion of the (over)reaction of the French Embassy and media to the disaster.
- He alluded to the politics behind the dispatch of international rescue teams and this would clearly have an impact on the dispatch of language and cultural mediation - and the frustration of some interpreters of being brought up to the camp in the disaster zone only not to move from it.
- He talked bout the culture block for response - the rules designed to prevent non-Japanese rescuers from touching Japanese bodies and the fact that the foreign teams were directed to search for casualties in areas that had already been searched by Japanese forces - was it a role of the interpreter to culturally mediate this sort of situation (unwritten rule) for frustrated professional rescuers who had been sent to the disaster zone for, perhaps, political rather than practical reasons.
- He had an interesting shift of narrative voice when talking about interpreting from “they were looking” to “we were looking” when talking about trying to look for corpses with the French rescue team.
- This interview provided some more evidence of the beneficial aspect of just letting the participant talk as a way to jog memory - at one point he says something like “Oh, yeah, now it comes back my mind.”
- He talked of some of the cultural barriers - in particular with respect to human relationships, a lack of deep communication, and the problem of belonging - faced by long-term residents in Japan, even those completely fluent like himself. (Belonging could be a category for me - but he is careful to caution whether this problem is specific to Japan - maybe not.)
- He made some interesting points about the importance of cultural mediation (and more than just linguistic transfer) in his practice of being an interpreter in Japan.

2013/09/24 Record of interview with Participant 14

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in a Dotour Coffee shop in downtown Sendai. It was the participant's choice of location and was based on being halfway between his workplace and my hotel. We were in the basement in a small alcove. There were no other people near us, though there were some other customers a few tables away. The participant sat with his back to the wall of the alcove and I sat opposite. The table was very small so we were not far from each other. However, the background music was a little loud and we were near a speaker, and there were some young children nearby who were occasionally pretty noisy, so I was a bit worried that the recorder would have difficulty catching his audio. But I was confident enough of our privacy
and my ability to focus just on him. The participant had just come straight from work (his office was nearby) so I was afraid he would be tired, but he seemed pretty fresh. The interview lasted about 100 minutes (5 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 95 minutes interview).

**Similarities with other interviews**
- Once again in this interview (like with Participant 10) I turned off the microphone too soon and missed recording some useful information that I would have liked to have gotten the exact wording of.

**Differences with other interviews**
- This participant seemed reluctant to talk so it felt at first a little bit like talking to Participants 3 and 5. I think, as with Participant 3, this participant did not want to reveal certain parts of his experiences or thoughts or feelings to me. (Perhaps because of the family he was close to who lost a family member in the tsunami?)
- I did not call on my personal experience of the disaster much at all through the interview and the participant did not refer to it. However, when the participant talked about feeling stress and still not talking about all aspects, I decided to give a fairly long account of my own mental struggles to try and make him feel less alone and perhaps to build more intimacy so that he may want to share more things with me without me asking, if I am honest. This could be used as evidence that I only brought my experience in when I saw a need for it - e.g. to build trust, to model answers, etc.

**Problems**
- I had started to wrap up the interview and switched off the recorder. Almost as soon as I did so, the participant mentioned that reaction to a disaster seems culturally bound to him based on his experience. He said the Japanese colleagues of his went back to work after the disaster. He couldn't go because he couldn't get to his base school. Not going to work would have been considered paid vacation so he contacted the board of education and arranged to work as a volunteer as a way of working. For Japanese people, going to work (almost continuing on as normal, to a certain extent even after a massive disaster) seems to be a way of coping.

**Implications**
- I need to make sure that I put the above off-mic passage in the transcript that will be subsequently approved by the participant so that it can officially enter into my data for analysis.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**
- The first intervention by me (‘Tell me about your experience…’) did not work so well for this participant as it had for others. His first answer was not so long and it felt like he was constantly editing himself before he spoke and deciding case-by-case what he was happy to reveal to me. As it turned out later, he told me that there were things he did not want to speak about and had not told me and so it explains the slow take-off in the interview compared to most others so far where participants answered for a long time just on my first prompt.
- On a couple of occasions in the interview, I tried to use silence as a way to encourage
the participant to speak without directing what he would talk about. I was concerned that as he was being so guarded that I might bring up a topic that he was not comfortable with, so I tried to use silence to encourage him to talk while at the same time giving him control of the direction of the conversation.

- I noticed I was a bit leading at times in some questions (e.g. saying that defining the end of the disaster is a difficult thing to say - maybe it wouldn’t have been so for him.) Such leading is not a problem with my constructivist epistemology but it is not good practice.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

- The participant seemed eager to help me but, nonetheless, cautiously and carefully considering each word. This may have been because of his continuing employment in Japan or because of his unwillingness to talk about certain aspects of his experience.
- Even though the participant was extremely helpful and friendly and did not show emotion, overall this seemed to be one of the most sombre interviews I had and I felt there was a chance that this participant had been traumatised by the experience more than some other people I talked to. He rated himself a 2/10 on my Likert stress scale but this is still more than the 0/10 that most participants gave.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- He seemed to be very aware of the audio recorder and would look down at it on the table between us occasionally. This combined with his careful choice of words and slight guardedness at times made me suspect that there were things he did not want to reveal to me.

**What I felt surprised by**

**What I’d do differently**

- I made the mistake about fifteen minutes before our recorded interview ended of saying ‘not if but when another earthquake comes to Japan’ - even though this might be a valid statement, I could see that it somewhat upset the participant and I regretted it as soon as it came out of my mouth. It shows that the researcher has a responsibility to think about her/his words may affect the participant’s feelings.

**What didn’t I find out**

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**

- His account started with the idea of fate - he was at a school two days before that ended up being completely destroyed in the disaster. This probably impacted on his emotional experience of the disaster, but it also indicates that when defining the disaster period, I may need to think about putting the starting date as the 9th because several people have mentioned it.
- He made the point that at one school, they left the tv on all day long. He asked why, they said because of the danger of a tsunami, two days later that school was gone. This speaks of the centrality of TV and also allows us to presume that foreigners in
school teacher’s rooms might have been exposed to Japanese TV early on in the disaster.

- He did not initially have any instinct to communicate with anyone because he did not yet realize the scale of what had happened but he had tried to send an email by phone.
- The first contact he made was with one of my friends in Aomori (where the most important people to him in Japan were then located) by cell phone (March 12) to get the friend to post on the participant’s facebook account that he was okay. He only got to contact his parents a few days after onset by brief text message.
- The first instinct of this participant was not to go to a communal shelter - he went back to his flat alone where he knew he had a little food and would try to get warm (in his car) and get some sleep and then wake up and start making decisions in the morning.
- Again the image of terrible traffic jams came up in this account.
- This was another account where the participant used a car to charge a mobile phone but not to listen to the radio. And it was another account where it never even seemed to strike the participant to use the radio (even though as an ALT they would have been given one as part of initial emergency preparedness).
- This account is more evidence for foreigners coming together and making their own communal response communities - he said one of the best decisions he made was going and seeking out an acquaintance who lived nearby on March 11 - they stayed the next 4, 5 days together and other ALTs came and they all camped out together in his one bedroom apartment.
- This participant clearly talks about the stress of being a volunteer taking calls about things he was worried about too, but having to give them information to make them feel more comfortable. But he makes an interesting point about life being thrown out of routine by disaster and how this robs us of some security so establishing a new routine based around something to do (e.g. volunteering) can be beneficial mentally. I imagine I could tie this to theories in disaster studies on the benefit of giving people ownership of their response and perhaps translating could be an ideal way to give foreigners that needed sense of mission.
- In addition to the stress, this participant mentioned the feeling of difficulty at having stand by information that he doubted by virtue of being a volunteer. He also illustrated the effect of stress and the difficulty of maintaining volunteer efforts in a disaster by the fact that the team lost members progressively as they decided (being sufferers too) to go home or elsewhere.
- The explosion came up again in this account - can I show this was a pivotal event where better news translation would have been beneficial?
- This is another account portraying a slightly negative image of his embassy.
- He noted the fast-changing nature of the information and the opacity of the language. With each hour the information you had was subject to change. Could this be an argument for translation technology as a way to keep speed and reuse already translated information? But then, MT is not good at opaque language. This would be a strong argument against using some translation technology for some purposes.
- There is more strong evidence in this account for a major disconnect between Japanese and foreign media coverage and how this made things hard for foreigners in Japan. He also says that watching the news too much and having the same stuff repeated too much is bad for mental health. Overall, I was quite struck by the effect
This is more evidence for the positive use of social media (though it was not a feature of his life before the disaster) and for the need for power and connectivity and how social media was perhaps somewhat used to spin the disaster by his employers to balance with a more positive view of foreigners experiencing the disaster. This is an example of using social media to re-frame the disaster for a varied audience and could be an interesting thing to talk about. Social media (Facebook) was also used to communicate store openings and new arrivals in stores.

I need to recognize that he talked of translation in a somewhat negative light (‘rely’ on a translator, information coming to you second hand, etc.) and doesn’t see that the so-called first-hand information would still probably have been mediated by a translator. It’s about a feeling of security so perhaps this is a reason to make translators more invisible in disaster?

2013/09/26 Record of interview with Participant 15

Information about the interview

This interview took place in the canteen of a university in Miyagi high in the mountains outside Sendai. This means there was no chance this area could have been affected by the tsunami. It was a big open room with many large tables. We took a seat in the middle of the room near a balcony that looked down onto the first floor of the building where my contact who had introduced the participants and the other two interviewees were waiting, chatting and eating some lunch as we held the first interview. This participant had come from another university especially to do this interview as so he was also unfamiliar with the setting. There were a few students quite near us eating as it was lunch time, but they were not really near enough to hear what we were saying and they left us alone. Though we were in a restaurant, we did not have any food and we had just been given two cold coffee drinks kind of like juice boxes (which neither of us opened) so we didn't have the issue of eating or drinking time taking away from talking time. The fact that the participant did not open or drink his coffee is explained later on in the interview - he worries now about food and drink provenance because of radiation! The interview lasted about 45 mins (7 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 38 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

This was another interview where food safety came up as an issue (quite unexpectedly) and this probably helped to contribute to my own unease about food and water contamination as the data-gathering trip went on. I had been very unconcerned about the whole issue at the start of the process.

Differences with other interviews

I had no control of the recruitment or arranging of these interviews – my contact at the university did everything on my behalf without really giving me too many details beforehand. I arrived at the university and had a short meeting with this contact only knowing that I was due to meet three participants - one from Sudan, one from Bangladesh and one from China. While waiting for the first participant to arrive I
found out that only the person from China was a student at my contact’s university and that the other two people were coming from another university. My contact had never met them either - he had recruited them through a colleague. It turns out that my contact had told each participant we would take for 30 minutes (though I had informed him that my goal was about sixty) so I did my best to keep the interview brief. I still went over time at about 45 minutes, though.

- This was the first interview where I became slightly concerned that the participant’s English ability may be insufficient for the purposes of this research because I had no idea whether this participant would only really speak Arabic and Japanese and some English. But as it turned out, he uses mostly English in his research in Japan and his English was sufficient with no difficulties for communication (e.g. heavy accent, poor comprehension, etc.). However, I do think his English level may have prevented a more ethnographic interview as after his prepared account which was long and detailed his responses did become shorter so it moved more to a traditional semi-structured form.

**Problems**

- I had no idea how these participants had been recruited or what they had been told about me and my project. I also wasn’t sure what time commitment they were expecting or if they had to get back urgently.
- Time, in general, was an issue for this interview. Participant 15 was not due to be the first interviewee - it was due to be the person from Bangladesh - but he arrived late, so I started the interview with Participant 15 not knowing whether the guy from Bangladesh would show and whether they would hang around long enough for me to interview them.

**Implications**

- My contact at the university kindly ended up sitting waiting for the Bangladeshi participant as I began my interview with Participant 15 and kept him and the Chinese participant talking as they waited. I decided to try to keep each interview to 30 minutes in order not to keep either the interviewees or my contact waiting too long. I failed, but Participant 15’s interview was so interesting I decided that even if the other two participants got fed up and left, I would prefer to have richer data from one participant.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- The question on the informed consent sheet (about circling ‘yes’ to having had all your questions answered) rarely works for me because the participants say that they haven’t asked any questions so how can they circle it. I would need to change this on informed consent forms for future projects and explain to the REC why I am doing so. I couldn’t change this question in the field though as the informed consent form was the one which had been signed off on by the REC and which I would need to be used as evidence that my participants were informed in the manner agreed.
- Participant 15 asked about how to answer the disability status question on the profile data sheet - this was not sufficiently clear probably and may not have added much value in terms of data - I’m not sure.
- The Likert Scale to mark stress after speaking to me again didn’t work well. It
seemed to be unclear to him what zero should represent (before the interview? because maybe he already had some stress (related to other things) before the interview so would it be right to start from zero.) I will really need to explain my understanding of this scale clearly if I use it in my thesis.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**
- Participant 15 seemed really open and relaxed - he was as unfamiliar with and unclear about the whole set-up as I was, but it did not seem to faze him at all. He was offered lunch by my contact but turned it down because he said he needed special food (I interpreted this as perhaps halal food or food following some sort of religiously-informed preparation).

**How they used non-verbal communication**
- He leaned in with his hands clasped and elbows on the desk for most of the interview. It seemed to be a pose that he wanted to help me. Also, his repeated used of ‘yes, yes, yes’ may have indicated a desire to help or please me in some way.
- There was a lot of laughter during this interview. I’m not sure why. Maybe I was in a particularly good mood, but I think it was just that he was a really nice guy and I enjoyed talking to him. Maybe I was also particularly happy getting a participant from Sudan and a potentially new perspective.

**What I felt surprised by**

**What I’d do differently**
- In future, I would be more proactive about finding out the concrete details of who I was interviewing, when, and what they had been told. There is a Japanese tendency to vagueness which I was trying to respect by not asking too many questions, but also I did not want to seem pushy as my contact was being so kind in arranging this for me. I guess I would spell out more how other interviews had gone so that the contact might think to tell me more detail. However, maybe I wouldn’t do anything differently at all. Perhaps the lesson to take from this experience is that you need to be flexible and ready to just roll with the punches when carrying out this type of research and this in itself is a skill and trusting friends or colleagues to take care of things and knowing that you cannot control everything is something that maybe needs to be embraced.

**What didn’t I find out**
- I did not find out really whether food or dietary requirements impacted on his experience of the disaster response even though I initially thought to when I saw him refusing food of which he did not know the origins before our interview started.
- I did not find out why he did not prepare at all pre-disaster (do I need to know this?).

**What do I need to clarify**
- Participant 15 sent me the link of the website he used during the March 11 disaster. He got the link from a Japanese friend through Facebook. 
- Perhaps I should follow up on the two Facebook groups he mentioned ‘Foreign
People in Sendai’ and ‘Really Want to Do Something For Japan’ to use as secondary data - examine their interactions, what they talked about.

**First reflections on data**

- The participant had an interesting point about how to differentiate between earthquake and disaster - the length and the electricity going off.
- There is a potential theme to explore of all the times that the participants point to the stereotypical Japanese gaman attitude or ways to highlight culturally different perceptions of disaster (e.g. the bus came on time) - maybe I could gather all the way the participants talk about Japanese stereotypes and how they reflect on disaster response.
- He went to the refuge shelter because he was told to by his professor and colleagues in the laboratory.
- The participant very clearly stated that the main problem for this staying in the shelter was a language one.
- The participant talked about seeing the pictures in the newspapers in the shelter without being able to read any of the Japanese - for him though pictures do not seem enough. In fact I think his account shows the limitations of pictures - he may have known there was a tsunami but he could not know it’s location by pictures alone and so he had the difficulty of understanding why his family called asking him about a tsunami.
- This is also another example for my ecosystem idea of a phone call from Sudan told a person in the disaster zone about the tsunami because he could not speak Japanese.
- For him the disaster was not the earthquake or the tsunami really but Fukushima - that’s all he really talks about in terms of his personal experience of something disastrous.
- He said clearly that a problem for him was a lack of information. However, when you look deeper into the interview you see that he got lots of information in many different ways, and even though at one point he says he got no information from the university, he ends by saying that he used a university advice centre as a way to get information about radiation before the electricity came back and before he had access to regular internet and that they gave as much information as they could. This disparity in how he answered the question about information first and finally shows the advantage of my questioning methodology in giving people time to strike links and remember things gradually.
- He did really seem to suffer from an information lack though - he only found the evacuation centre by following others and did not have the details of the centre beforehand.
- There is evidence in this account for volunteer Japanese people (other evacuees in the centre) acting as English translators but that they did not translate all the time (the implication is not there enough) and that nobody came from outside to translate when he was there. - perhaps this could be evidence of expecting too much of volunteers - they were suffering too much to translate perhaps.
- This participant is evidence for the hypothesis that people turn to the technologies they use in their pre-disaster lives - he didn’t know why he used Facebook in the disaster just that he was used to using it.
- He said that he kept on the TV even though he couldn’t understand 100% what was
This participant placed a lot of importance on the timeliness of information. He mentioned that online news gives information but not in time whereas Facebook is quick (but I would argue it can be shown it may not have been reliable or accurate from other participants and from secondary literature). The importance he placed on the MEXT radiation website also showed the value of on time information to him (he says this).

His experience with his embassy was another example of not so positive- while they did contact him regularly, he felt he was more of a PR exercise and crucially the information they gave him was not useful - so it is not about frequency of contacts but quality perhaps when talking about embassies as information sources - he reiterated the now common feeling that he had more information than them!

This participant may be an example of motivation in language learning - he cannot read much Japanese but since the earthquake he tries to read all food labels to know where his good is coming from - this is another example of modified behaviour since the disaster.

2013/09/26 Record of interview with Participant 16

Information about the interview

This participant is a Bangladeshi postdoctoral researcher working in Sendai. This interview took place the canteen of a university in Miyagi. The university is located high in the mountains outside Sendai. This means there was no chance this area could have been affected by the tsunami. This was my second interview in a row at the university. Again, the canteen was a big open room with many large tables. We took the same seat in the middle of the room near a balcony that looked down onto the first floor of the building where my contact and the other two interviewees were waiting, chatting and eating some lunch. Like Participant 15, this participant had come from another university especially to do this interview as so he was also unfamiliar with the setting. There were still a few students quite near us eating as it was lunch time, but they were not really near enough to hear what we were saying and they left us alone. Though we were in a restaurant, we did not have any food or drink. The interview lasted about 69 mins (6 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 63 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

As this interview was held directly after the one for Participant 15, there were many similarities in terms of my lack of control over arrangements and the fact that the participant had been told to expect a 30-minute interview. I did my best to keep the interview brief, but I still went over time at about 60 minutes because of the long detailed responses the participant wanted to give.

Again, as with Participant 15, I was a little concerned about English ability. In this case, I was concerned with accent, in particular, but also with some incoherent sentence structures that were difficult to follow. It took me some time to get used to his pronunciation of English, but once I had done so, communication was relatively smooth.
**Differences with other interviews**

- This interview was different to the one that directly preceded it because it was much more emotional - the participant had more dramatic experiences in the quake and was very concerned for his wife and family. The memory of this fear caused him to shed tears and be quite emotional at times.
- In general, this interview was a much more sombre than the interview that directly preceded it.
- This interview did not seem to have the structured narrative around the topics that interested me that other participants seemed to have. I suspect this participant did not read the list of topics I sent in advance. A lot of the second half of the interview was me asking for repeated clarification on how exactly he gathered information and communicated. This interview would therefore appear to be evidence against the efficacy of my methodology.

**Problems**

- Time, in general, was an issue for this interview. I was very conscious of the fact that my contact and the two other interviewees were waiting downstairs.
- English was a big problem in this interview. Despite the fact that communication was relatively smooth during the interview time (I had facial cues and other information to help my understanding at the time - and my questions were coherent) but listening back to the interview after without these extra cues proved much more challenging. I, therefore, had some concerns about the extra burden I would feel at the transcription stage. The participant’s accent was strong and new to me and he had a habit of not finishing sentences which took away from some coherence. I do not want to amend his sentence structures. I want to represent his voice as much as I can. But the participant did not lack communicative fluency as he spoke almost uninterrupted for the first thirty minutes.

**Implications**

- I tried to put my worries about timekeeping out of my mind and focus on the fact that this was pretty much a once-in-a-lifetime chance to get these data and so I should not worry too much about politeness.
- In the end, the occasional lack of coherence and strange pronunciations did call for some repeated listening at transcription until I could get used to his unfamiliar pronunciations, intonations, grammatical mistakes, etc. and I did have to include more (Indistincts) than I wanted to in the transcript.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

- Participant 16 seemed a little flustered at the start (he had arrived late) but was very warm and friendly but the account turned very emotional very quickly.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- He would hold his hands over his nose and mouth when shedding tears to show, I think, that he was not ready to talk. I tried to just leave silence unlike with Participant
10 where I feel I did not use silence well during his emotional periods.

- He also used gestures to describe things like cracks in the road that occurred after the earthquake or the tall buildings oscillating like oscillators.

**What I felt surprised by**

- I was surprised again by the shedding of tears and the strong emotion that came out in this account but I tried not to let it distract me and put me off my focused listening as I feel it did a little with Participant 10. This emotion was understandable as his wife was about five or six months pregnant at the time of the disaster (and pregnant women are warned more than other members of the population about the effects of radiation).

**What I’d do differently**

**What didn’t I find out**

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**

- Here again the idea of just copying what the Japanese people were doing came up as a way for a foreigner to formulate a response in an unknown situation (running to where the Japanese were running).
- He clearly stated that no electronic communication was possible for him for the first two or three days because even though they got the mobile network back after about one day they lost their mobile charge quickly by contacting family and friends in their home countries and had no electricity to recharge. This goes somewhat against my claims of ease of mobile recharging. It was hearing about the nuclear explosion that made them alarmed to seek out recharging points at the hospital (school of medicine) - quite ingenious and yet they made sure to share only one point amongst themselves to not take too much electricity from the hospital. This could be used as an example of the foreigners going against communal refuge response and thinking of ways to help themselves.
- His first thought seemed to be about the safety, soundness and quality of buildings - this may have been due to a frame of reference based on earthquakes in Bangladesh where building codes might not be as strict as in Japan. He did actually see part of an eight-story building collapse in front of him, so maybe this concern was very valid. He came back to the point of collapsing buildings again later on in the interview.
- He talks of a feeling making a mistake by using a car to try to get home because he got stuck in heavy traffic and maybe this is possible advice for response in future emergencies (because Participant 10 also mentioned that traffic could be a big problem in disasters).
- The Bangladeshi people all went to the local elementary school’s evacuation centre. This is contrary to my idea of individualistic responses for foreigners and may indicate that not all foreigners may be averse to group response. Perhaps it depends just on what you are used to in your home culture. (Even his choice of the word ‘camp’ to describe the evacuation or refugee centres speaks to a possible discourse of refugee camps that he may have been influenced by). However his account later of
secretly preparing the cars of the Bangladeshi community to escape on hearing of the Fukushima disaster reverts again to the idea of more individualised response and not necessarily heeding the group or government line.

- He offered the most detailed account I have of the experience of an evacuation centre - he focused quite strongly on this aspect. It is clear in his account that Japanese was the main language in the refuge centres and that he did not speak Japanese.
- This was another account where the participant was fairly negative in portraying the embassy response (here seen as delayed compared to other nationalities but finally pretty satisfactory but only after pressure from the Bangladeshi community in Japan).
- This account provided more evidence of foreigners volunteering (he visited Natori with the Bangladeshi community and others).
- Here again we saw the dynamic of a senior member of the community gathering information (the gatekeeper role) and choosing whether or not to share it with the rest of the community (one guy finding the TV report of Fukushima through his mobile or car navi and then secretly telling only three others in the community at first so they could plan what to do.
- This is another account that seems to support the idea of getting by in the camp without Japanese but this is because many of the evacuees came from the same International House and crucially several of these people that already knew each other could speak Japanese. So this reinforces my claim of the importance of volunteer interpreting and translating roles.

2013/09/26 Record of interview with Participant 17

Information about the interview

- This participant is a Chinese PhD researcher working in a university in Miyagi. This interview took place in a meeting room near the office of a contact of mine in a university in Miyagi. This my third interview in a row at that university. The participant had been waiting for almost two hours now to get started - he had let the other two participants who had travelled from another university go first. Again, the organization of the schedule had been out of my hands, but the participant repeatedly stated that it was not problem for him to wait. There was no worry about recording quality or privacy because we were now alone in a meeting room, but there was a tension in me of not wanting to keep the participant much longer (he had already been so patient) but to want to get as much information as possible out of him. The interview lasted about 60 mins (7 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 53 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

Differences with other interviews

- This is the first interview where I was not sure that his explanation was viable - but nonetheless it was his experience and it is my job to try and interpret it. I don’t know whether it was a language issue or a culture issue but I found it difficult to have faith in what this participant was saying to me - I felt there were a few internal inconsistencies (see clarify section below), and I could not figure out if they were
arising due to misunderstandings or due to his poor memory of events or due to some other cause. I think member checking could be especially useful with this participant and help confirm that this is how he wants to represent his experience. What could also be necessary is for me to think of why he might tell me his account in this way?

Problems
- I only did an okay job of using silence or raising topics that I’m interested in (i.e. the ethnographic interview style) because I was conscious of how long the participant had already waited for this interview.

Implications
- There was more of a semi-structured question and answer feel to the whole interview, except for some occasions where I did let the ideas develop more dialogically.

What questions worked well or didn’t
- The question on the Informed consent sheet (that if part of the DCU template) about ‘I have had a chance to ask questions’ caused confusion again. I really should emphasize that they have a chance to stop me and ask questions at any time right at the beginning of each interview, but I often forget when I am trying to get through the form filling in a hurry.
- Listening back to this interview was at times hard. It has happened in other interviews that I have felt flashes of embarrassment and anger at the way some participants seemed critical of my questioning or research topic. Of course, I almost never said any such thing and always just bit my lip and tried to maintain silence and listen, but hearing the audio back creates the same desire to defend myself again. But I could feel that I got a bit annoyed by the end of the interview with the sometimes critical posture of the participant and I did spend a little energy defending my line of questioning.

How participants seemed to be feeling

How they used non-verbal communication
- He sometimes tapped on the table with his fingertips (as if playing a piano chord) especially when he was making a point - stressing something he had noticed or believed or thought. A lot of the time, it felt like he was trying to convince me that “This is how something is!” I tried to note whenever he did this, but I do not think I caught them all.

What I felt surprised by
- I was surprised by the fact that he said the disaster never happened for him. I thought I might hear this from someone in Tokyo but not someone in the disaster zone. I need to think about the things that caused him to say this - these aspects might be learning points for resilience. I really have to take into account his view that really the disaster was nothing - this is counter evidence I need to treat and have an explanation for. One thing I could say is that after the first five days he was safely outside of the disaster zone for 40 days - the period many participants are saying was the disaster! In a sense, he could be said to have missed a lot of it, especially the cumulative stress.
relating to Fukushima that seemed to affect many.

What I’d do differently

- I don’t think I did a great job in this interview - I was really tired from doing three interviews back-to-back in this way. I probably should have followed up on more points at the time, but I’m not sure I was catching them. In future, I would avoid running three interviews in only four or five hours.
- I think I might have tried to follow up more and get an interview with the person he knows from Haiti in Sendai. I did not at the time, because I did not want to step on the toes of my main gatekeeper. But now I look back on it, I think attempting to get the input of that person from Haiti could have been really interesting.

What didn’t I find out

What do I need to clarify

- I’m not sure whether it was a language issue or a memory issue or what but I found that there were inconsistencies in his timeline that I never really followed up on properly. He didn’t know about the tsunami etc for three days but other Chinese students escaped to Tokyo or Osaka the second day. Did he not ask why? Was he three or two days without electricity?
- How is it possible he only found out about the tsunami and Fukushima when he got back to China? But then again, the other similar participants 15 and 16 only found out by being at the evacuation centre or from others who had access to TV.
- How is it possible that he could help his Japanese friend clean up his company and not know about the broader situation? He clearly says his Japanese friends had their radios on so that means they would have had the information. He seems to sidestep this question when I ask him directly and gives an answer that the Chinese had much more information than the Japanese at first.

First reflections on data

- This interview was another possible piece of evidence for the ignorance is bliss scenario - because he had no experience of earthquakes in China up to now, he was not scared at first.
- He mentioned a complete lack of situational awareness and first, and his first act was to try and call his friends, but the main point he noticed was how the traffic continued to move relatively smoothly even without electric signals (an example for him of Japanese group dynamics which impressed him a lot).
- He and his friends didn’t know why there were all these helicopters flying above (because he did not yet have situational awareness).
- He again mentions how impressed he was by businesses getting back to some sort of normality after only about three days. He seems to be comparing Japan favourably to other disaster settings in several elements of his narrative.
- This was the first participant to outright say the disaster never happened for him - never mind when it finished. (Even though some others have hinted along these lines.) He goes as far as to say that the earthquake affected the lives of people in Sendai positively because it made them realize that life is short and that money is not the most important thing, etc. It made people start to think what happiness is. (I must
say this was indeed the case for me.)

- He made the point that in a really big earthquake, it makes so much noise that you wouldn’t be able to hear any PA announcements, whether they were made or not. He goes on to say that even if there’s an announcement, you’re not concentrating on the announcement.

- He gave a good learning point to switch off your phone in the immediate aftermath of the disaster when phone lines are clogged anyway because this conserves battery power for a little later when lines may be up again or less clogged.

- He described the general Japanese response to disaster as first just cool down and wait. Just ensure your own safety, because if you are safe you don’t make trouble for anyone else. (Again another hint to group dynamics?)

- This interview was more evidence for the formation of ad-hoc response or support communities - the Chinese students in Miyagi all stayed together.

- He seems to have had really low situational awareness. Even when he called his parents, he did not get information from them because it was just a very quick call to say he was okay. Even when he got on the bus to evacuate he still did not know why (I find this difficult to believe but must take him at his word). Taking him at this word, it shows the huge role played by TV and Internet (he did not mention accessing either in the initial stages) in creating situational awareness but possibly also in creating more stress for those who were not materially too badly affected.

- He pointed out how the informal information networks work in the Chinese community in Japan - embassy does not contact your directly but embassy information quickly spreads by word of mouth. He also alluded to the self-sufficiency of the Chinese community in Japan.

- He said that he gave information to his Japanese friends rather than the other way around. He seems to portray the Japanese as having only relatively distant government information waited for passively while the Chinese community actively sought out and therefore knew practical, locally-relevant information through their word-of-mouth network.

- He criticised the radio for broadcasting information that was not locally relevant to Sendai. He saw the radio as being completely different for Japanese and non-Japanese. For Japanese, he thinks the radio means hope. He also strongly ties radio communication to government communication and the Japanese have faith in their governments in times of crisis. Chinese, not so much.

- He went off on an interesting anecdote about the opportunities to make big money in a disaster - is this revealing of some connection I am not seeing?

- He had a very, very short-term view (temporal and functional definition of the boundaries of) the disaster, and I think this is why his ideas are jarring with me so much. They might be true for the first few minutes or hours or perhaps days, but then what about weeks and months - still a valid disaster period, I can show - but he wasn’t in Japan for that period.

- He said in China, he didn’t care about the information that much. I must account for this counter-evidence of information gathering being central or important. (Though he did call a friend beforehand to see it’s okay to come back so he’s not being completely upfront I think).

- He pointed out how Chinese (one of the largest foreign communities in Japan) don’t use Twitter or Facebook - so tailoring a strategy only to Twitter or Facebook could
really leave a lot of people out of the loop.

- This participant made me realize that in my themes I will have to be really explicit about what period of the disaster I am talking about, otherwise my ideas about communication may be written off straight away just as this participant did.

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2013/10/2 Record of interview with Participant 18

Information about the interview

- This interview took place in the offices of the place of work of the participant in central Tokyo. The participant had suggested going to lunch and talking over food. Having had the disastrous experience with Participant 6 where trying to run the interview over food did not work, I really wanted to avoid this. Luckily, it was raining torrentially when I arrived so I used this as an excuse to speak in the office instead. We went to a board room, so I was confident that there would be no problems with the audio recording or with privacy. In addition, all other members of the office were away on leave etc. so we had to the whole place to ourselves. The participant had said he could give me about 30 minutes, but in the end we spoke for nearly double that amount of time. I apologised to him on tape and he seemed not to be upset at me running over time like this. The interview lasted about 55 minutes (4 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 51 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

Differences with other interviews

- This was an interview where I felt I had some insider knowledge - the participant was acquainted with Participants 1 and 3, and they had told me that his Japanese wife’s family had had some terrible experiences in the disaster (loss of loved ones and home), so I knew to be careful about this and not push for detail that he might not be prepared to give. I was prepared for him to be guarded in his answers because of this but also because of his job which involves high level dealings with business and government.

Problems

- I feel that the talk of not being able to remember the term ‘merry-go-round’ threw the participant off and the answer to my first raising of the general topic of the disaster was not as detailed as it could have been so I had to intervene and try and repair this.

Implications

- His first answer ended up being unexpectedly short and irrelevant.

What questions worked well or didn’t

- Again, the question of always trying to check with them if there’s anything related to language or culture that I haven’t covered proved useful - if I hadn’t asked this last question, I could have left without hearing how he felt now he may have helped more people with intercultural mediation because he now uses Facebook whereas he didn’t have a social media presence or a wide network of foreigners that were calling on
him. So he is basically saying that social media could be a way to encourage more mediation by long-established foreigners in the community.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**
- He seemed to be relaxed overall and gave me his attention for nearly double the time he had offered without showing any real signs of needing to rush. He did seem a little sceptical about the needs or feasibility of the language issues I was dealing with in my project and definitely seemed to identify with Japanese in many areas of the discussion. He even talked about the difficulty of defining the borders of his community with a Japanese family and a job that requires him to represent Ireland.

**How they used non-verbal communication**
- He used some hand gestures (gently hitting the table etc or using the table in front of him to suggest maps, etc.) I tried to catch and write down as many of these gestures as possible.

**What I felt surprised by**
- I was surprised by the fact that the participant remembers no tsunami warnings even though Disney is by the coast. Also, I would have thought that after a big earthquake a person who had lived in Japan so long wouldn’t approach the water (that’s basic safety training) but maybe this speaks to the original lack of situational awareness.

**What I’d do differently**
- Because of having been warned by Participants 1 and 3 to be cautious about the topic of the wife’s family, I was a bit annoyed with myself for asking about how she communicated with her brother. I made a decision not to try to find out anything about that part of the story. But because he had brought up the topic unprompted, I guess I felt I could delve a little deeper just about communication. But then he ended up telling me about the relatives who died and I felt like I had pried into too personal a part of the story - even if unintentionally. I’m not sure I would again and I must be careful in future if I have any prior warning to be even more aware during the interview.

**What didn’t I find out**
- I forgot to ask this participant the question about whether the interview increased his stress. You can hear from the transcript that I turn off the recorder a little bit more abruptly than usual. I usually turned off at the end of some sort of thank you, but I had realized that I was starting to run late for the next interview that day which would be way over the other side of Tokyo.

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**
- This participant began his interview by stating that his is married to a Japanese woman and has three children. He may have seen this as the most important contextual information that he wanted me to know - he is the first participant to have started this way.
There seems to be more evidence for foreigners following what the Japanese do in the first instances (crouching when they saw the Japanese crouching).

He was asked not to leave the theme park - general safety advice seems to be stay where you are. And then later they did a controlled evacuation (moving to certain sections first rather than creating bottlenecks) - perhaps important contextual knowledge for translators to have, because some foreigners were getting annoyed that they weren’t being let out of the park - this is perhaps an example of a language barrier.

The theme of “we didn’t understand how serious it was” came up again in this interview. Perhaps this is another potential code. Lack of initial situational awareness - can this lack in any way be tied to language or culture?

The participant stepped in as an ad-hoc interpreter at one point to explain about the controlled evacuation to some Korean or Chinese fellow guests.

The participant does not remember any tsunami warnings coming, despite the fact that Disney is by the coast. Whether or not the warnings actually came, pragmatically they did not work if they did not make an impression on this person with his young family as he took them walking along the banks looking out to sea to get to their hotel. He even calls this a lesson learned. Perhaps this could be another possible code.

This participant’s account gives us some window into what the experience might have been like for a tourist based on the interactions he had with tourists in the theme park and the fact that his first port of call after onset was a Hilton Hotel.

The participant talked of pushing the baby car through mud and slush - this is probably evidence of liquefaction.

The participant made a really relevant statement relating to the idea that in this large complex emergency, different people focused on different elements of the disaster depending on their circumstances. So because of his wife’s situation with relatives dying in the tsunami, Fukushima did not affect them.

In this interview, there was more evidence for the mismatch between domestic and foreign media. (He said he would be more on the side of the Japanese media.)

He talked of the fact that authorities cannot plan disaster preparation scenarios for all foreigners - not practical and not maybe even feasible in terms of resources - so maybe this suggests an argument that foreigners must help themselves, so maybe any solutions I suggest should be based on facilitating this help themselves idea.

There was a strong sense from the second half of the interview that the participant does not think providing special language treatment for foreign nationals is realistic nor that it even should be as the Japanese have too many other things to be worrying about in terms of disaster preparation. I need to have a good answer to this type of view in my thesis.

2013/10/2 Record of interview with Participant 19

Information about the interview

I had arranged to visit the participant's office and then go from there to a cafe in the atrium of the office complex. It was a long elevator ride and we had some small talk about myself, my research and the participant's life on the way to get coffee. The
interview itself took place at a small table outside a coffee shop in the atrium of a large complex of office buildings in central Tokyo (three large skyscrapers joined together with a shopping mall and residential complex linked in). The interview took place directly before the interview with Participant 20 - they are both colleagues in the same firm that has offices in one of the mega-skyscrapers. There were people regularly passing by through the massive atrium to get to other offices or shops, but no-one came very near us as the coffee shop was tucked away in a corner. It felt very private (despite the unusual setting) and we could speak freely. I bought us both drinks but he barely drank his. This interview came through a contact that my supervisor had met at a conference – the person at this conference’s company had translated messages of hope sent from around the world for Japan to Participant 19’s company. The participant thought this incident was the main thing I wanted to talk about, but, in fact, his own experience was more interesting to me because it more directly related to my research questions than messages of hope. So I chose not to pursue the topic directly and he himself only mentioned it just before he had to leave. The participant had to cut his interview off abruptly to go attend a meeting, which meant that we did not get to cover as much as I’d hoped and there was a strong sense of the clock ticking throughout the interview (he kept his phone on the table in front of his as he spoke) he interview lasted about 42 minutes (7 minutes explaining informed consent - although there was also considerable small talk at this time about my own experience of the disaster - and filling out profile, 35 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

Differences with other interviews

- This was the first interview where the participant directly asked me about my experience of the disaster. Up until now it has been something that I have brought up at times convenient to me, and it was perhaps of note that he seemed interested to know this before sharing his own story. He seemed to be interested in how involved I wanted my voice to be in the process. Perhaps this is because he was a journalist before his current job. I was a little concerned at this mainly because I knew we were under time pressure and I didn’t want the whole conversation to be focused on me, so I tried to keep it brief. But, I guess it is human nature to want to talk about yourself, and I felt my story went on longer than it needed to. I will probably be more careful of this in future. (Although maybe it helped build rapport and some trust with the participant?)

Problems

- We were under time pressure for this interview - the participant had a conference call he had to get to and kept his phone clock open in front of him.
- I did not have a chance to ask the anxiety assessment Likert Scale question at the end of the interview because the interview ended sort of abruptly to allow the participant to go back up to work.

Implications

- Even though I did my best to apply the ethnographic interview techniques that I have been focused on and let the participant speak freely, at around the 25-minute mark I did intervene when he started talking about liquefactions (which is not a major focus
of my research) to pick up explicitly on a language-related issue he had mentioned in an earlier anecdote.

- My anxiety / stress data will not have a full set of participants and I must note this if describing it.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- The confidence in using English scale didn’t seem to work great here - the participant wondered if it implied something like confidence in public speaking. I think there is no perfect way to present a scale to measure such a thing - other native speaking participants have been a bit confused by having to rate their English abilities - but I think doing it face-to-face is the best solution - at least I can explain what I’m hoping to assess with the question.

- The experience of natural disasters question didn’t work well again - I should have probably just phrased it earthquakes or something much more explicit - disaster seems now to be the wrong point and not what I am really asking about.

- The question about when the disaster ended seemed to work well again and each time participants seem to put a lot of thought into answering and seem relatively engaged with the question. His answer again points to the functional rather than the temporal definition being more important (things like alertness, fight or flight criteria, for example).

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

- He seemed to be relaxed, even though he clearly had an eye on the clock throughout the meeting.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- He used quite a lot of hand gestures which I did my best to note and describe but he even apologised for using gestures in this was when he knew I was recording the audio.

**What I felt surprised by**

- I was surprised by how intimidated I felt being in a very high-powered corporate environment. I was glad I had worn a suit, as I think it helped me feel more confidence. But certainly, I found that I wanted to portray myself in as professional a light as possible in contrast to other interviews where I felt more relaxed. This was really nothing to do with the participant who was completely engaging and friendly and more to do with the environment.

**What I’d do differently**

**What didn’t I find out**

- The participant mentioned having done an interview with an overseas radio program during the disaster. I could not find it in the online archives of the radio station, so maybe the participant could direct me to a link.

**What do I need to clarify**

- I did not think to ask him for what Twitter feeds in particular he was following during
the disaster to use for an illustrative corpus.

First reflections on data

- This participant’s former career as a journalist likely had a strong impact on his information gathering and communicating and he mentions his background in journalism a few times in his account.
- He started his account with the very interesting anecdote of his older Japanese boss putting his hand on his shoulder and saying “Let’s wait here” instead of immediately going outside of the subway station like the participant wanted to do. In fact, staying put is probably the safer thing to do and the anecdote could have been to show the voice of Japanese experience - even though the participant was a long-term foreign resident and had been in Japan for the 1995 Kobe - maybe this is an argument for foreigners missing out on the deeply ingrained emergency response education of the Japanese school system from birth?
- There is another little bit of evidence in this interview for details coming back through anecdote rather than directed question. (“I’m remembering now.”)
- He gave another account that emphasizes Japanese stoicism in the face of disaster - his boss continuing the advertising pitch under the meeting table as the shaking continued.
- The participant made a really nice point about the issue of what I’m asking them to remember and said something like “I’m not exactly sure how good my memory is of that incident, but that was the atmosphere.” - maybe I could use this quote to talk about the fact that I’m not looking to represent some reality or external truth and for this reason I would prefer to have atmosphere than precise details.
- The image of foreigners drinking alcohol at the outbreak of disaster came up again - this is seriously a recurring theme. I don’t know that it’s suited to my thesis but it may be interesting for some future work.
- He is a good example of the information-richness of some foreigners with news feeds from all over the world that might fit into the ecosystems idea that is starting to form in my mind.
- In addition, his anecdote about the freelance camerawoman in Japan who was hired by the British TV crew shows the importance of satellite phones and the networks of foreign communities - he got information about evacuating from the disaster zone, which would have the spread out through his network and also how he was giving her the situational awareness - this anecdote is an interesting example of the complexity of information sharing among the people I spoke to - embassy to foreigner in zone with satellite phone to foreigner beside zone with Internet and social media.
- He states strongly that the foreign media was better for him than the Japanese - this is the opposite of what many other foreigners said and I must account for this.
- He said that rather than government influence, the caution of creating a panic may have held back the domestic press and this opinion is based on his having worked for a Japanese publication - he thinks that the Japanese press would be much, much more careful about checking - but this opinion fails to recognize the globalization of media and the fact the people in Japan (foreigners and Japanese alike) would have been exposed to non-domestic media who did not feel such caution.
- The participant mentions the spontaneous development of protocols among his contacts in the crowd to try to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness in the information
that they spread about the disaster.

- There was another example in this interview of Japanese people coming to foreigners for information rather than vice versa.

- The people responsible in subways for making announcements in emergencies are the regular station staff who are probably unlikely to have advanced foreign language skills (and who may have delivered messages not just in an unfamiliar language to foreigners but also in a panicked tone of voice). One of my recommendations could be to think of ways to support such people.

- While the concept of translating messages of hope that he talked about was not so relevant to my research questions, the success of the process of using this translation service and his high opinion of it might be relevant to my thesis - especially the speed at which their network of human translators was willing to volunteer their time and services, but also the fact that efforts were stymied by the technical issues of getting the translations up. He also raised the interesting point of the branding and publicity motive than can be behind the private sector being involved in these “humanitarian” services - a point that could be brought to the work done by the likes of Google and Yahoo in the disaster - and the fact that they are under no legal or moral obligation to continue services or to maintain ethical or humanitarian principles in serving.

- This participant volunteered his services as a translator through the Google site.

2013/10/2 Record of interview with Participant 20

Information about the interview

- This interview took place at a small table outside a coffee shop in the atrium of a large complex of office buildings in central Tokyo (three large skyscrapers joined together with a shopping mall and residential complex linked in). The interview took place just after the interview with Participant 19 - they are both colleagues in the same firm that has offices in one of the mega-skyscrapers. There were people regularly passing by through the massive atrium to get to other offices or shops, but no-one came very near us as the coffee shop was tucked away in a corner. It felt very private (despite the unusual setting) and we could speak freely. I bought us both drinks but he barely touched his. I was a little concerned about running over time as the participant was taking time out of his working day to come down from his office and speak with me (especially because the previous participant had had to cut his interview off abruptly to go attend a meeting) - but as the interview with this participant is essentially a monologue, I just let him talk. Also, he seemed really unconcerned about the informed consent and other profile data and flew threw them. For these reasons the interview lasted about 65 minutes (2 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 63 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- The setting was exactly the same as with Participant 19.

- Again, my interjections increased dramatically (as say with Participant 2) as I realised that time was running out and I had not had the chance to ask many questions (though I was confident on this occasion that the participant’s monologue has spoken of many topics that were of interest to me). I was trying to somewhat break his flow. But the
increase in interjections could also have been just down to tiredness - this was my third interview in a row that day and I may have felt too tired to really do the focused listening (ethnographic interview) that I was trying to practice.

- Participant 20 also mentioned the idea of going into a taxi as a fluent speaker and getting the 'nihongo jozu' thing - this was also mentioned by Participant 13 - this could be used perhaps by me as a sign of the constant foreignising of non-natives living in Japan?

Differences with other interviews

Problems

- At first, it seemed as if he was also looking for directive, precise questioning from me. (I wonder if he was suspicious or thought that I was somehow unfocused). But once I assured him that I was just looking for his experience in general, he took the ball and ran with it and spoke uninterrupted crafting his story around information gathering and communication as I had requested while at the same time giving lots of context.
- The participant naturally spoke really fast.
- About thirty minutes into the interview some noisy large cleaning machine was cleaning near our table and this, combined with his speed of speech, could make the audio quite hard to catch in places - there may be more points that will have to be marked as ‘indistinct’ in this interview than in others.
- As with Participant 19, I did not have a chance to ask the anxiety assessment Likert Scale question at the end of the interview because the interview ended sort of abruptly to allow the participant to go back up to work.

Implications

- I felt I needed to somehow break down his suspicions and gain his confidence in my credentials and trust in me as a researcher right from the start, so I was rather on edge for a lot of this interview.
- Even as he was speaking, I thought that his interview would be difficult to transcribe
- My anxiety / stress data will not have a full set of participants and I must note this when describing it, if I use it.

What questions worked well or didn’t

- The previous experience of disasters question on the profile data did not work well as he clearly stated that he didn't know what to make of the context for this scale, so his answer is probably meaningless. This question has not worked well for me and I sometimes forgot to even ask it, so probably those data will not aid my interpretation.

How participants seemed to be feeling

- He seemed to be relaxed and confident - not at all rushed. His words were considered but fluent. (I felt a little intimidated by his delivery.)

How they used non-verbal communication

- At first, he rarely made eye contact with me and looked off often into the middle distance. This did not give the impression of someone nervous, though, rather it gave
the impression of someone confidently giving information (almost like a lecture). But as the interview went on he laughed more and made more eye contact especially at these points of sort of gallows humour.

What I felt surprised by

- I was surprised by how long the participant talked and how infrequently I had to intervene. He spoke for nearly forty minutes without almost any interruption in answer to my first intervention. It shows the value of sending the topics beforehand as it was mostly all on topic.
- This participant seemed to be particularly eloquent (perhaps because of his job) and I was surprised at how often he paraphrased ideas I had been developing independently in nice ways that I can hopefully quote in the thesis.
- I was surprised that again (like with Participant 13) class and socioeconomic distinctions again came up in relation to response to the disaster. This might be an interesting point to pursue (perhaps not for the thesis though).

What I’d do differently

What didn’t I find out

What do I need to clarify

- There was one line of dialog that I think was just a mistake - he said “Look, if you don’t have, non-essential stuff don’t go, but if you have to be there, it’s okay”. From the context, I think he meant “non-essential stuff go”. (NOTE: this sentence was clarified by the participant at the first member checking stage.)
- I could follow up on the historic tweets of the key Tweeters he mentioned (Jean Snow, Jake Adelstein, Hiroko Tabuchi) in my Twitter data set to look at what they were contributing.

First reflections on data

- The different cultural responses to earthquakes came up very frequently in this participant's account: filming his Japanese colleague who kept working through all the shaking (the colleague wanted to get the work done so he could get out of there): how the participant did not want to stay in the building (even though he knew this is the recommended safe response in Japanese preparedness training and for example where his wife worked in downtown Tokyo was not letting anyone out of the building)
- The strength of sound (aural) memory of the experience of an earthquake comes up again here - the noises rather than the movement etc seems to stick with people (for this participant the noise of the office cabinets slamming together)
- The centrality of information from his account came when the focus shifted to “What’s going on with Fukushima?” - he also felt it was in this shift that the government started kind of doing things in English (implying that they hadn’t beforehand for the other elements of the disaster)
- His account fed into the fly-jin narrative and the story of his wife ringing her boss and catching her at the station to Osaka gives a good sense of the strange mood of fleeing from danger in those early stages. There is also some sense of the divisions
within the foreign community (they were french and they just split) - which I could show could be put down to embassy information perhaps.

- He clearly says that the Japanese spirit thing in relation to disaster (being back at desks on Monday morning) was a challenge for him. Especially when especially French friends were leaving and saying he should go too (there was a duty to show up and continue working even though there was nothing to do).
- He talked about a lack of deep contingency planning in his company (slightly contrary to Japan’s stereotypical image of preparedness and he felt other firms he knew might have been better prepared).
- He spoke of there being a lot of distrust of official records (and he ties this to systemic issues of Japanese life and society) and, in general, he brings up the idea of trust (the members forum versus Twitter) frequently.
- He explicitly mentioned a small group of foreigners translating stuff through Twitter and how this was useful to him (not speaking Japanese) - he does say, however, that it was not perhaps done for the foreign population of Japan but for the world to know what was going on - which shows the idea of people being ‘indirectly involved’ throughout the world.
- The nuance here again was that wards and local governments used ineffective channels of communication (letters or forms through the door that participants wouldn’t look at, knocks on door when you’re at work).
- He makes an interesting point about defining foreignness and diversity in Japan with a third-generation Korean in an advanced bureaucratic position being held up as an example of diversity - he also makes the point that lack of integration does not stop Japan from being a pleasant place where people care for you - but you are always foreign in their eyes.
- He makes an interesting point that discounting the official word may have made him want to access Japanese information less and thus reduced his need for translation - is this something that might be more general?

2013/10/3 Record of interview with Participant 21

Information about the interview

- This interview took place in an Excelsior Coffee Shop in central Tokyo near where the participant worked. I had been on a volunteer weekend in the disaster zone with the participant a few days prior, so we had already gotten to know each somewhat. I knew that the participant was a big smoker, so we sat in the smoking section of the coffee shop. She went through about 8 cigarettes over the 90 minutes. This made it slightly uncomfortable for me at times, but I wanted to ensure the participant was as relaxed as possible and I did not want to chance that she would seek to end the interview early in order to go and smoke a cigarette. As it was late in the evening, there were only one or two other customers in that section of the coffee shop during our interview, and even they did not sit near us. Also a glass divider separated us from other customers in the non-smoking section, so it felt very private, I felt that we could talk freely, and the background music was not loud. After we finished the interview, she suggested going for a beer together. I really felt I couldn't say no
because she had been so instrumental in getting me a place on the volunteer team and because we had had some nice chats and become a little friendly over the weekend. The interview lasted about 108 minutes (3 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 105 minutes interview).

**Similarities with other interviews**

- This coffee shop was near where I had met Participants 7 and 18 (it is one of the main business districts of Tokyo) so I was slightly nervous that we would run into each other and that that would be awkward.
- This interview was a little bit similar to Participant 14’s in that I came away with some really useful data that I cannot use. It was too personally sensitive to her, so she told me about it and showed it to me but then said that I could not mention the details of it in my research. This is an interesting point for the methodology chapter about ethics.

**Differences with other interviews**

**Problems**

- Having a beer together after the interview made me feel a bit conflicted. I still haven’t resolved the idea of being friendly and social with people I am still researching on. I find myself not lying but not being as forthcoming as I could be.

**Implications**

- I will probably need to write about some of the advantages and disadvantages of being socially involved with some participants outside the research setting.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- I think the whole form of ethnographic, non-directive interviewing worked particularly well here. You can see, for example, in how the story of her former boss going up to the disaster zone with reporters as a translator comes up through the dialogic process. I do not think these data would have been revealed if I had just asked something like, “Tell me about your experience of or thoughts on translation in this disaster.” In fact, this participant said in our conversation following the interview that she did not think she would have remembered about Yokosonews, her Israeli boss and her acquaintance offering translation if I had just directly asked ‘did you use translation during the disaster’. This was only one participant, but I feel it kind of justified my methodology a little bit.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

- She seemed to be really nervous - hands shaking and almost chain smoking - but she laughed a lot especially at the start, so she may have just been feeling the effects of a lot of caffeine and tobacco throughout the day. It seemed odd to me that she would be nervous as she had seemed such a forthright and self-confident person during the weekend of volunteering. But I guess she might not normally talk about personal matters.

**How they used non-verbal communication**
• She often gestured generally with her hand that held her cigarette - more waving the hand than making a particular gesture in relation to a particular point of dialogue.
• This participant was very expressive with her voice and often used exaggerated accents, styles of speaking and tones of voice. I tried to capture them whenever I felt they might have an impact on how the dialogue should be interpreted.

What I felt surprised by

• Some things that surprised me was her confessed high level of mistrust for me before meeting and how she wanted to know my earthquake story - I had never really thought to tell it I guess. By my not telling it, I thought I was keeping the focus on them, but perhaps I should have started more interviews with it to build up that communal bond. I’m not sure.

What I’d do differently

• I would have let the participant speak more uninterrupted at the start. I think I should have used silence a bit more and just let her talk. Maybe because I had gotten to know her a bit, I felt more like I was having a regular conversation and less like I was conducting an ethnographic style interview which was a common point with other participants where the line was a bit blurred between participant/friend. I don’t think it had a major negative impact, but I think it would have been more ethnographic if I had kept quieter at the start.

What didn’t I find out

• I never even thought to ask for the contact details of her former Israeli boss who acted as an interpreter for the US reporters, but I do not think I would have had time to interview him anyway.

What do I need to clarify

First reflections on data

• There was some sense of a lack of confidence in the physical soundness of her office building (she started the interview by pointing out that she found out later that it had been built after strict codes for building earthquake resistant buildings had come into effect). It is interesting that she found this out after the disaster, so that may be one changed behaviour.
• She pointed out that she works with a lot of international people and highlights the difference in immediate response between foreign and Japanese staff. Many foreigners ran out of the building (which you are not supposed to do) while the Japanese went under their desks.
• Her first information gathering was by Internet, clicking on the CNN news website with her bicultural (JA-US) colleague. She very clearly states that nobody knew what to do in the initial first hour after onset showing that gathering information was important to her early experience. Her first time to see about the tsunami was videos in the bar they went to at about 5.30pm.
• Beers and alcohol come up again very early in this account.
• This participant very quickly mentioned the rumours and misinformation that started spreading (through email messages from friends) in even the first couple of hours of
the disaster and this is a strong theme in her account that she returns to often.

- Her previous experience of having her sister go through 9/11 likely impacted her experience of the disaster, especially in relation to her desire to communicate with loved ones. It seemed to be that the sister’s trauma from 9/11 made her react very negatively to Fukushima and this transferred onto the participant.

- Does the relatively calm reaction of the foreigners to the freaked out reaction of the staff at the bar indicate the difference in situational awareness by having access to TV?

- It’s interesting how much she talked about images when I asked her about how much she knew in general. Is this another indicator of the important role of pictures, diagrams, etc.?

- There is another example here of a participant counterbalancing their account with something like ‘at least from my memory’ indicating that they recognize that there may not be a perfect ‘truth’ to what they say.

- This participant was quite negative towards Facebook in particular and social media in general. The hassle of a kind of social obligation about saying she’s okay which she didn’t feel like dealing with, especially because the obligation seemed to be to people she did not feel a particularly strong connection with.

- She states that she was already disillusioned with the media in general so I must temper her negative statements about the reporting of the disaster with that knowledge. This distrust of media is another major motif in this participant’s account. Because of this distrust her information gathering techniques in the disaster would surely have been affected.

- There is, though, an interesting disconnect in her story about how she’s fine and how Tokyo’s fine, and getting angry at others for making worse of their situations than they needed to be, and yet she left Japan for Hong Kong because of Fukushima. Did a lack of translation and interpreting lead to this disconnect?

- Her story about finding the plug for her TV as the first thing she did when she got back to her own apartment shows that she did not use it much beforehand but that she saw it as an important information gathering tool in a disaster.

- This is another story featuring centrally the image of the Fukushima reactor exploding - could I use the explosion as a sort of vignette to bring varied participants’ experiences together? She very clearly says at this point that this is where the translation stuff probably comes in.

- This seems to be another account showing the advantage of having a wide network of friends and contacts (e.g. the friend who had a reactor in their hometown

- The participant’s account speaks clearly of how she was pulled in two directions - some friends telling her not to worry about radiation and continue as normal and other friends and family telling her to panic and stock up on supplies etc.

- This is another piece of evidence about people who do not speak the language fluently putting stock in the tone of voice of the person delivering the message (you hear the news announcers getting freaked out).

- The participant makes an interesting comment about not expecting translation services simultaneously with the nuclear announcement based on her experience of translation from Japanese TV when she was in Japan for 9/11.

- She made a very interesting point about the foreign nationals being complicit in the sensationalization of the story by what and how they told of the disaster (especially
images that foreigners chose to share through social media).

- This participant had a big impact from the earthquake in that she decided to stay longer and found she liked Japan more based on how they responded to the disaster.
- Her first time going up to Tohoku to volunteer was in May (at that time the roads were still restricted to military vehicles and large trucks)
- She underlined that it is the more leadership roles in volunteering that might need more language and culture mediation.
- The participant seemed a little defensive when I brought up the term fly-jin, even though I never implied she might be seen as one.

2013/10/4 Record of interview with Participant 22

Information about the interview

- This interview took place in a Turkish restaurant in a suburb of Nagoya. Though the meeting took place in Nagoya, the participant was living in Tokyo at the time of the disaster. Though the restaurant was small, we were the only customers and the staff stayed behind the counter and left us alone. I felt there would be no problems, therefore, with privacy or background noise. The interview lasted about 75 minutes (5 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 70 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- This was a very similar environment to the interview I had with Participant 6 - at a restaurant over lunch - but I had learned from that experience how to get better data.

Differences with other interviews

Problems

- This participant was a frustrating participant to interview. The ethnographic interview method states that you should encourage participants to go off on tangents and seemingly unrelated anecdotes, if they want to. However, this participant only seemed to go off on tangents and it was difficult to imagine how any of this might relate to his experience of the disaster.
- I did not enjoy my time with this participant as much as I had been expecting to. From his emails, I thought we would have a great time talking.

Implications

- I have to be careful not to discount these seemingly unrelated or useless passages, though. As per an ethnographic frame, they are only irrelevant in my world and may tell me a lot about the participant’s perspectives.
- I also feel that whether or not I like the participant can affect how ethnographic I want to go. I feel when I like the person I want to know more of the context and am happy to listen to the asides. When I do not feel so comfortable in the person’s presence I want the interview to be over quicker and am less interested in the asides. This may indicate problems with identification with the participants or blurring lines of researched and friend.
• NOTE: in the end there were some difficulties with transcription based on the participant’s low speaking volume and hybrid German-English accent. There were some passages in the transcript where I could not avoid putting ‘indistinct’ for the transcription.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

• I knew in advance that this interview would be in a restaurant. I had learned from my experience with Participant 6, so I knew some of the pitfalls of interviewing over food and tried to counteract them. For example, I made sure the conversation was about stuff I was not very interested in for most of the ‘meal’ so that he would have time to eat and I could talk and let him do so about other rubbish topics. Then by the time the eating was done, I could go on to the topics I cared more about.

• Once again, one of the most interesting things in the interview came in the last few minutes when I said, ‘is there anything else you want to add’ kind of thing. This time I had not switched off the audio recorder - I am learning.

• I definitely did not do a great job of using my ethnographic interview techniques here, mainly because of the interview environment but perhaps also because of the human relations side - I didn’t use silence so much, and talked over the participant occasionally and intervened more than I would normally want to.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

• Face to face, I found this participant to be less warm and more cynical than he had seemed in his emails arranging the interview. Perhaps this indicated that he was not at ease with me and not so comfortable.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

• The participant did use a few gestures and I tried to capture them at the time and will include them in the transcript.

**What I felt surprised by**

• Arriving a bit early, I walked around the neighbourhood a bit to kill some time before the scheduled meeting. I was surprised by the many non-Japanese faces I bumped into in just 30 minutes or so (about 6!). It seems Nagoya is an international city in Japanese terms.

**What I’d do differently**

**What didn’t I find out**

• I did not really ask the participant to go into detail about their feelings on the interview process. I just asked him to fill out the Likert scale. This is because I was worried that I was starting to run late for my next appointment. (You can see this by how abruptly I switched off the audio recorder.)

**What do I need to clarify**

**First reflections on data**

• The participant started with how he thinks Japan is moving off in a strange direction
(more right wing, less international) and this links with the idea of closing off from the world that other participants have mentioned. However, he does not see any causal link with the disaster here. But it reinforces this discourse on appearance versus reality in desire to internationalize in Japan that may be relevant to interpret measures for responding to disasters in a more culturally and linguistically diverse way.

- The talk about international experience maybe not being such a work advantage and his feeling that he is seen as a threat to the coherence of the system seems to indicate that he is really not integrated into his work environment and feels he is getting treated very differently on the basis that he is a foreigner and that he works differently. He seems to have quite an antagonistic relationship with some of his Japanese employers and colleagues. (Can I link this to an idea of responding differently in a disaster?)

- The participant talks about having no idea about the magnitude of the disaster initially. The first information gathering device he mentions in TV, but they never watched TV because neither he nor his wife were good enough at Japanese, so they did not use it. Instead they went online first. And then, he did go to NHK’s international English channel.

- Bureaucracy, administration and his perception of how these often seem illogical to him came up repeatedly in his account.

- The participant still has a bit of a sense of guilt about not taking up the university position that he had signed for but not yet started near Fukushima before the nuclear disaster happened.

- He had an extremely negative view of how the German Embassy handled the crisis. (His language changed here talking about this topic - more vulgar, perhaps showing real anger).

- He criticizes the wider German community (like Goethe Institut and the German school) citing the cause of the trouble being the fact that they did not communicate - another piece of evidence for the importance of information to response but also to recovery.

- He pointed out the complicated result of having these people coming out of the woodwork over social media to check on you in the disaster - nice in one way that they care, but if it’s too much, then you get annoyed.

- This participant spoke of the large hurdle that learning the Japanese language presents (even for a linguist who has learned multiple other languages in his life).

- This participant seemed to go off on several long digressions somehow justifying his level of Japanese ability or integration in to Japanese culture. What does this mean for disaster? Maybe that this feeling of otherness is strong in Japan because of the language and culture and is part of the experience of migrating there.

- This participant mentioned (like Participant 17) mentioned how, where there is disaster for some, there is also opportunity.

- There are really plenty of incidences in this account of the participant pointing to language and culture barriers in his experience of living in Japan. He even says that cultural differences and the desire to be free to make an individual choice would probably put him off spending (or make it difficult for him to spend) an earthquake training with Japanese.

- Another point that is important to my thesis from this participant’s account is that he
makes the recommendation that Japanese local authorities should work more closely with the embassies. This is quite significant for me as my empirical data clearly point out an important role for embassies.

- He pointed out that people providing information to foreigners should not assume that all foreigners speak English.
- The participant ended the interview by saying quite strongly that he doesn’t think language is such a big issue in disaster. This somewhat goes against parts of the evidence in his account, but it is consistent with the emphasis he put on cultural barriers. I need to make sure I deal with such evidence for lack of significance of language in my themes. But he does put this down to the lack of strong ties he had in his life to Japan and contrasts it with the experiences of others he knew in Japan with family etc but little Japanese ability, and then he, kind of contradicts his earlier statement by saying that a reason he decided not to go to Fukushima was because of the linguistic problems he would have had there with building situation awareness, understanding warnings, etc.

2013/10/6 Record of interview with Participant 23

Information about the interview

- This interview took place in a small seaside town outside Nagoya with some ship building and military facilities nearby. The participant had lived in Tokyo at the time of the disaster. I had taken the train about an hour from Nagoya where I had stayed that night and just met the participant at the small local station. There was no problem meeting each other as we were the only two non-Asians in the building. I was a bit uncomfortable because I had my big backpack with me (I was travelling directly on to Tokyo after the interview by bullet train). It was also blisteringly hot. The participant had chosen a coffee shop about 20-minute walk from the station. It was an old Showa-era place. Even though there were only the two staff and one or two other people (unfortunately including a young kid) in the place and we had a table tucked away in the corner, it was pretty noisy with lots of background raised voices, music, plates clanging, etc. But it did feel private at least. The interview lasted about 60 minutes (5 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 55 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- This was another native-English speaking participant who seemed concerned about giving herself full marks for English.
- I felt immediately relaxed and comfortable with this participant and I think this type of interpersonal stuff really conditioned how well the interviews started but not necessarily how well they went overall because even with the people I felt uncomfortable with at the beginning I sometimes still ended up having great interviews with them.
- This is another interview where I felt the participant was not really responding to the listening-focused, ethnographic style of interview I was trying to go for (giving very short answers) and so I tried to give more and more of my experience to try and model answers and categories for discussion and to build intimacy.
Differences with other interviews

Problems

- I still haven't learned my lesson - never switch off the microphone. As soon as I had switched off the audio recorder, the participant said that she felt foreigners actually did better in terms of information than the Japanese because they had access to other viewpoints and sources. She had Japanese people coming up and asking her what she knew. Especially when Japanese heard the foreigners were leaving an element of them were like what do you know that we don't. She also said that even if the information in Japanese had been translated for her she might not have considered it because she had lost trust in the official Japanese line and just did not believe what official sources were saying.
- Even though we just had coffee, I still felt the need to let the participant have a chance to stop talking to drink their coffee. It would be better to have interviews without food and drink, I think.
- The participant really tended towards short answers.

Implications

- I have added the above information not caught on tape to her transcript and will have her approve at the member checking stage so that it can officially enter the data that I will analyse.
- I tried to leave quite long pauses at the end of each apparent stop (she ended a lot of sentences with “so, yeah” as a signal that she had no more to say), but unless she said that I waited as much as possible.

What questions worked well or didn’t

- The disability status question needed to be explained again.
- It worked well to have an idea of where the participant had been before starting the talking section (I knew from the profile data that she had been in a European country after the disaster) so this gave me the confidence and motivation to probe deeper when she was only giving short answers about the day of onset at first.

How participants seemed to be feeling

- The participant seemed a little nervous at first (she spilled some coffee on herself just as we were about to start), but I think this was just at the oddness of meeting a complete stranger more than any sense of unease. She quickly seemed to become relaxed and it was a very convivial chat. There was a lot of me laughing in the interview.

How they used non-verbal communication

- The participant did seem to look down quite a lot at the start - I think this was just a symptom of general shyness rather than not wanting to reveal information. But as the interview went on and as she used more humour she began to roll her eyes in a self-deprecating way or cover her face with mock embarrassment at the decisions she made in responding or at the lack of clarity in her answers.
- She also used air quotes at one point but made a point of stopping, looking at the
recorder, and saying that she didn’t want to use such a gesture.

**What I felt surprised by**

- She spent a lot of the account making jokes about the silliness of her own response and the choices she made. Overall, she used humour a lot in the account, usually in a self-deprecating way.
- I was surprised by how unafraid she was of any of the dangers (tsunami was not mentioned barely - even the radiation which preoccupied so many people) and on how focused she was on going back to Japan once she had left - she only left because of parental pressure.

**What I’d do differently**

**What didn’t I find out**

- I didn’t even bother to ask about the slogans as I’d given up on that as an avenue of inquiry. Same for the handout emergency list question which I had totally abandoned by now.

**What do I need to clarify**

- The participant suggested that one of her friends might like to participate. He was a teacher who was in Fukushima at the time of the disaster and stayed there. I knew I would not have time to meet him in Japan, but I thought I might try to follow up with him if he were in Europe over the Christmas holidays, for example.

**First reflections on data**

- The participant suffered an information lack right at the beginning of her account not knowing what was going on as they waited outside the subway station BUT she was not sure it was because of language - she thought no-one seemed to have information, including Japanese. In this scenario, someone in some sort of official capacity (a station guard) seems to take on the role of someone who should have information. These may be the types of people to focus translation assistance on.
- A feature that seems to come up is how people had no idea about the tsunami but this lasted for different periods depending on what sort of communication was available to them - maybe I could look into this to determine which communication tools worked best for situational awareness in my participants. My sense is TV because this is another account where it was the first information gathering source (the shop TVs turned out to the street to inform passers by).
- While she said language was not an issue with the station guards, she clearly said they were not getting much information from the TVs because all the headlines were in Japanese and kanji. Perhaps this is justification for just translating headlines in a disaster when resources are limited - that plus pictures might be sufficient (this could call on audio visual theory). She also clearly stated that language stopped her from feeling part of the dorm or local communities.
- She talked about dissatisfaction with what she was getting from Japanese source of news mainly because her limited Japanese ability (critically under stress which tallies with my own experience) might have made her miss things and that Japanese information was coming too slowly for her (not timely) - this slowness may be linked
to cultural differences in what information to give out and how much to give out, etc.

- Her dad came up a few times as influencing her way of responding (reliability of news sources, and both her parents seemed to put pressure on her to leave - this pressure from home is an important category to take into account when exploring the fly-jin idea).
- This is another account where the participant talks about feeling more comfortable having information in their native language.
- This participant clearly stated that she left Japan because of not being able to get information (especially not face-to-face information because her friends were leaving).
- She has an interesting anecdote about a Japanese student questioning why she was still here and saying if she could leave she would be her family just wouldn’t leave. This could contribute to my discussion of fly-jin that many Japanese might have left if they could have more easily and probably would have left if the situations had been reversed.
- This was the only participant to have checked a Japanese governmental website - so I can use her assessment of the poor quality of the MOFA website as evidence of room for improvement.
- She made a valid point that “if something happened in Ireland, I doubt the government would be, “Let’s update our website”” so I must not overstate the likelihood or expectation that governments will provide multilingual, multicultural support and I need to deal with this argument in my thesis.

2013/10/7 Record of interview with Participant 24

Information about the interview

- This interview took place in an Excelsior Coffee Shop in central Tokyo near where the participant worked. It was not too noisy and we could get some privacy. The interview lasted about 105 minutes (3 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 102 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- I think this is another interview that shows the benefits of my methodology (sending a framework by mail beforehand and then letting them just speak to get their memories flowing) as he constantly hit topics I’m interested in but in a free-form way that allowed him to structure a story around what is important to him. He spoke for twenty minutes uninterrupted. Maybe it might be interesting for me to measure how long people spoke initially in each interview as a way to illustrate my methodology.
- Also, by saying at the end of the interview “em, I didn’t say this at the start” where he went back to a communication topic, it perhaps showed that things come back to people as relevant by not having things to structured (he went directly from translation technology to this communication topic - a bit of a jump).
- This was another interview where when we reached the hour mark I was trying to wrap things up so that I wouldn’t break my promise regarding the time the interview would take, but as he seemed still quite eager to talk I took my chance and asked
more focused questions about translating and translation technology which I might not have asked otherwise. Once I had made this decision it became more of a conversation than an ethnographic (largely listening) interview, as can be seen by the increase in exchanges.

**Differences with other interviews**
- This felt different to Participant 14’s interview because this participant had a much more official response and coordination role in the disaster whereas Participant 14 was just a temporary volunteer. It came across clearly that this participant was very much part of the official line and that his response was largely dictated by his employment responsibilities.
- Participant 24 seems really socialised into the Japanese way of responding to disaster by virtue of the job he did.

**Problems**
- I had the embarrassment of going up and asking a foreign Caucasian male who was sitting alone if he happened to be the participant because I thought it might have been him waiting for me. It was not. I was embarrassed.

**Implications**
- One of the learning points from the interview process is definitely to let people know what you look like and what you are wearing so that at least one of you should recognize the other. I forgot to do this a couple of times and suffered the embarrassment and stress of not knowing who to expect. This was more of an issue in cities where there were more foreigners likely to be about.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**
- The question about when the disaster ended seemed to work well as usual and stimulate a good bit of thought, reflection and (hopefully) memories from the participant.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**
- He seemed to be pretty relaxed. He was clearly a bit tired after work though.

**How they used non-verbal communication**
- He tended to use a lot of aizuchi showing his acclimatisation to Japanese norms of communication (or perhaps interference from Japanese norms).
- He was very open, relaxed and sat forward in the chair showing interest but he did not use many gestures or certainly not large gestures.

**What I felt surprised by**
- He did not mention the tsunami or nuclear issue at all. This seemed to surprise him too when I pointed this out. It shows how different people focus on different aspects of such a huge disaster and, I think, justifies my decision not to do group interviews.

**What I’d do differently**
What didn’t I find out

What do I need to clarify

- I need to follow up with Participant 24 on possible interview candidates that he said he could introduce me to in New Zealand in case he does not contact them and let me know as promised (he mentioned one former colleague in Auckland and two in Tokyo).

First reflections on data

- He talked about recording the information at the radio stations and how they would just keep playing it, so this fits in with the complaint from some participants of just hearing the same information over and over when listening to the radio.
- He said people were looking on their phones at the Internet and news websites (which is evidence for connectivity in Sendai) when they were standing outside after evacuating and that is how they started hearing about the tsunami that he means via one-seg tv.
- He very clearly mentioned the importance to foreigners who don’t speak Japanese of having someone that they knew in their network who does speak Japanese.
- He also talked of Sendai already having the idea of foreign leaders in the neighbourhoods that Participant 10 suggested as a future strategy so clearly it is something that could be developed easily in more places than just Sendai.
- He mentioned reasons for many foreigners not going to the designated refuge centres (that they only found out about later indicating that the local authorities might expect people to go to the centres) - the reasons he states are: easier to stay at home; not speak Japanese; not want to burden anyone. He hinted later at friends of his who just didn’t want to go. He also said how the international centre got feedback that culture was a reason for some for not going to the refuge centres, for example about those that don’t eat meat or to pray. He spelled out the Japanese cultural response succinctly (for Japanese people, they know that if there’s a disaster, you still go to the refuge area).
- Was the fact that he was unaware of the nuclear issue until people were telling him you have to leave an indication of how in line he was (and how implicated he was in) the official Japanese response?
- Being willing to stay and help out came up a lot (possibly in return for the kindness that was shown to him in his friends’ and colleagues’ reaction to the earlier Christchurch earthquake that affected his family).
- His opinion of the New Zealand embassy was very high. So far, mostly the UK and New Zealand and Irish embassies were positively rated by participants. The others less so. (And even opinion on Ireland was a bit mixed.)
- He made an interesting point about how trust of information from an embassy is built (and perhaps lost) in their first actions in the disaster.
- He emphasised how all foreigners should not be lumped together in the disaster.
- There seemed to be a theme running through his story of showing how nice Japan and the Japanese people are and how good the group dynamic is (e.g., leaving 10-yen coins at phone boxes). Possibly to counteract suspicions he might have that I or my readers might be critical of Japan and its response???
- In terms of difficulties with his work of translating he focused on consistency,
storage, repetition, accuracy which could easily be solved by freely available translation technologies (e.g. translation memories, terminology banks, etc.) - but he also underlined that just having translated information out there whether it is perfectly right or not is also important as well.

- Near the end, he sort of raised the issue of translation quality and perhaps the limitations of volunteer translation - the exchange students could do the information for the radio but not the technical stuff about getting subsidies from the government offices.
- Use of International Englishes and some of the problems and inconsistencies that arise when translators use their own versions of English in translation came up as a bit of a category - especially for more official translations. It also appeared that Japanese higher-ups had input into the translation of terms (noted with some negativity). This really comes into the realm of terminology and term management. There is also the problem / issue of institutional memory and expertise related to terminology and translation in city hall being held by just a few key people.
- He also mentioned how some privacy rules could affect communication between foreigners in disaster in Japan (e.g. some schools don’t have access to gmail).
- A change in behaviour was that after the earthquake they started telling JETs to get a smartphone. He spoke of the advantages of this technology even recognising the limitation that you might not have power immediately.
- There did seem to be some support near the end of the interview for the idea that talking to someone like me who had been there was beneficial.
- He did mention long-term effects of the earthquake on his mental state (strange relationship to food).
- He is one of the few people to have mentioned Easy Japanese independently and to have mentioned it in a positive light.

2013/10/9 Record of interview with Participant 25

Information about the interview

- This interview took place in a Dean and Deluca near the participant’s workplace in central Tokyo. As it was late in the evening, it was pretty quiet (even though it was late, the participant was going back to the office after our interview so I was conscious of not taking up too much of her time). There were no other patrons at the tables just behind us, so it felt fairly private. Also the BGM was not too loud. The interview lasted about 55 minutes (3 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 52 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- This felt a bit similar to Participant 10’s interview - I wasn’t expecting any emotion, especially because there was a relaxed, jokey atmosphere at the start of the interview, but then she started crying quite early in the account. The participant was surprised, too, at showing emotion, and this is where the two interviews felt similar. It is perhaps worth putting in the methodology that predicting who will react emotionally in this type of interview was impossible for me to predict.
**Differences with other interviews**

**Problems**
- I knew I had to get to my next interview over the other side of the city in very short time, so I was conscious of the time passing, especially near the end of the interview.

**Implications**
- I may not always have been as focused as in other interviews because my mind was on getting to the next unfamiliar location on time.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**
- Yet again, asking a native English speaker to evaluate their own English ability on a Likert scale seemed to cause some amusement/consternation.
- The first general topic raised by me (tell me about your experience of the disaster) did not work very well - it only produced only a short answer related to the first few minutes of the disaster.
- I do think I used silence pretty effectively for most of the interview - mainly because I felt comfortable with her and liked her instantly - these easy initial connections always made the interview process easier and show that there is just an element of luck to how the interview will go based on the chemistry between the researcher and participant.
- And yet again the question about the disaster ending was met with a ‘good question’. I think this means I have to deal with this issue in my thesis. Perhaps I could go and look for the responses to each time I ask this question as one code in itself.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**
- She seemed relaxed and jokey and there was a lot of laughter throughout the interview. (This is why both she and I were surprised when she suddenly became emotional.)
- I feel she also wanted to make a stand that not all foreigners felt their experience was dramatic and terrible (she describes the sensational interviews that some foreign nationals gave to overseas media) and that her story should be counted as one strongly supporting the way the Japanese responded.

**How they used non-verbal communication**
- The participant did tend to use hand gestures more often than other participants, especially when talking about the movement of buildings in the earthquake and aftershocks or showing imaginary scales. I tried to note wherever she did this so that it could be included in the transcript.

**What I felt surprised by**

**What I’d do differently**

**What didn’t I find out**
- I didn’t really ask specifically about social media or radio, but I could infer a lot from
her answers to related questions, I think, so I’m not sure it was much of a loss.

**What do I need to clarify**

- I may follow up with her offer of introducing me to other Australians in Japan through the various networks she is a member of or runs.

**First reflections on data**

- She again talked about running outside after the disaster and how she knows you’re not supposed to do that.
- She made an interesting point about the ‘group’ notion in Japan - different groups of office workers sharing the same evacuation site did not communicate with each other - you just stay in your group. This could relate back to the disaster training Japanese people receive all through school.
- There may be something about the idea that people who have no other frame of reference might be calm about the earthquake once not right in the disaster zone (e.g. the visiting foreign winemaker in this account or the Participant 1’s recently arrived colleague).
- There was an ecosystem moment where she was talking on the landline to her sister on Australia who turned on the TV and then reported to the participant back in Japan that it had been a big earthquake (but not much more detail than that) - so again this shows how situational awareness sometimes first came from overseas.
- It seems that overall this participant’s very early situational awareness was poor. Can we put this down to her being alone, and being focused on the work event she did not want to go to the next day? Or is this some sort of repair she is now doing in hindsight? The first real information gathering act she made was when she turned the television on at home. What stuck with her is the image of the map (she does not remember seeing any tsunami footage at this early stage). This may be another pointer to the power of graphics in times of disaster. We can be sure that this was Japanese language because she only has the domestic channels.
- Again the sudden and unexpected emotional reaction (as with Participant 10) probably relates to not being able to get through to a loved one - in this case the man who would go on to be her husband.
- This participant probably wanted less information than more - especially repeating images over and over. One reason she did not want to go home is that she would have been exposed to more media bombardment.
- Foreign media reports seemed to anger her and caused her to focus on Japanese media.
- She made a good case for linguistic and cultural skills being needed if foreigners want to spread information and help in a disaster.
- She said that after the earthquake Tokyo English Lifeline needs not just English speakers but speakers of all sorts of languages now.
- She did not mention Fukushima and when I questioned her as to why, she said she didn’t worry about it. She implied that forwarding information and horror stories on Facebook about Fukushima was not helping.
- Despite her low opinion of Tepco, she shows a high regard for the trustworthiness of Japan in general. She has faith that people will do their job to deal with the situation overall. Moreover, she actively bought Fukushima peaches and is trying to support
their industries (very contrary to some other groups of foreigners) - will information or translation be some part of the explanation for these very different views on the nuclear and food safety issues?

- She gave lots of evidence for how much she felt part of her local community. Can I draw a link between this and the differences in her answers versus those who did not feel such links? But I must note that she did not think Japanese would have been necessary to make the link with the izakaya owner. I must make sure to note this counter-evidence.

- The overall sense of her account is similar to the Japanese idea of one way of responding is everyone (like a cog in a bigger wheel) just getting on with their regular job as quickly as possible after a disaster.

2013/10/9 Record of interview with Participant 26

Information about the interview

- This interview took place at a Denny’s Family Restaurant just at one of the exits of a major train station in Tokyo. I had to come straight from a previous interview over the other side of the city. I had planned the train times precisely but it was tight and I had to run through the evening commuter crowds of a very busy station to get to the meeting point outside the restaurant. I even got a little lost, so I arrived stressed and flustered. But in the end I was on time, had a chance to cool down, and was happily waiting for the participant when he arrived. The interview lasted about 75 minutes (8 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 67 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

- This felt very similar to the interview with Participant 5 - a noisy location, and a soft-spoken interviewee who felt he did not have much to tell me. I felt better able to deal with these issues, though, based on having been through so many other interviews at this stage and based on the fact that I now felt I had reached critical mass and have enough other data to work with, even if this one did not go so well.

Differences with other interviews

Problems

- This was a bit of a disaster location-wise. Lots of background noise in terms of the hustle and bustle of a busy restaurant (we were right by the wait staff area where a bell was constantly going off) and there were customers at tables close to us on either side having their own conversations that, in the end, could to some extent be heard on the audio recording.

- Yet again, I switched off the recorder a little too early. Even 26 interviews later this is still a mistake I am making!

Implications

- It’s really hard to choose between quiet and tucked away versus noisy and easy to find when selecting locations. However, even though it did not feel particularly private, but virtue of being two foreigners speaking English, and by virtue of the fact
that the other customers were deep in their own conversation, I think nobody else was really paying us any mind.

- I did not capture the audio of the participant’s talk as he was filling out the Likert Scale for post-interview stress but I included a memo at the end of the transcript with my recollection of what he said and this will be member-checked.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- I didn’t always make clear that the scales I was asking them to rank on in the profile data (levels of English and Japanese in particular) was really relating to their estimated level at the time of the disaster in 2011. Several participants, including this one, asked for clarification, but I didn’t always remember to make it explicit.
- This participant may have been uncomfortable with or unused to my unstructured, ethnographic style of interviewing and may have been another participant expecting me to have been more directive. He spoke a lot but then stopped after covering the first day in good detail and then asked me if I had any questions or anything. So I tried to ask a few very precise directive questions before building up the dialogic process again to show that I was heeding what he was saying and responding to it.

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

- The participant seemed very at ease (though he did say at the end that he felt a bit strange). He was a very thoughtful informant who seemed to want to answer me in as helpful a way as he could.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- He was not outwardly gregarious and did not use any exaggerated expressions or big gestures. This could just have been due to the fact that we had other patrons of the restaurant near us on either side.

**What I felt surprised by**

**What I’d do differently**

- I laughed at one of his responses about having emergency packs at work. This gave the unwanted impression that I was laughing because he couldn’t remember clearly. I tried to explain the real reason I was laughing (that all our emergency packs for the disaster ended up containing out-of-date water and food) but I must remember to be careful of the mistake signals my responses can sometimes give out.

**What didn’t I find out**

- The participant offered that as a follow-up he could check his Internet history and emails from the time. I have not yet asked him to do so, but this may be an interesting source of communication that I could use in an illustrative corpus, if necessary.

**What do I need to clarify**

- The participant suggested that two of his friends might like to participate: a guy from Jamaica and a guy from France (who was in a hospital when the disaster struck and could not speak Japanese). Both were contacted, but neither agreed to participate.
- This participant used the phrase foreign community several times. I did not ask him
what he understands by that, how he delimits it, what function does it play in his
daily life, is it a good thing or bad thing.

First reflections on data
• This participant is an example of the many cultural identities that foreign nationals in
  Japan can negotiate (Irish? German? Spanish? Foreigner?). He holds two passports
  and seems to apply identities at will.
• This participant started his account by talking about the company he worked for - his
  company context may be an important feature of his experience.
• There is conflicting evidence about how well this participant was able to use Japanese
  (checking Japanese Yahoo, speaking to building management on the phone, versus
  not really understanding the TV news).
• This is another account where the first talk after work was of trying to go for drinks,
  but that there was no-one out (again evidence for not yet truly understanding the scale
  or severity?).
• This is another account too where the idea of pictures (on the TV screen)
  compensated for a lack of Japanese ability.
• This is more evidence again for the idea that the embassies really mediated the
  experience of some foreigners at key times (e.g. as justification for leaving - the
  embassy was telling us to go).
• The word traitor came up again - quite a strong way to express this notion. Also this
  participant is another person who brought up fly-jin without my prompting. It was
  really in the discourse, but I am not sure if it is the sort of concept that will make it
  into my thesis. I need to think about how it related to my key research questions and
  my explanatory theory. If not, perhaps I can write a separate paper on the
  phenomenon.
• This is one of the first people to attribute relatives outside of Japan watching their
  own news as being an information source and influence on those foreigners in Japan
  (especially regarding Fukushima) - this feeds into the global news cycle and
  ecosystem ideas. This also feeds in in another way to the extra emotional pressure
  that family overseas put on participants.
• This is one of the first participants to independently mention using language tools
  online to help understand Japanese information in the disaster. (In particular, Jim
  Breen’s Language Tools and Excite Japanese-to-English translation engine to
  translate URLs, and a popup dictionary [Firefox add-on] called rikaichan.)
• This was another account that featured concerns over food safety - this participant
  even considered buying a device to measure radiation.
• This seemed to be one of the few participants who was quite interested in and focused
  on disaster preparedness before the big disaster.
• I think one of my biggest arguments for translation could be about whether there is a
  need to translate radio information, as here again the participant did not use it (even
  though he went out and bought these devices one for home and one for office AND
  wind up radio could be very important in a disaster if internet and power went down
  because I can show how crucial these influencing factors were to the prevalence of
  internet and TV in this particular disaster context - but we should not assume that this
  means the same set of factors will be at play in the future and thus translated radio
  could end up having a role to play).
2013/10/13 Record of interview with Participant 27

Information about the interview
- The interview took place in an Italian restaurant in Shinjuku. The participant made a point of telling me that he chose this restaurant because he knew that they used imported (non-Japanese) ingredients. It was a quiet restaurant with no background music and only two other customers (at first) so I was happy about privacy and audio quality. It was a little early for lunch (hence few customers), so I did not think he would want to eat, but he did. I really did not want to do this interview. I was going to be travelling to New Zealand the next day, and I felt this interview was taking time away from all that I needed to do to prepare. I think this may have made me happier for more direct, shorter answers and less of a focus on dialogic ethnographic development. This seems to indicate that the interviewer's own state of mind even affects the very methodology of the interview and shows the usefulness of record sheets like this one in helping to explain some of the differences in style etc, across the interviews. The interview lasted about 62 minutes (2 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 60 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews
- Like Participant 19, this participant showed no real concern about the informed consent sheet or profile data and flew through both with only a cursory glance at the contents. The only question he took any time on was the Japanese language ability question.
- I also think, like Participant 21, this participant was perhaps expecting a more directed, structured interview rather than my dialogic, ethnographic style, so we spent some time at the start establishing some of the boundaries of what I was hoping to get from the participant in the interview.
- Overall, though, this felt very similar to the interview with Participant 11 - near total focus on the nuclear and constant referral to what he himself had written about the disaster and to his own interest in the political science dimension of the crisis (rather than my interest in the linguistic and cultural dimensions).

Differences with other interviews

Problems
- This was another lunchtime interview where the participant wanted to eat (I purposely just ordered a drink because I knew that it really didn’t work out having two people eat and try to talk)
- On a few occasions in the interview, he said that my research questions were not the real story (or not the real interesting, original questions). He said that the real questions were political ones not a linguistic one and said I’m asking the wrong question - I explained that there are people more qualified than me to write a political thesis and I am trying to get a PhD in translation studies hence the linguistic and cultural focus.
Implications

- At the start of the interview you can hear me struggling a bit to give long-winded explanations of what I’m doing in the research and more long-winded questions because I am trying to give the participant the chance to eat his food.
- I tried not to really engage with these criticisms or to spend time in the interview defending what I was doing. But there was a slightly hostile atmosphere at times because of his repeated advice to change my research topic. I do not think he intended it to be so hostile or dismissive, and he apologised later, but I could not say it was a pleasant interview.

What questions worked well or didn’t

- The participant seemed slightly suspicious of the language ability question (could this be because he has lived in Japan a long time and can speak and understand it perfectly but cannot read and write?)

How participants seemed to be feeling

- I think this participant had a very definite agenda for talking to me, and so he did not talk in many ways directly about topics that I was interested in.
- He definitely wanted to talk - it was really more monologue than dialogue. But again, I felt he was taking a very definite ‘position’ in what he said to me - his survival of the state theory (that in a choice between the state of Japan continuing and the state telling the people the truth about the disaster, they chose the former)

How they used non-verbal communication

What I felt surprised by

- His focus is on food safety. I have been surprised by how much the participant’s talk of food safety as an issue has affected me personally. Overall, the interview with him left me feeling more and more convinced that the radiation damage after the disaster was probably more severe than I have considered and that long-term health effects may turn out to be serious. This has contributed to me feeling a little blue rather than elated at having come to the end of a successful data gathering trip.
- I was surprised at his support for Tokyo winning the chance to host the Olympics in 2020. It was very interesting that he saw this as a great pressure to push cleaning up and dealing with the nuclear issue as well as possible and leading to greater transparency.

What I’d do differently

What didn’t I find out

- At multiple points in the interview, I did try to direct the conversation away from the nuclear and food safety issues to see if he would be willing to talk about other elements of his experience, but these efforts mostly still ended up coming back to the same focus on nuclear issues. To be honest, this lead to a certain sense of defeat in this interview that the topics were not going to go broader (and not really deeper either as so many responses ended up being restatements of an original position). I found it quite exhausting and I felt that no matter what tack I took, we always ended
back at the same point.

What do I need to clarify

First reflections on data

- This participant used the term ‘post-disaster’ rather than ‘recovery’ - I wonder does this indicate the negative view he still holds on events.
- His first information gathering seemed to be to turn on the Internet when he got home the day after onset - and his first desire seemed to be to go to trusted media from his home country (New York Times) and trust is certainly the recurring motif of his account.
- He goes almost straight into talk of the nuclear reactors with hardly any mention of the other elements of the disaster except for the fright of being stuck in the subway and spending the first night experiencing hourly aftershocks.
- His first action based on this information was to buy a ticket to the US (he had already been distrustful of Tepco long before this disaster).
- He was one of the first participants to really lead by with a cultural barrier - the fact that Japanese are not transparent and trustworthy in a crisis - he makes the causal relation that they do not respond quickly enough because they spend time seeking consensus and so information from them cannot be trusted. This is a very interesting point - the relationships between consensus, speed, and trustworthiness - that I need to think about more.
- Lack of trust comes before inability to inability to read Japanese in his reasons for not using Japanese information sources - this a counter-argument against translation and mediation that I need to take account of - even if translated would people trust it? The other side of this, though, is that fact that global news is necessarily mediated through translation but just that it’s not as visible or explicit perhaps.
- On several occasions he mentioned knowing the reporters who worked at New York Times and NHK as ways his trust in them was increased. Was this a form of bragging? Or was it just a recognition of his dense networks of high social capital contacts? Is this an argument for translator visibility - if someone in the community knows them they might be more trusted?
- His account provided further evidence for tensions among foreigners about the fly-jin issue. Does this actually work in a way to prove that foreigners were effectively a community? It was tension arising from the fact that they were being tarred with the other’s brush which neither side seemed happy about showing that to the Japanese the foreigners were a cohesive whole.
- His account shows some evidence of Japanese people wanting to get information from foreign, non-Japanese sources too, and he makes a very interesting point about how translation INTO Japanese could also be significant.
- He talks of Japan as a place where there is a history of broken trust. Can this interpretation be supported with some evidence? He brings this back to WW2. Is this a typical foreign perspective? What it shows for my research is how preoccupied this participant may have been with thinking about issues of trust and Japan.
- In terms of the role of translators in global news media, this participant (who seems to have contacts in that world) provides evidence that some foreign journalists in Japan do not speak fluent Japanese.
He holds a very strong view about community in crisis - that the power of the group stifles honesty. I need to account for this radically different opinion to other views I have been given on community.

Like with participant 13, this participant says you cannot have a deep discussion with Japanese people because of the cultural barrier.

He had a low opinion of the citizen journalist idea and favoured traditional media over social media because of the professionalism of the journalists. What he felt he was doing with his Facebook blog was just taking traditional media and putting it on social media - just being a vehicle for translating what’s already out there.

2013/10/22 Record of interview with Participant 28

Information about the interview

This interview took place in a cafe in Christchurch - about a ten-minute walk from my hotel still in the CBD disaster zone. It was a very funky restored old building with a hipster clientele, so it very poetically summed up the vibe of the city. I had big high ceilings, big windows looking out onto the rubbly surrounds (it is the only business operating on this block and is surrounded mostly by demolished spaces). The participant had picked the location for his convenience and mine, and I was really just glad I’d found it. There was definitely an element of relief for me when the participant showed up as it was a mental milestone that I’d managed to make all my interviews on time. Originally, the participant had proposed meeting me with his wife (who had also been in Japan at the same time) but I asked if I could interview them one after the other, instead of together. In the end, she did not come at all. The interview lasted about 62 minutes (6 minutes explaining informed consent and filling out profile, 56 minutes interview).

Similarities with other interviews

This felt a bit like Participant 4’s interview - he seemed eager to help and engaged with the topic, but not sure that what he had to say was of very much relevance (when, in fact, it was).

This participant also did radio interviews (like Participant 19 did) for his home country at the time of the disaster and with a newspaper - it was noticeable how closely these accounts given during the disaster match what he recounted to me 2.5 years later and can perhaps act to give confidence that the personal face-to-face ethnographic interview is still a useful data gathering tool even 2.5 years after the disaster for such a significant period in people’s lives.

Differences with other interviews

This was the only interview to take place in New Zealand and arose from the fact that I got an introduction from Participant 24 when he knew I would be in Christchurch.

Problems

The interview was not an ideal location as there was quite loud BGM, but we were sitting at a small table fairly close together with the recorder on the table between us,
so the audio quality was okay.

- I again forgot to find any way to visually identify this participant or for him to be able to identify me, so I guess I never learned by the end of the process to remember to tell people what I looked like.

**Implications**

- Transcription may be a bit difficult because of the BGM.
- I embarrassed myself again by going up to the wrong person and asking if he was the participant.

**What questions worked well or didn’t**

- I think I did a good job of using the ethnographic techniques of letting the participant talk and going off into their own anecdotes etc in this interview - maybe because I had had a break from interviewing and came to this one fresh and maybe also because I knew it was my last and wanted it to go well?

**How participants seemed to be feeling**

- He seemed to be at ease and seemed well accustomed to talking about his experiences.

**How they used non-verbal communication**

- The participant did not use many hand gestures and seemed to be aware of the recorder (i.e. not leaning away from it and speaking clearly). This may have been due to his previous career as a journalist and wanting to help me get a good recording in a noisy environment.

**What I felt surprised by**

**What I’d do differently**

**What didn’t I find out**

**What do I need to clarify**

- I need to check up on his radio interview and newspaper interviews he was the subject of at the time of the disaster. (I will not reference them directly in my research, though, as they would identify the participant.)

**First reflections on data**

- The participant spoke like someone who had prior experience of earthquakes (natural as he comes from New Zealand) - he was the only person to mention how the length of the shaking gave people time to think about what to do and to take some measures. This is not always the case (e.g. Kobe in 1995).
- There is evidence for the bonds of community among foreigners in Sendai. After establishing his wife was safe, their next port of call was a nearby New Zealander who was new to Sendai and had just arrived that year (i.e. less than 2.5 months) and more friends came around to their apartment the next day. The all stayed together for about a week gathering food but the other activity he mentions is spending five or six
nervous days watching the BBC TV news on their mobile phones - again showing the central role of information gathering and the complex ecosystem of delivery channels.

- There is evidence here for the beneficial role of friends in the network who could speak Japanese and were familiar with Japanese life - did their presence afford this individualized response?
- They got power back in their apartment the next day showing the great variety of experience in Sendai just depending on what part of the place you were located in.
- Their first action after getting power back was to turn on the TV. It shows again how cut off people could be from broader situational awareness without use of radio in such an individualised response as phones were down, power was off.
- In his first radio interview, he talked of the importance of translation of news media and the importance of embassy communication for foreigners in this disaster. He also talked about his head going back and forth constantly - should I stay should I go. He also talked in the second interview about collecting snow in buckets to melt down to water - this is good concrete advice, but the talk show host mentioned the worry of nuclear fallout in the snow! Maybe I could even just do an appendix of concrete advice from participants even if this does not exactly fit into my thesis.
- The third interview it showed the fast developing nature of the disaster - the couple had originally panicked and wanted to leave, then decided to stay because they felt reassured by expert opinion and embassy that they were safe and also they had nowhere to go and feared getting stranded in worse conditions elsewhere, then changed from deciding to stay to deciding to go on a bus provided by the Embassy based on embassy communication.)
- The participant’s radio interviews really highlight how well he remember the key points of his account when he talked to me, so could I use this as a way to justify the interview 2.5 years after the disaster as a data-gathering tool?
- He made a very interesting point about getting sick of people in the NZ media at home taking things out of context - would this have caused him to edit what he told me? He has one anecdote in particular about being hassled by a news crew only looking for emotionally manipulative recorded TV stuff at a particularly stressful time when they had just turned back from trying to escape to Yamagata versus the good experience of talking live on the radio where he felt he couldn’t be manipulated. His experience of the TV crew brings up ideas of the ethics of reporting in disasters.
- He talked of the language barrier preventing him from doing volunteering one day in one of the coastal towns.
- He said he got faith in the nuclear response by the fact that it was being monitored by the international scientists and this probably could only have taken place with the help of translation - so it shows another role for translation in the disaster.
- He spoke of feeling quite confident about knowing what to do in the crisis based on the fact that he and his wife had watched Christchurch go through its own disaster only a month previously.
- He thought that the fact that they did not feel in any particular immediate danger conditioned their information gathering. So they weren’t looking for evacuation notices or that. This is an interesting point and maybe I could check through my data to see what conditioned people’s information gathering and also their need for translation.
The thing that put them off going to the emergency evacuation point seemed less to be about a cultural barrier and more about the fact that it was a park (while they had a roof over their head at home) and the buddy system with the other ALTs in the area meant that they knew almost everyone they knew in the area was okay.

Sensationalistic reporting was quite a problem for this participant but also the sensationalism spread by friends on Facebook.

He said he was definitely not at newspaper reading ability for Japanese which can be used as evidence for why I asked for reading separately from other abilities.

He said that the Internet was totally invaluable because he imagines that if they hadn’t had internet they would have been going from Japanese TV and Japanese radio completely.
APPENDIX E: Anonymised and member-checked interview transcripts
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/7/18 Interview with Participant 1

Researcher: I just wanted to know in general about your experience of the 2011 disaster, so if could tell me a little about what you experienced, that would be great.

Participant: Sure, ehm, that’s probably a good way to start, everybody was a different situation, so I will just explain my situation at the time. So, I was also working in Tokyo and I was working for {a European country’s government} so I was housed in the {country’s embassy building} in Tokyo, {redacted}. Ehm, my, the, I work in a very small office, so there were only a few employees ehm, my boss is {European}, I’m {European}, our assistant was Japanese. My boss was on holidays that day, so there was just two of us in the office. I don’t know whether to tell you, I don’t know, I never thought about this before I started, this is very personal, but I was actually in the restroom at the time the earthquake started, sorry. Very like weird to say, I don’t know, I don’t know if I ever had to explain that before. I suppose I have to explain this, I have been, as I have written down there, I have lived in Japan for over 10 years, which means I experienced multiple earthquakes every year, loads. I was there during the, I don't know what year it was but there was quite a large one I think in Niigata several years before that.

Yeah, in 2004, I think that was.

Okay, so in 2004 at the time of the 2004 earthquake I was actually at work even though it was a Saturday. I was at work. I had a deadline for financial reporting. I was on the 36th floor of the {Japanese electronics company} headquarters that I worked at, and I was on my own. I was on the own in that building. That was in 2004. Because I was on the 36th floor there was the last of, ehm, the building swayed a lot even though that Niigata, I don't know what it was in Tokyo, but that experience at that time had shaken me at that time because I was on my own, and it was dark, and it was six or something, and I remember thinking at that time “Oh my god! what's happening? what's happening?” then, no, because there was no one around, it was Saturday and I didn't know how to contact security even, because there wasn't anyone anyone at reception. So being there over ten years, besides that one in 2004, the other is, you know, you're very first earthquake that you get in Japan in my first year was always very scary, even though it was small, but then you get used to them. You know, if you've lived there for a long time, you get used to earthquakes, and, you know yourself, if it starts shaking, you're used to being used to them, and you're like this is fine, I'm not worried about this, and as you know, I don’t know, I suppose you, you know, you probably over time get an idea of what you think might be a dangerous situation for yourself. So anyway, that's the background because the point there is that I was very used to earthquakes when I experienced the March 2011 earthquake, and so unfortunately I was in the restroom at the time, and it and I didn't think anything about it when it started, that it was just, you know, as it is, eh, you know, you just hope, you would always wait about 10 to 20 seconds before you make the judgement then as to whether this is a big earthquake or not. But anyway, I was waiting there and it was going on for ages, and it was starting to get, you know, it was stronger and longer, and I was waiting there going, Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my god! This is not stopping. This is not stopping. This is not stopping. And anyway, I managed to leave the restroom and I kind of just stood there I guess because it was still ongoing, and I think it was really long, and I was just thinking I have to get back to my office, I have to get back to my office, because we have are, you know, our helmets and an earthquake kit and everything in our office. But my, the assistant’s office is on the way to my office, and her and her office is first, but by the time I got to her office, it was very
shaky, and I kind of, and I think I kind of, I think I was scared to actually go back to my office on my own as sitting in my own office, in your office, no one else is around, and I was scared to be in my office on my own, and I was kind of, ehm, I was, it was that I think I wanted to stay with her, I suppose, I just kind of, because it was getting really strong, so I sat in the door of her office, I just sat down and, ehm, and she was, she was, you know, she's Japanese and she was starting to panic so I thought, oh my god, she is starting to panic, so this is bad, and then we ended up in this very comical, when I think back, because she was under her desk, she was talking to me, and I was in the door, and I was like, oh my god now I've got no helmet, because it really did start to get much, like, worse. There was kind of a banging noise in the building, kind of whatever the building was doing, and she threw me her helmet, so we had this very comical moment where she was throwing her helmet, and I was trying to throw it back to her. It's part of the Japanese nature, right, because, and in a situation like that, ehm, where, you know, she might see me as her superior. So she was throwing the helmet at me, and I was like, no! And I was trying to throw the helmet back to her, and I don't know, I, actually cannot remember now whether I had the helmet or she had the helmet, because it just kind of turned into this kind of white fuzz, like it was just, I can't remember what happened at the end. All I knew is that it stopped and {the assistant} says, “Hey, okay, we have to, let's go, we have to go, we have to get out of the building.” So we went to go out of the building. Of course, I've had numerous amounts of earthquake training, loads, like, like yourself I'm sure. Every company I've worked in its obligatory, ehm, I had the most intense one, actually, after I joined the {embassy building}, because they do a pretty, pretty big one once a year. So I have been well trained from, ehm, but I did grab my, I grabbed my earthquake bag, because the bag in the office had a load of stuff and is, now, we really had a good comprehensive pack. Ehm, grabbed our packs, put on helmets then, and then I went to get in the lift, you know. So {the assistant} is like, “No. We have to go down the stairs.” So everything you learn, kind of, up to that point, any small earthquake we had, I would have gone down stairs. I would have remembered to do that. But I don't know what it was at the time, definitely a lot of stuff went out the window, and I actually was a lot more nervous than she was, than some of the people downstairs. Maybe, you know, it wasn't on the highest floor, but it was kind of an old building. Now, my apartment building would be much stronger and sturdier, but it’s an old kind of {redacted}, it's not that big a building, you know, and it's an interesting building. So downstairs, and went downstairs, down the stairs, I had my stuff and my helmet, and I was very nervous. I was very nervous because I have, at the time, now it's different, but at the time I was going out with someone in {my home country}, and he had asked me to call him at exactly, ehm, he had early plans with his job I think. It was 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

About that, yeah.

And he had asked me to call him at like 5 or 7 or something. Whatever, I can't remember the time, time difference, but whatever it was, I was supposed to call him bang on that time, when this happens. So of course I'm running out onto the street, and the hat went on, and all these other people come out on the streets, but there are no-one with their helmets on, and everyone was downstairs, and I am going, all I have to do, you know, in the middle of this, I've forgotten about calling him, but then I realised I had to call him, I have to call him, I have to call him. And, of course, the mobile phone is not working. So I, ehm, actually ran back into the, into the downstairs office of another government agency, and went into the office, and when I picked up, the phone worked. So it did actually work initially for a couple of minutes anyway. And I picked up the phone, call him [laughter]. It was actually worse, because the phone got cut off into the call. So I called him, and I said, ehm, I needed to call you, but I couldn't call you because we had this big earthquake, and the phone cuts off. So that probably [laughter].
[Laughter] Oh, good grief.

So, as you know, after that, land lines went down, mobile phones went down, ehm. We stayed outside, outside for maybe another 10 minutes and then came back into the lobby in the downstairs of the building. Ehm, when we got into the lobby downstairs, we had another pretty big quake, maybe five minutes later, maybe another 10 minutes later. A big aftershock. It was, it was almost as strong, actually, as the first one, I think.

Yeah, yeah, I think it was. Certainly similarly to you, in my company, we got outside, we were all told to go outside, and I guess it was, and I don't know how long this was, but it was sort of maybe 20 or 30 minutes before the after-shock, and we were all outside, so we saw the buildings swaying from the outside, and that was actually scarier, in some ways.

That’s actually scarier, yeah. Well, it was when we went outside, there were people, with people everywhere, and I went, my, my concern was that after having had all this training, I had seen a, had seen a simulation on what would happen if Tokyo had a big earthquake before, and I said to {the assistant}, “If another shock happens now, are we were more dangerous standing outside, and what if something falls on us? We need to go back inside.” So that's why we went back in, because I said, “Look, if something falls, we’re in trouble.” So we went back into the lobby of the downstairs, and we were there for a while. And then after probably two, th, three more aftershocks, people started moving back together. And there was this television, a television downstairs, and we went and turned on the television. Then everyone from the building from all three floors were in the, ehm, went into the room with the television, and we turned it on, and that’s when we started to seeing the warnings for the tsunami coming and fires in Tokyo after breaking out in Chiba, the oil refineries, and so on. And that's when, actually, I did get really scared because you don't know what's happening around you and whether there’s a fire somewhere and we don't know where it is. And, you know, we, we didn't want to go outside, because we thought when you're inside you can, you can't see what's happening around the rest of the city. So we got, we got really concerned about the fact that you don't know if a tsunami is going to hit Tokyo or, you know, that there was going to be a fire.

So that TV that you switched on, would that have been the Japanese broadcaster?

Yes, it was. It was. So, at that time, and because I was in the [European country embassy building], I do speak. I mean, I would have marked an eight, though probably, it is probably close to a ten, like, there would be very few words that I wouldn’t get. So I was understanding completely what's happening on the television, but there would have been government staff that didn't speak any Japanese, but there was also Japanese staff, so there was a little bit of translation happening at that time. And the commercial director, he had only arrived in Japan maybe a couple of months back. So it was his first ever earthquake, he was calmer than anybody else.

Fascinating.

That is fascinating because because I had experienced so many, I knew it was bad, right? He hadn't, he hadn't really experienced any, and he just thought, “So this is what it’s like, this is what a Japanese earthquake is like.” And he was, he was way more calm. And I was saying to him, “No, [commercial director’s name], this isn’t a normal earthquake, this is a big one, look what’s happening on the TV. Aftershocks were continuing. The ambassador was not in the building. He was off with the guys from the embassy upstairs, they’re always out at something. But he was in the basement of some gallery or museum or something, and he said he didn't actually feel in it very much. He was in the basement then, but the minute they came back out, they realised how serious it was, he came back
to the embassy, I suppose, a while after that. We all stayed together for a little bit, and then everyone, everybody kind of separated back. And I went back to my office. The ambassador had come back, and, ehm, downstairs said basically, “As you know, like, transport was down, so anyone who had kids that wanted to leave, ehm, to walk home,” or whatever, ehm, to please to feel free to go. Because there was no, I don’t know how long communication was down for. The phones were down into the middle of the night, I think.

It was a long time, yeah. Ehm, in my case, I was, I was able to use Facebook, ehm, so, like you, we had to go outside, and I didn’t really have a partner in Japan, and I had friends, but I didn’t have anyone that I really felt the need to call, but I wanted to let my family back in {my home country} know that I was okay, because they were always worried whenever they heard of any sort of earthquake. So I couldn’t get any phone reception, unlike you being able to get a little bit of a phone call. I couldn’t get anything, so I used Facebook to just update my status to say that there’s been a big earthquake but, you know, I’m okay kind of thing. And that, to me, was a big deal because it meant my family all knew I wasn’t, you know, dead. Ehm, did you, did you use any of those things, that sort of thing?

Yeah, so I think in the immediate thing, we were all really concerned for about the first half an hour or an hour about our own safety, and then I think when people separated, I went back to check the phones again and my mobile wasn’t working. I checked my phone again. We had Internet. Our, ehm, Internet was working, and I sent an e-mail to, ehm, I sent an e-mail literally to the VP of the {government agency that the participant worked for} in {the home country of the agency} and to the head of human resources to other people saying “Yeah, this is our situation, this is what has happened and we are okay. I haven’t had any contact with {redacted}, with my boss, as you know he was on holidays, and I know I don’t know his situation or, you know, where he is. “I just wanted to let you know we’re okay – I’m staying in the office and if the phones come back up I’ll try and ring somebody.” I said, "Could you please call my family?" So I asked them to call my family, and because my parents wouldn’t be on email first, first thing in the morning, they didn’t have email on their phones, and I couldn’t call. So I thought they’re going to wake up and see the tsunamis coming in, we’d started to see them coming in, and completely panic. And I, I, I, so I asked. I knew they wouldn’t be up at the crack of dawn looking at the e-mail, so actually so even though I’d sent it to 5 or so people, my parents woke up to a call at 7:30 at 8 o’clock or whatever it was from like the VP of the {government agency that the participant worked for}, who was actually really good like, called my parents straightaway and said, "Listen, I don’t want to panic you, but there’s been, this is happening in Japan, {the participant} is fine, I just wanted to know." Ehm, so my parents knew. And our land lines came back up earlier, because I think two or three hours later, I was able to call my parents.

Okay, yeah.

Ehm, like it would nearly make me cry now thinking about it, because my father, you know, the worry that my parents had. Like my dad was like, "I’ve never prayed for anything so much in my life." Because I think they didn’t even know if a tsunami was coming or anything, and I said, "What you’re seeing on the TV is not what I am experiencing here." But we were still getting those shocks every 10 minutes. By the time it was about 5 o’clock in the afternoon at the office I was like, you know when you feel completely drained of energy. I was almost like white in my head because we’d been having these shocks every 10 minutes, and I was just sitting in the office, and we had requests from radio stations wanting to talk to the people, to some of the people in {the embassy building}. So the embassy were setting up to talk on radio, but I also had some contact into our office into the assistant, and {the assistant} was forwarding it on to me,
and I was like, "I can't talk to anybody. I can't talk to anyone. I didn't want to talk to anybody. I wasn't prepared for it. So fair play to the ambassador, like. He, he was like, you know, I mean that his job but ehm, I actually just personally wasn't together enough. Didn't want to. So I got in touch at my parents by phone, by landline, maybe it was 8 o'clock in the evening. I can't remember.

Yeah, it's funny isn't it. As bad and all...

It felt like forever sitting in the office.

But what really struck me about what you were saying there is the aftershocks, I found that exhausting because every time...

I was still shaking after about three or four hours.

And then you didn't sleep that well something the subsequent night, I found. I didn't anyway, because every time it shook, it felt quite big and, like you, I'd been in Japan, so I knew this was big, even though they said aftershocks.

I was really worried that something worse was coming, and when even after they cleared the tsunami warning, I was worried and thought, "Oh my god, is a big earthquake going to happen in Tokyo now?" We actually stayed, so the ambassador, he was amazing. He came down, because I was there on my own with our assistant, he came down, you know, 4 or 5 o'clock, sorry he rarely comes down into our offices [laughter], do you know what I mean?

That was a sign, that was a sign.

So he came down to everybody's office, like, came down, and he said, like, you know he opened the doors, and we were up, we were up and down into his offices. His television broke. It fell over, and he was on the highest floor. Everything in his office was on the ground. But, ehm, so he was, there was a lot more, most of, a lot of the Japanese staff with children left then and walked home, and I suppose we were left with, the embassy had to mind the crisis centre. So there was three or four [of this European country’s citizens] still missing or that couldn't, what's the word, accounted for, ehm, so I stayed in the building as well because, you know, you know, that, you know, phone, landlines. I didn't want to, I wouldn't, it didn't occur on me to try and go home, because I live on my own. I live on the 17th floor in a building of thirty, forty, stories. I live on reclaimed land. I lived in [central Tokyo], all reclaimed lands are maybe about to sink, ehm, sure the elevator is broken, didn't know anyone in the building at all, been there 1 or 2 years - a feature of staying in Japan - didn't know anyone. I actually stayed until, ehm, maybe it was about 10 or 11. 11, 12. Anyway, we talked about getting everyone who is left out of the building, but we went back to the ambassador’s residence, and my, I had actually had an ankle, really bad ankle injury

God.

Like, that kind of partially severed my tendons, running, like maybe five months before that. They still weren't great, so I actually, I was pretty lucky. I got the car with the ambassador, and I would have had to walk. So that was about maybe 5, 6 of the staff, diplomats, and, ehm, myself and the ambassador went back to the residence at 1:30, 2:00 in the morning, I would say. And they had had stuff to do up until that. I just felt better. I didn't want to be on my own. I felt better with other people being around me in the building. I was, there was no way I was going to go home and be, like, in my own house. Friends who all had families were just in the immediate, the thing is, people go directly to
their own family, so they were looking after their own families. And my best friends that were there with kids, {various European nationalities}, were saying, you know, “if you, you are more than welcome now to come over here.” And I’m like, “How would I get over there on my own all the way across the other side of Tokyo?” So, you know, I stayed over.

Yeah, ehm, I think that that was a very logical thing to do, because I know that my own, in my own case, I was lucky I lived near to my office, so walking wasn’t that much of a problem. But if I had lived over the other side of the city, I’m not sure I would have been able to find my way with those, without trains and buses. You know, there wasn’t much information that I could see for how to get home, and, you know like, there’s been a lot of talk in other subsequent, ehm, in other studies of this about how how people used Twitter or you know their GPS to try and get home, ehm, but, you know, I didn’t have any experience of that, and I saw a lot of people struggling, you know, walking long, long distances to get home, and people looking very lost, massive traffic jams. But like you, I lived alone, so I would be afraid to go home. Actually some of my friends lived nearby, so we all stayed together for, ehm, until approximately the morning. Ehm, I remember that feeling of, kind of, not knowing what was coming next. It was really that I really didn’t know what was. Okay, so this has happened, but what’s what’s coming next.

Yeah, I think, ehm, I was I was more scared the second night because that night I stayed in the ambassador's house. It’s a bit of a funny situation...

[Laughter]

...anyway. Ehm, diplomats live right beside, they have to live right beside the residence, so they were there and, ehm, I actually stayed, stayed in the house with the staff, and I didn’t go to bed until two, until my phone, my phone came back up at whatever time 3, 4, 5 AM, whenever. That when that came back up, I actually then made a call to the guy I was dating.

Okay.

Ehm, I had talked to my parents on the landline and I think, like, I didn't really go near Facebook or anything like that. I actually continued working a little bit.

Okay.

But I think it was just I don’t know what I’m supposed to be doing, and I’ll keep going, and it was only like you, like, we realised we didn't really get food, so myself and {the assistant} went out to get food at about ehm, at 8 o’clock or something, we said something like, “Oh my god, like, I just felt weak, let’s go and get something to eat.” And it was then, when I went outside, that I realised the total gridlock, ehm, you know, totally gridlocked. We went into a deli near us with no food left. So you see, I hadn't even been thinking about these things, and then when I went, and I was like, “Oh my god, the food is all gone.” And it was only like, there was, ehm, it was like there was only a tiny amount of food left, ehm, we went in there and I was amazed when, you know, you’ll know this as well, but I was just amazed because all of the people who were, were buying the last bit of food were only taking a little bit, and I, like, and I, like, oh my god, I probably would have taken...

[Laughter]

...you know, I probably, whatever the last of whatever was left, but you know, that experience for Japanese people having those kind of disaster situations, they all only
took, just took a little bit which was enough for them to, to maybe get themselves through, to leave enough of whatever for as many people as they could. So, you know, we just did the same, and took a little bit, so we went back. We, we did eat those horrible biscuits...

[Laughter]

...in our earthquake, in our emergency kits. So we were starving by the time we got back, we ate those horrible biscuits, and so when we got back to the ambassador’s residence with the rest, it was the morning. So he has, he had a personal chef and there is always food, there's everything. And he had made food for, like, just pasta or whatever, he had made food for everyone who had come back. So that was like three in the morning. It was the next day when I woke up and I was on my own because all of the embassy staff, it was a Saturday, but all of the embassy staff had to go in straight away at 7 o'clock. They had to man the emergency around the clock. Okay, so I woke up, I woke up and there was nobody there. I woke up at 10:30. I really, I, I really slept, I actually really slept then. His residence is and, {redacted}, it's in {central Tokyo}, it's a really, really strong building. Very, you really didn't feel the aftershocks in his building at all. It really, what’s the word, soaked it up. So I actually maybe it was 5:00 before I went to sleep, but then I did sleep to 10:00 or something, and I woke up, and the ambassador came back, and he had been relieved so he had come back for lunch, or to change or shower, and I had lunch with him. My breakfast, his lunch. And he was so good because, I mean, I wouldn't have that kind of personal relation with him, you know, but he said, ehm, “If you want to stay here the weekend, if you want to stay tonight, if you don't want to be on your own.” But I actually probably would have liked to, but I, because I didn't want to be on my own, but I just, I didn't feel, like, that was appropriate, either. And it was kind of like the panic has died down, so I went back to my own place at about 1 o'clock that day, and I thought I'd go and see, I said to him, like, “I’ll go to see if my elevator is working okay,” you know, or whatever. So I went back to my own place that day. See this is, this might be interesting to you because there were all these cracks all around the walls of my house. Now not the wall. There is all this wood, and I live on the 17th floor, and so the building must have really gone hammer and whatever it is. There's, like, wood panels in front of all the concrete, and only when I got back into my apartment. No nothing had moved. Things had not fallen over, but there were cracks, like, in several places in between and all the boards had moved apart, and the wallpaper, wallpaper had moved apart, ehm, and apparently - because I, I went down to the reception desk and talked to the girls on the reception, there is a reception desk in the building, right - ehm, the elevator was working, back up working, but they had been down. But they told me that a lot, a lot of the other rooms also had these cracks. But, because, I went down to say, “Look, is the structure of the building okay?” And they said that the structure of the building was sound. It was only the boarding in front. It's not the actual, there was none on the concrete, or anything, or that any of the other actual structure had been damaged. And I said, “Okay.” But we continued to get the aftershocks, as you know, all weekend. And I was actually that night terrified. So I was on my own, I didn't know anyone in my building. Nobody did actually talk to me from the apartments around me. And, you know, a couple of my, couple of, the friends from the embassy I would have known or other people in the embassy, they were all manning the embassy, doing their own thing. And then other friends asked me if I wanted to try and come over. The trains were still down, I think. I'm sure because on Monday morning, I was the only person that came to work from our floor. No one else could get transport. Now I lived, like you, well I don't know where you were, but I lived in the city centre. Other people were an hour away an hour commute...

That makes a difference.
...an hour and a half commute, and they couldn't get into work. As, and as I was coming to work on the Monday morning, ehm, they must have, ehm, introduced a new system, because the subway - I was on the subway - the subway stopped, right, there was a big announcement that an earthquake was coming, and I went, “Oh my god.” And my heart nearly stopped, and I thought I was, was going to be, I thought I was going to throw up. “Oh god, we’re in the subway. We’re all going to drown.”

[Nervous laughter]

You know, because the water would flood right in there, and it was, it was only a little thing. But it must have been that they were like, you know, we need people to know, and...

I'm really interested in this point point because, as you know, I'm into the whole translation, language and culture, thing. Would you remember, by any chance, what language that, sort of warning that you heard...

It was only in Japanese. Yeah, it was definitely only in Japanese. So I'm sure you'll get, you'll get a very different, you know, ehm, report from people in Tokyo who didn't speak any Japanese.

This is what I'm really interested in, because, so, for example, you said about going down to the reception in your building and asking them, and that was all in Japanese.

Yes, but I could do that.

You see, that's a huge difference I think, ehm, in terms of, just, so certain things which you wouldn't account for beforehand. I mean, you know, you wouldn't necessarily think, “God, what if I have to talk to somebody about cracks in the wall,” or something, you know. If you don't speak the language, that's challenging. And the actual warnings are really fascinating to me.

I never heard that, I have to say, I never heard that again. I never heard that again, that warning. I don't know if they continued it, or maybe someone said you're panicking the whole nation here, because it actually completely scared the life out of me, and then it was nothing, and it was just a very small aftershock. And I got the office and my nerves were shot. And my boss - I had gotten in touch with my boss. Now, unfortunately, my boss's wife, his wife. He's {from a European country}. His wife was from {one of the three worst-affected prefectures} and they couldn't, couldn't locate whether a certain number of her family were alive. They hadn't been able to get in touch with them. They had gotten in touch with them before the tsunami, Before the tsunami, there was contact to say they were okay, and then there was blank, for like, I don't know how many days. And they didn't know, they did, there was, I think they did lose some relatives, not sure. There was, you know, house damage. So he, actually, had a very tough time with his own wife's family. But, ehm, so then on the Monday when I got in, I think just the thing of being on your own, just the thing of being on your own and, ehm, the aftershocks continued like that. And I actually, I think if I had have had any immediate family there myself, even living with somebody.

Yeah.

I think I would have found it, I think I would have said, “This is fine, I can stay in this.” But by Monday afternoon, I had had three days of this, aftershocks every thirty minutes or twenty minutes, and I was like every time, even sitting at my desk on the Monday because I didn’t know what else to do with myself, I was the only person in the office,
like, I could feel every time I would see something start to move I would be, “Okay, like, here we go.”

Yeah.

Non stop. And, eh, anyway, that’s when I, ehm, that VP rang me on Monday afternoon to see are you there, what’s going on, are you all right. And I said, “Oh my god, my nerves are shot.” My nerves were shot. I was like, every ten minutes, “Oh my god, what’s going to happen next.”

Yeah, yeah.

So three days of that. It is, as you know, very stressful, and I completely thought, like, “Oh my god, what am I going to do? I am going to die here.” And at the same time I felt, like, well if I could stay and do something helpful that would be fine. But there wasn’t anything particular to do in Tokyo for me, you know. Ehm, and then has said to me “Look...” – I was actually due to come back for my mother’s, can’t remember her age, sixtieth?

[Laughter] I’ll, I’ll I’ll fudge that bit in the record.

I was actually due to come back for, it was a special occasion, and I was actually due to come back. March 10th is that occasion, but they were doing it on like the 27th or something, and I was due to come back the next week, so for two weeks for a holiday, so, I actually said, “Look, I’m due to come back in two weeks anyway.” [redacted] And it was only then that I realised, I hadn’t even realised. I manage to get in, I managed to call my friend [redacted], and I said to her, “Look, I’ve decided to go back a week early. I’m going anyway. Ehm, there was no work going on. Everything is shut down. I’ve no-one, you know, I’m not with anyone.” And [my friend] said to me, “How are you going to get to the airport?” And I went...

[Laughter]

...“What?” She said, “{participant’s name}, there’s, transport is all down to the airport.”

So, I don’t know if you were there, or if you left, or if you knew that the transport [laughter] was down to the airport [laughter].

[Garbled] Yeah, no [laughter]

Of course not, [redacted]. Did not tell my parents. Did not tell anybody I was leaving because I was worried I would not actually get out. So I said, “Look, I’ll wait till I’m about to get on the plane,” you know? Don’t want them to be like, “Oh good, she’s coming.” And then I don’t arrive.

Kind of false hope, yeah.

So I said, I said, eh, “Oh my god, you’re kidding. There has to be like, are you kidding?” And she’s like, “No, {participant’s name}, the trains are down.” And I didn’t realise that all the transport was down to the airport. So I’m like, “Oh my god, what am I going to do? What am I going to do?” So, I rang a taxi company that I, I used to use all the time, and they said to me, “What time do you want the taxi for tomorrow. No. Whole company’s booked out.” Because all the transport was down in the city and a lot of people were using it just to get to work, or whatever.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.
All the transport was down, and I thought, “Oh my god.” Anyway, I rang three or four different companies. I had to call our assistant and say, “Can you help me, like, to find a company?” They were all booked out. So I rang back the first company and said, “If I go now, can you take me?” Well, well, they actually said, “If you go right now, we can take you.” And I went, “Okay, I’ll go now.” So then I was like, “Okay, what do I do now?” Because people were sleeping at the airport, people were forced to sleep at the airport. But I said, ehm, there was a friend I knew who, eh, worked in airport-related stuff, and I just rang her and said, “Is there any cabin crew rooms anywhere?” So she got me a room somewhere. I can’t even remember the name of it. I was just, like, “Get me there.” Just went to some random hotel, you know, ten miles from the airport where there was a shuttle bus operating. And when I got to the hotel, it was, because they drove me, it must have been near midnight, like, I just went, got to the hotel. When I got to the hotel, you know, they were having rolling blackouts. So he said to me, ehm, that there’s, there’s, ehm, there’s rolling, there’s rolling blackouts, so we’re going to have no electricity. No, no. It wasn’t the fact that they were not going to have electricity. They didn’t have any electricity. So he said to me, “Electricity is down. So you can,” - I had a, had a big, heavy suitcase - and he’s like - I was on, like, the 6th floor - and he’s like, “There’s no elevator working. So you’ll either have to...”

And again, this was speaking in Japanese?

Yeah, yeah, all my communication was in Japanese. So he’s like, you, you know, “Just take the stairs or, ehm, eh, leave it here.” And that’s what I did. I actually, I just took some small bag out of, I left it there and went up and down. I didn’t sleep that night, because in the middle of the night, we had two or three huge aftershocks. It then dawned on me, in the middle of the night, right. The phones were down in that hotel as well. It dawned on me in the middle of the night, nobody knows that I’m here.

Crikey.

Nobody knows where I am. I didn’t tell anybody that I was going to this hotel in the middle of nowhere.

[Laughter]

And then I went like, “Oh my god, like, what it, what if something happened and I died here. Nobody would know, like, where I am.”

Yeah, yeah.

But anyway, yeah, so the, basically I left. I didn’t sleep, actually, because I was very scared. There was a couple of large aftershocks. And I emailed, I actually emailed work in {the participant’s home country}, {redacted}, and told them, “This is where I am,” because I was a bit worried, “this is where I am, just in case. My flight’s due to fly out in the morning.” And then, I, I didn’t, I didn’t text, I didn’t, ehm, text my parents or my boyfriend at that time until I was getting on the flight.

Right. You really were waiting until the last minute.

Yeah, well, I knew that the, I think some of the flights weren’t taking off; and there was people sleeping at the airport, {redacted}. The one thing I will say is that day when I got back, ehm, I took the next two days off. It was {the weekend of a national holiday}. And, eh, my boyfriend said, “Look, we’ll just go away for the weekend somewhere quiet. We decided to go to {a remote rural location}. The night before, I was in a hotel in {the
capital city} - I’m from {a rural area} - so I was in a hotel in {the capital city}, and, ehm, I was just sitting on the bed, and he [Note: the participant makes a clapping sound] started moving his foot, his legs were crossed, and he started doing this [Note: the participant makes a kicking motion] and I swear to god, my heart nearly stopped, like I went, “Oh my god.” Like I, I, I thought we were having, like, an aftershock. And that happened I-don’t-know-how-many times for a while. Like, I was completely convinced. It was still in my head, like, every time I would feel some kind of a shake like that. Even now, I can be sitting at my desk in {the participant’s current workplace}, and I feel a little bit of a something, probably a truck or the wind, and for one second I think, for one second I think we’re getting an aftershock, we’re getting another... I was shot. My nerves were shot. Came back to Japan three weeks later after the holiday. Even at that point, it was like, “Do I go back?”

Yeah, yeah.

My boss was, like - really needed me - so he was like, “Everything is fine, {participant’s name}...”

[Laughter]

...come back. Nothing wrong here.” Of course, I got back, realised no water. The whole issue was going on with the nuclear power plant.

Yeah, yeah. Like, that’s really interesting to me as well. Because it’s quite difficult to figure out when the disaster stopped for people. Because, you know, everybody had different experiences...

Yeah.

...and there were different, sort of, phases - part was the earthquake, part was tsunami, then part was the nuclear accident - so, like, when you got back did that nuclear thing become part of the disaster for you after your time back in {your home country}?

Ehm, when I was back in {my home country}, I couldn’t concentrate on my, the holiday I was supposed to be having because I was watching the news 24 hours a day. Is everybody I know okay? Is something going to blow up? What’s happening there? Ehm, and that, that, you know, that was, that was still ongoing stress even though I wasn’t in the country.

Yeah.

It certainly was. Ehm, and I would have been in touch with my boss a lot saying. “Is everything okay? Has your wife’s family been found? You know?”

Yeah, of course.

All that kind of thing. Ehm, other friends had also left. Some of them had left. Once the nuclear thing happened, people with kids left.

Yeah.

Because I think they were worried about the children. But for me, I think, even when I got back, I was shocked that there were still aftershocks. Three weeks later there were still big aftershocks coming. Maybe not three times an hour, but I think once every couple of hours.
Oh yeah.

Two or three hours, or. It really was that, that part. That they were still there because [my
boss] had said to me, “It’s fine. Don’t worry.” But when I actually got back I was like, “No!” [laughter] It was still, it was still pretty bad, and, ehm, and for
months because I remember having a visitor in April, I had a visitor, like someone from
overseas, and there was definitely a big one when they were there, and there was another
one two months later.

Yeah.

Like it was ongoing for at least 6 months, I would say to some degree.

Yeah.

And I, I definitely felt for at least 6 months. And this is awful, but once all that had died
down, I had just, I had none of my own family there. I just wanted to be gone. I was like,
this is, I absolutely hated it, and I didn’t want to be there anymore. But my contract for
that particular job, the posting itself was three years, and I kind of felt like, “Uh, I should
do this extra...

Yeah.

...I should just finish it for them and then leave.” And that’s what I decided to do. So I did
stay on until March 2013. So I stayed on another two years. Actually that was one year
into that.

Yeah.

But I did, there were several times when I just thought, “Oh, I think I’ll just go.” And
then there was a lot of talk, as you know, even 6 months, after 6 months, for another 6
months, for another year about the percentage chance of it happening in Tokyo.

Yes, yeah.

This is what was, what, most worrying. So, for people, maybe, after the disaster happened
in other areas of Japan that, like, maybe they thought, “That’s it for a while.” But in
Tokyo, I was just like, “I do think something is going to come...

Yeah.

...and I do not want to be here for that.” That’s all I thought.

Yeah, yeah.

It’s all I thought. And I thought because I’d seen these simulations of, it’s just like, it’s
water breaking everywhere, it’s flooding I was worried about, and drownings and stuff...

Yeah.

...and I thought, you know, not so much fires any more, because they’d controlled a lot of
the...

Yeah.
...the, ehm, mechanics. But I really, really thought, like, I just wanted out of here. Second thing, well, you know, eh, a personal thing which you might be interested in. I got a, eh, I still have it now. It’s a, eh, eh, it’s a very funny name, it’s urticaria. It’s, like, ehm, it’s any, could even show you now. It’s like any, any pressure, any, anything on my skin, and I break out in welts, like hive welts. And I got that in about, April / May it came on. My whole body was breaking out in these hives and these welts.

Yeah, yeah.

And I went to the doc going, “What the hell is going on here?” It completely, it, eh, it’s, eh, a very, like, chronic form of hives, but it’s all over your body. And it’s all the time. So, I actually went, and they said it’s not food-related because it’s constantly, like, it’s constantly there. So they said, “Listen, this is chronic. It’s probably brought on from like, ehm, something would have set it off... Yeah.

...and once it’s set off, it’s an autoimmune condition, so it’s like, once it’s set off within your system, it’s not going to, it’s not going to just stop today.” But they said for a lot of people when it’s chronic, like, if it’s only ongoing for a week or two, it might go away, but if it lasts for longer than that, it will definitely last a year. 50% of those cases, it will go away within a year, and unfortunately, mine didn’t. And then they say you’ll have it for ten or twenty years. So I, I’ve to, I’m taking medication every day for that.

Crikey.

Now. But I know that that was like, at that time, I think, I just, for about, I’d say for about two months I was, like, not realising it, but internally was so sick and, like, you know, internally felt, like, so stressed about the whole thing. Non-stop, on-edge, kind of, worried, going like, “Uuh”, and I think maybe the fact that I was on my own, or no emotional support. Really, I think, the whole thing anyway just, ehm, I am pretty sure that that was as a result of that.

And that’s a long-term effect, so in a way it hasn’t ended...

Yeah, I mean...

...even though you’re,

...no, and I’m hoping, look, I’ve to take two antihistamines a day, and I, that’s actually just to keep the, the itch factor down, and to keep it down, but if I forget to take that for one or two days, my whole body breaks out in hives, even now.

So sorry to hear that.

No, no, no, but that’s, you know, the thing is, I was really for the first year praying, going, ‘Oh my god, please let this disappear after twelve months, and then when it wasn’t disappeared, and I was still out in Japan as well, and to be honest, I, I, my, my last few years there I did not feel, I felt very, I felt a lot [Note: the participant sighs] I felt quite lonely. Like, a lot of people left, ehm, a couple of the good friends I had left the country that had kids and went to Singapore or Hong Kong. Ehm, and I really felt like, people were like, “Why are you hanging on, like, why don’t you leave?” You know, but I was, like, I just felt this commitment to my job...
Yeah, yeah.

...for the last two years, so I just stayed and did it. I’m only home three months, and I was there for over 10 years, so yeah, so it’s a long time. And, ehm, it’s been a big change for me.

Yeah.

Very hard at the start moving back. But, you know, even now, gradually, I’m just like, “Why was I there so long?”

[Laughter]

I don’t, you know, because I know, like, okay, the weather’s been super since I came back but just, it’s the, the interaction here between people is different for me and that’s really important, I think.

Yeah, I’m really interested in that because there is this notion that in a, in a disaster...

Yeah.

...you know, the first people who help you are people around you, and a lot of recommendations are how can we make foreign people in Japan feel more part of the community, so that when another big one happens, you know, they feel that they can help or that they can be helped. Do you think there’s, sort of, any way that they tried to make you feel part of the community?

I would have to say probably not. I suppose this may be unfair, but I, if this had happened and I was in {the participant’s home country}, ehm, where I’m living now, I’m in an apartment block, don’t know anybody in the apartment block. If that happened, if something happened in {the capital city of the participant’s home country}, I am pretty sure the next day that I would go and knock on the neighbours’ doors. I am pretty sure I would, and just say, “Look, I’m next door, my name is {redacted}. If, you know, if anything, if you need anything, or whatever.” You know, even if they, I’m sure if I even, if I even had foreign people living beside me or {fellow nationals} living beside me, I think I would do that. I, I just think that that’s what would have been done here.

That’s fascinating, because...

Cultural difference.

Exactly, because you had no problem with the language, you could have...

I could have gone

...communicated, or they could have come to you

But nobody came to me...

Nobody came to you.

...nobody came to me. Nobody. That’s the one thing, like, that whole day Saturday and Sunday, I was in my apartment and nobody knocked on my door. But somebody could have knocked on my door and said, you know, “Where are you from?” Like, people have seen each other, like, some people, I’m sure, may have known there was a foreign girl
living there. Somebody could have knocked on the door and said, you know, “We, we,”
you know, “are you okay? Do you have some help. If you need anything, let us know.”
But, ehm, and I, and I, I do think, like, when you are in extreme crisis in Japan...

Yeah.

...I mean, the people in, ehm, I can’t remember the names of places, Oshuto, or whatever,
you know, right near the epicentre.

Oh yeah, yeah.

I believe that, you know, in extreme times of crisis like that in smaller communities, those
Japanese people would be all over you, would be all over it...

Yeah.

...would be all on top of it. But I think when it’s kind of a, semi-crisis, semi-crisis, it’s
kind of, like, a halfway point. Because of the culture, because of the Japanese culture and
the way they interact with people, I think there’s this thing where you don’t want to
intrude...

Yeah.

...and then, there’s another thing that’s, kind of, not an embarrassment, but just different
from, kind of, just going to talk to people you don’t know. And therefore when it’s not
quite at the point of extreme crisis, ehm, everybody just carries on, everybody just tries to
carry on as they did before. So people were still trying to go to work and carry on
completely normally, but trains were down, and there was no water, and I think, you
know, in {the participant’s home country}, it would have just been like, “Look, stay
home, look after your families.” Or people would have been knocking on their
neighbours’ doors saying, “Look, we’re around here.” Even, I think, in the city in {the
participant’s home country}.

Yeah, yeah.

I feel that that would have been a difference.

I think, I agree with you. I do think there was a huge cultural difference. They, you know,
another thing that they’re trying to do is, like, you would have gotten some information
from the embassy or from your work...

My situation was very different from others.

...yeah, did you get any information from the, like, the ward office or city office or
anything like that?

Now, they did, there’s two sides to this. One is I probably would have ignored whatever
because I had the embassy backing, I had the connection to them and, I had, I, I, I
probably was very fortunate in knowing that if something really awful happened,
somebody, eh, would look after me...

Yeah.

...right? Which is different from maybe an average person who didn’t have any family in
Tokyo, So, I, I, that, that would have been something that if it came in the door - I do
think there could have been a leaflet or something saying, you know “we’re trying to organise this community,”…

Yeah.

…they definitely did some kind of, eh, a morning at some point. Now it could have been quite late, later on, six or nine months later where they wanted people in the community to come out and do emergency exercises together…

Yeah, yeah.

…and do stuff together. So I think - but that was definitely in Japanese - I think that, ehm, I think that they were trying, like, in that community, there probably is a community where I lived, but I wouldn’t have been involved with it or included in it or wouldn’t have known about it. And I might have felt embarrassed just to turn up...

Sure.

…to this, you know, thing with all, with lots of Japanese people from the community at it…

Yeah.

…I think. And, my, my situation was definite, definitely different in that, in two ways. One in that, you know, I was fluent, so I could look after myself. Two, ehm, I knew the, I had work support in terms of if anything really went wrong…

Yeah.

…that, you know, there would be somebody to call on, or.

I’m not sure that that’s going to be so unusual, actually, because I suspect that a lot of the people in Japan who, you know, weren’t Japanese got support from their work or from, kind of, colleagues, and stuff like that as well. I’m, I’m not sure, I mean, I won’t know until I speak to more people, but, ehm, I don’t, I didn’t feel part of the community…

Yeah, no, no.

…at all. I mean, I wasn’t there anywhere near as long as you, but I was there a fairly significant amount of time, and I just felt, again I was in Tokyo, so maybe that’s a big difference, maybe the big city thing is, like, a big difference, but I didn’t receive any e-mails or any, sort of, you know, leaflets or anything like that, and I had never gotten any, you know there’s sometimes training, eh, like local level training, I had never been told about them. I don’t know whether, maybe I ignored the leaflets, I don’t know, but I didn’t feel linked in that way. So I’m interested to see how they might go about getting foreign people to feel more part of it. And maybe, because I will be going up to, like, Miyagi and those places, as you said, maybe there’s something about real huge disaster situations, crisis versus the, sort of, grey area that Tokyo was. It was in crisis but you weren’t…

Well…

…too sure.

I went up, eh, there was a volunteer group called {redacted}, I’m not sure if you ever went up. Did you go up?
Yeah, yeah, I didn’t go with that group.

Okay. I went up, probably, I can’t remember the first time I went up, but I went up every month or every other month right up until two months before I left Japan.

Wow.

So like, I did, we, we went to this, eh, ehm, yon-chome was, in Ishinomaki [Note: a town in Miyagi that was devastated by the tsunami], was where we went where they had, they were in a rundown, a completely rundown building, no showers [laughter] nothing in it, we used to go to the onsen afterwards, but we’d drive over night, but the people in that area...

Yeah.

...this, that the volunteer group would go up to, I mean everybody there would, you know, they would - not in English but they would, they would talk to you when they saw you doing kind of work, and...

And how did you find out about that volunteer group, eh?

...that was through a friend who was doing it, an American friend who was doing it a couple of months after I had gotten back...

Okay.

...and she said, “Oh well, you know, if you’re interested in doing something?” I think it makes you feel kind of, ehm, I, I don’t know why, I felt, I felt better doing something if I was going to be in the country...

Yeah.

...ehm. And then when you go up there, if you went up there, you saw it yourself, you know, driving from Ishinomaki we went for Oshi...it’s either Oshika or Oshito, anyway [Note: the participant is probably talking about Oshika near Ishinomaki] from Ishinomaki up to, it was about 40 or 50 kilometers along the coastline. It’s way, and, like, all the villages had been completely wiped out, and that particular one, Oshika, is it Oshika? It was like, you know, half the town is just completely gone, and then half of it’s left. And it’s, it’s quite small but they were really badly affected.

Yeah.

But you see that, and you’re just like, I couldn’t even look at the people because I, I couldn’t imagine...

Yeah.

...they’d lost their whole families, most, half of their communities, and, ehm, and all of those people talked to you...

Yeah.

...you know, they all talked to me, you know, they all talked to me. No one in Tokyo talked to me, but they all talked to me, because they were, everybody was like, “Oh,
“thank,” - if they saw you doing anything - “thank you.” Or, you know, they’d be bringing out, they were bringing out bottles of water and cans of juice and I, god knows, I’m sure they had absolutely nothing...

[Laughter]

...some of them had nothing left...

Yeah.

...they were bringing out whatever they had. Do you know what I mean?

*But again, you could talk to them because you could speak Japanese....* I could talk to them because I could speak Japanese, yeah.

...which is a great thing. And I think that’s also, you know, the community thing goes two ways. In one way you want to be supported, but you also as a foreigner want to be able to do something....

Yeah.

...so I think, being able to speak Japanese, you were able to contribute in a great way that maybe some other foreigners felt...

They couldn’t do.

...difficulty in doing, or...

Yeah.

...you know, there mightn’t have been access to volunteering so easily if you didn’t speak Japanese.

Well, see, this is the thing, this communication, one of the things that we did, right, one of the things that has, you know, obviously has been identified is after a crisis like that, people who are on their own, so, when we went up to Ishinomaki, one of the project, one of the activities we got involved in was, as you know, many, many people had been moved out into the, ehm, what are they called, those, ehm...

*The refugee evacuation centres, yeah.*

...yes, well, no. Those kind of prefab...

*Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.*

...housing...

*The temporary housing.*

Yeah. There was, like, rows and rows and rows of these, ehm, and one of the activities for that, and so that, some people were on their own, and especially people who were, you know, retired age or whatever, they, ehm, if they were living on their own, ehm, they might not have lost somebody, they might have lost their house, but they might not have
lost somebody, but at times like that, to facilitate communication because maybe they
were not talking to anybody...

Yeah.

...you know, and maybe some of them were in there are not even knowing their
neighbours in this small - that’s definitely a cultural difference with {the participant’s
home country} because, if that was the situation, people would all be on top of each other
- there was a real big drive up there to get them all communicating. There was events
there every day, they could do karaoke, like, in one room and try and get everybody, you
know, all the, ehm, older people to come, or whatever. One of the things we got involved
in was, we, it, it was, eh, I can’t remember the name of it, it was, we were to give out
bags of rice...

Yeah.

...but we were only to give them to, eh, people who lived, people who of, who kind of
looked like retired age who were on their own. Not couples, or whatever, The purpose
was not to give them food. The purpose was to try and go in and have a chat with them
for fifteen or twenty minutes because they may not have talked to anybody all day. So the
purpose was not to give them rice. The purpose was communication.

Yeah.

And it, that was just, kind of, the mechanism to try and talk to them. I did that, I did that,
I, I did that once and, ehm, oh my god, I was, I was, I was terr, I was a disaster, I was
like, “I can’t do this again.” Because I was just, I was about to burst into tears talking to
some of those people. And I was like, “Oh my god, bite your tongue.” Because these
people had been through something awful and you’re, like, it’s not for you to be crying.
But still it was very hard to listen to it. And there was one particular woman who was on
her own and oh I, I, oh my god, the stories like, she brought us in and had tea, because,
like, you’d stand, they would never let you in straight away, so you’d stand at the door
and give them the rice, and tell them like, “Oh, we’re this group, and we’ll be coming
around every two weeks.” It’s for them to know, because I think, the, the, I’m sure, like,
the suicide rate in Japan is very high, and a lot of people are very lonely, they’ve lost
everything. So the purpose was to come back, for them to know that this organization
would be coming back every couple of weeks. Someone was going to be coming to visit
them. So, and, you’d stand at the door talking to them first and, you know, like, “How are
you? How’s everything?” You know, “How is everything for you now?”}, ehm, “Do you
have anyone to talk to here? Do you know your neighbours? Do you,” And you start
chatting at the door, and it takes a while, but then people start, some people didn’t, some
people weren’t able to, to, to even talk about just daily things. Start to talk a little bit, and
then, in most of the cases, they would feel, like, because you had brought them
something, “Well, do you want to have a cup of tea?” And then you come in, and some
people are really like that, and then you go in and spend maybe twenty minutes with
them, and the point was not for us to spend three hours with everybody, so we have to try
and excuse ourselves and leave, but just to spend twenty minutes with someone...

Yeah.

...having a chat, because, then, you’d be saying, “Look, this group will be coming back in
two weeks,” you know. And I even felt guilty, like, that particular woman, that particular
exercise we only did once...

Yeah.
...and every time, we did different things while we were there.

Yeah.

I, I already felt this bond to this one woman, like, oh my god, she’s going to be expecting me...

[Laughter]

...to come back in two weeks. [Laughter] Do you know what I mean? It was, like, she was going to be devastated when I don’t turn up. It’s terrible, you know, so , because, she was all like, “And where are you from?” She was really interested. And I think from that perspective having the foreigners do that when they could speak Japanese was very interesting because they, they wanted to hear something else.

Yes, yes.

They didn’t, they wanted to be taken away from what was going on, in, in, in that awful situation. So just...

That is really fascinating to me.

...for them to, for them. But that was a mechanism for communication to facilitate...

Absolutely.

...you know, for them, some kind of a, eh, a, an outlet.

Yeah, and it’s a contribution that foreign people can make. It’s, it’s...

Yeah.

...it’s not only taking stuff from Japan, but you can give stuff in a crisis as well.

Yeah.

That’s really fascinating and I’m definitely going to be looking into that, that more. And I’m really so thankful for all that you’ve told me today. It’s been absolutely, some of the things you said really resonated with me, ehm, like yourself, the aftershocks, the shaking, I’m still...

Do you still? I still get that. I get that.

...if a, if a, if a truck passes by I’ll occasionally, not as much now, when I came back, ehm, I came back in the April, I think, for two weeks. Like yourself, I had a holiday booked so I stayed until the April of 2011 and I came back for two weeks. And honestly, it was, the first night, like a bus or something passed and my family were quite shocked at how high I jumped, like, thinking that it was an earthquake.

No, I definitely got that for a long time, and in Japan, because I was still in Japan, especially...

You see, exactly, yeah.
...even if the wind, if the wind moved, I, I, it was like as if my heart would stop...

Yeah.

...and I said it to my, my, eh, a best friend who had lived in Japan but wasn’t there for the earthquake, she was down in Singapore, {redacted}, she, I was, eh, I was talking to her, like, every week, and I said to her, “Oh my god, {redacted}, I’m, like, I swear to god, if something moves, it’s like my heart stops for a second.” And I never reacted to earthquakes like that before.

Yeah.

But it was like as if, in that second, for one second, somehow I think a big one’s going to come again, or something, or it’s going to be the big one, and I was like, [laughter] “I can’t live like this.”

I know. I know exactly.

So, anyway, yeah, like, and I did, I did get that skin, ehm, allergy that I’m going to have to carry for ten or fifteen years.

Yeah, actually, having said that, I want to make sure, there’s one question I had just about...

Yeah.

...this talking about this. I hope I haven’t made you feel more stressed...

No, no, no, no...

...ehm, I want to.

...not more stressed, but I did actually once or twice get a little bit emotional thinking about, like, now that I’m home, thinking about, you know, oh my god, how worried my parents were. Do you know what I mean? At the time. I just remember, when I was talking about what my dad said, and now when I think about it, at the time, you know, it, I wasn’t, it didn’t upset me, but now thinking about what my dad said...

Yeah.

...on the phone, you know.

That’s fascinating, because I had a lot of the same feelings as you about, I felt a kind of a guilt, ehm, for staying over there when my parents were so worried about it, and, ehm, and I wouldn’t...

I’m not anxious. [Note: the participant said this as she was marking on a scale of 0-10 how anxious she was feeling now after the interview]

...whatever you feel. Thanks a million.

[Laughter]

And if you do in any way feel anxious and if there’s anything I can help with, please do let me know.
It’s not a bad thing, honestly, you know, what you’re doing is great, but it’s also not a bad thing to sit here and talk about it, like, I, I, I never talked, like, I suppose you feel like everybody in Japan was in the same boat, so you don’t, kind of, you didn’t really talk about it ever. And then, I never talked about it to anyone at home because they wouldn’t really understand, really.

That’s the thing...

Yeah.

...I’ve had no one to talk about it to. Because even, like, obviously, I talk to my supervisor and that and she’s great, but she hasn’t experienced that, those feelings, you know, even about the aftershock thing. People have a certain idea of what and aftershock is and...

I’m like, [laughter] “No. It’s the same as the earthquake.” [laughter]

[Laughter] It was every few minutes...

Yeah.

...it was every few minutes. Eh, like I completely, that really hit home when you said about, and I’d kind of forgotten, but when you said about like, even just about the door jamming or something, I was getting ill, I was getting.

No, well, it was a big thing for me, because I remember that week that I came home after it that, honestly, any, any little thing...

Yeah.

...any little thing like this, and, it was just, I think I, I, I felt extreme pressure and stress, and, ehm, not really to include anything, but I got this, I think it was around the time I just had a lot of anxiety for a few different reasons, but, I got, like, this anxiety thing where, I can’t explain it, it’s like, ehm, a lump in my throat, or something, and even now just talking about it, like, it’s slightly comes back...

Gosh, yeah.

...but it was just around that time...

Yeah.

...then this skin thing, then everything happened...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And when I think about it, it’s like, eh, something comes up here [Note: motioning to upper chest, lower neck area]...

Yeah, yeah.

...I can’t explain it, like, it’s that kind of uhh!

A physical kind of reaction to your feelings of, I suppose, anxiety, or whatever.
Yeah. And I think it’s time, because that’s the difference, I had a semi-, well kind of bad experience when I was in Spain years back when I was a student, ehm, and I thought, “God, this is never going to go away.” But, you know, that’s, eh, I don’t know, 18, 19 years ago now...

Right.

...whatever it is, and, you know, now I don’t even think about it. But for years that particular thing did, did set off things in me where, like, even years later, do you know, like, three or four years later. But now I don’t, and it’s, kind of, I think as well it’s like a time thing. I, I, yeah, I definitely, I, I, felt like, I have, ehm, I was going to say, if you need more people, an American girl...

Oh god, that would be great, yeah.

...well, she speaks Japanese as well, no, but an American girl...

That’s, that’s really interesting to me.

...ehm, an American girl, eh, one of my closest friends for, after a lot of my friends moved out, you know the way the turnover there is really big in friends...

Oh yes, yeah.

...so I became close friends over the last year-and-a-half with, eh, an American girl called {redacted}, also been in Japan for close to or more than 10 years, and she really wanted to move on, and I kept saying to her, “Look, it’s very hard to make that change when you’ve been there a long time.” Really hard...

Yeah, yeah.

...to move on. Really hard to, to figure out and get a job and get out...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...you know? I was really lucky with this, because they actually approached me. They, they were out in Japan, they met me last year...

Oh wow.

...which was great. Ehm, it’s kind of, like, I felt, this is god’s thing, okay [laughter].

It’s, yeah, yeah.

Like, here you go, you know, there’s a job for you. Ehm, but she was really struggling as well and I just, I kept saying to her for the last six months, “I think you just need to get, just break the chain to try and get out.” “I’ll never get a job. How will I get out?” Anyway, she’s moving to {the participant’s home country} in August.

Oh my god.

And, yeah, she came in March, April. Now, she did do some business trips with a company in {the participant’s home country}. She’s getting a job with a Japanese company {redacted}, and she came and did interviews in March. She’s moving over in
August, but she, I was actually on the phone to her earlier this morning. She was calling
me about, you know, “Do you use gas or electricity?”

[Laughter]

You know, she’s packing stuff.

Yeah, yeah.

I’m delighted she’s coming because I’ve been away so long, I don’t have close friends in
{the participant’s current city of residence}. So, ehm but I was actually saying to her on
the phone, I felt like, this is way I explained it, I felt like I was actually drowning,
seriously, emotionally in Japan for the last two years, found it very, very hard, and I said
to her like, I’m only home, the first period is tough, I’m only home March, April, May,
June, four-and-a-half months, but it’s starting to, I’m already starting to feel emotionally
a little bit better and I think over time that will, that will just grow, and I was just, I was
convinced for her as well, I said, “I’m convinced you’re doing the right thing.” So I think
you feel a loneliness in Japan unless you have your own nucleus, you know your own, I
think you feel a loneliness there that’s very difficult, and it’s within the community very
hard. So, I do think, I was going to say, like, ehm, I’m sure {the American friend} would
do this for you as well.

I would love to, if there’s any chance, yeah. If there’s any chance, that would be
absolutely fantastic, and I really, I’m sorry I’ve taken so much of your time.
2013/7/26 Interview with Participant 2

Researcher: So then, that’s all the, kind of, the paperwork. Sorry about all that. There always seems to be more than you want, but eh, ehm, as I said, so the project is about language stuff, communication, also about culture, like, if culture had any sort of an impact, and the way that I’m, sort of, looking at the, you know, the, the people’s stories, is I’m just going to basically ask you to, just, tell me your experience of the 2011 disaster, and then work from there, like, eh, there might be times where I’ll, kind of, ask for some more detail, or that kind of thing, but, basically, if you just tell me about your experience, that’s...

Participant: Okay.

...that’s the way we do it.

So, going back a week before it. Like, say, everything was completely normal let’s say the weekend before that. We were. Was there even an earthquake? I don’t, there was much, and even going past, before that, like, do you know, my experience of earthquakes would have been, I’d a good few at work they were kind of just little, nothing on the scale of what we had, they were just tremors, like, and even, like, in Japan, like, a level 5 [Note: the Japanese seismic intensity scale measures earthquakes from 0 to 7, with 7 having the strongest effect], sure you know yourself, is, people don’t bat an eyelid at it, kind of thing. So I had a couple of those. I had the whole thing, do you know, where you’re in, you have one in the cinema, the whole, the top of it [Note: gesturing to the ceiling] started shaking, and do you know that was the kind of relative, that was one of my first, kind of, new ones, and you’d, kind of, be getting a bit, “What’s going to happen now? Where are the exit?”. But, you know, really, Japanese people don’t bat an eyelid at it, so, it’s just, you know, they didn’t [laughter]...

[Laughter] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...[laughter] do you know, so, eh, up until a week before that, we were in Sendai [Note: Sendai is the nearest major city to the area in Miyagi where the participant lived and worked], I don’t know did we have one of the tremors, I can’t remember, but I think something is telling me that we had tiny, tiny, little tremors, but I can’t remember. I had, eh, we were out in Sendai and, eh, had the weekend over, but then Monday, Tuesday.

Monday, straight into work, like, just like normal.

Yeah.

Tuesday was normal. I think, the, it was Tuesday, the other one, the big one, it was like a 7 or something like that, and that was the first time, apart from the, they do the [clears throat] earthquake and fire drill.

Yeah.

I heard the [cough] the only time I heard, the, the, the fire alarm go off, for the, or the alarm go off. That was the only time. And, ehm, it went off. It went off for a couple of seconds, and I remember I was in the, the I was in the computer lab.

Yeah.
[Clears throat] Looked around. There was another fella next to me. His name was [redacted]. He was from [Europe too] but he was, eh, actually my manager [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so he was sitting next to me. The two of us kind of looked around, looked around at everyone else and, eh, lots of other people just kind of looking around, eh, “What’s this alarm all about?” kind of thing, and, do you know, eh, and then there was a fairly violent shake. But nothing, kind of, broke and nothing fell off the tables. It was, ehm, it was kind of an up-and-downy [Note: the participant gestures an up and down motion of the ground with hands] kind of a one, so it was, kind of, a lot more violent than the ones we’d experienced before that, do you know. But like that, it only lasted a short little bit. Ehm, a small bit of confusion afterwards, though, there was. But there was no evacuation. There was nothing like that.

Yeah, yeah.

There was, everyone just went back to work. But, eh, afterwards then, I got home that night, and obviously my parents had heard about it, and they, they rang me on Skype [coughs] so, I was able to tell them, “Ah yeah, it was grand. Back to work. Don’t worry about it,” kind of thing.

Yeah, yeah.

Like, do you know what I mean...

Yeah.

...thought no more of it, like. Ehm, I don’t know was there other small ones in the middle of the night, but, I think there might have been one in the middle of the night. I remember that was, it was after lunch, kind of, it could before lunch. Around lunchtime. But there was another one night time. They weren’t too bad. They were just shake and back to sleep, kind of thing. But I didn’t sleep too well that night or the Wednesday night. Thursday, I was back to normal again, and work went on normal, like, do you know?

Yeah.

Ehm, at the same time we were over there, there was two lads from Malaysia, they were on a business trip, they were over, they were, they were setting up some sort of engineering support for the sales office in Malaysia, and so they were over learning the products, and all that kind of stuff, learning the, how, the design, and all that - I was designing products, car products over there. Oh wait.

Work away.

Just two seconds. [Note: His cell phone rings. He answers. It’s his Japanese fiancee now living in Ireland. They speak for about 30 seconds.] I have a feckin’. That was {my fiancee} there. I got a fridge freezer delivered this morning.

Oh right.

But it don’t fit in the front door.

[Laughter]
[Laughter] So I’ll have to go and sort that out.

*Oh, you’re going to have to deal with that now.*

Yeah, yeah, but sure we’ll get over that.

[Laughter]

*[Laughter] You wouldn’t have that problem in Japan, would you? They’re usually those micro things [laughter]*


*You’ll have to be taking things off hinges and what not.*

I don’t know what I’m going to do. Yera, I’ll get it in. I’ll squeeze it in somehow.

*Good man.*

Eh, what was I saying there?

*So, Malaysian guys were over, like...*

Oh yeah

...*setting up.*

They were over there, so we were actually staying in {a chain of small, basic, monthly rental apartments in Japan popular with students, temporarily transferred workers, foreign nationals, etc.}, that was the apartment we were staying in, they were, they were in the same apartment block, let’s say. They had, first of all, they were frozen because it was still snowing, and all that, where we were. And, eh, I think on the Thursday night, we had, ehm, there was some work night out or some celebration, or something...

Yeah.

...I can’t remember now what it was, but they were, the two of us were together now and the whole lot, and, ehm, that was the Wednesday night, the work night out, the celebration. The Thursday night, they were, they were at a loose end in the evenings, so that Thursday night, like, I was still doing overtime, so it would have been about 8 or 9 o’clock, I got finished and I called in to the lads and I said, “Do you want to go to the gym or do something like that?”...

Yeah.

...so, we went away off to the gym and I remember looking at the car - I had the car over there - and, ehm, the petrol tank was nearly empty, and I said to myself, “Fuck it. It will be grand till Saturday. I’ll sort that out Saturday. So the light was just coming on, do you know, like, “It will be grand. Don’t worry about it. I’ll get that sorted Saturday. Too tired now.” So I went back and went to work then Friday, everything was going normal, no problems. There were, we were busy now with, with, ehm, with getting ready for a launch for {a motor company} in America and they were looking for samples to be sent, so I, I had all the samples ready. They were all, they were at my desk. There must have been about 200 of them [laughter]...
...all stacked in little trays and perfect. And, ehm, after lunch I went away up and I was up in the computer lab, and I was, I was clicking away at something, I don’t know what I was doing, and, ehm, out of the blue, the, the alarm went off, the same one that I heard on Tuesday, and I literally just looked up. We had no time, now, there was no, the warning was 2.3 seconds, and, ehm, and, then earthquake hit, and it was [Note: the participants says “oh jesus” to himself] it was strong. It was, ehm. First of all, the, the whole, I was at a wall of computers. Big heavy table, heavier than that [Note: pointing to the 1.5mx1m low, heavy, wooden coffee table in front of us], and there was desktops, and there was the towers, and the whole lot were on the table and all that, and there was a divider, and the same thing, they were big heavy tables. The whole thing, just shook up and violently back, violently back, and ehm, just, only thing that was, there was windows breaking, there was pictures and all that falling off the walls, there was computers flying everywhere. The only thing we did was, I dived underneath, same as the fella next to me, dived underneath the table, and we were sliding, sliding with the table, we were going to get thrown over or crushed, like, so the, the power cables coming from the monitor - the power went then. The whole place just went black, died. All you had was the natural light coming in. The windows were kind of tinted windows so it was kind of dark - But the, all you could hold on to was the power cables from the, on the desktops, and just hold on to them. We were sliding all over the place, and. But the scariest thing I thought was the whip. The, the, the whole building - now I was on the fifth, fourth floor - the whole building, there was pillars that size [Note: pointing to a nearby concrete pillar about 60cm in diametre]. The whole thing just used flex, whip, and used go so far, and it just used to swing back, and you, like, if you were ever in a ferry or a, or a boat on, in the bad weather, and you, you kind of expect it, you know, you go up, and all of a sudden, you’re like, “oh the sky” and then down on the ground. It was that much. And I reckon the building tipped, definitely a metre if not more, over, like, do you know? There wasn’t a very tall building. It was only six stories. But it definitely, it, it, it tipped over, you could look out and you were looking at, ehm, out over the side, like, ah it was [Note: at this point the participant’s eyes reddened and teared up slightly] and I thought, I, I said my goodbyes then. I thought that was it. Swear to god now, like, I, I thought to myself, “I’ll never see Ireland again.” I swear, like, and, eh, the earthquake stopped then. Kind of, well, it calmed down, I don’t know, it lasted for 2, 3 minutes. It seemed like ages. And, ehm, we were trying to get out of the building then, but there was, the whip off the, it started up again, and the whip off the, the violence of it was outrageous, so I got from the fourth floor down to the third floor, and there was tables up in a heap, there was vending - the smoking room there with vending machines - the vending machines were all thrown against the wall. There was huge damage. It was, there, there were products all over the place, there was tables, books, shelves, everything destroyed. And there was just people, kind of, just picking themselves up and the whole lot, like. And, ehm. So I got down to the third floor and then it started up again, and you couldn’t stand, so, I kind of just went over the, the, there was a doorway to, a fire door - there was fire alarms going off - to a stairway, and I just stood underneath that, and I just waited for a couple of minutes, and I was holding myself trying to stay standing. And then kind of, after a while then, it kind of died down again, and got, I was able to stand up, and the whole lot, and then everyone just, kind of, there was a break for about 5 or 10 minutes of earthquakes, so we were able to get all the way out and downstairs, and we got to, there was a, there was a field, like, for the, the emergency, like a baseball field, so we all went in there. After that, then, once we were out, I was happy, like, but, ehm, do you remember actually I was telling you there that there was the, I was sending products to America? There was a, next to the office, let’s say the office building, there was a building for the, did all the assembly and that had collapsed. And I was in that before lunch. It was gone, like, it was, and inside
there, I kind of had to walk through it a little bit. Did you ever see a hundred-tonne moulding machine turned over?

God.
The thing is like a train engine. Just tipped over, and that’s what it was like, fuck that big like, do you know?

Yeah.

And even when we were out in the, out in the baseball field, they have floodlights. They were swaying like mad. No-one would go near them, like, we were all in the centre, like, do you know? But eh, after a while then we all kind of, I think it started snowing as well then, they kind of just said, everyone was like eh, just, “Go home, I suppose,” like, do you know? The, you were, your name was ticked off, you were fine, I suppose, that way, do you know? So me and all the lads, we all headed back to the apartments, and eh, I opened up the door like [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and it was fuckin’ destroyed, like. There was, I, do you know the way, like, you’d, you’d go to a house party and the place would be wrecked the next morning, like, do you know...

[Laughter]

...this was nothing on the scale, like, there was, I had a, a little press where I used keep the, the plates and all that, and that kind of stuff, just in the door, it was only small, but it wasn’t bolted to the wall, I bought it myself, just put it up there...

[Laughter]

...because I had no space for anything. That had tipped over, and inside in it, I had a deep-fat fryer, so there was fuckin’ oil everywhere, right [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...that was greeting me when I went in, and I stood in it, and the shelves had come out and there was broken glass everywhere, and broken plates all over the place, and cups, and every-thing, and that had fallen that way, the fridge freezer had fallen that way [Note: gesturing in opposite directions] and of course the doors opened, and there was food and milk and everything all over the place. It was destroyed. Disgusting. Of course, the night before, because I went out with the lads on training, I didn’t tidy up [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so everything that was in the sink was now all over the place, do you know, dirty, everything, this is, I just opened the door, and it was getting dark now, it was nearly half four, four o’clock by the time we got back. And, eh, the place was fuckin’ destroyed, like. And eh, opened up the, the bedroom door, well the sitting room, you know {the chain of apartments he lived in are generally pretty small and often have a combined sitting/bedroom}. There was, the wardrobe doors had fallen off, the, the table was bolted to the wall so that was all right, but the chairs were gone, like, in the hall, all over the place. The TV was broken, the back door was broken, and, eh, we’d no electricity,
nothing like that, and all the stuff for the toilet, there was a shelf over the toilet, of course
I didn’t close the lid [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...all that was inside in the toilet, you know. Oh, the place was disgusting, do you know?
[laughter]...

[Laughter]

...absolutely horrible. And, eh, I had a little jar where I used keep my 5 yen coins, and of
course there was fuckin’ five yen coins all over the place, do you know, you couldn’t
walk without hearing something break. There was clothes, there was the TV, there was
coins, there was bottles of whisky [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...all over the place. The place was an absolute wreck. Absolutely destroyed, now. And
then there was, walking on it, there was just grease from the deep-fat fryer, there was
milk, there was everything. The place was a wreck. So I literally just went in, walked
over everything, opened the back door and kept going, and I didn’t really want to deal
with that, like, do you know? And eh, I said then I better, they’re going, if they heard
about the one on Tuesday now, they’re going to hear about this now, so, I, the battery ran
out of the phone that morning, so I had the charger inside in the car, so I went into the
car. I was able to charge away, and, eh, I, eh, I rang them on Skype, just told them,
“Look, there’d been an earthquake. It was all grand.” Of course, my mother knew
this was about maybe two hours after the earthquake - of course my mother had probably
known and so I think they were delighted to hear from me and that everything was
grand, and I said, “Look, the battery is low,” and all that kind of stuff so we just, “I’m
fine anyway. I’m with the lads, and we’ll be okay, I’ll keep in contact.” So that was that.
And, eh, we had a meeting, kind of, with the lads, do you know, just to say like, “What
the fuck will we do now?” There was, ehm, do you remember {a mutual acquaintance}?

[Note: I had met the participant and a big group of other Irish people living in Japan once
about two years prior to the earthquake.]

Yeah.

{That mutual acquaintance} had moved to Sendai. Two, only about two weeks previous.
Bigger apartment, and all that. And, eh, so he had no place to stay. There was no trains.
There was no buses. There were no roads. So, we kind of said, “Look, what do we need?”
I had all my passport and all that kind of stuff, and eh, I had the gaijin card [Note: ‘gaijin
 card’ is a registration card that all foreign residents of Japan must carry at all times], and,
but I’d no money, I’d, kind of only three sen [Note: ‘sen’ means thousand in Japanese - it
is not unusual for foreign residents to mix English and Japanese when talking with each
other about money in this way] and all that kind of stuff. So I had only bits of change,
about three sen, but that was grand. And, eh, no food of course [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and, eh, so, like, then got kind of, I was like, “Right, I can get what I need anyway,”
like, do you know, so I had the passport on me, I got a warm jacket, and, eh, hat, scarf. I
had a little cycle bike, so I got the light off of that. So I kind of had everything kind of
okay, do you know? You know, everything was kind of okay that way. And then, like,
“What will we do?” like. There was another fella came down, there was the two
Malaysian fellas, there was another fella came down to actually check up on them, and he
said, “Look, there’s a, there’s a shelter up the road.” It was like a big secondary school hall, a high school hall, so we went up there and said, “Look, we’ll just go up and suss it out and if there’s information,” or something like that. This was now maybe 7 o’clock. It was, it was black dark at this stage, so we drove up in the car and, ehm, and the place was just thronging with people. And we were, kind of, like, “We’ll be better off where we were.” You know, just, just, if they need to know who we are, where we are, we’ll just let them know, give them our address, and we’ll be gone again. So we went up there and there was just, there was just people just all over the floor, and they’d be all like, like Japanese people share their nice little space, nice neat, and we were like, “We can’t hack this. Not at all.” [laughter]

“Laughter”

“This is just way too neat for what’s just happened.” Do you know what I mean? Too much, now, so we all [laughter], we used the lavatory, used the facilities and we hit the road again. So we were in the car and I knew the car was kind of running low on petrol so I said, “We’ll go for a quick drive just to see what the damage was.” So we drove just literally, ehm, you could drive along the shinkansen [Note: Japanese bullet train] line and it was just now a road that is used for the farmers going out to the rice fields, and, eh, we were driving along, the road is kind of icy now, and, eh, all of a sudden, a massive fuckin’ hole in the road. So we just barely missed that, got around it [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...skidded and just missed it, like. Imagine that like [laughter]. So we kept going anyway, got around that, and were like, “This is fairly fucked now, so!” There’s a road actually, it is called {redacted}, that goes through {the area of Miyagi where the participant lived}, from {that area} to Sendai. It actually goes all the way down to Tokyo, but it is one with traffic lights and it would take you a week to drive it. So we went up onto {that road}, and {our mutual acquaintance} was kind of hinting like, “Would you drop me to Sendai?” And I was like, “I don’t know would we have enough petrol to get there and back.” It was about 30 or 40 kilometres there and back, like. So I said, “Look, we’ll go up to the road and just have a look.” It was chock-a-block, chock-a-block, now. There was nothing moving. So like everyone had the same idea, or something, do you know? So we just went up, turned the car and then came back down again, and said, “Look, fuck this. We’ll just go back to the apartments and just see what we can do,” like, do you know? We went away back there, parked up the car, and, eh, I tried park up the car, turned on the lights, and see if I could throw a bit of light into the apartment - I had the ground floor so - try and throw a bit of light into the apartment, see if I could sort it out and went in, and there was just fuckin’ stuff everywhere. So I decided, “Fuck it. I’ll sleep in the back of the car.” “And, eh, {our mutual acquaintance} was there, and I said, “{redacted}, you just, look, you could stay there now as well,” and then {another Irish co-worker} was only - {redacted} - he was only after coming out, he was only there maybe two months, do you know the way he did the same kind of thing we had [Note: both the participant and I had been placed in our respective Japanese employers by the same employment program] so he was new, and he was kind of a bit lost and that, so I was like, “{new co-worker’s name}, jump in there as well. So the three of us were there and never met this fella now in my life...
{that group of apartments}, one of them was from Mississippi or somewhere like that,
and he was a sound fella, the whole lot. And this other fella, he used to hang around with,
teach with, he used never say hello to anyone, and the whole lot, and just do his own
thing. He was just one of those fellas who did his own thing. Seen your man coming
down to the car park and he was doing all this kind of thing [Note: gestures rubbing his
head and shaking his head from side to side] panicking, lost the fuckin’ plot altogether.
And he came over talking to us, and so we were there, “What the fuck is this fella going
to do?” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

…”What?” And it was such a serious situation. It was, kind of, half laughable as well,
like, do you know? And we were like, “What the fuck is wrong with your man?” kind of
thing. And he came over to the car and, eh, and it kind of dawned on me as he was
coming over the car like, “He hasn’t fuckin’ said a word to any one of us in so long. He’s
coming over now.” And the poor fella is in an awful state, like, do you know I was just
like, do you know, “If you’re stuck,” I said, we, look, we told him, “everyone is gone up
to that, that hall, if you want to go up there,” like, do you know what I mean, “there’s a
roof over your head and you’ll be with people,” and all that kind of stuff. And I said, “It’s
fuckin’ chaotic up there,” like, do you know, “we’re not going to go up there.” And he
was, kind of, humming and hawing and he was doing all this kind of pacing, and all this
kind, he didn’t know what to do, panicking, like. And I said, “Look, jump into the car
there, you’ll be a
[laughter], he was something else, now. What was
his fuckin’ name again? It was, eh I became Facebook friends with me after but that was all. Accept and just do
nothing else [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...do you know? It was, eh, he used talk to himself in the third person. Do you know? And
he was like, [Note: putting on an American accent] “Oh my god, momma’s going to be
asking,” - I’ll just call him John - “Oh my god, and momma’s going to be like, ‘What’s
happened to John?’ John, and John doesn’t know what has happened to John.” And we
were getting all this, he was panicking, losing the fuckin’ plot. So, we were like, this was
getting late now and, eh, the parents rang then and, eh, they were saying, “What are ye
for the night?” and it was like, “We don’t know. We’re here for the moment. But,
eh, {our mutual acquaintance} is going to Sendai,” and all this kind of stuff, and it was
like, “Keep away from Sendai, there’s a tsunami coming.” And we were like, “What? A
tsunami?” We were, we were just about to go, like, do you know what I mean, a couple of
minutes ago [laughter], we’d just come back. Only for the fact of the traffic, we’d have
gone there, like, do you know? So then we were like, “What? A tsunami” And she was
like, “Yeah, yeah, a tsunami. Don’t go near, don’t go anywhere near Sendai.” And I was
like, “Right, right, right, don’t, we won’t go to Sendai so, “ like, do you know? And, then,
eh, that was grand. Quick phone call come up again, and, eh, it started snowing then
outside, and, eh, they were like, another phone call back, and it was like, “Did you hear
about the, the nuclear power plants?” And I was like, “No.” “The tsunami had hit them,
and now they were worried about the nuclear power plant.” But there was another place,
then, Ishinomaki, which was near enough to us on the coast, just say north of Sendai, a
little town, where they had a power plant, and that was after going on fire, and they had
this already, Sky News had it, like, do you know? And, eh, they were saying, “Is this
place near enough to ye?” And we were like, “Yeah. It’s only over the road.” [laughter]
Thinking that, oh, well, we were kind of telling that, oh, the earthquake had stopped, but
as a matter of fact, it was like being out at sea. They were constant. The whole time, they
hadn’t let up, and even, like, you were getting to level sixes, level sevens, “Fuck that. They’re grand, like.” [laughter]

[Laughter]

Do you know what I mean, like? Walk around, and we had our sea legs at that stage...

[Laughter]

...we were grand, do you know? But, eh, we didn’t know anything about the tsunami that was coming, we didn’t know anything about the, about the power plants blowing up. And this one was on fire and there was, there was another fella then from, he’d done an internship, he was from Germany. Of course, he fuckin’ got on Facebook. Do you know the way you can look at Facebook on the phones, and the whole lot. And he was like, yerra, he was panicking us a small bit, like, and he was saying, “This place here, you’d want to drive away, get as far away, it’s going to blow,” and all this kind of stuff. And we were there, “What the fuck will we do?” like, do you know what I mean like.

Yeah.

And so we were like, “Look, fuck it, we’ll tough it out.” Of course it started snowing, now it started snowing this really weird snow. It was really dry, white powdery stuff, and we were like, “Oh that’s the fuckin’ fallout, now.” [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

...do you know what I mean, like, we were having a laugh. So, and we had this fella, this yank in the car, and he kept talking about, “Oh granny is going to be asking about how’s John, and John’s not going to know.” He kept repeating this, and we were like, “This fella is off his fuckin’ game!” Do you remember them bottles of whisky? [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

We went in and we found one of them. There was only a drop left in it. We brought it out to the car. And we were asking this fella, “Do you, do you ever take a drink, or anything like that?” And he was all like, “No, no, I can’t drink.” He was on these meds [laughter]. And we were like, “Oh god, we should have just left him go to the fuckin’ that hall, like. And we were like, “It will be grand. Have a drop of this now.”

[Laughter]

This was going on now about midnight now. No comfort at all, like. “Have a drop of that and you’ll be fine, you’ll be fine.” So your man took a swig off it, we all took a swig off it. And, eh, without saying anything, your man just got up and left. [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

...he went up and we didn’t hear anything for, ehm, about, ehm, twenty minutes and we were like, “Should we go looking for him?” And we were like, “Nah, really not he’s fuckin’ grand, like.” [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

He went up, and, we think he went up and went looking for his medication or something, because he came back down and he was a different man. Do you know what I mean? He
was completely calm and the whole lot, and, eh, and, what, what rest we got, we got that night. It got kind of bright early the next morning, and, ehm, I’d been in contact with the girlfriend {redacted} and, eh, she was saying, “What are you doing?” Just like, her house was okay, it was in a town called {redacted} which was about a half-an-hour I’d say inland from {where the participant lived}. So, their house was okay. There was, they had, they’d no electricity or nothing like that but, she said, eh, she’d be out like, do you know, she’d come out and that, because we had no real petrol and that. That night, fuck it, we nearly froze inside in the car, like. We were running out of petrol, and the only way we had was ehm, to, to, like, ehm, turn on the engine and get a bit of heat out of it that way. It was like absolutely freezing. We got through it anyway. The next, next day, then, we said we’d go cycling, go down looking for a bit of food, like, do you know, and, ehm, we hadn’t heard nothing from work, we heard nothing from anyone. There was no food in the, in the apartments, like, or anything. No one had really anything. Biscuits and stuff like that and they were pretty much gone. So we went outside, we went up to {a Japanese supermarket / shopping centre chain}, and in {the supermarket} there was a McDonalds, and McDonalds were giving out, like, getting rid of all the food that they had, like, you know, all the lettuce and the buns and all that kind of stuff. They kind of fed us there. Do you know what I mean? [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

And there was a {small convenience store / grocers} down the road from us, and we went there and, eh, they actually had, their shop was completely destroyed, there were actually, people going in and getting stuff off the shelves and bringing it out and selling it and all that kind of stuff, so. A huge carpark, now, and there was a queue going all the way around, and we joined the back of it and queued up, and the whole lot. It was, we were laughing about it afterwards, like, there was people going in and they were getting, like, pot noodles and that kind of stuff, and stuff that they could, nutritious stuff. A group of Irish lads go up, and order, first of all ordered, they order forty fags [laughter]...

[Laughter]

…that was {the participant’s new Irish co-worker}. [Laughter] And I was like, there was, like, another order, so your man had to go in and get like big boxes of fags, do you know what I mean? And we sent him back in and said, “Beejaysus, you couldn’t go in and get us some Asahi [Note: Japanese beer brand] would you? And Kirin Ichiban [Note: Japanese beer brand].” He went in and he got about twenty cans of that, like. And then, the only nutritious thing we got was the tins of tuna [laughter] and sliced pan. That was the only food we had. The lettuce from fuckin’ McDonalds. There was people looking at us and they were like, “Do you not need water, or? [laughter]...
with the lads. I’ll tough it out another for another night and I’ll see you Sunday.” So,
ehm, then on, we went away and we were looking for petrol and it was the longest queue.
It was, like, do you know, do you know, 5 o’clock going through the tunnel here.

Yeah.

It was, it was absolutely mayhem. There was people, people even standing and walking,
they had their cans, and the whole lot, so we said, “Fuck it. We’ll join it, “ you know,
and, eh, by the time we got to the end of the queue, they were rationalizing, rationing the
petrol, by the time we got to the end of the queue, there was, you only could get two sen
worth of petrol, which is actually, kind of, half fill the car. But, ehm, the boys that were
leading us in, and that, I first of all went up to them, and I was like, “Ah we’ll just sneak
in there like.” And, “No-one will know, just let us in, let us in, like.” And they was like,
“No, you have to join the back of the queue.” So we sort of said, “Fuck it, grand” So we
drove around, all the way around about 2, 3 hours later, we got in and, eh, we were kind
of pushing the car, like, and it would still start, she’d catch and she’d still start on you, but
your man must have recognized me, and I tried to start it and she wouldn’t start and there,
I was like, “You should have let me in first, now.”

[Laughter]

“You’ll have to push it now. And they were giving out, is all I’ll say, and they were
coming over to push it and then, I, she started and so I was like, I gave her a bit of juice,
like, and was like, “She’s alright, boys. No problem.” Had a bit of a laugh with the boys
and we got our petrol and it was like, “Sure if we go up to the next one, they’ll give us
another two sen, she’d be nearly full then, boss,” you know like. And just saying all this
stuff to them.

[Laughter]

And, eh, I was just having a laugh with them, and, eh, they said, “No, no, it’s only two
sen, but if you come back tomorrow, do you know, we might give you, get some more.”
So we’d enough petrol and there was a half a tank in it then, so we toughed it out that
night. Or did we? No, fuck it, myself and {the new co-worker}, we went to {the
participant’s girlfriend’s} house, her parents’ house, because they had a generator and
they had electricity. We went that, back to the apartments. I’d been home that Christmas,
I’d managed to get, when I was going back, {redacted} I managed to get about like 6
pounds of sausages...

[Laughter]

…I had 5 or 6 black puddings, and there was packets of rashers and the whole lot, like,
and it can’t go to waste like...

Yeah.

...do you know what I mean, like? So loaded them all up and they were, they were all
thawing out so we had to eat them. We’d no way of eating them there, and it was like, it’d
be an awful shame, like, they came this far, and we got them through customs and the
whole lot [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...there was no problem, we’ve, all this far, like all the way from {Ireland} to {Miyagi}.
Yeah, yeah, yeah [laughter].

Ispíní! [laughter] [Note; ispíní is the word for sausages in the Irish language]. So we brought them to {the participant’s girlfriend’s} house and, ehm, all her family, like, her, she has two older sisters and they’re, they have a big enough family house and, ehm, and they said, “No problem. Please stay here,” like, and all that. They had electricity, they had a generator out the back. And they’d, her father does, is a farmer, like, and he has his own plumbing business, so he had a diesel generator and diesel tanks, so he’d ehm, he’s enough, so there was power going to the house, you know, and there was, and they had a gas cooker, kind of for camping, and all that. So that night we had the sausages and the whole lot.

[Laughter]

So we actually done alright for ourselves, like, and eh, let us sleep there, but like, all that Saturday, we had only, do you know, quick contact with the parents on Skype, quick updates from the news, ehm, we knew that Fukushima was in big trouble, and we weren’t, we knew that the one next to us was in trouble, but we didn’t know how much. Because they had, eh, electricity, let’s say, they were able to turn on the TV. And, ehm, NHK were broadcasting, and eh, that’s when the first images - probably the same as you saw - of the power plant, and they were from this lens miles away. But we could see the, the helicopters coming in and dropping water. Myself and {the new co-worker} goes, “What the fuck is going on here! We’ve heard nothing from no-one.” The embassy had, rang us. No, actually. I rang the embassy, because they just didn’t know who was there. I rang them and I goes, “Look, there’s this fella, this fella, this fella, this fella. We’re all okay. We have no information. But this is your contact numbers. I goes this, this, and this. I had all that.” And, eh, they were happy enough. It was like, but they, heard nothing from them, they were not giving us any advice. We heard, ehm, nothing from work. Far as we were concerned, they were probably thinking we should turn up Monday.

[Laughter]

Do you, do you know, I’m serious like. And, eh, [laughter] and, eh, and nobody really knew what to do. So we were like, the two of us were kind of like, a bit, I turned around to [my girlfriend] and I go, “[redacted], did you ever hear of Chernobyl? “ And she said, “No.” “You never heard of Chernobyl?” She said, “No.” I said, “Well, we know about Chernobyl and, eh, this is very, very serious. Like, what, what’s the news actually telling you?”, like, do you know, “What are they, what are the experts saying?” Because we just couldn’t understand, it was all these new words that we were hearing, do you know, all this. So we had to get her to try and tell us, and, like, “No, they’re just saying, like, you’re okay, kind of thing.” We were getting all this, sort of, “Don’t worry about it. They are going out.” And this, and, “It’ll be okay,” and all that kind of thing. Then, we were able to get on to, the news on the phones and check BBC, and all that, and BBC was, ehm, the, what was it, the milli, what’s that, the metre level of, millisieverts [Note: millisievert is a unit used to measure radiation]...

Yeah.

...and they were saying they had raised the level or doubled the level from 10 to 20 or something like that for the amount of millisieverts you are allowed in a year, and, eh, oh, we were like, “Why are they after doing that?” and all this, and “What is the actual level?” and, obviously, it broke the first day and they don’t want to panic people, and they were saying “Aw, it is still within the level.” And I was like, “Aw, I don’t believe one word, now, that we’re being told by the Japanese government.” And, eh, the, the word from home was that the Americans had evacuated their naval bases and their ships
were going out to sea. So we were getting all this, and we were like, “The Americans are
jumping ship. The, not hearing anything here, and the Irish don’t seem to have a fucking
cue what to do,” the, the embassy, like, do you know? And, ehm, we were like, “Fuck,
what will we do? What will we do?” So, we, we went to bed that night, and then there
was one night we woke up. I think it was either the Sunday morning or the Monday
morning. I think it was the Sunday morning, that there was, ehm, the alarm went off
again, but, do you know, I was in her house, so it wasn’t, they didn’t have the earthquake
alarm, but everyone’s phone rang at the same time. Everyone. And, eh, her mother got up
and, eh, and was saying, “Run downstairs! Run downstairs! There’s a jishin, jishin,” and
all that. [Note: jishin is the Japanese word for earthquake.] So myself and {the new co-
worker} were up and out, the first out, do you know? [laughter]...

[Laughter]

And, ehm, and nothing. Absolutely nothing came, and it was like, “Jesus, they were
hardly just testing the fuckin’ things, like.” And we thought, we thought nothing of it, and
it was like, “Fuck it. It was probably miles away now or something like that.” And we
turned on the news then that day, and do you know that, that image where you see the, the
actual top being blown off of the thing, and I was like, that was on the news now, and I
was like, “I guarantee you now that was at that time. “I guarantee you.” I was like,
“That’s after blowing up now and we’re fucked,” like, do you know what I mean? And
we were, the two of us were kind of like, “What the fuck will we do?” We were on the
phone to the embassy and they were “Oh, we, we’re not saying,” I don’t know, but they
were kind of sitting on the fence, and it was like, they were saying like, “We’re not telling
you what to do, but you are in a very serious situation.” I was like, “Well what, come on,
you’re the fellas with the information. You should have more information,” and all this, I
was like, “Tell us what, tell us, are we in a safe area?” And it was like, “We’re not telling
you what to do.” And I was thinking, “For fuck’s sake.” They were, they were helpful to
a certain point, but they were sitting on the fence also. It would have been better if they
just jumped in and goes, “Look, the area you are in is, there’s fuckin’ a load of radiation
heading your way. You should. Move.” That would have been better. So, that night we
went back to {the participant’s residence} because we thought we had work the next
morning, so let’s, we were kind of, “What the fuck will we do? Or that, “We’ll go into
work. Maybe they’ll tell us something.” But go to work, and we were just turned away at
the gate. It was like, “Work is, come back tomorrow.” And it was like, “Come back
tomorrow? You’re having a fuckin’ laugh, do you know what I mean? This is stupid. Do
you actually think we’re going to work? That building is gone!” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

So I said to {the new co-worker}, like, do you know, “They’re only going to fuckin’
make us cook and, or clean for, and tidy up, so there, we’re all, no panic. There would be
no work done anyway for a while.” We had seen that the moulding machines were gone,
like, do you know, and there was computers smashed all over the place, we knew all that,
so I was like, “They’re only going to be cleaning up anyway. We’re in no rush to go back
to work. We won’t be actually, meeting work deadlines, that’s the kind of the...

Yeah.

...just, it’d be just helping-out work. So I said, “Look, we’re in no panic anyway to go and
work.” [laughter] So, do you remember that American fella that I was telling you about
on the Friday night? We went back to the apartments, right, and there was two Czech lads
there, they were, they were there, and they were kind of, “What the hell will we do? What
will we do?” And, eh, there was, {our mutual acquaintance} at this stage had gone back
to Sendai. There was a bus he got on Saturday. So myself and {the new co-worker}, eh,
(another Irish co-worker) was there and he was the kind of fella who would do his own kind of thing anyway, and he’d, he’d all, like, eh, he was kind of hanging around with the Czechs but he was kind of, he was leaving anyway. He’d done his, his going-away party the week before and he was only, because he was waiting around for his last paycheck...

Yeah.

…do you know what I mean, like? [Laughter] He wasn’t, that’s why he was, so he was kind of holding on, he wanted to work and he was going to get money, like, do you know, after that he was gone anyway, he was finishing the Wednesday, the Wednesday, I think it was. Whatever, the earthquake was on the 11th, he was waiting for the 15th, the pay day and then he was gone anyway, that was his last day. So, ehm, he was kind of hanging around doing the whole thing, but he was, he said he was going to tough it out, stay on. At this stage, myself and {the new co-worker} were like, “What the fuck, what’ll we fuckin’ do, like? Will we just jump ship?” and all that, like. It was like, “I don’t know, I don’t know. What’ll we do with work,” and all this kind of stuff. And there was no direction from anyone. So we, we, ehm, we were around the apartments anyway, and the yank was there, the Malaysian fellas were there. I felt sorry for them, because they were, didn’t know what to do, like, because they just wanted to, getting, they had no affiliation to the place, they were only on a business trip. They just wanted to jump on the first plane and get out of there. And they were waiting on work, do you know? They had no way of, they had no Japanese, do you know what I mean, they were just, they had English, and they had Mandarin, whatever they speak in, ehm, Malaysia, and, ehm, they’d, they’d no way how to, no way how to, they, they didn’t know how to get to Tokyo, they didn’t know anything, there was no direction there. I felt kind of sorry for them, but like what could you do? Just kind of chatting away to them, and, ehm, all of a sudden this big, ehm, hi-ace van came. Blacked out windows, the whole lot. Military fellas jumped out and goes - I can’t fuckin’ think of his name now - “Do you, have you seen this fella?” And ehm, the American fella, your man - I can’t fuckin’ think of his name. John, let’s say - “Have you seen John?” And we were going like, at this stage now we were fuckin’ hungry [laughter]...

[Laughter]

…do you know what I mean? There was no food, do you know, and, and all the food had gone, and we were like, [laughter] do you know, “If you want information, we want food,” kind of thing [laughter]...

[Laughter]

…”You must have water, or something like that, or something we could fuckin’ get off of ye.”

[Laughter]

And they were very, very serious, very strict military, like, do you know? US military or Japanese military?

US military. And, ehm, and we were like, “Ah yeah, he’s over there now, but come on, give us something. You have all this water.” So he gave the fuckin’ American some fuckin’ water and everything. “Fuck you, anyway, like, do you know, driving around in your big fuckin’ car with your air conditioning. We’re fuckin’ starving here.” [laughter]

[Laughter]
And that kind of thing, but they were having none of it. They were on business, kind of.

They were serious types. And, ehm, apparently, the, your man, this fella, his parents had panicked and rang the embassy, and the embassy got on the nearest, eh, American base, or something, and sent the, the crew of the people to come and find this fella and get information on him, and that’s how they ended up there, so we were like, “Yeah, you man’s over there. You can have him!” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...kind of thing. Sour bastards wouldn’t give us anything, like, do you know? So, eh, the, so, we knew like when that was happening, and they obviously got information, and, eh, from them, and we were like, “What are the Americans telling ye there?” They were saying, “Yeah, I think we should leave, like.” And, on to the embassy again in Tokyo, the Irish Embassy. I was like, “Well, what are ye fuckin’ doing now?” like, do you know what I mean. I was like. “You are in a very serious situation, but, ehm, basically.” And I was just like, “Fuck’s sake,” do you know? So that evening, the Monday, we went back to {my girlfriend’s} house. It was like, no point in staying where we were. So we drove way back, and, eh, and, eh, fuckin’ Monday then, stayed there and then on Tuesday [Note: rubs face with hands as if trying to remember] Monday, there, we, we, we got a phone call from {our mutual acquaintance who had gone back to Sendai}, and {where my girlfriend's} house was, we had no reception for whatever reason, so we had to go out the road a small, little bit, the phone was kind of turned on, and the amount of messages that came through in one go, it was like, “Oh no, something’s after happening.” So {our mutual acquaintance} had sent me a message and it was then we rang {him}, and he said, “Have you not heard? Have you not heard?” They’re telling us to get out now. They’re, they’re sending a car to Sendai.” The, and the, eh, he was getting on it, and he was like, “You’ve an hour to get to this place.” And I was like, “You’d think they’d have fuckin’ told us,” like, do you know what I mean, like? All, “We’re here, we’re sitting around twiddling our thumbs.” And, myself, rang your man, and was like, “What are we to do?” And he was like, “Yeah, you should get out of the area.” And I was like, “I fuckin’ rang you there the other day and just this morning and you gave no fuckin’ information on this. What do you mean get out of the area now? Like, how serious is this?” “You should, you should move now,” like, do you know? And I was like, “Move where.” And he was like, “Where are you?” like. “I’m in {an inland area of Miyagi}, it’s a little,” - I had to tell him on the map where it was, and he was like, “Can ye get a, can ye get away from Fukushima?” “What do you mean get away from Fukushima?” “I said. “We can go west, but all those mountains are frozen.” He was like, “Go west, go as far west as you can. Just get petrol and keep going,” and all this, and I was like - this fella now - I was like, “No, no, that’s not the right plan at all. “like, do you know? “Have you ever been to the mountains in Japan? Have you ever been to them in winter?” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...do you know? “If we go that way, you can, we’re going, we’re going to run out of petrol and freeze.” I was like, “No, no, no, that’s not the right plan at all.” So myself and {the new co-worker} were going, “What the fuck will we do?” Went back to {my girlfriend’s} place, and we said, “Look, they’re telling us go, and we think you should,” We said to {my girlfriend}, “Do you want to? I know you want to be with your family, and all that. You know, you should consider going.” And they said, no, they were going to stay, and all this. And I said, myself and {the new co-worker}, they were like, “You should, look ye, kind of, go.” And, “Fuck it. We’ll go to Osaka.” Because we were on to the lads in Tokyo, do you remember the lads from (indistinct)? And they said they were going to Osaka. So I said, “Look, we’ll try and go to get as far to Osaka as we can.”
[Note: the participant started playing briefly with a pen in his hand]. So back up to {the participant’s residence} that night. And, eh, we got a, actually there was no buses to Sendai, but there was a taxi, so between the two of us we got a taxi to Sendai. We actually bartered with your man [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...35 euros each brought us all the way to the bus station. Some bus station. It wasn’t the main one in Sendai. And from that then we got the last bus from there to Yamagata. And we, and there, we booked into a hotel and would you believe that was the hotel, whatever hotel we booked into, we met the yanks. [Laughter] And there was three of them. And they were there, “What are ye doing?” And it was like, yeah they were, they had made up their mind, they were going back. San Francisco and all this kind of stuff, and California and all. And we were like, “Yeah, we’re going to Osaka. But we haven’t, I haven’t made up my mind yet.” And then, ehm, that, kind of, turned into a kind of competition then, where we were going to, the idea was - we had no flights or nothing - we would go to Tokyo, sort it from Tokyo, try and get flights from either Tokyo or Osaka, so. The idea was go from, eh, Yamagata, to Tokyo, to Narita [Note: location of main airport in Japan], try and do something from there, or go to Osaka, and go to Osaka, and/or so. We, ehm, we were able to get food, and all that. Went to would you believe a restaurant, an izakaya, that night. Yamagata was open to business, like, do you know, they had electricity, they had power, they had the whole lot. They were getting earthquakes and all that, but, eh, they seemed to be, they seemed to be fairly normal, like, but fierce kind of, a weird kind of air of something happening in the background. And we just didn’t know what it was, and we were like, “That definitely has blown up. We saw it.” And we heard nothing. There was nothing coming through and everyone was saying, “Oh, it’s all within the levels,” and all this kind of stuff, and all this was all the information. And it was like, “No. They’re lying. That, that, stonewall lying.” And, eh, so we went from, the plan there was the Americans said they were going from there, getting a bus the next morning to some train, some station that had on the other coast that had the shinkansen [Note: Japanese bullet train] going down to Tokyo, so they were going. So that’s what we did. We went, we got on the same bus. Woke up the next morning and the, of course the yanks beat us to the bus, like, and [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and, eh, we were there going, “Fuck them anyway,” do you know? They weren’t helping us at all, like, do you know? And we were kind of pissed off with the fellas that came in the truck and the whole lot, and they were going, doing their own thing, and they weren’t giving us any information. We helped them out a small, little bit, like, so fuck them anyway. So we got to this, the shinkansen, and it was like, myself and {the new co-worker} turned around and says, “We’ll beat them to fuckin’ Tokyo.” [laughter]

[Laughter]

It was like Top Gear, so. The, the, the, the queue at the train station was absolutely huge. There was fuckin’ hundreds, hundreds of people at this tiny little train station, like, do you know, and, eh, it was a local train station, actually, to the next train station that had the shinkansen. That’s how it was. And at this local train station, there was, like, queues and queues of people. So we were just like, “There has to be a better way.” So we went into, ehm, a H.I.S., do you know, the tourist information place, the travel agent, and we were like, “Where is the nearest airport?” And they said, eh, “Oh there’s one actually just 7 kilometers away.” And we were like, “What is the chances of getting a flight from here to Osaka?” And, eh, and she said, “Oh yeah, you’ve to go from here to Haneda [Note: biggest airport directly in Tokyo] and change, and, eh, or get from here to Haneda and
then from Haneda to, no, it was booked out, but you’d have to spend the night, and we were like, “No, no, no. We said, we’ll go, we’ll get, we’ll go to Haneda, anyway.”

And were you speaking to her in Japanese?

Yeah, we booked the whole lot. She got the, she told us that we’d have to go on standby, so it was like, “Grand. Where is this?” And she gave us the address and the whole lot. Oh sure, this was in the countryside, in the middle of the west coast of Japan, right on the coast now, do you know, and it was deep, deep winter, now, the, there was lots and lots of snow there. So, we went from there to the airport, and, ehm, went up to the ticket office and your man was like, “You can go on standby. It costs this much.” And we were like, “Yeah, yeah, grand.” So we got numbers, 13 and 14. It was either 12 and 13 or 13 and 14. We were well down the list. And we were like, “Yeah but you’ll give us a shout won’t you when the, the flight is leaving,” and all this. “Oh yeah, you’ll be called,” and all this, and all that kind of stuff. And, eh, we went in to this little cafe, and, eh, we had just sat down, like, we were just eating and the, having a sandwich, and, ehm, and, eh, I heard this announcement, and, eh, it was all in Japanese now, but I was like, “They are after calling our flight and they haven’t told us.” [laughter]

[Laughter]

So, eh, the two of us like dropped everything and ran out in panic, and went up and said, “You forgot to call us. Weren’t you, you were going to call us.” And, eh, it was like, “Why didn’t you call us? Are we on this flight? Are we on the flight? Where are we going to be boarding? You must give us the boarding pass?” And he was like, “No, no, no, no. We’re very sorry. The flight, that was a different one,” do you know.

[Laughter]

“Your flight isn’t for another hour, or another two hours, and you won’t be called for at least another hour.” And the two of us were like, “Oh yeah, sorry about that.”

[Laughter]

So we sat down, we didn’t actually budge from the thing, and we were like, kind of panicked. And we didn’t go back into the canteen at all, because it was getting kind of serious. We realized we won’t make the shinkansen [Note: bullet train], any shinkansen to Tokyo if we miss this flight. And, we were in the middle of fuckin’ nowhere, do you know? If we were to stay here the night we were fucked, like we were fucked, do you know? What the hell would we do? All right, we could get money out and all that but we were like, “What the hell are we going, we’d have been better off in the town in Miyagi where we lived.” So I don’t know, the, the lady issuing the tickets, the last few tickets for the, ehm, for the, the plane. You see, it was fully booked, there was only really like 4 seats left. And she said, she goes, “Now please come together everyone that is standby for this flight,” and all this. I understood that. Then, we were the first there, and the whole lot. Then all of a sudden there was about 20 people and we were 13 and 14. And I don’t know what she said now, did she say it was a lotto or what. I don’t know, to be honest. And she said, “People number 1, number 2, number 12, number 13, please come forward.” And that was us, and we were like, we just came forward and kept the heads down, gave us the, we got the boarding pass, the whole lot, straight through security, onto the plane, last two seats, in the back. God! And we were like, “How did that just happen? How did that happen?” [laughter] There was no-one else called, she definitely called number 1, number 2, number 12, and 13. And it was like, “What happened to the people in between?” like, do you know? [laughter]
I reckon that, eh, she must have felt sorry for us, or something, like, because we were the only foreigners. I’d say we were the only foreigners she might have seen in a long time, that way, do you know? And, eh, we got on the plane and we flew all day to Haneda. And in Haneda, then, ehm, we were in the airport and we went up, there was no sign of anything for the Irish. There was lots of like embassies had set up, because there was people coming through and all that. We went over to the British Embassy and they were very, very helpful. Really, really informative and didn’t mind that, do you know, we weren’t English and we weren’t, we were, we were just looking for information, and, eh, and they were asking, “Well, what did ye, what has your embassy told you?” like. “They haven’t told us anything really as such as what’s going on, but just the area that we were in we shouldn’t be there,” and all this kind of stuff, and, eh, and there was a, we were asking, “What’s the story with the English?” They were kind of the same, but were, eh, they had all the information set up, people at the airport waiting to meet English people, and all that, give information and help them get the tickets, the whole lot. If they wanted any assistance, all that kind of stuff, they were providing for all those things, like. “Fuck’s sake, guys.” So we went up to the ticket office, and Air France was the first one. And your one was looking for 5,000 Euros...

...to get as far as, to get as far as, eh, Paris. And we were like, “You’re having an absolute laugh. There’s no way we’re doing that.” So, got on to the embassy again and we were like, “What are ye, we’re in Tokyo now, like, is Tokyo okay, like?” And it was like, “Eh, yeah, yeah, yeah...” And it was like, “Look,” - they were kind of humming and hawing - it was, “Look, we’re going to Osaka because that’s where all the lads are, we’ll be there for the night, and we’ll be with a load of Irish people, it’ll be grand. We’ll tough it out there, and we’ll have a place to stay, and the whole lot.” And, ehm, they were like, “Yeah, yeah, that’s a good idea, that’s a good idea.” And I was like, “You’re telling me it’s a good idea? You should be telling me this kind of thing!” [laughter]...
...all this information, we were giving him, do you know what I mean? We were telling him about the mountains being frozen, and the whole lot, and, eh, and that, ehm, we were going to Osaka. And, and, “Why are you going to Osaka?” And it was like, “Because it’s about 2,000 kilometres away from Fukushima,” do you know like, and, “Oh yeah, that’s a good idea,” and all this kind of stuff. I say, “I don’t want to be hearing this.” [Laughter]

[Laughter]

So they knew anyway we were on the way to Osaka, and they were happy enough with that, and we were happy enough with it. So we went from Haneda, we got the, the shinkansen [Note: bullet train], and we rang, it was the couple of lads, {redacted}, and we were like, “We’ll meet ye in,” - in either Osaka or Kobe. Which one do you pass through?

Eh, Kobe, you pass through to get to Osaka usually. [I was confusing Kobe and Kyoto here - Kyoto is the city you pass through to get to Osaka from Tokyo.]

There was one of them we passed through.

Or Nagoya, no?

No, Nagoya, it wasn’t. It was further on. It was definitely, because we were very close to the airport. Do you know the one out in...

Kyoto maybe, then.

...maybe be passed Kyoto and stayed somewhere else. And, eh, it was my first time down that far, and, eh, as we just got on to the shinkansen, ehm, obviously, there, do you know, mother was panicking at home, do you know, worried, and they didn’t know what to do, and I was like telling them, “Look the flight’s are, forget it, we’re not coming home, the flight’s are five grand. Forget it.” And they were like, “Ah, well, we’ll just pay for it,” do you know, like, and all this kind of stuff. “You will not. They’re robbing, they’re just robbing people there now,” do you know, and all that. And mother was like kind of half-panicking and she obviously had rang, she rang the local TD [Note: TD is a member of the Irish parliament] who was actually very, very good. And he had, he was in, ehm, Leinster House [Note: the seat of the Irish national parliament] and he had his secretary ring us directly, and we were on the shinkansen and, eh, - his name was {redacted} - absolutely, very, very helpful, great now, and, eh, he was like, “You should stay in Tokyo tonight.” And I was like, “Look, we’re just after getting on the shinkansen. We have our plan. This is our plan. We’re going to Osaka and we’re going to join the, look, we know them, and we have the Irish lads in Osaka, we’re going to try and head away home, I think, and go back to Ireland, because there’s nothing happening where we are, and the place is a wreck, and I, there was no food, there was no running, water had stopped at this stage, and there’s no electricity and all. It is freezing up there. We’re going to go back to Ireland. And if we’ve to, just, we’ll play it by ear, then. We don’t know what we’re doing, but that’s the plan.” And he was like, “Shouldn’t you stay in Tokyo.” And it was like, “No, no, no, this is what we’re doing now. We’ll be okay.” And, ehm, so in the meantime I rang, the parents had been on to my sister about the whole thing, about the, the flights, and all that kind of stuff, and my sister lives in Italy, and she had, ehm, the place where she works, she has contracts to a, they go on business trips, like and all that, so she was able to get on to her travel agent or whatever they are called, and, eh, and they were telling her, that the Italian government had sent out a chartered 747, it was leaving from Osaka, and, eh, there was a ticket as well, like, so, eh, {my sister} booked them, my sister, straight away, two tickets from Osaka leaving the next day, and to Milan, so, we, ehm, we’d no plans at this stage...
Yeah.

...and it was like, we had told {my girlfriend} that we were just going to Osaka tough it out for like ...

Yeah.

...a week or so, or something like that, so, “We just, we just, don’t want to stay here,” do you know, and all that kind of stuff. So we had, eh, went to Osaka and met up with the lads, and the next morning then we went to, we flew out, we flew to, to, ehm, Milan, and that’s, that was, it was midnight, it was close enough midnight on Patrick’s Day, so we’d one hour of Patrick’s Day in Italy and we woke up the next day, and, eh, like, do you know, as regards, we were, we were saying it, do you know - we stayed in Italy for two days. It was, it is, two or three days we stayed in Italy before we flew back with Ryanair - and we were saying to ourselves in Italy - we kind of enjoyed, it was the first time we were able to let the hair down and have the couple of drinks, and all that kind of stuff - and, eh, we said like, “Everything that we did went perfect. The taxi, to getting the, getting set up in, ehm, to getting the bus in Sendai to Yamagata, getting a hotel, getting the tickets, we got on the plane.” We were, we said, “The luck of the Irish. This has to be something. There’s someone looking over us,” do you know? And, eh, getting on the shinkansen, finding it, finding the hotel in Osaka or whatever, wherever, I can’t remember the name of the city now [laughter] finding all that, finding the lads, and the whole lot. It was like, and getting the flights then to Milan, it was like, “We were so, so lucky,” like, do you know? And, ehm, in Milan, we stayed there for two or three days and it was, do you know like, going from that air of panicking and all that kind of stuff to Italy was just another world where people weren’t really thinking about it, but it was then we really kind of got information about the scale of the damage, the scale of the tsunami - we were seeing the videos - and the scale of the, the radiation, and all that...

Yeah.

...and all this kind of stuff, exclusion zones and 10 kilometres around it, and all this, and 20 kilometres being set up and all, and it was like, “We made the right decision. Thank, thank god, like, you know.” We went back, flew back then to Ireland, and, eh, my parents they live in {the south of Ireland}, so flew into Dublin, it was like, maybe it took us, {redacted}, it took me a day or so to get down, all the way down, and then, the next, one morning I woke up, I was only after sleeping one night in {my parents’ home} and I checked my emails and it was my manager in Japan. Like, I’d, I’d tried ringing him but couldn’t get through. So I sent him a text message and goes, “Look, I’m going to Ireland,” and that was it, like, do you know, I wasn’t asking for permission or anything kind of like that...

Yeah.

...I had an email and it was like - this was a week afterwards now, so the place, kind of, maybe opened or they’d got it...

Yeah.

...tidied. Or, or actually, it wasn’t that, it was maybe ten days or two weeks. And, eh, he was like, “We need you back straight away,” kind of stuff, and there was, all this kind of, he was just, I was just, just, “No way can I do it.” So that was another stress, like, do you know, because they were just getting back into work and the only one thing they could think about was work and I was like thinking to myself, “Do you read the news? Do you not realize, like, that there’s a nuclear power plant after blowing up just down the
road? And, if you’re not worried about that, do you not know what’s going to happen, like? What about food, water, do you know? Is that all safe? Can you tell me that?” So this was all going through my head. And, eh, I rang the, the manager in the, let’s say, in {the Irish branch}, because I knew he was going to go out on a business trip out there, do you know?

Yeah.

And, ehm, I was like, “Do you have any information?” and all that, and I said, “Look, I need some fuckin’ help,” like, do you know what I mean, because your man is fuckin’ telling me to go back to work, and all this shit, and he’d be kind of a good fella, he’d be quick, do you know what I mean, very switched, good with answers, good with all this kind of stuff, and he says, “You go back to him now and you tell him that the Irish government won’t let you.” So, and, eh, so I went on the website and all this, and they had all this kind of information stuff set up at this stage, do you know. They said, “We do not advise Irish citizens to travel to this part of Japan,” and all this kind of thing. And I said, “That’s my fuckin’ ticket now!” So I was able to go back to him and I was just able to just go, “Sorry, but I’m in Ireland now. There’s, they’re being told, directed by the government not to go back to this area of Japan. So I just, just can’t.” “If I go back, after, they can’t, they won’t help me in the future,” I said and all this kind of stuff. And I said, “Look, we’ll have to wait until that gets sorted out.” So that kind of quietened him for a while, and, ehm, but to be honest, like, it was only hit me then, the stress of it and all that kind of stuff. It was like when I got back the first week or so, I was, met up with friends in {the city near where my parents live} and I met up and we went out, like and all that kind of stuff, and eh, I remember I went down to the, one weekend, I went back down to the visit the parents in {their home}. And, like, my old fella would be 60 years old and he was out the, in the garden working, he was putting down steps, and I went got down and I went out the back, it was a lovely day, and I went to try and help him and I was just lay down on the grass and I was just like, “If I could go to sleep here now, I would.” I was just beat. And I stayed down there for about two weeks. It just hit me then. And every, my mother was like, he is still sleeping, do you know, and I was, like, I used go to bed early at night and sleep all through till about 12, 1 o’clock in the day, like, and this was going on for about two weeks, and, eh, mother was getting worried, talking about, I was just like all of that was just stress like, do you know, and it was just the whole thing like and, eh, had to go to the doctor’s, and the whole lot. My mother was like, “You were exposed to radiation. You have to get your blood test.” So there was all that kind of stuff as well, like, and, eh, all that kind of died down and, eh, I took about a month off work and, ehm, then, like, I was just, like, it still said on the website, do you know, that you can’t go back to Japan, and all this kind of stuff, so I was playing that card away. And, ehm, but they were kind of like, “You’re going to have to do something else.” So I said, “Look, I’d work in {an Irish branch of the company}. They have the software there. Maybe I could help you from there. So, ehm, we did that and we were, myself and {our mutual acquaintance} did that for about a, about a month, and, to be honest, it was the most enjoyable, it was just, like even though we were going to work, it was fuckin’ really, really enjoyable, do you know what I mean, like, we had, the weather was good, the craic [Note: craic an Irish word for fun] was mighty like off the lads, it was just something we missed, do you know what I mean, like, and, eh, and then we were told, obviously they weren’t fuckin’ happy about this in Japan because they knew we were doing fuck all, kind of all like, do you know? [laughter]

[Laughter]

And, eh, and they said, eh, they sent us out, our contracts were up anyway in October, and they sent us out this thing kind of, “What are you going to do, do you know, after
your contract?” Do you know, and they were, “Apply for a new extension?” And I was
like, “No, no, transfer,” like.

Yeah.

And there was two choices, basically, of, you know, Ireland or the sales office in
Germany. So I put down both, kind of thinking, I didn’t really know what the story in
Ireland was, if they really had work or anything like that, so I, ehm, from, I filled it in,
they were like, “Germany is probably the best option for you, now,” and all this kind of
stuff. And I was like, “Ah, fuck it, grand kind of thing, do you know?” I wasn’t too, I
didn’t really want to go because the way they, I didn’t think they handled that too well
because the whole thing was the, ehm, we thought, like, do you know, we should have
had more preparation, or something like that, it wasn’t just, “You’re going to Germany
and that’s it.” You’re going to Germany or quit, basically. HR came on and we were like,
“Alright, so, we’re going to Germany. That’s fair enough, we don’t mind that, but, ehm,
you’re going to have to set up somewhere for us to stay,” and all this kind of stuff, do you
know what I mean, “You can’t just expect us to go and turn up.” They wanted us to just
drop everything, go, turn up Monday morning, and we were like, - this is, I was going to
{Germany} - “All right, so, go, where am I to stay? What about, ehm,” - it was, they were
classifying - this was a fuckin’ disaster - they were classifying it as a business trip. So we
were still getting paid in Japan, we were, like, couldn’t access the money, because, do
you know, you can’t access from over here. We were paid in Japanese yen, just
borrowing money off the parents...

Yeah.

...ehm, they wanted us to go to {Germany}. They had no plan, they had no nothing. And
we were like, “It’s a business trip,” so we were, like, we were just telling them, like,
putting them, and it was like, “Right, where will I stay for the business trip?” And, and
their first idea was, “Right you get an apartment.” And it was like, “Did you ever try and
get an apartment in Germany, like, there’s, they do interviews and all that kind of stuff?
And did you ever move into an apartment, and you ever, sort of, see, they take
everything out of the houses, do you know, there’s no furniture left in them?” I knew this
from my sister, like, do you know, and she was in Italy and they were the same there, but,
like, clean it out. Do you know the way we might leave
a sofa or something like that. I
said, “The whole place is going to be empty. What am I going to just sleep on? Am I
going to do this? Is there going to be a, am I going to get a fridge, or am I, what am I
going to do for food? What am I going to do for transport? How am I going to do all
this?” And, and, eh, (indistinct) and if it’s like on a business trip get like, eh, like, eh,
health insurance because our health insurance was in Japan. Do you know?

Of course, yeah.

We were just thinking of stuff. Are you doing this? Are you doing that? Are you doing
this? And, eh, they were like, they were getting, eh, as much as we were getting annoyed
with them, because they had no plan either, it was just, be done with them kind of them,
like. And it was like, “Yeah, you want us to go to Germany. It’s no problem, no problem
going to Germany and working for you. And if it was on a business trip, one, the money’s
in Japan and you’re paying me Japanese yen, so you’d want to set me up here.” So
eventually they got, ehm, a hotel, and the whole lot, like, eh, and it was just, kind of, set
up. We were basically told go Germany or that’s it, like, do you know what I mean, like,
(indistinct) like, do you know what I mean? And this was all over a couple of days, like,
do you know. And, ehm, and then, to fuckin’ make things worse, like there’s a flight from
{Ireland to Germany}, direct flight, on, I think it’s a Friday, I’m not too sure, I think it’s a
Friday. But that meant that I wouldn’t get in till Friday night. Or is it Saturday? And,
ehm, and their thing was like, “Oh no, you must travel on the Friday.” They wanted me to travel a day earlier. It was actually the flight {redacted} is on a Saturday. They wanted me to travel on the Friday to {Germany} and to, ehm, and to meet someone that was finishing up on Friday, so they could show me the apartment. And I was like, “No, no. I’m not interested. {redacted} It is a waste of a day,” I said, “So, I’ll just go direct from {here}, like, just give me the address, I’ll check in, I’ll do everything, and I’ll find the place Monday.” I said, “I’ve travelled the world. I know all this. I’ll be grand. It’s Germany, like, they were organized. I’ll,” They wouldn’t have it at all. [Note: suddenly the participant looks directly at the researcher and says] I’m after leaving a bit of the story out. I had to go back to Japan in the meantime.

Ah [surprised laughter]

Before Germany, they were pressurizing us, right, to move to, I went to Germany, {our mutual acquaintance} went to Sweden. And we were like, “What about our clothes, and all that kind of stuff, we brought nothing with us? And what about our apartments? What about our money? What about this?” and all that kind of thing. So it all had to be done fairly quick. So they, we had to go back to Japan to, ehm, I, we were like, “What about our banks? What about this? What about, fuckin’, what about our apartments? What about, that has to be all tidied up, and that? And, ehm, so, we had to go back to Japan, and do all that, go back, send all our stuff to Ireland. First of all, we didn’t know, the, the trip, the trip to Germany was, was, eh, a business trip, right?

Yeah.

Until the end of the contract in Japan. And we were told nothing from the end of, there was nothing, it was like, “What’s your plan after, we’re going to Germany, what’s the plan after September?” This was the whole thing about getting an apartment, and all that. “Do you think I’m going to rent an apartment three months in Germany, which is going to cost me a fortune between the deposit, rent, the whole lot, to have to give it up in three month’s time. My money’s in Japan. I have no, no way of setting up, if I’m not going to be working there after September with the company, if you’re not going to offer me a contract.” They wouldn’t offer contracts, they wouldn’t do that, but they were like, “If you don’t go now, that’s it, you’re gone.” And like, “Fuck it, we better go so.” They all wanted this done quickly, and we were like, “We have to go back to Japan, get our clothes, all this kind of stuff.”

Yeah.

{redacted} so then it was, they were like, “You go from Ireland to Japan and Japan to {Germany}.” And I was like, “Hold on a second now. I’ve all this stuff from Japan. All my belongings. Am I getting a, if I’m getting a contract for {Germany}, that’s grand, I’ll se, I’ll ship it there, and I’ll hold on to it, and when I get a contract, I’ll have the apartment set up, and all that. I’ll have all my stuff there. But until then, I’m shipping all this stuff back to Ireland.

Yeah.

It meant going back to Ireland with it, and I’ll start up from there, and go from there to {Germany}. So I went back and, to Japan, back up to {the town in Miyagi where I lived}. This was maybe about 6 weeks afterwards, after the earthquake. And, eh, they weren’t a bit happy with us, like, do you know, and all this kind of thing. Half-treated as deserters, and all this kind of stuff, and - that was by the company now, like, do you know?

Yeah.
And, ehm, and we went from there, we did, we went, we did all the tidying up. There was all this shipping stuff here, there, getting it all boxed up, and bringing it to, bringing it to the post office. All that kind of stuff all took time. There for about two weeks, and there was a reason why we, it took two weeks? Eh, I think it was just the whole, we gave ourselves time to, eh, set up and the whole lot, like, get everything sorted and get back. I think that was the only reason. But work, they wanted meetings with work. And it was like, “We were after paying for the flights, so as far as I was concerned, I’m still on holiday.” [laughter]

[Laughter]

“There’d be no fuckin’ meetings or turning up for anything. I’ll go in and I’ll, ten-minute fuckin’ job.” Went in, met everyone, all the colleagues, friends, and all that, and said, you know, “I’m going to Germany,” and all that. So they were all grand. So, went from there back to Ireland, got everything ready, and then they were like, they were, they were like, “You have to get this flight from London,” and all this sort of stuff. And I was like, “You want me to travel on a Friday, spend, leave here first thing in the morning, be in London, to make it to {Germany} for 8 ‘o’clock that day, where I could travel on the Saturday, I’ll be there in three hours. I’ll find out everything. I’ll check in to the apartment. I’ll do everything.” And they were like, “No, if you don’t do,” - they got really angry later - “no, if you don’t go now, you, you won’t be able to do it. You have to meet this person. He’s expecting to meet you.” I did it anyway.

[Laughter]

I went to London spent half the fuckin’ day there, and went from London to, to {Germany}. And your man met me at the airport. But like, he was like, as far as he was concerned it was 5 o’clock on a Friday. He wanted, he dropped me there and he goes, “This is where you work,” in the car. Dropped me, goes, “This is the bank, this is this, this is this, this is where you work.” Drove me, did a big loop and goes, “And you’re staying in here.” Half and hour, out the gaff. And I was like, “I came all the way for fuckin’ this.” I had no idea where anything was, like, do you know what I mean?

[laughter]

[Laughter]

I could have just got the train and just been grand. And, eh, so I knew one fella who I was working with in Germany, {redacted}, salt of the earth, nicest fella you’ll ever meet.

Yeah.

I got on to him before I was going and he met me that Friday night. Brought me to his house. Had pizza, and all that, and he sorted me out, set up in the, showed me like, this is the shop, this is the...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...I’d no word of German, like, do you know what I mean?

Oh god!

And, eh, but sure it was grand. And on the Monday morning - he used live fairly close - he actually cycled from his place to the hotel, picked me up and the two of us went - it
was only about twenty minutes - to the office. So he brought me the first day. And that was grand, sort of thing, do you know what I mean, like?

Smoothed the way, kind of thing.

Yeah, yeah, it was grand. I had an idea anyway. It wasn’t, it was just outside {a major German city}, and all that kind of stuff, like, That was grand. No word, contract at all there then. There was, they, they played their cards very close to their chest. I did the same. As much as they played me, I played them. And, eh, about a week before the contract was up, I had already organized, I had got a job back in Ireland, in, ehm, in {redacted}. They offered me something, and I said, “You had fuckin’ time enough. I requested from ye all along. I heard nothing from you.” The HR fella was done there, so like, “You were down in the office came. You said you would talk to me that day and you never came near me once. Fuck off.” I didn’t say that to him, I said, “Look, I’ve had enough. I’ll go back to Ireland and it will be grand. So I came back to Ireland and once I came back then, that was in September or October time, and, eh, once I came back then, that was, kind of, for me, that was the whole ordeal of the earthquake was finished. I had a base, I had somewhere to stay, all that kind of thing. I was in a house, not a hotel/apartment, I had normality around me again, such thing. I knew I was going to work the next Monday morning, and the whole lot. I knew all that. That’s, and for me then it was, it was grand.

But March to September...

March to September was the whole ordeal, like, yeah...

Jeez.

...so like the actual from the earthquake to getting out, let’s say, getting home initially, or even getting to Osaka was, was one week, and then there was the other maybe three weeks kind of just lazing about at home and just getting over it like, do you know? And then there was about a month of working in {Ireland}, and then there was the three months in {Germany}, which like, work over there, I had a great experience over there, do you know what I mean?

Yeah, yeah.

I really got stuck in, like and I really like, and I reckon, and they did offer me a contract in the end at the last fuckin’ minute like. And I was like, “Sorry lads, it’s too late.” And I mean they offered it, but it was kind of a one-year contract and I was like, “No, no, you’ll have to do better than that,” like, do you know what I mean, like?

After all you’d been through.

Surely, I said to myself, surely I’ve proved in the last three months I’m worthy of more than a three-month fuckin’ contract and they were, they were like, there was the budget for, and all this kind stuff, and I was like, “Yeah, yeah, that doesn’t matter, just put two years, three years down. Not one year, because,” Have you ever been to Germany?

I have yeah, yeah.

Did you ever try and rent?

Aw!
It’s a, you have to do interviews and fuckin’, they want a deposit, they want this key money, up front, and it’s really expensive, and one year renting a place is feckin’ no good because you’re going to have to put down three, three, four months, and like come over there, you’re going to have to spend like six fuckin’ grand to get the apartment.

Yeah.

Just rent and deposit, and that’s including the key money. I said, “I’m not doing that for fuckin’ one year to have to just turn around and leave. I’ll go back home and I’ll earn proper fuckin’, I’ll earn, I said to myself, I’ll know exactly what’s coming in and going out, do you what i mean?”

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And that’s what I wanted, eh, a bit of solid ground...

Yeah.

...a bit of steadiness. So, I left [Germany], then, whilst I really enjoyed it, but I had to draw a line in the sand and put September to January to September to be at home like [Note: the participant points to his head]. Just finish it. And, eh, I came back and that was it. It was grand then. I was normal, and all.

And you, when you did that, sort of, mental line in the sand, then things started to just fall back into place for you?

Fall back into place. Yeah. No problem. Everything was grand. I went to, like, I only stayed six months in, in {redacted}...

Yeah.

...ehm, actually, because they, one, it was a long old trek. two, because I couldn’t see myself, do you when I drew that line in the sand, I was like, I wanted to really do something, do you know? The old job that I was doing wasn’t the path that I wanted to go down, after all that I’d done the previous three years. I said, “It was too different,” and I thought my, my, do you know the way, like, I was only after coming out of college three years...

Yeah.

...still studying, still learning, I was like, “I need experience.” And I thought, like, fairly soon after starting, let’s say, three after beginning, I was like, “When I was in Japan my experience and knowledge as an engineer was going like that [Note: gesturing diagonally upward]...

Yeah.

...I felt after Ireland, it was after going like that [Note: making a leveling out, flat-line gesture]...

Yeah.

...and I knew that if this was going to go on, it was going to start going down, because I was going to start getting slack.
Yeah.

So at that point, I decided I needed to change job, and that’s when I got the job here in \{redacted\}, and that, that, that’s the reason for that one. So I kind of knew straight away, like, that, that, that’s why I changed that, like, do you know?

Yeah

That was for that reason.

Yeah, yeah.

It was nothing really to do with the company or the people or the earthquake or anything, so.

And now, there’s just one or two things that, ehm, that you were talking about that I just - maybe I didn’t understand or I didn’t catch right - so, do you remember you were saying way back at the start that your folks rang you first...

No, I rang them.

Oh, you rang them. You rang them on Skype. Do you remember that they were telling you about the tsunami?

Oh, they did ring me that time. Oh yeah, I rang them the first time.

Yeah. That was on Skype so you couldn’t get...

Everything was...

So it was always on Skype.

Yeah, you couldn’t get signal...

Right.

...where we were. Couldn’t get it. It was all over, there was wireless, but that was there was no, let’s say, phone lines...

The phone signal was gone. Gotcha, gotcha.

...or maybe the masts were down....

Yeah.

...or the power from Docomo [Note: a Japanese mobile carrier], or whatever.

Yeah. Gotcha, I gotcha.

So anytime I would turn on the phone I used turn on the wifi login and that’s how, 3G was working, so that’s how I, ehm...

I gotcha. Yeah, no, because it was just I’d read about the phones being difficult to use, but if you were doing it always through Skype, that makes sense.
Yeah.

And then, do you know the way you were, like, able to look at the BBC website?

Yeah

That again was using your phone through the?

Yeah, yeah. The way that we kept the phones charged was charge inside in the car, I’d turn on the engine, which is why the petrol was very, very important to us.

Yeah.

We used it for our electricity and heat. Heating was the first couple of nights. That was the main thing, because it was snowing, actually.

Yeah, yeah.

Freezing cold. Really, really cold. And, ehm, so yeah, that was really, really important, fuel. So, we was like, do you know the way you kind of go back to being hunter-gatherers, kind of thing. What do we need? We need food, shelter and fuel.

Yeah.

And it was, it was. Food was McDonalds and {a local convenience store} [laughter] the fuckin’ cans of beer.

[Laughter] yeah.

Ehm, the shelter was the car.

Yeah.

The apartment, like, could have got into it, but, eh, there was, it was glass all over the place, the TV was smashed, it was just destroyed, like, do you know? It was only in the daytime you could do a bit of cleaning up.

Yeah.

Ehm, and the way it was done, like, my, I had a back door, so that was grand, the light used to go in there. But then there was, like, a little narrow thing where the kitchen, come, hallway was, and that usen’t get any natural light at all...

Yeah.

...because, on the other side, if you opened the front door, there was kind of a little balcony overhead which was sheltered by a, there was kind of these little garage things, and that, that people can rent as well, and there was no real light coming in there. It was very dull and dark, and, like, even during the daytime, it was just too hard. That was summertime as well. It was just too hard to make out. You needed a light on, especially, there was a toilet, shower-room off of that, like, and there was still stuff all over the place. The only thing you could do was push everything back into, do you know, an easy position and pick stuff up.

Yeah.
There was bits of glass...

Yeah.

..the was broken plates all over the place, do you know, and, eh, so I was, just said, “No, leave the apartment.”

Yeah. And, as well, would you have had, like, a car radio, or that, ehm, in, in the car?

Ehm, yeah. I did. Ehm, did that work? I think I did but there was was fuck all on it, like. And there was no - Japanese radio is terrible, like [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and we only had, like, in {the area of Miyagi the participant lived in}, you only had about three or four stations but I’m nearly sure, the AM stations were working, but I can’t remember the FM - they were all useless, anyway, there was no real, no...

Yeah.

...there was no, there was no, we didn’t know what they were talking about, like, anyway, do you know what I mean?

Yeah, yeah.

Didn’t know what they were saying. Ehm, the radio that we did have was, on the phone, you can listen to Internet radio, so we were like tuning into RTE news and all that kind of stuff, and we’d a little, we’d a little jack from the, the end of the phone into speakers in the car, and playing the, that through, the, through that, but like that was, that news was, just, that bit too far away, it was just, like, general, there’s been an earthquake...

Exactly.

...but we knew, like, we knew that the place was in big trouble. BBC, do you ever go on to BBC News on the Asia section? That was all about it, and that was a really, really good source of information. It told us, we knew that there was big trouble, like, with the, with the, ehm, the power plants and it was more that reason, like if it was just the earthquake, would I have come home? Probably not.

Yeah.

If it was, the tsunami was another thing, but in {the area of Miyagi I lived in} we, it didn’t hit us. But, ehm, we were just that bit too far in...

Yeah.

..but, ehm, like, ehm, if it was just the earthquake and tsunami, would I have come home?

Good question. Ehm, I don’t know. I don’t think so. It was the main thing that we were worried about was the power plant...
...that was the main thing. And we had the information from the BBC, Sky News, to an extent, the BBC was really a very, very good website. Eh, you had the other tabloids then you could log on to...

Yeah, yeah.

...and all that, but we had all our information from that, and the morning that we were in {my girlfriend's} place and, the alarm, everyone’s phone went off and there was nothing, and we were, turned on the TV that, later, and we knew they were on about something, like, do you know the way they do all these graphs? They’re really good at explaining stuff on Japanese TV...

Yeah, yeah.

...I would still watch that.

That’s gas.

And it was really, and, the, I think they’re really good at explaining. They were explaining it and, eh, like, I wouldn’t be an expert on anything, like I know as much about nuclear power [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I knew that flying a helicopter over it and dumping salt water on it was not fuckin’ good, and I knew that that was the last resort.

Yeah.

And I knew, like, from reading these articles from these experts on, eh, from, on the Internet, putting up columns, and all that, that like, I knew then that what they did at Chernobyl was just pour concrete on it. I mean there were like people like, “Right how do you pour concrete on it, what do you do?” And listening to this, there were obviously people panicking and all this kind of stuff...

Yeah.

...like, it seemed to be the outside community that was panicking. The Japanese government, there was no information. That’s what I found, well, that was my experience of it anyway. There was very little forward, truthful information coming forward, they were giving bits, dribs and drabs, I think they were putting a nice picture on it, and I still think that’s they way it is. It’s far more serious than what they were, they let on.

Yeah, because you were staying with {your girlfriend’s} family, so they were Japanese people...

Yeah, yeah.

...obviously, and they would have been getting...

Yeah, yeah.

...the Japanese side of information, so you felt...

I, ehm.
...you felt there was a difference?

Yeah, I was like, I said to {my girlfriend}, “Did you ever hear of Chernobyl?” And, eh, no, not a word of it. And, my god, like, you know, we all know Chernobyl.

Yeah.

And then there was nothing, no mention of it, and on the, in the news, or anything like that and, do you know the way you’d think there’d be somebody go on about it.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

What’s that island in America?

Oh, eh, Three Mile Island.

Three Mile, nothing about it, anything like that, but maybe that was, maybe it could have been, like, I don’t know, maybe it could have been foreign newspapers, the BBC and all that looking for news, but I reckon it was as serious as it was...

Yeah.

...because they changed the levels of, ehm, of the, the, the whatever you were meant to be exposed to, to the double that, not even double, I think they put it up ten times in some places, like...

Yeah, yeah.

...and they kept putting it up a bit, and they reset it again, and I was like, do you know, I’m an engineer, like, and you set levels for reasons and you don’t change them just [laughter] you know...

Yeah.

...like that, you know. You go like, “Right, why did they change them? You know, there has to be a fuckin’ reason? And the reason is it’s pissing fuckin’ radiation!” [laughter]...

Yeah.

Yeah.

...and that, you know?

And did you, so, did you ever get any contact from, like, the city office or the ward office or any of the, sort of, local government?

No, no, nothing.

Because you would have registered, like, you had a gaijin card.

I, no. And I’ll tell you the reason why. Where we were was like a war-zone. We were the last of their worries. And there was people, there was ambulances going up and down, there was people who really needed help. Like, they, if we really needed help, they’d have found, they’d have known, they’d have known. We didn’t, they didn’t need to be
worrying about us. We weren’t injured, we had a place to stay, and we weren’t going to go hungry. We were going to find something...

Yeah, gotcha.

...we were going to eat, we were going to survive...

Gotcha.

...they didn’t need to be coming out and looking for us. That kind of stuff, With priorities...

And, and I knew, like, there, where we were, there was helicopters flying overhead and there was fire brigade and there was ambulances and police, like, and we knew that there was buildings collapsing, we knew there was, probably even in {the area of Miyagi where the participant lived} there was people after getting killed...

Yeah.

...and we knew, like, the tsunami, and the whole lot, like, and it was, I wouldn’t, if I saw a Japanese person coming out to us with a little clipboard and going, “Is this you, is this you, like?” I was like, “Come on, man get your priorities in order,” like, do you know what I mean, “You’re a wasted resource.” And that’s why they didn’t come to us. It was a war-zone, like.

Understood, understood. And, like, as well, do you know the way, it was clear, it seems that your work, like, didn’t give you much information directly after, and the embassy, you were giving them information...

I was giving them information, but they were very nice, like, I mean, they were, I was giving them information but they were, like, I knew that it was a tough situation for them. There was never any like, even though I was giving them information - I was like “You should have told me that.” - there was never any arguments...

Right.

..there was never anything. It was always very, very good, very, I knew the fella I was talking to, I didn’t know him, I knew, the fella that I was talking to was doing his best...

Yeah.

...and I knew that he was fishing for as much information as he wanted as well. And obviously, I don’t know, maybe we were the, the people where we were were probably the closest...

Yeah.

...and the best source of information for him. But, ehm, they were very, they were good, like, because, like, they were good, like, as in they kept in contact with us, but they kept, they kept on the sequence of events.

Yeah, and that was always by phone? Like, the phones were back up?
No, was that, how did I ring them? Was it through Skype? I rang them on Skype. I put credit on Skype.

_Ah, I got it. Yeah, yeah, yeah._

Yeah.

_You can do that, can’t you?_

I was able to do that. I was able to ring them. The phones were working in Tokyo, but, so, you were able to ring a landline and all this.

_Gotcha. Gotcha, gotcha._

And, ehm, so like I mean, it worked okay but they kind of sat on the fence, but I reckon they must have been told, like, when we were there, we wanted information now, now, now, now...

_Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah._

...kind of stuff, and that’s obviously not possible, to an extent. And they were obviously getting their information from, maybe from the Japanese, they would have been told, and all this kind of stuff and eh, and they were obviously going, been told maybe, “Just tough it out. It’ll be okay,” kind of thing, and that’s what they were kind of telling, do you know, like, the way, I mean, we were asking them for should we stay, should we go, and they weren’t, they probably didn’t have that information to give us, or the, until maybe everyone was kind of leaving, like, do you know...

_Yeah._

...and all that kind of stuff, and they were like, “Better do that.” like. Do you know?

_Yeah, yeah. It’s, like, it was such a huge thing. It’s amazing to think, like, so how long, it’s two, two-and-a-half, no, not quite two-and-a-half years ago now is it?_

It is, oh, it is just over two-and-a-quarter years, yeah

_Two-and-a-quarter years. In a way it feels..._

Longer.

...longer, and in another way, like...

_Yeah, yeah, like, so much has happened, like, I changed job, kind of, the whole lot, like, do you know, and it’s kind of just, like, you move on at the same time, do you know what I mean? I don’t know whether that’s just the way I think, like, or what like, but move on and, eh, that’s it._

_And you still have a link to Japan obviously..._

_Yeah, yeah, yeah._

...like, so...

The main link now is through {the participant’s girlfriend and now fiancee}. 
Yeah.

Yeah, I was back there, I went to {the area of Miyagi where the participant lived} last, two weeks ago, and to be honest with you, you’d never know that there was a disaster. I drove from {there} to Matsushima [Note: a famous tourist spot on the Miyagi coast] and, eh, along the way you could see like, I would say to {my girlfriend}, “What are those?” And, ehm, the prefabs, do you know the way like prefabs for an office, stacked on top of each other, and I was like, “What are those?” and she was like, “Oh, they’re the houses for the people who been in the tsunami.” And they’re still, like, they’re still in prefab accommodation, like, they probably had nice places, living and livelihoods, do you know, and all that. But we went to Matsushima and there was the tourist boats going way out and no problem and all the shop fronts were open and clean even though they would have been definitely hit by the wave. The pier was, I walked along the pier, and there was some parts of it were damaged and not fixed, the concrete was torn, like, other than that, it was up and running, like, you’d never know. Maybe there was other parts, if you go up by Iwate, they got hit bad, maybe there’s, they’re not as tidied up like. But, ehm, Matsushima was grand.

It’s great to hear, like, that...

Yeah, you’d never even, you’d never know, you’d never know because, yeah you’d never know. I’m thinking back, now, because the piers and all that of course had been hit bad, to be honest, you’d often seen a pier here that was [laughter]....

[Laughter] in worse condition!

...[Laughter] and they’d still be using it.

Yeah, exactly.

Yerra, it was grand.

And do you find yourself thinking back about that time much, or?

Not really. Ehm, I suppose at the beginning alright like you’d be kind of thinking away about it, like, but, to be honest, like, everything happened so fast afterwards, it was like, back to Ireland, Ireland back to Japan, Japan to Germany, Germany back to Ireland then, and I was looking for a job, and then I got the job, and then I moved, and then I started, and it was all, do you know, you’d only think about it every so often.

It was just non-stop really.

Yeah, yeah. So, ehm, Not a whole lot, no. Not a whole lot. I wouldn’t really stop and think about it, anyway, do you know.

Yeah. The main thing I want to check as well is that I hope by talking today, you’re, you feel okay, like?

Oh yeah, yeah.

The main thing, this is just [Note: I pass the participant the Stress Likert Scale to mark] if, if you can or if you want to after having spoken about it today, do you feel anxiety or?

Ehm.
Is it a bad thing to talk about it? Is it a good thing to talk about it? What would you say your feelings were at this point?

No, I wouldn’t be any bit, [Note: at this point the participant did not mark the scale but just put the paper back down on the table] talking about it would be grand now. I suppose now the only time I’d, always, just, do you know when you talk about the initial shake, it’s like, “Fuck, I can remember that, like.” And I did say my goodbyes then, and I’ll never forget it. Because I thought the building was coming down. And that’s the only time I’d ever stop and kind of think like, “I was fuckin’ lucky,” like, do you know, but, other than talking about what happened afterwards, and, ehm, all that kind of stuff that happened afterwards I never felt in danger for my life like I did that day. So like, ehm, that, it was that initial part is the only, only time that I ever think, like, but, ehm, as regards once we got out it was grand. I mean, never, ever afterwards, I felt more in control once we got out.

I got you.

Because I suppose, like, there was, I was in control, in a way. I could, like, we were, I was in control because we heard the news about Fukushima and we got on a plane and left, do you know, we had that decision to make. But the, that was the only time I felt unsafe in the area or felt that I wasn’t in control of what could happen next.

Yeah.

Do you know what I mean?

So, giving people a feeling of control is maybe, kind of, an important thing in?

Yeah, I like to be in control, like, even in the job, like, do you know?

Yeah, yeah, for you then.

That’s, some people don’t mind, like, tipping away and just doing, following the other, kind of stuff, I’m the kind of a person, I need the information. I don’t let people make decisions for me, I’ll put it that way. I’m kind of stubborn. I don’t know if it’s good or bad, but I like to make my own decision and right or wrong I’ll always stand over it.

Yeah.

And I’m stubborn that way. I could make the worst decision, but I’ll fuckin’ stand over it, like.

I got you.

Do you know what I mean, like? I’d even do that, eh, if you want me to make a decision at work or anything, if you want me to make a decision, I’ll make a decision for you based on the information that I have at the time. No matter what, I won’t sit on the fence.

Yeah.

As much as possible, I won’t sit on the fence unless I’m sussing the situation out.

I see.
I’ll have a, I’ll try and make a plan and I’ll try and do something.

I see.

And, eh, half that, once we got out, we were able to gather ourselves, get, eh, gather, information was coming in about the tsunami, the, Fukushima, the pla, Ishinomaki over the road, we’d all this coming in and for the first couple of days we were looking for other information, and afterwards we’d got like this decision. Went to work on the Monday and there was no information, it was like, “Come back tomorrow,” or something like that, and it was like, “I dare not make any decisions,” - do you know the way you’d be looking for people in authority, like, work, you’d look for the embassy, after a while it was like, “Right, we’ll make this decision ourselves.” {our mutual acquaintance} was heading away and it was just like, work, the decision was made then, we made up our minds, “We’re leaving as well,” like. We didn’t wait for work to come and tell us anything. Couldn’t contact my manager. I just sent him a message and didn’t bother contacting anyone until we got to Ireland, and, ehm, once we were, once we had that decision made and told them at home, like, that the decision was made that we were leaving the area, that we were going to Osaka first, and that if we could get home, we would get home, and all that kind of stuff. Once that decision was made, I know my mother was a lot happier. Because she knows me as well, like, she knows I’d be stubborn, like...

[Laughter]

...but she knows, like, I could kind of make decisions and, I’d make gut feeling decisions...

Yeah.

...and, eh, they’d be okay, and no matter what, it’d be nearly alright, do you know what I mean?

I understand.

It was even like, do you know the way, what made us go to the airport? We could have just queued up. We beat them to feckin’ Tokyo, like, do you know? And, ehm, we got there in such a time, like, that it all led on, that we met the English Embassy, like, and we got the quote for the flights, and we knew what that was, and, eh, we ended up in Haneda, and I think the shinkansen [Note: bullet train] goes through Haneda, there’s something, it was very close together, we only had to hop on the train, I think, and we [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...do you know there was, or did we even go to? I don’t know did we go from there? I can’t remember now, did we go from there to Tokyo, I don’t know what we did, but it was very simple, anyway. It was...

It all, kind of, eh, it all fell into, into...

...but we had a plan, we knew what we were doing, we were going sightseeing, we were going from here, we were going here to get the tickets to the train, and we were going to the train, and we were meeting the lads, and we knew what hotel...

Yeah, yeah.
...we had to book in, we knew this was the plan, we had to get there, we had to book in, there was no going for pints first, and there was no, it was go to the airport, get booked in, get the room, drop the gear, and then we can worry about food...

Yeah, yeah.

...with that, with the, with our accommodation sorted for the night, we can worry about food afterwards, and all that kind of stuff. It was like, it was like going back to the caveman.

Yeah, hunter-gather, just like you said the fuel and the shelter and the food, and all those things.

Yeah, yeah, all this kind of stuff, like, do you know what I mean? We went back to that kind of basis, and it worked, do you know what I mean, it worked in the, and to be honest, I think, we dealt with it, Irish, we dealt with it an awful lot better than the yanks and an awful lot better than the Czecks. They were kind of humming and hawing. I don’t know what it was, we did it an awful lot better.

Yeah.

I don’t know whether it’s just we’re used to dealing with fuckin’ [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...getting the shit end of the stick, like, fuck it, we beat them to Tokyo, I’m fairly sure we, while they were in Tokyo waiting in the queue for flights to America, we were in Osaka and we were on a plane, like, do you know the way?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

I don’t know. We just had it done, like.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And, eh, well, we were just lucky. Just lucky, do you know?

But, as you said, you made decisions as well, though.

We like, there was no information coming forward because, I suppose, they didn’t have it, and they didn’t know the extent and they didn’t want to be giving out scaremongering information, so we made the decisions ourselves, based on what we had, and I think to this day, they were the correct decisions anyway. I’ll stand over them, anyway.

Yeah, on the topic of the scaremongering as well, you know, there’s been a lot of talk, like, about how people were saying things over Twitter or other social media, or that...

Yeah, yeah.

...like about rumours, did you use any social media...

Ehm...

...during the, the, the process?
...the only thing was, logged on, do you know when you turn on the phone, the wifi
logged on to Facebook automatically...

Yeah.

...and, ehm, so people could see that you were online. It was a balls, like, because, it was,
every fuckin’ person was just, “Are you okay? Are you okay?” And it’s like [Note:
making exasperated face]...

[Laughter]

...I’ll just put up ‘I’m okay’ on the thing and it will be grand, get them off, like, but do
you know what I mean and, ehm, ehm, yeah, you do have that scaremongering, ehm, you
did have people, that German fella, he was a bit much, he was kind of going on about,
“Oh there’s, the place is gone on fire,”...

Yeah.

...and all this kind of stuff. And then, like, you had tabloid papers, like The Sun and that
type of stuff and they were like, “Get out of Tokyo,” and all this kind of stuff.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ehm, and ‘Tokyo is starving’ was another headline, and I was, “have you ever even been
to Japan, like?” And you had that kind of stuff, but, ehm, I’d take all that with a pinch of
salt, to be honest. The, I read more into the fact that they changed the levels, and I knew
that there was something up then, like.

Yeah.

Do you know, whereas someone might say, “Oh, they changed the levels, so it’s still
within spec. and it’s all okay.” And I was like, “They changed them for a reason, like, if
they changed them, controlled them, it’s for a reason...

I got it.

...because it’s spiralling out of control.”

Yeah.

And sure it blew up then a day later, something like that

Yeah, yeah.

We knew then, like, we were gone. We made the decision, “Let’s go.”

Yeah, yeah, it’s absolutely fascinating how, like, you know, in one way, you’re trying to
help people get information...

Yeah, yeah.

... but then it’s like where do you start?
Yeah, yeah. It’s like, getting information was the hard part. We went to work on the Monday morning for work, like, but there was no information there and kind of all that turned up and they were just like, “Come back another day.”

Yeah, yeah.

It was like, “Well, what the fuck are we meant to do?” It’s all well and good if you’ve a house and family and all that kind of stuff. But when you don’t, there’s that, eh, there’s that, like, what do you do? Just sit around all day, like? Wait for the cloud to arrive?

Yeah, yeah.

Or make our move now, do you know, we were playing poker, like.

Well, I think you played your hand very well, it would seem, for what you were dealt with.

But sure, like, I reckon if it was anyone else, they’d have done the s, they’d have done something similar anyway. Whether we were very, very lucky with how things panned out, like, getting trains, buses, airplanes, hotels, we ate in a restaurant in Yamagata, like.

You did alright, in that sense, yeah, yeah.

So we done alright, like. I mean, we were very lucky. Got the job done at the end of the day.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, thanks a million for telling me, I’m sorry, Jesus, I’ve taken so much of your time. I hope you’re alright. I really appreciate all that you told me. It was amazing to hear your story.

Yeah, yeah.

It’s fascinating how you dealt with everything. I hope, like, like, if you do feel, you know in any way stressed or anything, please, if there’s anything I can do to help, or...

No, no. I’m grand now, talking about it now. It is a story, like, do you know, it’s a story that will fuckin’ entertain people.

Yeah, well this is the thing. I’m going to meet a bunch of people as you can imagine, and I’m a bit afraid that if I get them to tell their stories, it might bring up bad memories, or something, or...

Like, I know that there was loads of people died, and all that, I never saw any of that. Maybe if you do see someone who might have seen bodies or something like that, maybe they might, but like, I only had to deal with the earthquake and the fallout of that and from that then was the Fukushima, which I had some bit of control over, my part.

I understand.

I didn’t see the wave. I didn’t run from a wave. I didn’t, do you know, I didn’t have anything like that.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So, like, maybe there’s people who did
Yeah.

Do you know, like, maybe that might be a different story, a different thing, whereas we just went into survival mode for a couple of days and from there then to leave. But other people might have, have far worse.

Yeah, well, yeah, I suppose it’s just different as well you know, it’s not necessarily in terms of worse or better, you know, everyone has a different kind of experience.

Experience, yeah.

Well, thanks a million. I really, really appreciate it.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

Note: the participant had mentioned before recording started that due to the nature of his professional role at the time of the disaster, his professional and private experiences often overlapped and that he would be speaking only to personal experiences. In cases where it would be difficult to untangle the professional and the personal, he would not speak about the experience.

2013/8/16 Interview with Participant 3

Researcher: So then, as to the actual questions, if you’d just like to start by telling me a little about your experience of the 2011 Disaster.

Participant: Ehm, okay, well I suppose the first thing to mention is that, ehm, I was the consular official in the embassy [of an EU country] at the time of the disaster, so, ehm, I was in work at the time, it was a Friday afternoon, I think, eh, so the ambassador was off site and the deputy head of mission were off site at meetings, so it was myself and the other staff in the embassy at the time, eh, so in terms of experiences, we just had to implement our emergency plan at that point.

And had you had many similar experiences of, you know, dealing with earthquakes or other forms of disaster while you’d been in Japan or...?

Well…

...perhaps previously in your life?

...Japan is a very well-prepared society for natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, so earthquake drills and earthquake preparation planning happens very frequently and, ehm, you know as part of our preparations within the embassy, we would have conducted emergency drills and emergency plans ourselves, but we wouldn’t have had any prior experience of an earthquake or disaster of this nature.

Yeah. And in your own personal experience, you know, as someone who had lived in Japan had you many experiences before the 2011 Disaster?

No, and like, tremors, ehm, are very frequent in Japan, and, eh, it’s just a normal, accepted part of living in, you know, in Tokyo. Ehm, so you kind of desensitize yourself to it very lively. I remember I arrived in Japan, I was in temporary accommodation in a skyrise building for my first couple of weeks and the first time I experienced, eh, a tremor, it was quite a large tremor, but in retrospect, you know, it became a, you know, those (indistinct) were actually very frequent and, you know, the bed shook and obviously the ensuing feeling of panic and what-do-I-do-now and having to, you know, try and exit the building and, but obviously you had no need to, everyone else was just going about their business, but, you know, you got, you get used to that.

Yeah. I think a lot of people that I speak to talk about how they really were, kind of, familiar with earthquakes to a certain extent because most of the people had been there a couple of years.

Yeah, you just become very accustomed to it, and, ehm, large tremors that would, eh, you know, frighten a lot of Westerners as you know, ehm, it, they just become normal part of the life in Japan, ehm, so when the earthquake struck, ehm, the first couple of minutes
people were kind of going, oh well, this is just a very large tremor and continued about their business.

Yeah. And I’m interested to talk about the idea of defining the disaster in terms of time, eh, when do you feel the disaster began and ended, or has it ended?

Eh, well, for us, I suppose it began when we realized that this was not just a tremor, it was actually an earthquake, and that happened in the, you know, a couple of minutes, ehm, after the first aftershock hit Tokyo, ehm, and, you know, it became, the strength of the aftershocks, ehm, you know, increased, and so that was the start point for us, I wouldn’t consider the disaster to have ended because, you know, in my own opinion, I don’t think it has ended yet. And like, recent news reports from, you know, radiation levels from Fukushima have indicated that, you know, it’s far from over. But from an earthquake perspective, I mean like obviously, the earthquake didn’t really last too long at all…

Yeah.

...but the after-effects have…

Yeah.

...so from that perspective, yeah, it’s a continuing disaster.

Yeah. And again, if this is on the borderline of the, the personal and professional, please let me know...

Yeah, yeah.

...but, ehm, I’m interested in how you communicated with the important people in your life at the outbreak of the disaster. If you feel you can speak about that, can I ask how you, you did, went about that or?

Yeah, ehm, well, the first thing, obviously we had to implement our emergency plan in the embassy, and I’ll kind of leave that to the side…

Yeah.

...eh, from my perspective, I mean like, eh, I made contact with my mother as soon as I could. Now, slightly different from a te, from a communications perspective for us because we had a secure, eh, la, all embassies, ehm, in Japan have secure lines, which op, which is designed to operate in case, in cases of emergency, so I, you know, once I had made other calls, I made a call home, ehm, and spoke to my mother, but, you know, that was, ehm, just to assure her that, you know, we were okay and alive and, eh you know, try and put her fears at rest because, ehm, you know, media reports in Europe, so a consistent feature of the, of the climate, ehm, kind of sensationalized it. Obviously it was a terrible disaster, but they focused on the worst possible aspects and, you know, you know, the tsunami and the fire and just the worst images, and then, obviously, everyone thought that this was engulfing the eastern seaboard of Japan when in fact it wasn’t, so but anyway.

Yeah. And were you able, I mean, I know you were able to contact [your home country] through that secure line, were there people in Japan that you tried to contact? Or you know, for example, a lot of people have talked about how the mobile phone system was troublesome.
Yeah, actually we found the mobile phone system to be incredibly effective, but that wasn’t because of the mobile network, that was because of the data. Eh, so we could access social, eh, media. Eh, it was one thing that continued to work right throughout the crisis. Eh, so everything else went down, but people could still access Facebook and Twitter, and that’s how most, that’s how we ended up making contact with a lot of people. You know, friends and colleagues.

Yeah, actually, I had the same experience. I was, I was there at the time and, eh, when the earthquake hit, eh, you know, I was working in a company, so we all, kind of, just went under our desks…

Yeah.

...and then after, I can’t remember how long, but maybe 15 or 20 minutes, we all went outside the building and I was able to go on Facebook and just update a status, and...

Yeah, yeah. It was fine.

...yeah, and, like, did you continue to use those, sort of, communication tools as the days went on and as the weeks went on?

Eh…

...in your personal?

...Personally, no. I didn’t, eh, I didn’t use Facebook or Twitter. Eh, I mean like I wouldn’t necessarily be a prolific Facebook user anyway, so its relevance to me wouldn’t have really mattered. The people I would have needed to contact, I would have been able to contact anyway. Eh, so, but that’s just personal.

Yeah, yeah, oh no, I understand. The reason I ask is because there’s a lot of research about using social media, ehm...

Yeah…

...but I’m just interested to know...

...well, I would say professionally, eh, if we didn’t have the, if we didn’t have access, if social media wasn’t as, if its usage wasn’t as widespread as it was at the time, it would have caused a lot of difficulty and, like, we were able to set up a crisis page on Facebook and were able to make contact with people we hadn’t been able to establish contact with through traditional means. It was really vital and we got a lot of, we had, you know, regular Facebook updates and, ehm, how to contact the embassy and we were able to trace people who otherwise hadn’t been contactable and we were very worried about through social, obviously it ended up being six degrees of separation, but eventually we got in contact with people who knew them or knew where they were. So that was really vital.

And did you find it reliable?

Ehm, from a technical perspective?

Whatever perspective. I mean, the information content.
Yeah, yeah, it was. I don’t think we had any situations where we were, like, chasing leads that didn’t exist, so.

Yeah. That’s great to hear because obviously what you want in a disaster is, kind of, you know, accurate, ehm, reliable information in, you know, when you need it...

Yeah.

...in good time, so it’s great to hear that those, those tools did work well for you.

Uhm. They did, yeah.

Again, in terms of the personal now, ehm, it might be a different situation for you now because of your professional experience, but about finding information, how did you go about it or did you have to?

Ehm, I don’t really have any personal experiences of that because...

Okay.

...in seeking information for me, I was the person who was going to the Japanese ministries, and I was attending the briefings, and I was, ehm, I was liaising with various other embassies and coordinating information, so I was in a totally different situation to people who would have been outside of that sphere. We were genuinely trying to find out where things stood in terms of radiation or the risk of further aftershocks and earthquakes, so it was, I, I don’t actually have any personal experiences. At that point then I was completely occupied with, you know, we were running 24-hour shifts, so...

Yeah.

...my personal experiences were completely my professional experiences.

I see. This is where, yeah, and again because of that situation, I, I, I don’t know if you’ll be able to, be able to answer this, but, as someone who is interested in translation studies, I am interested to know if translation was used or how translation was used in that workflow. If you feel you can’t speak about that, I completely understand.

No, that’s okay. In terms of translation, {we communicated with our citizens in our native tongue}...

Yeah.

...ehm, obviously the Japanese ministries translated all the information for the benefit of the diplomatic, you know, corps that was in Tokyo...

Yeah.

...so they, all the official data, all the official documents was translated by the ministry {into English} and was given to us that way...

I see.

...and translation issues only really arose in the immediate aftermath of it when we were listening to the Japanese news and trying to pick up what was happening before the ministries had actually activated themselves, ehm, so in the immediate afterward,
aftermath, that’s where translation issues would have kicked in. Ehm, but we, you know our local staff would have been our main conduit so they looked after that.

And those local staff, would they have been Japanese people?

Japanese nationals.

{redacted}

And professionally trained in translation? Or just working to...

Some, yeah, some would have had professional translation experience, ehm, and others would have been with the embassy for a long time, yeah.

Yeah. One thing that’s come up, actually, quite a lot with the people that I’ve been speaking to is the importance of television and various news media...

Yeah.

...again personal, personally or professionally, what did you think about that?

Ehm, it wouldn’t have been the source we would have relied on the most because it was very difficult to, like obviously, the media is getting it from different sources as well unless they have a crew on the ground, you can’t really rely on it. So we took the decision that our information for the most part would have come from official sources, ehm, and, eh, in terms of, in terms of media, ehm, like, there was an emergency channel on the radio and that would have been something we would have been tuned in to constantly because that was, you know, giving the most accurate, kind of, as-it-happened, you know, “oh there’s an earthquake in X, Y or Z or whatever”, so.

And that would have been the NHK [Note: Japanese national broadcast company]?

It was the NHK, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. Ehm, like, eh, a lot of the people that I’ve been talking to have talked about television or radio actually kind of...

Uhm.

...depending on where they were...

Yeah.

...located. The people who were sort of in big cities or in Tokyo tend to talk about more about television...

Uhm.

...but the people who were in say more...

Yeah.

...disaster-hit zones tended to talk about radio.

Yeah, radio, I think, was a big medium for a lot of people in the countryside.
Yeah. Ehm, and obviously in Japan they have things like the one-seg (a special digital TV signal designed to be broadcast over mobile phones) TV and one-seg radio...

Yeah.

...you know the mobile, did that, was that ever mentioned, or?

No, not really, ehm, no I don’t really recall. A lot of, a lot of {our citizens} in my experience tended to shy away from the traditional models of mobile communication and would rely on, I suppose, more Western brands like iPhones and Samsung and what-not, ehm, rather than going where the Docomo handsets [Note: biggest mobile carrier in Japan] which are ferociously user-unfriendly...

[Laughter]

...so, you know…

[Laughter] Yeah.

...that’s, that’s why I think in terms of, I suppose, a cultural difference there that would have been, whereas I know an awful lot of the, the, the local staff in our embassy would have been using, one of them in particular was tuned in to, like, her Docomo handset and, ehm, rather than going where the Docomo handsets [Note: biggest mobile carrier in Japan] which are ferociously user-unfriendly...

That’s really, really interesting to me because obviously coming from a translation perspective…

Yeah.

...I’m interested in is the ways we could, sort of, I guess, overcome that barrier so that people would feel, maybe, that they could use these type of technologies, but, as you say, you mentioned ‘user-unfriendliness’.

Yeah, it’s very, it’s, even if you are very proficient in Japanese using these phones is, you know, it’s a nightmare…

[Laughter]

...it’s just a cultural thing in the sense that it’s much in the same way as you looking at a Japanese website and it’s, kind of just, they, like, completely bomb you with information and it’s very, you know, they haven’t really moved over to, I suppose, a more graphic interface and, ehm, they just throw, like, reams and reams and reams of text at you, similar to the mobile phones, like and, it’s, they don’t, you know, it just hasn’t really shifted, and that’s a cultural thing, I think. Ehm, though, with the increasing popularity of, like, iPhones and similar, ehm, interfaces, that might change. But traditional mobile phones which are very advanced, ehm, are just very user-unfriendly for anyone that’s not in the mindset.

Yeah. And actually, just as you mentioned there about cultural differences, that happened to be another thing that tends to come up when I, when I speak to people that, even people who are proficient…

Uhm.
...in, you know, not just Japanese, but let’s say several languages, found that there were sometimes some cultural barriers that prevented, kind of, communication during the disaster. Did you personally, sort of, come across any cultural issues?

Ehm, no, not really. I don’t recall coming across anything that I could describe as a cultural barrier, ehm, you know, in terms of the way they processed information and, you know, I can’t, if you look at the response to the tsunami in, ehm, just there at the turn of the century, you know, it’s similar.

Yeah, absolutely, yeah. Ehm, I think, ehm, one thing that I have noticed is that you talk about, when I talk about say the 2011 Disaster, it’s almost like talking about several disasters because...

Yeah, yeah. Definitely. I wouldn’t identify it as one particular disaster. It was a multitude of things and, ehm, you know obviously, the earthquake, the tsunami, and the nuclear element, and a lot of that was all bundled into one.

Yeah. For you personally, were there any elements of the disaster that were more difficult to deal with or?

The nuclear disaster would have been the most difficult thing to deal with and that was, that was primarily because it had the closest proximity to Tokyo. Obviously, the tsunami and the earthquake, well, the earthquake itself actually, you know, because it was offshore, you know, it didn’t have an immediate, it was the tsunami that did the damage, ehm, and that was very, you know, focused on a specific region, eh, whereas the nuclear disaster directly affected Tokyo and that caused then, obviously, the downstream difficulties it did. And the information then became a huge issue...

Oh.

...because, it’s a very technical issue, trying to translate that into something people can understand, ehm, but also trying to allay fears, and like, you were in a situation whereby a lot of people were very distrustful of the information that was coming from official sources and were looking, then, to other people who, with an ‘in’, and, you know, who has an ‘in’ in these situations? Ehm, so you know, that was a difficulty. Ehm, you know, what can you do?

Yeah. And again I know you mentioned personally you weren’t a big user of social media but that was one thing social media was, kind of, criticised for, especially say Twitter for example...

Yeah.

...about the, sort of, what was termed scare-mongering.

Yeah, I think there’s a real risk and you see this across many, many different areas with social media, there’s a real risk that in situations like that where it’s incredibly important to manage the situation and to not scare-monger, because, you know, if panic were to break out in Tokyo, ehm, you know, for example, if there’s something said on Facebook or Twitter and all of a sudden, there’s mass panic, I mean that would do far more damage than whatever the situation was that was occurring. So, you know, thankfully, that didn’t happen, but had it, it would have been phenomenal.
And, in terms of like, not, not necessarily social media but did you find other more traditional forms of communication to be useful, em, in terms of your personal communication or in terms of managing the disaster, like email or.

Emails became, once the networks started to come back online the Japanese having prepared for this for a long time had, you know, back-ups all over the place, you know, so, ehm, online communication came onstream fairly fast and email then became our primary mode of communication. Ehm, in the sense, well, that and Facebook, but there are two different demographics there, so there would have been a portion of our, I suppose, clientele that would have been very social-media orientated and another part who, which wouldn’t really have had a presence. And trying to communicate then with both and make sure you capture both was, but also there was obviously the family contingent then back in {the participant’s home country}, and telephone was actually the main, the main method of communication. They wanted to, they wanted to speak to people and have that one-to-one contact rather than email.

That’s really fascinating about the idea of different, sort of, profiles of people using or maybe being comfortable with different types of...

Yeah, yeah...

...ehm.

...yeah, there were definitely people who would have just, a lot of JET students [Note: government-sponsored Japan Exchange and Teaching Program], for example, wouldn’t have come near us with an email but would have sent us a message on Facebook.

Yeah.

Whereas the business community would be more email orientated.

That’s fascinating. That’s really, really fascinating. But I guess it makes sense...

Yeah.

...one thing I’ve read about is that when a disaster happens you use what you’re familiar with, so...

Yeah.

...you know, say for example as a, as a researcher in translation studies, I might want to develop some great new tool but...

Uhm.

...if it’s something that people aren’t familiar with, will they, will they use it? Ehm, did you notice the development of any new forms of communication or any new tools as - as you said, the disaster maybe hasn’t even finished - so as time wore on, did you notice any changes or differences?

Ehm, I think traditionally, eh, public diplomacy has been an area where, that hadn’t received an awful lot of attention, and I think the disaster, {redacted} in general, in public diplomacy social media to communicate hasn’t been to the fore of thinking, and I think the disaster really brought that, really highlighted that for a lot of foreign services
sense that this is a real, valuable asset that had, that should be brought within our other
fields of communication. So I think that was something that developed out of it. Eh, so.

That’s interesting. You haven’t become a more active user since the disaster?

Not, not really, no. I, Facebook for me is a particularly useful tool for keeping in touch
with friends who are across the world…

Right.

…but you know I don’t say what I had for breakfast…

[Laughter]

...take pictures of my food and what not.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Em, the reason I ask is just because personally I thought, as I
said, the fi, five, what, maybe fifteen minutes after the disaster Facebook was like a
lifesaver to me…

Yeah.

...in the sense that I could do that one status. I don’t think I used it once after that…

Yeah.

...just like what you said, I, I used Skype calls…

Yeah.

...or I wanted the face-to-face, well, voice-to-voice contact.

Yeah, I think a lot of people feel more comfortable with that. The one thing I probably
think didn’t work was the traditional, eh, crisis management tool of, em, and it was, it
was deployed right across Japan where you leave a voicemail and - I can’t remember the
name of the system [Note: it is known by its NTT dial-up number ‘171’ and there is an
online version called ‘Web171’] - but you leave a voicemail and that relative and friends
can check in and see if you’ve checked in as well. I think Facebook and Twitter
completely supplanted that. I don’t know anyone who used it.

That’s fascinating. Yeah, I know that a lot of those phone companies had this registering
system and special numbers but…

No, I don’t know, I don’t know anyone who used it.

...personally, yeah. On and off I lived in Japan for nine years…

Yeah.

...so I mean I would have been familiar with all of the systems but I didn’t.

No. And I think it’s, I think a lot of people were just like, that’s just incredibly
complicated…

[Laughter]
...and in a disaster situation the last thing you need is to be going through fifteen different steps...

[Laughter]

...whereas you could just log on. Like, it might have been a different situation if mobile communication had gone down completely. Eh, in which case then people would be forced to rely on these, but that wasn’t the case.

Uhm. This, now, you kind of touched on an issue which I would like to ask you about. In terms of power and connectivity, again maybe because of your professional experience it wasn’t an issue, but did you feel that was something which prevented communication?

How do you mean?

Uhm, for example, battery, batteries running out, running out of power, or...

Yeah...

...ehm...

...yeah.

...or, you know, phones didn’t, obviously you mentioned that the data worked but the, the.

Yeah, a lot of, we couldn’t really rely on, eh, and I think it was just because of the sheer demands that was being placed on the system rather than any technical issue...

Yeah

...but, em, mobile, like, voice and text were very unreliable...

Yeah.

...eh, the data was fine. Eh, we, certainly I, used a lot of little wind-up mobile chargers...

Oh.

...and, you know, Japan is great - you can go into a conbini [Note: abbreviation of the Japanese for convenience store] and buy, like, two AA batteries in a little mobile phone - I don’t know why they don’t do it here, but anyway...

They’re a great idea [laughter].

...fantastic, you know, a couple of Euro and really saves you. You can buy them anywhere. Eh, and, you know, but obviously the conbini sold out of absolutely everything in the days afterwards, eh, but that kind of stuff was really handy.

Yeah, absolutely. Eh, I think those, I, I, I asked the same question - why don’t they have those little battery packs [laughter]?

I don’t know. I don’t know. I’ve oft, I’ve asked myself many times to save myself the hassle...
Yeah...

...but, eh, I don’t know.

...and the wind-up thing, I, that’s a really good idea.

The wind-up is good, yeah, yeah. Eh, solar chargers for batteries as well, you know, that’s, that was all useful, but, yeah.

Yeah. It, based on the people I’ve spoken to, it hugely depended on the area you were in.

Yeah, yeah. I could imagine, like, we had JET students [Note: JET is program to employ foreign workers (mainly teachers) run by the Japanese government. JET is short for the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program] who were, ehm, you know, in very remote areas who would have had big issues with connectivity and power and what not, ehm, so.

Yeah, ehm, I know some people used things like, em, maybe if they had a car...

Yeah, plug it into the car, yeah.

...they were able to just plug it into the car, you know switch the car engine on or whatever...

Yeah.

...but then you run out of the fuel so, like...

Yeah.

...it’s, I think, in, if people are going to develop these communication tools, they also need to have the other sort of infrastructural things working as well.

Yeah, yeah, no, absolutely. Eh, so, but, the availability of those little conbini chargers is something that’s, you know, would be very, they, I can’t imagine they cost very much to produce, so.

Yeah, maybe that could be a recommendation for this project [laughter].

Yeah, set up a startup company...

Yeah, you never know [laughter] I’ll get on to.

Oh, it’s recorded [laughter]...

Yeah, [laughter] I think it’ll be another Facebook or something...

...yeah.

...we’ll have a fight. No, but, eh, I’ll leave it to you, you’re the man with the [laughter] contacts. Eh, now this is slightly a, a different view on the topic but, eh, just in terms of you as a person who was a foreign national living in Japan, again, your professional experience may have affected this in some way, did you feel that, say, your local authorities where you would have lived like the Ward Office or the Government Office, did they communicate with you after the disaster?
Ehm, again, and I think I was aware of this but it probably wasn’t really too, you know, in my conscious too much...

Sure.

...em, they did send around information all right, ehm, you know, in relation to where your emergency centre might be and, you know, the provision of supplies for people that, you know, maybe their building had been damaged or, you know, whatever, ehm, ehm, I think it was relatively well organised. Now, having said that, I lived in Minato-ku [Note: a part of central Tokyo with a large number of high-status foreign residences] so high percentage of the population would have been foreigners anyway...

Yeah.

...but I think they were definitely, probably taking that into consideration, you know, I got bilingual material, you know, so...

Oh that’s, bilingual you mean Japanese and...

...and English, yeah so...

That’s interesting.

...I’m not sure other kus did that [laughter] [Note: a ku is a ward of Tokyo - essentially wards are independently incorporated cities of the Tokyo Metropolitan Area]

Yeah, I lived in Chuo-ku and ...

Yeah.

...received nothing, so.

Yeah, also, I think, you know, Minato-ku was probably very aware of the fact that a lot of, the, you know, a lot of embassies would have been in Minato-ku so they were hopefully increasing their visibility.

And when you say you would have received the information, would that have been, like, a flyer through your door?

Yeah, they were mad into flyers…

[Laughter]

...you know, for everything, so, yeah, you get the flyer in under your door or into your postbox.

But not necessarily an email or some other.

No, no.

It was more.

Do people get emails in Japan?
Exactly [laughter].

If it’s not on paper, it doesn’t count.

Right, and stamped.

Stamped, yeah. And faxes.

Yeah. They still use faxes?

Yeah, we used to get a daily fax in the aftermath of the earthquake from the Japanese ministries…

Wow.

...reams of paper would come in on fax.

Wow.

Yeah.

I wonder, yeah, I guess that means that if you work in an embassy over there, that technology can’t become obsolete for you because they are going to...

No...

...you have to,

... we would be completely reliant, like they rely on fax for everything.

That’s fascinating.

Yeah.

But again, one thing I would say is when I came in to propose this project, I was very focused on technology...

Uhm.

...I had ideas of new media and all this kind of thing. But, you know, traditional things like radio...

Yeah.

...which I might have said was obsolete before I looked into it, that turned out to be incredibly useful.

Yeah, no, it’s, em, I think, obviously, like any portfolio, diversity is the key, so, ehm, you can’t really turn your back on outdated or outmoded methods of communication because often the technology they rely on is so simple, they tend not to fail. Like, if radio communications go down, it’s probably, you know, definitely verging on, you know…

[Laughter]

...catastrophic…
Just…

…yeah…

…Japan will sink.

…it will just implode whereas, you know, data and mobile technology is quite fickle, relies on a lot of infrastructure and, you know, things can happen.

That’s a really nice way to put it - diversity is key. I think I’ll probably…

[Laughter]

…be using that, if you don’t mind, but, em, going back a little bit to the idea of where you lived in, in the centre of Tokyo and that, em, one of the recommendations that, em, var, various local authorities and NPOs have made is about the idea of making, I guess, foreign nationals feel more part of their communities…

Uhm.

...in Japan. Ehm, because in a big disaster, like, say if the earthquake had been centred on Tokyo, the theory is the first people who’ll help you are actually your neighbours…

Yeah.

...the people around you. Ehm, so first of all, can I ask, again in a personal capacity, did you feel part of your local community?

Ehm, no. Ehm, rarely. Every now and again I would bump into, you know, people who would live in my building and there would be the usual courtesies, but, you know, I can’t say that I would have ident, I’m not sure they would have been my first port of call in a disaster…

Right.

...you know, my network of friends would have provided that. I think that’s similar for most expats. Ehm, I think, quite frankly, the biggest issue, eh, for expats in Japan in feeling part of the community is language. And if you don’t have the language. I assume you didn't, are not proficient enough anyway, em, that’s a huge, huge barrier. Because a lot of Japanese people, even though they might have a decent enough level of English, won’t necessarily communicate with you in it...

Yeah.

...and that’s a big problem. And a lot of expats don’t really take the time. It’s a huge commitment…

Yeah.

...to learn Japanese to that level, and a lot of them don’t need to as well, you know, with, you know, a cursory knowledge of the language can be quite sufficient sometimes but…

Yeah.
...it’s not, it goes be, beyond I think the language as well, I have friends who do speak Japanese quite well and who, for a more authentic Japanese experience, moved from Tokyo out the country and, em, you know, they found it quite difficult as foreigners being isolated from, I suppose, the safety of the metropolis that’s Tokyo, trying to integrate into the local community and, you know, and they were quite active and, you know, would have been quite friendly and still found that barrier and it’s, you know, it’s, eh, it’s, it is a cultural thing, and, you know.

What do you think that barrier is or how does it come about? Do you have any idea?

Ehm, I’m not really sure wh, how it comes about, but I mean, like, Japanese society is drastically different to, I suppose, our concept of Western society, and I don’t think Westerners or expats give due allowance to that whilst living in Japan. You know, in a lot of ways they probably go, “That’s very backwards,” in the sense of doing things by fax or the over-reliance on huge wads of cash, or having to spend two hours at the bank to do some transaction, whereas this is part of daily life for Japanese people, and you, kind of, have to, if you live in a foreign country, you have to accept the norms and values of the society you’re living in, if you want to integrate...

Right.

...if you don’t, that’s fine. Eh, you know, live within the expat community, and go about your business. But if you do want to integrate then you, kind of, have to, it’s you that has to change…

Yeah.

...it’s not the society…

Yeah.

...em, there’s a little bit of meeting half way, but, em, or even meeting a quarter of the way, but, you know, in a sense, you know, living in the countryside in Japan is a different ballgame to living in the city where Japanese people who are familiar with foreigners, like, whereas in the country you would be stared at.

Yeah [laughter]. Right, yeah. Routinely.

Routinely.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And just to get back, you mentioned a, kind of, a circle of friends would have been your first...

Uhm.

...point of contact if there had been, say, if the earthquake had been centred on Tokyo. Would those people be from the expat community?

They were, yeah. Yeah, yeah. Ehm, one particular friend of mine, ehm, I actually went to college with her, she lived, em, about an hour or so away, eh, from Tokyo, but she was in Tokyo when the earthquake, and obviously all the trains went down so, you know, she came over to me, stayed in the embassy and then, you know, we went back to my place when it had been cleared for structural damage. Ehm, and she stayed with me, then for, like, a week or two afterwards so…
Oh, wow.

Yeah. It was just the trains were so unreliable that had she gone back out to where she lived, she might not have been able to get back in and then would have been stranded on her own so, you know, that wasn’t a good situation, so.

Yeah, so again, like, your, it is true that your first port, you know, the people who help you in a disaster are your, sort of, friends or close ones but not necessarily...

Yeah.

Yeah, whichever community you have, like, you know, integrated yourself into, so be that the expat community, which, I know, they all helped each other...

Yeah.

Yeah. That’s really interesting because this is one, as I said, one of the, kind of, recommendations that these NPOs and, em, local authorities are coming up with, but just as a person who lived in Japan as a foreign national, a little bit of a warning light went off in my head and I went, “Hmm, I don’t know it’s, it’s that easy to, to break down those.”

No, I don’t think it is. I think it varies widely where you are. I mean, like, if you take the example of Minato-ku in comparison with, just pick another ward in Tokyo, they are vastly different, eh, in their approaches and, you know, different wards are more open to that type of an approach than others...

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah.

...to begin with, in my experience, so there is, but also, the expat community tends not to want to integrate. You know, a lot of expats in Japan are there for a short time...

Yeah.

...they’re there to fulfill a contract or to gain experience in the market and then would be moved elsewhere or will move elsewhere, and that’s always there. Eh, which is a barrier to integration, obviously, you know, if you are only going to be there a short time, the investment isn’t worth the, the, the payback.
Absolutely. I think as the project progresses, one of the things I am going to have to be quite clear about is maybe the difference in terms of when I say foreign nationals in Japan, I mean, if you were just a business person who just happened to be in Japan on a business trip...

Yeah.

...when the disaster happened, or if you were somebody who lived there a long time and had maybe family or something, your experience would likely be very, very different, I guess.

Yeah, I mean, like, massively different. I mean, like, you would come across situations whereby you would have businessmen who might be in Japan only a short time, be it just a couple of days, or a week, or a couple of months, or whatever. Or even people who might have just been there a year who had an immediate panic reaction and sought to get out of the country immediately with their families...

Yeah.

...saw that quite a lot, as opposed to people, Westerners, who would have been, em, in the country a little bit longer and who were a lot less panic-orientated. Eh, you know, obviously, then, I think there’s a big difference between the Western foreigner and the Eastern foreigner...

Oh.

...because there are so many Chinese...

Yeah.

...and Asians in Japan that, I, certainly, my experience was their reaction was maybe less, was more of a measured.

That’s really fascinating. And in terms of translation studies that’s really fascinating, too. You mentioned getting, you know, bilingual literature from your ward...

Yeah.

...but that would have been Japanese and English. Perhaps they also provided other languages, but.

I’m not sure, eh, I don’t know if that applied. There wouldn’t have been a big demographic of other nationalities in my area that I could have seen. Eh, and the cynic in me thinks that they’re obviously creating a, a, you know, a visibility amongst, you know, that, that area. Eh, a lot of the Chinese people would speak Japanese...

Right.

...so…

Right, right.

...at least would understand…

Yeah.
...yeah, which makes a big difference.

Yeah, that makes, that does absolutely makes a big difference. In terms of, sort of, moving from, I guess, the - I know you said that the disaster hasn’t necessarily finished and I absolutely agree with you there, but - there was a move from, sort of, the response phase...

Uhm.

...to the recovery phase. Ehm, were you aware of any efforts, sort of, national efforts to move towards recovery, ehm, like to get the country facing towards a recovery direction?

Ehm, you see, I left Japan in July.

Okay.

So that window between March and July was still very much a response phase...

Yeah, yeah.

...because Fukushima was still rumbling on...

Crikey.

...and, so from my perspective it hadn’t really switched, though I do recall, like, watching the media in the months after I’d returned to {my home country}, and, you know, it had, kind of, you know, kind of, sort of, moved itself slightly towards recovery at that point

Yeah, because, ehm, this is just another, kind of, element of research going on, ehm, there were lots of slogans, ehm, that were used in Japan to kind of, I guess, get the country together and get the country moving. I’m just interested to, to see if any foreign nationals were aware of these, kind of, campaigns that were going on. They were part of, sort of, the Japanese discourse at the time. It was in the media or, you wouldn’t, you didn’t?

None that sticks in my head, no, but I think it’s an interesting comparison from a sociological perspective as to the Japanese mentality. You look at their war, post-war mentality and how they reacted to the aftermath of the earthquake, I think there would be striking similarities, mobilising the national rhetoric, ehm, which is something they’re very good at.

Yeah, eh, one, one of the big, sort of, slogans was this Gambare Nippon...

Uhm.

...and you’d just see gambare, gambare everywhere, and you know that is, kind of, that notion of, eh, slightly, slightly hardline but, you know, ...

Uhm.

...kind of, get on with it or let’s move forward and...

Yeah
...all of that kind of thing, so, that’s a really interesting parallel that, but again because
I’m coming from a translation perspective, I’m interested in the, would translating those
type of slogans into other languages have any effect?

Ehm, on the foreign population in Japan, I’m not sure. Ehm, I think it loses, it doesn’t
really translate into our parlance, you know, ehm, it’s more of a cultural thing than a
language thing, and, eh, you know, if you were to tell, if a similar disaster had, you know,
happened in {my home country, I’m not sure the population} would react to “Okay,” you
know, “get on with it!”

[Laughter]

Ehm, there would be a period of moping required…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so, ehm, but, you know, that’s, they’re different mindsets, so.

That’s really interesting because again this is a theme that’s come up with all of the
people that I’ve talked to that whenever I talk about language, that’s one thing, but
culture comes up time and again as something that you can’t, kind of, ignore, so, you
know.

Yeah, developing responses to, you know, how people communicate in Japan, I think the
culture is such a huge part of it, and the language itself is completely haunted by cultural
norms and values…

Yeah.

...and there’s just no escaping that. Even Japanese people themselves are, you know,
sometimes terrified of using the language because, you know, it has so many nuances and
interpretations and status and hierarchies and if they are put into situations whereby a
level of interpretation or translation is required at say ministerial or prime-ministerial
level, that can become very intimidating…

Yeah.

... ehm, and, whereas we wouldn’t have that in English, for example, so.

Yeah. And again this is not necessarily in terms of the disaster, so in terms of your
personal, professional, did you have to use translators or interpreters a lot as part of
your general work? Would that have been something that you were, kind of, regularly
interacting with?

Ehm...

Again, if you don’t want to.

...yeah, we would have had to use, just by virtue of doing business in Japan…

Yeah.

...or in any country, no matter which country you’re in, ehm, you know, the, if the, if
{your native language} isn’t the operational language, you have to work through a
translator or an interpreter…
Yeah.

...and that’s just, that’s just part of it. Ehm, at official level, in terms of, you know, ministries and certain wards like Minato-ku, you would have had officials there who would have been completely proficient and very comfortable...

Right.

...and would communicate with you in English and that wouldn’t be a problem. But at other times, especially if you were dealing with local government, ehm, local government services, you would have to go through an interpreter.

I see, I see, so it, kind of, again depends on the, where you’re talking or who you’re talking to.

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, like, personally, you know, when I went to set up my bank account and set up my, you know, utilities and my mobile phone and all the palaver that goes along with that...

[Laughter]

...eh, you know, I would have brought someone with me who spoke Japanese because there was no way that that, that I was going to manage that on my own, so.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Ehm and then just, kind of, as a general, final question, is there anything that you would like to add or anything that you, kind of, has struck you since we’ve been talking that you might think would be relevant or?

No, I think we’ve had quite a wide-ranging discussion there. I think the one thing I would say is, you know, language on the face of it is one thing but it can’t be held in isolation to the cultural, the culture that informs the language...

Uhm.

...because that’s how you interpret, that’s the medium through which it’s interpreted and Japan which has such a vastly different culture to Western society that can be a barrier even if you are very proficient in a language...

Yeah.

...eh, the two go hand-in-hand...

Yeah.

...and that was a big factor during the disaster without a doubt.

Yeah, oh I’m really thankful, so very thankful to you for em, talking...

No problem.

... to me today. There’s only just one other element to the interview. This may not apply to you at all, but I’m asking everybody, em, because sometimes talking about a disaster is bringing up feelings or, you know, reliving experiences or whatever, I just want to make sure that I haven’t increased anybody’s anxiety, so if I could just ask you to [Note: I pass
the participant the Likert scale about stress to mark and he marks 0/10 without any hesitation] okay that’s fine [laughter].

Yeah, no, no problem. And, then like, I was, I was very lucky, eh, no-one I knew had been directly impacted by the disaster and no-one in the {community of nationals I was supporting} had, thankfully, you know either. So from both a professional and a personal perspective, you know, I did and - yes, okay so it was deeply unpleasant - but it wasn’t from my perspective traumatic and, you know, I don’t have, well, having said that, I mean, like, in the aftermath of, for, you know, a good, definitely, couple of months anyway, you’d have phantom tremors, eh [laughter]...

Yeah!

...but I don’t think I lost any sleep over them.

That’s fascinating. That was one of the things that I really struggled with, ehm, so I was in Japan for the disaster and then I had a holiday already booked in the Golden Week [Note: a period of several public holidays that fall around the same time in April, May when many Japanese people take a vacation] of that year, so that was like the end of April, beginning of May...

Yeah.

...I came back to Ireland, and every time a bus went by or...

Yeah, phantom tremors.

...I was like, “Oh my goodness”...

Yeah.

...even though I knew I was in Ireland it really, that stayed with me for quite a long time.

It stays for quite a while. I think you are just hypersensitive to it…

Yeah.

...and, em. knowing so soon after the earthquake that tremors or very large tremor which could be just as devastating if they were on the mainland, ehm, you know, so, I think…

Yeah.

...you were very aware of it.

And you [returned to your home country] in July, did you find that you still, kind of, kept one eye on what was going on or did, you know, did you just have to, I mean, as part of your job obviously you have to get used to a new environment?

Ehm, I definitely, kind of, drew a line under it and moved on, ehm, but I think that would probably be part of my personality any way in any case. We move around so much that you, kind of, can’t really hold on to what you’ve just come from. Especially if you’re, you’re in a situation where you have to adapt to a new role…

Yeah.
...ehm, also {returning to your home country}, you’re kind of reigniting your life {there} and, you know, it takes time, so I tended not to focus too much on it. Obviously I keep in touch with people in Japan…

Sure, sure, sure, yeah.

...I didn’t really concern myself...

Yeah

...too much with what was happening...

Yeah

...because, just, there was enough {in my home country} to keep me occupied

Oh, absolutely, I can imagine. Well, once again, just thank you so much.

Yeah, no problem.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/9/18 Interview with Participant 4

Researcher: Okay. I think that’s it for all of the paperwork.

Participant: Cool.

So, then, ehm, basically, if [Note: the researcher stops mid-statement and hands one of the signed copies of the informed consent sheet to the participant] I will give you that one...

Okay, yeah.

...so basically, if I, I sent you the questions, if you had a chance to look at them...

Had a little look through...

...okay, so basically...

...yeah, yeah, very brief look through, to be honest with you.

No, no worries, ehm, if you just start by just telling me...

Uhum.

...about your experience, and we’ll go from there.

Okay, so it was, eh, March 11th [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...2011, I believe [laughter] ehm, so I was at home, eh, when the earthquake struck. So, eh, it was a Friday, and, ehm, it was getting towards the end of the time for filing tax returns, and I, I’d filed my taxes that morning, and then I was at home, and, eh, I think at the time when the, eh, apartment started shaking, and where I live, as, as you’ve seen, it’s, ehm, a two-storey wooden, ehm, apartment building, quite small. Ehm, so I was at home sitting on the sofa, and, eh, I was watching, eh, a program on my, on my laptop. I was watching Peepshow [laughter] [Note: this is a UK comedy series]...

[Laughter]

...and, ehm, so anyway [Note: the participant briefly covers his face with his hands] the, eh, the, eh, place obviously started shaking and at first, I think just, eh, maybe two days or three days before, eh, this earthquake, of course, there, there had been another earthquake and [I was in my workplace in the centre of Tokyo] and that, that one a couple of days before, ehm, it was certainly big enough to, to feel, and, eh, you know, a bit of a warning maybe, but because that had happened a couple of days before, anyway, I thought, “Ach, this is the same again. Nothing to worry about.” Ehm, but, eh, yeah, the earthquake, of course, it, eh, it kept on going, it, it didn’t stop, so, ehm, and it kept on getting stronger, and, eh, so, eh, yes, I remember closing my laptop and, eh, then, eh, taking refuge, eh, under the, under the desk in my living room. So I had been in the living room all the time, and, you know, I just, eh, went under the desk in the living room. And,
ehm, so, eh, yeah, the, the apartment was shaking quite a lot, em, you know, it was very noisy as well, and, em, there were, eh, eh, things falling off the bookshelf, ehm, the TV was shaking very vigorously as well. I thought it would, I thought it would come, come off its, eh, eh, the table, ehm, but, eh, that was okay. Eh, also the bookshelf it moved, I don’t know, maybe it moved about, eh, five inches, you know, from where it had been as well. So yeah, a lot of things, em, fell off the bookshelf, and so on. Ehm, so yeah, the experience itself, it was, it was very scary, ehm, and I don’t, I can’t remember how long the earthquake lasted. Was it, was it nearly two minutes or something?

Yeah, they say somewhere between two and three.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, anyway, it, it felt like an eternity. It was very, very long. Eh, so, you know, when, when the shaking stopped anyway, you know, I just, you know, just walked around the apartment and, eh, just to see what kind of damage was done. I think the, the worst damage was the bowl, the bowl had fallen off the, the, the kitchen sink and it was, it was broken. That was about the extent of the damage. But yeah, I mean, eh, a few things had fallen, em, just, oh I can’t remember, ehm, eh, books and so on, em, but no damage really. Ehm, so immediately anyway, you know, after it had stopped, eh, so I sent an email to {my wife}, eh, just to see if she was okay, and she got back to me very quickly anyway. Em, you know, she was, eh, over, oh actually in the building right next to here [Note: this interview took place in the Shinjuku Southern Terrace area], ehm, she was {redacted} on the, on the, I think on the 24th floor at work, and, ehm, eh, at that point, eh, you know, obviously the shaking had already stopped, but her building was still swaying. She felt like she was on a ship or something, you know [laughter] so it was, eh, you know, quite, I suppose, a different experience for her. Ehm, so, yeah, anyway, we were able to communicate by email, ehm, I think, eh, I think I probably used my iPhone, eh, to send her an email and she was using the office computer, eh, to, to get in touch with me. And, ehm, yeah, so, quite soon after that anyway, you know, after, I, you know, we had [laughter] established that we were both safe, ehm, and she was staying put where she was for the moment, you know, anyway, she was, she was, you know, seeing what her colleagues were doing, and they all decided to stay put and so she, she did likewise. Em, but I decided to get out of the apartment, anyway, and I decided to head towards the, eh, towards the park, eh, {redacted} which is about, I suppose, about a ten-minute walk from my apartment. Ehm, I think I went there by bike. I can’t [laughter] remember exactly. Eh, and on the way, ehm, I remember, ehm, on the road, just, eh, just, eh, you know, two-hundred metres from, from where I lived there was some workmen doing some work on the road there, and, you know, they were just all sitting on the ground, and, you know, laughing and joking. I don’t know if they, well, of course they noticed the earthquake but [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...but they, eh, didn’t seem too concerned anyway. And, eh, then, ehm, I walked past, there’s this, this, eh, cake shop which is on the, on the corner of the top of the road, eh, and there were, as always there were people queueing up to buy cakes there. Eh, so just, I, I felt like, “Oh, am I the only one who noticed that?” You know, it really was, it really seemed that, eh, for me it seemed a very shocking experience, but life seemed to be going on. I mean, obviously, this is, you know, within a couple of minutes from my apartment, ehm, and, and, you know, maybe within five minutes of the earthquake or ten minutes of the earthquake having struck. Eh, but, eh, yeah, it seemed, “Uh, okay. Nobody’s panicking anyway.” Ehm, so, yeah, then I got to the park and I sat on the bench for a while and, em, eh, well, people were there walking their dogs, and so on. Ehm, I think, I, I noticed that, you know, maybe a few more people than usual were coming to the park, maybe for the same reason as, as, as I did, you know, they didn’t feel safe in their apartments, and, eh, they wanted to, to get somewhere which was open. Ehm, so, eh, let
me think, so I think about thirty-minutes after that initial earthquake struck, eh, there was
another very big tremor. Ehm, so, eh, yeah, about half-an-hour after. And, eh, so I was
sitting on a bench in the park anyway, and, eh, be, be, before it started shaking you could
hear rumbling a, as you could actually with the, you know, before the first earthquake as
well. Ehm, and, eh, the water in the, in the lake or the pond in the park started swaying,
ehm [laughter] it was, yeah, it was a very strange sensation to see, you know, this, this,
eh, water swooshing about. You know, I mean, it’s, it’s a reasonably big pond, so, eh,
quite unexpected. And all the, eh, the birds, the ducks, and so on, took flight as well, eh,
at that time. And the trees were shaking, so a very strange sensation. So, you know, I
mean, I experienced, like, the main earthquake indoors and then the second, eh, big
tremor outdoors…

Yeah.

...so it was an interesting contrast [laughter] but also very scary as well actually…

Yeah.

...the second one because I, I mean, it was, when, when you’re outdoors, it’s hard to
gauge just how big it is and, you know, I, I couldn’t tell at that time whether this was, was
bigger than the first one or, or whether it was, it was smaller, you know?

God, yeah.

[Laughter]

And so obviously, what I’m really interested in are things, like...

Uh.

...anything to do with communication or...

Yeah.

...information or that. When the first earthquake happened...

Uh.

...and you were in the apartment.

[Note: interrupting the question before it could be formed] Oh, I turned on the TV
actually! I did, yeah, yeah. Ehm, yeah, there wasn’t much information coming through
yet at that stage, you know, about the size of the earthquake and so on, but I did turn on
the TV. Yeah, obviously, every programme was, ev, every channel was focused on this
and, em, you had the map of Japan, you know, of course, with all of these areas, all, I
think, lit up, you know, warning about tsunamis, and so on, you know. But I can’t
remember very well about that now.

Do you remember whether you looked at a Japanese TV channel or another?

Oh it would have been Japanese, yeah, yeah, yeah. I’m pretty sure. I clicked through
various Japanese channels, yeah.

And did you have any other instinct to try any other type of information source? Like TV
was the first thing that came to your mind was it?
Eh, TV was the first thing that came to mind, yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

Ehm, yeah, that was, that was all, yeah.  

Because the reason I’m asking is obviously one of the big things...

Uhm.

...in the disaster literature...

Yeah.

...after this earthquake, a lot of talk has been going on about social media.

Of course, yeah, yeah. And yes, I mean, when I got to the park, eh, I put on Facebook that I, eh, had just experienced an earthquake, I, I can’t remember exactly what I wrote, just, em, you know, something maybe, “We just had a very big earthquake in Tokyo but I am okay,” or whatever, eh, so, and, and, a lot of people responded to that as well, just, em, you know, saying or asking, “Are you okay?” Ehm, or, “I’m glad you’re okay,” and so on, you know?

Yeah.

It was obviously in the, you know, this was very soon after the earthquake, so, you know, it hadn’t, eh, really got to the international media yet.

Yeah. And then, so, for example, you said that in the park, it was difficult to judge...

Yeah.

...how big the earthquake was...

That’s right.

...how did you start to find out about?

Well, yeah, I was there with my iPhone and I was checking, eh, all the news sources, mostly Japanese, ehm, because as I say, it hadn’t really, ehm, became a big story in the international media yet…

Yeah.

...ehm, so, yeah, I, I think, you know, I got to the park let’s say around 3pm, something like that, and, ehm, eh, I stayed there for two hours or two-and-a-half hours. It got too cold, eh, eventually, so I decided I had to go back to the apartment. It was getting dark anyway. Ehm, but, eh, yeah, I was there constantly on the iPhone, eh, just checking, ehm, eh, you know, the latest details on this. Ehm, and I think, eh, you know, what I, what I read was, like, you know, there had been an earthquake which had its epicentre near, eh, Sendai, ehm, I think I remember reading early on that the, em, the, that it was a magnitude 7.5 or something, but as we all know now it was a much bigger earthquake than that, you know. Yeah, and as well, in the park, I sent my mother a text, ehm, eh, you know, just reassuring her that I was okay and that {my wife} was okay as well. Em, and I
didn’t receive, em, a reply straight away, but it was quite early in the morning there. It might have been 7 or 8 in the morning time. Eh, and, eh, yeah, there was no immediate reply but also I kind of suspected that maybe it was a problem with the, em, text service as well, you know, SMS service. Eh, but, eh, later on anyway, when I got back to the apartment, em, using Skype I, eh, I phoned my, well I, I used Skype to phone my mother’s, eh, phone…

Yeah.

...and, eh, ye, ye, yeah, she, I mean, I think, eh, she still wasn’t aware of the earthquake at this, at this stage. I mean, she had seen my text, actually, but she, she, she hadn’t made it to, to the, I guess she hadn’t turned on the TV [laughter]...

[Laughter] Yeah. And then, ehm, so, one of the issues, like, is, what I’m trying to do is to see what information was available to people...

Yup.

...in the disaster...

Uhum.

...what information maybe was not available...

Yeah.

...to people in the disaster, so just more generally...

Uhum.

...in terms about the information that you could find...

Right.

...or the information that, that you couldn’t find but wanted, could you speak a bit about that?

Okay, so, so, I mean basically, you know, when I got back home, eh, around 5.30 in the evening, eh, so I turned on the TV and this was very shocking, you know, there was, there were pictures coming in of the tsunami, eh, hitting, em, Tohoku and, you know, I just, I was very shocked at seeing this. Eh, but, you know, I was able to get this information about what was happening and, em, you know, of course, the information was in Japanese, but I could understand it, so that, that was okay for me. Eh, later on, of course, em, there was information coming in about, eh, Fukushima, and so on, about the nuclear plant and, eh, you know, I wanted to get as much information about this as possible, I mean, I was very concerned about it. Eh, but, eh, of course, you know, I wasn’t familiar with all the Japanese vocabulary, eh, associated with that. But I think even if it was all, eh, relayed in English, I don’t think it would have been very, eh, [laughter] helpful either, actually [laughter].

That’s the thing, isn’t it...

Yeah.
...I mean, it was a learning experience for me. I heard words that I’d never heard before in English.

Exactly, exactly, yeah, I mean, it was just very unfamiliar territory.

Yeah, yeah. In general, were you aware of any websites or any other sources of information at the time?

Ehm…

Or subsequently?

...let me think, em, obviously I was using, ehm, Twitter, or sorry not Twitter, I wasn’t using Twitter at all [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I was using, I was using Facebook…

Yeah.

...eh, to, eh, see other people’s experience of the earthquake. Ehm, to see, you know, eh, how other friends, you know, to see , to see if they were okay and to see what they had written about their experiences, and so on. Eh, in terms of websites, ehm, I mean, obviously, I looked at the international websites such as BBC, and so on, but also Japan Today, the English language Ja, Japanese, eh, news website, eh, also, Japanese news sources such as the Yomiuri, eh, website, and so on. Eh, I think that was about it really.

How about from the Embassy?

Ah, okay, ehm, yeah, I can’t remember. Em, I’m sure in the days after the earthquake, em, the Embassy contacted all the Irish citizens in Japan, but I can’t remember about that. Can you yourself?

Yeah, I can. Em, so, I, I didn’t find any information outside through…

Yeah.

...I, I looked at Japanese TV like you…

Yeah.

...but a lot of my information came through work.

Ah, okay.

So, em, most of my decisions based on the disaster were based through work because that was the way things were done in a Japanese company…

I see.

...whether to come into work…

Yeah.
what, what, you know, was happening, because our company was based throughout the Tohoku Region...

Right.

...it obviously had a huge impact on our company...

Yeah.

...operationally, and because I worked in the Human Resources Division, I was involved in...

Yeah.

...the response, so everything information-related came either, for me, from TV news...

Yeah.

...or from, eh, work.

Right. I, I, I, from my own work, em, now, let me see, so, perhaps a day or two after the earthquake, I don’t remember exactly, ehm, one of the directors of the {place where I worked}, eh, he did send an email, you know, em, eh, just checking if I was okay, you know, ehm, but, I mean, yeah, there was no information as such coming from work. Now, like, regarding, like, the, the one thing obviously in the days after the earthquake that I was constantly checking on was, was Fukushima, you know, eh, NHK [Note: the Japanese national broadcaster] and the other Japanese news sources, other Japanese TV channels, constantly checking those, and, eh, also, eh, eh, checking the, em, I, I, I’m pretty sure the Irish Embassy, eh, I don’t know how long it took them, but they, they did, eh, eh, put, put up some information eventually, you know, about whether the situation was safe or not, whether to stay in Tokyo or to leave. And, you know, I checked, I checked, like, the British Embassy website, the French Embassy website, and so on as well, I’m pretty sure, yeah.

Uhum.

Yeah, but anyway, so, the earthquake happened on the, the Friday, and eh, so the next morning, so, {my wife} decided to stay in her office that night, and, eh, so we remained in touch the whole time by email, and, em, eh, she decided, oh yeah, so, she got home, eh, using the first subway the next morning {redacted} but I, I walked there to meet her, em, you know, we talked about the situation about, eh, especially about Fukushima and, eh, you know, I was very concerned about this, you know, obviously with the, em, having grown up in the time of Chernobyl, and so on [laughter] you know, eh, I’d, yeah, I don’t think {my wife} was as concerned about that as I was at that stage. But anyway, em, eh, so we got home early Saturday morning and from that stage on until Monday, eh, I don’t think I left the house once, you know, I was very concerned about the radiation...

Uhm.

...ehm, I think, eh, then on the following Monday, no, it might have been Tuesday actually, then, eh, we made the decision to get out of Tokyo, and we, we headed to, to {my wife’s} parents’ place in {redacted} Okayama [Note: located about 600 km west of Tokyo]

And in terms of making that decision...
...your information was based, your decision was based on information that you got from?

My decision was based on the uncertainty, really, there wasn’t enough solid information coming from Fukushima. Eh, I mean the reason that we decided to go there was that, because of concerns of radiation…

Yeah.

...eh, and there just wasn’t any reliable information coming through. I suppose as well, you, you know, eh, there was a lot of, especially I suppose on Ja, Japan Today [Note: the participant is referring to the online comment section of one of Japan’s main English-language dailies], and so on, there were a lot of comments coming through, you know, em, “Ignore the government advice. Get the hell out of there,” and so on, you know, eh, I think there was, eh, especially coming from abroad, a lot of people just saying, “You, you should leave.” Saying it was a very dangerous situation. Eh, yeah, especially on, you know, forums, and so on.

Yeah. That’s a really interesting topic for me...

Yeah.

...in terms of just this whole issue of information and communication...

Yeah.

...because what you are saying there is say in these forums...

Yeah.

...information can come from all over the world...

Exactly.

...so people outside of Japan could be, in some ways, getting information or...

Yeah.

...getting a different perspective, but that’s now being fed back into people in Japan...

Well, exactly.

...through English, right?

Yeah.

Presumably. Japan Today is an English-speaking...

Well, exactly...

...forum.
...ehm, I think, you know, from the Japanese media sources, ehm, it was a case of, “Don’t worry. Everything is okay in Tokyo. Once you are,” em, whatever it was, “more than 30km away from Fukushima, you’re fine. Nothing to worry about.” Ehm, so, but, you know, I was very, you know, suspicious about this information, especially, you know, when there was conflicting information, especially, coming from abroad, and it wasn’t just forums but also, let’s say as well, I mean, I was getting phone calls from, and, and, ehm, and emails from friends abroad, and also messages on Facebook, ehm, eh, you know saying, “You should leave,” you know, “Come home.” You know, I’d no intention of leaving Japan, eh, I knew that Okayama was far enough away, you know, but I, you know, ehm, yeah, several friends said, you know, “You should get out of there,” ehm, “this situation is dangerous.” Especially I had one friend, eh, friend from France, ehm, the French seemed especially, ehm, worried about it, and I think they moved their embassy staff out of Tokyo as well, em, if I remember correctly, and maybe moved them to Osaka or something, em, em, a few days after the earthquake. Ehm, so yeah, my, my, French friend, you know, he was especially adamant, “You should get out of there.” Yeah.

Uhm. That’s fascinating for me because that is an issue...

...in a disaster. What, what the disaster literature talks about...

Yeah.

...is in a disaster what you need is accurate, reliable, timely information...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and so, you know, one issue say with Fukushima...

Uhm.

...is, say, reliability.

Yeah, I mean, who, who, who could tell what was reliable, you know, it was just, em, a case of having to make your own judgement really...

Yeah.

...so, you know, o, o, obviously most people decided to stay in Tokyo, but, you know, not only foreigners but a lot of Japanese people as well were getting out of the capital so, ehm, yeah, I think, eh, at the time anyway, for my mental health, it was the right thing to do [laughter].

Absolutely, yeah.

Yeah.

How did you decide to come back?

Eh, actually, again this was, eh, you know, from watching TV and seeing how the situation in Fukushima was developing, and, so, they seemed, eh, I think, we, we came back, ehm, on the, so, yeah, when you think, so, we might have left, so the earthquake was on the Friday, and we went to Okayama either on the Monday or Tuesday, and then
we came back to Tokyo on the Monday again. And, eh, we made that decision because, em, according to what we were seeing on the news, things were under control, eh, things weren‘t going to get any worse anyway, it seemed, eh, according to, you know, eh, like, the government, according to, you know, the news which you could see on, on NHK, and so on.

Okay. And did you look at, say, other news sources outside of the Japanese media to make that decision?

I, I‘m sure I did. I‘m sure I did, of course, yeah, yeah. Eh, and, eh, it, it, obviously, you know, there, there were still huge concerns at the time, eh, but, eh, you know, they were, eh, in the media at the time they were saying, you know, there was no risk of a meltdown, that the explosions that happened were just the, well, outer buildings not the containment vessels themselves...

Yeah, yeah.

...and so on, so, em, although it looked dramatic, eh, you know, the media at the time were giving the information which they had received from Tepco [Note: Tepco is the power company that ran the Fukushima plant] and from the government...

Yeah.

...that, eh, the situation was under control and, and there wasn‘t any huge danger, which I think, eh, it wasn‘t quite true!

[Laughter]

[Laughter]

Well, now, you‘ve actually touched on an issue that I do want to talk about, about a little bit...

Yeah.

...ehm, so if you remember, the first question I asked you was “Tell me about the 2011 Disaster”...

Yeah.

...I very cautiously and, sort of, specifically didn‘t say earthquake, tsunami, whatever...

Sure.

...I try to always just say the 2011 Disaster...

Ah, okay.

...because I‘m really interested to see how people define the disaster, especially in terms of time...

Right.

...so different people are talking about different periods...
Yeah.

...because it’s such a huge and complex disaster...

Such a complex one, yeah.

...that, for you, obviously, you talked about the day, like, March 11th...

Yeah.

...right?...

Ah, okay.

...ehm, some people barely mention March 11 and talk about, well, different things because they had a, a very different...

Yeah.

...experience. For you, when did the disaster end? If it has?

Oh, that’s eh, I suppose, that’s a pretty difficult question to answer really, I mean, em, as we know the situation in Fukushima is ongoing, ehm, there’s constantly radioactive water being released [nervous laughter] into the ocean, so, I, I, you know, in some senses I don’t think we’ve returned to the life that we had before, eh, in, in quite minor ways, you know, and just more cautious about the food that I buy and where I eat, and so on. But, yeah, I mean for me, the disaster is over, em, but when, when did it end, ehm, yeah, it’s, ehm, during, yeah, I mean, very much in the first few days after the earthquake, I really felt like I was living in a disaster. I mean, Tokyo wasn’t a disaster zone but, you know, it really felt like, oh, you know, “These are very worrying times.” Ehm, “We may have more earthquakes,” eh, which we did. None, none as, but as the, eh, as the, ehm [laughter] as March 11th, of course, but, em, eh, but the main concern, of course, was radiation.

Ehm, eh, and as I say, then we went to Okayama. Yeah, I suppose when we came back, let’s say nine or ten days after the, eh, after the disaster, after the earthquake, ehm, you know, I went back into work, back into, you know, living my life as normally as I could, ehm, but yeah, it’s very difficult to say when for me the disaster actually ended. Maybe a couple of weeks after.

Yeah. Oh, it’s an extremely difficult question to ask...

Yeah, yeah.

...and I also think for a lot of people, it’s, it’s different, just it depends on your experiences.

Yeah.

For me, I mean, as you know, I didn’t do very well after the disaster, I got, you know, a definite depression...

Yeah, yeah.

...and a lot of issues, I don’t know that I can blame it fully on the disaster...

Uhm.
...there was a lot of stuff, maybe, that the disaster brought to, to...
Yeah.
...to the front. So when I try to answer this question just for myself, it’s actually months.
Months, really?
Months...
Yeah, yeah.
...months, definitely. Eh, I would even talk as far as, kind of, six months.
Uhm.
I had a lot of problems...
Yeah.
...with the warning system [laughter]...
Ah, okay. Yeah, yeah.
...eh, so remember I was talking about, like, the accurate, timely, reliable information thing...
Yeah.
...do you remember all of those mobile phone warnings, like the sokuho [Note: this is the Japanese word for early warning]... 
[Laughter] Not very accurate [laughter].
Not very accurate...
Yeah.
...but they came, I don’t know, do you get them on your phone?
Yeah, I do. Ehm, now…
Do you remember, did they, did they come in the disaster for you?
...I don’t think so. I, I, I, I don’t think, ehm, I had that, so I was using an iPhone at the time, and now I think the, the latest iPhones, it comes as standard that, eh, if there is a, the early warning system does go off, em, but at that time, you had to download, eh, a special app for that, eh, which I downloaded after the earthquake [laughter] yeah…
So you mean after 3.11, like, you didn’t.
...yes, yes, yeah, look, I mean, before, before that I didn’t have, eh, that kind of…
Yeah.
...thing installed so, em, no, I don’t think I, I got any sort of warning [laughter] like that, no, no.

Can you remember is that app available only in Japanese?

Eh, oh [Note: the participant checks his current iPhone] so let’s see, ehm, I think it’s only in Japanese. The name is in Japanese.

Okay.

Ah, actually, no, it gives information in English.

Okay.

Yeah, yeah. So I don’t know about at the time whether.

No, but, eh, that’s really interesting...

Uhm...

...that, eh, like, that they are providing, sort of, multilingual...

Yeah...

...warnings.

...I, I, I think, now I don’t check this very often [laughter] ehm...

That’s probably a good sign [laughter].

...yeah, it is at this stage, yeah. Ehm, I think in the past, yeah, well, it certainly used to display it in Japanese...

Yeah.

...whether there was the option to display it in English, now, I don’t know but, now, em, maybe.

Do, do you know which company makes that app? Like, so is it a government thing or?

So this is ‘yurekuru call’. No, it’s not a government one, I don’t think. Now, I mean, it, it, there’s ads here, and so on...

Okay, so it’s like a...

...it’s a commercial...

...it’s a commercial app.

...one, yeah. But also on the iPhone now as standard, ehm, if I can find it here somewhere [Note: the participant checks through the settings on his iPhone] dah,dah, dah, dah, there’s a, a, an inbuilt thing, it’s not an app as such, ehm, where would it be?

General, maybe?
Yeah, where’s general? Eh, I don’t see it here. Eh, notifications.

*Ah, there you go. That’s probably it, is it?*

So, we have, em, emergency alerts…

*Ah.*

...yes, which I have on [laughter].

*And that’s in English?*

That is in English.

*That would probably be supported then in any language that you have your phone set to.*

I, I, I guess so, yeah, yeah.

*Because the reason I ask you about this is because I also had an iPhone, and I also had a work phone, which was a KD, KD, AU KDDI, em…*

Yeah, yeah.

...*clam shell. You know the flip phone?*

Right, right, yeah.

*The iPhone never sent me anything...*

Ah okay.

...*but the Japanese phone in Japanese...*

Yeah.

...*sent me these early warnings, and if you remember, there was an alarm...*

Yeah...

...*it goes boo-uh, boo-uh, boo-uh...*

...oh, yeah, I’m quite used to hearing those at this stage, yeah [laughter].

...*they traumatized me more than [laughter].*

[Laughter] Pretty traumatizing alright.

*Honestly, I think I actually have [laughter] PTSD about that sound...*

[Laughter]

...*because if we were in a big room like this...*

Yeah.
...all of the phones, not all, many of the phones would go off at the same time...

They would, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and if you remember, it’s, it wasn’t hugely accurate...

Uhm.

...sometimes it would warn for an earthquake that didn’t happen...

That’s right. Actually...

...sometimes it wouldn’t warn for a big earthquake that did happen.

...very, yeah, very, em, I don’t know unreliable system really...

Yeah.

...but, I mean, for example, I’m sure you’ve heard it already, but about two months ago, maybe, probably in July of this year, ehm [laughter] there was, eh, an alert sent to everybody’s mobile phone, whoever had the thing, you know, working, installed or whatever, ehm, apparently it was a big earthquake about to strike Nara [Note: a prefecture in the west of Japan far from Tokyo], eh, which in the end turned out to be magnitude 1 or 2 or something tiny anyway, nobody felt anything, but, eh, yeah, even in Tokyo, we were all getting these alerts and I actually ran out of the house at that time because, you know, I just, I just looked at the phone and it said, eh, I think it, probably, yeah, it was in Japanese, and it said, eh, “shindo 7” [Note: this means seismic intensity 7 which is the strongest possible intensity on the Japanese scale for measuring the shaking of earthquakes] so eh [laughter] on the Japanese scale, and I just saw that and I decided to get the hell out of the apartment, and, eh, then, you know, once I was outside, I just saw, “Aw, Nara! Ah, okay.” I waited a minute or so and realized there’s no shaking, it’s okay. I turned on the TV and then I saw, you know, they, they had a camera, live pictures from Nara, and I expected to see violent shaking, but nothing happened. It was just a big false alarm.

It’s a really interesting system...

Yeah.

...I think it’s amazing what they’re trying to do...

Yeah, yeah.

...but it clearly needs a lot of work.

It needs a bit of work alright, yeah [laughter].

I think, in, in, in terms of the potential for lifesaving...

Yeah.

...it, it could be huge, but it just is so, such a difficult thing...

Uhm.
...apparently, there’s two different types of waves...
Right.
...right? I, I can’t remember exactly, but, like, the P-wave and the blah-blah-blah-wave
[Note: P waves are followed by Shear waves (or S waves), which are followed by Love waves and then Rayleigh waves, and these do most of the damage in an earthquake] and...
That’s right, yeah.
...so they detect this first wave...
Yeah.
...which triggers the system based on the assumption that more waves of a different nature will follow...
Yeah.
...and they’re the waves which cause the earthquake, but they don’t always follow, just in nature, they don’t always follow...
Yeah, yeah.
...so it’s really, it’s tough.
It’s very tough, and I mean, okay, for me it was just, “Oh!” I don’t think I’m so traumatized that I [laughter] that, that I was getting a heart attack or anything, but it did, it did certainly scare me, but, you know, it, it shut down the shinkansen [Note: Japanese bullet train]...
Yeah.
...ehm, for a while as well, so it had implications, you know…
Yeah.
...and people could have been injured, I think, you know, em, from traffic accidents, and so on, because of this.
For me, you see, the reason I’m traumatized is I very clearly remember the, let’s say, first two to three nights you got...
Yeah, many aftershocks.
....and that alarm was going off fairly regularly...
Oh yeah.
...so I couldn’t sleep...
That’s right.
...and I think, I’ve often said, like, if anyone wants to ever torture me or anything...

[Laughter] Oh god.

...just deprive me of sleep and I’ll answer any questions you have. I think that’s it, I have this association...

Yeah.

...with being jerked out of, sort of, half sleep...

Yeah.

...by this alarm. Do you remember the aftershocks in?

Oh very much, yeah, yeah, there was so many, yeah, it was, eh, very frightening, yeah. Ehm, they were non-stop for a few days, really.

Yeah, apparently, I can’t remember the figures, I have it all written somewhere...

Yeah.

...we got like four-hundred-and-something aftershocks of a significant size in...

Something crazy, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...it was something ridiculous. I definitely was jarred, em, and I’ve talked to other participants about how...

Yeah.

...when a bus or something would pass...

[Laughter]

...and the doors would shake, I would be...

Yeah.

...in alert mode.

Really? Really? Yeah, I’m interested, em, on Monday this week there was a very small tremor, and so it was the typhoon at the same time. I thought there was going to be a double disaster, but, eh, I was at home and, eh, yeah, I think it was around midday or something and, yeah, my, my compu, my computer, you know, on the desk just started shaking and I realized, “Oh, we’ve got an earthquake here.” And, now it seemed like a small one, but immediately I turned on the TV to see what information was coming through, you know?

Yeah. It’s fascinating that, like, one thing that I think may be one of my findings is the importance of TV...

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...you’ve mentioned just in that conversation, I think you’ve mentioned three or four times that “I immediately turned on the TV.”

It was the main source of information, yeah. I mean I’m not going to turn on the radio [laughter], it was, it was the TV, of course.

Em, I think so, also, like, in terms of, do you remember we were talking about that warning system?

Uhm.

Apparently, you know, it is linked also to all the public announcement systems...

Oh yeah.

...throughout Japan...

That’s right, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...when you were, on 3.11...

Yeah.

...do you remember any sort of PA announcements? You said you were in a park.

Eh, that’s right. Ehm, um, so of course, there’s the public wireless communication system, and I, eh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think after the earthquake, ehm, there was talk about power cuts, and so on, and I think information regarding that was coming through on the public wireless system. I think, but I’m not sure, but there were never any power cuts anyway where I lived, ehm, I really can’t remember very clearly. And, you know, even just a couple of days ago when we had that typhoon, there, eh, there was, you know, this public wireless communication system, public announcements, you know, they were coming through, warning about, eh, flooding, and so on, so I’m sure, I’ve no doubt there were, you know, announcements being made, but I just can’t remember…

And...

They would have, they would have been in Japanese.

...that’s, that’s, kind of, what I was just about to ask...

Yeah.

...because, I mean, obviously two years ago, it’s difficult to remember...

Yeah.

...but seeing as it’s the same system...

Yeah.

...those typhoon messages, you’re confident were only in Japanese?

Absolutely, yeah, yeah, yeah.
Yeah. This is an issue because in, so say if you’re in the rural area…
Yeah.
...fair enough. But you live in Tokyo.
I live in Tokyo, yeah, ehm, within, eh, three or four minutes of where I live, I can think of, you know, about ten other foreigners living, you know, eh, in a suburban area. So yeah, I’m sure in the city where I live, there, there must be, you know, at least five- to ten-thousand foreigners living there, and yeah [laughter].

And, I mean, you’re in the position of speaking Japanese fluently...
Yeah, uhm.
...eh, would you say other foreigners are also in that position?
Of course, many aren’t, yeah. Ehm, we both know many foreigners who’ve lived here even for a very long time who don’t speak or understand the language very well, so, yeah,
I’m sure that many people would really struggle to understand those announcements, yeah.
Yeah. Ehm, I know how difficult these questions are because all the questions I’m asking you, I’ve asked myself...
Yeah.
...and I’m trying to remember...
Yeah, uhm, uhm.
...about the public announcement system where I lived in, in, in downtown Tokyo...
Yeah.
...I definitely remember announcements going off...
Yeah.
...they were only in Japanese. I couldn’t hear them right.
Look, I mean, this is one thing. Eh, you know, as I say, we had this announcement a couple of days ago during the typh, or just before the typhoon, and, eh, what, what I heard is omekaido, which is a road not far from where I live, but {my wife who is Japanese} heard it at the same time and she thought, ehm, what was it, eh, oamekeiho [laughter]
[Note: this means heavy rain warning]...
[Laughter]
...but she said yeah it really did sound like omekaido [laughter].
You see? Yeah, so, you know, even though...
Garbled.
...you know, we both, but also we both speak Japanese...
Yeah.
...maybe under pressure...
Uhum.
...or in stress of an emergency or disaster, it’s more difficult to understand...
[Laughter] I think so.
...a, a, a second language or a third language or a non-native language...
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...there’s something about receiving information in your own language...
Uhm.
...that, you know, I, I think there’s something to be said for it...
Yeah.
...I mean, I don’t know if one of my findings is going to be that we should be translating, I don’t know if that’s the case...
Yeah.
...but I know as somebody who speaks and reads Japanese...
Uhm.
...I didn’t trust myself.
Oh yeah, yeah, no, I understand that. Ehm, I think, even if it was in your native language anyway you just, you’re in a state of panic. I don’t think you catch everything. “Is that?
What was that?” You know? So yeah, when it’s your non, when it’s a non-native language, even if you [laughter] do understand it very well, yeah, it, it, it’s particularly hard.
Yeah, so, like, I mean, in that sense, I think there is something to be said for providing information maybe over different sources in different languages...
Yeah.
...there’s no one-size fits all.
There’s not, there’s not. And which languages do you choose as well, you see?
That’s interesting. Why did you say that?
Well, look, in, in the city where I live, right, em, there’s, eh, a, as in most, eh, reasonable-sized cities in Japan, there’s, eh, I suppose, what do they call it? Kokusaisenta or something [Note: it means international centre] and, eh, so they provide some, some help
for foreigners, they, they, they provide basic language, Japanese language classes, ehm, they have helplines, and they have, em, I guess, they have this, they have this, em, newsletter which comes out maybe once every two or three months, I’m not sure. Eh, but, eh, in, in this, eh, newsletter anyway they give information about, eh, you know, over-the-phone counselling available. Eh, of course, they have English available, they have Chinese, ehm, a, a, and several other languages, eh, but for some strange reason, they also provide counselling in Norwegian [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I haven’t got the faintest idea why. Who are all these Norwegian speakers? [Laughter] There’s maybe one guy in the city, one Norwegian in the city, maybe, you know, he needs a little counselling now and then, I don’t know [laughter].

Or else there’s that one Norwegian who works in the counselling centre [laughter].

Maybe he’s talking to himself. I don’t know [laughter].

That’s fascinating.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

The reason I, kind of, pounced on that...

Uhm.

...as an interesting topic is because, eh, there’s a question about whether using English is the best second language to be using in Japan.

Yeah, yeah. Well, I mean, well, obviously a lot of the, em, a lot of the, eh, foreign residents in Japan, you know, they’re from countries like Korea and China and Brazil, and so on, and many of the wouldn’t, em, wouldn’t speak English, I’m sure, so, yeah, which language do you choose?

Yeah, it’s a tough, it’s a very, very tough one.

Uhm.

I’m really glad that you mentioned that kind of kokusaisenta, like, the international centre...

Uhm.

...tho, those sort of NPO or...

Yeah.

...semi-governmental bodies are all throughout Japan. Do you remember getting any information from your city office or from any other NPOs or support groups or something after 3.11?

Eh, no I don’t. No. I don’t remember receiving any information. Eh, I mean, there’s, there’s, like, from the City Hall, there’s also a magazine in Japanese, I think that’s, it may be weekly or it may be monthly, I’m not sure, it seems to come fairly regularly anyway, eh, and that would have had information, you know, about the disaster after the fact, but
of course, all in Japanese. Ehm, yeah, I don’t remember getting, I don’t remember getting
any information from the city.

So you weren’t emailed or telephone or called on or?

No, no.

Yep. That’s consistent with…

Yeah.

...my other participants, so I’m not sure whether that’s a good thing or a bad thing...

Yeeeaahhh.

...em, as you know, as foreigners living in Japan we’re obliged to register...

Of course, yeah.

...with the city office...

And pay our taxes, and stuff [laughter].

...yeah, so there is, there is a database of information there.

Yeah, certainly, yeah, yeah.

But similarly, you know, I talked about disability earlier on, there’s a database of people living with disabilities...

Yeah.

...they also weren’t called on.

Really?

There’s legal, there were, they, this may have been sorted out now...

Yeah.

...but, as you can imagine, between city offices...

Yeah.

...there’s very strict laws ab, about privacy...

Very strict, very strict, uhm.

...so there was difficulty for different offices to know whether they were legally allowed to give out...

Are you serious?

...information. Yeah.
No, I just, I mean, privacy is important, of course, but look, I mean, let’s say, you know, when I was, em, when I was teaching in a university in Ireland, of course, I could obtain any student’s, eh, email address and contact them, but, eh, in the Japanese universities where I work, I don’t have that [laughter], you know. So, okay most of the universities, they have a {online portal} system, or something similar, you know, where I can send information to the class as a whole…

Yeah.

...but generally the students don’t check that anyway so.

Yeah. It’s, it’s, it’s tricky, it’s tricky, I know they have to find a balance...

Yeah.

...but for sure I know that if you are talking about layers of vulnerability...

Uhm.

...that having a database...

Yeah.

...of, say, people living with disabilities or who maybe don’t speak the language...

Yeah.

...that could be a useful resource for helping people after a disaster.

Definitely, yeah.

Another thing that I, I know exists now, because I’ve been studying them...

Yeah.

...say governmental websites...

Ah, okay, yeah.

...do you remember anything about that?

Governmental websites? No [laughter] not at all.

So it didn’t cross your mind to check...

No, I don’t think so.

...the ministry of? Yeah. No. Again this is consistent with a lot of other people. As it turns out, most governmental websites did provide some information...

Ah, okay.

...but not necessarily in a timely manner.

Uhm, right.
But it’s just interesting that, so far…

Yeah.

...just in the people I’ve people I’ve spoken to so far, it hasn’t even come across...

Right, yeah.

...their minds to, to, so, I mean, this is an example of translation being done...

Yeah.

...but for what end? Could those resources be used in another way?

Oh, some of this government information on government websites was actually available in English, in English was it?

Exactly.

Oh, okay. Never saw that [laughter].

Yeah. It was available in English, Korean, Chinese...

Right.

...Portuguese, but it, the point being that you didn’t, it didn’t cross your mind as a foreigner living here...

No.

...to check.

Checking the, eh, the embassy websites was, eh, yeah, that, that’s, eh, I suppose, eh, I suppose, coming from the Japanese side, I, I, I guess I thought I was getting whatever information was available from NHK anyway, and, eh, then for, you know, other opinions, and so on, I was looking at foreign media and, eh, and embassy websites, and so on.

That’s really interesting. I’m very fascinated by how you said that in your information from the Japanese side, NHK, the TV broadcasting, national broadcasting.

Yeah, it was the national broadcaster, yeah, yeah. And it just seemed anyway that, em, you know, whether it was NHK or Fuji Terebi [Note: a major private broadcasting company in Japan] or whatever, they were all providing the same information anyway, and it was, it was kind of a, it seemed, it was, eh, you know, it was no, there were no dissenting voices. It was all, “Don’t panic.”

Okay, okay.

That was my feeling, anyway.

No, no, that’s really, really interesting...

[Laughter]
...to me, because, you know, I am trying to think about how translation services could contribute...

Yeah.

...so, maybe a focus on making TV resources, Japanese TV resources available in languages is...

Now, that does remind me, alright, I mean, of course on the NHK news they have this fukikaeban [Note: this means dubbed version] where they do have simultaneous interpretation going on, ehm, eh, and I, I, I, you know, I’m pretty sure during the disaster time as well there would have been, if you changed that sub-channel, you could hear information in English, translated information.

Yeah. This is, this is something that I’m thinking about anyway...

Uhm.

...could be a, sort of, a focus [Note: the researcher covers his face with this hands briefly] for the study just because...

Yeah.

...as I said, in terms of translation that people might have been exposed to...

Yeah.

...of the people I’ve spoken to so far, TV is probably the only, like...

Ah.

...maybe that’s the only source where they’ve actually...

Yeah.

...had any sort of contact with translation.

Uhm. Yeah, I suppose, look, I mean, if you’re going to be looking for information in your, in your native language, you’re going to look for information, I suppose, from, from, you know, in my case, from websites from English-speaking countries, you know, so.

Yeah. Ehm, another thing that’s kind of linked to what we were talking just a little bit earlier about is the fact that from, you know, your instinct was to go to, say, embassy...

Yep.

...websites or embassy information. One thing that a lot of recommendations are being built upon is the idea of building stronger links in the community...

Right, yeah.

...between foreigners and their local...
Yes, yeah.

...Japanese communities. Did you feel or do you feel part of, no, let me ask you one question...

Sure.

...at the time of the disaster, did you feel part of your local community?

Certainly not, no [laughter]. Not at all, not at all. Eh, for example, eh, so in my apartment block, there were just four apartments, and so a, across the hallway from me, there’s a, a middle-aged family and their, their daughter who, I guess, at the time of the disaster might have been, she might have been around 10 years old or something. And, you know, they’re friendly, you know. We’ll say kon’nichiwa [Note: means hello] to each other, and atsui desu ne [Note: means isn’t it hot!] and, and, and what have you, you know. Em, and same if {my wife} meets them, it’s just small talk, eh, but, you know, they’re pleasant and they’re friendly, eh, but, you know, we really don’t know that much about them, you know [laughter]. For example, I don’t know the, the, the husband’s job or, or where they’re from originally or whatever. No idea. Eh, and then, eh, downstairs, so immediately downstairs from me, there’s a woman or possibly two women, eh, maybe sisters, you know, I’ve been living there for, how long? About three-and-a-half years, and I’m still not sure whether it’s one woman or two women who live there, you know. I have no idea what they’re called. Eh, you know, if I pass them, I’d say kon’nichiwa but they’re not partic, they’re not particularly friendly. Not at all, actually. Eh, and, eh, at the time then, in the fourth apartment, I’m not sure if, eh, yeah, I don’t think anybody was actually living there at the time...

Yeah.

...and then outside of the apartment block, eh, it’s a suburban area. Mostly, eh, eh, you know, families living in houses along the road and, ah, I don’t know any of them. [Laughter] Not at all.

If you were to try, if, if the government as a recommendation wanted you to be more part of the community...

Yeah.

...how would you go about it? What would work with you and {your wife}?

What would work? Eh, I don’t know. I mean there are local community centres, so, em, I don’t know who visits these community centres, you know, maybe it’s mostly the elderly, for example, I’m not sure. But if, if there were, em, yeah, if there were events going on in the community centre, em, you know, I suppose, to engage the community, you know, kind of a get-to-know-you session even, you know. Eh, yeah, I’m not sure if we would participate, but, eh, but, you know, that would be a start, anyway, if, if such a thing existed.

It’s, it’s, I’m asking you incredibly difficult questions here...

Uhm, uhm.

...because first of all, there’s the big city element...

Yeah, exactly, yeah.
...so in any big city it can be difficult to, to know your neighbours...

Yeah.

...but I’m trying to see if I can unpick the ‘big city’ element from the ‘being a foreigner’ element.

Yeah, yeah, it’s a really, it’s a good question. I mean, em, I really, I think, you, in Tokyo, yeah, it can be very difficult to get to know your neighbours. People don’t necessarily want to know each other. They want to, you know, maintain a certain distance, keep their own space, and so on. You know, for example, eh, the woman downstairs or the women downstairs, ehm, they’re not avoiding me because I’m a foreigner [laughter], it’s just they don’t, eh, they don’t interact with any of their neighbours, you know, this is quite obvious. Now, em, in my neighbourhood, em, eh, there’s, eh, you know, a lot of people who’ve been living there, eh, for many years. And I, I, I’m, you know, I’m sure they will know their immediate neighbours and they, they have a sense of community much more than we do, eh, but for, you know, for people who are, especially just living in an apartment, em, you know, I suppose not really putting down roots or, you know, people didn’t really see you as putting down roots when you’re just renting for a few years, or whatever. Now, if you were to build a house in the neighbourhood, I think, eh, you know, people would, em, make more of an effort to get to know you...

Yeah.

...and I guess if you were to build a house, anyway, you would make more of an effort to get to know the neighbours as well...

Yeah.

...I mean, for example, ehm, eh, a, a few days ago, our neighbours, eh, ehm, from one of the, from one of the neighbouring houses, they called around, ehm, to say that they were going to be knocking down the house and rebuilding, and they came around with a gift, eh, as is the Japanese custom, you know, just to apologize for the, for the noise and intrusion over the next few months while that goes on. Ehm, which was nice, you know, but, eh, now that we’ve seen these people, that they’ve called around, I’m sure when I pass them on the street, I’ll say kon’nichiwa, but, you know, will, will the relationship go any further than that? I doubt it [laughter].

No, I, I’m really glad you explained it in the way you did because what I have to be careful of...

Uhm, uhm.

...is that I don’t interpret, sort of, ‘big city’ lack of community for ‘you being a foreigner’...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...lack of community. But, I am conscious of the fact that one of the recommendations coming out of this is that, “Oh, we have to make foreigners a part of the community.”

Yeah.

I want to think about is that realistic.
Is there a community? [laughter]

Yeah. Yeah.

Uhm.

And, you know, that’s the sort of thing that sounds nice...

Yeah.

...but, okay, how do you make that happen?

Yeah, it’s pretty difficult.

Yeah. The other thing, em, which I did want to, sort of, ask you about, it’s more general now, this is not...

Yeah.

...your local community, but just in general were you aware of any kind of community-building or nation-building sort of slogans or campaigns or anything after 3.11?

No. No, I wasn’t. Not at all.

You don’t remember ‘Gambarou Nippon’ [Note: one of the slogans widely used after the disaster meaning ‘Let’s hang in there, Japan’ - other versions included ‘gambare nippon/nihon’ and ‘gambare tohoku’].

Ah, okay. Yes, on a national level, yes. Yeah, that existed, yeah. ‘Gambare Nihon’ and, eh, there was a slogan as well for Tohoku, ‘Gambare Tohoku’ or whatever it was, yeah, yeah, that’s true. That did exist, yeah [laughter].

Yeah. But you didn’t feel connected with it or?

[Laughter] Not really, no.

No, no, no, no. I’m, ju, the, again, I’m just trying to, there’s, you know, been research done about...

Yeah.

...kind of, how this was a, a game-changer for, sort of, nation-building...

Right, yeah.

...community-building in Japan. Maybe, maybe not...

Uhm.

...but, you know, long-term residents, are they part of that or not?

Yeah, yeah.

I’m not so sure.
[Laughter] I wonder, I wonder, yeah. I mean, em, like, that was, that’s my own experience, you know, I don’t have, I’ve been living in this neighbourhood for three-and-a-half years and, eh, I don’t really feel part of the community. But then, you know, eh, a five-minute walk away from me, there’s another Irish person and he’s been living there, eh, I think, I don’t know if he owns the house or whether he rents it, but, you know, he lives in a house as opposed to an apartment, ehm, and, eh, he speaks Japanese very well, ehm, I, I, he seems to very much belong to the community, you know. Ehm, you know, if he has a party, he will invite his neighbours, and so on, around, so, yeah, it really depends.

Oh yeah, like, I think, you know, it’s your experience...

Yeah.

...there may be other experiences out there...

Exactly.

...it’s just interesting to, to try and figure some of these things out...

Definitely.

...em, the other issue we haven’t really talked about...

Yeah.

...like, don’t, I don’t know your experience...

Uhum.

...but power and connectivity in terms of information and communication, was that an issue for you?

No, not really. Ehm, now, I, I, yeah, we didn’t have any power outages, you know, there was talk of that at the time, ehm, but it, you know, never affected us, actually.

Yeah. I think this, like, it’s, it’s down on my list of questions, but I think it’s really more for people who, maybe, were more directly in the disaster zone.

Yeah, yeah. Ah well, I think, like, outside of Tokyo alright, there may have been power cuts, let’s say, em, towards Yamanashi, and so on. I’m not sure, but I, I think there may have been at the time alright.

Yeah, yeah. I think, like, for most people, it wasn’t a big issue certainly...

Uhm.

...ehm, it wasn’t an issue for me...

Yeah.

...I was concerned a little bit about water, but that was for other reasons, that was Fukushima [laughter].
Yeah, yeah, me too. And it was all bottled water for me, actually [laughter].

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think that’s pretty much all the things I wanted to ask you...

Okay, right.

...today. Eh, yeah, that seems to be it. [Note: here the researcher glanced through his list of interview topics - as this was still only Participant 4, the researcher was not so confident about remembering all the topics he wanted to cover, and as this participant was a personal friend of the researcher, he felt comfortable openly doing this check.] Just, there’s one, kind of, final question...

Yep.

...this is more again, eh, to do with part of the research process...

Yeah.

...because we’ve been talking about disasters...

Uhum.

...I just wanted to make sure you feel okay about it, you don’t feel any extra stress or anything [laughter].

I think I’ll be okay [laughter].

So, like, could you, sort of, rate your feeling of, kind of, anxiety [Note: the researcher passes the participant the Anxiety Likert Scale sheet] just after talking.

[Laughter] Eh...

[Laughter]

...I didn’t feel anxious at all.

No, ehm, the reason I wanted to ask this is because, li, like...

Yeah.

...some people have answered differently [laughter] to you, put it that way.

Well, I mean, the only anx, anxiety I felt, because I mean I didn’t, I was, I was anxious in terms of, like, trying to remember, ehm, I mean, like, the, I’m fine with the disaster, you know, but trying to remember, oh, the communications, you know, and so on, but it’s all, yeah.

Yeah, trying to remember what happened yesterday is difficult enough...

[Laughter]

...never mind what happened two years ago. And as I said, like, any of the questions I’ve, kind of, been asking you, at first, I’ve asked myself, and I find them difficult to answer, so I understand.
Yeah, yeah, they’re pretty tough actually. Surprisingly, yeah.

Like, just in terms of, also, we’re, we have quite similar experiences...

Uhm.

...in that we’d lived in Japan for a fairly long period of time on and off...

Yeah, yeah.

...and we both are able to speak Japanese...

Uhm.

...sometimes it’s been difficult for me to remember, “Was this happening in Japanese or was this happening in another language?”

Yeah, you don’t really differentiate when you’re remembering things...

Yeah...

you know?

...yeah. There are some things...

Uhm.

...that were clear enough, I know for sure, like, I remember for me a really useful thing was watching the streamed NHK broadcasts...

Aw, right? Yeah, yeah.

...because they had, you know, the commenting function on the side...

Uuhh.

...and, like, it was all in Japanese...

Yeah.

...but I really used that as a main information source...

Oh, you did?

...remember how you were talking about...

Yeah.

...how forums, kind of, helped you...

Yeah.

...get ideas. I remember reading, like, I mean, I was, while I was watching the news...

Uhm.
...I was reading all of these comments that are, you know, it’s, it’s that, like a YouTube
comment function, it’s constantly, kind of, updating...

Aw, right, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and so I was, like, basing a lot of what I was feeling...

Uhm.

...on those things.

But you know, like, em, you mention, eh, how, you know, I found forums helpful. But I
don’t know if I really did. You know, there was a lot of conflicting information and a lot
of people giving the worst case scenario, eh, which, you know, I think caused a lot of
people anxiety. Em, now, obv, obviously, you want to know the truth, you want to know
the real situation of what is going on, and as it turns out, I don’t really think we got that
from the government at the time, but, you know, they were really giving, there were some
people, really uninformed people, really giving, eh, Armageddon-type scenarios
[laughter] which, you know, that, that just caused anxiety.

That’s very, I’m very glad you said that so explicitly because I think that’s important to
say that, in terms of, like, forums or social media, if we’re going to make a case for
translating them...

Yeah, you, you, you see the thing is…

...like, to be careful.

...you even had people in California who were really, really concerned about the radiation
coming over to them, I, I don’t know how far California is, but [laughter] I mean, it’s a
long, long way away, you know, and, like, “Oh my god, he’s in California and he’s
worried. I’m just a few, hundred-and-forty kilometres away in, in Tokyo,” you
know, so.

That’s very interesting.

Yeah [laughter].

Yeah. It’s, this is what I’ve been finding [laughter] all the time is, like, it’s so difficult to
think of what, you know, in terms of information, what’s the right level. When is it too
much? When is it too little?

Well, I mean, you know, Kan [Note: the prime minister of Japan at the time of the
disaster] after he, after he was, eh, well, he didn’t quit, did he? [Laughter]...

Right.

...after he lost his position as, as PM, ehm, he, eh, I think he admitted it, didn’t he, that,
eh, you know, he was very close to, eh, ordering the evacuation order for Tokyo, wasn’t
it?

Oh yeah, yeah, that was, that was on the cards.

Yeah, yeah, that was really on the cards [laughter].
So if we [laughter], yeah, you see, eh, like, as I, as I said, I’m kind of trying to bring everything I think about back to...

Yeah.

"Okay, so where does translation fit into this."

Exactly.

But that’s, there are some deeper problems that are, just in terms of a disaster and information...

Yeah.

...that have, how, kind of, translation is like another thing on top of that then...

Uhm.

...just, in terms of giving information in a disaster...

Yeah.

...it’s difficult to know what to give and what not to give, so never mind what to translate and what not to translate.

Exactly, exactly. I mean, obviously, you have to give the same information to the Japanese citizens as you do to the foreign...

Yeah.

...eh, residents here, you know?

Yeah. Ehm, like one part of me would love to go and talk to Japanese people...

Uhm.

...about their experiences...

Yeah, yeah.

...because I’d love to find out how many of them who could speak English...

Yeah.

...or another language were using foreign...

Aw, many, I’m sure...

...sources for information.

...many, many, many, yeah.

Unfortunately, that can’t be part of this project, because it’s just muddying the waters...
[Laughter] It would be, yeah.

...but I’m really interested, because I think that’s where technology has changed the game a little bit now.

That’s right, yeah, yeah. You know, I mean, you can just get information from everywhere now, well, as long as you’re able to, to understand it, so.

Yeah. And also as long as you have power and...

Oh, yeah, yeah, exactly...

...connectivity [laughter].

...so, many people didn’t, yeah.

Yeah, yeah. Those, those are the things, like, this is, one of the reasons why I wanted to talk to people from, from fairly broad geographical areas...

Yeah.

...is I want to see how those differences impacted on their experiences...

Yeah.

...so certainly, the people I’ve spoken to in Tokyo, power and connectivity wasn’t a big issue...

It wasn’t.

...but the people in the disaster zone, it was.

In Tokyo, the biggest issue really was getting toilet paper...

[Laughter]

...and batteries [laughter].

Ah yeah, batteries. That’s another key point. Let me just do a real quick check. [Note: here again the researcher glanced through his list of interview topics]...

Sure, sure.

...to make sure I’ve, kind of, covered everything. Yeah, I think that’s pretty much it. Cool.

Alright.

Well, listen, thanks again.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/9/18 Interview with Participant 5

Researcher: So, then, it’s actually down to the [laughter] interview part. Eh, I, I sent you the list of questions if you had a chance to look at it?

Participant: I just had a quick look over it, and I didn’t have too much time to look at it in detail.

Okay, so the first question I ask everybody is just to tell me a little bit about their experience of the 2011 disaster.

So, em, yeah, that day, we were in work and there was an earthquake. The first thing I remember, it’s, it was six point something in Ibaraki and that area, in Tokyo, it wasn’t actually that strong. I mean it was a big earthquake but, yeah, the office was shaking and there were some people who had the, the one-seg on their phones [Note: this is a special digital TV signal designed to broadcast TV over mobile phones in Japan], so you could actually see the pictures that came up on the TV later of cars, like, smashing into buildings, and stuff. Yeah, there was, kind of, a bit of panic, but here was no realization of just how big it was. Like the whole nuclear stuff didn’t happen until a week later or maybe a little after. So the work stopped there and then, like, lots of trains were stopped so a lot of people were planning to stay there that night. I actually heard some of the trains were still running, so I decided to, I was actually heading already out toward the Chuo Line and I thought, “If there’s not trains, I can’t go home.”

Uhum.

So I decided to stay at a friend’s house. They were staying in a dor, dormitory, and, ehm, we just decided to go drinking, because, you know, that, there was no realization of just how serious it was on so many levels, like, that so many people had died, you know? All we knew is there was a massive earthquake. And there wasn’t, there wasn’t anything more serious. But, you know, we had no idea, like. The numbers and stuff didn’t come out till later. So we went drinking and I saw up, up on the top of the screen it was like, “some train services have begun”. So I said, I’ve got to run. So I just ran to Shibuya and got the train home. And that was that day.

Yeah. So, obviously, what I’m interested in are issues about information and communication. You said you found out that the trains had stopped or were running, can you remember what language that was in, where you found that information?

Eh, at the time, {redacted} so at that time, work and home, the language was Japanese. Here you can see the JR status [Note: JR is Japan Rail] on the Internet and you can also, yeah, check your phone, and that’s all through Japanese.

Okay, and similarly then with, you know, you said about the TV?

The TV, yes, you know they have the, the, some sort of new information, they always scroll at the…

Yeah.

...that’s Japanese.
Yeah, yeah. And did you yourself have a one-seg?

No.

No. I didn’t even know what one-seg was until that day.

Ah, okay, okay.

Ehm, so also what I’m interested in is the idea of when the disaster and when the disaster stopped for people. So I noticed that you mentioned 3.11 - that day - so for you, when the disaster then end?

As I said, like, that day, it didn’t really hit in so hard that, that was the start and then as for the end, things got relatively back to normal - you know, there were days and days of updates about the nuclear plant, and that was very scary stuff, and, like, obviously my parents were worried - but it probably took about, that happened in March, I think the situation had calmed down July, as in my parents had, kind of, gone like, “Okay.” You can get toilet paper, you can get water - because, you know, there had been shortages up to that time. You know, whatever activities you might be involved in get cancelled, your work can’t go on for the moment because we have factories in Ibaraki. There was a lot of, yeah, just stuff, like, that all propagated. So it was probably a few months, yeah.

So several, several months, in other words. Ehm, obviously I’m interested in how you got information, that’s one, one area that I’m interested in, but I’m also interested in how you communicated with the important people in your life at the time of the disaster. Can you speak a little about that?

Yeah, eh, I, at the time, I was living with my to-be wife. So I couldn’t talk to her because the phones were all not working. Eh, so, I didn’t talk to her until that, she walked home from Shinjuku which is about a four, five hour walk. So I, eh, talked to her and she was able to talk to her parents on the mobile phone. I was able to talk to my friends around Japan, actually, for some reason, everybody was using Facebook. Yeah, I managed to get in contact with people through Facebook. And, em, family, I wasn’t able to use the Internet, so I think I emailed, I was emailing my family in Ireland. I was just emailing.

Did you have any trouble with the communication in terms of, sort of, power or connectivity or anything like that?

Inside Japan, yes. So everybody was basically communicating through the Internet, which was working at the time.

And power?

Power, yeah, there was some trouble, but not that much trouble because the company actually had a power backup generator…

Aahh.

...and, yeah, we had to use that a few times. But I don’t, yeah, things weren’t normal, but I don’t remember having a massive issue.

Yeah, I think really it depends on where you were located, ehm, so, you know, you mentioned that your company had, maybe, some plants or production facilities in Ibaraki. That might have been more troublesome...
Oh yeah.

...depending on where. But Tokyo, maybe, was relatively unscathed.

Yeah, I don’t remember, I don’t remember it being able to use the Internet at home and I
don’t know how long I was on holiday off work, actually, I think it was only a few days,
but. Sorry I don’t remember more.

Ah no, but, eh, like, I, I think this is one of the issues, you know, it’s two years, two years
have passed now so asking anybody about their experience two days ago [laughter]
never mind two years ago, memory is always going to be an issue, right? Eh, so just to
get back to, kind of, the idea of information rather than communication. So I know you
were getting most of your information in Japanese but what were the main sources of that
information?

At the time it was television.

Television?

I’d say 90% was television and 10% was Internet.

Can you be a bit more specific, like, about channels or websites?

Eh, channels, probably NHK [Note: Japanese national broadcaster], but I can’t be sure,
but it was NHK, I think. It was always the same channel.

Yeah.

Websites. There’s a paper available online in English, but I can’t remember what it’s
called.

Would that be the Yomiuri, maybe or the Asahi Shimbun?

No.

The Japanese Times or Japan Today, I know, are, like, more designed for foreign
nationals.

I’m not sure which one it was. There was only, I think it was the Yomiuri, you normally
pay, pay for articles, but they were actually free for that period so you could read all the
information that was going on.

Oh I see.

So that was actually pretty good. They, they had a lot of detail, but that was the one that I
went to for the nuclear updates, and stuff.

Uhm, uhm.

And I can’t remember if that was Japanese or English.

[Laughter] That’s what I was just about to ask! [laughter]

I imagine, a lot of technical stuff, it must have been in English.
It’s funny that you should mention that. I know that, for myself, I’m able to speak
Japanese okay but when, in terms of the nuclear, sort of, technology or some of the issues
that were talked about in Japanese, I didn’t even understand it when it was translated
into English [laughter] to be honest with you.

Like, there was one thing, the, eh, you know Japanese people are really good at
explaining stuff with diagrams. Well, they did that on TV, obviously. Regular people now
have a detailed, intimate knowledge of what the inside of a nuclear core looks like.

Absolutely.

You know what I mean, like, this, inside this part is this whole, is cooling what’s there,
and you have to have water here at all times and like, just, just, this kind of information,
the words, you find they’re using the same words, so then in that way I might probably be
able to read articles on my own where people are talking about, about the, “the nuclear
core and this it the, the rod, this is the,” and all this kind of stuff.

That’s absolutely fascinating that you should mention that because you’re not the only
person who I’ve talked to who has spoken about how good Japanese people are at
communicating complex information through diagrams.

It’s genius. It really is.

Yeah, and, also, it’s something that I’d never really thought about, but in terms of, like,
helping people to understand about, you know, I’m interested in disasters, obviously, that
means that maybe some sort of diagrammatic representation could be really useful as a
way for.

It’s very, yeah, I think it’s, like, most Japanese people would have been watching the
whole thing, and I think everybody at the time was understanding which part is now in
danger, which part is…

Yeah.

...that, that is a really good thing.

And did you, so, I, I know you said about 90% was TV, which again that tallies with
everybody I’ve spoken to, they’re all mentioned the importance of TV to them as an
information source, and you mentioned then about maybe 10% websites, or whatever. In
terms of the websites, were you aware of any websites designed specially for earthquake
information or disaster information?

Ehm, I only know one that it actually updates, like, all the time with all the, you know
the, there’s, like, frequent earthquakes in Japan all time…

Yeah.

...so they actually have the one website that just always updates with the latest
information.

And is that Ja, in Japanese?

Yes.
Okay. Ehm, so, for example, did you think of going to any government ministry websites or Irish embassy?

I think that the Irish Embassy updates didn’t happen for a fair bit of time. I do remember they sent an email about it later saying, “We recommend that people may want to leave Japan,” or “we’re already in Hawaii and you guys should think about getting out!”

[laughter].

[Laughter] Yeah, I know that some people have talked about, you know, embassies - not, not just the Irish Embassy - but embassies in general struggling with providing information.

Are you serious? Yeah, I, I think I remember my parents tried to get in contact through the embassy. Yeah, I, I’d imagine they were very busy.

Yeah, I, I think not just that I think the difficulty was the embassies didn’t have any information sources themselves that they could rely on, so, or maybe the had them but there was difficulty in assessing how reliable the information was. You also mentioned a bit earlier about Facebook and I’m interested in the topic of social media just in general. For you, was social media useful in the disaster?

Yeah. Eh, a lot of people are looking at it so, in the most, I don’t really use Facebook regularly, like, to, posting what I’m doing, but I often use it to communicate, especially at that time, I think I posted, like, that, you know, “That was crazy and I’m still alive everybody.” That information actually got through my sister’s boyfriend to my parents. That was the first link between me and my parents, so, obviously my parents - they do use Facebook now but - at the time they were not on, it wasn’t the type of thing that my parents would use. I mean, it was this sister’s boyfriend that told them.

That’s fascinating. Then, in terms of social media not for communicating with people but for getting information, was it useful?

Uhm, it was. I don’t remember the details. Yeah, yeah, because it was a year I had friends around the place…

Yeah.

...Tokyo was, Tokyo was not so serious but there were guys who had to go up to Sendai {redacted} but one of the guys was still up there at the time, and, eh, he posted a picture of a car over, what do you call it, over, like overhanging a bridge through the, the, and it was, like, across the road from him.

[Laughter]

That was the first time I, kind of, realized this is more serious in that area.

Yeah, yeah. Ehm, also, just in terms of, for this, ehm, disaster, what a lot of people, you know, a lot of people are now making recommendations for what to do in the next disaster, or before the next disaster and some of them, the Japanese government or Japanese NPOs are saying that we need to make foreign people feel more part of the community because, you know, a community pulls together in a disaster so, the Japanese people, the, the, these NPOs and governmental authorities think that foreigners need to be part of the community. Can I ask, did you feel part of your community before the disaster or after it happened?
By community, do you mean where I live, like?

*I guess, or however you want to define it. Like, what would you, how would you define it?*

Ehm, ehm, I think they’re quite good at, you know, letting everybody know what’s going on, what we’re going to do next, how that’s going to, like, work is very good at that. I, I think I did feel part of that work community. In terms of where I live, ehm, not, yeah, ehm, I mean, I think I know where the emergency centres are but I don’t think I’d feel a part of, I don’t know if anybody feels a part of that community.

*That’s interesting that you should say that, wha, why do you say that that I don’t think anybody?*

Ehm, is there a community spirit in Ireland? I mean, not, not much, and especially in Dublin. You know, in, in my area anyway, I’d say, there’s nothing, there’s no, there’s no reason for it to be otherwise.

*Yeah, I, I think that’s a very valid point, you know, is it just big city living, maybe it’s difficult to form, kind of, community bonds. Perhaps if you were living in a small town or small village, you might have a different experience in general.*

Yeah.

Yeah. And similarly, maybe, that’s true of Japan, that’s also probably true of Ireland as well. I know in Dublin, I don’t know any of my neighbours.

For some reason, I do actually know my neighbours now. I didn’t at the time.

*Yeah. The reason is, I guess the reason that these, ehm, NPOs and so on are trying to make this a recommendation is because especially in the Kobe earthquake, but also to a certain extent in the 2011 earthquake, the first responders are usually neighbours or passers by. So, the emergency responders will get there are soon as they can, but often a lot of lives are saved just by the person living beside you, so, they’re hoping that by, I guess, fostering these community links beforehand foreign people won’t be abandoned or foreign people will be able to contribute.*

That makes sense.

Yeah, but it’s difficult. Like, how do you build…

Yeah…

...community bonds.

...in Tokyo that’s not, you know, most people are out early, home really late at nights.

*Yeah. Just similarly about the, kind of, community idea, do you remember being contacted by your local government or city office?*

No, no.

*No contact? Yeah, yeah. Would you want to have been contacted?*

Eh, would I have wanted to? Mmm, I think they knew what the scale of the damage was in my area, so I wouldn’t really expect it, in that sense. If there was, if they knew there
was going to be, you know, there was actually damage, there was a possibility of damage, I would have expected it then...

Yeah.

...especially for old people, it would probably make sense.

Yeah, yeah. And in terms of, I suppose, again still on this idea of community to a certain extent, were you aware of any campaigns in general throughout the country to build, like, a kind of a spirit of response?

Yeah, yeah.

Can you tell me a bit more about that?

Ehm, yeah, there was a big, what do you call it, swelling of support for those people affected for about six months. I suppose everybody, I mean, for a good few months around that time people were going to Tohoku to, to, you know...

Yeah, yeah.

...help out.

Do you, were you aware of any of the slogans or that were used in those campaigns?

‘Gam, gambare Tohoku! Gambare Nihon!’ [Note: this was a slogan that means something like ‘Hang in there, Tohoku! Hang in there, Japan!’]

Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Exactly, exactly. The reason I’m just asking about that is because there has been some research done into the effectiveness of slogans in terms of disaster response and especially disaster recovery, so I just wanted to see if any of the foreign nationals that I get to speak, if they’ve been aware. And you’re absolutely right, there was ‘Gambare Nihon, gambare Tohoku!’ kind of almost as a brand, eh, which was used a lot, ehm, after the disaster as a way of, kind of, getting, pulling people together, I suppose.

There, there was actually a massive response. I mean the TV said there was a massive response, anyway! [laughter]

[Laughter] And how about in terms of your work? Eh, was there much, eh, I guess, you mentioned how they’re good at telling you what’s going to happen, what’s going to happen next. Was there any, kind of, pulling together from them?

Uhm, not as such. There was one, eh, like I said, one of our plants was in Ibaraki, so that one was damaged, and, eh, yeah, there was maybe some pulling together because, we helped, like, obviously, those guys.

Yeah, yeah. Ehm, the other thing, just again it’s, kind of, going back a little bit on what we’ve already talked about, just talking again about information in general, it seems like you were able to access a lot of information, certainly through, through Japanese, were there any topics that you felt you didn’t get enough information about?

There were some things I was annoyed about at the time, but I can’t quite remember now. But I think a lot of information about the nuclear incident, that’s the one I was, I was
concerned about. They only talk about the maemuki stuff on TV [Note: maemuki means positive or upbeat] they don’t talk about, “Okay, sound, we’re pounding water in there.”

Yeah.

They don’t mention the obvious effect of that which is you’re going to have a tonne of toxic water. You know I mean?

[Laughter] Yeah.

That kind of stuff. And they, I’m not, I’m not sure if they were just ignoring - that’s just one example - there’s actually lots of stuff where I think they were, sort of, glossing over or not really considering the, eh, the long term effect and the immediate effect, too. You know, what I’m trying to say is they are really determined to say that it’s, it’s, one: that it’s under control, and two: that the, the radiation getting as far, getting this far, this far is not serious. But, myself, I think through what I know, I do, I do hear things from other sources.

So, can I just ask you to confirm who you mean by ‘they’?

Well, I’m talking about NHK. They, they, they have experts, they had experts from, you know, Tokyo University and, I think, Kyoto University [Note: the two top-ranking universities in Japan] you know, nuclear experts and engineers and stuff…

Yeah.

...and, like, I’m looking to that analysis.

And then you said you heard from other sources…

Yeah.

...information that made you doubt that. Who or where?

Yeah, the negative sources were mostly foreign. And there’s two kinds of foreign sources that I read [Note: the tense of the verb is past tense]. One which is, you know, experienced experts and one is, em, let’s say, the outrageous, over-the-top, eh, “there’s no food in Tokyo”, like, do you know that way [laughter] it’s kind of...

[Laughter] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and one of the reasonably believable experts abroad that I did hear said, “There’s radiation going as far as California.”

Yeah.

They had measured it, like.

Yeah.

That part of it was a lot slower than anything. I expected more. You know, obviously, as the thing died off, that’s when the actual, all the other data actually arises, but the news has died off at that point.

Yeah.
And that’s hard, like, because you’re missing.

Yeah, I mean, you’re talking about some issues there which are, in, very interesting to me in terms of translation as well. Eh, a, a, as you said, for you 90% of your information came from TV, in particular Japanese TV, and what I’m interested in is can translation be used to help get, maybe, more TV news available to people who don’t speak Japanese so well. Eh.

I, I think, news is, does, English translation, it does have English, I’m not sure.

It does, eh, but would you be aware of how much?

No, I wouldn’t.

It’s very, it’s extremely limited. But, I, I mean, it’s great that they, they do provide simultaneous translation, but it is very, very limited, so I’d be interested in, maybe, looking at ways to help supplement that. Eh, but, you know, that would be, that would be difficult. But I think it’s clear from talking to the people I’ve talked to that TV was an important.

Yeah, it’s funny because there was, experts they have on TV are always certainly, at least, they’re fluent in their fields in English, I would imagine, and they would be quite good at explaining what was going on even in English… Yeah.

…even on paper, and yet for the first few days, or for the first few weeks, the explanations that I found in English of what was going on were terrible… [Laughter]

…they were a mess.

So there’s an issue there, in other words.

Yeah, there must have been.

Wha, what do you think might have caused that?

They were focused on the management of the disaster, I suppose, in Japanese.

Also, another issue which, ehm, comes up from what we’ve talked about is is English the best language to be translating to for non-Japanese people in Japan? What, what would you feel about that? If you want to communicate with foreigners in Japan, do you think English is the most effective language?

Ye, yes.

Why?

Ehm, people would say otherwise but generally, even people who say they don’t speak too good English, would speak better English than, say they speak, say they only speak, you know, French and Japanese…
Yeah.

...that would be the biggest example I could think of, these are people that would speak
decent English, because Japanese people may not, like, be perfect at English but, actually,
if you slow things right down, people generally still understand. And I think generally
people who travel, in general...

Yeah.

...have, eh, they have some base level of English. I mean another better, I mean, Chinese
or Korean, I don’t think that they are as high as being the minimum level of English.

I see, I see. Yeah. I think that's a very interesting point, and that's also one of the
recommendations that is, kind of, being discussed now is, rather than translating
information, they want, these, sort of, government sources want to supply, eh, supply
information in Easy Japanese. Have you ever heard of Easy Japanese?

I heard of it for the first time last week...

Oh.

...{redacted} my company hired some people independently and those guys are now at,
at the first stages of learning and they see a lot of stuff in Easy Japanese, but they said it’s
not that easy, like, it has, it has hiragana and, what do you call it, furigana [Note: these
are relatively basic Japanese scripts to help read the complex Chinese characters used in
Japanese writing].

Yeah. Would you think that’s a good idea?

For emergency situations, I wonder are there? I don’t know, yeah, I mean, you’re in
Japan, you should know, like, a minimum of Japanese, but they could also use English.

Yeah, I think it important to consider a variety of options. When you’re talking about
disasters, I don’t think it’s a good idea to focus too much on one thing, because if you
focus on only one thing, it’s kind of like putting all your eggs in one basket. Eh, for a
disaster, they often talk in the disaster literature about how multiple information sources
over multiple platforms are probably the best way to go. Just there are a couple of other,
just, things I want to check and see if you remember about. These are quite specific. Ehm,
on your mobile phone, did you get any early warning in the disaster?

My company actually registered that system after the, eh, after that.

Oh, I see.

Yeah, send us an email and then we write back, you know, saying we’re safe.

Yeah.

There’s a system and the system has you registered.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think a lot of companies went ahead and, and did that. Also,
again this is quite specific but, you know the way there’s the PA system, the wireless
communication system all throughout Japan, eh, it does public announcements if there is
an emergency, do you remember hearing any of those?
Ehm, yeah, I think I do remember hearing them.

Do you remember what language?

Probably Japanese.

I think so. I think you’re absolutely right about the idea of Japanese being, sort of, useful for people who’ve lived here for a certain amount of time. There’s going to be a, sort of, minimum level of Japanese. I’m also, obviously, in a place like Tokyo, I’m interested in short-term residents like business travellers or tourists who don’t have any Japanese and who have no interest in learning Japanese and can’t read simple Japanese even if it’s given to them, ehm, especially with, you know, the 2020 Olympics [laughter] coming to Tokyo, in terms of translating and disasters it’s something that needs to be thought about. Maybe I need to divide between residents and visitors. So...

Yeah, it’s a very good idea.

Yeah, just because it’s difficult, maybe, I can’t include foreign nationals all in one big group. There’s different types of foreign nationals, if you know what I mean. Ehm, that’s pretty much all the questions I have. Just, in general, is there anything else in particular you’d like to mention or anything else that comes to mind that I haven’t talked about?

Ehm, there was a major push, you know, to save, energy after the nuclear thing, and I don’t know if that has any effect on?

Yeah, go ahead, if, if you want to, eh, talk about, if you want to talk about the energy saving or?

Oh no, I, I don’t, yeah, there would never have been major issues. I suppose, like, I wondered if anybody would have a problem at the time if they just came into the country. I imagine they were wondering why the escalators didn’t work and stuff. It didn’t actually have a major impact. Yeah.

Or why there was no airconditioning [laughter]...

Yeah, airconditioning in the stores.

...in the 35-degree heat.

I wouldn’t really be able to think of anything else.

Yeah, I know that the, for people again who were resident here, ehm, it, depending on what area you lived in, there could have been power cuts rolling through the year. I was lucky, I lived in the centre. You live in the centre as well, so we probably didn’t experience the power cuts that people living, say, in Kanagawa or, you know, parts of Chiba might have, might have experienced.

I imagine my experience was fairly bland compared to, to the guys you talked to in Sendai and, eh…

Yeah, but, yeah, but, also, what you have to remember is that I’m interested in a variety of experiences, so if all I was talking to were people who’d had, I don’t know, some sort of movie-like stories, or something, that wouldn’t be representative really of, eh, kind of, the overall type of experience that people had, you know?
Yeah, that’s true.

So, like, I certainly wouldn’t call your experience bland. I think it’s informative, it informs, your, informative of one type of foreign national who was living here. Eh, again, this is kind of linked to what you just said, but, because I’m talking to a variety of different people, I do want to make sure that, like, by talking about your experiences, I haven’t made you feel any extra stress, so if you wouldn’t mind, could you mark, kind of, here on this scale wh, eh, how you’re feeling?

I’m not feeling any stress...

Okay.

…so I’ll put down a zero.

Perfect. Eh, the reason I’ve asked this question is because, as you yourself pointed out, some of the people I am speaking to have had very different experiences, eh, some of the are, kind of, like a movie, and I just want to make sure that by, you know, remembering their experiences, I haven’t caused them any extra [laughter] problems. Because that’s something I don’t want to do, you know?

I’m sure they have to, whatever they did, they would want to process it.

Oh, hopefully, hopefully. I have gotten some marks which have been considerably higher than I thought. In those cases, the university has put in place some measures like counselling and so on that I can offer or whatever, but, eh, luckily with you at a zero, I don’t need to [laughter], I don’t need to worry about that.

I did try to think about it a bit in advance to see if I could remember anything, con, considering about, you know, language issues, but they got mostly covered, like.

Yeah, I’m really glad to hear that and, you know, you’re representative of a type of person who is using Japanese every day, and I think it’s important in my recommendations that I do underline that, just by being a foreigner, doesn’t necessarily mean you can’t speak Japanese and Japanese isn’t a useful tool, because some, I guess, some work, some research in the area does portray foreigners as extremely vulnerable but, you know, foreigners who are here a long time and speak Japanese may, in fact, not be vulnerable, they may be able to make a big contribution in future disasters.

Yeah, I think, well, I’m not sure if it’s related, I don’t, I don’t feel, like, being a part of the community means I need to personally participate. I’ve been here a long time and maybe I’m just blind to it but [laughter] yeah I don’t feel like a separate part of my community in Japan or, or at work, as such, yeah.

I think that’s a great thing to hear. I’m, there’s a lot of, do you remember hearing about the fly-jin [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who left Japan during the disaster]?

Yeah, I know immediately after they said that everybody went. My parents were telling me to do it…

[Laughter] Was, was that difficult for you to make that decision to stay?

Uhm, ehm, there’s a lot of stuff. One is that, ehm, I, I’ve been working in the same job so, like I said, I don’t feel separate from everyone else, and everybody else was just going to work normal, like, so I’d go to work in a panic after talking to my parents, and I’d go talk
to my boss, “I’m thinking I might go home for a while.” And he was like, “What? Do
what you want, but it’s not such a big deal.” And I was like, [laughter] “Not big deal?”
He was, kind of, un, un-emphasizing it. And, like, my wife would have gone to her home
town, which would have been another option, because that’s relatively safe. It’s on a
separate island…

Yeah, yeah.

...eh, I had thought about that.

Yeah. And in terms of, just, the fly-jin kind of concept or story in general, what, what’s
your opinion on it?

Just a lot of people panicked, like, I don’t know, that’s not, like, I’m not sure if I’m right
or not, but it’s kind of a derogatory term, but I think there’s absolutely nothing wrong
with it. Nobody had the information they really needed. It doesn’t matter if it’s in English
or Japanese. In those situations, it does look pretty grim, so I think going home was
actually a really, really logical option, except for the fact that it probably cost [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I don’t know, a small fortune.

The airlines were charging, like, five-thousand, six-thousand Euro just for economy class
seats.

They were just money making.

Yeah, well [laughter] the poor old airlines have had a tough time of it since 9/11 so
[laughter] maybe, maybe it was their time to make, make some of it back. Well, anyway,
that’s pretty much it, unless there’s anything else.

I can’t think of anything.

Okay, well listen, thanks a million.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

**Note:** As this interview was held during the participant’s lunch break from work, it followed a slightly different format to others in this project.

2013/9/19 Interview with Participant 6

Researcher: So there’s not much literature that has asked foreigners themselves...

Participant: What they need.

...what they need.

Yeah, right.

So that’s, kind of the sort of gap I am hoping to fill, but, ehm, whether or not...

Okay.

...[laughter] that works out is a, another question.

But interesting, you know, what you say with the, eh, Olympics coming up, and just looking at the tourism numbers, so July and August both hit all time record highs for the number of inbound tourists...

Really.

...to Japan. So the interest is there...

Yeah.

...eh, whether the resources and the infrastructure specifically designed for foreigners...

Yeah.

...is there or not is another question.

Yeah.

Ehm, so yeah, I was working for a PR consulting company at the time of the earthquake...

Yeah.

...and, eh, {a Japanese government office} was one of our clients. Ehm, we had quite a few Japanese clients...

Yeah.

...we had real issues with, eh, particularly Fukushima because they were getting questions from abroad on what was going on and they just didn’t have any information...

Yeah.
...so I think foreigners struggled but even the Japanese were not clear on what was going
on. No-one understood the nuclear issue [laughter] so…

This, absolutely, this is, kind of, one of the things that is, that is interesting to me, ehm,
because it was such a big, kind of, complex disaster, it is difficult to even talk about it as
one event, ehm, because there was the earthquake, there was the tsunami, and then there
was the nuclear issue…

Yeah.

...eh, for lots of different people, depending on where you were, your concern was very
different…

Uhum, uhum.

...you know, some people were very concerned about Fukushima, some people were
concerned about the tsunami. It’s, it’s not like it is one kind of disaster.

No, and I think I was pretty lucky because, em, it was only about an hour walk home
from work for me. I didn’t miss any work. I had electricity the entire time…

Yeah.

...ehm, shops around me didn’t run out of anything, so.

Oh really?

No.

Wow, you were lucky.

Very lucky.

Even, even, eh, sliced bread and [laughter].

Not that I noticed.

Yeah. If you didn’t notice it then, yeah.

I never felt I can’t buy what I need, so.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I guess, were, were you living? So, if you were an hour, you were
probably somewhere pretty central, ehm.

{A major city in Tokyo}.

Ah, okay {a major city in Tokyo}, yeah, so.

Yeah, so I think central Tokyo…

Sort of, 23 wards or whatever [Note: the subdivisions of Tokyo that do not include its
most suburban areas]
...yeah, yeah, the earthquake, tsunami were not really concerns. Fukushima absolutely was.

Ehm, I know that, em, like myself living in Chuo-ku in Nihonbashi...

Uhum.

...and I was really lucky as well. I actually lived a ten-minute walk from my office. So I didn’t have an issue with, eh, that at all. Like, with the earthquake or the tsunami...

Yeah.

...more than, eh, anything, but it was the, sort of, the weekend following. So it happened on the Friday...

Uhum.

...and the, sort of, the Saturday and the Sunday were very odd because I was afraid to go outside and I mean I wasn’t working, like Saturday and Sunday was a day off, so I just stayed at home...

Uhm, uhm, uhm, uhm.

...kind of, was following the news as best I could. And just trying to figure out...

Uhm, uhm.

...what was, what was going to happen on Monday, kind of thing...

Right.

...yeah, eh, it definitely took some, some time for it all to sink in as well.

Well, because my day-to-day life wasn’t affected, ehm, it felt surreal watching the news…

Yeah.

...it felt like something taking place on another planet. It felt so far away. Ehm, so I didn’t feel that nervous…

Yeah.

...when it comes down to it. However, because I was working in PR consulting and a lot of our clients were foreign, they wanted information…”

Yeah.

...they wanted to know what was going on. So I was watching the news very closely, and providing the most relevant information to clients. And we were feeding the {Twitter feed of the Japanese government office that was our client} …

Wow.

...so we were picking up information generally off of NHK and Kyodo in English…
...and feeding that out through {the Japanese government office that was our client}…

...so that foreign nationals could get access to information. So we were trying to bridge that gap when it comes to, eh, eh, the lack of resources to get English out.

Yeah, you were at the coalface then because I know in, in all of the literature that I have looked at so far and, certainly, with the, the few people that I have spoken to so far, TV has come out to be such an important source. And it is interesting that you mentioned Twitter, but the Twitter feed was based on information coming from NHK.

Oh, for sure. I think that was the whole attitude at work - social media is important as one channel, as is TV, as is the newspaper, ehm, but to channel this kind of information, it’s not a medium, it, it, it’s not a source in itself…

Yeah.

...if you know what I mean…

Yeah.

...because those established news agencies are established for a reason…

Yeah.

...and they have very strict standards when it comes to the information that they send out, and the last thing we wanted to do was drive fear and panic, so we were going to very established sources…

Yeah.

...and spreading them as widely as we could.

Yeah, and I know as well, like, when, I’ve spoken to some people who were in, ehm, parts of Miyagi, so near Sendai or in other parts of that prefecture which were very badly damaged…

Uhm.

...and they had no power, and they had little connectivity, so for them, as you said, you know, things like social media were one channel…

Yeah.

...but just very temporarily...

Yeah.

...as long as their phone battery was alive, it was a channel…

Yeah.
...ehm, which, you know, what was interesting to me was, eh, a lot of the literature talked about the importance of radio...

Uhm.

...a very old-fashioned channel...

Yes, yes.

...ehm, but in the very worst-affected areas, it was actually vital...

It was the only source of information.

...eh for Japanese, for Japanese language. Eh, I’m not sure it was so good for other languages, but for Japanese, certainly, it turned out to be really important.

Well, the day of, of course, there was no phone service so, eh, Facebook was the main source of information for me. Eh, I hadn’t really used Twitter before the, eh, the earthquake, but through the process of it, I realized it was the easiest way to get live information. Eh, and to be shared...

Uhm.

...as appropriate. So, eh, I started following all the international news outlets...

Yeah.

...em, English and Japanese, directly followed a lot of reporters who were on the ground...

Yeah.

...em, and I got a lot of good information from that...

Yeah.

...so often it was a question of picking up the information from Twitter and then sharing it via Facebook.

Yeah, yeah. I think that’s one thing that I’m, em, starting to think about now, just, eh, when you are talking about, say, whatever communication tool, you know, there’s an element of information gathering and there is an element of just communicating with people, like, important people to you, or that...

Yeah.

...I think I am going to have to try and differentiate the two a little bit because for some people, for information gathering, let, let’s say TV...

Uuhh.

...seemed to be really important.

NHK English was very important for me, definitely.
Yeah, but then in terms of just say, communicating with, you know, important people in your life, maybe things like social media did prove very useful, you know, whereas something like TV, that’s, that’s obviously, it doesn’t have that function, you know.

Right, right.

Did, did you find, like, when the actual disaster happened, were you able to communicate with people that you wanted to easily enough?

Ehm, well, it was all through Facebook because, well, Facebook or email, but mainly Facebook, em, so messaging back and forth…

Yeah.

…or sending out messages saying, “I’m okay. Don’t worry about me.”

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Eh, so yeah, it was, generally, you’d pick up the phone, but that option wasn’t there…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

…so it was the easiest alternative in the smartphone age, right?

Yeah, I, I had exactly the same experience, ehm, I wasn’t, I wouldn’t say I was a particularly large Facebook user before the disaster…

Uhm.

…but certainly that day and, you know, the, the moments after the, the first earthquake happened, it proved really useful…

Yeah.

…because I could just let everybody…

Uhm, uhm.

…pretty much, that I knew know I was okay…

Absolutely.

…in a very short space of time, so I saw the value of it then. But I’m not sure how much value I found in using it for getting, kind of, accurate or reliable information. I found, found that there was a lot of stuff that I questioned.

Yeah, well this is the problem we had at work as well…

Uhm.

…because a lot of people were reacting to pretty speculative stories from non-established news sources…

Yeah.
...and it just drives fear, panic…

Yeah.

...which was why we were trying to pick out pieces from established news outlets, right?

Yeah.

Eh, but there was also a massive difference between the Japanese approach to telling a story and the Western approach. The Western approach, if you look at somewhere like Bloomberg, the reporters are assessed based on the number of clicks they get on the headlines that run on the website. So if you get five-hundred clicks, you get a gold star, if you get a thousand, you get two gold stars, and it goes up and up and up and up and up. So they are motivated to write sensationalistic headlines that will get clicks on their story.

In the Financial Times, the reporters will tell you outright, “As an organization, our mandate is to set public opinion, to influence public opinion.” In order to do that, you have to, to have something no-one else has, and tell it in a pretty sensational way…

Yeah.

...to get attention whereas communication in gen, in general in Japan, I find, is all about providing all [Note: this last word was said with great emphasis] of the background and detail, you know, it’s, it’s context as opposed to content…

Yeah.

...and that was really clear with the news reporting…

Yeah.

...they give you all of this information but not explain what it actually means, and people just wanted to know, “Am I safe?” and “Am I not safe?” “Well, becquerels are at this level?”…

[Laughter]

…”Well, what the hell does that mean?” It was not helpful…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...to be reported in that way. Ehm, so again at work, a lot of our focus was to try and put things in context. “This is what becquerels are. This is what you are exposed to in daily life. Every time you fly, this is what you are exposed to, and it is perfectly safe.” And explain it in those terms so that people could understand, “Okay, maybe we’re not at risk here.”

Okay, yeah, yeah. That’s, that’s an absolutely interesting, and I think probably that I need to talk about that point that there are cultural differences as well just in how you tell stories…

Uhum.

...and how information is processed, and that can have an impact on how it is, how it is received by, you know, people who aren’t used to that.
Yeah, yeah. So from my perspective, it wasn't even a question of whether information was available in English or not, what was available where it was directly translated made absolutely no sense…

Right.

...so I think Kyodo and NHK are exceptions to it because they have pretty savvy, ehm, reporters who understand that you need to take a different approach, I mean, NHK obviously has its international arm…

Yeah.

...which is all foreign, or the majority are foreigners…

Yeah, yeah.

...they take a different approach to reporting which is part of the reason they were particularly valuable, ehm, but the Japanese government in particular, they were producing difficult to understand direct translations because they are all focused on approvals and avoiding risk, and ‘it has to be exactly the same as the Japanese’ was the mandate, right.

That’s, I, yeah, I mean, that is certainly an issue that comes up time and again in, just, translation studies…

Yes.

...the idea of, you know, how do you define translation...

Yes.

...eh, so I mean, you know maybe the Japanese government were looking at it as this kind of direct equivalence or, you know, some sort of transfer that maps on to another language...

Well, I mean, “The Japanese has been approved. If we are going to do anything in English, it has to be as close to the Japanese as possible otherwise it is a separate document that has to go through approvals again.”

Yeah, whereas, em, you know, in the news translating that you are talking about, you know, say Kyodo’s or NHK International arm’s, they are, kind of, doing this cultural mediation as well so, kind of, thinking about how their...

Localization.

...yeah, yeah, yeah. That’s, that’s a really, that’s a big issue [laughter]. That’s a big question to, to touch on.

I find it at work as well. All the time. Ehm, you know, it, it’s, eh, ‘you can say that but we don’t’ argument so [laughter].

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, you know. I think what, what I am already starting, what I am already starting to notice about this, you know, just looking into this disaster is that it is kind of like peeling an onion…
Uhm.
...in that, you know, I peel away one thing and then find that there’s all these other layers of stuff beneath, so, you know, even though I am talking about or trying to talk about translation, I am finding that there are these other issues that are, are coming up, eh, you know, just about, like, life for foreign nationals in general...

Uhm, absolutely.
...never mind in particular in, in the disaster, you know, so it’s, it’s, kind of, turning into a bit of a huge [laughter] huge area. I am going to have to focus in.

Well, eh, in terms of our work with {the Japanese government office that was our client}, it developed into a strong relationship.

Yeah. I certainly have noticed that since the disaster, like, the, certainly the, eh, {certain offices of the Japanese government} are much more active...

Uhm, uhm.
...so that’s coming down to, to these relationships. That’s fascinating.

Invested a lot in training them [laughter]...

Yeah, it’s...
in developing an understanding of.

...yeah, yeah, I mean, I know that obviously, you know, in terms of what I’m talking about, I’m talking about one particular context, one disaster, but from that I would like to be able to, sort of, say, “Well, perhaps in the future, this might work and this might not work.” And I know that, em, as, as I mentioned a bit earlier on, a lot of NPOs and local government authorities are making recommendations, and one of the big things they are talking about is this idea of making foreigners feel more part of their local communities...

Yes.
...eh, this is tricky for me, I’m, I’m not sure, I’m not sure how it will, I’m not sure how it will work as a, as a recommendation because, well, just to ask you yourself, do you feel part of your community? Did you feel part of your community?

Absolutely not. Ehmm, I live in a danchi complex [Note: means a housing estate or apartment complex] {redacted}. It’s reclaimed land. The buildings are old, they are from the seventies. It’s not safe if a big earthquake hits. But I am not aware of any disaster preparation measures they have in place in the community. I have lived there, I guess, four years now. I don’t know any of my neighbours. I know some people, I’ll, I’ll nod at them when I walk down the street. But at the same time, I’m not really interested in taking part in community activities, and I don’t want to start, start talking to the old ladies who hang out by the garbage...

[Laughter]
...and feed the homeless cats every morning because I know they are going to start picking on me for the way I throw away my trash, you know, I just don’t need that stress…

[Laughter] Yeah.

...maybe it is unfriendly on my part, but we come from different worlds, right? A lot of them are retirees, sixty, seventy to eighties. Very Japanese domestic culture. They are nice people, but we have nothing in common, right?...

Uhm.

...and I think when it comes to community, it’s about having that sense of common values, ehm, and goals, right?

Uhm, ehm, I guess, that’s a really important point that it is about what you have in common, so maybe your community might not be the local people in your neighbourhood, it could end up being the people you work with or your friends who you, kind of, make your community.

Yes, that I think is absolutely true. So, ehm, I have been here, well as I said, for eight years, and I have got a lot of foreign friends in Tokyo, and that really was the community, ehm, in the aftermath of the earthquake for me...

Yeah.

...eh, we, we were sharing information with each other, eh, a lot of people left and, you know, in some cases, needed help getting out of the country…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so, em, those are the people that you look to for help. Not the people living in the community next to you.

I can understand why the government and so on are trying to make this recommendation because one of the things that they often talk about in, in disaster studies, and, you know, say for example, back in the Kobe earthquake, the first people who actually respond and help in an emergency are likely to be the people who are near you...

Yes.

...so it could be your neighbours, it could be the person walking by, it could be your office co-workers. They are probably going to be the actual first responders because the official emergency services are going to take time...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...time to get there, so there is this notion that you need to have relationships existing with the people around you, not, not necessarily the people you live beside...

Yeah.

...but the people who you interact with...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...because that is who you are probably going to call on.

The {Embassy for my home country} has these types of measures in place where they ask someone, they’ll divide up the city into sections, and where they have someone within any given section, they’ll say “Can you be a contact point if a disaster hits?”...

Oh, ah!

...and we can gather up the others in the area. They have the system, but didn’t do anything during the earthquake, and everyone, all the embassy staff left. They locked down the embassy, they wouldn’t let people in [laughter]...

What?

...yeah. So, they were not exactly supportive.

That’s, that’s crazy.

But they had these measures in place and when, you know, the shit hit the fan, they just took off. And it happened with a lot of...

That’s crazy.

... it happened with a lot of embassies. The French left, the Germans left, ehm, the immediate reaction was, “Get the fuck out of here.” [laughter]...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...you know, every man for himself, right?

That’s really, that’s quite scary actually, ehm, because I was just about to say, “What a good idea.” you know, to have, kind of, these local contact-points...

It was (indistinct).

...but it wasn’t.

I didn’t, you have to register with the embassy...

Yeah.

...I, I didn’t get information from the embassy.

You didn’t receive anything.

I didn’t get any useful information from the embassy in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

Wow, that’s crazy. So the system might be in place but if there is people not there to execute them.

I think that is a big part of it because so many people got out...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...so what do you do when the people you’d assigned are not there to help.

That is, that is very worrying. Eh, obviously from a translation point of view, for me something like the Embassy would be a very interesting case ...

Yeah.

...you know. But obviously, you know, it didn’t happen in that way. Did, did you get contacted by, say, like your cit, city office or ward office or anything like that? Do you remember any Japanese contact?

I really don’t remember...

Yeah.

...ehm, I definitely don’t remember any effort in the aftermath to help with, kind of, preparedness. There was nothing that I was involved with through local government. It was all through work. If I had proactively looked into it, I’m sure there were options there…

Yeah.

...our office was in central Tokyo, not far from Ward Offices…

Right.

...with information available in English…

Yeah.

...it is not fair for me to say maybe it wasn’t there…

Yeah.

...it was just a question of who I thought could help me most and who would understand my situation the best. That is not the Japanese government or the local ward office, right? So, I turned to friends in the international community…

Yeah, yeah.

...I worked with an international chamber to help set up a panel discussion with a specialist from a major overseas academic institute, eh, so he had just written a book on radiation, eh, and we invited him in to speak. It got a huge crowd, and it was all, it was the international community, eh, and many of the participants were mothers who were concerned about radiation and, for their children…

I understand.

...ehm, they didn’t really know where else to go for information, so it was very helpful for a lot them…

Yeah.

...you know, we recorded it and broadcast it on youtube.
Yeah, those kind of, em, I guess, self-organized efforts are really valuable and I, I think it shows the, exactly what, what we were just talking about that community is what you make of it...

Uhm.

...so your community may not have been the people living in your, your danchi [Note: means housing estate or apartment complex] but it was...

Yeah.

...let’s say, I guess an international community or an expat community.

Most of it was tied to work as well...

Yeah.

...it was a lot of people I had met through work-related networking…

Yeah.

...and in terms of follow-up training, you know, on this event, eh, we did our own internal earthquake preparedness training at work and we hadn’t any earthquake preparedness [laughter] you know, eh, resources. We didn’t have any water or food stored…

Really?

...we didn’t have helmets, so the company invested in that after the disaster...

Yeah, yeah.

...so then everyone had a helmet and a backpack at their, eh, desk…

Yeah.

...and we went through the dos and don’ts, you know, things like, if an earthquake hits, you are probably better off staying in the building and getting under a desk if it’s a newer development…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...rather than running out on the street because, you know, if a pane of glass gets shaken off, eh, a building in the area, it can fly a long way and you can totally find yourself in trouble…

Oh, right. Yeah.

...so it was those types of things because on the day of the earthquake, I remember I was sitting at my desk working and, right, it hits and earthquakes are not all that uncommon, and first I was like, “Oh, another earthquake.” And then, it was getting so intense, it felt like the windows might actually shatter, and people were shrieking and jumping under their desks…
...and then I looked downstairs and people had run out and were outside on the streets…

Oh.

...whereas we were all still inside…

Yeah, yeah.

[Laughter]

...no-one knew what to do, right? So.

Wow. That’s, but, yeah, I guess, those are the good things that hopefully from the experience, the fact that maybe Tokyo is better prepared now, because I mean, there is going to be a big earthquake here, you know, I don’t think it’s a question of ‘if’, I, I, I think one will hit…

Yeah.

...a significant one will hit.

Well, I remember some of the programs that I heard about on the news in the aftermath, like, they did some evacuation scenario in one ward, where, eh, entire office buildings were picked and they explained to people what they had to do if there was a need to evacuate, and in another area they had a program where you could go in and they would explain to you exactly how to walk home from your workplace…

Yeah.

...and they had some, eh, programs where they showed the disaster preparedness resources they had because apparently this massive, ehm, underground facility in one central area, it has blankets and clothes…

Yeah.

...and food and water, so it was reassuring to know that’s there. If that earthquake had not hit, it wouldn’t have been promoted in the way they did.

And that, that kind of promotion, was that all through Japanese or was it provided in a variety of languages?

That’s actually a video I saw on youtube…

Oh okay.

...but it’s one of those things, you know, that came from a news program, it may have been Japanese originally, someone took it on themselves to dub it and then spread it around, so there was so many cases where people just couldn't find the information…

Yeah.

...so they were doing their own homework and sending it out.
Yeah, yeah. Again, it’s coming back to, like, the original source. If it’s, kind of, a reliable, trustworthy source, people are going to try and spread as best they can.

Uhm.

In, in your actual, in your, your work, did you have your own translators who were working or was it just internal staff who were translating or were you taking already translated information?

Mostly we were taking already translated, eh, material. So, as I said, it was, kind of, Kyodo, NHK, ehm, no, we tried to avoid foreign in a way, we didn’t deliberately try to avoid foreign media, but foreign media was much more sensationalistic about it for the reasons I mentioned earlier…

Yeah.

...and one of the big goals was, just, to keep people calm and understand things were not as bad as they seemed.

Yeah, yeah.

Ehm, to be honest, at the time, for the first two weeks, no-one had any idea what the risks actually were…

Yeah.

...you know, three years on, two years on, we know that we were relatively okay…

Yeah, yeah.

One of my {acquaintances} created a Facebook page {redacted}, ehm, and he was digging around for whatever information that he could find on radiation and health risks…

Yeah.

...I can introduce you to him, if you would like me to. He was deeply, deeply involved in digging up information and spreading it as widely as possible…

Yeah.

...and, eh, the website is still up and running, but he was so tr, emotionally invested in it that he couldn’t run it himself any more, so he just handed it over to someone else to manage.

Oh I can, I can understand how that, ehm, sort of, emotional difficulties or the stress arising from, from that could be significant, you know.

Oh, and he is still stressed. He is very worried about the food supply…

Yeah, yeah.

...and it is not a question of immediate, external exposure to radiation, it is long-term, in the food supply, the, the groundwater is, eh, what’s the word, not infected…
Yeah.

...but irradiated, ehm, and it is getting into the food supply with cows and fish and everything else. If you are exposed to those levels of radiation over a fifteen, twenty year period, what does it do to your health?

Yeah.

These are the issues that he is still looking for information on and the Japanese government is still trying to address.

Yeah, you, you, kind of, touched on a point that I am trying to, to figure out with each participant that I talk to, em, kind of, the idea of, you know, this big disaster, when did it start and when did it end, if it has ended?

Uuuuhhhmmm, yeah.

So just for you personally, how would you define the disaster in, kind of, time, temporally?

Ehm, I think post-Fukushima 50 [Note: a media pseudonym for the 50 power plant workers who did not evacuate and worked to directly respond to the nuclear disaster on site], we were probably over the worst of it and got a sense that things were settling down…

Okay.

...ehm, I don’t even remember what the timeframe was…

Yeah.

...it felt like two, three weeks, maybe…

Yeah.

...after that, it seemed like we were going more reliable information…

Yeah.

... and Fukushima was not as, ehm, much of a risk as it had been.

So, kind of, for you, it was after that period that life sort of went back to normal to a certain extent?

Life, day-to-day life never changed, so I could take the train to work, I had electricity at home, I could shop as I normally did, at work I was doing the same kinds of things but with more of a focus on spreading information…

Okay.

...on the disaster. Ehm, it was just the fear of ‘Is this going to affect me long-term?’…

Yeah.

...and the, the, the, the lack of information on nuclear industry for people.
And did you consider leaving at any point?
No, I didn’t. Eh, don’t ask me why. I don’t know. Eh, it is a horrible thing to say, but it was exciting [laughter].
[Laughter] Well you were, as I said, you were right at the coalface, right?
Yeah, maybe that’s part of the reason it felt pretty [laughter] exciting.
Well, yeah.
So we had big clients…
...that were getting questions from overseas, “Where do you do your manufacturing in Japan? Are there risks with your products?” Eh, we had to produce, you know, fifty-page q & a documents that were going to all customer-facing staff worldwide…
Yeah.
...pretty high profile work…
Yeah, yeah.
...so you don’t get to do that every day [laughter].
Yeah, yeah, yeah. That’s, that’s very, very true, I mean, for, you know, just in terms of what you were doing day-to-day, I mean, not only that it was interesting, but you were making a contribution.
Well, and because I was so close to the source of information and because I was being paid to monitor the thing…
Yeah.
...as closely as possible, I was better off doing what I was doing than running off, especially if I intended to come back again…
Yeah, yeah.
...my, em, girlfriend at the time was Japanese and she wasn’t going anywhere…
Yeah.
...because her family was all here…
Yeah.
...so I wasn’t going to dump her…
Yeah.
...and run off…
Yeah.
...and just a lot of workplaces, this {acquaintance} that I mentioned, ehm, he left the
country immediately, he, he has lived here twenty-five or thirty years now, ehm, he was
reprimanded by his employer.

Yeah, yeah, but that kind of feeds in, I mean, one of the, I guess, themes which has come
up about this disaster is the fly-jin [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who left
Japan during the disaster] kind of, idea, do, do you have any feel, do you have any
feeling about that kind of story?

The majority of people I know who left, left with their families, or because they just felt
they didn’t have access to the information they needed. Ehm, but those reasons are
entirely legitimate. I don’t judge anyone…

Yeah, yeah.

...and it’s not like foreigners had the opportunity to leave and Japanese didn’t. Anyone
who felt at risk was free to relocate…

Yeah.

...a lot of people went to Okinawa, so.

A lot of people did, yeah, yeah, a lot of Japanese people did. I think there is an element,
you know, there is an element of, I guess, kind of, scapegoating to a certain extent,
maybe, that it was something that, again I suppose it was a sensational story that got
picked up, but it was certainly, you know, if you look at the, the stories in the Japanese
media after the disaster, it came up quite a lot, so...

Yeah.

...feeds into the, kind of, the whole, I guess, discourse...

Uhm, uhm, uhm.

...around the.

Well, I think there is an aspect of occidentalism there…

[Laughter]

..."Lazy foreigners"...

Yeah, yeah.

...you know, “They are not as committed as I am. I am willing to sacrifice everything…

Yeah.

...for my family and my, eh, company.” Em, whereas I think people were a bit more
pragmatic, a lot of foreigners were more pragmatic…

Yeah.
...and it’s not that you are not committed, it is personal safety comes first, regardless of whether you are Japanese or foreign. Eh, this whole shoganai, gaman attitude, right?

[Note: these expressions are used to convey ideas like, ‘well, it can’t be helped’ and ‘things must just be endured’ and are used to indicate certain stereotypical elements of Japanese culture]

Yeah, yeah. Oh yeah, I mean, I didn’t connect with that at all. I mean, I stayed on a year, I guess it was a year-and-a-half after the disaster, and at first, you know, initially at the disaster, I thought I was going to stay here forever, but things got more and more difficult for me at work, my boss had a bad time after the disaster and our relationship got worse and worse, and so I ended up deciding to leave, and I did feel that, I mean, I wasn’t reprimanded, but I definitely felt I was being disloyal because I worked for a very traditional Japanese company and I was one of the few non-Japanese staff.

Yeah, but, in the end, it came down to me making a decision on what was important for me, not what was important for the company.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. That’s fair and the company should be prioritizing what is important for you as well…

Yeah, yeah.

...you shouldn’t have to make that decision yourself...

Yeah, yeah.

...if they value you, they will value your personal safety above everything else and no-one can claim they had enough information to make that judgment call.

And like, on the, on the idea of information, I mean, obviously, you were getting access to a lot of information, you know, sources, apart from the Fukushima element, was there any other information that you felt was lacking for you?

Yeah, apart from Fukushima?

Yeah.

Ehm, apart from Fukushima, no. Because, again, I wasn’t really affected. Eh, hardly anywhere in Tokyo was damaged, a lot of people went without power, but I was living comfortably, you know?

Yeah, yeah. And how did you find out about the details of the disaster, like, on that Friday, Saturday, Sunday?

Uhuh.

Was it all TV or how, how did you know what was going on?

Ehm, well obviously I felt the earthquake on the Friday. Immediately, kind of jump onto eh, Facebook, whatever and see…

Yeah.

...the, eh, tsunami pictures, but it is not like I was watching the media very closely through the weekend. I didn’t find out about Fukushima until Sunday...
Yeah.

...and then it was someone had posted an article on Facebook, eh, with these staring eyes and radiation symbols...

Yeah.

...and, ehm, that is when I got a bit nervous.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So I think I, in, in many ways my experience would have been similar that, eh, I, kind of, well I found out most of my things through work, I guess, like, or through my own, I used, I used to follow the streaming of the Japanese TV, ehm, you know they started showing it on, eh...

U-stream.

...U-stream, yes, ehm, I liked watching that because it had the, sort of, comment function on the side so I was, kind of, following people as they were commenting...

Ah, right, right, right, right.

...but then there was also that sensationalism and the fear and stuff, so I don’t know whether it was good for me to [laughter] follow that or not.

I tend to ignore the comments because you don’t know who the people are you don’t know, so many people were just scared out of their minds.

Yeah.

Do you want to move on somewhere a bit quieter?

Yeah, sure. [Note: after this we moved to a nearby park. On the way, we talked more in general about our experiences of living in Japan. At the park, we filled out the various pieces of profile data that we did not have time to fill out before the interview at the restaurant and briefly talked about the research process as below.] And then the final thing, again it is just another scale, ehm, you, you know, you talked about how in total your life was pretty much unaffected...

Uhm.

...but some of the people I am speaking to, their lives were very deeply affected, so I just want to make sure that anyone I speak to hasn’t been, kind of, stressed out by, by talking to me...

Oh.

...it, it is not about asking your stress during the earthquake, it is just stress you feel by taking part in this research.

Yeah, no problem [Note: the participant marked 1/10 on the scale]

Ehm, some people I have spoken to have given much higher than you...

Uhm.
...but that is just because they were reliving some very traumatic experiences...

Yeah.

...especially the people I have spoken to in Miyagi...

Oh yeah, I can imagine.

...and one of the things that I, I did with the university was if anybody answered over a certain figure, we had some counselling services that we put in place.

Oh right, right.

I'm not a counsellor, absolutely no, I can’t do anything, but we wanted to make sure that there was something in place, you know, just, just in case.

I did go up to Miyagi after the disaster, somewhere on the coast, it was near Iwate, and it was amazing to see because people were just going about their lives, living in shelters, doing the clean up where it needed to be done. It was business as usual mostly. The thing that I found amazing was doing this work in Tokyo, the eye of the entire world was on Japan in the disaster, and in this little town that was recovering, they had no awareness of this whatsoever, they had their own local newspaper, their own local television, and that is all the locals watched. It was probably just what happened, what was happening down the street. Not what the Japanese government is, is doing to support them. Very much a sense that we need to take care of this ourselves, our, our community, going to help each other in the same way we always have.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

It was wonderful, right? So the rest of the world was saying, “What is the Japanese government doing? You have to give us information. What are the levels of destruction?” The people who were actually involved in this were not looking to Tokyo at all. Tokyo could be New York in terms of the Japanese disaster. So that I found very interesting.

Yeah, really, really interesting. Well, listen, I have taken up so much of your time already. Thank you very much.

Oh you are very welcome.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/9/19 Interview with Participant 7

Researcher: So the first question I always ask is can you just tell me about your experience in the 2011 disaster?

Participant: Eh, well, it was a normal working day as usual and then I had lunch, come back to the office, I had some meeting to take care of, and I was on the phone. Suddenly it started to shake and we understood, I understood that it’s not a usual, like, earthquake, because we have experience, or I have experience, like, feeling earthquake in the past. It’s something very normal in Japan. But, eh, because of everybody panicking around, understood that we have to run, and we did run outside of the building, and, yeah, so.

And when you ran outside the building, could you hear any, eh, warning signs or any sirens or any announcements?

No announcement in here, but I’m not sure, maybe there was an announcement but there was a big confusion…

Uuhh.

...and even if there was announcement, I was not aware of. But I’m sure there was announcement because I sometimes hear announcement for other things that happen, but that day I was not aware of announcement, but was aware of, like, people around, everybody, people were not sure if we should stay in the building…

Yeah.

...or go out, and there were lot of noise, like the traffic light, like…

Yeah.

...shaking and, and, yeah, so, but I can, I don’t remember if there was announcement now or not, but I’m sure there was…

Yeah.

...announcement, because usually there is announcement even for smaller things than that time.

Yeah, exactly, and obviously because I’m interested in translation and information and so on, one of the most interesting things for me is how you communicated with important people in your life. What did you do?

Eh, well, you know, because I’m, I think, I’m fully bilingual, at least in terms of speaking, I can understand Japanese as much as I can understand English, so, eh, yeah, I mean, I tried to call my partner, I tried to call my family in the beginning. Of course, the phone was not working. And, until I realized that we could use Skype, for example, or, at that time, I was able to talk with people I wanted to talk to.

And was that process, eh, easy, you know, was the connection a good connection for the Internet?
Yeah, it was normal connection, eh, like…

Yeah.

…unlike the phone where it was not working at all, and, eh, everybody’s trying to call until somebody said, “Actually, I was able to use Skype.” And I tried it, and it worked.

Yeah. That was, I think, a big relief for a lot of people. For me too, ehm…

Uhm [laughter].

…I, I couldn’t connect with anyone using the phone, but I could use, you know, Facebook…

Yeah.

…or some other Internet…

Net, yeah.

…did you use any social media or SNS tools?

Eh, yes, I did. Not, I mean, you mean that, when it happened?

Or, or, or, aft…

After that was the only way, not the only way but the easy to communicate with everybody else instead of saying a personal message to every friend, all the people who are asking what happened and if I’m alright, I couldn’t reply to each one but using Facebook, eh, like, eh, group message to all my friend and to all the people who are asking, eh, was the easy way to do it, actually, rather than send many messages [laughter].

Absolutely, yeah, for, for, me too, I used the, the same system…

So [Note: this is a Japanese way of showing agreement meaning “That’s right!”]…

…like, kind of, a blanket…

…so, so, so. [Note: this is a Japanese way of showing agreement meaning “That’s right!”]

…eh, message.

Yeah.

Eh, then obviously, so, that’s communicating, but also I’m interested in how you gathered information. So how did you find out more detail about the events?

Like, wha, what kind of detail? What happened?

Eh, what happened, yeah.
Well, the television where there were like 24-hours for about a week, the only thing they were showing on TV. There were no other program except information about the tsunami and earthquake. So that’s the only way. Of course, Internet and so on, but, yeah, after, actually, after two, three days, I, we, we stopped, like, we switch off the television. Was not a good idea, yeah, to.

Oh really, why, why?

Why? Because it’s just, you know, we tried to get just, like, somehow of a normal life, rather than yeah, so, to, to get a bit distracted with other things, rather than watch, like, the same thing, and the same, because after three days, you realize that they were showing again and again and again the same scene, the same thing. So it was just like, “Agh, it’s enough. We’ve already seen it. We understand what happened. That’s okay.” It was something, it was too much, actually.

I understand. And during that, you know, two or three day period when you were checking TV news, what channels were you checking?

I’m not sure. There are many channels.

Japanese?

Yeah, yeah, in Japanese, ehm, for, for sure.

You didn’t check any overseas?

Eh, not, no. No, because, like, the overseas channels, they are getting their information also from Japan, maybe copying from or getting the footage from, like, Japanese TV, so I rather got the information first hand.

Absolutely, yeah, I think you make a very good point there. Eh, some people have talked about accessing...

Uhm.

...overseas TV channels or overseas Internet...

Uuhh.

...but, of course, those journalists got their information from...

Yeah, yeah.

...the same Japanese sources.

Yeah.

Ehm, one thing I am interested in is whether you felt you had enough information about important topics for you.

Like what, for example?

Well, for example, did you have enough information about where to go for help or did you have enough information about nuclear issues or?
At that time, we were not sure what’s happening. I mean, you just like, yeah, there were contradictory information, there are sources that say, “No problem. Don’t worry about nuclear.” Other one who are too much alarming. And, frankly speaking, I had no illusion about infor, to get the real information from the, from the normal TV, eh, channels, for example. I know that the, it’s not, that’s not the truth.

Yeah.

I know that every TV channel have it’s own agenda for whatever, I don’t know - it’s another topic or not...

Yeah, yeah.

…however, I don’t, I, I don’t believe in getting information or the truth or what really happened from listening to the news, for example. It never. Now, I know they never say the truth, anyway...

I see.

...they say what they want to say.

Yeah, yeah. This, this is a big issue in, eh, disaster studies, the fact that after a disaster, the, the sort of, the three things which are very key for people are accurate information, reliable information and information in good time...

Uhm, uhm.

...so if you can get these three points, it’s a, the best situation.

Yeah, but, you know, you don’t, I just have, have to have my own idea about what happened, but of course I get information from everywhere. I read a lot. I, I watch TV also. I check the Internet. I, not only just Japanese news, but you know, and I was able to make my own idea. Eh, I didn’t panic. Of course [laughter] I panicked a little bit. Not same as many other people who left everything behind…

Yeah.

...ran, like, the first day. I couldn’t do that and because, like, I didn’t, I was not sure about the information. Until I was, until I, yeah.

And for you, to make your decisions, what sources of information were the best sources for you?

Yeah, it’s to, to look at different sources - not just one sources - then try to process it inside of myself and then come right to my own conclusion. It might, I might be wrong or I might, might be right but the conclusion that make me think, “Okay, this is, now I’m satisfied.”

I got it. I got it. Eh, another one of the reasons that I’m doing this project is the Japanese government, like local government, and Japanese NPOs are trying to make some recommendations about how to help foreigners in the future. And one of the recommendations that they’re talking about is, they think it’s very important for foreign people to be a part of their local community because in a disaster, maybe, your local community can come together and help. Did you feel part of your local community?
Yes, I, I felt part of my local community. Local in terms, yeah, I think I feel a part of my
local community and I think I feel they, the, the, I have a very strong connection to
Japan…
Uhm.
...unlike many other people who. I, like, basically, half of my life I spent here which I
consider as my country. And I was, I felt like it’s not the right, it’s not the right thing to
just escape and run away…
Yeah.
...when there is some disaster like that…
Yeah.
...I mean, things could happen anywhere. And I have friend and I have, like, people I
know for many years like my family. I just couldn’t run away…
Yeah.
...I have, like, yeah. So.
Uhm, can you think of any ways that you could help other foreigners to feel the same
way? What should foreign people do to become more part of Japanese communities?
I’m not sure what made me react and what made me react, and, and, what made me, yeah,
like, feel that way. It’s maybe because I’ve been in Japan for a long time and my, I have
roots here…
I see.
...if, for example, if I just arrived to Tokyo and I have no connection in terms of, like, I
don’t know, like, friendship…
Yeah.
...or, I don’t know, much people…
Yeah.
...or, it would have been much easier for me to pack my thing and leave…
I got it.
...but after many years I was, I couldn’t do that…
Yeah, yeah.
...because of, because of the people I know, because of my friend, because of, yeah,
Japanese people I know. I just felt it’s not the right thing to do [laughter]…
Yeah, yeah.
...especially those people like my Japanese friend, they were, they were there, of course, there is a disaster, and they know that, and they are aware of that, and they probably more, as confused as foreigner about…

Yeah.

...what is true in terms of information, eh, they are getting, which is not true, but they stayed anyway [laughter].

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Like, other, like, people from, yeah, and so it depends. I don’t know. As I told you, it’s very confusing because the news, for example, even in the foreign community in Japan, there are people from certain country who are more stressed than other people. Like, there are certain country who just, like, send airplane to, like, eh, for people to go out from Tokyo, from Japan for free even…

Right.

...where other country were, “Oh, don’t worry. It’s okay. There is no, the situation is under control,” and so on. Who to believe? That’s, again, you just have to rely on, on my inner, I don’t know, radar [laughter].

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I understand. Ehm, did you feel that you got information from your local authorities, like, I don’t know, city office or ward office? Did they give you any information?

About, eh, about?

About disaster response or how to prepare or what to do?

Uh, yeah, that’s, the information is there, like, even before the earthquake there, there is always, like, drill, there’s always, like, eh, yeah, they, they sending, we, the website of the, of the city government or the local government, there are all the information necessary in Japanese and English as well. Probably in other language. I’m not sure. Like where to go…

Uuhh.

...in case of the earthquake, and what to do, and, yeah, I mean for me, because Japan, like, it’s the, it’s the biggest thing that happened. Like March 11. Having earthquake, like, quite big is something very [laughter] very normal here and they were expecting something big to happen. That’s, I think they were prepared in terms of what to do, where to go…

Yeah.

...and, yeah.

Ehm, obviously, I’m interested in ideas of language in particular...

Uuhh.
...eh, eh, because I’m interested in language and culture, and I know that some of those websites that you’re talking about, they provide information in Japanese, in English, and other languages...

Korean, maybe Chinese, yeah.

...they also provide information in Easy Japanese. Have you ever come across Easy Japanese?

What’s Easy Japanese?

So, Easy Japanese is a simplified version of Japanese where, for example, if there’s a kanji [Note: Chinese character used in the Japanese writing system] character, they write the hiragana, the furigana [Note: these are relatively basic Japanese scripts to help read the complex Chinese characters]....

On top.

...on top...

I see.

...or they use, ehm, they don’t use very complicated verbs or very complicated nouns.

They try to make things simplified...

Uh, uh.

...ehm, ehm, you, you haven’t come across them?

Yeah, yeah, I, I haven’t, I mean, probably, there but I, frankly speaking, I just, I know that the information is there. It’s not like I’m checking the website every day [laughter]...

Yeah.

...I just know the information is there and, and I know, for example, in my neighbourhood, if something happen, where to go...

Yeah.

...I know that but I’m not aware of everything.

Okay. I understand.

So, it’s just I think when things happen I will, yeah.

Yeah. I, I, I completely understand. Eh, the reason I was just asking about the simplified Japanese, the Easy Japanese is because some, eh, local governments are pushing this very strongly...

I see.

...because there is a fear that providing information in English maybe is not the most useful. Eh, for example, many foreigners in Japan do speak English, but many foreigners in Japan don’t speak English...
Uh, uh, uh, uh.

...so they’re trying to find a balance between.

Yeah, they are right, yeah. But I think there is information not only in Japanese and English but in other language because when we talk about foreigner in Japan, it’s not, the English-speaking community is not the biggest community. So the Chinese, the Korean are maybe ten times as much as, so there are, and, I know that there is information in Chinese and in Korean, yeah.

And, of course, in Tohoku, the biggest groups were not English-speaking groups of foreigners. It was, as you said, Chinese, Brazilian, eh, also, Peruvian and, eh, Filipina/Filipino, so, eh, that’s why I’m interested, as I said, in these ideas of, of language and communication. Eh, in your circle of friends, did you have some foreign nationals who couldn’t speak Japanese very well.

Yes.

Do you know what they did to get information or to communicate? How, how did they manage?

Not sure how did they manage. But, yeah, probably most of them, they were looking at foreign TV channel, which is, yeah, which is very alarming [laughter].

Oh right, yeah. There was quite a difference...

Yeah.

...between the Japanese TV and, eh, the, ehm, I, I guess, overseas, foreign, foreign media. Eh, for you, was, eh, radio, was it a useful, eh.

I never, I don’t, I never use radio. I look at the Internet, I watch TV…

Uuhh.

...that’s it. And I don’t even read the newspaper.

Ah, I see, I see. Yeah, ehm, the reason I mention radio is because in Tohoku radio was very important for Japanese people because they didn’t have enough power...

Uhm, uhm, uhm.

...ehm, and enough conn, connectivity for, you know, TV or...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...social media. So radio was very important, eh, in that part of Japan...

Yeah, yeah.

...but here in Tokyo, I, I...

I don’t know many people who have radio.
[Laughter] Really? Yeah, eh, I know that one of the recommendations that you'll see after the disaster is that people should have a radio, em, just in case in the future it could be, it could be, eh, a useful way of contacting. Eh, I think, you mentioned earlier on about it's important to go to many different sources...

Uhuh.

...so for, eh, information, it should be given through many different sources. So just because radio is a bit old-fashioned...

Uh, uh, uh.

...it still can be very...

Sure.

...it still can be very, very, eh, useful.

Yeah.

Eh, after the disaster there were some efforts in Japan to, I guess, use slogans and campaigns to move towards, eh, recovery. Do you remember any of the slogans or any of the campaigns to encourage people.

Not sure, I don't. No.

Ehm, the reason I ask is there were some famous slogans like, eh, 'Gambare / Gamabou Nippon!' [Note: these were slogans that meant something like 'Hang in there, Japan! Hang in there, Tohoku!']...

Ah yes, yeah, yeah.

...or 'Gambare Tohoku!' Di, did you notice?

Yeah, yeah. On TV, the shop.

Yeah, the reason I ask that question is simply because, eh, some research, interesting research has been done on these slogans...

I see.

...and I wanted to know if foreign people had, eh, paid attention...

Uh, uh.

...or not really, eh, paid attention. It seems from most of the people I speak to, they don't remember immediately, but after a few seconds they remember. So I guess somewhere inside [laughter] the information, the information passed on. For you, when did the disaster end?

So, this, this, is like?

For you, when did you feel like, “Okay, the disaster is finished.” Or if, if the disaster is finished.
For me, I think it lasted for a long time. And I felt that, the, it’s finished and everything went back to normal when light is back in the street, for example. And on, on, yeah, like, for, for about more than three or maybe four month, or even longer than that, the light were dim from, I go back to home by bicycle on {a major road in central Tokyo}. It’s not a long ride but anyway, it’s quite bright street, even in the middle of the night but all the light were, eh, dim for a long time and I felt everything went back to normal when the light is back again.

I see, I see. Yeah, I think a lot of people who I’ve spoken to talk about, maybe, somewhere between two months and six months, depending on their situation.

I think even the first, yeah, eh, yes, like, I think just before Christmas light is back but not as much as it used to be but normal, like, all the, the shop, they have their light up again, on again, and the sign are lighted and, but, that situation dragged for a long time…

Uhuh.

...I’m not sure how many month, but I remember for me I thought that everything is back to normal when the light was back in the streets.

Yeah, I got it. I understand. Ehm, kind of, really my last question, eh, for you, it seems that you were pretty happy with the level of information and pretty happy with the communication...

Yes, I think so. Yes, I am.

...is there anything you think could be improved?

Of course, there is, like, I understand your study and I understand the subject of your thesis, this language and translation, but I don’t think, like, Japan can translate and give information in every language in the, in the world. Like, why do we say it has to be in English? There are people who don’t speak English. Why do we have to say that? It’s in Japanese. There are people, I think the best way is to find a new code for everybody to understand, regardless of what people, what language people speak, like, in terms of this, or, like, even, sign, or like, like, I don’t know, blind sign, for example…

Uhuh.

...for people who don’t, who cannot speak and cannot hear, they have sign for, for everybody to understand. I think, like, we should come up with things like that because still Japan is, for sure, is a place where disaster happen…

Uhuh.

...earthquake or tsunami and we know that it’s going to happen again. It’s, it’s not, like, if it’s going to happen again, it’s when it’s going to happen, and we need to be prepared and I don’t think we should blame the Japanese government for not giving information in, because people say English, why English? Why not Swahili, for example?

Oh, I think, sorry [Note: the participant still clearly wanted to speak]...

And, em, yeah, I think it’s translation, okay, it’s not feasible that they can translate it in every language and I don’t think we, we should, like, like prefer some community to others. We are all foreigner here. Of course, there are community or people from certain country that are more, in terms of number, than other communities, but even the, the
community where there is only, like, few dozen people, they have the right also to get
information, same as the other people, and again translating the information in English or
in French or the other thing, it will not help the, the, there are, there will be other people
that really feel that they are left, eh, behind. Eh, and we can not also ask every foreign
here in Japan to learn Japanese. Of course, it is, if people are thinking to stay for a long
time here, they should because it help for everyday life to speak the language. But again,
I think we have to think out-of-the-box and we have to find the solution that is not
connected to language. Like, for example, sign…

Uhmm.

...that everybody understand.

I think you make some really excellent points there and I agree with many of the, the
things you say. I know that, eh, the United Nations and the WHO have developed some
symbols and signs and they are trying to introduce these as a kind of standard in the
world, especially in, sort of, say, the Pacific Rim of Fire where, as you say, it’s not a
question of if there’ll be another disaster but when...

Yeah, yeah.

...there’ll be another disaster. And I strongly agree with you that, eh, favoring, for
example, English or favouring French or favouring Chinese is not a good idea. Eh, I
don’t know that favouring one language over another is the right way to proceed. Eh,
some of the people I have spoken to have talked about how useful diagrams were for them
in understanding issues with communication...

Yeah. So.

...so I think the idea of symbols and diagrams is a very, very interesting one. And just
also, to, to let you know, em, my, the purpose of my study is to explore this issue...

I see [laughter].

...so I’m not trying to, eh, say we should translate in every language. I’m simply trying to
find out what the foreigners I speak to really want or really need...

So.

...eh, also, I hope you don’t think that I’m blaming the Japanese government...

[Laughter]

...yeah, eh, I, I really, I don’t have a strong position either way. I think it was an
extremely large disaster, a very complex disaster, and I think any government would have
difficulty, eh, I’m just trying to, to see if the recommendations that the government are
making now seem useful...

I see.

...based on what, eh, some foreigners, some foreigners said. But my study will only be
very small, small money [laughter]...

[Laughter] Sure.
...but I’m, I’m just trying to see. Ehm, basically that’s it, unless you have any other comment or any other point you want to make.

Eh, not at the moment. But again, I think the, the best way is to make sign and diagram and probably hand, like, some kind of leaflet to every person who arrive to airport…

Uhum.

...or port in Japan to be prepared, or even for people who are here visiting because it could happen, you know, when they are, when they are here, like, as tourists or business trip or, or that. Yeah.

That’s a very interesting idea. I think that could be a very useful, eh, type of information source for people. And, as you said, one big concern is short-term residents...

Yes.

...people who are only here, say, for example, for business...

Yeah.

...or tourism. And with the 2020 Olympics now being planned, it’s another reason to also focus on people who are only for a short time...

[Laughter] for a short time, uh.

...so I think that, of course, we have to talk about foreigners in Japan, but already it is difficult to define what is a foreigner...

Ah, sure.

...that’s already a big issue. And then, once you’ve even made some sort of a definition of what’s a foreigner, then maybe you also have to look at who’s, maybe, a longer-term and who’s a shorter-term, because they might have very different needs.

Sure, yeah. Uuh.

Yeah, but thank you so much for your time and your very interesting opinions.

Sure, you’re welcome.
2013/9/19 Interview with Participant 8

Researcher: So then, basically, to start very, kind of, generally, could you just tell me a little bit about what happened to you in the disaster?

Participant: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I was at the time in office, ehm, yeah, I know exactly the time, somehow… Yeah.

...every second or minute, I remember. I was with my colleague and I had had a few experience of earthquake, but they caused just some little movement, but this time it was, it, it kept on going, it kept on going, and then I saw, I worked in a, on a floor in a office, open space, but a little area, and area where I’m working was only Japanese, and I saw them also getting scared so I was, they were getting under their, em, so I was doing the same for the first time actually, I never went under my desk for earthquake, now I did it and I was writing a mail to eh, my family [laughter] to say, like, eh, “I’m, I think there’s big earthquake.”...

Yeah.

...then, I remembered that I saw my colleague on the other side, she was changing shoes, em, we were on the 27th floor and one of the things I learnt from this experience is to have, eh, shoes with flat heels in the office. We had to, eh, so after this what happened, it’s, I didn’t, I don’t remember it, but afterwards I heard many stories, so some of the foreigners immediately want to get out of the building… Yeah.

...so they started going down, but I was maybe in shock, I think, kind of, although I didn’t think I was in shock, but I think, I, I thought, “Okay, I look at my Japanese, eh, colleagues and see what they are doing and they wait a bit, of, of course everyone was quiet and they waited until the announcement came that we could go out of the building, because apparently after earthquake there will be, eh, eh, aftershocks and then you just have to wait until, em, there is no aftershocks… Yeah.

...so that it’s okay… Yeah.

...to go downstairs. So that was maybe five minutes later. I remember one of my colleagues shouting, for, foreign guy was shouting, “Ah, Japanese, what are we supposed to do?” [laughter]

[Laughter]

Anyway, I thought that was good. I just followed. So then, we walked, eh, down the stairs very calmly and no, well, we, we heard stories afterwards that some foreign people were running and, eh, running to get fur, just being in panic…
Yeah.

...so, but, yeah, I was with my colleagues just running, and we were somehow, yeah, now I’m talking about taking care of each other in a way that we know our team was six, and, eh, we were checking if everyone would be going downstairs with each other, and we know one girl, she was with others so that was okay so we went downstairs and then we have this evacuation area close to the office and every year we have the practice [laughter] when we have to go, walk down the stairs but no-one does it …

[Laughter]

...because it’s announced, this was actually first time walking down the stairs…

Wow.

...and then being downstairs we, we checked if everyone was, eh, there of our team and I think we had to, because there are some coordinator on each floor or in each division, so we had to say that we were all there…

Yeah.

...and then they, we, we had to wait on what to do next but maybe after half an hour they said if you don’t need to be back in the office, you can go home. And then some people had to be back in the office for really some urgent task, but when we were waiting downstairs, we could see the building moving. And I work in, eh, {redacted} which is a building of the seventies…

Wow.

...em, you have, next to it, you have the hotel {a famous hotel in central Tokyo}.

Afterwards I saw movies of the buildings moving towards each other…

Wow.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And, ehm, yeah, well that’s more for after the, how, how…

Yeah.

...on the day itself then when they said you can go home, ehm, I think, well, it was four o’clock and the weather was nice and because of we were just talking about, we went to the local pub {redacted}. But there was no-one there, eh, they, they, eh, left but, eh, there was a heater outside, eh, and we just turned it on and we sat, sat there, went to convenience store and get some beers, and started, eh, drinking beers and, em, at that time already it was difficult to make phone calls but, em, I [laughter] knew the password for the wifi for {the local pub} so we could have Internet connection and because of that some news started getting in and, eh, of course, em, I think it was by then maybe daytime in the Netherlands and my sister, I, I had written my family and my boyfriend at that time who was not in Japan, eh, so, em, they started mailing me back, “Are you okay?” and then maybe after one hour, em, yeah, that was when the tsunami happened so at that time, they were asking, “Oh, the tsunami,” and, are, “Are you okay?” I was just, “I’m okay, I’m okay.” Ehm, then, ehm, yeah, we were then mainly with the foreign colleagues and a few Japanese were, we had some plans for that night, two birthdays, and, em, so one guy, em, I remember they bought a cake and put it there so we ate it in the bar and then the other birthday was later that night which I didn’t go anymore because it was karaoke but,
em, I stayed in the bar quite a while, even the people came back who worked there, so they might be back two hours later so opened up everything, so we had to buy the beer, not bring our own cans [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...ehm, yeah, I, I said to my colleagues because there were no taxis and public transport was difficult, I, I, I go to work by bicycle because it’s not so far. I said to my Japanese colleagues, em, em, “Yeah, you can stay, you can stay at my place if you would like to.” But they said, eh, they would prefer to go home to see their family if they were okay because they couldn’t call them so actually they didn’t even drink the beers, they were already, like, worried...

Of course, yeah.

...and they wanted to go home as soon as possible.

Of course.

...so maybe that’s why it was only the four people who were there because we hang on to each other…

Right.

...at that time. So then at certain point I said, “Oh, now I want to go home.” And then when I went home by bicycle I was so surprised about how many people were walking on the streets. Usually I can just, I, I just ride on the sidewalk but the streets were full with, with cars, cabs, everyone who could, em, drive or, well, everyone was on the street going home. And the, the, eh, sidewalks were also completely packed, so it took a while for me to get home, but, eh, usually we take 15 minutes and now half an hour. But that’s nothing compared with other people who walked to Yokohama or whatever, wherever [Note: Yokohama is about 30km from the centre of Tokyo]…

Right.

...so for me, it was not that troublesome but by the time I got home then I started watching the news, em, eh, could see, the, the, the things, eh, the movies of the tsu, so I started watching news, em, without eh, stopping. Of course, many mails. It was, it was, eh [laughter] I was on my computer all the time because everyone from the Netherlands, ehm, started mailing me. Eh, but, em, [laughter] what I remember from that night specifically that I watched CNN and then I thought I don’t want to watch CNN, I didn’t watch CNN ever after that because I felt how they brought the news was so far off reality or…

Yeah.

...I was really annoyed by the. I’m not going to watch that news any more [laughter].

That’s very interesting.

So, I, I, I, I, I think I, the news I kept on watching was NHK and, em, I think, at a certain point, one of my colleagues sent me a link, maybe, that was on Sunday with NHK foreigner news.

Uuhh.
Yeah, yeah, but anyway, at that time, that was Friday night, I, I decide, okay, I was just
behind the computer, watching news, watching everything I, I could, and, em, then I felt,
“Oh, I don’t want to go out anymore,” eh, because, yeah, it’s not a good night with the
 tsunami and go sing karaoke…

Yeah.

I didn’t, and I didn’t want to go on the streets anymore by that, by that time. Then on
Saturday, that was the day after, I think I was still following news, and some, I don’t
remember exactly because I didn’t feel like going out because there were still many
shocks and, yeah, there was a lot to, to see and a lot to mail. People I haven’t from for
years…

[Laughter]

...started mailing…

Yeah.

...em, I think by the time it was Saturday night, people started, maybe, I’m not sure when
Fukushima happened, that news came, I think, during that day, but, I think, from that
evening, Saturday evening, people started, I, I got a mail from, em, Japanese friend, he,
she said to me, em, I’m not sure if she first asked, “Ah, you are by yourself? Do you want
to come and stay with us?” I said, “No, I prefer to stay at home.” I think in the next few
day, days, in total, three Japanese friends, colleagues asked me, eh, if I want to stay with
them, so that was, eh, really, I felt touched by that.

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Eh, but, yeah, that same friend, she also said, like, “Oh, I hear many
foreign colleague are, are leaving.” I said, “What?” I didn’t, eh, think about that. But I
think, maybe, from Saturday night also the mails from the Nether were, “You need to
leave,” or bah, bah, bah…

Yeah.

...those messages came. And I was thinking, “Eh, what shall I do?” Em, well, I had at that
time a boyfriend. He was not in Japan, but his brother lives in Tokyo, too, so he was
going to go to Osaka with a few people so they said, basically, also said, “Why don’t you
go with us?” Then I was thinking, “Ah, but all the Japanese people are going to?” Or I
don’t know, I, somehow I decided to stay, ehm, yeah, I, I cannot exactly remember what,
when I thought what, but I guess it had something to do with all the Japanese people
stayed. If I would be in the Netherlands and the dykes would [laughter]…

[Laughter]

...then, when, what would I do. I thought, “Okay, if, if it’s safe enough I would stay.”
And maybe I’m not sure if at that day I received, it, it was maybe in the first few days it
was also like, “Oh, people are not here. They do not know how it is. So why are they
telling that I should leave..

Uhm.

...or em, so that was over the weekend…
Yeah.

...kind of confusing and, eh, yeah, knowing, “Ah maybe after this weekend I am the only foreigner left here.”...

Yeah.

...that feeling...

Yeah.

...I, I had, em, em, so then I was still here Sunday night, yeah, but I had contact with, eh, yeah, Japanese friends and colleagues and, yeah, with the Netherlands somehow...

Yeah.

...and with my boyfriend. So that was, so then the thing with Monday morning, em, we didn’t hear anything from our company and I felt like, “Ah, should I go to work?” And we have a whole disaster, eh, em, system that, em, if something happens they should call you but, em, we didn’t hear anything and I was thinking, “Is it safe to go out?” Maybe I didn’t go out because of Fukushima.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I didn’t go out, didn’t want to go out. Then I went to the office on Monday because I looked outside and I saw some people...

[Laughter]

...on the street and then I came in the office and basically my Japanese colleagues had the same uncertainties...

Yeah.

...compared with, eh, just like me. Some colleagues, so there were not many foreign colleagues left but also few Japanese people they didn’t come, but mostly, there were few foreigners also just like me...

Yeah.

...yeah, som, some of them were really scared for, for the building and, eh, because of the experience, and some had left the country, ehm, yeah, my colleagues and I, we still there but also, kind of, puzzled. Do we have to work? Why don’t we hear anything that they tell us? Eh, and, in the company ourself, we, we realized, “Ah, with such a disaster, yeah, you have to still keep working business as usual but actually our backup facilities are not, eh, prepared for this, or the backup plan or the disaster plan...

Yeah.

...so, in that week, many people were suddenly busy with disaster plan, setting up a backup site in, eh, Kita Kyu, or the west Japan...

Yeah.
...so a lot of work was needed for that. Ehm, then, ehm basically people were in the office
just not really, eh, working but, yeah, we were talking a lot with each other, talking about
news and what everyone did at home and how the families were and, em, yeah, we had,
we have some offices, branch offices in, in the north so...

Oh.

...yeah, the, yeah. So making sure that they were okay. Ehm, so, yeah, so still I thought,
okey the Japanese are still here, I am also staying. I think by that time, maybe, I received
a mail from the Dutch Embassy...

Ah.

...yeah, compared with other, eh, countries, the, the Dutch were not so panic, panicking
or, because we heard, “Oh, the French, they want everyone to leave the country.” I
received a message more about, ehm, that, eh, it would be, eh, if you do not, if you did,
did, wouldn’t have a, a urgent reason, or, to stay in Tokyo, it would be recommended to
leave Tokyo and maybe go to west Japan...

Uuhh.

...something like that, they said...

Yeah.

...and I thought, “Okay, I have urgent reason because my work is here so [laughter]...

[Laughter] Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah.

...Yeah, yeah, and maybe one month later they sent another mail and it was also similar,
reassuring and, eh, eh, both of the mails I forwarded to my family and my, my boyfriend
eh, to, em, yeah, make them feel reassured because they, they saw all the news which I
knew was exag, not exaggerated but, ehm, yeah, it was, the, outside of Tokyo, well, if
you don’t know Japan and you have never been there, then you would not know where
Fukushima is...

Of course.

...you would not know, so, I think at home I spent most of the time behind the computer,
discussing with friends and they were, the people were starting to have, I became
specialist or suddenly specialist in radiation and just, also, because I, I wanted to
understand...

Uhum.

...but it didn’t help that my friends and [laughter] relatives were sending me all these
alarming, eh, things and, yeah, it, that was maybe the most, well, I, I think by the time it
was Wednesday that the company said, “Oh, you can work from home now.”...

Yeah.

...I felt so relieved and I said to my colleague, because some colleagues had to stay
because of making the backup plan...

Yeah.
...so working from home was really for them working from, I said, “Is it okay if I travel to west Japan?” And they said, “No, no. It’s okay.” I brought my laptop…

Yeah.

...I basically didn’t do anything…

Yeah.

...and, ehm, I think that is, yeah, things are coming, it’s, it’s two years ago…

Right, yeah.

...things are coming back and maybe I will remember more but it was just, if, if I would listen and think again, then I would remember more details...

Right.

...I would know so many details about that time. Ehm, after I, well, I, I went to west Japan so relieved that everything was normal…

Yeah.

...and, and the weird, weird thing about Japan which I, about Tokyo which I didn’t know, the, the hoarding which started. I was not prepared for that, but somehow I had enough toilet paper [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...tho, those things, but, yeah, the stores completely empty…

Yeah, yeah.

...everything dark. It was strange experience, but it, yeah, we had to live like that for, for a while…

Uhm.

...before everything was normal, but looking back it was maybe normal quite soon again…

Yeah, yeah.

...but still, maybe, the first year everything was, the light darker, so the feeling was so different and you didn’t want to go sing karaoke. Just, your normal life was, eh, different.

Yeah.

I don’t know what I did those days, but probably more with friends or more staying at home. Ah, what happened, for example, was that my parents were, eh, visiting or planning to visit me for the first time in Japan end of March, but they could postpone, so they came, eh, they could postpone maybe six weeks, so they came just when cherry blossom was here. The cherry blossom was different but it was for me special with my, my parents. And my parents, like, also, were, even their family and friends, brothers and
sis, they were saying to them, “Aw, don’t go to Japan. Everything is dangerous and scary.” Still they came because I sent them the mail from the [laughter] Dutch Embassy…

Yeah, yeah.

...and also I was okay. And they came and they were so relieved to see that everything was still standing here…

Yeah.

...and, eh, eh, yeah. So that was good.

It’s, yeah.

And I think by the end of the month, at that time, also, my boyfriend came back to do job interviews so then I felt less alone, and I, I booked a holiday Golden Week, came back maybe after that. I did volunteering one time…

Uuhh.

...up in the north. Maybe the first half year was really different and I think we still kept on talking about it for the rest of the year.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was a big part of your life...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah…

...your everyday life.

...yeah, yeah, yeah. It was, it was a shared experience, in a way…

Yeah.

...even now, eh, now and then, yeah, you check, “Ah, were you there when the earthquake happened?” “Yeah.” “Where were you?” “There and there.” Yeah, so everyone has his or her story…

Yeah.

...about it and it’s something I will never forget.

Ah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

It’s extremely interesting to me...

Yeah, yeah.

...what, the, you know...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...the details of your story, they are very similar…
Um, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...to some of my own experiences and similar to some...
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...of the experiences of the other people I’ve spoken to...
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...em, because I’m interested in the ideas of, particularly of things like language...
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...translation and barriers, I’d just like to, kind of, check up on a few details...
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...em, for example, do you remember, at the beginning, you said there was an announcement in your company...
Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...to say it was okay to leave the building...
Yeah, yeah.
...can you remember what language that announcement was in?
Eh, I think it was in two languages or maybe they changed it afterwards…
[Laughter]
...yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So, but, probably if it was in two languages, first it would be Japanese and then English. But I, I think, I, it, I was maybe so much in a shock that I even didn’t hear it or paid attention to it, so it could have been only in Japanese, yeah.
I understand, I understand. Ehm, then also similarly you talked about how, you know, you started watching CNN but then decided to stop...
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...and when you stopped watching CNN, you probably watched NHK...
NHK, yeah.
...do, do you remember, were you watching that it Japanese or were you watching...
In English...
...in English?
...in English, yeah, yeah. Because you have the, eh, NHK World [Note: this is the
Japanese national broadcasters subscription, multilingual (predominantly English)
television channel]...

Yeah.

...I watched that one.

Right.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I, I watched everything which was, was in English so, ehm, what
do you have? Japan Times [Note: one of the main English-language dailies] all, all the
news...

Yeah.

...which [laughter] all news, the Japanese source which I could find. Yeah, yeah. And, of
course, I read Dutch news but I was, I was all the time annoyed by it [laughter]...

Yeah.

...I would think, “You don’t know.” Even, yeah, I had some experiences and also about
foreigners, that they did some interviews, people, eh, from your home country or
people from the Netherlands would interview people who were here or I would see a
Dutch journalist come here and make a, em, some reportage and then, “Oh no, this is just
sensation.”

Yeah.

Yeah, so then, I felt like, “Oh, this is, eh, this is how they make news.” I didn’t want to
listen to all of that, yeah.

So it’s very interesting...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...that for you how the, the foreign sources...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and the Japanese domestic sources...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...had a very different kind of value or...

Yeah, yeah.

...it seems like you trusted the Japanese sources more.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Because, well, it was difficult, you know, in a way that, “Ah,
maybe they are not telling everything.” At the same time, yeah, I still believe, oh it’s a, a
democratic and open transparent country. I don’t live in China or Russia so maybe they
also don’t know or you, you can think even more, “Oh, they say this but it’s not certain
that they will do things.” And I had, kind of [laughter]...
...well, I thought, “Okay, maybe now it’s okay but there, it can still be possible that, eh, another shock comes and then that really disaster happens in Fukushima, eh, or even more…

Yeah, yeah.

... then [laughter] maybe I made a bit a joke of it but I, I do the cycling, then I said, “Okay, I go with my bicycle to, eh, Hamamatsucho and take the boat to, eh [laughter]...” Yeah, because I thought, “Okay, the planes are full…” Right.

...and maybe they are not there.” Yeah, but, yeah, it was maybe my new, more, more also talking with my colleagues. I went to the office every day, so I got, in that sense, the same, and they would tell me things. For example, I didn’t have the, eh, the flat shoes in the office, but, eh, since then I, I have [laughter]

[Laughter]

...because I didn’t have to walk but still had pain in my, eh, well, muscle pain after taking stairs…

Of course, with twen, twenty-, twenty-something floors.

...with high heels. And, em, the emergency kit. So in the office, we didn’t, well now, only this year, we got a new emergency kit. But officially we are, are supposed to have one, but, eh, yeah, at that point it was a kind of mess: “Where are these things?” But now they are really tied to our, eh, chair and everyone has one but it’s only since two months.

Yeah, I think a lot of the procedures have, em, kind of been improved and...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...a lot of the, you mentioned about the disaster plans or backup plans...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

I think a lot of companies and organisations have done their best to implement more procedures.

So at that time, I didn’t have anything, by my Japanese colleagues, they are so, eh, yeah, colleagues, friends [laughter]...

Yeah.

...they are so, they are so, like, prepared, in a way. They are also scared but they stay calm and they don’t, I could have, no, I have so much respect for how they deal with it. Not, the prices stayed the same, you know?
Yeah.

There were not people who were trying to sell things, eh, for, eh, two-hundred times the price. The, they, they checked up with me if I was okay and if I needed help, even although for them it’s difficult but also …

Sure

...they, they were checking with me. And they were telling me things which would be important for me to know because [laughter] like, for example, the emergency kit, what to have in there and that I would need to have, well, if it was raining, better to really cover myself because Fukushima may be…

Yeah, yeah.

...with all these uncertainties, the things they heard in the news, they would tell me so I had this, also, this emergency bag with all the things I needed, em, in the office [laughter].

Yeah.

Yeah, now I have it at home and I didn’t look at it…

[Laughter]

...anymore for years. Maybe I should.

Yeah, keep it, eh, up to date.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

That point about, you know, how your colleagues and your friends...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...can become, kind of, like a volunteer translator or a volunteer helper for, eh, foreign people...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...to me, that’s a really interesting aspect of translation, I guess. As you said...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

... they were getting information in Japanese and they were passing it on to you, to you in English, so that’s some sort of, I guess...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...there was information you needed that you couldn’t access by yourself, so it was your friends or...

Colleagues.
...your colleagues who help, who help, who helped you...

Yeah.

...em, overall, in terms of the information that you needed...

Yeah, yeah.

...what information did you feel was most, kind of, lacking?

Eh, like, well, in, in general there was uncertainty about Fukushima. I think what, what we felt was lacking is the, how, maybe, how slow the reactions were to come with information, like, we, we experience in our own company, but it was not only in our company because they wait for information from the government or from Tepco [Note: the electric power company that runs the Fukushima plant]...

Yeah...

...yeah, yeah, so maybe they...

...it was a domino effect.

...everyone learned [laughter] fr, from this, but it, that was what you, feel that you, you, you cannot really decide what is best for you...

Yeah.

...so, in a way, you choose what you want to listen to, and now I remember because I was thinking, “Ah, if it is really bad, eh, what, what happened in Fukushima,” - that’s why I maybe decided to stay, I remember so now - “that I don’t have any children.” So I could imagine if you had children then you want to bring them to a safe place...

Yeah.

...drink bottled water and only, those things. Em, so I thought, oh and looking at my age because I had read something if you are above forty, then, eh, it takes some time for radiation if it’s really bad to have effect on you. And I thought, “Okay, by that time, I would be 80 or something, yeah, yeah, I think it was that I read something that if you are a little child then, yeah, it’s more severe than if you are older. And if you are older and you get exposed then it will also take some time. So I thought, “Okay, I, I’ll take that chance.”

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, yeah. And that’s how I decided, I think. But it’s, I don’t know, I got so much information and you pick something which suits you and I did, and I didn’t get, I didn’t feel panic because my, I saw the Japanese people being calm...

Yeah.

... I think that’s what.

That’s, that’s a really interesting point. I know, also, that you mentioned that your embassy, the Dutch Embassy...
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...sent you maybe a couple of emails. Do you remember, did you receive any, eh, contact from, like, the city office or the ward office or some, some Japanese kind of government organization? Did, did they contact you?

Not sure, because, that I would not be able to read or, I know in our home, eh, in the apartment building where I live, I think after the earthquake they also started having more procedures and they have the meetings with, eh, eh, with, eh, community, and, and, with, eh, people who live in the apartment building, so I got many explanations later that I should fill my bath, eh, keep my bath water in case of earthquake then I could use it to, for the toilet...

Ah, uhuh, uhuh.

...all this, they have many buildings, eh, things in my building but before that I didn’t know. So basically, when I stayed in my apartment, when there was, eh, a big shock, eh, aftershock...

Yeah.

...I think a few times I checked outside what my neighbours were doing, or I saw them also, but, ehm, I didn’t really have contact with my, I don’t remember exactly. I, I, I just remember that I stayed inside.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, maybe also, in my building, it became qui, I, I, I get the feeling that maybe people really, these were also Japanese, who didn’t really need to be here, they left, met families, children to family...

Yeah.

...in the rest of Japan, so it was just quiet, yeah, yeah. So maybe, yeah, what did I miss? Hmm, hmm. I, I think, I thought - okay I don’t remember [laughter] what I said anymore.

No, you, you got, you, you got information from various sources...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and then, kind of, made up your own mind about what was important and what wasn’t important. Eh, just to check, what’s the profile of people in your building, is it mostly?

Ah, Japanese.

Mostly Japanese. Now and then, I see, eh, a foreign person but I don’t remember if that was at that time, if there were other foreigners but mainly Japanese, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. It’s very interesting that you talked about how you would, you know, during the aftershock you would look and see what your, your neighbours were doing and, kind of, be checking on...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...your neighbours, because one of the...

Yeah.

...recommendations that the Japanese government is making is that foreigners need to be more part of their local...

Ah, okay.

...community...

Yeah yeah, yeah, yeah.

...ehm, what do you feel about that?

Yeah, that’s, I can see that’s, well, eh, I think the, the chairman of the, the, the group who takes care of all the things in the, eh, how would say, call it? Apartment community?

Yeah, uuh.

He, eh, he can speak English, so I, I, I have in my building, a few people who are, who lived, maybe abroad, and some retired but, they, they, ehm, I had one time, they, they grabbed me and said, “Oh I need to explain to you all the emergency things.” One thing that happened, eh, I realize now, on our floor we have the, the fire emergency, or the emergency exit on the balcony and on every floor there are three balconies where there are, ehm, eh, ladders down, eh, you can roll them out for this. And I’m one of them...

Ah.

...so I need to keep my door open in case there’s an emergency. Everyone basically understood. But it’s good to learn it because I didn’t.

Absolutely, yeah.

Eh, also, I learned that the, the, eh, how would you say? Dividers between the balconies, you can kick them in. So if I would go, because I was, “Oh, if I’m in the office, what then?” And, of course, they had thought about, yeah, then they would kick from the neighbour’s door...

Yeah.

...and then they could come at my balcony...

Yeah.

...so those things, and I have now a, kind of, magnet.

Yeah.

...so if I am safe, if somethings happens and I am safe, I am supposed to open my door and put it outside so that they can see.

Oh, there’s a lot of good community procedures...
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, so.

...in your, your apartment building. That's great to hear. Eh, I wonder, just, if this is not really that.

Because I didn’t know before. Maybe they were there already, because I always throw it away because it’s in Japanese.

That’s what I was just about to ask you because, eh, it’s not really too important, but I know from my apartment building...

Uhm, yeah, yeah.

...that in, eh, you talked about the dividers in the balcony...

Yeah, yeah.

...I remember in my apartment building there was a sign in Japanese...

Oh, probably it is, yeah, yeah, yeah...

...and it said, you could, eh, in Japanese it said you can kick this, this through...

...yeah, yeah, I think it is....

I wonder, maybe?

...there is something written there.

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

So it’s interesting how those small points can just, you know, like you said, if you receive something Japanese, maybe you throw it away.

I would throw it away, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah. You, you, many people have said, eh, many people have said that. Em, this is a little bit linked to another recommendation - ah, sorry, no I was [Note: I pointed my finger in a way that looked like I was gesturing to a sheet of paper on the table between us, but I was simply moving my hand] - the idea of Japanese language being used, ehm, so, the, the Japanese government are trying to use more Easy Japanese...

Ah, yes.

...have you heard about Easy Japanese?

No.

No. So what they are trying to do is they are trying to come up with a more simple version...

Uhm.
...of standard Japanese...

Ah.

...you know, for example, if there was a Chinese character, they would put the hiragana [Note: a less complex writing system in Japanese than that of Chinese characters in which all Japanese words can be expressed] on top...

Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah...

...so that...

...that, that.

...would help you read it. But my fear about that is that if some foreigners see Japanese...

Yeah, yeah, throw it away.

...even if, they still, they still throw it away.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So, because, eh, for example, the thing which I, I received many, eh, pamphlets in my, eh, building, eh, from, eh, the com, the apartment community, maybe every month which they have a meeting, but, eh, well, I can already recognize it’s from them because I can read the apartment building name in katakana [Note: one of the writing systems of the Japanese language] eh, I think one time the, the receptionist who could speak, who can speak English, she walked me through it, because it was all the emergency procedures, so I could recognize that or I can check with them, but now lately she, eh, resigned [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so there is no English speaker anymore there...

Ahhhh.

...so that’s, eh, yeah, that’s, yeah. I think for now I’m okay because I know the procedures, yeah, yeah.

Yeah, I think, and it sounds like the procedures that they have in place are very, kind of, sensible procedures...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...they’re not asking you to do too many difficult things...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...but simple points like a magnet on your door or something is a very is a good.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And if there is a fire, then these, they would explain these doors close, eh, where, which map do I have? I have to, I need to have the, let me check. [Note: the participant begins to check for a map on her phone]

Some sort of special, special map or something?
Yeah, because maybe one hour, after one hour everything gets all so dark, and those things.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

And how I can open the windows, I even had to practice and they pointed me where all the, eh, fire extinguishers are.

Well, you know, I mean, of course it was terrible that it was such a disaster...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...but maybe from this some good things have, have developed in that, you know, people are being more careful or planning a little bit more, more in advance.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Ehm, the, just another couple of points. Did you get any early warning about the earthquake on your mobile phone?

I don’t remember any more because afterwards I, I downloaded the programs so I didn’t have it at that time. But also it, it drives you crazy everything goes all the time...

Oh yes.

...so I think I didn’t want to use it. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Afterwards, I think also that I only realized afterwards that I actually was in a shock. At that time, I, I, I just didn’t think or I just followed but then later I thought, “Oh, this was a shocking experience.” Yeah, and then, eh, look, more then looking back and seeing, you have those little movies on Youtube that it’s every day, or when there is a earthquake, you see, you hear, kind of, fireworks...

Yeah, yeah, yeah...

...have you seen that one? [Note: the participant is referring to the many animations on the Internet that simulate the number and size of earthquakes that occurred in the disaster e.g. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpOl8vkJ-G4]

...yes, yes, yes, yes.

Yeah, yeah. And then I realized it was really...

Huge...

...unbelievable.

...right? The number of, sort of, shocks...

Shocks.

...that followed...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...hundreds and hundreds. And, I, I agree with what you said about the, the alarm on the, the early warning system...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...it was very traumatic...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...to be honest, in some ways, I think I’m more, I’m more afraid of the alarm than of the actual earthquake now...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...because every time, I just remember being woken up...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...or out of, you know, unable to relax because, because the alarm was going off.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I think also we were talking a lot like if there was a bigger aftershock, then we were talking with each other, “Ah, did you feel it?” You know, we always checking did [laughter] like, every time, yeah, in the office, like, “Did you feel the one yesterday? Were, were you okay?” Or the, if there was a bigger one, then I would get messages from my friends, colleagues, saying, “Are you okay?”

Yeah, yeah. Because it did continue for several months afterward.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And if there was really a big one, it was in the Dutch news, then I would get mails from them, the Dutch.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It seems to me that email was an extremely convenient...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...kind of communication tool for you. Did you use any other sort of communication tools with eh?

No I think, yeah, with my family and boyfriend, Skype. Did I use the phone? Some people started calling me. It was, I think because of the time difference with Netherlands and also to, at, I think at certain points, I didn’t want to reply or, or it, eh, well, no, I was also, no, I think I replied because I thought, “Oh, people care for me.” So it’s nice and if they ask me, “Are you okay?” then I replied but some, sometimes it was just the tone of a mail which [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...“How do you know? You cannot know!”...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...that was mostly the Fukushima thing.

Right? Yeah, if people aren’t here...
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah…

...it’s, it’s, it’s very difficult…

...yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

... “Why are you telling me what to do when you are not, you’re not even here?” yeah.

Then I just wouldn’t reply, yeah.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I know that you said, em, in the, sort of, early days that you spent a lot of time just at the, at the computer…

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Checking the news, I think and.

...mainly was it news websites you were checking or did you check any other website?

Ah, I think also because people were sending me mails with links, eh, mainly my friends in the Netherlands. So some of them, I checked. That would be on, eh, radiation…

Right.

...mostly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I don’t remember exactly any more.

Yeah, I know it’s a very difficult question to answer because two years have passed…

Yeah, yeah.

...the reason I ask is that I know that, em, the Japanese government translated a lot of their ministry websites…

Ah.

...or, you know, they created special information websites.

Um. I didn’t know.

Most of the people I’ve spoken to didn’t know they existed…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so it seems like there was some effort to translate…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...but there was no communication that this information is here…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...for you, so that seems to be a little bit of a problem that they did work but…

Ah, unknown…

...people didn’t know about it.
...but how would they find the foreigners to? Yeah, maybe they have these bulletin boards or.

Well, also, I know that, em, all foreign residents, we have to register, right...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...as living here but there are...

Okay, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...difficult legal issues about accessing people’s, sort of, private information. So Japan, as you know, can be, it can be difficult to access that so maybe that was a reason why they didn’t share it. Em, I know there was a lot of talk in the weeks and months after...

Uhuh.

...about social media. Wa, was social media useful for you?

I, yeah, I always put a lot, what did I put on Facebook at that time? What did I read? I don’t, specifically, I think, probably I didn’t feel like using it for while [laughter]. Ehm, did I make pictures of empty supermarkets?

Yeah.

I think, as opposed to usual [laughter] I didn’t use Facebook a lot or, I think I, I went to west Japan, maybe I made some pictures there. Because I went to Miyajima [laughter]...

Ah, kind of, sightseeing.

...yeah, sightseeing pictures. That’s what I remember I made at that time, but I was, yeah, it was more mail maybe only I think now I use Facebook also a lot for chatting…

Uhum.

...but at that time maybe What’s App or…

Yeah.

...those things or with my friends from Japan…

Yeah, yeah.

...who left Japan and they were checking…

Yeah, yeah.

...not so much.

The reason I ask about it is just because, as I said, there was a lot of talk about social media but there’s not so much evidence of…

Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...that social media was used. So I’m interested in trying to get, even though my project is very small...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...I’m trying to get some evidence. Did people really use it or did they not? And to be honest, so far...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...I think not so much, not so much. But it, that may change...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...maybe I’ll talk to more people and they’ll have different experiences.

I will check, I can check my history. [Note: the participant looks down at her mobile phone]

Yeah. The other issue, I think I probably already know the answer but, for you was power or electricity or c, connectivity, was that a problem for you?

Eh, no.

No, no. It was working all the time and then we got the instructions to save energy during the summer so there were no issues for electricity, water. No, everything, all the utilities…

Yeah, to be honest, I, I, but, because I knew where you lived, I, kind of, knew...

Yeah, Tokyo, it’s okay, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...that it, it was, you probably didn’t have. I’m speaking to people, you know, who were in different parts of Japan...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...some of them had, had big, big problems, eh, with, with power and so on. Ehm, I know that in, say for example in the, the northern parts...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...that for them, mobile phones or TV wasn’t so useful because they, they had no power and didn’t, couldn’t connect to, to the Internet easily, so for them, they used radio, for example...

Ah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...Japanese people used a lot of radio communication as a way of getting information but, em, I think in Tokyo, did you use radio?

No.
No, no. But one thing I would suggest is it might be a good idea to have a radio...

Ah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...just because if there is a big earthquake centred more near here, em...

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Needs a radio, yeah, yeah.

...it’s one of the, sort of, early findings, em, of this project, is that the best plan is to have lots of channels...

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so, if you only use social media, it’s not a good idea...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...if you only use television, it’s not a good idea. If you have a lot of channels available...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, you can.

...there’s a chance that one of them will work. Yeah, yeah.

It’s good, yeah, yeah, the radio.

And, you know, going back to your story, face-to-face communication was also extremely important...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...eh, talking to your colleagues...

Talk to the neighbours, maybe.

...talking to your friends, the neighbours. These, these things are also vital, like giving you advice about do this, don’t do this...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...yeah, so it’s something that’s worth, em, worth, worth remembering.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Em, just, kind of, as a final question, em, overall did you feel that language was a barrier for you in, in the disaster in your experience?

Eh, ehm, well, I, I think because I was already here for long time and I, working, had friends, it was okay, but if I would, it would have been in my first year, with never experience, eh, little earthquakes, em, then it would have been different story...

Yeah, yeah, em.

...because I know also people who left who were just two months in Japan and then this happens. They, they left.
I can completely understand.

Me too, yeah, yeah, yeah.

You had some support networks...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah...

...already, already in place.

...I think that made big difference.

Yeah, and of course, you know, in terms of my project, I’m also interested in what happens to business travellers or tourists. That’s very difficult. They have no Japanese...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...they have no friends. How can we help them?

Yeah, I, I don’t know what happened because I didn’t hear about any tourists, well, I didn’t know any tourists or friends visiting at that time in Japan. The, the, the most intriguing story I heard was, it was a Japanese, but living in Niigata and on the day of the earthquake, she’s, she’s a schoolteacher so they had a trip to Tokyo with a…

Oh dear.

...yeah, and they couldn’t go back, eh, and then you have to calm all the children and you have the parents who keep…

Of course.

...yeah, yeah, that was, well, yeah, that’s a Japanese story that.

Yeah, but, I’m actually hoping to speak to somebody who is also a teacher but not Japanese but a foreigner, he had a school tour in Fukushima…

Ah, on that day?

...yeah, I’m hoping to speak to him but I don’t know if it will be possible...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...but that could be very similar type of, eh, experience. [Note: as it turns out, this potential participant did not agree to an interview in the end]

Oh.

Yeah, I’m very interested also in what you said about how at the time maybe you were in shock…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...but you didn’t realize it until after. I think the same is true for me. It was only after a few months that I looked back and thought…
Whoa. The, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...“That really affected me badly.” [laughter]

Yeah, because talking with colleagues then we realized, “Ah, we keep on talking about it.” Yeah, we said, like, “I’m a, this is really shock.” [laughter] yeah, yeah. Because also, maybe in the company, there were, there were some pamphlets about how you can recognize that you are in a shock maybe that made us realize, you know, things like, oh, don’t sleep very well. I, I don’t even, don’t remember the points, but maybe we, from the ten, we could say six or seven…

Yeah.

...then I thought, “Oh!”

Yeah, yeah.

Keep on talking about it [laughter] yeah. Probably, it was, yeah, yeah…

Absolutely, absolutely. We did similar tests in my company and I was very surprised at my own answers…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...yeah. And that actually links to the, this final point [Note: I hand the participant the stress Likert Scale to mark] here. Ehm, I just want to sure that by talking today…

Uhuh.

...I haven’t given you more…

Ah.

...[laughter] stress.

No, no, no, no [laughter].

So I’m just asking everybody…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...after the interview to, to rank how you feel now.

Okay.

After talking about it today…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...what number would you choose?

Well, it’s already a long time ago and the experience was shocking but also, yeah, the feeling of community was good, so it’s, in a way, nice to talk about it [laughter] although, eh, yeah, the, the earthquake itself and all the, well, the tsunami and the Fukushima, yeah, that was. So then, the anxiety level is low isn’t it?
Yeah, yeah, if you’re not feeling.

Yeah, it’s, it’s, yeah, it’s maybe, okay, now I talk about, uh, some... [Note: the participant seems to be thinking aloud as she hovers the pen over where to mark on the scale]

Yeah.

...maybe it’s the one [Note: she marks 1/10 on the stress scale]

Okay.

Yeah.

Certainly one of the key feelings I have from listening to your story is the idea of community...

Um, yeah, yeah, yeah. I think so.

...em, like, of course, there’s many negative things to talk about but from your story it seems that, you know, you had community with your colleagues...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...you had community with, you know, the foreign and the Japanese colleagues...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

you had community building with your neighbours, a sense of community with Japan.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, doing the volunteering and those, yeah, yeah..

In a way, it helped to build...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, in a way.

...maybe, that feeling for you, yeah. And I think, you know, I, I, I try to be a, sort of, optimistic person...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and I’m trying to look for what are the positive points to take from this and, if, if something like making people who live in Japan for a long time feel more part of the community, then I think that’s, that’s a good thing. I hope, anyway. Well, I just want to say thank you so much...

Okay, you’re welcome [laughter] yeah, yeah, yeah.

...it was fascinating, it was really interesting listening to your story and, em, I, I, it’s been a pleasure to meet you.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/9/20 Interview with Participant 9

Researcher: Lovely, so that’s pretty much all of paperwork. Then, just, this one is for after, eh, after we’ve had a talk.

Participant: Okay.

So then, just as a general kind of question, can you tell me what happened to you on the 2011 disaster?

On March 11th, I was at home in my apartment preparing dinner for my family. {redacted} So I was preparing dinner and after the earthquake, I just went straight to pick up my son. Actually, I went to the gas station first, but it was shut down. It wasn’t working. The gas pumps weren’t working, so I went to the hoikuen, preschool, picked up my son. They were nicely lined up under blue tarps. Some parents got there before me, two mothers, “Ah, waa!” [Note: here the participant was mimicking the panicked cries of the two mothers] So got my son, then, I asked the teacher, “What should I do? Is it safer if he stays here or go back to my apartment?” [laughter] and she couldn’t give me a straight answer. It was just basically my choice. So I had to come back to the apartment but I couldn’t, we couldn’t go into the apartment because, aw, everything fell down, it was all messy, everything was scattered all over the place. So we stayed outside in my car. Between that time, I had contacted my wife for maybe, like, a couple of seconds and it cut off, on the cell phone. And I emailed my mother-in-law who lives in Japan who is Japanese. And my wife couldn’t speak, she was just, like, yelling, “Rahrahra.” So I was, I basically just told her, I, kind of, knew it was going to cut off any second so I told her I got, I’m going to get {son’s name} in, my son. Don’t worry. Stay in {a city in Ibaraki}. She has to cross over a bridge to get over to {our town of residence} and that’s the last time I talked her and my mother-in-law. I think the earthquake was around 3, so we spent the whole night and day together in my car. I went, I managed to go in by myself to the, I mean, to my apartment, I told the neighbours to watch my son for, like, a couple of minutes and grabbed some food in the icebox which I was preparing. In the earthquake, I put the food back into the icebox and still, even though we had no electricity, it was still cold, it was March and it was cold, so we got to eat food in my car. Dinner. Eh, my wife ended up walking home at 11. We were sleeping in the car and there was a knock on the window. She evidently walked home from {the city in Ibaraki she had been in}. It took her, like, over 3 hours, in her high heels…

Wow.

...And, yeah, we slept in our car and from then, yeah, getting, I had to wait in line three hours for gas, eh, waiting everyday for water in line, to get food, just basically surviving, which I felt was a simple lifestyle.

Yeah, yeah.

My day was just getting water, getting food, making sure, I mean, I had, when I got gas I was safe, I felt like, in my car…

Yeah.

...and, yeah, just basically what I did every day…
Yeah.
...for a couple of weeks.

_Ehm, for, for, for instance, you said that the first thing you wanted to do was to get gas, even before you went to get your son._

Yeah.

_How did?_

Because my car was, was running on fumes [laughter]. It was bad luck. So the first thing I thought about was gas...

Yeah.
...I had water and can, because I’m from Hawaii, I had water and canned goods, but I just didn’t have gas.

Yeah. _So obviously coming from Hawaii..._

Yeah.

...you had experience of what to...

Yeah.

...to prepare and so on.

I surf, em, so, yeah, I’m always prepared.

_I see, I see. That must have been, that must have been a help._

Yeah.

_Ehm, what I’m also interested in is you said your day was going getting water and so on. How did you know where to go?_

Water, there was, word-of-mouth, yeah? I mean, in our community there was, like, three places where they had water pumps or wells or other. So just, basically, word-of-mouth and, eh, gas? Word-of-mouth [laughter]. Some gas stations were closed down. I mean, one day I went and then it just so happened I saw the long line, it was like, “Okay I have to wait three hours.” So the next day I knew. I only could get half a, half a tank’s worth of gas that one day...

Wow.

...2,000 yen or 1,500....

Yeah.

...so I had to come again the next day, but I knew beforehand that, “Okay, I have to go early this time.”
Yeah.

So I got there maybe 7 o’clock and I was maybe, like, the thir, thirtieth person in the line…

Wow.

...which was way better than the previous day.

Yeah.

And food? Yeah, word-of-mouth. Which supermarkets were open, what time. Basically, trial and error. I mean, I went there, there was just long lines here. I went to one supermarket and it was, like, limited, kind of, food and water there. This one had more variety. This store you could get two bottles of water, this one just one. It was just trial and error…

I got it.

...and word-of-mouth.

I got it. And that word-of-mouth was mostly with your neighbours or?

With my neighbours who spoke Japanese, yeah.

Yeah, you see, obviously I’m interested in things like language and communication…

Yeah.

...and translation, so those are the topics I’m, kind of, focusing on. Eh, I don’t know if you remember, but at the time of the earthquake, were there any announcements over the PA system {in your hometown}? Before the earthquake?

Eh, once, once the earthquake happened…

Yeah.

...you know, the City Office might have.

Probably, but I don’t remember, but what you are saying would probably…

Yeah.

...probably had something going on.

Yeah. It’s fairly standard, I know, in, in Japan but…

Yeah.

...I was just wondering if the technology worked.

But, really, what they were saying, maybe I could comprehend 50% only.
Okay, because it was only in Japanese.

Even when I got to the supermarket, it was, like, they were, like - yeah, I’ve forgot even the term, I forgot it already - it was like kigen or ki [Note: the participant is probably referring to the term seigen which is used to talk about restrictions on something], it was, like, you couldn’t get two bottles of this and I, I didn’t know at first what they were saying and then my wife had to tell me or I asked somebody behind us it.

I got it. I got it. So there was, you know, for you, there was some new vocabulary...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and stuff that you have to learn related to, to disasters. Em, also, you talked about asking the teacher in the hoikuen [Note: preschool] for advice.

Yeah.

Was, was that in, in Japanese?

In Japanese, yes.

So, like, obviously, in, in {this village}, it seems that mostly Japanese communication...

Yeah.

...that you, you, you were involved in.

Correct, yeah.

Em, what I’m also interested in is how did you find out about the general disaster? Eh, how did you find out more information, what was happening all over Japan not just what was happening in your local area?

At the time, I was working, em, part-time, my main job was at {a nuclear power station in Ibaraki} teaching English. And then my part-time job was at the cram-school and at the community centre teaching private. So, first thing on my mind was about the nuclear power station. So I emailed my friends, “How’s everything going?” I forgot clearly if I got an answer, reply quickly or not but, that was on my mind. I was worried about the nuclear power station. Eh, {redacted} a lot of people, my father-in-law used to work at the research centre, their research centre so. And then, actually, one of my friends from Hawaii emailed me because he was watching the news, and he said, “[redacted], get out of there.” He knew I lived near the ocean. “There’s a tsunami coming.” And I told him, “Well, my apartment is kind of far from the ocean and the tsunami, I don’t know when I found out but it was in Miyagi.” But I know, I felt the magnitude of the earthquake, so I knew if, the tsunami could, and the tsunami did come to {this town}, and it went on to, generate, some generators and shacks, some tool shacks at {the nearby nuclear plant}.

Yeah.

Ehm, I might, I may have asked some students working at the power plant. Ehm, I didn’t know the condition of the power plant until maybe a couple of days later because my, I don’t know when I contacted my boss in Tokyo and she said that, “[redacted] you have to take off a couple of days at the power station.” But maybe, like, until, like, one month later, or when, I, I came back to work at the power station maybe after the third week…
Uhuh.

...and that’s when I knew that the typhoon destructed [Note: we can assume that the participant means ‘tsunami’ not ‘typhoon’ here] I mean took out the tool shack and.

Yeah.

So, what was your question again? [laughter]

Yeah, no, just basically about how you found out about not just what was happening here in {this town} but what was happening all through, through Japan...

Yeah.

...I mean, you’ve mentioned emails...

My friend watching the news.

Ah, so you did have a, you were able to watch?

No, I wasn’t able to, but my friend was explaining to me what he was watching, my friend in Hawaii.

Ahhh.

“The tsunami is coming.”

Yeah, the reason I am asking is because some people have talked about using their mobile phones to, you, to watch the one-seg TV...

Oh.

...or check websites or anything. Were you able to do any of those?

I didn’t even think about doing it. I didn’t even have a interest. Basically, I knew {the towns where I live and work and} my boy was safe. I knew my mother-in-law, her husband is retired, he has contact with many researchers and we were, we were contacting through emails, so if something happened I, I would, I have friends who live in {this town} so I wasn’t really, I was worried, but at the same time, I knew that I could get information quickly. You know, if we had to evacuate or. I knew my wife was in {the nearest major city} and she was probably not trying to [laughter] come, walk over - I told her to just stay there...

Yeah.

...basically, I was just trying to keep my, my son was in front of me, I had my son in the car, you know, just keep us safe. I knew I didn’t have gas. I knew the food was okay in the icebox. I had water. I had to get blankets for the night.

I understand.

Yeah.
Em, so, you had, you said that you had this fairly, sort of, simple daily life of getting food and water and so on…

Yeah.

…and how, how long did that continue?

I think it was around, maybe, two weeks…

Okay.

…and then I got back to working after the third week at the power station. My private lessons took a little longer…

Uhuh.

…because there was some damage in the community centre where I teach. And then, I’m a surfer so I hadn’t surfed for maybe three, two months after earthquake, and then, by that time, I knew that the milli, micro, and everything, stay out of the water. [Note: here the participant is probably referring to the millisievert, microsievert measures of radiation that entered the discourse on the disaster] I went out running and then one day I said, “Screw this. I’m going to just chill out and surf.” And I surfed and people were, I mean, I’m teaching the kids in this city, I mean. We’re still here [laughter].

Yeah, yeah.

I mean, of course, I took precautions but, I mean, I still had to, I put, I wasn’t afraid to go out running…

Uhuh.

…and, I mean, which you did, after three months, I went surfing one time…

Yeah.

…the people at the power station were testing the water every day…

Yeah.

…they said it was fine, but on the news they said it wasn’t fine. Different information here and there, but those workers at the power station are sending their kids here to learn English, I mean. They were saying the water was okay. I mean, it was higher than usual, but not going to grow a third eye [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…but I, we, we won’t know, actually, until, in the fu, twenty years or whatever, but.

I understand…

Yeah.

…yeah, that’s, I mean, the, that’s, you, you said you’re still here you’re part of this…

Yeah.
...community, so, em, the, I, I’m actually interested in the idea of community because, em, the Japanese government and various, kind of, NPOs and associations are trying to make recommendations for how to help foreign people in the next disaster...

Yeah.

...and one of the things they talk about is making sure that foreign nationals who live in Japan are part of the community. Do you, it seems you feel part of the community here. Do you?

In a way, yeah, because, I mean, I’m not in a community group or association, but I’m acquainted with people in those associations and I teach them...

Yeah.

...and I work at the community centre...

Yeah.

...at the power station, but I heard some, eh, foreign nationals from England, at the research, they went to the community centre, and they didn’t really know where to go or what to do...

Yeah.

...for me, I didn’t even worry about going to the community centre. I just was in my car and my apartment...

Yeah.

...trying to clean up my apartment, just like, “Uh.” I, I had enough confidence to be able to survive and get information here and there with my Japanese and...

Yeah.

...but if I didn’t know any Japanese, if I didn’t have a wife, if it, wasn’t, yeah, definitely would have been harder.

Yeah, so, for example, those English people that you mentioned, do you think would they have been able to speak Japanese?

No, they were, they were, yeah, they weren’t capable. These weren’t, it wasn’t so good. So luckily some people knew English and the Japanese community centre, over here, it stayed, but I heard it was difficult for them.

I can imagine, I can imagine. Em, I know from talking to some other people that community centres did offer some support but it was a bit limited...

Oh.

...and I think, you know, they’re trying their best to improve it...

Yeah.
...improve it now. Eh, I, I mean, obviously, for you, things like having a wife and family here helped...

Yeah.

...make bonds with the community. Can you imagine any other ways that foreigners could become more attached to their local communities? What, what can the government do, do you think? It’s difficult, very difficult question.

Oh, yeah, well, it’s like for my, say {in this town}, like, they have Japanese school, they have many community centres, even the power stations have, like, em, like, it has like, not an amusement park, but there’s some kind of park…

Yeah.

...and over there, many of the staff speak English, so just, like, working, just be in a company, just somehow be related to other people who, who can speak English…

Yeah.

...or, the community is a, is a community itself in a company…

Yeah.

...and, just joining community, try to, try to be involved in Japanese lifestyle…

Yeah.

...like, for me, I had an advantage that I had, I had been here ten years already, ten years, around, and I made a, I made it, a effort to go to Japanese school every Saturday, so I met many foreigners there and Japanese…

Yeah.

Ehm, there’s not many people from Hawaii over here. I think the only one up here so, it’s not like I, I cruised with Hawaii people every weekend…

Yeah.

...I mean, I, I met foreign, I met English, Irish, eh, Japanese. Some people are, I know, man, the English are, just stuck together…

Yeah.

...so it’s give and take, I mean, the government has to do something about it and even foreigners have to, like, try to get involved in community activities or.

Yeah. I think that’s a really...

Yeah.

...important point. I, I definitely agree with you, em…

Yeah.
...I lived in Japan for about 9 years...

Oh yeah? Wow.

...so, n, n, not as long as you...

Yeah.

...but, you know, for, for some time and I do understand that feeling that if you want to be part of the community, the community has to make an effort...

Yeah.

...but you have to make an effort...

Yeah.

too. Absolutely, yeah. Ehm, I was also very interested in when you were saying your friend or a p, person from Hawaii...

Yeah.

...contacted you by email...

Yeah.

...about the news they were watching...

Yeah.

...in the States...

Yeah, live, yeah.

...Wh, wh, wh, what did you feel, did you watch any of the news from, I don’t know, CNN or things later on and...

Oh, yes I did.

...things as it developed? What did you think about the news in say the States and the news in Japan?

I guess, I really can’t tell you so much but just from what people were saying, the reaction it got from my parents or my friends. They were like, “Whoa, you have got to get out of there. It’s dangerous.” And I guess in Japan it was more laid back, but.

Yeah. Yeah, I mean, I think there’s different p, presentation styles between, you know, maybe ...

Yeah.

...so like, Japanese news sources...

Yeah.
...and maybe US news sources but also, I mean, there’s different reasons...

Yeah, yeah...

...for communicating.

...yeah, they don’t want to cause panic, of course, you know [laughter].

Yeah, I mean, it makes sense and, you know, I think if you’re living in the States and
you’re watching the TV news in the States, possibly they’re making a program because
they want more viewers...

Yeah.

...so if they make it, kind of, sensational, they get more viewers...

Yeah.

...right? But maybe in Japan at that time, it wasn’t about getting viewers...

Yeah.

...it was about giving information. Ehm, just in general about the topic of information,
what did you feel was most lacking? Eh, what information was most difficult for you to
access?

I didn’t think so deeply or detailed, so, just, basically, it just comes down black and white
and…

Okay.

...if it was safe or not safe...

Yeah, yeah.

...but, like I told you, the people were telling me it was safe at the power station…

Yeah.

...some people were telling me that it’s not safe but at one point I just made up my mind, I
mean, I can’t just stay indoors all day.

Yeah, so it comes down to your, your personal judgement.

Yeah, with the information I had on hand, I mean, people at the power station, and it’s
safe. I mean, they’re testing the water, the ocean water, they’re saying, “Of course, on
rainy days, stay in doors.”...

Uhum.

...which I did. Ehm, and then, sss, a year later, some workers at the power station were
quitting because they were against nuclear power, they felt it was dangerous. And then a
year later those same people changed their mind…

[Laughter]
...and said, “Oh maybe it was not so dangerous.” I mean.

Oh, it’s a big...

Yeah.

...it’s a big question. It’s, it’s, it, that actually links up to something I wanted to ask you about, ehm, for you when did the disaster finish or ha, has it finished?

It hasn’t finished yet. The reason why I’m in this school now is, is because of the disaster. I was working part-time at the cram school, my private lessons and the power station, my main job. And I was teaching one time per week at this school [Note: referring to the business he is currently running that has since changed locations] which was by a supermarket in the town and all those teachers had gone, they, they went back to their countries. And that, the previous owner was in [in America, she was American] and she said, “{redacted}, can you hold down the school for one month while I come back.” So for me, I was thinking, “Okay, I’m the only teacher. The kids, I have to give one class.” I mean, I was working one, another at another eikaiwa [Note: English conversation (school)] one time a month, I told that staff, I mean the boss, that there’s one teacher there, right, so I’m going to help this, the rival…

Yeah.

...there’s only two in {this town}…

[Laughter]

...and he understood…

Yeah.

Yeah.

...so I was working there for a month, busting my butt…

Yeah.

...and, and I was thinking, “This is only going to last a month.” And she didn’t come back to Japan. She was like, “Have you heard the news?” [laughter]...

Wow.

...“It’s dangerous.” And I’m just, I, like, I was telling her, like, literally on the phone, like, 12, at midnight, it was like, “Get back here!”...

[Laughter]

...and then, she came back, I don’t know how long after. But I was busting my back, I mean, it, but it became, like, after a couple of months, I got into the routine, like, “Wow, I didn’t even know my threshold,” like, “this, I can do this.” ...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...I was working maybe, plus, around eight hours a day, plus, like, emailing management and then, we decided to move that, we had to get out of that place because we couldn’t pay the rent. We lost students…
Yeah.

...we moved to a house, the owner’s house. She had come back to Japan...

Yeah.

...then, it was on the second floor. Too small and there was, like, a narrow stairway. I said, “We had to get out this.” So I found this place. And then, upon finding this place, we said, “Let’s be partners.”

Wow.

And then after that, she’s going through a lot of stuff privately and…

Yeah.

...with her body condition, so she ended up having to pull out of our partnership and she said, “{redacted}, take over this company.” And then, I work Saturdays, because, bef,
when the earthquake occurred, I was working at the power station. Saturdays were off...

Yeah.

...but as soon as I worked at this school, I couldn’t teach during the weekday because I was working at the power station the other, so those students, many of them had to move to Saturday…

I see.

...and those students are still learning on sa, they don’t want to go back to the weekday, so I still work on Saturday...

Wow.

...I’m still running this company and it’s not, when I got here, there was maybe, like, 55 students. Now there’s almost 80, so it’s, like…

Wow.

...before there was 130. So it’s still a work in process…

Yeah.

...ehm, I lost my job at the power station due budget, not getting enough money, so, I mean, they had to cut back…

Yeah.

...and so, I took over this company in September. Last September, sorry, yeah, it’s a year…

Yeah.

...yeah, it’s a year today…
Wow.

...yeah, so I just lost my job in March, end of March this year…

Yeah.

...em, I’m try to take, run this company, get it back on its feet. The reason why I have it [laughter] is just all because of the earthquake [laughter].

Yeah, that’s fascinating...

Yeah.

...absolutely, it had a big impact...

Yeah…

...on your life...

...my life has changed, yeah.

Yeah. But, you know, in, in bad ways of, like...

Yeah, yeah.

...losing jobs but in good ways...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...maybe, too, there’s been some positive impacts. Em, do you feel, even though obviously the disaster hasn’t finished, do you feel that, em, things are starting to turn around or?

Yeah, it is. Yeah. The streets are almost 100 percent, I mean, not 100 percent, there’s still cracks here and there but…

Yeah.

...it’s rideable...

Yeah, yeah.

...eh, the community is still divided.

Oh really?

We just had the elections a couple of weeks ago. The whole nuclear power…

Yeah.

...nuclear power, em. There still is cracks in the wall in my apartment. I see it every day.

Really?

Uuhh.
And...

It’s definitely changed but it is getting back to normal. [Note: the participant emphasised the word normal ironically]

Yeah, the, the, yeah, I mean, I...

Yeah.

...what is normal is a very good, good question.

You felt the earthquake yesterday, right?

Yes [laughter].

I mean, I, I woke up, like, in a, I just grabbed my cellphone, put on my glasses, put on my pants. I have everything ready. Before, I didn’t have my clothes ready. Now, I have everything ready.

That’s really interesting. You know, it was pretty big, right?...

Yeah.

...em, eh, I mean, I was in, I was in Tokyo, so it wasn’t really so strong for me...

Oh.

...but it was because it was the middle - well, what was it? 2 in the morning or 2.30 or something...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...whenever it’s in the nighttime I think it’s a bit more shocking.

It was.

Ehm, but that’s very interesting...

Yeah.

...that you have everything ready now...

Yeah, it’s all ready.

...so you’ve, kind of, changed your behaviours a little bit.

My keys, my wallet are already in my pocket.

Yeah, like, what would you say would be good advice for other foreigners coming to Japan? What would you say to be prepared for in terms of a disaster? What, what advice would you give someone?

Huh, jeez, I mean, just think there could be a disaster tomorrow…

Yeah, yeah.
...I mean, if you thought about that, I mean, how would, that’s basically how I lived before that…

Yeah.

...like water and cans, so I didn’t have my pants ready though [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...but I mean, the more ready you are, the better prepared you are, the better, I mean. And what’s important for you, I mean. For me, it was my family so it was, just, if I had my son in hand, I mean, that’s the most, for them, if you’re, if you’re a foreigner right off the plane, you might be just thinking about, if you’re living by yourself, you are probably thinking about, well, the consulate or the embassy or…

Yeah.

...it’s apparent that was going to be the most important thing…

Yeah.

...I mean, for me, it wasn’t a worry about shelter, like, going to the community centre, I felt comforta, confident living in my car…

Right.

[Laughter]

Right, right.

I mean.

But, yeah, maybe that’s an individual characteristic as well. Maybe you’re just a more…

Yes, yes.

...self-sufficient person.

So, yeah, I mean, just try to be, you have to have the canned goods, water, fill your bathtub with water, em, have the embassy phone number online, I mean, don’t be so dependent upon, on the Internet…

Yeah.

...because you might not be able to use your phone or the Internet. So know where the community cen, where the evacuation centre is, I mean, know where there is high ground, flat ground. I mean, just…

That’s a.

...just have a good sense, I mean.

Yeah. But the, that’s very interesting that you talked about, like, not being too, too dependent…
Yeah.

...on the Internet because a lot of people who talk about the disaster talk about social media and Twitter and Facebook. Were you able to use any of those things or?

I was, yeah, but just took it with a grain of salt. I mean, I was hearing things first-hand from the people at the power station, my family in America, Hawaii, Internet use. I mean, I just weighed it from there, I mean.

So it wasn’t particularly useful.

For me, yeah, I mean, people were saying different things from different places. Of course, I had to use good judgment overall, when it’s rai, raining, or not to surf as much...

Yeah.

...I went in maybe three times after the earthquake.

Uhuh, uhuh.

I was worried about my son but what could I do? I couldn’t run away to Hawaii. My son, my wife wouldn’t run away. Her parents live in {this town}.

Right.

I mean, it wasn’t any choices for me [laughter].

Right, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

I think, as you said, if you were somebody who, maybe, moved here just off the plane...

Yeah...

...and if you didn’t have a family...

...go back home...

...you might have made a...

...yeah, yeah...

...different choice, maybe.

...of course, I would have, yeah.

Yeah, ehm, so I don’t think that there’s any such thing as right ways or wrong ways...

Yeah.

...it’s, you, you base it on what your, your...
Yeah.

...situation is, right? Eh, the other thing, I’m, I’m also glad you mentioned about the embassy and the consulate. I’m a bit interested in that. Did they contact you directly?

No, but my friend in Saitama, he’s from, the same as me, he told me about it...

Okay.

...he was saying you can take your family on the plane. So I don’t know if he contacted the embassy. It wasn’t a big worry for me...

Yeah.

...but just knowing that, I felt safer.

Yeah, that if...

That was good information, yeah...

Yeah.

...that I could have gone, I could have taken my family to Hawaii or somewhere in America or something. They would have...

Yeah.

...flown you and.

I don’t know if my wife would have went [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...should have gone.

Yeah, but you had maybe, that..

Yeah.

...was a Plan B or something.

Yes.

En, also, just similarly, do you remember did the, like, village office or city office contact you?

No.

No.

Maybe through the speaker, the megaphone.

Yeah. But no direct?
No direct contact. Nobody came to my house. I might have got a letter or, I might have
got a letter where to go for the, eh, water after, one week later. They were pumping it out
at the junior high school…

Okay.

...but right near my house had a well, there was a well, an underground well. So that was
convenient. Yeah, if, word-of-mouth.

Yeah.

If the shiyakusho, city office, knew where each foreigner was living and had, like, a
representative go to each house, if they’re home or not, maybe they’re at a community
centre, but go to the community centre and having some, somebody to be able to speak,
able to speak in English would have been helpful.

Yeah.

I can imagine just being, I mean, when, I was living in Japan when 9/11 happened…

Okay.

...my first year, and then my brother lives in New York, near Time, eh, Times Square…

[Sharp intake of breath]

...so, I mean, I went to the, I rode, I had a bicycle back then, rode to the, em, station to use
the public phone, couldn’t get in touch with my brother but I got in touch with my mother
in Hawaii who said he was okay. Mmm. But that was in New York. I mean, if that had
been over here, one year, when I was right off the plane and I mean…

Yeah.

...just I would be calling my boss, maybe...

Yeah.

...in Tokyo, she lives in Tokyo...

Yeah.

...I would be like, “What do I do?” If I couldn’t contact her then I would have to find,
contact one of the students at the power station or…

Yeah.

...talk to my neighbour. I mean, my Japanese wasn’t up to par [laughter] wasn’t, wasn’t
good at that time...

I can imagine.

...so it would have been a different story.
Yeah. Ehm, the, the, this is pretty much my last question, ehm, the, you’re talking about some people, maybe, coming to Japan and, you know, they’re just starting out. Ehm, you know, city offices or government are going to try and provide information, maybe in English, but also in Chinese...

Yeah.

...or Korean or, em, Tagalog or Portuguese or, you know...

Yeah.

...it, it depends on the area but...

Yeah.

...you know, English might not be the best language. For you, in, in your image of, sort of, this part of Japan, is English maybe the most convenient...

Yes...

...second language?

...it is, yeah.

Yeah.

It is.

Because what some, eh, government sources are saying is instead of trying to provide information in, you know, English and Chinese and so on, they’ll provide it in Easy Japanese.

That's what I was getting, yeah, yeah, that, you’re right. That’s how it should be, right?

Have you, have you seen Easy Japanese before or do, did you, do you, have you seen any documents written in it or in anything like that?

Yeah, they interviewed me a couple months ago. Em, they had a list of all these words, technical words, and then, after - you checked which one you knew which one, and I didn’t know most of them - after we discussed about what kind of, instead, instead of this word what kind of other word would you think of in your vocabulary, knowing, of your Japanese, and we were discussing about that. If foreigners, and then some foreigners, many foreigners make it a point to learn Japanese when they get here. Some don’t but they should learn, there should be, like, a pamphlet or a handout with these terms on it. Or even like a once-a-month practice. Or half-a-mon, half-a-year practice. Where to go, what to do, these words and signs.

That’s a really good idea.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Really, really good advice. I agree with you that if a foreigner is living here, they should make an effort to, to learn Japanese and for those people, maybe Easy Japanese is a good solution, but, of course, you also have to think about short-term people, like, if you’re just here for business or just tourist, tourism, even Easy Japanese is not going to...
Yeah.

...be useful, so I think my feeling just personally is that you need to have a variety of channels...

Yes.

...a variety of types of information as possible. That’s very difficult...

That is, yeah.

...very, very, difficulty, but I’m interested in the Easy Japanese and I’m very interested to hear that you were taking part in, in that study...

Yeah.

...I think, I hope they develop it. It could be really good work, em. But I can speak, eh, eh, Japanese too, but I, I find reading Easy Japanese is a little bit difficult for me because, you know, it’s all the, the hiragana or furigana [Note: relatively simple scripts of Japanese that can be used to indicate how more complex Chinese characters should be read] is written on top....

Yeah, yeah.

...I’m not used to that so it takes a little bit of time to, to get used to it. But overall it seems like it’s a pretty good, pretty good system. Basically, then, just as a last question, is there anything else that you’d like to make a comment on or anything I haven’t talked about that you think I should be talking about, or?

No. So you were here for 9 years?

Yeah, I was here, so I was here on and off for 9 years. I, for example, I lived here for 3 years, and then I went to Australia for 1 year, and then I came back for another 3 years, and then I went to Ireland, and then I came back for three years. So I was not here continuously for 9 years...

Yeah.

...but, yeah.

And you want to stay in Ireland?

Yeah, well, ehm, so, I was in Japan, I was in Tokyo when...

Oh yeah. Really?

...the, the disaster happened. I worked, I worked there. And I left Japan about a year, a year-and-a-half after, eh, the disaster to go and start, start this project...

Really?

...and now I’m doing this project I’m very happy to be back in Ireland because my family is there...
Yeah.

...ehm, I, I felt, for me, when the disaster happened, I realized how important my family was and how much I was missing them, so I think I’m staying in Ireland, if I can. I, I don’t know, the job situation is very bad in Ireland right now. Eh, our economy is not doing so well, so I don’t know if there will be any opportunities for me. I may have to travel again, but I’d like to stay in Ireland.

So this project, you’re going to apply it to, you can apply it, are there natural disasters in?

Well, not, eh, we have flooding...

Flooding.

...the main thing we have is flooding. Eh, so I don’t think that this project would really apply as such to Ireland but I’m also interested in the case of New Zealand...

New Zealand.

...after I finish up here I’m going to go to New Zealand...

Uhuh.

...to Auckland and Christchurch because they obviously had big earthquakes there, so maybe some of the ideas here might be useful for, for people in Christchurch as well.

I see.

Ehm, but really the reason I’m doing this is because I’m interested in language and culture, not so much that I’m interested in disaster...

Yeah.

...but I’m interested in language and culture and I just think for me the disaster, it, kind of, highlighted some issues about what it’s like to be a foreigner in Japan.

Yeah.

Like, for me, I have an experience of being in a foreign, a foreigner in Japan and you, kind of, you just go by with daily life, and you do your job, and you meet your friends, and maybe you make roots or make a family, but when the earthquake happened, or when a disaster happens, it’s like everything becomes more extreme or something...

Yeah.

...so you notice things about being a foreigner...

Yes.

...in a, a, a foreign country...

Yeah.

...and I’m just really interested in the idea of what it’s like to be a, a non-Japanese person living in Japan.
Like, you said, rather than disaster, even in Ireland, just the channels, yeah, to get through to foreigners living in Ireland, yeah, the channels.

Oh absolutely. One of the things that for sure, I think, is going to be, like, a theme in this is the fact that it’s dangerous to put too much effort into just one channel...

Yeah.

...when I was starting this project, I was really interested in social media, like Twitter and Facebook, because all I could read about in all of the other research was about Twitter and Facebook and I was like, “Wow, that’s really interesting.” But what very quickly became clear is that that’s good and maybe it’s useful in some ways, but if you have no power and if you have no telephone signal, it’s absolutely useless. So, you know, I know that people, say, up in Miyagi, they used radio...

Oh.

...as a way of communicating. Radio for Japanese people was really useful. Especially older Japanese people. Eh, because in parts of Tohoku...

Yeah.

...it’s a lot of older people. And so then, I was like, “Wow, if you only have social media, that’s not a good idea. If you only have radio, maybe that’s also not a good idea.”...

Yeah, yes.

...so you have to think about how to, to, I, I guess, be widespread. What I’m also interested in is, I’m, I’m very interested in translation, but I’m also interested in the, sort of, role that translators can play in terms of culture. Not, not just language. Eh, I think there are some cultural barriers for people living in Japan. If, it’s just a, a culture shock...

Yeah.

...and sometimes people like, you know, maybe, maybe your wife or your neighbours or something, they might be able to explain some cultural things to you...

Yeah.

...not just language things...

Yes.

...so, I don’t know, did you feel any cultural differences in your experience?

Of cour, I guess, mine is, maybe, in some senses highlighted and in some senses not. I mean, I’m not caucasian, so I don’t really stand out as much, but when they hear that I come from Hawaii, many people think I’m, maybe, mixed Hawaiian or some Japanese and then I tell them, “I’m Okinawan.” And then, well, first I say, they say, “Are you half-Japanese?” And I’m like, “Eehhhh, yeah, I’m Japanese, eh.” And then they say, “You’re half.” And then I say, “Well, actually, I’m Okinawan.”... [Note: Okinawa is a prefecture of Japan, but many people living there identify with a separate cultural, historical, linguistic, and racial heritage to that of mainland Japan]
...and they said, then, they’ll say like, “Oh, Okinawan is Japanese.” So something is a little, some things are very similar, but those things that are different get highlighted… Yeah.

...like, I’m American, so our culture is a little different, but I’m also, I had a Japanese family… Yeah.

...the food and, and within the Japanese, I was Okinawan, so that’s a little different the food and language… Yeah.

Yeah, but, many things, I mean, I, I love the food, so and the characters are the same… Yeah.

...I guess, yeah, being from Hawaii, it’s small, but you’re living with many kinds of people… Yeah.

...so it’s, kind of, wider… Yeah.

...feel, take on things compared to Japanese so. Yeah, yeah.

Yeah. Mmm, I think, for sure, the Japanese people have, maybe, been a bit closed in the past about being exposed to other cultures and other people but I do think they’re trying to open up now, and...

Yeah, yeah.

...like, you know, the Olympics in Tokyo in 2020...

Oh.

...that’s, maybe, going to have an impact on how broad and wide people have to look...

Yes.

...now in the future, so I think it’s changing a little bit. But I, I, I, I don’t know, I don’t live here anymore so I, I’m a bit removed.

It has changed. The, the twelve years I’ve been here, it has changed. I mean, at the power station, well, one rule was I couldn’t live in {the nearest town to the plant}… Wow, okay.
...that’s why I was living in {another town}. Another rule was I couldn’t drive. And, of course, I started off wearing a tie…

Yeah.

...but all that changed, yeah. I could, I could drive my car on the grounds, I could get a pass.

Yeah.

I still lived in {another town but} I was getting closer to {the town where the plant is located}...

[Laughter]

...I lost the tie…

Yeah.

...I mean, inside changes within the company. I mean, that image of, I guess, all the teachers before me were from England or America. I’m from Hawaii…

Yeah.

...which is in America, but it’s, it’s a different kind of person, I guess.

Absolutely, yeah, yeah. I have to say, I, I’m really, really grateful for you speaking to me. It’s been so interesting and I hope that it hasn’t been stressful for you...

No, no.

...em, and that was, absolutely, that was kind of the last question here [Note: I began to look for the Likert Scale Stress handout on the table between us] eh, wait now, that’s not the one. Ah, oh, I think you have it just there. Eh, just after talking today, I just want to make sure that the people I talk to don’t feel extra stress because of me talking to them, so, eh, if you could just let me know, sort of, roughly how you feel now, after talking about this.

So at first would be zero?

Yeah, I mean...

Before the conversation would be zero?

...yeah, or, or, just like, if before the conversation started you were at zero, what, where do you feel now? Maybe you’re still zero, maybe you’re ten...

Yeah.

...where do you feel now?

[Note: the participant marks on the scale]

Okay, perfect. Eh, the reason that I do this is because some of the people that I’ve talked to had very tough experiences and, you know...
Yeah.

...their lives were threatened or people around them lost their lives, and an agreement I made with the university is that if anybody was over a certain level, then we’d introduce counselling services...

Uhm, yeah.

...because I don’t want to create more damage by talking to them. So thanks a million...

Okay.

...for that and for all your time.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

Note: This participant was in Australia from March 11-14 and arrived back in Japan on March 15 (i.e. the fifth day after the onset of the disaster).

2013/9/20 Interview with Participant 10

Researcher: So that’s all the, kind of, paperwork...

Participant: That’s all? That’s for later? [Note: he pointed to the remaining sheet on the table between us containing the Likert Scale about anxiety after the interview that I intended to show him at the end of the interview]

...Yep. Ehm, so, if I could just start with a real general question?

Yeah.

Could you just tell me what happened to you in 2011 in the disaster?

Okay, 2011, in the disaster, I wasn’t actually in Japan.

Okay?

I was in Australia by myself, actually. I left my family here. I’m married. I’ve got two kids. Ehm, I had left them behind, actually. Talking about it upsets me a bit. [Note: The participant began to shed some tears at this point.] Actually, I haven’t talked about it much. [Note: he regained his composure and took a drink of water.] That’s a bit weird. Yeah, but, em, being over there was probably worse than being here, I think, because no contact, ehm, yeah, I didn’t think it would affect me like this. Wow. [Note: again the participant took a little time to collect himself.] Yeah, em, yeah, no contact with them. Ehm, it was only for a Welsh friend of mine who had a computer with battery power still, and his wifi was still working amazingly, and I got through to him through Skype. And then, such a good friend, ehm, he had been around and checked on my family which was a great relief. [Note: at this point the participant shed a few more tears] And then, yeah, that was it, just the worry and, yeah, it’s quite weird. And it, shit, sorry, mate.

Yeah, no, don’t, please don’t apologise at all.

[Note: The participant took a little time to regain his composure and then continued]

Wow, yeah. But anyway, that all got done, and, eh, then I had to get back. I wanted to get back as quick as I could. So, eh, yeah, I couldn’t get any flights out of Australia. No airlines were actually flying into Japan at the time. They, yeah, they were still worried about Fukushima. They didn’t know which way that was going to go whether it was going to go berserk or stay the way it has for the last couple of years. [Note: by saying ‘the last couple of years’ the participant is probably referring to the likelihood of Fukushima further endangering the Tokaimura nuclear power plant which is also located in Ibaraki. A serious nuclear accident occurred at the Tokaimura facility in 1999 and is still seen by many to be unstable.] Ehm, but yeah, finally got back. My ticket was to come back on the 15th and I got back on the 15th anyway but I still did have worries. I still had, my car was in a parking lot at the airport, so I didn’t know if that would be driveable, I didn’t know if it was, if it was going to be cool, and then, ehm, also, yeah, I didn’t even know whether I’d be able to drive all the way from Tokyo to here after seeing some of the some of the, some of the photos starting to come out on the news in Australia
of {the city in Ibaraki in which he lived and worked}. I could see the roads were in a bad
way, so I didn’t even know if I’d make it home. I did manage to get back. The roads
were, yeah, they were a bit of a mess and there were a few detours and whatnot, but I did make
it back without too much trouble. Eh, come back to find the place, ehm, yeah, an absolute
mess, mate. Eh, the place was rocking and rolling. It was, you, you were here yourself,
so you know, it was, on, well, every thirty minutes it was, there was a decent sized
quake...

Yeah.

...so, ehm, yeah, that was that, and then, ehm, eh, well, being no power, no water, we
couldn’t run the business, but we still had a lot of food...

Yeah.

...so we started cooking it up and just handing it out to people that didn’t have food. Ehm,
did that at both our shops. Ehm, {the two neighbouring cities in Ibaraki in which he has
shops}. We got our water and electricity back within about a week, as I said, I got back
on the 15th, a, a, at the time there was still no electricity and water. A couple of days
later, we got our electricity and water. Everything seemed to pretty much, well, it didn’t
go back to normal obviously...

Yeah.

...I mean, no-one would go outside, ehm, coming from Ireland you’d know what the 17th
is [Note: March 17, St. Patrick’s Day]...

Oh God, yeah, it would have been a big day.

...it’s actually one of our biggest days of the year, so it really hurt us a bit but, ehm, we
had the water back on and electricity so, and we were doing, ehm, like 300 yen lunches
and dinners [Note: this would be about 1/3 the price of a standard lunch and perhaps 1/10
the price of a standard dinner] just to help out kind of thing, and at night I, kind of,
already had had enough of it just after a couple of days and decided I would sit outside
and have a Guinness being St Patrick’s Day.

[Laughter]

Ehm, attracted a few of the locals in, in fact twenty or so of us. I had told them, basically,
if we drank the Guinness, it’s got enough iron in it to counteract the radiation we were
going to get...

[Laughter]

...and everyone seemed to agree with me. Everyone was quite happy to knock a few
back. Ehm, eh, em, with that said, too, a lot of my friends, well everyone I knew
basically, ehm, the only thing you could get at convenience stores was cigarettes and
beer, basically, and for me and a few of my mates that was fine...

[Laughter]

...but obviously for other people it was a bit of a challenge. But I did find that, just from
asking around, people were pretty much drinking every day...

Yeah.
...just for the stress. And, vertigo or in like...

Yeah.

...just because the place was shaking so much, you didn't know whether it was shaking or not half the time, but if you had a few drinks in you actually, like, [laughter] it didn't really matter.

[Laughter] Nothing mattered so much.

Yeah. I mean, no, weren't, wasn't getting around rolling drunk but, em, yeah, a few beers here and there. Ehm, eh, yeah, I have an apartment in {a city in Ibaraki} as well so I was staying there, eh, two weeks before the electricity and water came back on over there. Bit of a struggle. One thing I remember quite well and I really did like was the community bonding together the way they did. Ehm, I wish it actually was a bit more prolonged. It, it, kind of, finished rather quick. I mean, about six months after, I guess, things really kind of went back to normal. But for those six months, people were talking to each other in the streets, ehm, for those two weeks in {a city in Ibaraki} lining up for water, ehm, it was really cool...

Yeah.

...just talking to the locals and everyone being in the same position...

Yeah.

...maybe talking about the six quakes we had through the night that were enough to wake you up and, ehm, obviously, for some people their housing and apartments were, they didn't have one. Ehm, mentioning that, on the day of the quake, ehm, as I said, I wasn’t here, but my wife actually took in a crew of Canadian reporters. No hotels, nowhere to go, and they just, luckily they, they found this place...

Yeah.

...and, yeah, they slept on the floor in here and…

Crikey.

...so, em, eh, and afterwards also, I, I did quite a few, took a few reporters around and whatnot to see some of the bit more damaged areas, eh, {a port in Ibaraki}, eh, big fishing area, actually I have got a lot of friends from down there. Ehm, and, well, a lot of them are quite old too so, just, it basically finished their careers, ehm...

Yeah.

...couple of them are still fishing now, but most of them had to stop what they were doing and change work.

Yeah.

Ehm, yeah, ehm, what else is important about that time? Basically just the amount of quakes we were getting. Ehm, oh, one little funny story, I guess. My other shop in {a city in Ibaraki}, ehm, after about two weeks after the quake, obviously we were still getting nasty aftershocks…
Yeah.

...but I wanted to put my beers back, eh, my bottles back on the shelves, my display, but em, I don’t know we’d gone about three or four days without anything serious, so I thought, “Stuff it, I’ll pack, put them all back up,” because I had, had enough whacked them all back up. They’d been up there an hour and we got hit with a 7 [Note: highest level of the Japanese Seismic Intensity Scale - extremely violent shaking].

Ahhh! It must be so.

[Laughter] Three more bottles hit the deck. I mean, we did, during the quake we lost all our alcohol, we lost all our plates, we did lost any food that was just in refrigerator, ehm, all the food that was in our freezers, and that, obviously, we could use…

Yeah.

...we started using over the next couple of days. But, em, in that sense, there was no real concern for my family knowing that they had enough food…

Yeah.

...and water and whatnot. But, eh, yeah, I think that’s, if you can think of anything else you’d like to ask.

Oh, there’s, absolutely, there’s a few things I’d like to, kind of, em, clarify with you or just get a bit more detail on. One, one thing I’m interested in is you mentioned six months as a, kind of, period when things seemed to go back to normal?

Yeah, I mean, I think it’s always there. I mean, it’s still there now, but, I mean, I don’t know if you felt that quake last night?

I did, I did, yeah

Were you, were you here?

I was in Tokyo so it wasn’t that bad.

Okay, so it was a little bit watered down, eh.

It was definitely watered down. I’ve heard it was very strong up this way.

Oh, yeah, it, it was enough to wake you up…

Yeah.

...I would have been in my REMs then, so , [laughter] it was, em...

[Laughter]

...yeah, so I did manage to wake up for that. And that, that is, that still is in everyone’s back of their mind, you know, that, I think, I don’t know if everyone is attuned to it, but I’ve ac, I’ve actually got this thing with my ears now. I can hear them coming…

Yeah.
...like, well, before anyone else…

Yeah, yeah.

I just tell people there’s one coming and they’re looking at me and their phones aren’t going off [Note: Japanese mobile phones have an earthquake early-warning alarm that should ring a few seconds before an earthquake strikes. It is an imperfect technology that doesn’t always work.] and, sure enough it’ll hit. It’s like a, it’s like a truck coming down the street but a lot, lot, awww, a lot more scary, I guess.

Oh I can, aw, I, I can just, I can only get a sense of it. I was only really in Tokyo and in Iwate. So both, when, when I was in Iwate, I was in the mountains so it wasn’t as bad as, you know, we didn’t get hit by the tsunami or anything...

Yeah.

... like that. So it was in those two areas. It was, kind of, watered down compared to, like, say, this area or to Miyagi area.

Aw, but I didn’t talk, I can show you a bit later, em, you can still see it. Basically, the front quarter of the car park over there dropped about, dropped about 70 centimetres so, we had about a, we had a 15-metre fissure going through that car park so, I mean, someone was looking upon us…

Yeah.

...because this, the actual building, both structures, even my other shop, must have been, yeah, some of the only few that had very little structural damage.

Do you know how old the?

Yeah, I built this place…

You [laughter] yeah, okay, well, you’ve confidence then [laughter] in the structure.

...it’s eleven years old.

Wow, crikey!

Yeah, so.

That’s amazing. That really is amazing.

Yeah, well, the apartments next door, half, more than halfway along they had a, a gap underneath their foundation that was, well, a metre deep.

When you’re talking about, like, 70 centimetres that’s, that’s huge.

Oh, and, like, I mean, that was here. That’s, this area has been totally transformed since. I mean, they knocked down that many buildings afterwards, ehm, yeah, this side of {a city in Ibaraki} was actually quite hardly hit...

Yeah.
...quite hit hard. Eh, all the plumbing and that, as you can see [Note: he points through the
window to construction work going on in the street outside the entrance to the bar] this is,
this is actually, they’re still fixing…
Yeah.
...the pipes from it now. Eh, but yeah, the six month period, yeah I’d say it was about
six months everyone had, kind of, decided it’s, it’s time just to forget about it and let’s,
let’s get on with this, kind of thing.
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah.

Em, the reason I’m interested in this is because for, like, some types of disaster, you
know, like, let’s say a hurricane or something like that, there’s se, seems to, like, a fairly
clear beginning and a fairly clear, sort of, time where people say, “Okay, this is over
now.” But the sense I’m getting from this is that it is still ongoing for a lot of people...
Oh, it...
...in some ways, yeah.
...for me, very much so. I mentioned I’ve got an apartment in {a city in Ibaraki}, ehm,
yeah, it didn’t help my marriage any. I know a lot of foreigners fled. I wasn’t planning
on fleeing but I would have loved to have got, I would still like to get my kids out of here.
My wife doesn’t - she’s Japanese - she doesn’t see the same danger, I guess, that I’m feel,
feeling myself…
Yeah.
Yeah.
...em, and also, she’s worried about their age and everything but I’ve told her, like, she
can go too, and everyone just go.
Yeah, yeah.

Ehm, it’s something I never, I don’t want to be, I don’t want to have to use it as an ‘I told
you so’...
Yeah.
Yeah.

...I just hope, fingers crossed, and it is ongoing, mate, I mean, em, I’ve got these things
about clouds. Before the big quake the sky was streaked, the clouds were...
Oh, I’ve heard about that, yeah.
...and, em, basically, if you get a day like that, it will put the wind up anyone…
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...and here they will start going. “Oh, we’re going to get one.” And apparently, eh, two
days ago…
[Laughter]
...there was some streaky clouds before this one here but here, but there were also, there
was also a report from the science people, monitoring place that said this area will,
between Fukushima and even down to Chiba, there was going to be a fairly big fault slip
over the next couple of days, so I’m hoping that was it last night.

Yeah, yeah, you see, this, this is unfortunate, you, you, you don’t know what big means
anymore because.

Yeah, well, I’ve a, I’m pretty sure that was it last night…

[Laughter]

...but again...

Yeah.

...yeah.

Yeah.

No, it is ongoing.

Ehm, the other, there are a couple of other things I’m really interested in, ehm, so
because you were, ehm, overseas at the time when the, the first big earthquake
happened…

Yeah.

...I know that you used Skype to connect with, with your friend...

Yes.

...your Welsh friend here. Em, were you able to get any other information like through,
let’s say, how did you find out about?

The Australian news was, gave me, really annoyed me. Em, basically the, their first
report that they released on the news in Australia was Fukushima plan and Tokai plant
had both been affected by the quake, so I was, you can understand why I was so
distraught and why it still upsets me today…

Yeah, yeah.

...ehm, yeah, it, they then, they didn’t actually, they didn’t actually come back with any
more reports on Tokai on the English news. Australia has an international television
station, SBS, ehm, they did give a little bit more detail and said that there was nothing to
worry about in Tokai eventually, which put my mind at ease. Ehm, eh, the newspapers
were not helping any at all, media, international media, actually, gave everybody, em, the
shits basically because - eh, I don’t know about swearing mate - [Note: as he says this he
looks down at the audio recorder and I indicated that he should not worry about it] but
just blowing things out of proportion and it’s not what we needed at the time. What we
needed was detailed information. Getting it out of here in Japan if you could not sp
...ehm, I talked to all the people that were here for it. Local people. And, I don’t,
they, I, they couldn’t have been as scared as I was in a sense because they did not know
the tsunami was even happening. And that’s, that’s probably what sent the wind up me
the most in Australia was seeing this tsunami just wash over pretty much very close to
where I live and it was, ehm, not being able to contact my family at the time was, eh,
yeah, really, really hard. Ehm, other information? Being where I am, I guess, ehm, I look
after a lot of the, eh, nuclear workers actually. They, they do head in to {the participant’s
shop in a city in Ibaraki} more than here. Ehm, lucky enough to call a lot of them good
friends. I’ve looked after them for, well, at that time for fourteen years, so they were
happy to pass on any information about the Tokai plant.

Right.

Ehm, there were loudspeakers, eh, in {the city in Ibaraki where the participant has one of
his shops} they’ve got a speaker system. All that was telling us in Japanese was, eh, stay
inside, keep your windows shut, and if it’s raining, stay out of the rain. Ehm, for me, that
wasn’t a surprise because I was here for the, ehm, the refueling disaster as well. So pretty
much handled the same way. Yeah, information. Foreigners then started to come up with
things like, ehm, Facebook. I wasn’t a huge Facebook user at, at the time really, but
there’s a {a city in Ibaraki’s} International Association, they posted quite a lot of things
and then, even to this day they still get, do pretty well on informing you what’s happening
in Ibaraki and the area. Ehm, other than that, I can’t really think of anywhere else I was
looking for information. It started after a while, it just, I was here so…

Yeah.

...you kind of, you didn’t really to know any more. Just all you needed to know was have
you got water, have you got petrol to get to the airport, not that that would have done any
good...

Yeah.

...but I suppose it would be useful, so. Yeah, I don’t know, yeah. That would be about it.
Internet, but again, international media was more annoying than helpful and inside
information, unless you could speak, read Japanese almost no.

This is one, this is one of the reasons why I asked in, in that sheet about, like, not just
speaking Japanese but trying to break it down into the different sections...

Yeah.

...because some people speak really well but they have difficulty reading. Yeah.

Well, I speak, I speak relatively good Japanese and I can listen to it relatively well, ehm,
so even the loudspeaker I could understand most of it…

Yeah.

...so I knew, like, em, that it told us, "Take cover. Don't go outside." "Yeah, right?"

Yeah.

So, the thing about that is, the loudspeakers, there's no way, you can't...
...and even if you're in your house where it's not enough, you've got to get close to one of them and, yeah [laughter], it's stupid. So then, they, they [indistinct] out, well, actually, they brought them out, they brought them out after the refueling one, eh, they gave everybody little radios, eh, to have in your house and you're supposed to keep them plugged in all the time. Most people I know did they kept them for about a year and then they just stuck them in their cupboard somewhere [laughter].

[Laughter]

So, they were useless as well and even if they had them, it wasn't like they were about to broadcast anything over in English. I heard from people that lived in Tokai, {redacted}, ehm, Tokai government were actually doing English announcements...

Okay.

...ehm, which was good for them. [Laughter] Ehm, why, why {the cities the participant lived and worked in} was not getting that service, I don’t know. Ehm, yeah, so.

That’s certainly one of the issues I’m looking at, em, you mentioned, like, there was a {a city in Ibaraki’s} International Association...

Yes.

...they, they, that Facebook update was in English was it or?

In English.

Any other languages or did you not?

Ehm, they were giving, they were giving links to Japanese pages and links to, you know, Earthquake Watch, and all this kind of stuff. It was, eh, you know, there was people getting into it and there was people that didn’t want to know about it as well, you know. It happened, ehm, one thing I guess, being a bar owner in the area for a long time, ehm, the news came out at a later date that said, like, 70% of foreigners had fled Japan. When I first heard those figures, I thought, “No way! It can’t be right.” Ehm, after running the shop for a couple of months, no, they, they, they might have even underestimated it in this area, anyway. I think, definitely 80% of the foreigners just took off. Ehm, I don’t blame them, ehm, I, I, I’ve got a family and a business here so it wasn’t really an option for me. Ehm, one option was to send my kids out of here and my parents were, eh, livid [laughter] about that and, well, they didn’t even want me to stay but I just told them, “This is, this is where I live and I can’t, I can’t leave my friends like that.” So, and when I say friends, well, Japanese and foreigners alike, ehm, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Absolutely, em, the, the reason with the, eh, the way I think, say, Tokai might have provided something but then {other places in Ibaraki} didn’t, I think a lot of it is volun, voluntary...

Yeah.

...those international associations are kind of NPOs or sort of volunteer organizations

Well I do know {a city in Ibaraki’s} International Associating, Association is well organized...
Yeah.
So, eh, I actually know the lady that ran the thing, but, ehm, if it’s the same one. Yeah she’s always on top of things and she’s always getting the, the local gaijin [Note: means foreigner] community informed on stuff which is great…
Yeah.
…but obviously she doesn’t have the power to tell everybody...
No.
…and, eh, yeah, so I mean the other thing is, I guess, once everyone got their power on, the other information was, “Everybody work now.” You know, em, the gaijin community here is sort of the old, it’s a, it’s quite an old group that’s been here for a long time. They all stuck together through it and people that I think were on the year contracts and two-year contracts soon just buggered off…
Yeah.
…people that had moved here and made Japan their home, ehm, they went through it with the Japanese just like they would have been Japanese…
Yeah.
…I guess, ehm, yeah, I mean, I guess the, the good information, the useful information at the time was actually which convenience store was being stocked, eh, which supermarket had food. Ehm, which petrol station was going to open that day and, and that information all came by, just, your friends…
Yeah.
…the language, and that, that was Japanese all…
Yeah.
…for me, because I speak the language, a few Japanese people called me and said, “If you need petrol tomorrow, the petrol station down the road from my place is opening and they’re letting you get so much amount of fuel or they’re letting you fill your tank,” or whatever.
Yeah.
So, em, I think, yeah, most of the information, word-of-mouth.
Yeah.

Ehm, the, It’s very interesting that word-of-mouth has come up with talking to you, it has come up lots of different places. Some of the people I spoke to in Sendai or other people I have spoken to near here, they all say that word-of-mouth is actually more important than many people realize beforehand…
Yeah.

...especially for things like, say, where to get water, where to get petrol.

Well, actually, lining up for onigiris [Note: a Japanese rice-ball that is a standard food item handed out in emergencies] and stuff like that, a lot of the schools opened up on the second day – I wasn’t here for it – but I know a lot of my friends said, yeah, they were told by their next-door neighbour just, “Come with me,” kind of thing, “we’ll go get some rice-balls.”

Yeah. And that actually kind of tallies up with one of the things the Japanese government is talking about now, ehm, they are obviously thinking about recommendations for how to make things better in future disasters, but it’s a big ask...

It is.

...one of the things they’re talking about is community. Like, if foreigners are more part of their local community, they feel it is more likely that.

Aw, for sure. I mean, ehm, obviously, I’ve been here a long time. I was in, once I was back, I was inundated with the locals asking me for information and what to do. Ehm, and luckily for me, I, I do have a lot of Japanese friends, so I could help most people. If not, they could come here...

Yeah.

...and I could feed them and look after them and whatnot. But, em, yeah, that would be very helpful, I think, someone knowledgeable in the area, knowledgeable in the language and that interacts with the, that source…

Yeah.

...of information would definitely help the foreign community.

Have you any tips for how to become more part of a local community in Japan?

You need a lot of patience, tolerance. Ehm, they don’t do things, when it becomes a committee or a group, things get quite complicated as far as my knowledge. It’s not done the same way it would be done in Australia or the UK, ehm, but basically, yeah, I guess, um, eh, maybe people like myself that have been here a long time that do have contacts in City Hall or in, in the government, maybe, I don’t know, maybe three times a year, sit down and have a meeting, work out and make sure you’re clear with the evacuation plan. Ehm, being, being in a position where you can get the information to the other foreigners, having that information would, would be great, you know, and even a couple of practice drills through the year wouldn’t hurt, you know, just, yeah, mock community evacuation plans and whatnot. Meet up at your local school at some time, would be good.

Ehm, eh, I, I’ve been here a long time, I’ve gone through a few quakes. I’ve been in the ocean having a swim and a surf and whatnot when a quake has hit and the tsunami alarms go off, but, eh, one of my friends [laughter] runs a beach house down there, and they’re, “No, just stay out there, just stay out there.”

[Laughter]

It’s like, so the, the thing was complacency, ehm, I believe two years on now most people have actually gone back to being complacent. Eh, for, for a year, I’d say, everyone kept
their backpack stocked, blanket, water, essentials, whatever, passport, all that, near the
door or near a place easily to grab where you could evacuate. Em, I'd be surprised if you
were to do, like, a bit of a censor on, a census on that now I would imagine most people
have let that slide. Ehm, completely if you see the footage from, from where the tsunami
hit, eh, there's one where a fire truck is going along the road telling everybody that
there's a tsunami coming, you better move along, and then the fire truck, pe, people on
the fire truck could see the tsunami coming, and they have just started to speed up and
then basic, it's from, they're just yelling out “Run” in Japanese, it's, because these
people, they've gone through that many quakes and then those tsunami warnings go off
and then 50 centimetre, like, a, a ripple rolls on to the beach…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

…Okay, it's over. They, the, the biggest, the biggest thing, I think, that caused the most
of the problems was complacency.

Yeah.

I believe that it was ten minutes before the first tsunami hit. Ehm, they, the ten minutes
for a lot of them, they could have gone up to two-hundred metres, em, but because it
happens all the time, they were just like, “Oh, it won't happen.”…

Yeah, yeah.

…and I think it has gone back to that now.

Yeah, after, after two years.

Two years, so, I mean, right after the quake for those six months, basically, any major
aftershock, it was out of bed, grab the backpack and be ready to move. Last night [Note:
he mimes waking up, raising his head off the pillow and opening one eye]…

[Laughter]

…”No.” and back to sleep, it's like.

I guess, it's a human thing to do maybe, I don't know. Is it?

Well, I mean, I've got other friends that go the other way that are, you know, if they see a
flock of birds flying south, they're like, “The birds are leaving, the birds are leaving.”

[laughter]

[Laughter]

And it's, like, one of them said, like, “There's reports of dolphins fleeing Japan.”

[Laughter]

And it's like, “Oh no!” [Note: he covered his face with his hands in exasperation]

Yeah.

And, and the streaks of clouds even…

Yeah, yeah.
...even though I, I think there’s something to them.

I’ve heard that one, yeah. I have heard about that one.

And I really do think there is something to that because, well, again, my mate that owns the beach house down there, he’s pretty good with the weather and whatnot…

Yeah.

…and he’d actually, he actually mentioned to me about the clouds, he said he’d seen the clouds, and then, yeah, he seen them a couple of days ago and he mentioned it and when I got back to work, my manager told me, “There’s a seismic warning for the area.” And I was like, “Oh right? Cool.”

[Laughter]

“My mate down the beach knows his stuff.”

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So.

There’s just one other thing I did, kind of, want to get a bit more detail on.

Um.

And that was about the reporters. I think that’s a really interesting topic in terms of, so first of all, the Canadians…

The Canadians.

...did they have a translator with them or could they speak Japanese?

No, that’s why they sought, that’s why the sought this place out, they said. Because they knew it was run by an Australian…

Yeah.

…and luckily my wife does, has a very good sense of Jap, of English. Ehm, and she could help them out. I mean, none of my staff were here. Well, I mean they were all getting ready. My manager was in the shower…

[Laughter]

…and so he’s out in the street, he couldn’t even, he didn’t even have time to grab a big towel…

[Laughter] Oh God.

...he had a little, he had a little wash around [Note: he gestured as if holding a small wash towel at his waist] and he was soaking. So they were all getting ready for work so they didn’t actually make it in, so, that was, in a way, that was good timing for my staff. But, ehm, yeah, I, I believe the reporters had, eh, they had come down from Tokyo, and, eh, yeah, when they got here, they didn’t, I don’t think they realized even how like we’re a
hundred, a hundred and a bit kilometers away from the epicenter. I don’t, I didn’t think they thought it would be this bad here…

Yeah.

…but when they got here, I mean, the hotel of a major international chain, they had to close, they’ve been closed for a year and a half [Note: a large hotel near the main train station of the city in Ibaraki where the participant worked was very severely damaged in the earthquake and was still being worked on at the time of the interview]…

Yeah, I was surprised to see that.

Yeah, so, I mean, for them, they were lucky.

Yeah, yeah.

It was very lucky, I mean. I’m sure, I, I love Japan for the people. I think they’re really nice people. Eh, and, usually, I think if you’re in need of help, even if they don’t, if they can’t speak English…

Yeah.

…they will try to help you in the sense that, em, so I don’t think they would have been in dire straits…

Yeah.

…they were lucky.

But it was great that your wife was able to take care of them…

Yeah.

…that must have been hard work for her.

Ehm, she’s a strong woman, mate. Eh, yeah. Eh, again, I guess, this is her life. What we do here, we, we look after people. Eh, I think she, kind of, it’s, kind of, a natural thing…

Yeah.

…she does a great job of looking after my boys. Eh, yeah, I guess, for her at the time, yeah, I, I felt like an absolute arse being in Australia. But the reason I was in Australia - I should tell you that, too – I went, I had gone back to fix up my parents’ house after the enormous amount of rain that they got that year [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…so they, the house was in a bit of a mess, and I spent three weeks back there cleaning up…


…and I was literally doing, I was literally doing the last little bit and after that, I had three days on the Gold Coast, just to unwind before coming back, but I was doing my last little
bit on the, on the back yard, and my sister came out crying and it’s just, “Oh, what?” And she was like, “Just come look at the TV.” And I went in and looked at the TV and I just seen this wave just washing over Japan and I’m like, “Oh my god.” Yeah. It’s hard to believe.

Yeah. It was, it was hard. And then, yeah, I can say for me that was very hard but then again I had, I was very worried about my wife. When I finally did get through to her, aw jeez [laughter], she said the worst possible thing in the world, the, the one thing I didn’t want to hear: “There’s water everywhere.” “Oh my god [laughter] shit.”

[Laughter]

“So the tsunami has come up and hit {the participant’s place of residence}.” And she was like, “Oh, no, no, no, no, no.” [Laughter] “The pipes around the house have cracked.” And I’m like, “Oh right, it’s okay.” [laughter]

[Laughter] Oh my goodness.

She was, “Yeah, there’s water everywhere.” “What!” [laughter] Yeah, looking back at it now you can have a chuckle but… I’m sure at the time it didn’t feel that way...

...shit, I just… I’m sure you didn’t feel that way.

I thought especially with the (indistinct) that they just ha, hammered into you on the TV. Ehm, it was, I showed a French reporter around, a French and a Spanish reporter around down at the harbour. Ehm, but I did see a CNN reporter down there and I actually did catch it on TV, it was laughable. Because he’s up there on the wall and, you know how they talk in the media, “So, ehm, there’s just been a quake a couple of, ten, fifteen minutes ago, do you see the water rising at all? And this reporter has just got this puzzled look on his face [laughter]…

[Laughter]

...like “Should I run?” or something like that. And then he just turns around and goes, “No.”

[Laughter]

[Laughter] So I mean, they were doing their best to, on the international news, to make it sound like we were falling apart here.

Yeah.

Ehm, in a sense, thinking back then, ehm, I remember being very proud. I remember I was happy to be here with the Japanese to get through it the way they did. And just, like, eh, you’ve got to have seen the photos of the highway, just, just up from here. Like, just up on the highway here. It was a drop it would have been, aw, 15-foot…

Yeah.
…half the highway was gone…

Yeah.

…that was fixed within, aw, four days. They had that highway running again. Eh, eh, business-wise, yeah, okay, four months of nothing basically. But then with that, with that rebuilding that had to go on, business-wise, eh, things became bearable.

Yeah.

Ehm, another good story, I remember I was working in {a city in Ibaraki where the participant had a business} about, I’d say it would have been about a month-and-a-half after the quake, and this old Japanese guy came in and he was a bit messed, a bit messy, a bit dirty, and he, he looked like he had had a few already. So I was going, “Aw, has he got any money?” kind of thing and I start, I worried a little bit. And he orders a double whisky, and a good one, too, and I’m like, “Oh, I might just go over and chat to him and see what’s going on. So I went and had a chat to him. He had been working for a month straight with no day off up in Fukushima…

Oh!

…he couldn’t walk [Note: the participant began to shed some tears at the memory of all the people buying drinks for this man who had worked so hard in Fukushima] they got him messed up, man. It was cool. It was a good story. Really good story. Happy story. [Note: the participant took a moment to collect himself] Very, mate, very proud. Sorry again.

Not at all.

Really proud of him. He had to be, oh, in his sixties and you could see he had worked himself to a standstill basically. Yeah, well, once everyone found out what he had been doing, they just wouldn’t let him pay for anything. [Note: the participant took a few more minutes] No, it was really good. Really proud to be, em, here during that time. Really, eh, really, really impressed with the Japanese people and just how they just, sort of, you know, I, I, well, they are not new to disasters themselves…

Yeah.

…so just, just their resilience, and their just, “Let’s get on with it.”

Yeah.

And the, “If we all get in and we do it, it will all be done.” And, eh, in that sense, that community, that community feel of being part of the community, even foreigners that did hang around it was appreciated by them…

Yeah, yeah.

…they loved it. It was like, “Oh you didn’t run. You’re not a fly-jin [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who left Japan during the disaster] .”…

Yeah.
which a few people got nicknamed, fly-jin or why-jin…

[Laughter]

...ehm, yeah, so, but no, they’re just, they’re amazing people, the Japanese…

Yeah.

...and, eh, yeah, if there was a, if there was ever an actual disaster, and I could choose of
being in Australia or being here, I would actually choose here…

Yeah.

...because of the way they did behave…

Yeah.

...em, I wasn’t here during the quake itself, but, ehm, I, from what I understand from
what I’ve heard of everyone’s stories. Even the level of panic, it just wasn’t there…

Yeah, yeah.

...it was just like, “Okay, let’s stay inside and see what happens,” kind of thing. Yeah, I
think the panic, the panic I experienced after the quake and being back was, yeah, just
more, just, trying to calm the foreigners down. Like, basically, they couldn’t, they
couldn’t get to the airport and all this kind of stuff, and some of them wanted to leave but
couldn’t, em, they, those people weren’t much help for the people who did have to stay.

Yeah.

But no, I think, em, like, the stories, the, the, just looking at the recovery and the speed of
the recovery and the way, I think…

Amazing,

...that, the story that Japan has to tell is a valuable one for the rest of the world, too.
There is a lot that we can…

It really is.

...that the rest of the world can learn.

Well, actually, yeah, it really is. Em, I look at 9/11 and then I look at the UK bombings.
9/11 you’ve got people screaming, running everywhere. Em, in the UK bombings you
know well the UK not being surprised that they, they’ve, they’ve had experience of
terrorism and stuff like that before but just one guy coming out of the subway just totally
covered in dust. “What happened?” - the reporter trying to make it all, “I think some sort
of explosive device has gone off in the subway.”…

[Laughter]

...“What are you going to do?” “I think I’m going to make my way to my office.”

[Laughter]

And it was, just, it was, yeah, again, I, I, out of the US and the UK, I choose the UK.
Yeah, yeah.

I think it is that experience of going through something so traumatic and just, I don’t know, having no, it’s in-built in them, I guess…

Yeah.

…it’s engrained in them and they can get through stuff like that. I imagine anything of that proportion to happen in Australia, the amount – well, again, looting, crime – it would, it would have been rampant. I really believe that. Eh, I don’t, I don’t like to believe it, I’d like to think Australians were better than that. But, no, I just, I really think there would be a lot of looting and…

Yeah.

…whereas here, it was just like, well it’s like it is always anyway…

Yeah.

“So that was, ehm, that’s, that’s what I was doing, too. Eh, once, I mean, by the time I got back, my staff had been in and pretty much got all the glass and everything all cleaned up in here and so there really wasn’t much to do around here. All I could actually do was go help neighbours or I was actually over in {a city in Ibaraki where the participant had a business}, ehm, a little bit of an older area again, so I was helping out around there. When I say helping out, it was just moving rocks or…

Yeah.

…(indistinct) stuff like that, but again, it was, yeah, I can’t say it was fun, but it, it was just good to be helping and feeling like you’re doing something because there’s, the uselessness and the frustration also, the quakes coming every hour and whatnot…

Yeah.

…you needed to do something. My line of work, I had nothing to do. If I was in here, I would have just been drinking…

Yeah.

…and that wouldn’t have helped anyone at all…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

…but, so, um.

Em, does, just one last question about, em, in, did you receive any information from the Australian Embassy?
That’s a good one, I’m trying to think back. I think due to the fact that I would have shown up on the computer, em, of being in Australia…

Yeah.

…they did not bother to contact me and they haven’t, they did not bother to contact me after that. Em, yeah, I would say I’m a little disappointed in the Australian Embassy but then again from what I hear many nationalities were in the same boat. It was basically, I don’t know, maybe, maybe if there was fresh paperwork sitting on there and you’d only been there for a year and parents were calling the embassy and that, they made an effort to contact you, ehm, but I know from a lot of my friends, too, that their embassy didn’t contact them either…

Yeah.

…so yeah.

Yeah, no.

Anyone that did, basically, I think the embassy were saying, “Your parents have called us and they were wondering if you were okay.” So, it was like, yeah.

_I think there may have been a kind of a numbers element to it as well…_  

Oh you can’t contact everyone, yeah, I understand that.

...because, well, say, _the Irish community were pretty small, so I think there is only about a thousand Irish people in all of Japan and so, I, I think they managed to get in contact with the, the Irish community pretty, eh, pretty comprehensively but I imagine Australian would be a bigger number._

Well, actually, I think, I ended up, I ended up calling the embassy myself anyway, just checking in, kind of thing.

Yeah.

I think I did. I can’t remember. There was nothing official. I know they didn’t call me.

Yes, yeah, yeah. _Em, I, I’d imagine as well from speaking to some other people from different nationalities that there may have been programs or place or plans in place for disasters but the problem was that the staff who would have carried out those…_  

They had already buggered off! Yeah. I believe that was the case. Again, I was lucky in that sense. Em, I had a Plan B. Ehm, as I already mentioned, I look after the, the guys that work out at the nuclear power plant there, ehm, the project manager at the, at the time had basically reassured us that, “Anything big happens, make your way towards the plant because they will be taking us out in helicopters.” He said, “Your family will be allowed to board the helicopters.” I said, “Sweet!” And it would have been the easiest thing to drive because everybody would have been heading the other way [laughter]. So it would have been (indistinct). It would have seemed strange to drive toward the nuclear power plant, but, em, that was the, that was my Plan B.

Yeah.
Plans after that, I wanted, I was trying to convince my wife to let me have a, buy a Range Rover [laughter]…  

[Laughter]  

…a four-wheel drive, I wanted because, yeah, but again, that airport exit, after the, some thinking, just made no sense. The amount of people trying to get out…  

Yeah, yeah.  

…eh, the roads…  

Yeah.  

…yeah, so. Yeah, yeah, like I said, I was lucky I had that Plan B, because everyone else basically if anything big happened afterwards, you were going to just have to ride it out…  

Yeah, yeah, yeah.  

…that was it, so.  

Well, I mean, I, I really can’t thank you enough for sharing your story…  

Not a problem, mate.  

…it was amazing to hear, eh, what you.  

I haven’t talked to many people about, em, that experience of being in Australia, obviously outside my Welsh mate, but, yeah, I, I really didn’t think it would upset me that long after the event…  

Yeah…  

…it took me a bit by surprise.  

...that’s, kind of, the, the, the last thing. I just hope I haven’t caused you too much anxiety or stress and…  

Oh, not at all.  

...I don’t want you to feel that this has been [Note: I handed him the Likert Scale to mark his stress and smiling he quickly circled 0/10]  

Not a problem, mate, not a problem. But, yeah, it just, that surprised me.  

Yeah.  

And I guess, yeah, being frustrated with the Japanese, you know, ehm, with the lack of information, I already had that due to the, due to the, em, refuelling situation [Note: the participant is referring here to the 1999 Tokaimura nuclear accident]  

Yeah.  

So, I’ve not, actually, I think I lied, I did do a study. I did one study for that months not the, not the earthquake. I did one study for the, eh, the Japanese, the {a city in Ibaraki}
government. Basically, about how they treated the foreigners during that, and they
vowed, you know, that they were going to improve it. Ehm, yeah, obviously, I think that
was something, like, - when did that happen – but there was quite a big difference, I think
it was 2001, I think. So, in those ten years they’ve done bugger all.

[Laughter]

Em, eh, again, I think if we were to have another quake any time soon, it is going to be
the same. Eh, that’s it.

The following is my recollection of some conversation that took place with the
participant just after I had switched off the audio recorder and just before we
parted.

The participant said that social media was very useful for him as a communication tool
and as a way to share and spread information with others in his network, especially at
times when they were being warned not to leave the house due to the danger of radiation.
He mentioned Facebook in particular and said that he felt these tools had gotten
better now that you have the ability to manage your connections and rank people you know in
different groups, orders of closeness, what content they can see, etc. He did recognize that
some people using social media who were panicking did not help, but that these people
could be managed as above.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

Note: This participant began the interview in his car driving me around the coast where the tsunami had hit. This meant the first thirty minutes or so of interview data did not get recorded and he started speaking before I had had a chance to read him the informed consent. For this reason, the interview did not follow the more standard flow from general to particular that I had established in the previous interviews.

2013/9/21 Interview with Participant 11

Researcher: [Note: as the participant is filling out the profile data, I explain the question about previous experience of earthquakes.] So the last thing there is just about your experience of natural disasters before 3.11, like how frequent you felt you’d had, eh, natural disasters. Some of the people I’m talking to are from New Zealand and they would have been through various earthquakes in the their childhood...

Participant: Uhm, uhm.

...and that before they came to Japan.

So Japanese earthquakes? [Note: The participant looks away trying to estimate how many quakes he many have experienced in this more than twenty years in Japan.]

Yeah, if you’ve been here, like, twenty-something years, you’ve obviously had a lot of, of, earthquakes.

Well, thousands now.

Yeah, probably. Well, certainly, you were saying there, hundreds of, eh...

Well, it’s up to, it’s up to, have you ever looked at Japan Quake Map [Note: this is a website that displays the earthquakes and aftershocks of the 2011 disaster as expanding coloured circles laid over a map of Japan in a kind of gifset animation.]?.

Yes, yes. The [laughter]...

That is just...

...it’s like fireworks or something [laughter].

...it’s, it’s over 3,000 now.

Em, it’s over 3,000 since the, the?

Yeah. And they were only measuring above 4.5.

Yeah. Did you feel the earthquake there the other, eh, two, two nights ago was it now?

Three nights ago?

Fuck yeah!

[Laughter]
I was waiting for the third kick.

You felt it.

I was, I was listening to a talking book and I heard it coming, “Oh no, here is comes!”
and “Ooooohhh!” and then the second kick and “Ooooohhh!” Got out of bed. Stood up.
And I was waiting for the third kick…

Yeah?

...because that’s what happened in the big one, right? It was three kicks...

Okay.

...and I, and it didn’t kick and I went, “Oh fuck!” And I went downstairs and turned the
TV on to see if there was any news about Fukushima.

Yeah, that’s kind of, the, the, sort of, first real question I had was, em [Note: the
participant hands me back the profile questionnaire as I am speaking] - ah, thank you
very much - now that you have been through the 3.11, em, earthquake, have you, sort of,
changed your behaviours in any way, ehm, when something happens?

Eh, in, in another earthquake or something?

Yeah, or just?

Eh, before, generally I keep my car, don’t let it get low. It’s just on half at the moment, I
saw, so I’ll fill that up…

Okay.

...I keep spare petrol at home. I do keep water supplies and stuff, yeah, I do. I have a
supply and keep my passport with me always…

Ah, okay.

...it’s in the car now. So, I’m, sort of, ready to move at any drop of a stick…

Right, yeah.

...because of the situation there. Eh, oh, I am selling up, by the way. So, ehm, someone
wants to buy the business [Note: the participant owns a language school in the town I
visited him in.] and I’m selling place next year. I’m going back to Australia next month
for four months and then when I come back, just, just sell everything up.

A, and, do you plan to move home to Australia permanently or will you move to another
location?

No, I, I wouldn’t be there permanently but I’ll leave six months here, three months in
Australia, three months somewhere else…

Ah, okay.

...but what I’ll probably do is get something down south in Kyushu…
I see.

...em, and, just, eh, live down there...

I see.

...away from everything.

You still have that connection to Japan, though?

It’s, it’s like with that there thing at the moment [Note: the participant is referring to the nuclear disaster in Fukushima], you know, which could tumble over or whatever...

Yeah.

...and I seriously talk about that in my - are you recording?

Yeah, yeah, sorry, yeah.

I seriously talk about the, the Number 4 reactor. You obviously know what happening to that [Note: this is the reactor from which Tepco plan to remove the fuel rods in November 2013 as the reactor building itself is extremely structurally unsound].?

Yeah.

I mean, that’s in such a situation where it can collapse any time, and the, so it’s, yeah, every time we have an earthquake, it’s like, “Is it okay... Yeah.

...or did it drain the water?” Probably, if the, if the cooling system goes, you’ve probably got about a week before it boils dry, but if it just drains then, well, you know, you fucking want to get out of here straight away. Japan’s finished...

Yeah.

...and, as I say in the book, once that goes up, they, they won’t be able to work in the nuclear plant, so the others will eventually go up as well, so you’re talking about an accident, if that went like that, you know, just that one fuel pool would probably do 50-70 times the amount of Chernobyl. And a lot of the facts about this have been done by, you know, eh, Fairewinds...

Yeah.

Okay.

...Arnie Gundersen, so he’s been through all my facts and checked them. Em, looked at his website?

No, no. I.

It’s called fairewinds.com [Note: the URL is actually fairewinds.org] and it’s, it’s, eh, F.A.I.R.E, it’s got an E on it, and then winds dot com.

Uhum.

Em, I can give you a contact of his wife, if you email me...
That would be great, yeah.

...but, eh, yeah, and then if the others catch on fire, if they, if they can’t control them because they’ve lost, no-one can enter the plant, so you’ve got another, what, five pools to go up, you’re talking about, it’s something like 500 times the amount of, em, Chernobyl...

Uhh.

...and that’s what’s sitting there and nothing is being done about it...

Yeah.

...and living this close, you know, a hundred-and-ten k’s away, everybody pretends there’s nothing wrong, people living around here, and, well, or try to just forget about it, but I guess because I’ve written two books about this, so immersed in it, you know?

Yeah.

My wife gets a bit pissed off. She’ll say, you know, “Stop bloody going on about it.”

Well, you know, it’s actually really there...

Yeah.

...it’s really what’s going to happen if it happens. What they’re trying to, trying to do actually is from November is pull the rods out from the Number 4. Arnie reckons, Fairewinds, he’s the expert, he reckons it’s a fifty-fifty shot. Ehm, they’ve never ever tested this manually and they’re so close together, the rods, like, you know, a centimetre or so apart, and a lot of the casing is broken because of the salt water, eh, they say some of them are bent...

Yeah.

...if one breaks and falls off and hits the others, then, you know, and that’s one reason I’m not going to be here when they do it...

Right, right.

...and the other thing is, even if, he says, even if it touches one of the others, it could set off, and he says they’re going to try and perform this...

In November.

...starting from November.

Em, just, do you mind me asking had you been, kind of, an expert on radiation before the disaster or did you find all this out subsequent to 3.11.

Ehm, I knew reasonably about the nuclear industry before, where we have the school is in {an area in Ibaraki near a nuclear power station} so, and as I said first, I actually worked, my first job was {as an English teacher in a nuclear power plant}.

Ah, okay, okay.
So I knew a lot of guys, I taught a lot of the scientists…

Yeah.

...involved in the, eh, fusion, eh, a director there as well, and {a person related to the participant worked in} Tokai 1 Power Plant, {redacted}, so yeah, I do have a lot of friends in the industry, and Americans as well, so, they had a fair idea of what was going on. But, no, I wasn’t a radiation expert.

Yeah, the, the reason I’m asking is...

Um.

...just because I’m interested in translation, so I wanted to know how you got the information. Was it in Japanese and you just were able to understand it or did you find?

No, it’s just I got English, eh, all through other friends, like, American guys in the nuclear industry, eh, another Japanese guy who studied nuclear, eh, physics in Tokyo University (an ex-student) gave me a lot, stuff that I couldn’t find…

Yeah.

...but a lot of it, Fairewinds, there’s an awful lot out there in English, if you search for it...

I see.

...there, there is. You’ve got to look at alternative media...

I, I see.

...that’s the, because, I mean, there was a complete black-out, I mean, when they started that, the reactor at Oi [Note: Oi had been Japan’s only operating nuclear power plant following the disaster, but all reactors were put offline in September 2013], I think, a year later, which they didn’t need to start, it was just to say, well, “we can start them up again” sort of thing. I mean, they said there was going to be a big power shortage, but how much power if this was started, that was, eh, last summer, and it went on and on and on, and they would have to make these drastic cuts, I heard nothing this year about these drastic cuts or anything that they’d need to make…

Yeah, yeah.

...there was zero in the paper, so it was all a load of crap. Eh, but, eh, when they started that up, it was complete media blackout and they demonst, the first demonstration which they reckon had over a hundred-thousand people, there was nothing in the news. It’s just a little flicker once on NHK and that was it. Complete media blackout, they, they went wild on the Internet, so they couldn’t keep quiet and then when the protests started going every week, all that came out in the news, but again, they suppressed it quite a lot.

Yeah.

You know they’ve brought in a new, well, they’re passing a new law, send me, remind me to send you the link, that if you publish anything about Fukushima that is harmful to the government or the country, it’s not really explicit on what you is or not and if it’s on a blog or anything, that it’s a criminal offence and they can prosecute you.
Crikey.

It’s going through right at the moment.

Wow.

I don’t know how my translation of the book in Japanese is going to go. [Note: the participant has written two books on the Fukushima disaster.]

Yeah, yeah. That’s, that’s, em, a very extreme law. My goodness.

So you can see how worried they are about covering it up.

Yeah. And you mentioned, you know, blog and social media, I mean, how do you control that as well?

Well, that’s the, that’s the big question. How far are they going to go…

Yeah.

...or what kind of story is it? I’m not quite sure of the details of it. But yeah, that’s as far, that’s how they’re going.

And I’m also just, kind of, now that you’ve brought up things like blogs and social media, I am particularly interested in that in terms of disaster. I know earlier on you said that, em, when the disas, when the earthquake hit you couldn’t use your phone to call out and some international calls could come in. Em, were you able to access the Internet to look at, eh, eh, anything?

No, it was all down.

And, do you remember how long it took before that sort of thing came...

The power came...

...back?

...back on, eh, on the Sunday afternoon where we were, but this area was out, like {area of Ibaraki near coast} was out for like two weeks or three weeks. Tokai was up because it’s, there was another power station so then they probably had to give power to the nuclear power station, so that area was quick.

Yeah. Okay, I see.

But, the thing is then, Tokai only just survived and the reason it survived was, you’ll read it in the book anyway, but they had decided to increase the size of the tsunami wall, ehm, by, it’s in the book, three or four metres…

Uhum.

...and they were in the process of moving the generators up to the second or third stories of buildings. They had moved one, and that’s the only that survived. That’s the only one that kept that one going. It’s quite scary because, you sort of, when you read how many of the power stations lost their generators, which is not, never publicized. You don’t really hear about it.
Yeah, yeah.
And lost their pumps and stuff and, it’s, [laughter] you know…
That’s, it’s…
...it could have been a much bigger problem.
...yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I, I, I do remember hearing that, eh, like some of the, em, I guess, faults that have been shown with the design were were known beforehand and had been.
The design of the reactor was faulty from the beginning and the guys who designed it - and it’s in the book again - em, resigned over the design faults and that was in the mid-1970s, and they continued to use it, ehm, until that, it was, the containment was too small, the bottom, they put the rods into the bottom which was, you know, really did melt through, em, it’s all in the book…
Yeah.
...all the facts about it. It, they knew and they continued to use it. As Arnie said, he was talking to his wife in the months before the accident and she said, “Where do you think the next nuclear is?” And he goes, “Well, I don’t know where but it will be in one of the, eh, what’s it, W, what are they called, Boiling W 1,” or whatever, it’s called, the reactor.

Which is the type of reactor. So, it was, it was known about. Em, I did also want to touch on you talked about how there was an information blackout in the Japanese media, did you try to, because obviously you speak many languages, did you try to use overseas media to get information?

Yeah.

And what type? H, how? If you could just talk a bit more about that?

So, you know, I saw that it was, it was a complete blackout, because I was watching, someone was filming it live and it was on the Internet, I forget how, who sent me the link, but I watching them demonstrate when they were just about to start them up, and I was encouraging them to go out, charge, be samurais [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and knock the gates down. I was, without leaving my name. Em, anyway, eh, I rang people in Australia and I said, “Is there any news about this starting up?” And then yes there was in Australian newspapers, em, but there was, I said, “Is there anything about the demonstration in Tokyo? There’s 150,000 people,” “No.” And then I went to another alternative media, which did have it, which was, eh, Alex Jones knew what was going on, and also The Drudge Report knew what was going on. And those two media, alternative media outlets knew, were, were putting it up...

Okay.

...and then it was getting spread around…

Ah, okay.
...but in, for the Japanese, some people were, you know, Japanese people were putting it up on, you know, Facebook and stuff like that…

Yeah.

...were getting shut down sometimes, too.

Really? That’s, that’s fascinating because that’s really, kind of, the sort of story I associate with, I don’t know, let’s say China or somewhere like that. It’s not what I imagine of, of Japan.

No, no. Em, shut it down.

Yeah. And in terms, again because, you know, my, my focus is on the idea of, like, translation and interpreting and stuff like that, as somebody from this area, were you asked by, I don’t know, any media or that to, to help them out, to show them around or anything like that?

As I said earlier, I wasn’t here most of the time anyway.

Yeah, yeah, but, I mean, even sub, subsequently you came back.

Yeah, yeah.

Em, because I know that a lot of the reporters who, who came to, you know, all over Japan, but who came to this area, they had no preparation...

Um.

...they didn’t, I think some people who came to {cities in Ibaraki} or that, they didn’t really know anything about the area, they didn’t speak Japanese, so I was just wondering how they?

No contact whatsoever. I would have liked to if someone had contacted me.

Yeah. But also just in terms of contacts, you mentioned before that, eh, on the, immediately after the disaster, you didn’t get any contact from anyone about the, the nuclear accident. Eh, did you ever get contacted subsequently by, like, the Australian Embassy or?

[Note: The participant shook his head in answer to this.]

Never.

I don’t think I’m registered with the Embassy anyway, so they probably don’t, eh, I’m sure they know I’m here…

[Laughter]

...I’m sure they know I’m here. They must. Eh, no, no, I remember when I, like, got to {the town in the west of Japan that the participant went to after the disaster struck} and the third one went up, and I rang my friend who was living up here, an Australian guy who now lives back in Australia. And I rang him up, it was, I had just got through, I had been trying to get through to him for days, and I said to him, “Where are you

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"Look mate, I can’t talk. I’m running out of the house. The wind’s blowing onshore.” And I said, “Are you still there?” I just said, you know, “Get out of there, mate.” You know, I couldn’t believe he was still here… Yeah.

...with his two kids. Young boys. Only, he’s got a Japanese wife who, you know, is a pretty, my wife is not like that so, you know, she believes it’s all serious. He actually and his boy evacuated to Tokyo without his school’s permission - he was working for the Junior High School - ehm, they cut his pay for evacuating during that time without letting them know. Because they were asking him to come into the office or something ridiculous like that.

Oh dear, that’s very, that’s very upsetting. And, so, it sounds like, in a way, the, your community of friends was the way you, kind of shared information.

Yes. Eh, you know, when I got to Shikoku [Note: a region in the west of Japan] I rang up my, he’d be another good person to talk to, my doctor friend who lives in {an area of Ibaraki} and I said, you know, “What’s the situation?” And he goes, “Oh, it’s blowing from the north today.” He says, “Where are you?” I said, “Shikoku.” He said, “That’s a good place to be in. Don’t let {the participant’s daughter’s name} come back.” That’s my daughter. “Don’t let her come back.” I said, “Okay, thank you.” And then I said, I remember, I forgot there was an Aussie girl going to High School in {this friend’s place of residence} and staying with them, and I said, “Shit, what happened to the girl?” And he goes, em, “She’s still here.” And I’m, like, “Really? Can I talk to her?” And she gets on the phone, because she’d been up to the house a few times, and I said, “How are you going? What’s going on?” And she goes, “Can you tell me what’s going on? I don’t know what’s going on. No one is telling me what, some people are saying this, some people are saying.” And I said, “Look, just get out of there as quick as you can. Get as far away south as you can.” “How do I do that?” I said, “Just get on a train. You just got to get someone to drive you. Just get out of there. Put me back on to him.”...

Yeah.

...and he came back on and I said, “You got to get her out of there.” And he said, “Yeah, we’re arranging it.” And I think she was gone in, like, the next two days. I mean, she was there at the worst time. Again she was left incommunicado. No communication.

Sorry, was that girl the same AET [Note: assistant English teacher] you were talking about earlier on?

No…

Is that a different...

...this is a different girl.

...oh so that other AET was also?

She wasn’t the AET. This girl was actually a high school student. She was...

Oh, I’m sorry. Yeah, I’m sorry.

...homestaying at the doctor’s. I mean, I’ve got an e-mail for her too. She can talk, if you want. But, eh, yeah, she was just there for junior high, she really had no idea what to do.
And I was really sorry, because in the rush of the thing, I completely forgot she was here. The other guy, the British guy who lived right opposite them was a friend who is now living in Kyushu [Note: in the south of Japan], he left with his family, his daughter, his son and his wife. And I said, “Why didn’t you take her?” So, he said, he said, “I tried to, but they wouldn’t let me take her. They said it wasn’t my responsibility because it was Lions Club or something, not Lions Club, Rotary, one of the two. They had responsibility for her.” Just get in, get in the car, man. I would have said, “Just get in the car!”

Yeah, yeah. Because, obviously, one of the things I would like to, sort of, see happen, I don’t know if it’s, if it’s possible, you know, but people like yourself, you speak Japanese, you have community friends, but some people are going to come to Japan without any network...

That’s what happened to them, that’s, that’s exactly what happened to the AETs...

Yeah.

...they were just left in their apartments, and if food was out, they were like, “Where do we get food? Where do we get water?” [Laughter] No one came around to help, they said. I mean, they, someone came around and just said something, you know, eh, and that was it. They didn’t really understand what they said...

Because it would have been in Japanese?

...in Japanese. Because a lot of these schools that have the AETs don’t, you know, you’re lucky to have anybody who speaks English...

Right, yeah.

...and if the teacher is commuting from [nearby large cities in Ibaraki], the one that does speak English, they’re not going to come in. No way...

Di, disaster. Yeah, yeah.

...they’re going to look after themselves. So that basically, I said, basically what happened was there [Note: the participant made a gesture of open hands spread apart indicating helplessness, nothing to be done.].

Oh yeah, it’s, because, em, like, obviously, everybody now is trying to come up with ways to prevent that sort of thing from happening in the future but, I don’t know, would you have any idea on how, how could you, eh, prevent that sort of thing?

Well, they, as the Japanese have evacuation centres and all that set up, they should have support in English, which they do in Tokai, because there are parents, and staff, but, you know, like Ota and these other places don’t. And they should have a professionally taped announcement through their announcement system that says the, “To English speakers, please report to, you know, whatever evacuation centre. Please go there.” And, you know, then they can be taken care of, obviously the half English, half Japanese, but, at least they know where to go.

Absolutely, that’s key information...

Yeah.
...because I know you mentioned earlier on, there was a message in Tokai but it was
difficult to even understand the person’s English.

That’s right. Yeah...

Heavily...

...accented...

...accented and...

...and, yeah. So I ended up understanding the Japanese better. So.

Aaaahhh, that’s a fairly small, you know, that would be an easy improvement to make but
could have a big impact on.

And being Tokai, a lot of people speak English in Tokai…

Yeah, yeah.

...because there’s the nuclear industry there and J-PARC [Note: this is the Japan Proton
Accelerator Research Complex] and all the research into new energy. A lot of people
speak really good English, so they shouldn’t have a problem finding someone to do it in
English…

Yeah, yeah.

...I know so many people that speak good English in Tokai. Why they put this lady on
that you could hardly understand…

Yeah.

...I’m not quite sure.

I know that, like, yeah, the, the, the disaster is so huge, there are many, many things to
improve and many, many things to talk about and I’m just doing one small thesis just on
language stuff.

But I’ll go back to the first nuclear accident that happened when the JCL accident
happened as well. So there was, there was no English announcement actually on that one.
Ehm, and during the, my wife spotted it first, she had the TV on in the afternoon, and she
just said, “There’s a leak.” And I thought she meant our bathroom upstairs was leaking,
or something. “Oh, no, no, no. Tokai.” And I said, “What do you mean?” I went and
looked out the window and saw reporters standing on the road with geiger counters
showing radiation levels. And I go, “Right, we better ring our government office in Tokai
and see what’s happening.” You know? And she rings them up and they go, “Oh nothing
to worry about. It’s fine. You can be outside. It’s all okay.” And we go, “You’ve got to be
shitting me. That it’s safe for children to be outside, it’s all cool?” I said, “You’ve got to
be kidding me.” So I rang up my office and said to the girls, “Close the school. Just put a
sign on the door that we’re closed today and get out of there.” And I knew which way the
wind was blowing, being a surfer…

Oh, of course, yeah.
...and I said, I told them which way to go according to the wind. It wasn’t that type of one anyway. It was like a big X-ray going off, actually, so it wasn’t actually a release of particles, you know, material, it was more like an X-ray coming out. But, ehm, so they left and then I packed up straight away and grabbed the kids from school and went to, the first night I went to {a town}, about 50 k’s away. Then, you know, I’m watching the TV that night. “Oh, now, we’ve got a 10-km don’t go outside zone. Here we go!” And then it went to 20 km…

Yeah, yeah.

so you know, I thought, “Here we go!” Communication, again, I was communicating with foreigners I knew…

Yeah.

different people in America that I knew, people in the nuclear industry I knew, {a person related to the participant who worked in the plant} was saying it was fine, it was okay. Having said that, my sister came and she took off with me, so that’s not good. Ehm, but, eh, again, the media was not giving you a true report…

Yeah.

...but after that finished and I did talk to some nuclear scientists about exactly what happened in the situation, they said, “Well, no. It was more like a giant X-ray going off.” So you had to be, to be really effected, within 300 metres to 500 metres and then maybe maximum just a kilometer away. {A person related to the participant} was probably 400 metres away at the second-hand shop when it happened. Got breast cancer two years later. My other friend was, {friend’s name} who lived up here was, you know, the Australian, he was probably, there was, there was apartments in a straight line from where that happened, 150 metres? They kept them all inside. He was there. They scanned him and they detected radiation. Ehm, his first babies, one had quite a few problems, you know, bone and hearing problems and all sorts of things. We don’t know where that’s from…

Right. Yeah.

...and we’ll never be able to say…

Yeah.

...but I haven’t heard anything else really much about it. Ehm, I mean, you know there was another leak in Tokai a few months ago…

Yeah, yeah.

...they didn’t tell us until two days later. There’s a, there’s a fucking primary school down the wind about 300 metres from it. I mean, it goes on and on.

Yeah.

One of the questions I had for when that first nuclear accident happened to one of the nuclear scientists I used to teach. I said to him, “Do you think there’ll be another nuclear accident? And he goes, “Oh it’s not a question of there being another accident, it’s just a question of when and how big it will be.” That was his answer. That’s, kind of, that’s the way they look at it.
So do you think that having been there for the first accident, do you think that having been there for that accident, so for the early accident, changed how you behaved in the 3.11?

Oh, definitely. Definitely. Ehm, because, you know, straight away I knew, you know, I knew it was a pack of lies…

Yeah.

...when nuclear power starts to dry up, mate, it’s not okay.

Yeah, yeah.

That’s, like, a complicated business. If they, they don’t actually blow up. Well actually those ones were designed for the top of the building to blow off, this guy told me, one of the engineers. Who would design something like that?

[Laughter] To blow up.

Imagine you designing in case it got a helium build up that the roof would blow off.

That’s what one of the guys told me. Can you fucking believe that?

It’s, it’s, actually, one just one, really this is my, kind of, final, final question, em, one of the things that people have talked about is sort of sensationalism in the overseas media about the situation in Japan. Wh, what’s your opinion on that? Do, do you feel the reporting that you saw in the overseas media was appropriate?

At, at that time or now?

Well, I guess first of all, at that time, and then, maybe, now, if you could deal with them separately.

No. It was very under-reported in Japan. Em, they, you know, hid most of the information from the public. I mean, when that reactor blew up in Fukushima, I don’t know if you know, they didn’t show it on Fukushima TV. Not for about 6, 7 hours. They showed it on other TV channels. [Exasperated laughter] They didn’t show it in Fukushima.

Wow.

Yes.

Really. Really.

Em, no, they really downplayed it in the Japanese media, like, “Nothing wrong guys. It’s okay. Don’t panic.” [laughter]

Crikey.

But I met a lot of people, even Japanese, who evacuated at the time, you know, it’s not just the foreigners…

Yeah, yeah.
...that’s bullshit. You know, one lady cal, said to me, you know, called me the ‘fly-jin’ jibe [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who left Japan during the disaster]. I was, I said, “Okay, let’s put it this way, your daughter is studying in China, a hundred kilometers away from a reactor, three reactors blow up after a big tsunami and earthquake, are you, what are you going to do? Are you going to say, ‘Cool, just stay there,’ or are you going to say, ‘Come home.’” And she goes, “Okay, yeah. I see what you mean.” And I said, “Yeah,” [laughter] “that’s what happened.” You know, what do you think is going to happen?

Yeah, no, I’m very glad that you mentioned that actually because you are not the only person to, to talk about that in, eh, in, in, in their stories, yeah. It was, I, I, I mean, absolutely, I can understand the decisions that people made, and I think that’s a good way that you described it there, “Okay, let’s, let’s turn the tables and, yeah, see how you’d react.” Em, that’s pretty much all I have, if there’s anything else, unless there’s just anything else in terms of communication and getting information and different languages. Is there anything you’d, you could think of that I haven’t talked about or?

You know, it was, it was difficult to know who was telling the truth and what, what was actually going on was the main problem, right? Em, and I really turned to people that were in the nuclear industry to give me information, people that were actually monitoring it in America, and saying, “Okay, what’s the radiation leak?” And he goes, “Aw, look like it’s safe to go back now, but not for too, too long. Beware,” as he said, “if one of them ‘burps’ get the hell out of there.”

And that, this, you, you, you, you said if one goes, it’s likely that it would be this kind of chain.

Well, nobody would be able to survive that much radiation to be able to run the plant [laughter] that’s the problem…

Oh my goodness.

...and it’s all kept secret from the public. No one knows about it. So I actually start the book off with that happening…

Okay.

...and that’s how I start both books off in different ways, but just to get people - oh well, I write action books, too - you know?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

And as I say, it is science fiction, so don’t get dismayed in the first, sort of, seventy pages of what’s going on, because there is a bigger message once it all happens, you know, I get a third perspective. The second book is pretty straightforward. The same characters with a few added extracts. Em, in the second one, I put in Americans, you know, chopper pilots and stuff.

Ehm, this is not really to do with the project. It’s just for my own interest. What, kind of, motivated you to, to write the books. When, when did it strike you to do?

Oh, I was a writer, anyway.

But I mean, sorry, not the science fiction version, the, eh, the version you said which was more you’d taken the science fiction stuff out.
Oh, it’s because someone said, “I really liked it, but I’d like to read one without the science fiction in it.”

Oh, okay. Okay.

And I said, “Sure. Okay, well, I’ll do that. That won’t take me long. Just take some characters out and put some new ones in.” That’s what I did.

Oh, I see.

And that should be out soon, actually.

Well, as I said, I’ll definitely check them out. And thank you again for everything.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

Note: the participant and the researcher worked together in the same company at the time of the disaster and actually sat at desks beside each other. Both were at their desks at the onset of the disaster and spent the first few hours of the immediate post-disaster period together.

2013/9/22 Interview with Participant 12

Researcher: So that’s all the paperwork...

Participant: Okay.

...and then - [Note: the researcher clears up the forms on the sofa between him and the participant] I will keep that one, this one, as I said, is for afterwards - ...

Okay.

... just to get down to it, I usually start with a very general - thanks [Note: the participant hands me back the pen I had given him to fill out the profile sheet] - [laughter] a very, very general question, just tell me what happened to you in the 2011 disaster.

Oh, well, from my perspective it was, I mean, it was fairly, I was in Tokyo and, like, it, it wasn’t that bad as such. I mean, I never once lost electricity, Internet or water [Note: gesturing to the researcher] the same experience, em, ehm, I was, the earthquake scared me. I did think I was going to die, em, when I was under the desk, and it was made worse by someone shouting “daijobu, it’s going to be okay” at me [laughter] [Note: the participant is referring to the fact that I, the researcher, shouted this at him while we were both sheltering under our office desks side by side]...

That was me, by the way.

...[laughter] ha, ha yeah! I know. Eh, you were saying for the record?

Yeah.

Okay. Like, that made me even more confident that it was not okay.

Oh, that’s good for me to know.

Ehm, like, I did, I really, really thought I might die. Ehm, because I was being, as I was, like, being thrown around under that desk was pretty scary. And afterwards, of course, and we ran, we ran outside and the, the, the [skyscraper that was directly beside our own office building] that wasn’t finished - finished now, it looks very nice - [Note: the skyscraper directly beside our own office building was under construction at the time of the disaster and had a huge crane hanging from it on March 11] ehm, it, eh, was waving back and forth, like, you remember that?

[Note: the researcher just nods because he wants the participant to focus on telling his own story rather than also imagining the researcher’s story]

And, like, I started crying and I had, I had another co-worker patting my hand, and, ehm [laughter] {co-worker’s name}, eh, like, it was just, and, I, I, I wasn’t, it was strange for
me, because when I was crying, I was, I wasn’t crying because I was, then at that point I
didn’t think I was going to die anymore, it was just, utter, utter stress, like, pouring out of
me. Like, I haven’t been in that situation too many times in my life where I’ve just been
so stressed that I’ve cried. I’ve had, I’ve had one other experience like that, and that was
in college when I had no money, and, like, I had no idea how I was actually, I thought I
wasn’t going to be able to do my Masters, which I had, like, all applied for and, like, was
finished and I needed money. That was, like, the only other thing that was similar to me,
for me. Ehm, and then I went home and, like, I found, like, a lot of, everything in the
house was thrown around of course, and, like, some things were broken and that upset me
again, like, em, I was, uhm, I was watching the news and the, the thing, like, that added
so much stress [laughter] was the kinkyujishinsokuho, the emergency earthquake warning
notification system, but that little noise beeping off. Ehm, I’ve kind of forgotten what
your question was. Can you remind me?
Just tell me what happened to you.
Okay. Just what happened, yeah. Ehm, that’s what I’m doing. Okay [laughter]. Ehm,
yeah, and so I went home, I tidied my apartment and I remember waking up the next day,
and I woke up, em, fair, pretty much, like, I woke up, like, as normal, but I just didn’t
want to get out of bed. And I went into work late, and just said sorry [laughter]. And I felt
bad, I felt a bit guilty for going into work late as well, but I just remember just going and
just not getting out of bed and, eh, uhm, yeah, that was it. The, the, one of the worst
things that stayed with me or has stayed with me was when we were in work and on the
news there was, ehm, ehm, on the TV there
was the live broadcast and you could see, you could see a car driving up the road, I think
it was in Miyagi-ken, and, eh, like, they were driving forward and they could see the
wave coming to them and, like, this [Note: the participant gestures as if one hand was a
car and the other hand was a wave approaching], and the car starts turning around and
reversing, and, eh, like, so you can see the car trying to reverse, but the wave is actually
coming in from the other side as well, and then the picture just cut off, yeah. That, that
really, like, that really, that’s upsets me now still thinking about that, like…
Uhum.
...I don’t know who was in that car, like [Note: the participant’s voice waivers and his
eyes water] in my imagination it could be, like, a mother with her little child or something
like that. Uhm, yeah, but for me, I was, I was very comfortable in Tokyo, like, I didn’t, I
really, like, there was big problems, things about the radiation, but personally I felt at
200km we were, we were fine, you know, like, but, the, from what I knew of Chernobyl,
like, the, the worst, like, area was, like, up to 50km I think, or something maybe up to, I, I
forget now at this point, but, I, I did, I felt very safe, and I also, another thing I did is I
checked the routes of rivers that come in to Tokyo to see if they passed anywhere near
Fukushima for the water supply, and I also thought that the water was safe there as a
result of that, so. Given the fact that I never lost, sorry, I said water, Internet and
electricity, but I also should have added gas, like, lost nothing, like, my life was very
comfortable. Ehm, yeah. In a way, like, felt slightly guilty actually, like, you know, like, I
had all the, I was very comfortable, my, all the amenities I needed, and, you know, there
was 20,000 dead on the other end of the country and hundreds of thousands without
homes, like, you know, that felt, you know, a mixture of, well, guilt, stress, panic, yeah,
lots, lots of feelings at the time. Ehm, uhm, uhm, that pretty much sums up my, my.
Okay. Well, first of all, there’s a couple of things I want to ask you about, but before I do,
I also want to tell you that I thought I was going to die as well.
Oh.
Ehm, I, I’ve had that experience once before in my life when I nearly drowned...

...and I did actually feel at the time, eh, when I nearly drowned that I was going to die...

...so I had experienced it before, but this was a different feeling. As you said, we were both under our own desks...

Yeah.

...and we were being shaken around...

Yeah.

...and, eh, I don’t remember the man’s name, but do you remember the bucho [Note: bucho means senior manager] who sat beside us...

{says manager’s name}.

...{redacted} When I was saying, “Daijobu, daijobu” [Note: this means ‘it’s okay, it’s okay] to you...

Yeah, yeah.

...”it’s okay, it’s okay,” he said, “Daijobu ja nai yo.” [Note: this means ‘it’s not at all okay.”] [laughter]...

Yeah, yeah.

...he said, “It’s not okay.”...

Yeah.

...eh, for me, I ca, I, I’d love to tell you why I kept saying daijobu, daijobu...

[Laughter]

...I don’t know that I was saying it to you...

To you! I don’t think it was. I don’t think you were saying it to me.

...I don’t think I was. I think I was saying it to myself...

I thought so, too.

Yeah, but what I would like to ask you is why that made you feel worse.

Because I, because I think you were saying it to yourself [laughter], yeah, I felt that. I was like, “You’re not talking to me.” [Laughter] I was like, “It’s nice.” Like, I, I didn’t, I appreciated the sentiment, though, like, I won’t lie. [Note: the participant covers his face with his hands and the audio becomes slightly muffled] I did, I was glad to, you know, I
was still fairly fresh off the boat, so to speak, at that time, like, just about five months in
Japan, you know. Eh, I was glad to have, eh, an Irish person beside me. I don’t know, like, it, it, it helped. Em, you know, it’s like, you know, it sounds a bit, it sounds a bit exaggerated if you say like a comrade or compatriot, you know, doshi, airurandojin-doshi, you know, it’s like that, that did have, that did, it was good for me, but, like, I did, I did feel you were speaking to yourself more than [laughter] you were speaking to me.

I absolutely was. I absolutely was. It was a very strange feeling for me.

I actually imagined the floor going from under us, I thought we were going to crash down into the, or, like, from above, our desks were pretty sturdy, so I didn’t imagine anything coming down on top of us, but I thought we were going to go down, like, and…

Uhm.

...I didn’t think that was going to end well…

Uhm.

...yeah, that’s what I was thinking about. Eh, and the aftershocks were, they were traumatic as well, but the, the worst thing about that was the, the system.

Yeah, I want to ask you about that, obviously, because what was it about the system that you didn’t like?

It’s the sound, right? It’s just, it’s just, it, eh, I, I have asked people who have, like, obviously never had to deal with it before, I’ve played it back. I think I’ve played it back from my, I think I sent a YouTube link to one of my brothers, and he was like, “Yeah, that does sound pretty panicky.” Panicked, you know. It, it’s probably a good thing that it has that because it makes people move, in a way. But of course, it just became extra sense then after the earthquake because you were just like, “Oh god, what’s coming next?” you know. Eh, like, you fear a bigger one, I feared a bigger one, you know, like, that’s what I thought about, eh, and up on the 8th floor [Note: referring to the floor of the apartment building he lived in] the highest, the highest place in the building [laughter] I mean, probably, eh, where my apartment was, like, I didn’t, I didn’t feel terribly, terribly safe. But as it turns out, Japanese buildings are actually very, very, very good at withstanding earthquakes. Shockingly good at it. Eh, so I have a lot of confidence in that now. Except, kind of, for the building where, I work, where you worked, because it does feel a little bit old [laughter]…

Uhum.

...but apart from that, yeah, I feel very safe in Japanese buildings. In, particularly in skyscrapers. If I was in a place like Roppongi Hills, [Note: this is a famous skyscraper in the Tokyo skyline. Construction on it began in 2000 so it would have used very modern construction techniques and been subject to rigorous building regulations.] like, I think I would feel super safe. Eh, safer than being anywhere at street level because nothing is going to fall on you, probably, inside those buildings…

Uhum.

...because it’s just the way they’re designed and, yeah. Eh, but yeah, to try to stick to your question, it’s, it’s just, I think it’s a combination of experience, em, you, asso, you associate negatively. You know, it’s like being shouted at by your mother or father, maybe. A bit like you’re bracing yourself. That’s, I think that’s what it’s like.
You’re really hitting home with me now because I’m actually more traumatized in some ways by the alarm than by the experience of the earthquakes...

[Laughter] Yeah.

...ehm, if I, if I heard it now, I’d actually possibly have a bad reaction. I really wouldn’t react very well so don’t, please, play it for me or anything.

Oh right.

I actually, I actually would probably get quite a bad reaction to it...

Yeah.

...and I do think there’s an element of a negative association with it...

Yeah.

...ehm, because we had hundreds of aftershocks...

Yeah, yeah.

...in the days following the earthquake, even in Tokyo, and I remember being pulled from my, sort of, fitful sleep...

Yeah, yeah.

...repeatedly, and so, I, I, I also, you know, there are plenty of cases where an earthquake happens and there’s no warning...

Yeah.

...there’s a warning and there’s no earthquake...

Yeah.

...so it’s not a reliable system so...

Yeah.

...I, I respect them for trying to introduce something...

Yeah.

...I’m not saying they should get rid of it...

No.

...but it definitely has traumatized me, too.

It’s traumatized me. Ehm, I, I don’t think it should be gotten rid of because it, it does, like, it’s not always accurate but it, it, it works to an extent. It, like, it’s definitely, like, predicting earthquakes, it’s a bit like predicting the weather, you know, like, probably,
they’re probably slightly better at predicting weather, like, generally the weatherman is, at least in Japan, the weatherman is generally right…

Yeah.

...but, yeah, it’s similar thing, like, there’s still cases of it being wrong, yeah. Eh, if, if, if it just adds, you know, five to fifteen seconds to one bad earthquake, like, that’s a major deal, like, you know. Even if it is traumatic, I would never suggest that it should be gotten rid of...

Uhm.

...even, even though it makes mistakes.

Oh, I would agree with you. I would agree with you. So, as you know, I’m interested in how people got information and how they communicated. So you said you watched TV when you went home...

I left my TV on all the time, yeah.

...what were you watching?

The news. It was Japanese news, which I wasn’t very capable of understanding at the time.

So how did you?

Ehm, well, reading was always a strong ability, strongish ability for me in Japanese, so I would, of course, there were lots of charts, graphs and pictures on the news, and with my kanji ability [Note: ability to read the Chinese characters used in the Japanese language] I was relatively able to get information out of what was on screen. Eh, the speaking didn’t help but it was, it, the noise of people talking or whatever there. Of course, Facebook and, like, just the Internet in general. To be honest, I didn’t watch too much English news. I didn’t really check it. I, I don’t know why when I think back now. It’s, it just felt like I, I don’t know, it never occurred to me to bother looking at it. I got everything I needed from friends, I suppose. Eh, just asking. Eh, yeah. Facebook, like, was a big source of news. And then Facebook introduced, shortly after that Facebook introduced some sort of, eh, like, emergency, like, what was it, I forget the, you know the anpi shisutemu?

Anpi kakunin, yes.

Facebook introduced something like that system. So, it’s, the system we have at work where you say you’re safe after an emergency event, Facebook introduced something like that after as well, I think. Sorry that’s more of a future question than [laughter] at the time. That applies to the future. That would have, so like, if there was ever another earthquake again, like, I would go to Facebook and click the little button that says I’m still alive, you know. Em, eh, but apart from that I posted, I just posted on Facebook that I’m okay, yeah.

And so, you said you were watching the news...

Yeah.

...using your existing Japanese ability...
Yeah.

...were, was translation a part of that?

Trans, translating for people or for myself? What do you mean, understanding it for myself?

Did you use dictionaries?

Oh, okay. Oh yeah [laughter]. Yeah, like, I mean learned pret, I learned plenty of words at that point that I’ll, I’m about to say I’ll never forget but yeah ekihoka, right, that was one. Soil liquefaction. Eh, yoshin, and I didn’t know the words for, eh, yoshin, foreshock? Aftershock? Aftershock, and stuff. Turns out there’s a, there’s a foreshock. It’s yoshin. It’s arakajime [Note: the participant is explaining the Chinese characters that make up the word foreshock in Japanese]...

Oooh.

...so the pronunciation is the same but the kanjis are different [laughter]...

Okay.

...which is like the worst thing ever to have ant, antonyms with the same pronunciation [laughter].

[Laughter]

Ehm, but yeah, ehm, yeah, those were it.

Y, y, y, you said you were also asking friends...

Yeah.

...what languages were you using?

Oh, English. I mean, just, my friends were all only English speakers at that time. Ehm, like, I just, I, I didn’t have Japanese friends really.

So where were these friends?

Eh, they lived in Tokyo. Ehm, like, eh, I had a French friend who lives in {central Tokyo}, em, he still lives in {central Tokyo}. I was going to be meeting him today if the weather was good. Em, like, I was talking to him. Em, I had another friend...

With mobile phone or?

Oh how? The method of communication? Oh, Internet and mobile, yeah.

You could, you could connect?

Oh at the time? Sorry this is the days after. You’re talking, you’re talking about, like, the day. Of course, no, yeah, of course, no. Like, there was no, mobile phone connection was out, but I mean the Internet was fine, like, so that was, at that point I was mostly talking to people back home. Like, you know, that was my family and other people, like, just
saying I was okay and a lot of people were telling me to leave, you know. I was kind of like, “Nah.” Eh, but I mean within a few hours, maybe, after the earthquake, like, the phones came back, you know, I mean, like, so then I was, I was able to use the phone then, like, I, I messaged people. I messaged someone who was, at that time I was, kind of, seeing, you know. Eh, like, uh, uh, I, I did have Japanese friends but, like, one of them would have been in Aomori [Note: in the far north of Japan] at the time, so, well, she sent a message to ask if I was okay, like, you know, that type of thing. Eh, yeah. The number of people I knew in Tokyo, like, I knew well at the time was very limited. I mean, you, you were one of them and, I mean, of course, and going over to your place was, eh, that was a good source of comfort as well. It was, just walking over to you [Note: the participant covers or rubs his face with his hands and the audio becomes slightly muffled] and it was all a bit surreal, I remember, when I was walking over there, like, it was just, there was, I think there was, there was a lot of people around, wasn’t there? Like, a lot of people just couldn’t go home, like, it was, if I remember correctly, like. And there was people, yeah, there was, there was far more people in {the area of central Tokyo where we both worked} around, and…

Uhum.

...{the areas of central Tokyo where we lived} at that time, like, there was, yeah, I remember that. A lot of stranded people. That also made me feel guilty. It was, like, you know, I kind of felt, you know, got an apartment up there, you know, nice and comfortable to myself with an unused futon, you know, and the hotels were undoubtedly full, you know, like, eh, that was, that was strange. I’m sorry, I’ve forgotten [Note: the participant covers his face with his hands and the audio becomes slightly muffled] what your question was again.

[Laughter] That’s okay.

I’m rambling on.

No, I think the rambling is important...

Yeah.

...because that’s giving me context and sometimes that’s a way to remember...

Yeah.

...remember things. Like, I’m interested, you went straight from 3.11, which was the Friday...

Yeah, yeah.

...to turning up late for work the next day, but that means...

Ah, that wasn’t the next day.

...no Saturday and Sunday.

Yeah, the next work day.

What did you do on Saturday and Sunday?

I don’t remember.
Okay.

I have absolutely no idea. Ehm, I, it’s likely I went out, It’s very likely I went out and met friends. I pro, I probably did go drinking. Em, actually, no, no. It’s not likely I went drinking. Because when I get very stressed, if I, if I’m very, very stressed, I tend to avoid alcohol actually. Ehm, but I probably did go out. I would not have waited at home, I think. Yeah, ah, it’s very hard for me to say. I’m sorry. I really, I don’t remember.

No, I just, I just...

Yeah.

...I just wanted to, to clarify that.

Yeah.

And, in terms of getting information...

Yeah.

...what did you feel you could get information about and was there things that you felt you couldn’t get enough information about?

Uhm, I felt like the, the earthquake itself, eh, the damage effected by the earthquake, eh, excluding Fukushima, which I’ll come to in a minute, excluding Fukushima, like, the damage effected by the earthquake, like what was destroyed, what was done, who was missing, you know, where the, where the effects were, you know, like I knew that there were parts of Chiba that were having it, that had it a bit, eh, rough, eh, which was relatively close, ehm, and not just, it wasn’t so far removed from me, like, it was, Disneyland which was, how far is Disneyland from {central Tokyo}? Like a twenty-minute train ride? Keiyo Line is...

Possibly even less. It’s really fast.

...less than twenty minutes. Yeah, like, it wasn’t that far away. Disney was shut down because they had, they lost power and water, which was a big thing for me. Like, it’s just, like, twenty minutes away, like, it was one and I was fine, ehm, so, like, I felt like the information of, like, who had what or, you know, what areas were badly affected, etcetera, like, was very good. Fukushima, yeah, I didn’t, I felt like the foreign media covered it a lot but there was just so much, there was too much information about that, and there was too much opinion. There was a lot of loud opinions going around, like, about how bad that was. Ehm, the Japanese penchant for understatement just left me with, like, where the hell do you draw the middle line, like, you don’t know how far to one side or the other it should have been. I didn’t trust it, em, and there’s still problems going on in Fukushima right now even, like, I mean, there, they had like 300 tonnes of seawater, like, they’re leaking 300 tonnes of seawater every day, or, I don’t know if they’ve finally stopped that or no.

I don’t think so.

Yeah. They have a fantas - this is very off the point, but - they have a fantastic idea now where they’re going to introduce a, sort of, an underground frozen chamber…

Uuuhhh…
...you know about it?

...I read about that, yeah.

Yeah, they have one in the US apparently as well. Apparently, it’s highly effective and I read up on it and it seems like a fantastic idea because ice, water cannot move through ice. So if you permafrost the ground, like, it seems, it sounds like a terribly good idea.

Ehm, yeah, but that will take time to implement and much like then as now the Japanese don’t seem to be inclined to ask too much for foreign assistance, and in, in the extent of ‘we can take care of it’, like, yeah, like, I feel like, yeah, the Japan, Japan is, probably has sufficient, uh sufficient? Sufficient experts, yeah, like, they probably have enough experts, they probably have the manpower to do it, but bringing in foreign assistance is only adding manpower. You know, like, it just makes it quicker. And, and that’s, I didn’t like that, I just, I felt like, “You should take any foreign assistance that’s offered with this because there’s no, this is not a matter of saving face, you’re talking about nuc, like, leaking nuclear material. This isn’t just a Japanese problem. It stays in the environment, it gets into the oceans, it’s a global problem instantly. So, it shouldn’t be a matter of pride.

It’s not a matter of just Japan, you know. It’s not like, I don’t know, fixing rail lines, which, which is only Japan. Which they would likely more readily accept help for. I don’t know. Possibly. Ehm, but like, it’s, it’s a, that’s a global problem, like, that should have been addressed globally. Unfortunately, like, borders are, like, a country has its borders and, like, even if a company, a country is, you know, leaking radioactive waste into the oceans, like, there’s not a hell lot, of a lot, legally that any, you know, like, any country can do short of declaring war, you know, em, “We’re being attacked by radiation.”

[Laughter] Ehm, like, I really felt they should have taken the assistance, ehm, and apparently, from what I know they still aren’t…

Uhm.

...like, they still aren’t asking, taking much in the line of assistance and Tepco [Note: the power company that runs the Fukushima power plants] like, oh, like, their, Tepco’s favourite line is nani nani ni tsuite kento shiteimasu, you know, like, like, they’re looking into it, you know, em, but like, they’re constantly looking into it but wh, wh, where’s the action…

Uh.

...that accompanies the looking into it, you know, like, two-and-a-half year’s later, they’re finally thinking of installing this permafrost thing, you know, like, I’m sure the, the, the woman who designed that permafrost system in the US, for the problem in the US, probably thought from the get-go, “You should permafrost the ground now.” You know, like, I’m sure she thought that. And, I don’t know if she said it or not, I’m sure, someone with her expertise and, you know, like, I get the feeling, like, she probably did try to say something, maybe, I don’t know. Or someone probably said something similar but it didn’t happen. You know, that just, it does, it does irritate me. Ehm, yeah. Though the man, the head, I think he was the head of Fukushima facility, he has already passed away, hasn’t he?

Yeah.

Yeah, he got cancer.

Yeah.
Yeah, I have, I have the utmost respect for him. Em, he was, he kind of did a bit of a captain-going-down-with-the-ship thing, in a little bit, but, which I, you know, it sounds good on paper but, like, he, yeah, but apart from, he didn’t pointlessly go down with the ship. He was there, he was trying to do something, ehm, yeah, and there just needs to be a little bit more openness about it, and, yeah. Uh.

Well, I can certainly see where you, you didn’t feel there was enough information coming through...

Yeah.

...but...

[Laughter]

...you said that, you know, about, sort of, the location or the, the extent of the earthquake damage, you felt you really did have enough information but, can I just be clear about how you got that?

Oh how? Again, TV, whatever popped up on the news that you could, it’s very, you don’t need to understand Japanese to see the train tracks that aren’t operating, or whatever, you know, or, em, also just, em, could, you could also realize from - [Note: for the following two sentences the participant is just quietly talking to himself] Well, I don’t think I checked Facebook. Would Facebook? - I don’t know what site I would have checked like, and, I would have, I used Tokyo Metro at that time, so, I probably just checked the metro website, Tokyo Metro website.

Yeah, yeah.

Ehm, ehm, it would have been, again, at that time it would have been a little bit difficult for me to read, but I, I would have been able to muddle my way through it, like...

Okay.

...em, much like I’ve managed to muddle my way through the online banking [laughter].

Okay [laughter]. So...

Probably easier than the online banking.

...[laughter] the reason I’m, kind of, coming back to this point again and again...

Yeah.

...is because I’m interested to see if anyone was aware of specialized websites. There were specialized websites.

Eh, no.

No. Okay.

No, not really. Ehm.

There were websites, for example, of the government ministries that were translated into multiple languages, but you never?
No, no. It seems like a terrible waste.

That, this is, this is one of the things that I’m interested in...

Yeah, no, I didn’t know about that. I wouldn’t, it, it’s a sa, I don’t know if it’s sad or stupid, but, like, it, it, just, it doesn't occur to you to go to government websites, it doe, it doesn’t occur to me, anyway, like, it doesn’t come to my mind, you know. Like, em, I never, it would never occur to me to look at that. Em, the Irish Embassy, oh, the Irish Embassy were emailing me! That was a source of information. I forgot about that. Like, I still get emails from them. Em, that is like, the mo, like, for me, the Irish Embassy is, like, the most use I’ve made of the Irish government in my entire life is when I was in Japan, you know, like, I’d, I, I never, I never would have thought to use them, but when they were emailing me, I was, like, “Oh, oh, thank you,” you know, like, “this is useful information.” They included information and links, em, I, I don’t remember what they linked to exactly but it was in there. Ehm, but like, yeah, I don’t know, it wou, it would be good, I guess, for, em, it’s not centralized, it’s voluntary. Like, I voluntarily became part of the Irish Embassy’s mailing list, thanks to you. [Note: it was the policy of the company we both worked for to encourage foreign staff to register with their embassy in case of emergency and I had encouraged the participant to do so] Ehm, but, like, actually thinking about it, like, there probably should be, like, to go with the, the - sorry this off, off, away from your question, but - to go with the, the emergency earthquake warning, they should probably just include links [laughter] to their own, eh, the government websites, like...

That’s a very good idea.

...yeah, and they should probably include ‘For further information, for English information, click here’ or something.

Oh, that’s an excellent idea.

Yeah. That would be...

Have you thought about that before or has that just come to you now?

...no, it just came to me right now...

Inspired!

...that would be, that would be a very good way, especially during a big...

That’s a really good idea.

...or just using the same system, you know, like they can mail everybody at once. So, of course, the system fails and occa, occasionally it’s wrong but, like, once there’s been, you know, a massive earthquake use that, just send people information links...

Very nice idea.

...em, yeah. Probably would be a good idea, yeah.

Okay, you said that the Irish Embassy was contacting you...

Yeah.
...do you remember getting any contact from the city office or ward office or any of the local authorities?

Oh, no, I don’t. I, I don’t think so. That’s not to say that there wasn’t any, but I don’t remember. I mean, the company performed some of those functions that might have been carried out with, eh, like, local councils in other countries. Like, the company takes a list of everyone being safe, like, and etcetera. Em, it’s like what, what, I’m going to ask you now, was there?

Eh.

To you, for you, did you get anything?

Eh, we both lived in the same ward...

Yeah.

...didn’t get a thing...

You didn’t get a thing [laughter].

Didn’t get a thing. But, ah, that’s...

Yeah.

...you know, some people may have received things and just seen it’s in kanji and thrown it away.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, I wouldn’t have done that, like, em, many disaster things came in the coming months [laughter] you know, which is a very human thing to do, em, you know it’s like…

Can you explain a bit more about that?

Eh, we, about what a very human thing to do?

No, no, no, no. Many disaster things came in the coming months.

Lots of little disaster booklets, eh, earthquake, like, preparedness things came in the coming months. They had probably come before that as well. I was only in Japan five months so, like, I have no idea, like. Em, probably April is probably the time for them all to be sent anyway, or something, you know, like, eh, but, after that I did get many earthquake things, em.

Do you remember what language they were in?

Oh, no. Definitely there was Japanese there, like, I, I, I got some multilingual things. Eh, to be honest, when I think about multilingual things, the most multilingual thing I can think about is the Docomo [Note: a Japanese mobile telephone carrier] pamphlet. It comes in Portuguese, English, Spanish, I think, Chinese and Korean, em [laughter]. The {ward in which we both lived}, like, anything of the {redacted} Ward Office, like, it might have been multilingual, I, I don, don’t remember. I can’t…

Okay.
I can't say, em. Definitely some things that the Ward Office issued were multilingual, you know. Whether the specific earthquake warning information was or not? I think I got, eh, hinanbusho, hinansho, eh, emergency evacuation site thing in English. I'm pretty sure that came to me in English. Where to go if there was, yeah. Apart from that, though, I can't remember. I can't remember about the general preparedness things. But those booklets were filled with pictures, em, which made them quite easy to understand, like, I mean, there were, there was things like showing, like, a person turning off the gas, you know, things like that, like, I can remember that, like, so even if it was only Japanese, like, there were, it was, it was, it communicated itself, I think, I think.

Okay. Then, you talked about, like, 'in the coming months'. What I've asked a lot of people is to tell me when did the disaster end for you?

When did it end?

If it has ended.

Oh, it ended. Fukushima hasn't ended, but [laughter] ehm, when did it end? Ehm, hum, when the trains started running normally, ehm, when I heard Disneyland had reopened, which was a while later, em, em, I've a little bit of information for you that's a bit beside, but I met someone from Disneyland, eh, who worked in Disneyland as a dancer during the earthquake, he told me that Disneyland had it's own, like, power and water generators, so, like, the staff would go there to have showers and stuff… [Laughter] Really?

...yeah, no, it was fantastic, yeah...

Wow.

...yeah, ehm, which was really interesting for me…

Yeah.

...but I'm not surprised, like, that place, like, like, it's a, it's a complex, like…

Yeah, yeah.

...it's an utter complex…

Yeah.

...you know? Ehm, but, yeah, ehm, trains in particular. When everyone had come back to work, and when, when I heard that the people in the factories in Iwate and, eh, in, in [an area of Ibaraki], so, when they were operating as normal [Note: the company we worked for had plants and offices throughout the disaster zone] I felt that it was pretty much back, we were, you know, back on track, like, I mean, there's still remaining things as a result of that. The Joban-sen, the Joban line which runs right beside me here still doesn't go to Sendai…

Uhum.

...you know, in Mito, you can see the, Sendai is blacked out, you know, you, like, I see that and I think, “Oh, the earthquake is, you know, the earthquake, the effects of the
earthquake are still here,” you know? [Note: the participant is referring to the fact that the Joban line which used to run through Fukushima to Sendai is now not operational in parts because of the nuclear accident.] Eh, yeah, so, like, has Japan completely recovered from that? No. I mean, Fukushima is still a problem, some of the train lines are still not repaired. Eh, but like, the disaster ended, like, for me probably around the time that, ehm, probably when I came back after Golden Week. I had booked my holiday to Ireland and when I came back after Golden Week, but then I got sick and I was out for ten days with the flu, and it was one of the, that was, that was one of the worst personal experiences of my life, as you may remember, when I came back to work, I was not in a good position for various reasons [Note: the participant experienced the break-up of a personal relationship].

Yeah.

Ehm, yeah, so, that was a bad year.

[Laughter]

[Laughter] That was a terribly bad year, like, to be honest, that probably, like, made, extended the feelings of the disaster for me in some ways, like, I, I, you know, like, it did, like, getting sick, like, I was so emotionally and physically weak, em, I think I lost weight, I’m sure I lost a bit of weight, like…

Oh yeah.

...I lost quite a lot, visibly, I think, I feel like I lost weight at that time and, em, yeah, I just, so in that way, like, if I in, include, like, what may have drawn it out or been a completely separate issue, like, I can either say when I came back after Golden Week or probably until the following September or later, June or July when I finally stopped, eh, crying [laughter]...

Huhum!

...about, eh, the, what I’ll, what I’ll, em, misleadingly label the flu trauma.

[Laughter] Yeah, yeah, well, I mean, it’s, it’s difficult to, it’s a bit of a chicken-and-an-egg situation, isn’t it?

Yeah.

It could be that that drew it out, or...

Right.

...or it could be that you reacted in a more...

Yeah.

...extreme manner because you were already...

Yeah.

...emotionally vulnerable.

Yeah, it’s, it’s hard to tell.
Yeah, I don’t think it’s possible to pick those two apart.

No, I can’t. I can’t say for sure.

Yeah, yeah. There’s a couple of other things. Just these are slightly unrelated...

Uhum.

...but one of the recommendations that a lot of, say, NPOs or local authorities are, are coming up with...

Uhum.

...in terms of how to help foreigners better in the future...

Uhum.

...is, for example, things to do with getting foreign people more involved in the local community.

Oh, yeah. I definitely think that would help. Sorry, I’m interrupting your question.

Not at all, no. Do you want to expand on that or?

Oh, right, huh. It’s, kind of, it’s easier to get involved in the local in a small area than a town or a city. There’s not really that much of a local community in a city, you know?

Ehm, uhm, well just by being, if you’re more, if you’re more involved in the local community you’re just going to know where things are. For example. Ehm, but, uhm, I’m, I’m sorry, you said that, like, NPOs are having ideas of, like, bringing in people -

I’m wearing two different coloured socks [laughter] eh, they’re subtly different shades...

Okay [laughter].

...ehm, the [laughter]...

They’re trying to integ...

Yeah.

...find ways to integrate foreigners...

Uhum.

...into the local communities more...

Yeah.

...because, for example, in the Kobe earthquake...

Yeah.

...one of the big findings was that the people who respond first...

Uhum.
...are your neighbours or passers by. It’s not actually the official emergency responders because they can’t always get to the disaster zone...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...immediately. So there’s a fear that if foreigners aren’t implicated in the local communities...

Uhum.

...they may not either be able to help...

Uhum.

...or they may not be able to be helped because people won’t know about them.

That definitely.

...I just want, well, first of all, let me break it into two...

Yeah.

...did you feel part of your local community in the 3.11 disaster?

Yeah, no, no, not really, no. I mean, if I, if I went to, if I went to the {redacted} Ward Office, I’m sure I would have gotten plenty of help. If I, if I had just gone and been involved in it, I would have, if I had gone and taken Japanese lessons at the local {ward of Tokyo in which the participant lived} , which I just never got round to for no good reason, I, I’m sure I would have been, eh, more part of the local community, like, em, but unfortunately, like, you live in apartment, you know, with strangers, it’s just like, even the Japanese people don’t know each other there, you know, like, it’s near impossible but, eh, disaster can bring out a bit of a community, ehm, community spirit, like, I mean, when I was going up and down the stairs to my apartment because the elevator was out, like, I met Japanese people, I couldn’t really speak Japanese, but people stopped and talked to me, you know, like, that would not have happened on a normal day, you know, like, and that’s, people know, like, you know, like, it’s time to be that little bit more, ehm, involved in someone else’s life, just make sure people are okay, like, and just stopping and talking, like, they stopped and talked to me, like, one woman stopped, she just asked me what floor I lived on, and, like, if I was okay, if everything else was okay, blah, blah, blah, you know, like, and, like, I, I think, like, of course, as a foreigner, like, there’s a bit of, as a foreigner, there’s a bit of novelty value in me, but I think she would have, I think, like, if she had bumped into a Japanese person on that stairs, she would have done the same thing, you know. Ehm, so, like, yeah, I, I, no, I wasn’t involved, but at the same time I don’t feel it was too a significantly greater extent than a Japanese person wasn’t involved in the local community.

Yeah, yeah. Ehm, I, I’m not saying that being involved in the community is a good or a bad idea, I’m just trying to get a sense of what the people I’m talking to feel about it...

Uhm.

...maybe I’ll have something to say about it later on, but for now I’m really just trying to see was anyone implicated, if they were, why, how did they do it...
...that kind of thing.

Can I ask you what you mean by implicated?

_Ehm, like, associated in some way with the local community._

Oh, okay, okay.

_Ehm, involved, I suppose I mean._

Okay, okay.

_Because I think..._

Yeah, not terribly.

_yeah, yeah, no, I, I think sometimes you can say you’re part of the community..._

Uhm.

...but not really do anything about it...

[Laughter]

...and then when a disaster happens, are you really a part of the community, you know?

Yeah.

_So that’s why, like, it’s, kind of, I’m trying to think of a way to, to describe what I mean by being active, I suppose, in the community._

To, to put it into something that I do think is a bit unique to Japan, I felt very much like a part of the company community. It’s the, they do check up, like, as you, that, the, the _anpikakunin_ system [Note: automated system over ICT where employees must confirm their status after an emergency], the, it checks you, like, it asks how are you, how is your family, how is your home? There’s a fourth question which I can’t remember. Oh, can you come to work? [Laughter] Ehm, [laughter] obviously. It’s a simple question, yes or no. They’re not, ehm, it’s an obvious one. Ehm, like, I felt like part of the work community. People were checking on me, you know. Most of them were sure I was gone [laughter]. I, I didn’t realize the extent of how much they were sure I was gone until later on when I was talking to [a work colleague]. Like, she, she was telling me, like, a year ago, she was like, “I, I thought you were gone.” She said, she was just telling me, like, in English [Note: this is a slip of the tongue, the participant means ‘in Japanese’], she was like, “_zettai kaerun daro to omotteita_” It was like, “I thought one hundred percent you were gone.” And she was just like, and like, but she, they, they checked on me, you know, they, they asked about me and, ehm, like, uhm, being close in Japan and being close in Ireland, and I can’t say Europe but, like, Ireland, like, they’re two very different experiences. People, even people you’re close with, they, like, they, they don’t ask much, you know, and they don’t expect to be asked much. It’s, the Japanese sense of community is very different. It’s very innate. It’s very, I want to, I don’t want to say latent. Things are expected and, ehm, everyone is expected to do them. And, and to understand it inherently. That’s, kind of, the sense of Japanese community, like, it’s, it’s all very vague...
[Laughter] 

[Laughter] Don’t you love that word.

Oh, yes. Did you feel part of any other community?

Oh, the foreigner community. Of course, I felt part of the foreigner community. Especially when people were leaving and flying off to Osaka, like, and, me and two, the, some people, I know people who went back to the US, I know people who went to Osaka.

Ehm, the, however, my two, who would have been the two closest people to me, ehm, my French friend who lives in {central Tokyo}, he didn’t go anywhere, and the person I was seeing, eh, he also didn’t go anywhere and he was very much of the same opinion. It was, like, em, eh, like, “Ah, it’s a bit of an overreaction, like, we’re, we’re pretty far away here, like, flying off home, you know, like, we still have all our amenities, like, and everything is, you know, how long did the trains take to, like, go, come back?

God, that’s a good question. Ehm, I think it really depended on the line.

But, like, the next day, were they going?

They were, I know that the Metro was definitely running by the Saturday.

It was?

Yeah. Some of the Metro lines by, so that would have been the next day.

Yeah.

But not all of the Metro lines.

Okay. Like, I, I’m almost 100% sure that I got on the train the next day, even though, like, fearing another earthquake, like, I wanted to get out of the house and I wanted to get out of {the part of Tokyo where the participant lived} and I wanted to go somewhere, like. I’m sure I went somewhere. I don’t know where I went, but I know I went somewhere...

Yeah.

...ehm, a little bit fearful, I got on the train...

Yeah.

...I think. Ehm, um, I saw, I remember because I remember just, like, seeing the cracks in the stations, like, and the water coming down. There’s still, like, plastic in some of the stations filtering water away which I’m sure are, are directly, are there since, because of the earthquake...

Yeah.

...I don’t think they’re older than that, like…

Yeah.
...ehm, um, but yeah, that's, yeah, I mean, like the trains were more or less running as well by the next day. I mean, within Tokyo.

Yeah, no, in Tokyo. And, and, I, I don't think it was all of the train lines by any means, and...

But the ones that I used were.

...yeah, the, we were in a very central area.

Yeah, they were very, they were going...

Yeah.

...and they were fine, yeah.

Yeah. There's just one or two very small questions I want to ask you. These are things which, again, you may or may not remember.

Do you remember any announcements? You know, there's the PA system.

Yes. I remember the tsunami warning, eh, which I didn't understand but was translated for me. I do remember it being broadcast that there was the possible risk of a tsunami up to two-metres coming to Tokyo. That never materialized. It did hit parts of Chiba, em, but we were in that little inlet, the Tokyo Bay inlet, like, it was, like, where the earthquake happened. I don't think it could have come in there. I remember that. I remember it being broadcast loud. I think some came in the coming days, like, maybe once or twice, but, it's possible I'm confusing that with those loud vans going around. Like, I don't know. I, I can't say. There definitely were some PA announcements, and, they were impossible, utterly impossible for me to understand, because it was, kind of, static-y, you know, like, crackley, kind of [Note: the participant then covers his mouth with his hand and produces some incomprehensible sounds] over the system so, but, like, the Japanese people around understood.

Yeah, this is interesting for me. You said, "It was translated for me."

Yeah.

Can you be more specific?

Like, by whom?

Or not by the people but, like, was it a stranger? Was it someone you knew?

Oh, the company. Again, it was, it was people from the company. I was with, we were standing outside the company for a while, ehm - when I think that like all the computers were still running in that company, like, after that it, like, you know, it's just shocking, like, everything was still there ticking away. We had a phone call come down from the IT systems asking us to turn a server on its side so it wouldn't fall over. You know, like, it just, like, that's what was going on. People were just, I think thinking so practical-minded about it is a way of, it's, it's a way of comforting oneself especially common in Japanese society. It's, it's the, it's probably the primary, the primary way of comfort is to think about something monotonous like, "Oh that server might fall over, I'll call down and ask
them to turn it on its side.” I think that’s, I think that’s a way of slightly escaping, slightly
comforting yourself. It’s to feel you’re doing something useful in the midst of being
absolutely useless in the, in the, in the way that counts for the people who were, way, up
further north, you know. Eh, but yeah, sorry, company people translated the
announcements, yeah.

Yeah, no, em, obviously all of the time I’m trying to come back to this idea of translation
and interpreting...

Yeah.

...and.

Ehm, I never really stopped a person on the street and asked them to help me with
something. But I would have, I could have done that no problem. Em, like, it wouldn’t
have bothered me for, so, to ask someone to read something for me. Even, like, eh, like,
if I, if I, if I really needed something to be checked, like, I would have, I could have asked
someone to, to read something for me. Like, possibly just hearing it pronounced would
have helped.

Uh uh.

Ehm, eh, but, eh, yeah, no, no, I never really asked anyone for help except...

Okay.

...company people, which includes yourself…

Yeah.

...at the time.

And then, again, this, I’m just, kind of, tidying up some of the things...

Yeah.

...that I wanted to ask but didn’t want to interrupt you at the time. You talked about using
social media...

Yeah.

...and you definitely mentioned Facebook...

Yeah.

...were there any other social media that you used?

No. Eh, I, I purposely stayed away from other things like Twitter, or even in Japanese
Mixi or something like that. I’ve just, I’ve just not bothered. Just one is enough for me.

Can you tell me, why or just yeah?

Why? Just manage, like one is enough. You waste enough time, you can waste enough
time…
...on one. Seriously. I’m deadly serious…

Okay.

...you can waste enough time on one easily enough. I don’t want more.

Okay.

And Facebook is adequate, like, it, like, it’s probably the primary one for most people and it’s not like Twitter where you have 150 characters or whatever, like, you can write out, “I’m okay. Everything in Tokyo is fine.” Em, you know, like, “I’m at home now.” You know, you can write a, a little bit more about yourself and, ehm, you can direct messages at people as well…

Yeah.

...in Facebook you can tag people or put people’s names into messages if you want to make sure things are given. Like I put cousins names into my posts and asked them to relay it to my mother if they were talking to her.

I got it. I got it.

Yeah.

So, I can see that you’re using Facebook as a communication tool…

Yeah.

...would you have used it as an information-gathering tool when you were in the disaster?

Ehm, not consciously, but I did. I mean, if you think about, like, of course I was checking what everyone else in Facebook was posting, like, what they thought, like what about the trains where people, if people were stranded or whatever. Eh, it turns out that the person I was seeing happened to be in {central Tokyo} at the time, em, and, like, walked from {central Tokyo} to where he lived in {suburban Tokyo}…

[Sharp intake of breath]

...like, and I remember just thinking at the time, I was like…

I’d have enjoyed that [laughter] [Note: I was making a joke here - the participant could not believe that I would walk long distances across Tokyo for fun when I lived in Japan]...you would have enjoyed that, but I remember just thinking at the time, I was, like…

I’m joking, of course [laughter].

...your, you’d have loved walking, eh, well, you would have loved it…

Not in a disaster.

...if you had planned walking from {central Tokyo}. If you had decided, “I think I’ll walk from {central Tokyo} to {suburban Tokyo} today,” like, you would have loved that…
...I think if you had it dropped on you, you might have been unhappy...

Possibly [laughter].

...but like, I remember thinking, like, ehm, like, he posted it and I was like, “Why didn’t you just come to mine?” Like, I was just, {that part of central Tokyo}, like, just behind Tokyo Station is {that part of central Tokyo}, right?...

Yeah.

...like it was just like...

Yeah.

...”Walk to mine.”

Eh, I can’t speak for that person but some people just want to get home...

Ah yeah, there’s that.

...they just want to see home. They want to, I remember {a work acquaintance we were with on the day of the disaster} wanted to go back to...

Oh yeah, he was...

...Shinjuku or wherever...

...dead set on it.

...he didn’t live in Shinjuku. He lived somewhere out that way.

Yeah, he was dead set on it. I remember that, yeah. Like, I can understand the feeling to a certain extent as well, like, but.

We were very privileged. We had a ten-minute walk.

Yeah, we were very privileged, yeah, yeah.

So.

I remember.

And I was even luckier than you. My, one shelf had opened, one drawer had opened. That was it. Nothing broke, nothing, eh...

I spilt my damaged kettle.

...nothing was even untidy. Yeah, no, I was, I was extremely lucky. It just went, like, one thing had kind of come out. [Note: I gesture easily closing a drawer with one finger.]

‘Pop’ that was it. That was my cleaning up...

[Laughter]
...so like I feel the same feelings you talked about guilt...
Yeah.
...I definitely felt that, I’m feeling it these last few days too talking to people who’ve had really different experiences.
Can I ask you about the, not the detail, but?
Yeah, I can tell you some of the people that I spoke to were in Miyagi...
Okay.
...eh, some of the people that I spoke to were in parts of Ibaraki that were very badly affected...
Okay.
...ehm, so I can’t talk about what they experienced...
No, of course...
...but it was...
...just what I am asking is where is, yeah.
...yeah, like, they did, so, I mean, those Miyagi and Ibaraki were both, as you know, in the tsunami path...
Yeah.
...ehm, so...
Ibaraki didn’t get so much of a tsunami, did it?
It did, so we drove around and looked at parts that had.
Mito did...
Yeah.
...near Mito did. Eh, definitely...
Yeah.
...no, I know that.
So, yeah.
The reason I know that is because I was in Mito a few months later, this was after I had moved to {another area in Ibaraki}, eh, there was a typhoon and, like, it was flooded between Tokai and Mito, I was on the train. I was just looking at fields flooded from the typhoon, so I can imagine that’s exactly where the tsunami would have rolled in.
Yeah. So, ehm, I understand when you mentioned about feelings of guilt. I don’t think we should feel guilty but we...

It’s a natural reaction, survivor’s…

Yeah.

…survivor's guilt.

Yeah, well, I mean, but also, you know, I mean, also don’t want to say that people who were in Tokyo didn’t have an experience of trauma or disaster because everyone dealt with it differently. I think it seemed for you, my image of your experience is, you were very upset on the day of the earthquake...

Yeah.

...and then you progressively got better and better. I was fine on the day of the, relatively fine on the day of the earthquake. I got progressively worse and worse.

Yeah. That sounds accurate.

Yeah, yeah. It affected me in a very strong way but over time. I didn’t affect me on the day...

Yeah.

...or even I would say on the first day or two...

Yeah.

...but it progressively affected very, very negatively.

I remember weeks later you were, like, still stressed and, like, panicking about small earthquakes as well that at which point I had, kind of, recovered from it.

Yeah. So everyone has different experiences.

Yeah.

And different things are traumatic for, for different people.

Yeah.

So, you know, just because we were in the centre of Tokyo, doesn’t mean that another person in the centre of Tokyo didn’t have a big disaster to go through in their own way. And also that’s another reason why I’m asking people when it began and when it ended for them, because...

Yeah, that’s an interesting question, yeah. I, I definitely couldn’t draw a line, but…

No, well, but I mean, even by you saying Golden Week, I know that that’s, sort of, April, May...

Yeah.
...so that’s, we’re talking about, let’s say, two months...

Yeah, yeah.

...so, basically then just to finish, there’s a couple of things. Is there anything else you think is worth mentioning about how you got information, how you communicated or feelings of community?

Ehm, okay, well, I’ll start with feelings of community because it’s easiest to answer. Em, the company was the community, like, it was, it’s the community unit. You see, that is Japanese society. The way it seems to be built up is, like, the company is the community unit, like, it’s, and I really appreciated it, like, that, I’ve told you this multiple times before and I’ve said it already in this interview, but, like, I, I thought that it was very well gelled together, taken as company unit. You cannot think of it, if you think of it as the traditional community in Europe based on the people around where you live. No. It, kind of, for me, it would fail in that way. But then there is this completely other, completely expected community, which is the company community. Ehm, information, ehm, yeah, I, I never felt like I lacked information, like, I never felt like there’s not enough, you know, the, it’s, the problem with the modern world is that there’s too much [laughter], you know...

Okay.

...like, there’s all, there’s just too much, you don’t know where to look...

Yeah.

...you know, who’s telling the truth, and, you know, you can only rely on your own opinion in the end then. Ehm, which has to be pulled from multiple sources which is, it’s time-consuming in reading, it’s, it's almost as bad as dealing with politics, you know, like, it’s not quite that bad, but it’s, it’s up there, you know. Ehm, yeah, and in terms of services, like, I, I felt that it was pretty okay, like, I didn’t even know about the Japanese government one, like, I, probably if I did, I probably would have absolutely nothing to ask, but it’s, it’s just a matter of knowing where to look, like. You never, you never learn, you never learn where something is, well, you can sometimes if you’re lucky. You’ll remember where something is. You were told, “Oh, go here in this event.” Most of the time, you just forget it. Like, it takes one, it takes it to happen once, you know, to know.

Absolutely, I mean I’m obviously going to try and make some sort of recommendations...

What’s this? [Note: the participant points to an insect on his arm]

It’s a fly or something, I think, is it? Oh no, it’s a mozzie.

It was massive. Where is it gone?

Eh, it went up there somewhere.

Shit. That was, that was a big ass thing. Oh, it’s over there. I see it, I see it, I see it.

[Note: the participant goes off to kill the mosquito with a tissue box] Oh, I’d use the tissue because, em...

You mean the box or the actual tissue itself.
The tissue itself because the box, you’re going to, the box, you won’t get enough purchase on him.
Okay, no, I’m going in with my box.
Sorry.
[Note: the participant bangs the box on the wall] Your neighbours are awake anyway [laughter].
Damn, big ass thing.
You do realize I have to transcribe this [laughter].
[Laughter] ‘Bang of the mosquito’.
Yeah, how do you transcribe bang, it will be like Batman or something.
Well, most of it ended up on the wall.
Oh dear [laughter]. But you did very well.
But you know I’m just happy to see that there’s no blood, there’s no blood in it...
Oh yeah, yeah. They didn’t get you.
No. He didn’t get either of us.
Now, this last question seems kind of pointless because I think the main anxiety level is related to the mosquito [laughter]. [Note: the researcher hands the stress scale to fill out]
No, I have no anxiety. I don’t mind…
Okay.
...I didn’t mind talking about it at all. I, I didn’t.
Good.
Eh, remembering it didn’t make me feel sad, like, I’m going to say. Like, anxiety is kind of a panic like I, I felt terribly sad talking about some things, like, I’m going to give it a one...
Okay.
...just because a zero seems like a lie.
Okay, cool. Ehm, yeah, unless you have any other questions or comments, that’s pretty much it.
No. That’s it. I, I, well, I can ask something, I suppose. I, I occasionally forget the significance of that event, like, you know, it, it’s, you know, I remember watching the
Thai, the great, well, it wasn’t just Thailand, it affected many of the countries in the
region…

Yeah.

...but it’s called, normally referred to as the Thai tsunami, but like, I remember that, like,
and I remember watching that on TV and, like, it, it, being in it was, but I, well, again, I
don’t feel like I was in it exactly…

Uuhh.

...you know, like, but being near it, eh, was, ehm, uhm, I think if I had been in the, a good
comparison I think would have been, like, if I lived in the East of Japan and had been
reading about the earthquake, massive tsunami which was happening relatively close in
the same country, I think that that probably would have been more stressful than, say, just
watching the Thai event from home, and then further stressful was, of course, actually
being in the earthquake and being shaken around and thinking I was going to die, ehm,
like, it’s, your, your prox, like, just the proximity to the event as well probably added to
it. But, but it’s hard for me to say that because I was actually physically shaken, eh,
physically being shook by an earthquake…

Yeah, yeah.

...quite strongly. Of course, I never, I haven’t, I never have and haven’t experience,
experienced anything like that since…

Yeah.

...ehm, ehm, I think if it happened again, I’d be slightly more well equipped to deal with
it. Ehm, not that I’m asking for that, though [laughter]...

Yeah.

...ehm, like, it’s hard to, what can you say, ehm, uhm…

How do you mean you’d be more well equipped to deal with it?

If it happened again? I think like, like, I’d know a little bit more what to expect. I, I
would be more ready, I would know where to, first thing is I’d know to go and just check
the Japanese government, Japanese government websites…

[Laughter]

...right? Eh, that, that would probably occur to me now, you know, based on what has just
been said here, like, I would probably think to do that. Ehm, yeah. So, uhm, but, like, that
is one thing. And of course, like, now I know what being shaken strongly is like. And I
have a touch more confidence in the buildings, like, I, I, as long as you’re not standing
under something heavy that’s going, able to fall, you should be fine…

Yeah.

...like, I mean, the, like, like nothing fell in Tokyo…

Yeah.
...you know, like, and it was strong...

Yeah.

...like, if that was Ireland, if that, if an earthquake, if the, the extent of what hit Tokyo had hit Dublin, like, Dublin would have been flattened...

Yeah.

...you know, like, gone. Ehm, I don’t think there would have been anything left standing...

Yeah.

...you know, and that wasn’t the strongest...

Yeah.

...that was, that was weak...

Tokyo was relatively weak, yeah.

...you know, relatively weak...

Yeah, yeah.

Ehm, but yeah, So that’s it, like, I, I think, just, I know what the buildings can take, if you know what I mean, like.

That, that’s really interesting for me because part of it is then, I mean, it’s not directly related to translation...

Yeah, that’s right.

...but do you try and give people an understanding for what to expect. How do you do that? That’s, maybe is it possible without experiencing it to give people an idea for what to expect?

There’s a fantastic guide for the Japanese shindo [Note: Japan’s seismic intensity scale] system on Wikipedia in English which I probably read after the earthquake which explains the shindo 1 through 7 and it’s like, “1 is like barely noticeable, most people won’t feel it. 2 is like slight vibrations. Some people don’t notice. 3, most people notice. Possibly light clinking of glasses or something on shelves something like that. 4, quite strong, most people get panicked. 5, very strong, everybody, like, pretty much everybody will panic or feel stressed. 6, it talks about sh, shelves start battling and rattling, em, the building will sway significantly, you will feel the motion quite heavily. Everybody, I think it says animals may start reacting quite badly as well. That may be for 5 as well.”

But basically, the Wikipedia article for the Japanese shindo explains it like that and so, em, if you go and read the shindo 5 entry, like, well, pretty much what happened in Tokyo, you know.

Okay, that’s really interesting. Well, definitely I’m going to check that out because that’s probably a translation.

It probably is a translation, yes.
Yeah, so I’m really interested in that, that, definitely going to follow that up.

Yeah, because the Japanese shindo system as you know is more about the human experience…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...at a particular location. It’s not the Richter Scale, which is the power at the centre…

Yeah.

...which is useless for describing how it felt...

Yeah...

...you know, like.

...oh, I’ve always thought the shindo system is a really excellent way...

Yeah.

...to describe earthquakes.

It, it should be, it should be accepted by more countries…

Yeah.

...like, em, when I heard, when I was in Ireland and I heard that there was a shindo system, and I heard that there was this, Japan has another system for describing earthquakes, I thought, “Oh god, another system. Why can’t you just use Richter or something.” You know, like, that’s what I initially thought. But, like, well, I, I think I read up on it afterwards, I don’t know if I read up on it afterwards, I probably read up on it after I came to Japan, like, after my first earthquake which was, like, ten days after I got here…

[Laughter]

...and it was long but small. Ehm, I read up on it, and I realized the usefulness of it…

Yeah.

...if you want to describe how bad an earthquake is to someone, familiarity with the shindo system is, ehm, indispensable in one sense, and, just, very easy, you know. If I told you that there was a shindo 4 earthquake this morning, you might go, “Uh, oh, a bit, a bit of bump!”...

Yeah, yeah.

...you know, if I told that we had a shindo 6, a lower 6, you’d be, your eyes would open, you’d be like, “God, everything okay?” you know, like, and it’s, whereas if I tell you that there’s a Richter 7, like, to most people that sounds big but the truth is that that could register as nothing in Japan, like, you could have a Richter 7 scale earthquake, forty kilometres down, a hundred kilometres down, and you don’t feel a thing…
On the surface...

...yeah, you know, like, it means nothing. I didn’t realize the utter shortcomings of that to reflect the human experience, like, and that’s what the shindo system is. It reflects the human experience. But to be honest, it is scientific, though. Ehm, because it represents acceleration at the surface, at the point. So it’s, it’s a location-specific. So, like, it indicates, for example, like, I think shindo 7 is something like two metres a second, that’s the ground moving back and forward, like, two metres a second or something, ehm, like, and that reflects human experience, like, you cannot stand up if the ground is moving like that...

Uhuh.

...you know, like that, so it is scientific but then it also has these very nice, probably translations, descriptions...

Yeah.

...of the human experience.

I like that, and I like the phrase ‘reflects the human experience’ - I think that’s one I’m definitely going to be borrowing slash stealing...

[Laughter]

...slash plagiarizing. For sure, that’s interesting.

Feel free.

Yeah.

Feel free.
Researcher: So basically then, the actual, the way I usually start the interviews is just asking people to tell me what happened to them in 2011 on March the, the 3rd. [This was a slip of the tongue on the part of the researcher and should have been March 11th.]

Participant: Okay, are you recording?

Yeah, yeah.

Okay. Eh, I clearly remember what happened. I was, I was in Tokyo and, eh, I just parted with clients, French clients, eh, for whom I was, eh, interpreting in a business session. And so we separated somewhere south, southern part of Tokyo. And, eh, probably five minutes later, it took place. At that very moment, I, ehm, I had to go to a post office and there was a post office there. Not, not a section of the city I am familiar with, but anyway, a post office on the ground floor, eh, I cannot remember that, eh. I went inside, I went inside and within no time it started to shake. And, ehm, I would say that the first second was something like, “Ooohhh, an earthquake!” And then it quickly shook seriously, and that was, “Oh my god! That’s a serious earthquake.”

[Laughter]

And I remember two things exactly is that, em, right away, right away, it was a kind of slow reaction, but after a few, well probably, seconds I started to get pretty scared. And there is something, I, I really remember, is that there were staff, it was a rath, rather big, medium-sized, ehm, eh, post office, so like a medium-size, eh, bank office, eh, office, they have staff here just to welcome, to help you, you know, and there was, eh, definitely a man [laughter] of the post office, a young man, standing here who showed me to go under a table. You know there are tables where you stand to write all the, the paper? To crouch under there. But he would not crouch himself and he looked, he looked kind of cool. Whereas the, the situation was not cool at, cool at all. That’s about what I remember. It was not (indistinct). Then, well, it subdued, it was, “Oh my god!” Nothing fall down inside, n, nothing. And I didn’t dare go outside. Outside there were no, very few people. I remember being, well, kind of, eh, “What am I go, what am I going to do?”

Yeah.

Well, call my wife. No phone already. Eh, I have a son, too, but, eh, he had no mobile phone at that time anyway. And I, I remember, eh, kind of, going out, “Shall I go out or what, what am I going to do here?”

[Laughter]

...And there was a foreigner, young foreigner, a Westerner, kind of, crossing the street who was totally in a, kind of, cool mode. He looked at me in a, kind of, you know, winking kind of, like, “It’s okay. It was just an earthquake. Big deal.” I didn’t know that guy. We didn’t talk. But some, some kind of, you know, our eyes spoke, you know what I mean?

[Laughter]
You know, kind of, well, “What’s the fuss?” And, eh, after a few minutes, I remember there were a few people there, eh, just like me, you know, pondering, “What am I going to do from here? Wait some more?” Because, it was, eh, some, somewhere in the mind you had that feeling that maybe something might fall from, eh, a building or whatever. “Might be safer to be here.” Okay. It subdued. So, well, I started to walk. And, eh, although the, the district, eh, was not familiar to me, eh, I’m an urban walker so I pretty much know Tokyo inside out because this takes more than a lifetime to understand half of it…

[Laughter]

...but at least I was not lost. It was a, kind of, “Oh, a familiar district is somewhere in that direction. No problem.” So, I, I started walking in somewhat that direction. And the, the road was not as large as that [Note: pointing to the six-lane Hakusan-dori road outside the coffee shop] you know, eh, not, not a crooked kind of lane…

Yeah.

...a serious road. And progressively while walking, I, I tried again and again to call my wife. If I remember well, at some, at some point, we couldn’t communicate by, eh, voice, but it looked she received an email I sent and she, kind of, answered back. Anyway, em, vaguely, probably something within twenty minutes or even thirty minutes, there was a second, the second tremor which, eh, which was big enough that you, kind of, stopped walking, kind of, oh-my-god kind of stuff. And, eh, then I was approaching a, basically it’s a business district, business district after business district, I was app, I was approaching - sorry, sorry [Note: he pauses briefly to take a drink of his coffee] - some district I was familiar with and the, the shaking was so formidable that, eh, me too, I stopped walking. You, you feel, kind of, uneasy and, eh, watching, eh, the buildings around, I remember me and other people watching one, one building which is, eh, eh, kind of, mirror, kind of, you know, eh, semi-transparent kind of stuff…

Yes.

...which, which create a mirror kind of, eh, effect…

Yes.

...and the building was shaking like that [Note: he gestures an extreme swaying movement with his arm]...

Aaaahhh!

...it was shaking like that and, and, eh, I’d never seen that, em, I’ve never seen that. It was kind of, “Oh my god!” But nothing, nothing fall down…

Yeah, yeah.

...nothing. I, I, I didn’t see anything like, eh, casualty…

Yeah.

...okay? Of course, eh, there were, there, the main difference with, em, standard d, eh, daily, busy Tokyo was the crowds, eh, of, eh, people standing outside their buildings some with, eh, helmets and the kind of stuff they, they are supposed to have, eh, really in
any case, in, in, eh, in corporate things. Some not. Eh, an incredible number of static
people which is not representative of, eh, of Tokyo where there are no benches…

[Laughter]

...and basically the, the public space, eh, is not designed for people to have a chat while
standing or just, you know, a cigarette. It’s, it’s not designed like that. It’s a mobile city…

Uhuh.

...where you are supposed to, to move. So, so many people not moving was, eh,
impressive. I was moving…

Yeah.

...I was walking. Of course, there are other people moving but, eh, even if Tokyo is one
of those many cities, eh, where crowd is, eh, a kind of image. So, so crowded a city which
is, we have the truth, eh, it was definitely crowded…

Yeah, yeah.

...because of the density of people standing. And then, well, it was obvious that the
subway were not running. I had no reason to, to, to watch [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I mean, the, the second big one was subdued, well, I went on walking. I knew how to go
home. All in all it took me something probably like two hours, two hours and a half,
which is, eh, well, which is unusual even for a walker like me...

[Laughter] Yeah.

...but, eh, at the same time, it, it was no, no big deal for, for me. Eh, while going home I
passed, eh, by the company where, the, the building where, office where my wife is
working. Couldn’t get in touch. Eh, it, it happened to be adjacent to, eh, one famous big
park, city park, and the, the park was crowded, outside was crowed. So, okay, eh, I think
I had some kind of email exchange and, which basically meant “Okay”. And so I went, I
went home…

Yeah.

...and, eh, I was the first to, to go back home. I think my, my son came back later. Eh, lucksly he was at a school two stations away so, in terms of walking distance, forty-five
minutes or something and nothing, eh, nothing nasty had happened in the school. And,
eh, when I went home, we live on the fir, on the ground floor or first floor in Ireland? I
don’t know how you call it…

[Laughter]

...in France it’s first floor…

Yeah.

...in Ireland, I don’t know…
Ground floor [laughter].

[Laughter] Okay, the ground floor. And, eh, well, opened the door and, eh, I was expecting something. There were a few something, but nothing, nothing special. A few, eh, toys in the kids’ room, eh, fall down and didn’t, didn’t break. Nothing, eh, some drawers were open. But, eh, basically nothing in terms of, eh, breakerage. Nothing...

Yeah.

...noth, nothing that could have make a crash...

Yeah.

...nothing happened where probably the, the, the advantage of living on the first, eh...

Exactly, exactly.

...the ground floor. Probably. And, eh, well that was, I can’t remember the time, that was probably somewhere around 5pm or something, something like that. Do you want to know more?

Oh, well, just, I mean really as I said, I’m interested in how people communicated and how people got information so maybe would you remember how you started to find out more about...

Well…

...the events?

...about, about the events? Eh, we don’t watch TV. Eh, so our source of information at the time was radio and newspaper. So, of course, I listened to radio and as I understand Japanese, eh, eh, I didn’t listen that much. Of course, I used Internet. Internet connection was okay at home, you know, no problems to, to use the Internet. Also, I, I started being busy with my, my customers who were, eh, in a big hotel in Tokyo…

Aaahhh.

...so I got in touch with them, I think we used, we used Skype. Yes, we, they explained me that, we parted five minutes before, they explained me that it started shaking while they were boarding a taxi and it’s shaking like hell in the taxi. And so they were in a panicky mood. Eh, back to their hotel. Kind of high-rise hotel where the elevators were stopped. Anyway, eh, well, you will, you will make the value of, em, on what I’m going to tell you, eh, for me it’s an interesting story in the sense that, em, they, they were probably more hooked than I was to, eh, news sources and as they, they do not rely on Japanese language, they were relying, I assume, on everything which is non, which was non-Japanese: French, they were French, maybe English news sources. And, eh, probably they were, they were more aware than I about the matter of Fukushima. So, they were in a total panic and, ehm, they asked me, eh, they told me that they wanted to go to Osaka and that they would pay any means of, eh, transportation because they were in that, ehm, they were thinking that everything was stopped. And, eh, I was not in a panic, well, I was not shaking. Eh, worried, but not shaking. And they said that the trains are not running. Tokyo-Osaka is something like, let’s say, two hours, okay? Bullet train. So, eh, I told them, “Okay. I’m going to check. The Internet is working.” So I accessed the Japan Railway website and I didn’t notice any information about train being stopped. So I told them, as they were locating in, in Shibuya, so very convenient place to ju, just go to the
ticket booth and you buy a ticket and it looks like there’s some delay but, eh, that’s about it. Trains that way are running. But before that they were ready to pay for a, a cab...

[Laughter]

...or anything. 550km, well, if, if you pay a huge amount of money the cab will go anyway, anywhere. That’s, that was the, the things I had to, eh, to deal with as a service. And, eh, it was, eh, my wife came back, my son came back, and then we pretended to live as usual. Eh, fixin...
Uhm.

...because the, the focus shifted to Fukushima. My French clients, eh, safely went to Osaka and I think they, I think, I can’t remember whether they started warning me that I should seriously consider leave Japan while they were still in Tokyo, because they left the next day I think, or whether they started nagging me when they were in Osaka, safe in Osaka. I’m going to (indistinct)...

Yeah.

So, well, they put enormous pressure which probably was the equivalent, well, which was the reflection of the pressure they got through, eh, relying on Western source of information that were, I started watching at that, of course, I look at websites of French dailies and I remember one, may, not the same day, maybe the next day or following day, I don’t exactly remember but, eh, the top page of the electronic version of, it was Libération - eh, the number two or number three top daily newspaper, national newspaper in France - where the, the, eh, the title was something like “Japan Wiped Out”, eh, “Northern Japan Wiped Out” with a picture suggesting that it was Tokyo. However, it was not a picture of Tokyo. It has not, it had nothing to, a few late, a few hours later it would change that, but basically Japan was “wiped out” or on the verge of being “wiped out”. And northern Japan was Japan. So, the fact that, eh, we didn’t rely on TV. We didn’t rely on video... yeah. I see.

Yeah.

...we don’t watch that, I don’t watch that, on purpose. I don’t want to look at that.

I see.

Ehm, so the information was a kind of redundant, eh, stream of, eh, Japanese radio. Japanese radio are extremely redundant in that kind of situation. They spell out the name of victims. All of a sudden, Japanese turns in to what it is in one sense - a big village...

Aahhh.

...all of a sudden, you have deceased people name are being read, read out. Anyway, the focus turned to Fukushima. The first, ehm, picture of, eh, something nasty which is by the seaside somewhere in the north, eh, we had that through the newspaper, Japanese newspaper. [Note: the participant stopped here and explained he needed to go up to the counter of the cafe and buy some food, so he gestured to me to shut off the audio recorder] I wanted something to eat. So if you can just...

Sure, yeah, yeah.

...and I’ll be back.

Okay, no problem.

[Note: the participant bought some food and brought it back to our table. When he sat down, I recommenced the recording.] The fact is that I had no breakfast.

Oh, I’m sorry.

No, no, no, no. It’s okay. That’s no problem.
Please go ahead, and...

I will be munching...

...yeah...

...while talking.

...well, it’s extremely interesting what you mentioned about the difference between the
media in Japan and the media overseas. It’s, it’s certainly something that has come up in
other interviews with other participants.

Yes. The, well, we, we listened to the NHK which is the public radio, and they have
guidelines and rules of, eh, behaviour. Eh, and that is still in force, I assume. They,
they’re not selling you, you know, a fantastic story. So they behave, voice-wise...

Yeah.

...okay? So this, this makes a difference probably compared with the TV channel that are
showing the little bit of video...

Yeah.

...they, they got from somewhere and they, you know, until you die they show that.

Absolutely, the same clip, again and again. I, I know that there is some, there is some
debate about, em, the delivery of the message, even in, in Japanese. I, I’ve read a few
research papers on some criticism that maybe NHK behaved too controlled...

Uhm.

...too calmly, eh, in major disasters...

Yeah.

...that it works well for, sort of, these regular, mild disasters but that they were somewhat
criticised, I believe, for not conveying in, in Japanese enough of the seriousness, that this
2011 disaster was special...

Yeah...

...it was not the usual.

...and at the same time, we were in Tokyo, which was better than to have been in
Fukushima. It was, it was, it was different. Eh, there were ca, there were casualties in
Tokyo. It happens that the ca, the casualty took place some, em, ten minutes’ walk from
home in, ehm, a hall which is, which was quite used for concerts, you know, that kind of
thing. We went there a few years ago...

Yeah.

...and, eh, some plasters of the roof or something fall down on the people that were, eh,
like, there for a concert or I don’t know. So there were six or eight casualties in Tokyo
and it happened to have taken place here. Anyway, the, I would say that the main source
of information was, was the news, of course, ehm, and, ehm, that was about it. So, we
listened to a lot of radio, but, eh, we, we tried and keep standard rhythm of, of living
because there was no, no reason to do this or that. Also, eh, the situation was, eh, fuzzy,
as far as Fukushima is concerned, and I think for two reasons of course, and I think the
major reason, at least for me, is that until, until, em, March 11, I, I had no knowledge
about what nuclear was about [laughter] you know, the plug, the whole thing about the
origin of the juice…

Yes [laughter].

...as long as you get the juice, so what? You know, you, you, you, unless you are
knowledgeable about that…

Yeah.

...they start using words about, em, stuff you never heard. Eh, eh, when something like
that happen you have a whole chunk of what used to be technical vocabulary that falls,
falls into, eh, public speech…

Right.

...kids started talking about cesium…

[Laughter] Yeah.

...24 hours ago, nobody knew what cesium was. Well, when it started, I, I, even me,
nobody knew what cesium was except that cesium is bad for you [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...okay? Later on we would hear about prisium, prisium, you know, it’s, sort of, like,
superman kind of, eh, superhero kind of, but, em, eh, the news turns technological in its
usage of words no, nobody was used to listen to, and, of course, the frustration there is,
eh, there was, at my level and the level of my wife, not in terms of we don’t understand
what they are talking about because we don’t understand the language, no, the language
was not a problem. The problem was that, eh, the lack of clarity of, eh, what’s happening,
what should we do, what should we not do. It was, em, it was a mess in the sense that
nothing was clear beside message of keep quiet and keep cool and don’t over, eh, react,
which was, eh, peppered by reading the foreign news, news sources, where basically
Japan was over [laughter]…

[Laughter] Yeah.

...that was the news, okay? When, when you want to, to, to put me back on track just tell.

Sure.

If I go, the, the, the coming days, so eleven? Yeah. Things, things, eh, went quickly, eh,
forward. My clients, em, kind of try and persuade me that, “You have to leave Japan
because it’s really nasty. I know some specialist, nuclear specialist in France talked with
me and told me that, eh, get the hell out of there.”

[Laughter]

And, eh, well, this, this thinking is, I would say, easy, eh, if you can see the flame coming
but you see nothing. Cesium has no colour. Eh, or if you are not living here…
...but, eh, me being a resident of Japan for twenty-five or more years, eh, the message that’s starting to come in, especially one, one, ehm, one disturbing source is starting to be the French Embassy.

Wow.

Eh, and, some people related, eh, the standard upscale who are schmoozing with, eh, with, eh, ambassadors, etc., sending their own feeds of information which was basically a copy-paste of information from the, eh, embassy, and it was negative, it was bad, of course. Ehm, there were stories quickly of, em, special plane being chartered by the French government to evacuate French citizens who want to leave Japan. But it was, it was still a kind of, “Uhm, uhm, I’m not exactly concerned,” kind of, you know...

Wow.

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Yeah.

...anyway, many things were, were crashing together. Eh, bas, at least at home it was not the question, “Do we leave Japan?” Or “do we leave Tokyo and go west or go, you know, Kyoto or whatever?”

Yes.

It was, ehm, well, it was vague, it was not, “Okay, let’s start seriously considering packing.” No, no. That, it never went through our mind. But the buzz, the Internet, someone you know, or someone you know who knows someone…

Yeah.

...and you hear that, “Oh, that guy, now he’s writing a mail, his blog, whatever, he’s tweeting from Kyoto” and you know that he is, he is a resident of Tokyo and he starts, “I’m in Kyoto and feeling much better.” And things like that, “Uhm!” you now, that kind of, but anyway, anyway, eh, I quickly wanted to do something. But what was, I had no, I was not ready to define what, what would be that something I could do but, ehm, just, you know, just stressing morning till evening was frustrating, kind of. “Isn’t the something to do?” …

Uhum.

...so, eh, but I didn’t know what. And, eh, I told my wife that, eh, I would ask to do something, you know, a contribution, volunteerism, whatever, but I don’t know what…

Yeah.

...and then it was, eh, it was the, the 13th, I think, 12 or 13, not exactly, which was al, almost next day. Eh, all of sudden there came an email from the French Embassy. French Embassy was recruiting interpreters to go - and this was unclear - to go to Sendai, to go North. And, eh, at the same time, the French Embassy was delivering standard warning information, lots of information where basically the story was unless you have something, some, some, eh, really valid reasons to stay in Japan, we advise you leave...

[Laughter]
...which was not, “We advise you leave Japan,” but “Get out of Tokyo, and maybe get out of Japan because there are planes which will be available for free, etcetera.” And my position was, even I remember my, my wife at some point said, “Well, if we have to die, I prefer to die in Tokyo.” But anyway, that mail came and it comes as a relief in a sense that “Oh, I want to do that. I want to be part of that.” So I call my wife, she was at the office. Probably the next day or two days later. And I told her that there’s that mail, they are recruiting, and I, I would like to go there. And she told me, “Okay, if you want to go there, go there, but beware.” And basically the email was something, if I remember well, I, I don’t want to put that into a, kind of, Hollywood adventure, you know, how I, I was right and brilliant. No, no, no. Forget about that. Eh, and I’ll show you a bit later why. I think it was “If you want to participate, you email back us, and you come this evening at the Embassy because we move at night.” So the decision was not like, “Okay, let’s sleep on that.”

[Laughter]

No. No, no. It was, “Okay!” So I, I, I emailed back that, eh, I volunteer. And earlier, and, eh, there was a list of, eh, bring this, this, this and that, you know, clothes or whatever, boring detail, the shoes, and it would be cold up there, or something like this. So, I, I bought a few things we did not have at home. I packed and probably something like 6pm I was at the Embassy. Well, I, I, I can go through what happened, eh, we went to, eh, Sendai. Okay? Before that, eh, despite the fact that, eh, we, we did not rely on visual source of information and escaped video…

Uhm.

...and I, you know, eh, the first, ehm, the first visual impact was the newspaper we received, the newspapers are delivered twice a day, morning and evening editions. The newspaper which is the, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun - Wall Street Journal* equivalent - which, which is not, ehm, the kind of daily with the big picture on top, unless there’s something exceptional, it came with a big picture of one of those, ehm, fishery port totally crushed, kind of, total mess, and it was, “Whoa!” That looks serious…

Yeah.

...because relying on, eh, audio report from the radio, well, you can’t imagine something you’ve never seen so “Wow!” that was the picture. Later on, a few days later, we were there. And it looked like that picture for me. It’s like, “Whoa!” Okay? So anyway, I was hired as a volunteer and not alone because they were looking for at least ten people. And, in fact, they were not looking for professional interpreters. They were looking for people ready to help and, eh, with, with a competence in Japanese. Okay? So I went there. Eh, if I go right away to the consequence of having been there, I think there are two consequences. One is that when back in Tokyo, I, I felt that, eh, it was a very good idea to get there because I was totally safe of, ehm, the feeling of, eh, “Oh, I have to do something,” or “Oh, I should have done something, I should have, I should have.” I was not in, eh, eh, conditional past…

Yeah.

...eh, I was, well, somehow I was kind of self-patting on the [Note: the participant gestures patting himself on the back] “You did a good job!”...

[Laughter]
...kind of, but, psychologically, eh, thinking, it was very good, and very selfish, but very
good to myself that I did that, because I was not in what I was starting to read around, the
frustration of, for instance those people that love Japan, the Japan fan in Europe, oh, you
know, wringing their hands [Note: the participant gestures wringing his hands] “I would
like to help. What can I do to help?” You know?...

Yeah.

...just putting in, eh, in the Red Cross or something is not, eh, but they can’t do that, but
being here, well, eh, I did a part of it…

Yeah.

...nothing spectacular but I did a part of it, and this terribly, eh, this was a terribly positive
something…

Uhm?

...because later on I will talk with people, eh, listening to their worries and their views,
some who left, eh, Kyoto, came back, some who left France, etc., and, eh, there quickly
started the, the feeling of, eh, “I was a coward,” you know, “I’m, I’m ashamed of.”
And, eh, they also that was the time quickly when the buzz about those, ehm, bastard
westerners fleeing Japan. No guts. No balls, eh, kind of story started around. I was not
concerned in any way…

Uhm.

...eh, and at the same time, I never, I never thought that, eh, cowardice was, ehm,
involved, eh, panicking and the consequence of panicking which was for a few friends of
mine, kind of, em, “And a few hours later I was in a plane,”...

Yeah.

…“leaving Japan, leaving Asia” was something, was no, no reason to, to jeer at, no
reason to th, think, “Oh, feeble human!”...

[Laughter]

...no, nothing, no, no! On the contrary, it was something like, “That’s tough.” It must be
tough, the feeling of, eh, “I should have…” Okay? So, I had not that fear. My wife was,
was in a different position because while I was, and maybe a more difficult position,
because she was in Tokyo, I was in a bus moving with, ehm, the French, ehm, safety
squad that came especially from France and we were moving around Sendai and the
miracle was that, eh, the mobile phone was working no problem. Yeah, it was. We were
expecting that, eh, don’t talk. But it was working when I came, so I could call my wife
and she called me while I was in the, in that bus, a huge number of buses and trucks and,
eh, you know…

Yeah.

...kind of military situation and running on the, eh, the highway, the highway was closed
except for, eh, security, safety trucks and, and cars, and she called me and told me that
the, the embassy called me, asked me whether we, ‘we’ which means her and my son
maybe me but me being away from Tokyo, were considering boarding that airplane
which was the last one. Well, it’s, it’s the last one after the end of the world, something
like that. And, eh, she called me and she ask, she asked me, “What do you think?” I, I, could, I couldn’t answer. I was, “Well, if you, if, I’m not in Tokyo, but if you think it’s better to go, and we’ll see.” And she, she told me that, “I will think about it.” And then later on, she, she called me, she said, “No. I decided not to go and, eh, told, told the embassy that.” “Okay.” And, ehm, that was it. I was, eh, around Sendai City, eh, it was supposed to be one week, and it ended after something like 72 hours for safety reasons. Eh, the specialist with all the geiger counting machines…

Yeah.

...were blue since we started going towards, eh, Sendai. There, eh, there, with, eh, the devices they had were kind of “kweh, kweh, kweh, kweh” [Note: the participant makes a sort of crackling sound]...

[Nervous laughter]

...but, but, but again a, for a specialist, it’s meaningful. For you, it’s like, “Oh, it’s noisy.” Eh, so it means something…

Yeah.

...it start meaning more when the, based on their readings, they said now, it happened they asked me in the bus, several buses, in the bus, they asked me, “Tell the, the driver to stop the air conditioning, which means no air intake, because the air is nasty.” Okay, I told him, so no more air conditioning with the fan. Okay? And, eh, that was about it. But again, it’s, it’s, there’s nothing visible. One, one guy, one guy especially sitting by my side later on told me, “Do you have family here?” “Yes,” I said. Then, ehm, “Take my word. Get out of this country.”...

Wow.

You know, a kind of, that, okay, I asked the driver “Stop!” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...in the middle of nowhere, anywhere, anywhere [laughter]...

[Laughter]

So, there were, I was one of interpreters and, eh, {redacted} anyway, back to Tokyo, back to life. Well, not normal life, but anyway. Ehm, what do you want to know more?

Well, for example. {redacted} what were the type of things that you were asked to interpret? What was the information that needed to be mediated in some way?

Hmm. [Note: the participant is in the middle of eating some food] Let’s see.

Oh please take your time [Note: the researcher tries to think of something to say to give the participant time to eat] I, just, I think the whole, eh, experience that you have been explaining is fascinating and why I am particularly glad that I had this opportunity to hear your, your story because I’ve read about some of these, eh, events in research papers or in newspapers, and so on. But to hear someone who actually was involved is, is a very special angle for me.
Something you have to know is that we were not, I can’t really, I can’t remember, we
were not required to sign, ehm, a non-disclosure agreement so what I saw, what I
witnessed, ehm, I did, I write blogs, but I didn’t write into detail. I didn’t much write
about that but, ehm, I witnessed, eh, things that, eh, from a journalistic point of view, eh,
was pretty, eh, unsettling and pro, probably the chief editor would say, “No, we will not
report on that.” [Laughter] But basically, the French squadrons, eh, arrived and the
Russians was, were already there, the British, I heard about Spanish, you know, coming
from all over the world to help...

Yeah.

...the problem was the communication was needed at the level of “Okay, we are here.
How can we help? Tell us what to do and we do it.” Ehm, incidentally, the, the, the
French squadron are, ehm, specialist rescuer, so their raison d’être is to, eh, help people
survive, eh, mitigate, eh, casualties. So that’s their, their very strong, very strong, eh,
reason to be here. They, eh, I never, well, I, I thought that time and again, two things: I
never saw people that were so, eh, willing to help. “Our job is to help. Show us where to
help. We help. We want to help.” And this something they frustrated with was, ehm, they
were not welcome, as, at least, standard case. Eh, also, on the contrary, dispatch, ehm, a
rescue team, it’s not only out of the heart. There’s, there is, there’s politics behind. There
are many, eh, essential interests which motivate to send people abroad or not. Okay? So,
communication was needed in order to, to get, eh, well, directions, directives from the
local authorities, the Japanese police mostly and army and know, “Okay, tell us what to
do, where, what to do and we’ll do it.” So that was, eh, our role as, em, interpreters. Eh,
okay so I was attached to a small group. Everybody was attached to a small group. Some
actually didn’t move out from the camp, eh, again, I, I consider I was lucky enough to be
part of a group that actually moved on the spot. Even, even if worse. Because even
among other interpreters, and again most people were not professional interpreters, they
happened to speak, eh, French and Japanese. But, ehm, later on, I heard frustration from
some that happened not to be called to move so they were just, eh, you know, chewing
the fat and killing time in ugly weather and, eh, waiting for something to do whereas
nothing was, there, there was nothing to do. So I was, I consider I was lucky enough to go
on the ground for a few, eh, hours. It was like, like jumping in the big picture, eh, we saw
in Tokyo a few days before in the daily. It was just like that. Kind of, everything crushed,
like, “My god!” kind of...

Yeah.

...everything smashed and crushed down, like, you don’t see that. Yeah, the demolition
site, you see that, but it’s tiny...

Yeah, yeah.

...but here, the, the, well, the most disturbing things, eh, no cadaver, we saw one but at a
distance, but, eh, just sawing one is, is enough, kind of, “Oh my god” kind of thing...

Yeah.

...it’s, ehm, we were in the middle of nowhere because there was nothing. It was, kind of,
ookay, it used to be something. Mostly, mostly nothing except, well, what they saw, what
they, there showed on TV, there was some photography...

Yeah.
...so we saw that anyway. But basically, the Japanese police would say something like, “This, this is the territory that you check.” Well, look for, look for survivors, look for cadavers. There were rules, rules which, rules for people that come far away to help people which was totally, ehm, disturbing, like, eh, if you see a corpse, eh, contact the police, do not touch it. Basically, it’s do not touch Japanese people. It was not written like that but it was something like that. And also a lot of frustration because before we went on site in daily, in day time, we waited almost a day doing nothing, and the, and, eh, you know, rescuers get frustrated because time is key. But, of course, they know how to behave because, eh, they are military people, but, eh, while joking, of course, “What are we doing there? People must be dying somewhere and what are we?” At long last, we went there and, eh, well, we patrolled some, em, specific territory, eh, went into crumbled, eh, houses, found people, eh, that, ehm, escaped but were coming back to, kind of, retrieve a few things or look for people, and most of those people were crying because they were asking for help. And, em, and, eh, of course, asking for help, but, em, like, eh, “A friend of mine, eh, is over there,” and, eh, the young lady was showing a field of mud. Okay, something like that. Mud. And, em, the, well, the, the, eh, the people, the people, eh, they have this, I don’t know, sonic radar? They have that kind of stuff but, ehm, they, they were lacking, things were lacking, eh, more precise directive from the Japanese police. One of the most disturbing, or if you get cynical, funny, but it was not funny, si, single situation was, eh, I remember there was a little kind of a, not even a, a hill, a kind of, eh, turfy kind of place, which was probably a holding spot, kind of shrine or something, which later on I saw on a picture taken from a helicopter, but anyway, kind of, “Oh, I was there!”...

[Laughter]

...but anyway, [laughter] and, he, we climbed there and there were Japanese, eh, safety, a group of Japanese rescuers there, and there, there, I, I seriously interpreted for a brief ten or fifteen minutes. The French wanted, the French, ehm, felt that, eh, they were manipulated, in a sense. They couldn’t find a corpse. We couldn’t find nothing...

Uhm.

...so they, they asked me, “Tell them, ask them about this territory. Have they already covered it?” And they genuinely answered, “Yes.” So, ehm, we were looking, we were searching for casualties on a territory which were, which was, which had already been search. And there were signs, poles and, kind of, things which suggested that people already came here, it was already searched...

Yeah.

...but anyway, there’s, eh, international relations behind that, so no comm...

Yeah.

...no comment.

Yeah.

Eh, came back in, in Tokyo with those little stories I was part of and, ehm, and on, eh, back on the Internet you had the buzz of, eh, espec, especially, well, the buzz like, “Oh, those French!” Yeah, especially French that flee Japan. “Ah, put a sock in it!”...
“The hell with that!” Anyway, ehm, a second good thing, I can really show you - self-patting [the participant again makes a small gesture of patting himself on the back]...

Yeah [laughter]

...a second good thing I, I did after being back to Tokyo is that, ehm, everybody was stressed, me included. But I pretentiously and cheekily considered myself above the crowd in the sense that I did something. So, everybody I, I read about or heard that, you know, wringing the hand, “I’d like to do something”, I was, “I did something.” It was not pride that “I did something. You did nothing.” No, no, no, no. I did something so I understood that there must be such frustration to have done nothing, which, eh, later, way, months later, I could, eh, confirm with some friends, relations, eh, who were, kind of, so ashamed to have done nothing. So, I wanted to do something, eh, quickly in terms of, eh, everybody’s so stressed, when you are stressed, what you need is to discuss, talk, communicate. Let’s have a dinner party. And at the same time, let’s have a dinner party that will support the neighbourhood, because the neighbourhood was the ghost town for a few days, for many reasons, of course. Ghost town. So, I had that, eh, regular mail from, em, a French guy I know nothing about but who is a kind of, em, representant of, eh, French residents in my ward. There are, there’s 23 wards in Tokyo, okay? And he was dispatching information, eh, many copy-paste from, eh, from, eh, the Embassy. And anyway, and, eh, for lack of, eh, consideration of privacy, he was dispatching on CC so the CC list was a huge list of, basically, French residents in my ward. But I would not use that. I came to the idea of, em, let’s have a dinner party, not at home, let’s go to a restaurant, not far away. I was not using Facebook, but I was suggesting somewhere, a blog, or, I remember that, “Let’s organize,” nobody would read that but, “let’s organize a neighbourhood, a neighbourhood dinner.” Because boarding the subway was, kind of, you weren’t safe…

Uhm.

... “Will I be able to come back after dinner?” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...you know? Okay, so, in your, in your neighbourhood, you spot a restaurant, a place that, eh, kind of, which is open, and that you, you like, and, eh, as a short support and, eh, support other people, friends or neighbours, well, neighbours, that kind of relationship doesn’t exist in Japan…

[Laughter]

...in cities, but anyway, “Let’s organize a party.” And I did organize a party and, eh, we, eh, were twelve. And, eh, {redacted} it was a nice dinner, because getting together allowed people to talk…

Uhm.

...some people knew other people, some didn’t. Eh, only two people I didn’t know came. Japanese-French couple came. And it was nice, you know. Very nice to talk and to, kind of, diffuse the stress for, for, for a few hours with food, and, and, and good beverages. So, eh, I’m probably, probably over-proud of the fact that I did two things which, eh, helped me never feel like, eh, I should have done this, which, which could have been including, “I should, we should have go to France.”

Yeah.
Now, we, it’s, it’s now three years, eh, well, it, it would not have been a good idea, eh, to
go to France. Ehm, nuclear-wise, definitely, ehm, I was nuked…

Yeah.

...for sure. Everybody that went there was nuked, for sure. {redacted} Ehm, before we,
we board the bus at, eh, the French Embassy on the way north, one of the organizer,
military, French military staff, eh, told us in military tone that, eh, “Well boys (not
girls)…

[Laughter]

...eh, you will see ugly things, okay, so when you come back to Tokyo, I advise that, eh,
you check with, eh, you know, the consulate or something.” And that was the only
suggestion that came from the embassy, because back in Tokyo, and in the coming weeks
and months, I had a few friends, especially friends that left in a panicky mood in Paris,
and actually who did not come back talk over Skype…

Yeah.

...or I heard buzz of people I didn’t know that were mentally in really bad shape…

Yeah.

...and definitely would have, eh, beneficiated from, eh, talking with someone. Not with
me, I’m, I’m no counsellor, only we talked. Oh, yeah, yeah, now it comes back to, to my
mind. One, one, em, friend of mine, lady, single, explained me from Paris how she was,
kind of, em, swirled not by the tsunami…

Yeah.

...by the panic of French people she knew around and she explained me that it was a kind
of, eh, “Eh, you don’t board, you don’t board the plane? The last plane.” You know, the
last plane at the end of the world...

At the end of the world, yeah.

...and she board the plane a few, eh, a few hours later, leaving everything in the room
where she lived. And, and, kind of, eh, after the, after, and twelve hours later ending up in
Paris. Okay? And a few months later coming back to Tokyo and, eh, we were not
especially, eh, chummy or deeply friendly but, you know, I had met her for other reasons
before and, eh, she contacted me, we had a few talk over Skype, but she contacted me,
tell me, “{redacted}, I’m coming back in Tokyo, eh, next week,” or something, and
really, we, we, we were in, eh, friendly terms but, eh, not much like that, not in, nothing
intimate, eh, friendship, and, eh, probably because I was the one with whom she had the
opportunity to talk, eh, on the tame tone, not the “Waaahhh, aaahhh” kind of, you know,
tame tone, and, eh, probably no-one sneering at her or, you know, innuendos of, eh, that,
then, she, she, she told, I was totally surprised, she told me that, “I’m coming back Tokyo, but
I’m totally panicked about a situation I want to avoid which is to arrive at the airport and
nobody is meeting me. Will you meet me?” Six, six, six in the morning, the plane. I said,
“Okay. Okay.” And so she was glad someone was meeting her, eh, at the air, at the
airport. And that was the last time we met in Japan. She’s in France. She, she went back
to France, and she didn’t come back. Anyway, so I did my part…
Uhm.

...which I’m, eh, stupidly proud of but, eh, everything for me is really even communication in a way, okay, so, but coming to your work, well, ehm, I speak and understand Japanese so the, the, any matter of, eh, we don’t know what to do because we don’t understand the message of the authorities...

Uhm, uhm.

...has never been an issue.

Yeah.

I’ve been here for too long...

Yeah.

...probably. It has never been an issue. I did not, I have never been, eh, an active, eh, participant of so-called, eh, local French community, for which I have never been, I have always had an uneasy feeling with that. For reason which have nothing to do with your research...

[Laughter]

...but anyway, I know, nothing wrong with that, and it’s not unique to French...

Uhm.

...it’s, it’s something specific with you dealing with the ecosystem of the so-called community of your home country, and it happens in any country, but anyway. Eh, that’s about it {redacted}.

All right, just, just, I, I have plenty of time, just to, okay, I will call my wife to tell her that I will be late.

Oh, I’m sorry.

No, no, no, no. No problem.

Are you sure, really?

Well, I will call her in about 30 minutes. I have something to do but that’s, eh, for later in the afternoon. Could you rephrase your?
So, so, ehm, a few moments ago, when we were, eh, when we were talking about the idea of community, you, you talked about having dinner with the neighbours, and you said, that doesn’t happen...

Uhm.

...in Japan, in big cities...

Uhm.

...I just wonder if you could explain wha, why you said that or?

Oh no, I’ve been here before, so, I’m, I’m...

Okay.

...I, I have a sense of why you said it...

Just to be safe.

...I just want to make sure I haven’t misunderstood you.

Ehm, people are, 99% of people are very behaved. There is no visible, visible clash in, ehm, public domains, territories. Eh, well, culturally even amongst themselves, Japanese people do not invite at home. There are always exceptions. Well, the family, maybe, but, eh, do not. Okay? So, having dinner is having dinner out. Or lunch. Okay? When it comes to foreigners, I don’t know. I’m a foreigner, but, em, am I representative of any trend?

But, ehm, spending all your life here is, is, ehm, for many, for many, is, ehm, an exercise in self-diagnosis. I mean, self-diagnosis about basically, eh, human relationships. And, em, for the, for the friend or people I have met on friendly terms who are French, or not even French but Westerners, ehm, with a long enough, ehm, relationship with Japan, living in Japan, and granted, granted, they are not, they are not member of the wealthy, plush expatriate world, which is different...

Uhm.

...ehm, all have had to accommodate daily with the fact that, eh, you don’t belong. Belong, the, the belonging is, is - personally, if, if I were on your - you are so lucky, you do a PhD…

[Laughter]

...if, if I were on your position, I would love to, to deal with really a few topics related with, eh, notions of belonging, that kind of thing. Anyway, I would say that belonging is not part of the blueprint. Is it specific to Japan? I don’t know. I’m pretty sure it’s not specific to Japan, but, eh, anyway. Belonging is not that, eh, deep communication, the kind of compensa, conversation - well, I am monopolizing this but - the kind of conversation we are having, the kind of conversation I have with other foreigners, are conversation that are not considerable with Japanese people. And it’s not a matter of language. I have no problem speaking Japanese. I could, I could speak to Japanese and say, tell the same thing, only you don’t, you don’t talk like that. You don’t relate like that. Ehm, it may happen but, eh, probably some connections I don’t have or I will never have.
But probably, I, kind of, suspect that connections are related with whether you spend your school days in Japan or not, which may make, despite the face [laughter]...

Uhuh.

...may make a totally different approach to belonging to, to feeling like, “Well, I’m part of that.” “I’m not.” Anyway, eh, when you go beyond, eh, food, dwellings, the weather, next door’s, eh, you know, barking dog...

[Laughter]

...deep down, what is left in terms of frustration is a matter of communication with other people because communication with Japanese is totally unsatisfied. It’s, we are on different roads of, eh, communication and there’s no way to fill up the gap besides talking with non-Japanese. And this is a common thread of frustration and, eh, that’s life!

Yeah.

C’est la vie. But, eh, it’s something which is nagging you, entertaining your, eh, stomach ache until you die...

[Laughter]

...and, and maybe later, but I don’t know.

[Laughter]

Anyway, okay, so that’s, that’s part of the background.

I understand.

So people that, that, people that, eh, well, people that don’t speak the language, don’t understand the language relies on, em, foreigners’ newsreels and sources and eh, the email from the Embassy, etc., etc. They are in a different ecosystem, in a different bus, you know.

Yeah, yeah.

To which I don’t belong, although I receive the email because I’m registered to the Embassy, but I don’t belong, I don’t belong to, to that. Is it interesting?

Absolu, no, that’s absolutely, em, just, to, to let you know that already, even though I’ve only had maybe, thir, I think you’re the thirteenth person I’ve interviewed, it’s come across very clearly that I can’t talk about foreign nationals in Japan as one group, eh, I think there’s going to be differences between the foreign nationals who, like you said, make a part of the expat community who don’t speak Japanese, or are just here temporarily, versus foreign nationals who have established links and a life here and are more long-term. I think there’s already seems to be some large difference in their experiences based on where they stand on that scale.

In Marxist terms, there is a single word which, which forbidden, even to think: class!

Ehm, there is no community. Only the same passport. It doesn’t make a community.

What they call community, which is not specific to France, what they call community is basically an illusion of sameness because of commonness of language and place of birth, which is totally phony, because what, what is determined is social class, social-
economical class. So the idea that, eh, there’s a community, a French community, well, there, there, there are and it’s the same for the US and the British…

_Uhuh, uhuh, uhuh._

...and the German, etcetera…

_Yeah, yeah._

There are, there is, of course, something which, eh, translate into, eh, associations of residents…

_Yeah, yeah._

...several associations, not only because such associations reflect, well, the, the, it actually reflects something, the forbidden word of, eh, social class, of, eh, experience, of “Where do you live in Tokyo?” “What is the husband doing? Where is the husband working?” Okay? “Who do you drink champagne with on Saturday?” Okay? This is reality. Only the guys at the top are the, are the proponent of community. They use that word community. We! To which I don’t feel I belong, but anyway. We!

_I see._

So, yes, you will never get the same buzz…

_Yeah, yeah._

...never get the same buzz.

_That, that certainly confirms that for me, anyway. I’m also - just to go back a little bit - there is one issue as well that I’m, I’m, I am very interested in…_ Uuh.

...you mentioned that of the people who went up to Sendai that se, several of the people weren’t professional interpreters. Ehm, do you think it was enough to just have conversational Japanese or non-specialist Japanese or did, that experience, would you have needed professional knowledge of some description?

I think there are two things in interpreting, at least, the way I approach it, and maybe you don’t know but I, I’m not a professionally trained interpreter and interpreting as a matter of fact is something I have been practising less and less, due to the lack of opportunities to do that for many reasons. March 11th totally blew away my market. Totally. Other fact, other factors came into the picture, eh, but, eh, it totally blew my, blew away my market and it never came back. Eh, but anyway, my view, and interpreting of, what is interpretation? And not conference interpreting…

_Yeah, yeah._

...I don’t do that, is, eh, I know it’s way off, it’s considered that, it will come off, “What is he talking about? He knows nothing.” But, I only know by practising, eh, you, you know that, ehm, the law [laughter] the law tell that the role of the interpreter is just to transfer the meaning back and forth and that’s it. The problem is that there are situation where that’s it, eh, is an invitation to catastrophe because, because it’s not only a matter of words [laughter]. It’s, it’s, words is just a tiny factor in the full relationship, okay? For
instance, when I deal with - well, these days I almost do not but - when I dealt with
people coming here for business, and repeaters, because it’s a one-shot, you can’t exactly
suggest that there’s another way to use an interpreter, but with repeaters, it’s that our
interaction, the interaction with your Japanese counterpart is not starting the moment we
got to, to the, eh, meeting room, it starts before. For instance, I used to develop and, eh,
use a kind of very simple questionnaire asking my clients, well, you’re, you’re, you are
interpreting for business meetings so you explain that “I am coming to meet my, for the
first time or not, for the purpose of this, and here is the PowerPoint,” and, you know,
background. I used late, late in, relatively late in delivering this to ask questions which I
know are not supposed to be asked by interpreters: what’s your purpose; what, what do
you want to take home at the end of the meeting; what’s your expectations; do you know,
eh, the power play of people you are meeting? I ask, “Do you have the, do you have the
names and positions of the people you are meeting?” Many cases, “None, none of your
business!” Okay? Well, maybe it’s none of my business but in terms of communication,
you know, play of power, eh, know who is who is key. {redacted} So, I, I ask things like,
I ask things like, “What do you want to achieve?” Many times the clients are glad to, to
tell that, but it happened me that, you know, kind of…

Uhhh.

… “None of your business! You just interpret what we are saying.” In, in, including the
crap…

[Laughter]

...including the use - well, I don’t say that - including the useless, totally out-of-scope,
meaningless, eh, that will generate no valuable information kind of question.

Uhhh.

So, for me, it starts from here. So, so in the, in the context of Sendai and of Fukushima,
eh, of course, people they, they come here, they are supermen, they are, and they are nice,
I have never met so nice people, really, so, never met so, the heart, really nice people.

But, if, for instance, the strategy is to find out what’s happening here, what have the
Japanese authorities and army authorities done so far, where can we help, what are they
not talking us…

Uhm.

...I think, do you, do you just run around, like, here [Note: gesturing like writing on a
piece of paper] and you start, eh, aligning the question in French and ask the interpreter,
“Please tell them that.” Which actually happened, as it happens usually, okay?

Yeah.

And, well, you get, get what you’re not looking for because Japan, Japan doesn’t work
like that, like communication-wise...

Yeah.

...it’s not, we’re not in Texas [laughter]...

[Laughter]
...we’re in a different Texas. Okay? In this Texas, things, ehm, question you just throw
like that may not yield what you expecting because, well, if you’re expecting something,
maybe the question should be formulated in a different manner in order to generate what
are you looking for. Okay?

Yeah.

But officially, this is not the role of the interpreter. For me, it is the role of the interpreter
because culture is, is so different here that just pretending that, “Oh, we are all, you
know, we all speak, we all speak English around here so we don’t need an interpreter.”
“Goodbye. Enjoy, enjoy!” It always happens, always.

That’s really fascinating. I think the idea of that cultural mediator...

Yeah.

...is something that comes across strongly for sure...

Uhm.

...I know that there is an idea that if everyone speaks English, it should be, it should be
fine, but, as you said, with those different cultural viewpoints, it may not be, it may not be
fine at all.

Has it answered your question?

A, a, absolutely, because, eh, what I was interested in was if, if, if you’re going to
interpret in an emergency scenario, say as a, a member of a team, what, what is going to
be expected of you or what are you going to need, what sort of tools, and from the sound
of your story, what is needed is not just language ability, it is this cultural knowledge to,
maybe, help mediate between why people aren’t being asked to do their jobs or.

You know, maybe the French, they did briefings, but if you do briefings without your
interpreter, you, you, you are not qualified. The interpreter is the bridge. Okay, get the
feedback from the bridge. So, involve, involve the interpreter into the, the dynamics that
will come very soon enough. So I know that it goes against the neutrality of the
interpreter...

Yeah, yeah.

...okay, neutrality, my ass! Okay? My, my, my basic, eh, monetary, con, definition is this
- neutrality is the side that pays me...

[Laughter]

...okay? There is no neutrality. There is no neutrality...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...in business, you know. It doesn’t happen...

Yeah.

...if one side, whichever, because it may happen on one side not the other, it is, eh, doing
things in order to fuck you, are you supposed to just transfer? Are you supposed to not
tell your customer? Are you suppose, are you supposed not to refrain and not tell, suggest, maybe it’s not impolite, suggest quickly, brief your customer that your question framed that way will yield nothing. I have done that…

Yeah.

...with some customers that, I’ve done that. I suggest you ask this otherwise you will never get the answer you are looking for. That’s not in the books. In the books is, “You shut up and you say,” [laughter]...

[Laughter] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...that’s why I am a disaster when it comes to interpreting.

Aaah, I doubt that very much! You did mention, though, that since the 3.11, it had affected your interpreting customer base and, and, and your business, my, kind of, final question is, for you, when did the disaster end or has it ended?

Well, the fact that my business was, ehm, impacted deeply, as a freelancer, I had been working alone indefinitely for so many years, except for a few, three-and-a-half year where I was, em, an employee in the company, which helped confirm me that I can’t work in a company…

[Laughter]

...beside that, I have been into freelancing for, for close to thirty years and I have changed jobs, eh, I am in transition, I have been in transition for thirty years, probably, but right, right now, I am clearly in transition, because I have to, I have to call interpreting quits. It’s quitting me. So I have to call that, well, there, there may be, I have had, in the past two weeks, three inquiries for interpreting and they pay nothing. They want to pay nothing.

Uhum.

They are wanting to pay by the hour, and this, well, it started with March 11th, but on 2008, it start 2008 with the Lehman…

Oh the, the shock, yeah.

...you know, with the precarity as obvious with, “Okay, you get twice as much as what they pay at McDonalds per hour. And you don’t want to do that. Someone will. Which is true. I’m not talking about conference interpreting price, okay? Ehm, well, there are, there are many factors that can be really relating one another to March 11th, but not only, not only it just, it just added, it generated the smash into something which was, kind of, crumbling. It was a direct slap, eh, into the face of my ecosystem which was, actually, not bad, despite 2008, it was not bad because I had, I had a very good, eh, regular, eh, customer. The one I was working with five minutes before the shaking. Okay?

Everything disappeared for, eh, the, eh, 3.11 was a big factor, not only, but, it was an opportunity to reshuffle things, voluntarily or not, mostly not voluntary. So that’s, so that’s life. So now, nowadays I am more inclined to trying again, eh, recreate something, unfortunately out, not out of interpreting, because I love to do interpretation, despite the low pay, it can be bad. But, yes, it has changed, eh, the world but, again, it’s one factor among other world-shaking events that were not, eh, related with, that were, well, the world has been changing deeply in terms of, basically everything is about lowering fees, everything is, eh, cheapening things…
Yeah.

...this has been clear enough. Also, I’m getting older, which is not a disease but, eh, there’s some pressure or some, some stage at which it is clear that there’s a well-defined, younger generation that, eh, may do even better than you, it’s fresher than you, and it’s less demanding than you. This is, this is clear. So, March 11, in a, in a sense has shaken many things, eh, the result of which is, eh, my current situation. It has brought incredible life and work opportunities for the, eh, interpreters, I know. If you are into nuclear, eh, you have lifelong job. I worked, not as an interpreter, I worked for one nuclear company after March 11. Never had that much before. It doesn’t lack of money. But I discovered myself as being anti-nuclear. Before that, I was, I was, eh, a total idiot [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...a total, I knew nothing. I knew nothing. I mean, everything was, everything is working as long as it doesn't smell of cesium...

Yeah.

...kind of, “Well, everything is working. Light is on. Life is good.”...

Yeah, yeah.

...okay? So I discovered many things...

Ühum.

...many things which I cannot talk about because I’m under, under NDA for that...

Ah, okay.

...but, eh, I, I discovered a lot of things. I was totally, as a, as a total dumb, I was totally unaware. But if I were smart and, eh, intelligent and, eh, crafty, interpreting nuclear? You have lifetime, a load of work. You, you are booked every day, every day for the next forty years. Sure. Guaranteed. Guaranteed.

That’s, that’s quite incredible. That’s very incredible.

You want something sweet? [the participant offers me some of the cake he bought]

Thanks, thanks, I’ll take that.

I think you, you need some calorie, some energy.

To process that! Well, all I can say is thank you so much for sharing, eh, your story with me.

I don’t know if I could help or not.

Absolutely.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/9/24 Interview with Participant 14

Researcher: So then, basically, usually what I ask everybody at first is just to tell me what happened to you...

Participant: Okay.

...in, in the 2011 disaster.

So, 2011 disaster. March 11. I was at school when it, the earthquake happened, but it was, it might be, em, interesting to note that, you know, before the earthquake we had numerous earthquakes and some of my Japanese friends were concerned that a big earthquake was going to happen. And, it actually started two days before the earthquake, because I was at a school the 9th, we had like a 7.0 earthquake and it was big enough that the students went under their desks, and two days before the earthquake I was at that school, em, in the afternoon, you know, things continued as normal. Two days later was the big earthquake, that school was destroyed completely. Completely destroyed, em, so yeah, it was, I mean, I didn’t know that until, until afterwards, but it, kind of, when you’re talking about March 11th, to me it, kind of, starts a little bit before the earthquake because I remember Japanese people being concerned about the possibility of an earthquake, and at the school that I was at, {an elementary school in Miyagi}, they always left the TV on, every day I was there because I thought it was strange, in the teachers’ room, they had a TV on, and I asked, “Why is the TV on?” We’re close to the school [Note: I presume this was a slip of the tongue and he meant ‘shore’ or ‘ocean’ or something, not school] if there is a tsunami, we need to know that information. The school was destroyed, like two stories up, just gone, completely. So, em, yeah. Okay, the day of earthquake, luckily I wasn’t at that school, em, all the children were saved from, on Wednesday [Note: this means March 9, 2011 - two days before onset] what it was is I’d go to one school in the morning and another school in the afternoon, the school that I went to in the afternoon was destroyed. The good thing was that all the students were saved. They got rescued off the top of the building by helicopter. The school that I went to in the morning, eh, one of the students was unfortunately lost, and the, the only reason that, eh, that he lost his life was because his grandmother had worried, earthquake happened, she came to the school, picked him up. All the other students had evacuated to the top of the building, and they went to their home towards the sea and was lost. So, it’s, em, yeah, I mean, considering what happened to the school, I think that, that, the students were pretty fortunate. So going back to where I was on the day of the earthquake, I was at the school which is a little bit out in the countryside, it’s towards the mountains. So there wa, wasn’t any damage from the tsunami. There was little damage from the earthquake. Lots of shaking. It was really violent shaking for a minute. I was in the teacher’s room of the school. All the desk drawers opened up, eh, sounds that I had never heard before, squeaking sounds of the school, deep rumbling, em, but there was no significant damage to the place out of that. So, eh, it was a cold day. We evacuated outside to the school ground, and we spent about twenty minutes of time there. There were numerous aftershocks, and we evacuated to the school gym, the school gymnasium became a refugee centre, a refugee, a refuge, a centre for refuge, sorry, I had that wrong. So people from the community started pouring in, and, yeah, I realized that, you know, it was either stay there at that school or try to get back to my house. That’s not my base school, em, I was an ALT [Note: Assistant Language Teacher in the Japan Exchange and Teaching Program] at the time, so I was positioned in a base elementary school and I was out, sort of, on a, a trip to a, a school that I go to once every two weeks. So while we’re standing
there, I decided to walk back to my flat which is about, em, 11 or 12 kilometres away, which, you know, it wasn’t rough but, em, it started snowing and there was just, like, mass of people walking and the, the roads were chaos, all of the lights were down, em, but again the place where I was at, at the time of the earthquake, there was no real, there was damage but nothing like you would see on the coastline, it was just completely, you know, different at the coast. And we didn’t know what had happened at that time.

Yeah.

So that’s where I was on the day of the earthquake.

*Em, at that time, do you remember any announcements or PA system, were anything working in that area or in the school, do you remember?*

Okay. The thing that I remember is the principal of the school after the earthquake, he switched on to a different mode. They must have had some sort of training, but the normally laid-back principal just, you know, switched on. He had his loudspeaker and there is a school transmission system and he said, “You need to get under your desks. There is an earthquake.” And after the shaking stopped, after the shaking stopped, they checked the hallways to make sure it was safe to evacuate, and went outside. As far as announcements in the community, em, loudspeakers, I know that they’re there, but I don’t remember, I don’t remember. Em, two days before the earthquake when I was at the school, em, I do remember being, there being a siren. That happened right around noon. 12:56, I think that earthquake was? 11.46? That’s the day of the 9th, but, on the day of the earthquake, I don’t, sorry, I don’t remember.

*Oh no, please don’t apologize, em, as I said, because I’m, kind of, coming at this from a language and linguistic point of view, I’m interested in things like: if there were loudspeaker announcements, were they in Japanese or were they in various languages…*

Uhm.

...*that kind of thing?*

My guess would be - no I don’t know this, but - eh, they probably would have been in Japanese only.

*Yeah, yeah. You said as well then that you decided to, to walk home. A, at that time, how did you try to communicate with important people in your life?*

Well, at that time, em, I basically thought it was just another earthquake. I knew that it was big, I knew that it was long, powerful, but I thought, “Okay, it’s another earthquake. The power is off. It’ll be back. I thought it would be a matter of days. And I did look at my cell phone, that was probably my go-to source for information. There was a TV function on it and I saw some news coming and they said something about a tsunami, but it wasn’t, em, you know, didn’t have any idea of the scale and I didn’t, hadn’t thought really to communicate with anyone yet because I just didn’t realize...

*Uuhuh.*

...*the scale of what it was. I think, maybe, at that time, I did try to send an email but the email was already, sort of, not work, the phone’s email, you know.*

*Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.*
Em, so cellphones were pretty much, em, you couldn’t use them. Everything was jammed, ehm, I don’t know if jammed is the right word but you couldn’t connect…

Yeah.

...if you wanted to make a phone call, it wouldn’t go through. Ehm, mail was the same. I remember on my phone, opened it up and it was, it had the same reading which you would when you go into a tunnel…

Ah.

...so it was, like, they say kengai in Japanese. It was like that on my phone. [Note: kengai means ‘out of service or range’ or ‘no service’] I could use, like, to get television, eh, television transmissions but as a communication tool, couldn’t.

Yeah.

I think once or twice that evening I could so the first contact I made was, eh, with one my friends in Aomori [Note: a prefecture in the far north of Japan not so seriously affected in the disaster] and what I got him to do, eh, because, eh, at that time, I knew that it was on a national, world-scale, because usually when there’s an earthquake there’s no news of it.

Yeah.

Ehm, so I got one of my friends in Aomori to post on my Facebook account that I was okay. Ehm, and occasionally, I did get incoming mail, eh, but, and I could see that people had tried to call my phone, and international calls, I did see that. But, as far as any type of working connection, it just wasn’t happening on that day.

Right. And just, just to be clear, you, you said your TV had that, or your telephone had that TV function…

Right.

...those programs were in Japanese?

Japanese.

Japanese. So it was, like, the NHK broadcast or one of those?

Uhuh, NHK and Sendai local television.

Yeah. Ehm, then, obviously, you know, you had maybe through your friend in Aomori been able to post on your Facebook. When was it you were able to, to get contact directly with people? How, how long did it take before communication was up for you?

Uhm, with people outside of the city, yeah, outside world, probably the next day, I was able to talk with one of my friends in Aomori. I had moved there the year before and that’s where my most important people in Japan were, in Aomori. Of course, I had friends here, but, we, eh, I don’t think I got to talk to my parents until a few days after.

That’s quite a long time.

Ehm, they were quite worried, obviously. I think I was able to send them a short message through the, the phone, you know, at that time I didn’t have a smartphone, I just had the
standard cell phone so it was, em, limited as to what you could type. But I think I sent, sent something like, “Big earthquake. I’m safe. Don’t worry.” But even with, with a message like that, they still worried...

Of course.

...and they were on the local TV at home, ehm, you know, because people wanted to know about these photos of, these pictures of destruction in Japan and the way it was broadcasted abroad was that Sendai was hit by the tsunami and Sendai, there was a nuclear meltdown by Sendai, and it was the, of course, that’s all the information they had, but it, it sounded like, that, that, that everything was, you know, had been hit. Well, the earthquake happened everywhere but the destruction was only, the mass destruction was only on a part of, like, Sendai, it wasn’t all of Sendai, but if you, if one of your friends is living in Sendai, even if you don’t know that they don’t live by the sea, you hear Sendai is hit by an earthquake, you’re going to worry. So, my parents, even though that they had that basic information that I’m alive and safe, they were still quite worried.

Of course, I can, I can only imagine. So you got back to your apartment...

Yeah.

...how did you start making decisions then?

Well, ehm, I walked back and the, the, the town was just dark, ehm, filled with cars, the, it was just a monumental traffic jam. I, eh, went back to my apartment. It was cold. I knew that I had a little bit of food there. I just thought, “Okay, well, you know, I’ll just get warm, go to bed, and wake up and see what happens tomorrow.” And that was, sort of, my game plan. And, when I got cold, I went to my car, turned it on, and got warm in the car, and I used my car to charge my phone, I had a charger, so I was really lucky in that regard. Em, so, yeah, I mean, basically the next day, I, kind of, had a game plan which was find some place to get food, find some place to get water. So, eh, [laughter] my friend and I, kind of, joked about this, eh, we [laughter], in our ALT meetings here we’d always talked about disaster management and where is the first place you’re going to go during an earthquake and my friend said, you know, “The first place I’m going to go is the liquor store.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...we have one in our neighbourhood and it was actually the first place I went because [laughter] I mean, not only liquor do they have but also, you know, lots of bottled water and other provisions. But the first place I did go was the liquor store...

[Laughter]

...and it wasn’t to get liquor. There was already a massive line outside and I lined up and I think I got two two-litre bottles of something, you know, it wasn’t liquor [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...it was tea, or something, but, that’s what I did. And I realized, you know, it’s probably going to be like this for a couple of days so the second day I went and walked to one of my friends apartments. It wasn’t a friend who I was particularly close to, em, until after the earthquake, during the earthquake, but, eh, that was probably one of the best decisions I made was going and seeking someone I knew...
Yeah.

...and we stayed, you know, the next four or five days together and other ALTs came together in his, we just, sort of, camped out in this one-bedroom apartment. My friend, he was from Canada, I’m from the States. We had people from Scotland there. We had Japanese people coming and stopping by, so we had our own little support group...

Yeah.

...in the city. That was really good, that was. We shared our food.

And, I guess you were sharing, probably, your information and your ideas and?

Yeah, we shared our information. Eh, it happened on Friday, so we spent the weekend there. Okay, what happens Monday? So Monday, obviously, we wanted to go in to our work and figure out what’s going on. My work is 10km away, so I went to the Board of Education and, kind of, tried to get a handle on our, on what happened and, eh, the scale of things. I saw some of my co-workers there, eh, Japanese co-workers and, you know, I said, “Well, what do we do?” “If you want to volunteer you can try volunteering at {an institution of the Sendai government}.” So that’s what I did. I joined the multi-language support team for three or four days, yeah. So that’s what I did, which involved translation and helping foreigners here and honestly it was really stressful. It was really stressful being there. So, if you’d like to know about that, I guess I can talk about that a little bit.

If you’re happy to, yeah.

One of my supervisors suggests, “If you want to volunteer, if you can’t go to school, why don’t you go to {an institution of the Sendai government} and see if you can help out?” So I did. Ehm, and, you know, this {institution of the Sendai government}, they helped foreigners to, on a day-to-day basis...

Yeah.

...you know, with their daily life, their daily life needs. You know, if they need translation, there’s a hotline they can call. If they need, eh, some sort of support in daily life, you know, if there’s a doctor they need to go to, they can call there and ask for support. So during the earthquake they set up, eh, eh, I don’t exactly know the official title of the, of the team that they used but it was like a tagengo, eh, sapooto chiimu or something like that. A multi-language support team. And what it was was the official information we had about the buses running and anything that was provided by the city or local information, we would translate it and make it available to the foreigners. We had a bulletin board there, and one of the jobs was to answer the phones which was I, which I was doing, so, had all these phone calls coming in and, eh, you know, there were completely legitimate phone calls and things I was worried about, too, but, by virtue of being on the team, I was, sort of, in the position of giving people information to make them feel more comfortable, but the fact is, that was quite stressful at the time. At the time, hearing people ask questions about things that you are concerned about yourself is, eh, that’s stressful info, information, you know, like people would ask, eh, “We just saw an explosion on the TV. Is it safe to live here?” And I’m just like, em, eh, [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...“That’s a really good question.” And, sort of, having to go by the information you have and stand by that, you know, and when you are somewhat dubious of the, the content or the veracity of that information, then it’s a little bit stressful, you know. But, the main
thing was to provide the basic information of, em, you know, buses and how to get into
the city, how to get out of the city. People would ask, “How do I get out of Sendai if I
wanted to leave?” And we got more and more of those questions as the, the disas, you
know, as it progressed from the earthquake to the nuclear disaster, we got more and more
questions involving transportation and how do I get out of Sendai, what can I use, you
know, and the fact is that a lot of the transportation systems were down and, em, you
know, that was, eh, that was, sort of, stressful, realizing that, eh, you were here and, eh,
you were, [laughter] kind of, stuck here in some regard if something really bad were to
happen. Really bad, I mean, on the scale of, you know, like, a nuclear, not a meltdown,
but something even worse like an explosion…

Yeah.

...that put us into immediate danger…

Yeah.

...you know. That was my main concern at the time.

Of course, yeah.

And obviously it wasn’t MY major concern, too, because the embassy sent buses to get
their na, nationals, you know, for all those wanting to, eh, to leave Sendai, em, the
embassy sent buses to Sendai. I’m sorry if I, kind of, got off track.

No, that’s absolutely linked to the kind of things I’m interested in, em, I would like to
know how different countries embassies actually communicated with their citizens or
gave information. You know, as a US citizen, what happened?

Well, as a US citizen, eventually the, the embassy came up and said, set up a, I, I don’t
know what exactly you’d call it, but in {the institution of the Sendai government at which
the participant volunteered}, they set up a table and I know they had a, a few personnel
there from the embassy and they were, em, they had a list of people that lived in Sendai
and they were trying to find the people, em, but I do know that some embassies were
more proactive in finding their nationals and caring for them, but the US Embassy was a
little bit, eh, they came eventually but I don’t think it was the, quite the quick response
that the UK provided. I mean, I, yeah, I don’t exactly have all that information as to how
the embassies came in, but I know that, that a lot of them did personally come to Sendai
looking for their citizens. {A colleague of the participant who I would also interview}
might be able to answer those questions.

But even just personally did they contact you with emails or?

They didn’t contact me at all.

Okay.

I had to contact them, so.

I see.

I know that a lot of the embassies hunted, hunted them down is a weird expression but,
looked for their, their nationals. With the US Embassy, I remember them coming to
Sendai, I was, I saw them there when I was at the, when I was volunteering with the, eh,
multi-language support team at {an institution of the Sendai government} and I said, “I’m
from the, you know, I’m a US citizen, is there anything I need to do, you know, so that
you guys are aware?“ They were just, “Call the embassy and register.” “Well, I
registered.” “But call them to see and let them know you’re here and safe.” So that’s what
I did.

And, in that multilingual support group, was it mostly English speaking people or?
Well, not as a native language, mostly, eh, international students, there were some
graduate students there from {a major university in the region} and some other colleagues
from the Board of ALTs had come in to help, and, yeah, it was mostly people from,
graduate students from the university, some people who were already working in the, in
this {institution of the Sendai government} and some, eh, bilingual people from the
community had all come in. But English-as-a-native-language speakers? There, there
were only two or three.

I see. Because, obviously, in places like Sendai when you say, you know, foreign people
that could mean Chinese or Brazilian or?
Oh yeah.
we had, eh, people from China, from Iran, from, yeah, there was a woman for
France, people from all over the world, probably 15 or 20 people on the team and we
broke off into groups, you know. We had one group answering the phone, we had one
group translating the information on the, em, on the, eh, the, eh, public transportation, bus
schedules, what buses were running, trains, eh, so we broke off into different teams and
that’s how we handled it.

And, obviously, that must have been extremely stressful.
It was.

Afterwards was there some support for the volunteers?
Well, here’s what happened with the support team, em, it lasted probably, em, I don’t
know exactly when, eh, when it was formed, but I joined on that Monday. Some of the,
eh, volunteers had decided to go home and it was obvious that there was, our members
were, sort of, eh, you know, me personally, I left because I needed to, eh, to go stay with
some friends. I was, a time when my parents had, eh, told me, this is, I had already had
contact with them, and they had seen the news, and they basically said, “Leave Sendai.”
You know, “Where are you?” They’d give, and I’d see, “Are, have you left Sendai yet?”
“No.” They’d call me and say things like, “Where are you?” So, I temporarily left the city
to stay with some friends who didn’t live here, em, just to, kind of, cool down. Eh, so,
that’s what I did and I’m sure that a few of the other members did similar things. So, I’m
not going to say that it disbanded. I know that there were a few people that stayed.
Obviously the people that worked at the uni, {an institution of the Sendai government},
ehm, you know, it was their job. I went as a volunteer because I couldn’t go to work, I
couldn’t make it to my school. So that’s, sort of, the reason I joined. Because I wanted to
do something, and I stayed as long as I could. When it was time for me to [laughter]
leave, I left.

I think, this is a theme that has come up with other people that I’ve spoken to, for
example, in Ibaraki or in other parts of, of the disaster zone, but if you do a volunteer
effort, it’s really hard work and mentally and physically stressful and it can only be done
for a certain period of time.

It’s really stressful, especially in the situation like we had, because it wasn’t just the one
event. Okay, the earthquake happened. Then the tsunami happened, okay. And then you
had the nuclear problem so it’s not, whatever information you have, whatever information
you had, it was not fixed. With each hour, with each moment, it was subject to change.
And what I knew from watching the news is that things were changing and things were
changing quickly. The news, even if you understood Japanese perfectly, the amount of
information you were getting, could not keep up with the pace the information was
changing, so working at {an institution of the Sendai government}, that for me,
volunteering there, I was watching the TV, trying to figure out what I could, my relation
to this information, okay, based on what the media is saying, what can I figure out as a
thinking individual without, you know, just laying my concerns aside, because I want to
know what’s happening, and I’m being asked what’s happening, watching the news,
trying to figure out what’s happening, and answering questions, people that are honestly
concerned as I am, too, and somewhat having to endorse the official information. “Oh
it’s,” every, you know, “This is what’s happening,” knowing that everything’s changing,
so it was just, you know, when you get a phone call, “I really don’t know what’s
happening.” So to be a volunteer, not only do you have to have language skills, but you
have to be, sort of, a pillar of positivity, too. You have to be, and, and, at the same time,
really rooted in reality. You have to be able to give support in a way that, that, you know,
you have to, I, it’s tough, it’s tough. And I didn’t know personally when I answered a
phone call and tried to help someone if I was in a better state before the phone call or
after the phone call [laughter]. My friend and I joked, because he noticed that I was, sort
of, stressed out. I mean, now I’m, sort of, in a different position here, em, I know that as
my job, I have to support people as an advisor here. Whatever happens, I’m the person
that people are going to go to, you know, so I would have a different mindset, eh, if the
same thing happened. But, my friend and I joked a bit. He said that after I went to {the
institution of the Sendai government at which he volunteered}, I was always a little bit
more stressed out. So he said, you know, “Someday, next, tomorrow when you answer
the phone, eh, someone is going to ask you, ask you a question, and you’re just going to
say, ‘Oh my god, thank god you called, you know, I’m so glad, I so needed to talk to
someone, you know, thank you, I wanted to ask you the same thing.’” [laughter]

[Laughter]

You know, so there’s that side to being on, eh, a support team like that.

Especially, as you said, in such a complex situation that was changing all the time...

Minute to minute.

...and, you know, you, you mentioned how on the TV you were getting these masses of
information. You know, even if you spoke Japanese perfectly, as you said, I, I remember
in my experience, hearing these things in Japanese about nuclear power. If, if I looked it
up in my dictionary, I still didn’t know what it meant in, in English...

Yeah.

...so how, I don’t know, how, ehm, its possible to, kind of, communicate these very
complex things.

Right. Okay, so the language that was used at all times was, em, in terms of the disaster
was very opaque, you know, you couldn’t figure it out, em, at all. I couldn’t figure it out.
I remember reading it, being able to understand the Japanese, and it was just like, “Okay,
there’s, there’s, there’s no connection.” I don’t, you don’t know what happened, you
know, but that’s characteristic of what’s happening today, em, but here’s the thing that
was hard for foreigners here is because the foreign media, the way that they covered it,
and the way that the Japanese covered what was happening were just so completely
different, you know, and, it, it was just hard in a situation where you’ve, you know, you
don’t have power, you don’t have electricity in your flat, or you don’t have food, to be
able to look at these two different sources, multiple sources and interpret for yourself
what’s happening and what’s your best bet for behaving, you know, as to what to do, it
was pretty stressful for a lot of people, myself included, em.

I can imagine, I can just imagine. On top of that, I know that there was also a lot of social
media going on at that time. In Sendai, were you able to access any of that.

So, eventually, I was able to get my Facebook account which I never really used at all,
but, em, yeah, I would say, eh, 3 or 4 days after the disaster. Luckily my friends, eh, lived
in the centre of the city and there was an island of power. He had, eh, he had electricity,
didn’t have water, but, eh, he had electricity and he had the Internet, so we were able to
use his apartment as, sort of, a, eh, shelter, Internet cafe, information hub. I would, I don’t
really know what I would have done if there hadn’t been a place like that.

Did you find social media to be useful?

Yeah, definitely. Em, and I know that our department here, the Board of Education, that’s
how they found out that a lot of people were safe and okay was through social media and,
em, we were encouraged to, to, you know, one of my elders here had suggested, you
know, show pictures of everyone, not only that you’re okay, but that, you know, that
convey that you’re - I wouldn’t say flourishing but - you’re, that show what’s actually
happening. Because we were in an apartment with, you know, four or five people and we
were in, we weren’t having a bad time, you know, we were supporting each other and,
em, yeah, so it was good to, to, to let people know not only we’re safe but we’re at times,
you know, we’re, we’re doing well, I don’t know if you’d say doing well but, you know,
but we’re here and we’re, we’re having a laugh too. We were stressed out but, em.

And it sounds very much like you were all there for each other.

Yeah, we had a, a, a group of four or five people that pretty much…

Became a kind of community...

...right.

...at, at that time. Did you ever at any point consider going to some, I don’t know like, ce,
centre for refuge or anything like that?

Eh, no. I didn’t. Eh, in retrospect, I probably would have. Em, and I know that in
my neighbourhood there is a school that I made visits to once a week, and, of course, all
the schools become centres for refuge, it’s, sort of, something that has happened, you
know, traditionally in, in the past, schools are, sort of, of the centres of the community and
even, you know, when they have sports days, people who aren’t involved in the school
come and gather at the school. It’s, sort of, a, you know, centre of the community. So I
remember meeting one of my co-workers in the street and they said, “Oh, you should
have,” you know, “we’ve had, our school is a refuge in, was a refuge centre. You should
have come, you should have come to the school.” It didn’t cross my mind, you know, but
I thought that if I would have gone, I might have, I would have been able to be with
people who were experiencing the same thing and maybe a deeper sense of community at
that time.

Um.
So I probably would, but we had our own sort of refuge centre.

It sounded like it, I mean, you had electricity and some Internet power. These are the things you are looking for at that time. Em, when did things start to, I guess, get back to normal for you? What I have been asking people is when did the disaster end for you, but that’s a very difficult thing to say, maybe.

When did the disaster end?

If, if it has ended.

Em, well, I would say the, eh, immediate, well, I guess there are different levels you can answer that question on. One of my friends was, eh, her family was greatly affected by the tsunami. It came, and, em, up to the second storey of their house and they rebuilt in the same place. They lost a family member but I was close with that family, Japanese family and they recently moved back in their house so as far as my friends, people that I know getting back to their normal life, I would say that they’re getting close to it, you know. But for me, em, I would say that the acute sense of the disaster ended when I went to the supermarket and things were there again and, em, well, here’s the deal, after the earthquake, any time you had some sort of food or something new, you found something new, you know, that you didn’t eat yesterday, it was just exciting. “Oh, I’ve got something new,” you know, or when you went to the store and something was open or they had this different food item that they hadn’t had, it was just, like, you know, I don’t know, seeing a flower bloom, I, that’s weird but, you know, seeing something really special. Going to the store and seeing food was really special, so I guess when that special feeling wore off, like a month or two later, and everything was there again and available, then it, sort of, ended for me, I guess you could say.

I see. And, I’m very interested in you, you know, you talking about the store having this thing suddenly or this thing coming back, h, h, how, how were these things communicated...

Oh yeah...

...among each other, did?

So people had that on Facebook, you know, em, someone would get, eh, information somewhere that this store is going to be open from 10-5, and I remember hearing about it at my friend’s apartment. “Okay, I heard that so-and-so is going to be open from 10 to 12 tomorrow.” It was also short...

[Laughter]

...you know, like, [laughter] sporadic times, but, sure enough, you’d see people lining up in front of the store. There would be a sign posted, so walking to the town you would, eh, pick up on things, I think there were signs, but also by word of mouth and through social media that was communicated. So what we did is when we were, sort of, living together, we would go out and people would get different things, you know, and bring them back, and we would share them and that was really neat. And food tasted really good. It tasted really good.

Yeah.

Yeah. But we were just lucky to be in the city, you know, and just, you know, to think about what happened some of the people, you know. You really can’t complain about our
situation. We were, I always tell people, we were inconvenienced but not really injured or
damaged or, we were inconvenienced. I’m just, the ALTs that were here in the city, you
know.

Yeah. Ehm, I mean, I totally understand what you mean about, sort of, different levels of
experience for, for people but still, I, I understand that you were inconvenienced, but it
was a very stressful time. Has, has it changed you in any way? Has it changed your
behaviour or thinking or?

Yeah, it has. I wou
ld say after the earthquake, em, during the earthquake, my friend, eh,
he would, there would, you know, people took different reactions. Some people thought,
“I got to get out of Sendai. This is not safe. I don’t trust the, the media at all. We’ve got to
get out of here. It’s melting down,” you know, “it’s dangerous. It’s not safe. Get out.”
People had that attitude, you know, and some people left and I remember seeing my
friend, em, and he was just the type of person that I could tell he was stressed but just the
amount of support he gave to other people, I felt so much better after I talked with him
and I thought, you know, I want to be that kind of person in a disaster. If something
happens, not to be more the person who freaks out and doesn’t know what’s going on,
you know, and just makes irrational decisions, but someone who can really look at things
level-headedly and be supportive of other people so I would say that the earthquake made
me want to be more of a support for other people. That’s one of the things I thought
during the earthquake and after the earthquake. But changed as a person? Hmmm. Yeah, I
guess, eh, as a teacher it made me think about what are you going to do when you’re,
when you lead people. If you’re in a class when this happens or you’re with students,
you’re walking on the street and, eh, at my school, I often walked with my students to
school, what do you do, you know, I look about, I look at my environment a little bit
differently. What kind of things can go wrong, so, yeah, it changed my perspective on
things a bit. Yeah.

And, obviously, what I would like, in, to be able to do after speaking to all these people
I’m speaking to is to try and come up with some, I guess, concrete recommendations for
how foreign nationals can be supported better in future, e, especially in terms of getting
information or communicating. Is, is there anything that strikes you that would have
helped you more?

Hmmm. What would have helped us more? I would say, eh, I’d just realised it at the
beginning of our conversation, but the emergency announcements, the loudspeakers,
having that in English is probably a good thing for the future, because there are more and
more foreigners living in Japan these days and a lot of them don’t speak Japanese and
emergency announcements, if you don’t understand, you know, the language of the
announcements, you’re pretty much, you have to rely on a transla, you have to get the
information second-hand…

Yeah.

...and even if you have someone who is fluent in English translating for you, to get
something first-hand immediately gives you a little bit more, eh, you know, I don’t want
to say comfort but, eh, you know, gives you a little bit more security...

Hmm.

...I think, so having emergency announcements, you know, like they have on the
shinkansen, you know, “The Shinkansen will be stopping.” you know, that’s standard in
the service industry, you know, more and more. [Note: he is referring her to the
professional, high-quality bilingual English-Japanese announcements that are standard on the Japanese bullet train]

Yeah.

Announcements at supermarkets and grocery stores…

Yeah.

...you know, I’ve heard that in English, em, but, yeah, emergency announcements, that might be something to look into.

Yeah, especially, obviously, one of my considerations may be typh, eh, tsunami announcements because in terms of tsunami warning, that can really be life or death, you know, if you’re told to go somewhere, to high ground or something, that can be very, very important so.

Definitely.

Yeah, I, I, I, I think in terms of concrete recommendations - I’m sure they’re looking into it, I’m sure they’re looking into it - but just in case, I could make some sort of recommendation and that would be something. Also, what I’m interested in is, you talked about how, you know, in a disaster situation, the person translating is also often a person suffering.

Yes. Uhum.

I want to think of ways that that could be eased but I don’t know how.

Uhum. Yeah. How can that be eased? Well, eh, one of the things about disaster is that, eh, you’re daily life is one thrown out of rhythm. Okay? You’re used to going to work every day, you’re used to getting a train. Every part of your routine is going to be thrown out of rhythm and our routine is really where we get a lot of our security from…

Uhum.

...you know, it’s the same principle if you don’t, you know, if you miss work for too long, you, kind of, feel like something’s off because our activity, what we do, what we focus on, gives our life structure. Our projects, you know, so during the disaster you’re thrown out of tune, you, you can’t go to work, you can’t do the things you normally do, so, em, in a lot of ways, your purpose or your mission is also not going to be there. You have free time, basically. So, in my experience, having something to focus on and have something to do, whether its volunteer work or, you know, translating, is, and having a sense of mission makes it easier to be here, wanting to help people. So as far as making that job easier, em, I don’t really know how it can be made easier, just, you know, taking in account that, that it, just being aware, that, that your position is one where you’re going to be hearing a lot of different, eh, attitudes and a lot of different reactions to something and, eh, just, you know, keep a strong footing and I, I don’t know, but I’m interested in that, too.

Yeah, because I think even the, you know, I, I’m obviously looking at things from a translation perspective but its not just translating, it’s counselling and support and advisor and so many different roles wrapped into one…

Uhum.
...that it's a lot of different skills that people are using in those situations.

I know.

It's, it's tough to, kind of, unpick [laughter].

Mmm, yeah.

The o, the, kind of, this is really almost the, the last question but I think it seemed from your, your experience that you were very integrated into different communities...

Uhum.

...you were part of the school's community, working in various schools, you were part of your local neighbourhood community with people asking you to, you know, stay at the refuge centre, you were part of your, I guess, friendship...

Yes.

...community as well. Have you any advice for foreign people who come to Japan em, kind of, just off the boat, how do they integrate into the communities?

Well, I've always told people that if you want to, em, make friends with Japanese people or you want to, eh, be a part of things, okay, even if you speak Japanese, you know, that's good to speak Japanese but, eh, there's only so far that humans can go on a level of language, even if you speak Japanese perfectly, you need to get involved in activities, and that's the way that I met my friends in Japan, became close to people is by doing something. Playing soccer, you know, while I was in Aomori. I had some good friends in Aomori who I would go surfing with in the morning. They became my best friends who called me after the earthquake, you know, every day, “What can we send you? Are you really okay?” You know, eh, but getting involved in action, doing something, finding an activity that you can do with Japanese people, joining a club or something. Em, you know, getting involved in a club or activity is a really good way to be integrated into a network and the closer you get to people, you know, the more the, the concern they'll show for you. I think that’s em, you know, that helped me a lot, knowing that my friends in Aomori were, you know, even when they heard that I was okay, they’d call and say, “Daijobu? Are you okay? What can we send you?” “Oh, I’m, I’m okay, don’t send me anything.” “Oh,” you know, “we’ll drive a stove down.”

[Laughter]

And, “I don’t know how, I don’t need a stove. I’m warm enough,” you know…

[Laughter]

...but, yeah, my Japanese friends were really good. It was really good.

Yeah. I think that’s, that’s clearly one of the important learning points for a lot of people that I’ve, eh, spoken to is, in these tough circumstances, you do maybe, I mean, you always value your friendships, but maybe you see them more clearly or in a different light or, or something after, after this kind of thing. That’s really pretty much it except for just this last one here, em, I’m afraid that by asking people to recall the events that I’m going to cause more stress for the people I speak to, so I just want to check that I haven’t...
caused you terrible stress remembering these things. [Note: I pass the participant the Likert Scale for stress to mark]

You know, there always is a little bit of stress involved [laughter].

Yeah, but please answer as honestly as you, as you want.

I’d say, I’d say around 2 point 5.

Okay [laughter].

We’ll give it a two.

Okay [laughter]. You, you were very generous. It’s, it’s really...

I don’t know, somewhere between.

Yeah, it’s really just because I, I, sometimes, some of the people I’ve spoke to have mentioned how they’ve never talked about these things.

There’s things that I, still parts that, I don’t talk about everything. Yeah, there were some times that, em, probably, em, don’t want to recall, I mean, they’re there, but, eh, yeah, there’s something, there’s just, I mean, one day I got really stressed out and being, eh, I was 29 at the time, just, it’s, it's, it was, yeah, talking to my parents on the phone, just trying to figure out what I was going to do, and just, I guess I was just thinking too much or worried too much, I don’t know, there, you have got to, I, I, got my head back, you know, but.

Yeah. This question was very important to me because I didn’t deal well with the stress...

Um.

...after the earthquake and I was in Tokyo. I was even less in, inconvenienced, you couldn’t even say I was inconvenienced really at all in my experience, but I found that I was okay on the day of the shaking and I was pretty much okay a couple of days after it, but definitely my mental health degraded...

Oh yeah.

...very, kind of, I guess, kind of, rapid, just scaring, scarily rapidly...

Yeah, definitely.

...and m, m, my, the reason I ask about things like community is because I didn’t feel attached to friendship networks or local, local networks. Even though I had been here a very long time, I found that living in the city it was very temporary, I would know people for six months or a year, then they’d move on.

Yeah. That’s similar to what I felt in Sendai at the time. I mean, I have a deeper connection now, but I had just moved here and it was still, sort of, unfamiliar to me, and I really felt home in Aomori. I had been there five years as an ALT, two years as a student. And, I wanted to be there, so six days, five days after the earthquake, that’s where I went, to stay with one of my best friends. Just, you, you know, you, you have got to find a place, you know, where you can find support, you know, and that’s where it was. And
that’s where I needed to be. So, I took the most indirect route to Aomori, just going
across, em, to Yamagata by bus and taking a taxi…

[Laughter]

...for, like, $150, then going to some, one of the only operating trains and going up…

[Laughter]

...staying with my friends for two days and then getting back. Em, that, this was days
after the earthquake, so, it was the next weekend after…

Yeah.

...so it was a week. But yeah, it was, em, it was a stressful time for a while.

Yeah, yeah. I think, em, for, for different people, just different people react differently. I
had a colleague who seemed extremely stressed on the day. Like, really, I was very, very
worried about him, very, very worried about him on the day, and on, maybe, the next two
or three days. But then, he seemed to, just, kind of, I don’t know, hit an upswing and he,
he dealt with it all very well. Whereas I went [laughter] the opposite…

Yeah.

...direction, but we both experienced, like, we were sitting desk by desk…

Uhum.

...so we experienced exactly the same things. I, I don’t, I, I suspect, the reason I ask this
question is I suspect it was to do with friendship networks or something like that...

Yeah...

...he was very integrated.

...and also, em, I don’t know if you watched the news, but I found that watching the news,
of course you want to watch the news to find out what is going on and see if there are
new developments, but there is a certain point you need to distance yourself from the
news because seeing things over and over and over and over again is not good for your
mental health. It heightens the sense of disaster and urgency and even if you know you
are safe, you know that you are in a safe place, it is not good. And I think that’s one of the
things that, that it, kind of, affected me negatively, was the fact that I watched the news
too much, you know, just glued to it. And I’m sure that, you know, all the shelters and
places, the people were constantly watching the news but, you know, it, it can be
unhealthy, too, you know. So you have to watch the news, whether it’s from abroad or
from Japan, you have to realize that you, you, kind of, have to take a step back from that
and, and, and function, you know. Instead of just being in crisis mode. Em, you know, I
say this as someone who is, I’m not, I’m not a victim of the disaster, someone who was
just in the city, you know, my four friends and my students, and that’s, I, kind of, feel
really self-centered and, eh, ina, unappreciative of, I don’t want to talk about things like
this, you know, because it was, for me, comparatively, like, it was nothing compared to
what other people went through. But still, it’s a real reaction that I had.

Yeah, yeah, I think everybody’s experience is valid. That’s my, that’s my view on it.
Em, yeah, guilt, you know. There’s some guilt, too. Guilt for being here and, eh, you know, knowing that people, you know, have gone through the worst. There’s a lot of different feelings that, that come along with the earthquake, you know. {redacted}

*After the disaster, some foreign people were criticised in the media, and.*

Yeah, they called them fly-jin… [Note: fly-jin is a derogatory play on the Japanese word for foreigner]

Yeah.

...not gaijin, fly-jin. Fly away.

*Did, did that?*

Ehm, yeah, there was some criticism. I remember, em, being introduced by Japanese people and they said, “He stayed here during the earthquake.” You know, they were like, “That’s his saving grace,” or whatever, eh, I don’t, I don’t know to that, but that was one of the things that people commented on like, “You stayed here during this time and your country said,” you know, “come home.” Eh, criticized? Maybe, I don’t know, yeah. I know that some people, eh, here, teachers here did go home. But they came back. Yeah, a lot of people were criticized. There was the term fly-jin, you know, you know, I realized that, eh, news, I think most of the people were concerned about the, the safety of Fukushima and all. There was, embedded in the news is culture, right? How much information do you give? What purpose do you give people news? Is it for entertainment purposes? Is it to keep them safe? Is it to keep them, eh, is it really to give them information to base their decisions on or is it to keep them calm, you know? So, a lot of the Japanese news was to not give people too much information, you know. And the foreign press was really in on it, sort of, as, eh, you know, “This massive thing has happened, there’s a meltdown,” and, em, you know, it’s just the different perspectives that the cultures take on, em, on how much information they give.

Yeah.

Do you understand what I mean?

*Oh, absolutely.*

I don’t know if it’s so well-stated…

*No, absolutely…*

...but it’s the way I feel deeply, you know.

...absolutely understand and, to be honest, you’re not the only person who has talked about it. Em, a lot of people who have talked to me have mentioned how they found this, kind of, disconnect between what they were seeing on, let’s say, NHK news, and what they were seeing on, let’s say, CNN news or some other, it, it didn’t relate to, neither one related to their experience. Em, and probably for just those reasons you were talking about, you know, em, the CNN was maybe framed for an audience at home in the States to get viewers…

Uhuh.

...then the NHK one was framed for, let’s say, Ja, Japanese domestic audience…
Uhuh.
...to, perhaps, like you said, to keep people calm or not to give too much information. Then the foreign people over here in Japan didn’t fit exactly either of those frames.

Got your foot in both streams, don’t you, you know, when you’re in here and the situation, you’re experiencing something, and someone is telling you that it’s not safe to be in Sendai, you know, evacuate. Yet you’re s, right here and your immediate experience is telling you, “Yes, it, I’m, I’m fine here.” And then you have people that love you from abroad saying, “Leave, because it’s like this in Sendai.” And you say, “No, it’s not.” And you’re just, you’re being pulled in two different directions and just being in that situation yourself is, you’re prone to, to lots of stress.

Uhuh, uhuh. I do, I understand what you mean about the, I don’t want to say, not badge of honour, kind of thing, but I was also, I, I experienced some of that feeling with my company about because me and my other non-Japanese colleagues didn’t go home, it was mentioned a lot, and not necessarily, we weren’t introduced as the people who didn’t go home, but it was definitely mentioned as a, kind of, a negative comparison to other people who did go home. But I, I can understand why people went home. A lot of the people who went home had children or families or different considerations or, just, they just had a different view on things...

Yeah.
...but, eh, the, I think the fly-jin thing is going to be something I will talk a little bit in my thesis because it is part of what was swirling around at the time...

Right.
...and afterwards, you know. And still a little bit, I think. I don’t think it’s completely out of the, sort of, the national media or whatever.

Uhuh.
What’s it? Two, two, two-and-a-half years later.

Right. [redacted]

And just what we were saying about when you might be the person who is able to translate, but you are also suffering yourself.

Yeah. And you have the, the responsibility, all the teachers here, em, they stayed at school and they had to contact, em, they, they had to wait until all the, eh, the parents came to get their children (indistinct) because that was my job, in an elementary school, and they had to wait until they came to the school so, eh, you know, you’re responsible for other people and typically ALTs, you know, were here to work but (indistinct) we were, kind of, were, kind of, guest status, beyond the normal, I mean, it’s, it’s part of the, the workplace, you know. ALTs are, they are, but it’s something that’s added on to normal duties, having to take care of this person, having to work with this foreigner, you know, em, so I can see how.

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I, I’ve always thought that, you know, being a teacher especially of young, younger children is an extremely responsible role and you have huge responsibilities, but I was very interested when you said how now, maybe having
experienced the disaster, you are even more aware of, like you said, your environment. What would you do? Those kind of things.

Definitely, yeah, after the disaster, it makes you think, do you want to be someone who is, who has to be taken care of when you don’t have anything that’s, like, physically de, do, debilitating or do you want to be someone who takes care of other people? For me, it’s the latter, you know, you want to be be someone who can go to support people. And, you know, I think I was. I gave support to the extent that I could. A, after the immediate disaster was over I volunteered and helped my friends and we made a team of ALTs and we went out and helped them dig the mud from the house, but, yeah, it’s one thing that I learned is how to help people rather than be helped, you know.

Yeah. That’s pretty huge [laughter].

[Laughter] But let’s see if I can do that [laughter].

[Laughter] Yeah, and I mean, that’s, I guess, that’s one of the things about living in Japan, I mean, it’s never really a question of if there’s going to be another, kind of a, disaster, it’s always when, really, I mean, not necessarily of that magnitude, but, you know, Japan is fairly regularly hit by different sorts of...

Uuhh.

...natural disasters, so.

Yeah, not if but when. {redacted}

And just getting back to Japanese television.

That’s the one device in your room that you wanted to destroy after the earthquake.

[Laughter] You see, this is, this is the thing, I mean, when is, you know, when is information useful and when does it become a problem.

I stopped watching TV.

Completely?

I turned my TV on last week for the first time in months, months. It’s just, I don’t, I don’t really rely on, for any news information, I don’t, I listen to radio, but I just don’t watch the TV any more and I didn’t after the earthquake after a certain point. I mean, I would watch the TV when there was an earthquake to find out magnitude, you know…

Yeah.

...where was the earthquake…

Yeah.

...and then after that I’d turn it off. That’s what I used the TV for.

And was that because you just had too much of the repeating cycle or?

It could be, it could be. I think that I, somewhere in trying to figure my own little interpretation of this whole earthquake, nuclear meltdown, all this stuff, I just, I, it was
mind-boggling, just trying to get perspective on a situation where you didn’t have all the
information, em, you know and trying to figure out what really happened. More
interested, you know, in, sort of, what people are doing, and how they’re getting along
rather than just, yeah, well, I don’t watch so much TV anymore. That might be an
indication of something. It might be a question to ask other people, too: do you still watch
Japanese television?

Absolutely, yeah, I’m going to now [laughter] for, for that very reason. Yeah, it’s, it’s
fascinating how, you know, as we said, two-and-a-half years later, there is, there are
some long term effects to the way you behave. I mean, that’s, that’s a change in your
behaviour that, that resulted from the disaster. [redacted] This is something that very,
very strongly came across. One person said that they, they, before the disaster, they
didn’t watch TV...

Uuhh.

...so they just didn’t like the TV...

Uuhh.

...and they listened to the radio and found that it was just repeating the names of the
people that had passed away.

I think it was the names of the people that, eh, were missing...

Ah, okay.

...which in most cases corresponded to people that passed away, but people that, names of
people they were looking for, unaccounted for.

Do you know why they repeat those names like that?

Because, eh, eh, if you were alive, and you heard that, you could report to people and,
and, em, you know, say that, that, “You don’t have to look. I’m here, alive.” It was not
repeating the people’s names that had passed away but repeating, saying their names
because if that person heard the broadcast, they would know that people were looking for
them, you know. So that there was also, em, a registry that, that all the cell phone
companies. Did you hear, did you heard about that?

I think so, yeah, you could say you were safe...

Right.

...or say you were looking for someone or something.

There was som, something set up on, online to find people. I don’t know what exactly.

Yeah, there was a Google Person Finder...

Google Person Finder, that’s the one.

...yeah. Yeah. So the radio one was the same idea. I, I’m, I’m just wondering if I was in a
disaster and I heard just this list of names, I wonder if that would, would that be, would I
listen to radio then. Di, eh, did you use the radio at all as a way of?
Didn’t, no. Didn’t use the radio once. I don’t think I had a radio.

[Laughter]

But I do now!

[Laughter]

The Centre for International Relations, they, they gave us all a, em, handheld crank radio with a, eh, USB connector and a power adapter for phones so that you could use it during an earthquake.

Oh, wow, that’s a good idea. That’s a really, really good idea.

Yeah.

To have that in a pack or something at home is, like, a really good idea. Especially because I know, like, you mentioned about recharging your phone in your car. A lot of people did that but then the gas ran out.

Right [laughter].

[Laughter] so, like. {redacted} One thing I’ve been thinking about as I’ve been doing this is for things like Facebook, I can see how it’s really useful as a communication and keeping in touch with people in your networks. What I’m not so convinced by yet is using Facebook as a way to gather information. Did, I know you used it as a way to keep in touch, but did you use it as a way for getting information?

Some people did. Some people did. Em, post store openings…

Okay.

…gathering information? I think for gathering interpersonal information and getting to know how someone was doing, you know.

Ah, okay, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

That’s why we were encouraged to put pictures of us, you know, eating whatever we were eating…

[Laughter]

…cucumbers dipped in miso sauce and smiling to friends to, you know, to let, because it shows, it gives information but, sort of, a different aspect, you know, to what that person is experiencing...

Yeah.

…because people post photos of what they are doing so, you know, it’s, it’s a different type of information.


Maybe even by looking at someone’s Facebook page, not only do you know that they’re safe but also, kind of, get, get an idea of that they’re doing, you know?
Yeah.

What they’re experiencing mentally. If they’re laughing about it or if they’re crying about it, basically, you know.

Which is important to know...

Yeah.

...I mean, it’s absolutely, that’s vital information in other ways as important as where the water is or, or, or those things as well. [redacted] Was there ever any sense of feeling trapped?

Oh, yeah. Especially because, you know, all the, em, transportation to the city was shut down. Where, how do you, eh, how do you leave Sendai? Obviously you can’t go by airport. Airport is covered in mud and American military are, they’re digging it out.

Trains? No way. Shinkansen? No way, not for ages, too many, too much damage on the tracks [Note: the Shinkansen is the Japanese system of superfast bullet trains] Cars? Well, you can’t use the highway because it’s restricted to, eh, volun, eh, you know, official groups. Eh, buses? They were best, about the only way you could leave Sendai if you wanted to. Or walk. Yeah, it was, and then, even if you had money, you couldn’t really buy things, so it was, you did feel, kind of, stuck, because all the system of distributions had shut down and you, kind of, wondered, you know, “What would happen if one more thing went wrong?” You know, I’ll tell you a funny story that happened. Em, I got, kind of, one day I was like, “Okay, well, you know, I’m stressed out.” I somehow got the idea that it would be good to, to get money out of the bank, just in case, you know, I needed money. So I went to my post office account, the ATMs were working, this was probably the Wednesday after the earthquake, five days afterwards. And I said, “Okay, the ATMs are working again. I’ll get my money out.” So, get like $2,000, all the money I have.

$2,000 out of the post office account I was like, “Yeah, okay, okay, I’m set.” Then, I turned around and the convenience store, the only thing that I could buy were two little jars of imitation peanut butter. So I’ve got $2,000 but what is $2,000 get me? One hundred yen peanut butter, two jars of it...

[Laughter]

...that eventually got me sick...

[Laughter]

...so, you know, [laughter] money, even if you have money, it doesn't get you anywhere.

Oh, the thing is, you have to be able to laugh at that stage.

That is the point where it was a turn for me, because I was able to laugh at the ridiculousness of my own behaviour and just, like, you know, just take it, you know, you want to get money, you can’t don’t anything with it.

Can’t do anything [laughter]. Well, listen, thank you so, so, so much for spending so much time answering my questions, I really, really appreciate it.

No problem. {redacted}
The following is my recollection of some conversation that took place with the participant just after I had switched off the audio recorder and just before we parted.

The participant mentioned that reaction to a disaster seems culturally bound to him based on his experience. He said the Japanese colleagues of his went back to work after the disaster. He couldn't go because he couldn't get to his base school. Not going to work would have been considered paid vacation so he contacted the board of education and arranged to volunteer with an institution of the Sendai government as a way of working. For Japanese people, going to work (almost continuing on as normal, to a certain extent even after a massive disaster) seems to be a way of coping.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/9/26 Interview with Participant 15

Researcher: So basically then just to start...

Participant: Yes.

...if you can tell me what happened to you on, in the 2011 Disaster.

In 2011, so, ehm actually I was waiting for, for a bus, like, in the bus station during, like, I mean before the earthquake, so, and suddenly the earthquake, like, is starting. Ehm, at the beginning, I thought, like, it’s not, I mean, like, not very big, like, earthquake, so, like, it stop and everything will be like normal after that. But the earthquake, like, continued for quite long time. Maybe, eh, ten minutes or even more than that. So it’s, it was quite long time and suddenly the electricity, like, stopped and, yeah, and, so, after that I started to feel the earthquake is like a disaster. Eh, the bus came, like, in time [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and I went back to my, like, laboratory so met, I met my professor and, eh, like, everybody there, they, they told me that I should go to shelter. I not come to university again because the situation is not, like, good. At that time it’s, like, quite dangerous to come to the university to the laboratory. So, I went to a shelter, like, in {a village in Miyagi}, it’s like very close to the village where I live, and, eh, so at that time, no electricity and also the network for, like, mobile phone was, like, not connected, I mean, was stopped, so I couldn’t contact anyone, like, to ask my other friends, like, about are you okay or not or, ehm, so after that so what happened? Yeah, I stayed like in shelter for maybe two-to-three days like till the electricity come and then after that I went to my home. After that, eh, like the problem I faced during my stay in the shelter is that the main language for communication was Japanese language, and because I don’t know, like, Japanese very well, so it was, like, a problem for me. I didn’t know, like, what is going on, what, what’s happening. And, eh, after, like, one day, they distributed, like, news, eh, paper with letters, newspapers, and, eh, of course it was in Japanese. I could su, I could see the, the, the pictures that, like, there tsunami and there is, like, a problem in Fukushima, there is, like, explosion in the reactor or something like that, but I couldn’t understand it just, like, from the pictures. And there is no Internet, you know, like, at that time. So it was a problem at that time. Eh, and, my family called me from Sudan, like, “Are you okay?” I said, “Yes, I’m very fine. No problem.” They said, “But there is tsunami.” I said, “Tsunami? Where is it. There is no tsunami in the road.” They said, “No. There is tsunami. We, we, we, like, we are seeing, seeing now in, like, in news, there is tsunami and everything is destroyed and so on, and so on, and so on, and it is in Sendai.” I said, “No,”...

[Laughter]

...[laughter] “everything is very stable and there is no problem at all.” But after, like, the electricity come, the electricity came and, eh, I searched, like, news and everything, I saw that yes, there was a tsunami and that, like, everything was, like, destroyed in, in the coast, coastal area, but, eh, just, like, the centre of Sendai is okay. I mean, like, the Sendai City itself was not, like, affected. I mean, like, the effect, the effect was not, like, very big, but only, like, the coastal region was completely destroyed. Ehm, so after that, ehm, what happened after that? Yes, after that, like, the Embassy of Sudan in Tokyo called me
and asked me, “What will you do? Will you go back to Sudan or will you stay?” I said, “I want to stay.” “But if the situation is, like, eh, worse, worse and, like, more and more maybe I will go back to Sudan,” I said. So, the situation was, was okay. There is, like, eh, like, lacking food and, like, the stuffs. When you go to the convenience store you can’t, like, buy what you need, but the life was going well. The, the, the last only one problem which is, eh, Fukushima, like, nuclear reactor, and the level of radiation was, like, increasing, and so on, and so on, and so on. So after maybe three weeks after the earthquake, I decided to go back to my country to Sudan because, first, the radiation level was high and also because, like, the, the, the laboratory was, like, how to say, there is no, there was no work in the laboratory. It was like, most of the machines were destroyed, and so on, and so on, and so on. So I decided to go back to my home for one month and after that I came back again. Eh, the problem I faced during this time is that there was, like, a lack of information. First, because of languages, because my Japanese language is, was not good to understand what was going on and, second, because, eh, even Japanese people didn’t know, like, very well what was going on at that time. So this is what happened.

It’s an extremely interesting experience. I would like to ask you some more, eh, questions about some of the details.

Yes.

Ehm, to go back to the day of the earthquake, you decided to go to the evacuation centre, how did you find the evacuation centre? How did you know that information?

Ehm, how did I know it? Actually just by, like, seeing, like, most of, most of people were, like, going and, like, how to say, carrying their items...

[Laughter]

...and so on, and so, so I followed them [laughter]...

[Laughter] Okay.

...and [laughter].

It seems basic, but it’s a very useful hint [laughter]...

Yes [laughter].

...it’s a very useful hint for, for people because, obviously, you know, language and communication is difficult, but if you just follow the other people, maybe that’s a very good piece of advice.

Yes, yes, yes. This is what happened.

Ehm, also, I’m asking you to remember now two years ago, can you remember now, when the bus, at the bus station and the earthquake struck, can you remember any announcements or, you know, there’s a PA system or there’s some, like, speaker system in Japan, can you remember any?

No, no, there was no, any announcement at that time, no.

Nothing.
No, at all. Yeah, at all. No. Even inside the bus. No, no, no announcement. Yes.

So even in Japanese, even in any, there was no?

Yes, yes, yes, yes. And even, like, in mobile phones, we didn’t receive any, like, notification, yes, at that time.

Then, so, you were in the evacuation centre...

Yes.

...and, of course, the language of the evacuation centre was Japanese...

Yes.

...so they distributed some newspapers...

Yes.

...was there any other information given to you, or were there any, I don’t know, English interpreters or anything? Volunteers or anything like that?

Eh, yeah, honestly, honestly, sometimes yes. Like, some volunteer, English-speaking volunteer like Japanese people they tried to translate what, what is going on, but not all time, just, like, sometimes.

Of course.

Um.

And tho, those volunteers, were they, I don’t know, other people inside the centre or did they come from another place?

No, no, other people inside the centre, yeah, yes.

So they were just...

Yes

...in the same situation [laughter].

Yes, yes, same situation, yes.

Yeah, it’s it’s one of the things which, eh, is a big problem for any country but, of course, for Japan the translators are often also suffering.

Yes.

They, so they have a lot of stress and a lot of pressure. Then, so your family was able to telephone you from Sudan.

Yes, but, how to say, like, the earthquake happened at maybe 2 o’clock, 2pm or 2.40pm…

Yeah, yeah.
...yes. And they were trying to call me, maybe, since, maybe, 3pm and they succeeded, maybe, around 12am, like, so it’s, like, after quite a long time …

A long time.

...yes, quite a long time.

A day...

Uuhh.

...a whole day basically.

Yes, yes.

And how did your family know the information?

Eh, from the news.

From the news.

Yes, news channels.

T,T, TV news or radio news?

TV, TV, TV, yes, yes, yes.

Okay, so already the information about the tsunami and...

Yes

...Fukushima was, this is a very interesting point to me that people in, in Sudan had more information than you in Sendai [laughter].

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, because you know, like, eh, Al Jazeera Channel, like, it’s, like, a very big channel now in the area so they, they are very fast, like, they are very fast.

Yeah.

So they even, like, how you say, like, video recorded the tsunami and like everything and, and I don’t know who sent, who sent it, the, the information at that time.

Yeah. But possibly it was some people just with the mobile phone, or?

The network, well, the network was very weak at that time so…

Of course, yeah, yeah.

...I don’t know how [laughter].

[Laughter] How did they? Yeah. Although, one thing I do know is that different places had different, eh, access, eh…

Ah.
...some, I think some places were very, very bad, some places had, you know, a little access or temporary, temporary access. So you were in the evacuation centre for about two or three days until the electricity came back, you said.

Yes, maybe three days, two nights.

Three days, two nights. So, when the electricity came back, how about your communication and your information gathering? Did it change?

Yes, a lot. Because now I, I could use, like, the Internet at that time, so I could communicate more with my friends, like, in, inside Japan and also outside.

What tools, em, did you use to communicate? Email or...

Emails, yes...

...Skype or?

...emails and, like, Facebook.

Facebook.

At that time, yes. Email and Facebook. Yeah.

Can you tell me why?

Used Facebook?

Why you used Facebook or emails or?

Ehm, actually, I, I don’t know why, why I used, like, Facebook. Facebook, because, like, I use it, like, always maybe. So that’s why I used it at that time. And, eh, emails also because I could ask, like, about many people by sending, like, the same email. Like, “How are you? Are you okay?” And so on, and so on, and so on. That’s why I send it at that time.

Yeah, yeah. You, you make a very interesting point there, eh, when people study about disasters, they say that people use the technology they are already comfortable with.

Ahhh. Ah.

So you used Facebook...

Facebook.

...in your daily life...

Yes.

...so you used Facebook...

Yes, yes, yes

...afterwards
Yes, yes, yes…

*It’s a very interesting point.*

...And even, even I used it, like, in the same day the disaster because the, the, the network was very weak but the Internet connection was not, like, so weak at that time. So you can use Facebook even at the time of the disaster. But it was, like, how to say, it was a little difficult.

*Okay.*

Maybe even I can show it to you. [Note: he was suggesting to show me his Facebook page from that period. He started going through the Facebook application on his phone but I kept asking questions because I was afraid I would lose all my interview time in this search for old Facebook data.]

*Yeah, that would be great if you could. So it means actually on March 11th you were able to put a Facebook…* 

Yes, yes.

*...entry.*

Yes.

*Oh, that’s very important.*

Yeah.

*And when you use Facebook do you use it in Arabic? Do you use it in English? Do you use it in Japanese? What, what?* 

Eh, actually, all of them but, like, mostly in Arabic and, eh, sometimes in, in English or Japanese...

*I see.*

...sometimes. But mostly in Arabic, because like it’s my native lang, language…

*Yeah.*

and it is easier for me to [laughter].

*Yeah, of course, of course. [Note: there was a pause as he was still trying to find the relevant Facebook entries on his phone, so I continued with some questioning.] Did you use any other social media?*

Maybe no, could be not. Yeah, just, like, eh, eh, Facebook or emails.

*Emails.*

Yes.

*Uhum.*
It’s very difficult, maybe.

Okay.

I can’t, I’ll show it to you later

Oh that would be great. Eh, also, em, I’m very interested in when you were using the Internet how did you get information? So, I know that you could use Facebook and email to communicate with important people. How did you gather information...

Facebook...

...about what was happening?

...in Facebook. Because, like, like, most people, like, in Japan or outside they write, like, some information about what is going, what is happening. Even before the electricity come, before the electricity came, they, they put or they uploaded some information that there are, like, some places in Sendai in which there is electricity, so even you can go there and charge your mobile phone and so on, and so on, and so on, and so on. So all this through, through Facebook.

And these were your, your friends or...

Yes...

...colleagues or?

...my friends.

Ah.

Friends, yes, yes, yes.

So it was kind of a network.

Yes, yes.

Were these friends, eh, Japanese or?

They were Japanese, yes, yes, yes. Yes, they were Japanese but they sent, like, the information in English at that time. They were very kind, at that time [laughter].

Yeah, this is a very important point, eh...

Yes.

...because under stress it is difficult to, it is difficult to, eh, understand.

Yes. [Note: he starts searching his phone again for the history of his interactions on Facebook.] I don’t know how, how, to search, like, for the history, but I send you.

A, A, afterwards, yeah, if you can. That would be great. Eh, also, did you use any news media?
News media?

Did you...

What do you, like, TV or?

...TV or

Yes, yes, yes. I kept it on. I couldn’t understand, like, 100% what is go, what is happening, but I kept it on so that if there is, like, how to say, alert or something like that, I could know, maybe.

Okay, so that was the TV. Did you use any other, eh, online newspapers or radio or any other tools?

Yes, online, online newspaper. Yes. I used, eh, like, eh, Japan Today, and there is a website, I think, called Kyodo, or something like that. Kyodo News also was very good at that time.

It’s a very fa, yeah, it’s a very famous, eh, news, news agency, right?

Yes.

Kyodo.

Yes, yes, yes

And that wa, Japan Today, I think, is in English.

Yes, in English.

And Kyodo?

Also in English.

Also in English.

Yes, also in English.

Did you also use Al Jazeera?

Al Jazeera. Yes. Also I used it. Yes.

Eh, watching TV online, eh, or using just the website?

Just the website at that time. At that time, just, like the website.

So you were gathering information from [laughter]

[Laughter] From everywhere [laughter] to survive! [laughter]

For you, which was the most useful way to get information?

Maybe Facebook. Yes. Facebook.
Can you say why?

Ehm, how to say, because, like, eh, for news, like, news, like, online news, like, websites, I could read information about what is going on, but it is not, like, in time. Maybe what yesterday happened or what, like, eh, maybe, twelve hours ago happened, or something like that. But on Facebook I could read what is going on now so it was more, like, useful.

That’s a really interesting point. Actually, I think, so I told you, you are person number fif, eh, fifteen...

Yes.

...I think you are the first person to say this point but it’s very true.

Ah, I see.

It’s on time information, right? Whereas newspapers or so on, it’s information that is already a little bit out of date.

Yes, yes.

That’s very interesting. That’s very, very interesting. I’m also very interested in your embassy’s contact.

Yes.

So you said, I think, they gave you a call.

Yes.

This was just on, to your mobile phone?

Yes.

And it was about one, did you say one week after or? I forget.

Eh, they called me like one day…

Ah.

...one day after. Eh, but they continued to contact me, like, every one day or every one or two days.

Wow.

Yes.

By mobile phone call.

By mobile phone, yes. Just, just because, like, I am the only Sudanese {in a certain area}...

[Laughter]
...so, [laughter] if they did, like, anything to me, so they, they, like, say in the newspaper that they evacuated the only Sudanese, not the only Sudanese, but they, they evacuated all Sudanese in [in a certain area] or so on, and so on [laughter].

[Laughter]

[laughter] That’s, like, earned credit to them.

You felt like you were a little bit of a PR, eh, opportunity [laughter].

Maybe, yes [laughter].

[Laughter] But that’s a very interesting point. But, you know, can I ask, did you register with your univer, or with your embassy when you arrived in Japan?

No.

How did they find you?

Actually, I don’t know exactly, but I think they, they asked one of my friends, like, to, to give me, to give them, like, the, my contact, like, information. And actually, not only Sudanese university [Note: he means embassy here but my earlier mistake probably caused this slip because he self-corrects in a moment] but also the, maybe Gatari, I don’t know how to say, like, is it Qatari or Gatari, maybe Gatari university, Gatari Embassy also contacted me [Note: he was unsure of how to pronounce Qatari in English and went with a voiced-consonant pronunciation] .

Ah.

And I, also, I didn’t know how they get my telephone number so [laughter].

[Laughter]

I think from one of my friends.

Right, right. And so these would have been your friends in Japan in other places?

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Eh, your friends were located outside Tohoku area or [Note: north-east part of Honshu Island where earthquake was centred]?

Outside, yeah, yeah. {redacted}

I got it...

Yeah...

...I got it, I got it.

...lots of them in the, like, west side of Japan, like…

Uhum.

…western side, maybe Osaka, Kyoto and this area.
And the information that you received from your embassy, was it useful for you?

No. It was not. It was not. Because, like, I had more information than them...

[Laughter]

...at that time [laughter]. So they were, like, asking, “Are you okay?” and “Is the situation okay now?” or “Will you stay or go back?” “Is the level of radiation is okay now, or not?” So they were just, like, asking but not, eh, providing information.

So you were helping them [laughter]?

Maybe [laughter].

Eh, no, but, honestly, eh, I can tell you that one other person I spoke to...

Yes.

...had the same situation. Eh, they were also [redacted] in Miyagi Prefecture and they said they were also giving information to their embassy. It was very difficult, I think, for the embassy staff to know. Uhm, you also raised an interesting point, ehm...

Yes?

...I know you, you’re a scientist...

Yes.

...right?

Yes.

Is your science based on radiation expertise?

Actually, it’s a bit fa, a bit far from that. Yes, it’s, it is different, it’s different. It’s, like, kind of, genetics and so on, so.

Ah, so it’s quite, that’s quite different.

Yes.

How did you understand about the radiation story?

Uhm, maybe because, like, eh, how to say, I, like, knew the, knew that it’s, it’s, like, how to say, the, dangerous for my, for my health or, so I decided to read about it on the Internet. And even I tried to compare between, like, what's ha, what’s happened in, eh, in, eh, Fukushima and, eh, what happened in, eh, the nuclear reactor in Ukraine...

Ah, Chernobyl.

Chernobyl, yes, Chernobyl. And, eh, the basic level of radiation and what we are, like, how to say, allowed to expose to, and what’s the limit. So I started to read, like, all this information at that time. Now maybe I forgot it but...
...at that time, yes.

Can you remember where, where you found that information, what language that information was in?

Ehm, the language, like, were both, English and Japanese. The website, for, for the level of radiation [Note: he then started checking his phone browser history to find the website but to no avail] yeah, actually it’s difficult...

Of course, of course, yeah.

...it’s difficult.

Ehm, Just by chance if you, if you did remember, eh, I just wanted to ask.

Okay maybe I can send it to you by, by email.

Oh, that would be great. [Note: he did send the website URL to me after the interview and it is a website that was hosted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan http://eq.wide.ad.jp/index_en.html though it appears to now have been taken down]

Yeah, yeah, because even, like, I, I, keep, I kept it, like, in my Favourite List and

Ahhh.

...I could go back.

Why did you keep it in your Favourite List [laughter]?

[Laughter] Like, so that I can, how to say, I, eh, can know, like, the level of radiation, like, on time, every day. Every day I started to check, to check, to check.

I understand. That brings me to another point, eh, I wanted to ask you about...

Yes.

...before March 11th...

Yes.

...did you feel prepared for an earthquake or a disaster.

Before, no. No. Not [laughter]. Like, ehm, like, I knew that, like, Japan is, eh, how to say, like, a earthquake-prone countries and pro, prone country and so on, and so on, and so, but I didn’t prepare anything for this. Like, even, like, the evacuation pack and so, and passport, and all this stuff. I didn’t do anything for that and food and, yeah. Didn’t prepare anything.

And after March 11th, have you changed your behaviour?

A little.
Yeah [laughter] a little. Just now, like, I know where is my passport [laughter]...

Okay [laughter].

...and, [laughter] and, eh, yeah, and, eh, maybe I, I’m storing, like, em, some, like, kind of food and so on, and so on, and so on. That’s all, I think.

Okay, uhum.

But also, like, eh, I, I still don’t have, like, evacuation bag.

[Laughter]

I know it’s dangerous but [laughter].

I think many, many people living in Japan have no [laughter] evacuation bag. Eh, I’m also interested to know, eh, for you, did you receive much contact from Sendai Local Government or local authorities?

Ehm, uh, eh, no. But I received, like, a contact from Sendai International Centre. I think this is governmental…

Uhum.

...so, they were asking also about me and about, like, other foreign people I know so.

When did that contact come, can you remember?

Maybe two or three days after the, the earthquake.

So you would have been in the evacuation centre still...

Yes, yes. At that time, yes.

Um, did, did they give you a telephone call or?

Telephone call.

Ah, telephone call.

Yes.

Yeah, yeah. How about from your university? Did they give you some contact or support or?

Eh, like, just after the earthquake or after, for example, one month or two months after that?

Whichever.

Eh, eh, like, during the first days, like, only from my professor who was, like, always, like, asking about my health and what, where I am and so on, and so on, and so.
But from the university, no. I didn’t receive any, like, contact. I received it just maybe after, maybe, around one month when I go back to my country. So they, they were, like, contacting me and, eh, they were telling me, like, the situation in Sendai now...

Uhum.

...and the level of radiation, and so on, and so on. Is it dangerous or not. And, eh, are like laboratories working now or not, and so on. And even they, they suggested to provide, like, someone to, like, clean and check my room to find if there is, like, cracks and so on, and so on.

Wow.

Yes, yes.

It’s a good...

Yes.

...it’s good to know.

Yes.

Ehm, I also, kind of, this is linked to what you just said, for you, when did the disaster finish if, if, if it’s finished?

[Laughter] Uhm, should I consider the Fukushima or no?

Whatever you want to consider.

[Laughter]

I mean, maybe if you want to divide up or whatever, whatever you feel.

Yeah, yes. If I consider Fukushima, I think it is not finished still now because now the situation is not under control in Fukushima. But if I didn’t consider that, I think, maybe, it is finished after just, maybe, one week after it. Yes. Because after just one week, everything, like, returned to the normal. That’s, normal, like, way. Ah, sorry, maybe one month, after one month, after one month. Not one week.

So when you say normal, what, what, what does normal mean in, in this case for you?

Eh, yes. Normal, I mean, em, you could find, like, for example, what you want to buy, for example, food and all these stuff without staying in line for very long time and so on, and so on, and so on. And, eh, also you could, eh, like meet your friend, contact anyone at any time.

I see, I see. But if you consider Fukushima?

Fukushima, no till now. Yeah, no. Because it’s not under control, I think. And, eh, even, like, you know, like, from the news there is still, there is, like, leak for the, for the, like, radiated water, contaminate, like, radiation, contaminated water…

Yeah.
...to the ocean and it is a bit dangerous.

Yeah

Um, um. Like, till now, I, I even, like, eh, when I buy anything I try to, like, read it. If it’s from Fukushima or no. So it’s like [laughter] so even this one [Note: he shows me the coffee drink (like a juice box) that he has not opened and not drunk from that was given to him by the professor before the interview started.]

Yeah, I [laughter] didn’t even think to look. [laughter].

[Laughter]

So, and of course, this is all in kanji, kanji characters [Note: kanji are the Chinese characters that form part of the Japanese writing system], so it is difficult.

Yeah, only in kanji but I can read, like, eh, like, a little, very little. For example, this one is, like, from, Tokyo, maybe.

Ah, okay. Okay, So once you see?

A little better. Like, ehm, I mean, better than to be, like, from Miyagi, from Fukushima, from, like, this area.

So even though kanji are difficult, you would be able to know, okay this is...

Like…

...Fukushima, this is...

...basic kanjis, yes.

...yeah, yeah, yeah.

Basic one, yes.

And you check your food...

Yes.

...that’s very interesting....

Yes.

...that’s very, very interesting.

But especially like for, for Fukushima…

Yeah, yeah.

...it’s, like, from Fukushima, I usually don’t buy it.

I got it, I got it, I got it. Ehm, the, the final kind of topic that I talk about is community.

Community? Yes.
Ehm, a lot of NPOs or volunteer associations are recommending that foreign people...

Yes.

...need to be a part of the local community because if another disaster happens, if they’re part of the local community, it’s better.

I see.

This is, this is what they say.

Um.

Ehm, first of all, can I ask you, did you feel part of your local community at the time of the disaster?

Uhm, actually, no, no. At that time, Um, Maybe because of language barrier.

So, because you didn’t speak enough Japanese?

Yes.

I see. Did the local community make some effort or did you make some effort to, to join together?

Uhm, at that time or now?

At that time.

Actually, I don’t remember exactly. Ehm, I tired, like to communicate with some people…

Yeah.

...but, eh, it was, like, very boring Japanese and, eh, I didn’t continue for, for a long time. Just to ask someone question, receive the answer and that is all, at that time. Um.

Well, this is a very common, eh, theme with many of the people I’ve been talking to that there was maybe little contact before, before the disaster.

Yes.

How about now? Eh, two years have passed. Do you feel linked to your local community?

Eh, maybe just, like, through Facebook, just through Facebook. Em, uhmm. Because like even we have, like, some, like, you could say, like, mailing list or, like, group mail or something like that, it’s that Facebook, ehm, contain, like, Japanese people and, like, some foreign people so, like, I mean, my friend, it’s not like very big one…

Yeah.

...so we could receive, like, some information from, from it. I mean, some of information and if there is the, like, a news, for example, the leak of, in Fukushima, after the last
typhoon, they decided to, to leak the water inside the ocean, so I received, like, some information about it.

Yeah. So basically, you made your own community.

Yes, yes.

Very interesting.

Yes.

And technology like Facebook has helped you...

Yes, yes.

...to create your own community.

Yes. And even, now there are like many groups on Facebook like ‘Foreign People in Sendai’...

Uhum.

...and, eh, there’s a group called Want to Do Something, ‘Really Want to Do Something For Japan’ and this one is for, like, volun, like, volunteer foreigner who, who, who wanted to, to help, like, in volunteering work after the earthquake and tsunami. Like, to go to tsunami area and help people. Um. So, like, I joined both, like, groups and I could receive, like, some information about what is going on.

And just, eh, sorry to keep asking the same question...

It’s okay.

...but, eh, because I’m interested in language...

Yes.

...those groups, what language do they?

Eh, English, English.

Ah, English.

Yes. It’s English.

English. So there are Japanese people, there are people for all over, different countries but using English...

Yes….

...as a communication tool.

...yes, yes. For, for the group call, for that group called, eh, ‘Foreign People in Sendai’, it uses, eh, English language and maybe few Jap, like, there are few Japanese members.

Ah, okay.
Few, few. Not so many.

*I got it, I got it. That’s pretty much all the questions I have. Do, do, do you have any comment or topic or question that you would like to make about communication or language or...*

Eh.

*...translation or?*

Uhm, I think no. Just like, eh, after the earthquake I went to, like, {my} University dormitory, like, called {redacted}, like, a big kaikan or big dormitory {Note: in this case, kaikan would mean ‘hall’ but the function is probably more like a centre for international exchange. {redacted}} so I went there and asked, like, in the office about information and they gave me a lot of information. This was the second day at night.

*Ahhhh.*

Second day. I went with some of my friend, so we went to ask about, eh, the information about, like, eh, for example radiation, and this, like, happened before the electricity came.

*So, what type of information could they give you, eh?*

The, the, well, like, eh, the level of radiation, when the electricity will come to Sendai, and, eh, like, gas, when it will come to Sendai, when they will repair it.

*And this was all just face-to-face?*

Face-to-face, yes. And they tried to give us as much information as they could at that time.

*In Japanese? In?*

In English.

*In English.*

Yeah, it was in English.

*Did they give you any papers or documents or anything like that or just voice, voice communication?*

No, just voice communication. Yeah. Just voice communication.

*That’s very interesting. So that was the...*

Yes, and...

*...second, second day, before power.*

...yes, yes, and even in the first day, they offered to use, the, like, how to say, the public telephone inside the dormitory for free to call your family back. It was, like, international call, but for free. And, em, huh, I didn’t hear about this until maybe, like, the second or third day...
...at that time, I could, like, call my family by my mobile phone but, eh, they offered it on the first day.

I got it. So that’s very good support that the...

Yes.

...that the, and that dormitory, is that university-, eh...

University, yes.

...organized dormitory or is it a private business?

No, no, no. University-organized.

Organized, um, okay. It’s great, yeah, thank you for mentioning that. I think that’s a very useful, eh...

Ah, I see...

...useful topic. Well, overall, just, again, thank you so much for your experience. I’m sorry I spoke for longer [laughter]...

No, no, no.

...forty-two, forty-two minutes...

It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s okay.

...is a very long time. The, the very final question is just this question here [Note: I show him the Likert Scale to mark his stress level].

Yes.

Ehm, I don’t want to cause you more stress.

Yes [laughter].

[Laughter] So please, can you just, just tell me roughly now after speaking, is your stress where is your stress, stress level?

Okay, like, em, how to say, like, if I started from zero, I mean, before the interview, start from zero...

zero...

...or start from...

...exactly. So before the interview you maybe felt like...

Zero.
Ah, okay so in that case

Ah okay, still zero - phew [laughter]!

[Laughter] Yeah., in that case.

Yeah, the reason I wanted to ask people about this, eh, this topic is because sometimes when you remember these, you know, difficult experiences it makes you feel more stress or it makes you feel more anxiety, and I just want to make sure that if, say for example, if you put, you know, 6 or 7...

[Laughter] It’s high.

...then, then, eh, for example, I have a counsellor service which I could introduce you to, em, so we found out about some English language counselling - I’m afraid we have no Arabic [laughter] counselling - but there is some English language counselling services in Japan...

Yes.

...so if, for example, you gave a high level, then we would introduce the counselling service, but because you put zero [laugher]...

Yeah, yeah.

...it seems you’re okay.

Yeah, of course, this one, if I started from zero.

Yeah. Exactly.

It didn’t increase, like, increase. It didn’t, like, decrease, so [laughter]

It’s just the normal, you stayed the same. That’s good to know. That’s very, very good to know.

Yes, yes.

Okay. well that’s it.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/9/26 Interview with Participant 16

Researcher: Okay, so basically how I start the interview is I just ask, please tell me what happened to you in the 2011 disaster, yeah.

Participant: During the, eh, yes. Actually, during the earthquake, I was the student of the university. My lab was in {an area of Miyagi} in the top of mountain. There’s, actually, I had an interview with different professor in {a campus of his university} that’s, it’s around 2.30. I was in {this} campus and, eh, my interview with that professor was scheduled at 3pm, as far I remember. It was 3pm that I was waiting outside of this building, and eh while it’s around ten minutes before three, I just was thinking to enter the room and I start walking towards that building of professors. There’s, suddenly I found that everything around me just besides the building and trees and everything just shaking. In thought this, yes, in Sendai because earthquake is, eh, it was 11 March but maybe it was 7 March there was another big earthquake and the intensity was around 7.1, as far I remember, it was 7.1, then I thought that this may be quite similar, it will stop with the short time. But, eh, I found that the intensity was increasing and it was not stopping for long time, and after everybody from different buildings was, eh, were just running. There was free space in front of that building, and everybody was running at that place and, eh, they, all of them were scared about this situation, they cannot say anything, what is going to happen or something like this. I also found that there is an, one big building, like, it may be eight floors building, the top of this building, one part just partly collapsed…

Wow.

…and exactly I was scared too much because I found in the road there is some, eh, crack, some crack in front of myself…

Wow.

…, eh, I was astonished about this situation and I actually could not understand what I, I have to do, or something. This, I saw, saw Japanese people were running to a free space. I was running with them, here to there, here to there. And they said - at that time I found that professor who eh – and he said, “Don’t be worried. Just, eh, stay with us. Don’t try to move anywhere.” I was trying to move in {the university campus where the participant worked} or go to my place, but he said, “No, just stay here with us.” And, eh, it was around 6 minutes, after 3 minutes, around 3 minutes, it was stopped and again start. After 6 minutes, the earthquake was stopped, but within this time many buildings, many, eh, surrounding me there is many buildings I found many crack inside, on the road, and, eh, on the buildings’ wall, there are many cracks and, eh, actually, my wife was with me in Sendai and we are living in {university accommodation in Miyagi}, this is quite far from here. Actually, I used my car to come here as well. There’s, on the day, my car was in {the university campus where the participant worked} or go to my place, but he said, “No, just stay here with us.” And, eh, it was around 6 minutes, after 3 minutes, around 3 minutes, it was stopped and again start. After 6 minutes, the earthquake was stopped, but within this time many buildings, many, eh, surrounding me there is many buildings I found many crack inside, on the road, and, eh, on the buildings’ wall, there are many cracks and, eh, actually, my wife was with me in Sendai and we are living in {university accommodation in Miyagi}, this is quite far from here. Actually, I used my car to come here as well. There’s, on the day, my car was in {the university campus where the participant worked} and I walked towards the {other campus}. At that time, I, I had not car with me, the car was in {the campus where he worked}. As I start, I tried to call my wife to the mobile, but at the time the network was collapsed, that, there was no network around here. Eh, I tried to call my friends or other friends around {the area where the university accommodation was located}, but there was no network. I was really, eh, what to say, it was, was my thinking that whatever my wife - actually, she was carrying a baby at the time [Note: at this point the participant began to shed some tears and paused] – and it was maybe around five months or six months of the
baby inside her, but this really tough situation, and I thought that is he, is she alive or not. This is a real fact. I thought is she alive or not. It was my thinking. I thought if the building around here is really good quality building, obviously, they have (indistinct) in {the campus where he worked} but what about my place? Maybe this building must collapsed and my wife died or something. It was, I was thinking like this. At that time, eh, I run through the, after stopping the earthquake around six minutes, the aftershock was helding after one or two minutes, after, within thirty minutes, there are maybe ten to twenty aftershocks. At this situation, I ran through the {the campus where he worked} and I, at the time, I found our, my professor, my supervisor and other staffs of this lab were waiting on the first floor free space. They was looking for me, they, they were looking for me as, eh, I said, “I’m okay but I want to go back to my place because my wife is in the place.” My professor says, “Okay, you, you can sign here that you are going back. Because if there is something like, eh, more destructive here, then we will be responsible for this, that you have to sign here if you want to go back.” And I signed and I go back my place with car, but, eh, at the time, the snow, snowfall was start. And, eh, there is the bridge, I just forget the name of the river, eh, toward, while I was through the road, there is a big bridge…

Uhum.

…and I found big traffic like it was big, eh, it was long, maybe it was very long traffic. That’s why I was waiting at that place. At that situation, I could, through my car, I could not walk. I thought that it was mistake I am bringing my car. But at this situation, I could not do anything. Around after one hour, I reached my place and I, I found my house is still, it not collapsed, but I thought maybe my wife is alive, but, but, maybe there are many big furniture, maybe she is injured too much. I asked the people’s around there, they said, “Oh I,” one of the people said, “Oh, I saw your wife to get out from the room and she was, eh, during, after the earthquake she was staying here with us. But now, where she is, I cannot understand. I, I, I cannot know. I don’t know;” he said. And I asked him, “Do you know,” I asked another friend, “Do you know where is my wife?” I was asking everybody. One of my other friends, “Oh I know they may be, all of Bangladeshi peoples are going to the, eh, {nearby} Elementary School. There is a camp. They, they opened, they declared this to be a camp after the earthquake and, eh, I went there and I found my wife at that time. It was really so tough situation. [Note: at this point the participant began to shed some tears and paused] It was really tough.

Oh, I can only imagine. I can only imagine.

I found my wife, my friends, and I was crying. Everyone was crying. [Note: he paused again to let his emotions out] I, that, even now when I thought, when I think these things, I cannot keep myself okay. [Note: he paused again to let his emotions out] Then, actually, ah, there in some place in {the} Elementary School for us, all the peoples from different countries, Japanese, foreigners, and we started to, we stayed that place. There is some food for us. First night, just dry food and, eh, you know, it, it’s camp, it’s, life is not normal, but, eh, we tried to quiet. After one day they said, “Maybe it’s difficult to supply food for everybody.” There’s, many peoples just take the biscuit or bread, like this kind. [Note: he paused again to let his emotions out] And, eh, there was no water. We tried to find a bottle of water and everybody shared just a little, and we tried to inform our embassy, Bangladesh Embassy, actually, all the community was trying to make communication with their embassy to rescue them from here. And we got, after one day, we found that the Indonesian may be the first one. Indonesia Embassy, they sent a car. We heard that, we tried to contact in Bangladesh Embassy. They said, “It’s okay. We can help.” But, eh, actually, they helped us finally, but, eh, at first, frankly to, frankly speaking to you, at first maybe they were not so responsive, they make it late because we contact with them they say, they said, “We can understand the situation but it’s not
possible to send any car with Indonesian community,” and maybe another country, I
cannot remind. And I answer, “They are sending car but you are not sending.”

Yeah.

…then everybody is pushing and we contact in our country. Not Tokyo. Finally we
contact in our country in Bangladesh Ministry and, eh, maybe they contact with us, like,
in my case, eh, I contact with the head of my organization of some, everybody people
tried to contact their position…

Yeah.

…and finally, they agreed that okay, “We’ll send a bus for you. I think it’s okay. It’s
enough, it’s enough. We can arrange ourselves anyway to go there.” Finally, we have
very good, but it was too late and during this time, actually, while we was contacting,
contacting, contacting with the embassy, we heard about the Fukushima Nuclear Power
Plant explosion. Eh, that was really, really [Note: the participant paused to shed some
tears] tough situation for us because, actually, who had family here, they can realize the
real thing. Because if I were, a, alone, then maybe I can, I could say, “Oh, I am safe.
Okay.” But I was thinking on my wife, she was carrying a baby, you know, nuclear
explosion is really destructive for this situation, for the babies. [Note: the participant
again paused to let his emotions out] They have very small kids, my friends. Who are
thinking about this matter, and it does actually, really, very odd times. Some proverbs,
you know, are, some country or some commented, ‘Misfortune not comes alone’. Like,
there is earthquake and there is nuclear explosion, explosion, and maybe two or three
days later, eh, in the camp, somewhere someone is cooking or something or electricity.
The, it was burning, firing, like we found this fire is spreading everywhere and, and at
that time, actually, I was helping one of my friend with my car. One of my friend request
to take his passport from his place, maybe he was living in {another area of Miyagi}. I
was driving car and I come, I came his place to help him, but when I was going back I
heard there is fire.

Ah.

This, again I afraid, what about my wife and other kids of my friends, because there was
many womens and kids. After going back, I found the, all of them were, are safe, thanks
to almighty. Then, from that day we can, or we could not stay at that camp because it was
burnt. We start to say in, eh, {the university accommodation} lobby. There is some places
for me, for us, all peoples from different countries. And, eh, some peoples stayed at {a
local} Civil Centre or something like that.

Uuhh.

Eh, and after one day, the bus came here from our embassy. They sent a bus and finally
we arrived Tokyo and the, obviously, Bangladesh Embassy after they, they helped us too
much. After arriving Tokyo, one of business men, I cannot skip his name, his name is
Sakura, Mr. Sakura, Mr Sakura and some others people, they helped us too much, they
arranged some location, then some place, we stayed there, because at that time, the ticket
was not available, the, as like in my case, I stayed three days Tokyo, because to get, and
many families were staying there. And Mr Sakura and others, some others, arranged the
place there, room or somewhere and they arranged food for all times, they supply us that.
And finally they dropped us Narita Airport or somewhere, another airport, and then
another airport, Haneda?

Haneda Airport.
They dropped ours peoples there, as like in my case, they dropped me Narita Airport. They helped us too much. And finally we go back in our country and we thought it was really a misfortune for us. Exactly true to say that at this situation, we was thinking just about ourselves but after going back, actually we can realize what is the situation of others and during this period, we can heard about the tsunami and that I, but at this situation, we had nothing to do, actually we had nothing to do. We just wanted to esc, rescue this, just remove ourselves from here to safe place. But after that we could realize we and some our friends, we would realize that what is the situation of Sendai at Narita or, sorry, Natori or some places [Note: Natori was one of the areas worst-affected by the tsunami] We heard about different places that this situation after tsunami, this situation is occurred and we are concerning about the nuclear power plant also. That’s, from our country, peoples did not advise us to got bac and everybody said you have no need to go back and I think almost all, every people sees the same situation from their family and friends…

Yeah.

…they (indistinct) don’t need to come back. After one month, eh, after one month I got a mail from our, from my professor to say, “Maybe things, it’s been quite a while and things become quite normal. It’s not normal but quite. If you want to come, you can come.” Then, we decided that, many of my friends together, not their family, not my family, alone travel here. Came back here after one month and, eh, at the time [laughter] actually, eh, all of us, were all times ready with our small bag…

[Laughter]

…and even though people start going to sleep and they, they just put their bed like in emergency things that if earthquake is start, we can run away, something like this.

Yeah.

Anyway, in this time, a few, after a few days, we can realize that it may be not so harmful, it may be the, the, there is some aftershocks, obviously, bu, but it’s not so concerned about this. Eh, then, we actually start, tried, not started, tried to start [laughter] living normal life. And at that time, actually, from our community, Bangladesh community or some personal people, we visited some victim area like Natori or some places and saw the miseries of the peoples. We visited some, eh, camp and we tried to help physically or like food or something, we tried to do this. Very small, it’s not. But we tried to share things with them and we found that things are becoming normal, it’s obviously takes long time to be normal but, eh, seems quite normal after maybe three or four months since government tried. Japanese government, obviously they tried to do this, but still [laughter] you know there is concern with nuclear power…

Yeah [laughter].

I don’t know, eh, actually, I don’t know why the government, eh, I, I, I, I don’t criticize, but I don’t know, at that time, I think it’s their policy, but they hide some things about the nuclear power plant. It was, the, for this maybe, because, because, we, we found that, like, different, eh, newspapers in different countries they say radiation is like this, but Japan says it was normal. Eh, for this actually, in this situation, these things were quite, quite confusing. Otherwise government tackled this, the situation, I think, it like becomes, it seems normal. Obviously it is not normal…

Yeah.
...because who is, who are the sufferers, they knows they are not still in normal life because last time, a few days ago, we also visited some places and, I think, it’s not normal life for the suff, sufferers, but, eh, or victims, but, any the structure or, in fact, structure, everything is going quite, eh...

Uhm.

...but still now when I thinking about that 11 March, it’s really. After the earthquake I went back my country and, eh, actually I am doing job one organization that, eh, there was some seminar, they invite me to talk [laughter] to give the lecture or talk about the earthquake during the lecture, actually [laughter] I said, like, “Ah, 11 is always bad number.” [laughter]

[Laughter]

Like 9/11, like 3/11. And it’s one, our, eh, national, eh, problem in Bangladesh happened, do you know?

Yes.

It was 3/11 or sorry 1/11, 1/11. [Note: on January 11, 2007 wide-scale protest and violence erupted across Bangladesh and a state of emergency was declared]

1/11, yeah.

I have the presentation, I just did, first slide I showed 1/11, 9/11, 3/11 [laughter]

3/11.

That 11 is really…

Something’s not right [laughter]

[Laughter] Tha, that was actually my thinking.

It’s an unlucky number [laughter]. Yeah, it, thank you so much for sharing your story. I’m, as I explained, I’m focusing in particular on things like communication and language and so on, so there is a couple of points where I’d just like to clear up some of the details. Um, for example, I know you said that, eh, the Bangladeshi community was contacting the embassy and then contacting your home country. How? Was it through email or by telephone?

No. Actually, actually first three days we could not do anything. Eh, three days or two days? Two or three days, anyway. 11, 12? Maybe three days. I, I cannot remind exactly. But maybe three days actually we could not contact with anyone because network is just coming and there is no electricity – there is another problem because when mobile network, we go the mobile network maybe after one day or something just we, all of us, were trying to contact in our country with our families not embassy not official because they were really very concerned about us…

Of course.

...that’s, we are talking and I think almost all the people’s mobile charge was released [laughter]…
...and, eh, finally, after three days when we heard about the nuclear power plant explosion, we are very alarmed about this matter and we went, eh, School of Medicine, to, em, visit hospital. There is emergency electricity supply, this, we charged our mobile phone from there...

Very clever.

...and, eh, we contact embassy and Bangladesh about the situation.

How did you know to go to the university hospital? That’s very clever.

It, it’s, it’s actually, eh, I think, the first day or, we, we, we had not this thinking because we are very anxious and, eh, unconscious about this matter, but, eh, when it seems quite normal, we thought it, that it’s maybe possible because hospital, there should be emergency electric supply.

Yeah, yeah.

That’s, we, we, was there and we were not sure but, eh, we walked there and we found that there is emergency supply and we put one point and we did it only one point, we did it serially all the people charged our mobiles.

And all of those people that you mentioned was it all Bangladeshi people or was it a mixture?

There was mixture.

Mixture.

Yes.

So, your international friends.

Yes, yes.

I see. Eh, I’m also interested in inside the, eh, camp, you said you found out about Fukushima, for example. How?

Actually, it’s, eh, one of my friend, maybe he has the mobile connection or, eh, or, or, or in his car or somewhere...

Uuhh.

...can receive the news. Maybe mobile or in his car there is some I don’t know exactly inside the car is possible to get, eh, maybe his car or his mobile, there is TV channel, that from the TV channel he first called me and, eh, two of my friends just, eh, secretly. He said, hushing, “Please come here,” or around and, “Please come here.” And, we said, he’s senior than us, we said, “What’s the problem, brother?” He said, “There is one problem, but if I say it openly, everybody will be scared. And everybody will run here and there and something. This situation like this.” Then we decided to contact our embassy and we prepared our cars who had cars. There is maybe in our community, there are a few cars. And from that, because there is no gasoline...
Of course.

…we thought that we, eh, like, eh, if we can go, like, after Yamagata or somewhere, then we can find some gasoline station. We, we could do this. For this, we are just preparing ourself like this. We first will contact with embassy. If they failed, we’ll start by our car. We don’t know where we will go. Maybe we will skip through Tokyo or somewhere. We don’t know the road is open or not. But it’s really uncertain situation. And we decided who has kids, especially, and womens we will send them first.

I understand.

And then we will, if possible, we will go, otherwise we will fight in this situation…

Yeah.

…and we make decision and then we inform some responsible person about these, this, we make contact with embassy and, like, they are, and after that night, this morning we make decision to go to embassy hospital [Note: this is a slip of the tongue – he means university hospital as above] for charges because many of friends, also in my case, there is no charge in my mobile. There’s a, we found, we are lucky, we found the, eh, there is charge, point of electricity supply, there is, after that we contacted.

I got it.

But actually if we failed to contact or we failed to go Tokyo by bus, maybe we had plan to escape here, at least our womens and babies from here to some safe places, anywhere.

Yeah, I understand. And so, that TV signal on maybe that man’s car or the mobile phone, that was a Japanese TV?

Japanese, Japanese. Japanese TV. And, eh, that, that man was living here maybe around 11 or 12 years. He knows Japanese very well…

I got it.

…and he, he was doing job here. He left, eh, Japan last, two months ago, and now he is in Australia. Eh, and he is really very good in Japanese because, because, he is, he was doing job in Japanese company.

Eh, was he, is he a Bangladeshi person?

Yes.

Ah, so he was, kind of, translating…

Yes, yes, yes.

...for, for the rest of the community.

Yes, in our community there is few peoples – five or six peoples – they know Japanese.

I see, I see.
But at that time, that person, that person heard this news and they translated me and my
two or three friends.

I got it. I understand. Eh, um, also, just again to go a little bit earlier, do you remember
when you were in the university, so you were in the [other campus, not where you
worked], and the earthquake happened, can you remember any announcements?

[Note: the participant shook his head here, so I vocalized his negative response in the
following interjection]

No.

Because I was not inside the building, I was just outside the building. I just said you that I
was walking to the building of professor.

Right

And actually, actually, in real fact, the, I saw from outside the building that was so big, I
could not imagine what inside the building they were thinking…

Yeah.

…obviously I was afraid because, because there was eight-floor building. It was shaking
like, eh, like oscillator [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…it was oscillating, and, eh, one part of the top floor just collapsed. That time, I thought,
maybe all the building will collapse.

Yeah, yeah.

And, I said you, I find crack on the road…

So scary.

…now [laughter] now I am thinking about the movie 2012 [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…because it was obviously not so, so dangerous but I found small, not, not it was divided
[Note: the participant gestured at two things coming somewhat apart with his hands – not
too large a spread]…

Yeah.

…but there was crack…

Yeah.

…I’m not saying it was divided. But…

You could see.
...I, I, I was thinking that what it will happen. And it was on the top of the mountain. Will it fall down on side or not?

Right, right.

What will happen?

Right.

Actually, and at the time, it was also persecution for me about my family because I can’t do something because my family she was sick at the time that was in, and, and we are living in {the university accommodation}. In Japan peoples don’t use big furniture I found, at least foreign peoples they don’t use big furniture...

Yeah.

...but in, in {the university accommodation}, it’s decorated with big, big furnitures…

Ah!

...and big shelves in my bedroom…

Yeah.

...and, em, my wife, eh, was not so able to go outside from the bedroom. It, but, eh, but as I thought that she was in bedroom and if one furniture fall upon her…

Yeah.

...it’s really dangerous.

Yeah.

But, thanks god…

Yeah.

...that, eh, my wife was taking food one side of the room, obviously she was in bedroom because she was sick…

Yeah.

...she could not go the dining place. She is staying at the bedroom and, eh, she was taking food nearby the window…

Uhum.

...and at this side there was no furniture, but opposite side, there was furniture, furniture was fall down, falled and she was waiting at this side, safe side, until the earthquake stopped and after the stopping earthquake, I heard from my wife, she just, eh, trying to, eh, she was trying to come outside but one or two big furniture was falled near the door…

Ah.
…that it was difficult. But at that time, one of my friend, one of my friend, he was living in {the same area of Miyagi as me} at that time, he rescue his family to the safe place and he was thinking about me, that what about my family…

Yeah.

…I’m in lab but what about my family. He knocked my room and he enter my room. He found a door was open, anyway, I don’t know, eh, actually, actually my wife, I just said you, she was sick, she was afraid or something, she make some kind of, she make the door unlocked…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Just in case.

Yeah. My wife was trying to get outside. Just there was some furniture she want to try to, maybe it was possible or not later, but my friend entered the room and he helped my wife to remove this and to get calm down and after that my wife get down and another family just, eh, the, we were staying in the second floor (indistinct) and, em, that family in first floor from Bangladesh, eh, she was staying under the table with her baby…

Yeah.

…and my wife knocked that room…

Yeah.

…and she was, eh, my friend’s wife was saying, she was crying, my wife entered that room and at this situation she bring that family outside. Actually, every people helped, everyone helped everyone. Like, eh, I said you just, eh, I, I found there is, there was fire, fire at the place…

Yeah.

…I found one of my friends was taking my frie, eh, my wife in the safe place and, eh, my wife also saved a baby to take out. Actually, everybody helped everyone.

Yeah.

Oh, actually, at this situation obviously not only Bangladeshi community, all the communities, they helped everyone…

Yeah.

…and possible for them or us, everyone helped.

Yeah, yeah.

Because that was the very odd time, and about the food, you shared because the supply was not enough, we shared the food…

Um.

…many times.

How did you get information about where food was coming from?

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No, that, they, they, they supplied food, eh, in the camp.

Ah, in the camp. Yeah, I got it.

As like the, for I reminded have hundred packet for, to peoples two-hundred-fifty or three-hundred…

I got it.

…thus, we shared and we specially preferred aged person…

Okay.

…womens, kids, if they are full, then we adult part, men shared the food.

I got it. I got it. And what was the language in the camp?

Mainly Japanese…

Mainly Japanese.

...mainly, all, all the adults went and, mainly Japanese but, eh, one or two peoples, eh, could comment in English, and, eh, to use Japanese it was not difficult for us, because all peoples were the same place and many of them know Japanese…

I got it.

…because, like, in our community, eh, three or four peoples I said about…

Yeah.

…I got it. I understand. Then, you said that electricity came back. Can you remember when electric and so on came, came back?

Ahhhh!

A, about how long do you, do you think it was?

Uhm, it’s maybe five, five, four to five days.

Four to five days. So, after about four to five days, how did you get information about Fukushima or about other topics?

A, after four and five days, we, we, we was able to use Internet. That’s like, especially because we was outside, one of my friends was in {a section of the participant's university located in central Sendai}, he was alone, he sometimes used to use net in his lab, he supplied us all the information about Fukushima.

So he would check, eh, newspaper or what? Do you know, how did he get?

Ah, yes, mainly, newspaper, because at that time he actually, he used to, like, eh, one channel in Japan, very popular channel in Japan, I just forgot…
NHK?

NHK. NHK, and, eh, first, he supplied some message from NHK but we requested to see all international, because at the situation because maybe it’s the one policy, as far I know, if government there is explosion, peoples will be scared and there may be some odd situation.

Yeah.

This first may, everything, if I am say to you, you may just say, “No, it’s okay, it’s okay.” Like, for this we request our friend that please check all international media and somethings. But, eh, when he said, “It’s melting. It’s going to melt.” He said, “It’s very dangerous.”

Yeah.

And, eh, there was some alert about nearby here, there was another power plant in Miyagi. I just forgot the name, I just forgot the name. [Note: he is referring to the Onagawa nuclear power plant.] Anyway, he said, “It’s maybe some difficulties, some slit or something there.” We said, [laughter] “If it explode… [Laughter] …it’s quite impossible.”

Yeah.

And, Fukushima, obviously, it’s not so far from here.

Yeah.

Because, nuclear, a hundred miles is not safe.

No, no.

Eh, after receiving that news, actually, we were concerned about the explosion, radiation. Not about the earthquake…

Yes.

…we just forgot about earthquake and we thought that, “What about,” because earthquake is stopped, some after, aftershock, we, we are in safe place. That is no problem, we can stay here even one month, two month, if we get a little food…

Yeah.

…little water, it’s enough. But what about the radiation?

Yeah.

Yeah.

It can’t be stopped.

Yeah.
For this we are hardly trying to go back in our country.

Yeah.

First thought, we have to go back, then we make decision, we will come back or not or what we will do.

I got it. Eh, how did your friend share the information with you? By social media or by email or telephone?

No, of course, by telephone.

Telephone. So he directly called?

Yes, yes, yes. Because all of us, maximum of all, not all, maximum of all, eh, eh, of, eh, maximum of all us, were at the same place that if he shared one person, we can share everyone.

I got it. So...

Or, or sometimes we called, “What about the situation current?” He said, “Oh this,” we can share everyone.

...I got it. So it really was that feeling of community...

Um, yes, yes, yes.

...links between people and word-of-mouth c, communication.

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

It was about all the peoples but unfortunately, one or two people failed to get some information as like the bus is coming to rescue them. They heard, some peoples heard later because the embassy sometimes says, “I, we’re going to send.” Sometimes they said, “It’s not possible.” That the morning they shared that, they shared us that they were sending a bus that we did this time, actually we tried at best to spread the news everywhere but unfortunately one or two peoples missed this...

Ah.

...opportunity and they joined, eh, with another embassy, maybe Turkish Embassy or some, I cannot remind exactly name, maybe Turkish or some embassy, they joined with us, with that bus...

I got it.

...the last one they said, “Okay.” If, because, eh, they were living quite far from here

I got it. And then, you got to Tokyo and you were in Tokyo for about three days, I think.

Three days.

How did you find out information in Tokyo? So, how did you find out more detail?
Eh, actually, actually, eh, we directly, the bus, eh, come from embassy and they directly, we directly first go the, our embassy…

Ah, okay.

…there’s, eh, there’s peoples in our embassy and some people, I just said you, some businessmen…

Yeah.

…and some peoples from Tokyo. At the situation they helped us too much…

Right

…which is, it’s really unforgettable…

It’s wonderful, yeah.

…eh, they, they helped us too much.

Yeah.

I am just talking about one of these mens, I said I didn’t know him previously but, eh, he arranged accommodation for all families. He’s big business, he has lots of apartment but many peoples has lots of apartments…

Yeah.

…he said, “Okay, yeah, I’ll responsible for all the families.”

It’s wonderful.

And who has not family, he also said that you may attend with us, but who has not family, they stayed five or six people they shared different place.

Right.

There, there is one mosque, do you know about the mosque are Muslims’ prayer place, mosque. They were staying in the mosque.

I got it.

And, but family, the refugees with the family and also this business supplied food for them at the mosque.

Ah, it’s fantastic. And this was, you said, Mr Sakura, I think…

Sakura. Sakura Saber [Note: This individual is president of B.J. International Co., an auto import and export business based in Sagamihara. He has lived in Japan 23 years.]

…he has a, a, a special relationship with Bangladesh community or just?

Actually, he is doing business in Tokyo…
Ah, okay, I got it.

...and, he, he is established businessman.

That is fantastic, really fantastic. And then, so, you were back in Bangladesh and you had to decide whether to come back to Japan or not. How did you get the information to make your decision?

It’s also from news…

Ah, news.

...because, eh, when I go back my country, went back my country, I get news from different channels like BBC, CNN and international channels or Bangladeshi channels or Japanese channels…

Ah, even Japanese, uhum.

...and from Internet, I got some information. And, eh, my professor, I was contacting, and, and then, not only me, all of us was, eh, contacting with our professors…

Yeah, yeah.

...for this situation…

Yeah.

...will I come or not? Actually, my professor is a very nice person. After earthquake, eh, I went, after one or two days, I came in my lab to take my some documents or something, I met him. He said, “Please go back your country.”

Yeah.

“First, go back your country, then if we think it’s safe, we’ll send you mail.”

Yeah.

He said, “Do you have enough money? If not, I can give.”

Wow.

He is really nice man.

Yeah, yeah. And did you ever get any contact from Sendai City Government or Miyagi Government? Any of those official contacts?

Not, it’s not actually personal contact with any community. There’s some information like, eh, these things. Maybe they, actually, I, I, I don’t know Japanese. Thus, maybe they gave the information to the peoples who are in charge of the camp. They declared sometimes, “This is the condition of electricity…

Uhuh.

...this is the condition of gas, this is the condition of the earthquake, this is the condition of this, this, this, this is the condition of foods…
Yeah.

...drinking water.” Like, eh, maybe they were contacting directly with them but general people were not contacting, have contact with the authority of Miyagi.

I got it. I got it. I got it. I got it. And then, just as a, kind of, a final question, ehm, you had some information trouble, some information lack, what, what step would make things better in the future?

Actually, I think it’s critical situation, critical situation means it’s really difficult to make decision, as like as if you say I’m the authority. At this situation, it’s really difficult. If I spread the real message, you’re saying about the ra, radiation?

For example, yeah, for example the radiation, or, or any topic but for example.

No, but if I, I say about radiation, it is really tough decision because if I say the radiation level is very high and it’s dangerous situation, peoples will run here and there and there would be some difficult situation. Thus, the government said maybe not good but not bad...

I see.

...like this. It’s maybe in point of view of the government, it’s okay, but in point of view us, we can say why they hide the situation? Eh, because if we absorb some, eh, eh, if we absorb some ra, radiation like our babies, our kids...

Yeah.

...absorb some radiation, it’s harmful. But if government said this is danger level we could back another place or something.

Yeah.

In this, eh, actually contradictory situation...

Yeah, yeah.

...between these. And, eh, about the, after earthquake, eh, about the earthquake, I think they committed, obviously I’m not saying about the food crisis or water, actually, especially I say for, in, in my ward, I can understand, I could understand that it’s difficult, because the main victim area is not {his place of residence in Miyagi}.

Yeah, yeah.

The main victim area, some people said why they are not sending aircraft or helicopter here. I saying that or I think that the main victim area like the tsunami affected area...

Yeah, yeah.

...thus, they’re busy with that place. We’re not main victim area...

Yeah.

...they supplied small food or something for us.
Yeah.

Thus, I think, eh, the handling is quite okay.

Okay. Well, it’s good, I’m very glad to hear that. That’s really all the questions I have unless, do you have any comment or any extra information you want to give about?

No, I, I actually, actually, one thing I don’t know. In Japan, I, one additional thing I’m saying…

Sure.

…when I enter in Japan, my S-SET professor said, “Ah, you will be staying in Japan for three years, thus, within this time, in Sendai there will be big earthquake [laughter].”

[Laughter]

I thought, “It’s really very big?” He said, “Yes. It will be.” He said, “Maybe you will [Note: makes gesture of leaving or going away with hands and laughs]

[Laughter] Really?

I don’t know how but, eh, still now, I, I, I heard there is some prediction like in Tokyo, within last three, next three years…

Yeah.

…there will be earthquake in Tokyo region and Ibaraki or something.

Yeah, yeah.

Though, the, it’s, it was not interesting, but [laughter] some way interesting…

Yeah.

…to me that the prediction is very good…

Yes.

…and, eh, actually, after the prediction, if they knew that situation, why they have not taken the, eh, necessary, as like, I’m saying about nuclear power plant…

Yeah.

…as like, eh, Pacific or some region, like, there is some wall height, it’s, I, I don’t want to talk about this because they said they have 10-metre, 10-feet, the water was 33-feet…

Yeah.

…they could not realize that it would be so high or something, but in power plant area…

Yeah.
…because it is around this region, they should, not should, they had to take the, I, I, I,
don’t know still now, why they had not take the, because I gave you example of my S-
SET professor because he knows, he, he, he knew, that means the peoples, the authority
knew that there is probability…

Yeah.

…to face this type of situation.

Yeah.

Thus, eh, as like, now we, we’re hearing that in Iba, in Ibaraki there may be some
probability for earthquake or after earthquake must be because this, the surrounding is,
like, Pacific, or something, water, there’s, there should be some tsunami or something…

Yeah.

…there is possibility. Thus, they should take necessary steps about this matter.

Yeah.

Why, why they will think that it should be not more than 5-metre?

Yeah.

Because thinking is one thing, but it’s not, earthquake, but radiation is long time effect…

Absolutely.

…they will suffer. Eh, like Japan, they are suffering after Second World War…

Yes, yes.

…till now. Thus, radiation is not matter of jokes.

Yes, yes.

Radiation is, this my concern about this, if they know this the real risk area, they should
stop or they should take hundred percent secure, and, eh, I’m not sure, but I heard there is
something within Tepco and Japanese government. I heard because I am not part of
government or I am not part of Tepco, I heard by the by, I heard Tepco is powerful than
government [laughter].

[Laughter]

I heard that. But in the case of security of general people, public, they should take care.

Yeah.

Obviously, Tepco can pressure government to do this or the government should do this.
It’s not matter of in general public…

Yeah.

…therefore we should remain in safe situation…
Yeah, yeah.

…and, eh, I expect and I believe that Japan will give the, Japanese government will give
the, in the current situation, they will give the real information to the people. Accident is
different, I said you that in the case of accident in the instant they said, “This is okay, this
is okay.”

Yeah, yeah.

But if you, now it’s two years past…

Yeah.

…thus, now what is the real situation. If there is real something danger, people should be
aware. They will go far from here…

Yeah, yeah.

…and o, o, obviously for food, we will take sometimes, sometimes we heard that sea,
seafood is dangerous, sometimes we say not, seafood is safe…

Yeah.

…what will we do? Some people say the food from Miyagi is safe, sometimes I heard
that it’s unsafe. Still now.

Yeah.

Still now. Thus the government should give some – it’s, it’s my opinion – that
government should give some directly information to the media or to the, to the people
that, eh, what is the real situation, what they really should they will do and something…

Yeah.

…and especially for foreign people’s they should give, in this severe situation, they
should have, because in Japan one is, I’m not criticizing this, but it’s my, it’s maybe my
difficulties, but I, I don’t know Japanese, but, eh, I think many peoples don’t know
Japanese. Foreigner. Thus, I don’t know about other city, other city maybe some peoples
can, but, eh, Sendai, as far I know, the international city, some people said it’s the
international city. They should give some information or in Japan TV channel or some
media, why they are not sending some message in English. If the channel is Japanese,
some part of Japanese some part of English. That would be helpful for us…

Yeah.

…because, eh, all the foreigners they depending and asking world, they are search all the
times, but we are not getting the real information, this the government, but the local
information from Japan as like Miyagi Prefecture. They, they, if they submit report like
this, the current situation, this you can do, and in English, and foreign people, there are
many foreign peoples…

Yeah.

…the language is always [laughter] a big problem in Japan.
Yeah, yeah.

Thus, eh, about this thing, otherwise their policies or their handling is very good. That’s I believe. But, eh, the information gap is still to language sometimes, as like I said you, in the camp, there is my friends that translate me but when I am outside now, every day I cannot request my friend, what is the situation and what is the situation? Or I hear one of my friends said, “You can’t, are you taking seafood?” It’s completely for dangerous or something.” I say, “Why?” “This is the situation.” Thus, the, what the real situation?

Yeah.

They should give us real, because radiation, I always afraid, afraid, because it’s long-time effect and, you know, it’s even though you absorb the radiation, you are okay, but your babies will be affected…

Yeah.

…it’s long time…

Yeah.

…that’s, in this case, if I have opportunity to say the government or the authority, I’ll say like this.

Yeah, yeah. Thank you so much for sharing your opinions and you experience. It’s been very, very valuable for me. Really, really helpful.

I, it’s my pleasure.

I really appreciate your time and your effort and I’m sorry that it was difficult for you, for you to speak. I hope I haven’t increased your, your stress, eh, by, you know, making you remember difficult times. I hope you feel okay… [Laughter]

…now. Ehm, not too anxious or not too, too nervous. Em, I, I, this is the final, em, question that I like to ask people, just to check that now that the interview is finished, do you feel okay [nervous laughter]? Eh, I, I, please honestly answer, I don’t want… [Note: the participant is thinking before marking his answer on the Likert Scale for stress]

No, after, after the interview…

Okay…

…I feeling not anxious…

…great, great…

…I [laughter] about this.

…perfect. Because, eh, I, I don’t want my research process to cause you more trouble.

No, no, no, I, I, I, I’m, because after hearing this, I feel, actually I glad to share these things with you and it’s not a matter of anxiety or something.
Okay, well, thank you so much. I really appreciate all your time and effort.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

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Researcher: Perfect. So that’s all of the paperwork, eh, this final point is for after, after the interview. So, the way I’ve started the interview with everyone I’ve spoken to is just with a very general question, please tell me what happened to you in the 2011 disaster.

Participant: Well, em, I was in the shopping mall that day. [Laughter]...

[Laughter] Okay.

...my school, eh, my school ended at 12:35 and after that time, in fact, at that day I wanted to go to the sea, but I thought maybe I should just cook first, and I go to the supermarket, it’s just at 12:35, around that, something like that, and at that time the earthquake happened. [Note: in fact, the earthquake took place at about 2:46, but the participant has just misremembered the time.] And, the, what I saw is the car, the cars start shattering up and down, it’s like in the movie, in the sea, it’s like this wave. So, eh, I was scared, and I saw the building, it’s really, eh, it’s very scary. But it just, this, they don’t come down, you know?

Uuhh.

...so I was amazed. And, eh, you know, Japanese girls are very strong most of the time, but I saw some girl crying, burst out crying that day. Just, eh, they just sa, sat on the street and screaming. And, eh, the problem is, eh, I spent nineteen years in China and didn't have any experience, so I not scared at that time…

[Laughter]

...on the contrary [laughter]. I just thought, “Whoa, this one was cool!” …

[Laughter]

...[Laughter] That’s all I felt. I, then, I stood at the intersection and, eh, looking at the house, just, eh, it’s very scary but I think, “Whoa, this one was cool!” I don’t know how big the earthquake was and I didn’t know the tsunami, I didn't know the nuclear plant. I, I, yeah, at that time, I knew nothing. And after the earthquake, I tried to get contact with my friends, but, eh, you know, the, the light turned off, everything was just stay in a mess, but what especially, eh, in, in my opinion, eh, I felt the, you know, the street, they, all the, all the cars they just, eh, without the signal, you know, the signal, the signal lights…

Yeah.

...because the, so, so, such a big earthquake. But they just, em, move like, you know, I mean, with or without the signals, they are the same for Japanese [Note: for emphasis, the participant taps on the table with his fingertips as if playing a piano chord]...

[Laughter]

...it seems they have got used to it. So I think it’s incredible really…
...especially in a city like Sendai. It’s kind of big city, but, eh, well, it works well. So I was amaz, very much, eh, well, impressed at that time. And, eh, I came back to school, no, I came back to my house, my, in fact, dormitory exactly. And my teacher are, were already there, yeah. They came to dormitory immediately. They came with, eh, some water, they gave me water, and some tissue, yeah. I think they bought it from the su, not supermarket, from the school...

Ah, uhuh.

...they have that thing, kind of, stocked in school maybe…

Uuh, uuh.

...and, eh, after that I, it’s, it’s not like, you know, if you see the data you could understand, it’s not like just the one big earthquake…

Uhm.

...the earthquake continued all the time, all the time. So we can’t, eh, went in to the house, we can’t go anywhere. Just stand in the sq, in the square and, yeah, wait, waiting for the earthquake to calm down, but it never did. All these day, all those days. And I went around, with my jitensha, with my bicycle…

[Laughter]

...to see my friends, and I see everywhere people are all on the street, em, but the Japanese people are rather calm down after the big earthquake, and, eh, what especially came into my mind is the helicopter…

[Long intake of breath]

...yeah, they are all around in the sky…

Uhm.

...we don’t know why there are so many helicopters on the sky, but, eh, when I came, came back to China, I’ve been understand. That time the tsunami is flushing the field and, yeah, taking peoples lives, but at that time we have no idea. So we just think, “Well, everything is just fine. There are big earthquakes but, eh, the, the, the buildings are still there. Why there are so many helicopters in the sky?” After that I spent seven days helping my friend, eh, I mean, the, my friend works in the company, the company is, like, you know, this bookshelf, just, eh [Note: the participant gestures as if a big nearby bookshelf had fallen down and books were everywhere] I mean, I helped them, but a, about three days later people are, em, I mean, getting kind of usual. They started their shops and serve the customers, so I think it’s, eh, well, it’s really amazing…

Uhm.

...how can they do that? But I, until that time, I have no idea of the earth, of the tsunami, I don’t know there are so many people died, yeah? And, eh, as for Chinese, there are many Chinese students here, we asked how, should we go back to home or just stay in Sendai. In fact, when the earthquake happened, the second day, some of them has already run into Tokyo, Tokyo and Osaka, using shinkansen [Note: shinkansen means bullet train] but, eh,
as for us, eh, I, I think I should stay in Sendai and, eh, look, and, eh, but three days later
when the electricity was on, we see the Fukushima, you know, nuclear accident and my, I
got the telephone from my mum and dad and they said, “You should come back home
just now.” I try, at that time, everywhere is people. Even if you go to Tokyo, Osaka,
there are people waiting for the plane everywhere, so we just stayed in Sendai to see is
there anything I can do. And at the same time, I can help my friends with their
companies. Eh, well, and after maybe five days, we search the Internet, see in Chinese
website it is said they are sending big buses to Sendai to other big places to, em, take the
Chinese back home. I also know that maybe American, eh, America has sent helicopters
to Sendai [laughter] to help their citizens come back home. And, yeah, something like
that, so after seven days in Sendai, we are picked up and go to Niigata-ken and after
maybe two days waiting there we, eh, went back home. So, it’s something like this.

*And how long did you stay in China for?*

Eh, for about forty days. You know, when I came back to China, eh, my family strongly
against me coming back to Japan again, especially Sendai. Of course, eh, they don’t care
about the earthquake, of course they worry about the earthquake, but most important thing is
the Fukushima…

*Uhm.*

…the nuclear accident. I choose to come back. I have friends here, I have my life here,
and, eh, maybe I was young that time [laughter]…

[Laughter]

...I’m not old now, but I was rather younger at that time. I think I can do something here.
I don’t think that’s the end of my life, so I just choose to come back after 40 days.

*Uhuh, I see. I see. And for you, when did the disaster finish? If, if it’s finished?*

Uhm, how do you say, in fact, for me I think it never happened really. Because, eh, when
the earthquake happened, that moment I was, kind of, first scary and then, “Wow, this is
big earthquake,” and I’m so happy this kind of experience in my life, because I didn’t
know, eh, many people are suffering at that time. When I came back home I was like,
“Oh my god, the Sendai International Airport is gone.” I can’t believe it because a few
months ago I landed on the airport and I remember thinking it’s so beautiful, but it’s gone
now and the people there. So I can’t believe it. But, eh, em, I mean for, for common
people or for people, you feel something, you really touch something. You feel very
impressed and feel, “Oh, this is disaster.” But if, if you don’t touch it, it’s just like a good
experience, you know? I’m sorry to put it in this way…

*Yeah.*

...but it is a fact, really. I just think, well, this disaster is so bad for those who are
suffering, but who does live in the Sendai City, in the metropolitan, they don’t feel
anything. When I came back to Sendai after forty days, people are living a better life, I
think, because they think, “Wow, however much money I have, if it’s the, the earthquake,
it’s just the same.” So I just abandon…

*Aaahhh.*

...I just enjoy my life. So it’s, oh yeah, it’s totally different. People elsewhere may think
Chi, eh, Sendai, Japan, this earthquake is so bad, people here are bad hurted, they feel
really bad, but the, the fact, those who are suffering are really hard for them, but, as for
the other people, I think it’s just fine. They start to, we start to think what happiness is.
What should they really, eh, pursue in their life. Yeah…

*Uhuh.*

...I think that’s my experience for disaster.

*That’s very interesting. Eh, I’m also very interested obviously in issues of language and
communication...*

Yes.

...and so on, so there’s some details I’d like to ask you about. Uhm, first of all, if you can
remember...

*Uhum.*

...when you were standing at the intersection...

*Uuhuh, yeah.*

...at the shopping mall when it, when it happened, do you remember any announcements
or any speaker system?

Well, in fact, the, this means you have never experienced the big earthquake [laughter]
right? If you ever have that kind of experience, if, you not ask like this because the
earthquake, what happened, it sounds, how to say, it gives, gave out a very big sound.
You can’t hear anything. You can’t hear anything. Even the car horn, you can’t hear it,
but, because, eh, first the, when the big earthquake happened, you have, in Japan,
especially in Japan, em, the population density is very high here, you have nowhere to
run, in fact. Of course, they have some security place especially for people to come, but
generally you ha, you have no place to run. You see, you run on the street, there are
lights, there are that line everywhere. When the earthquake happened, the noise is very
noisy, so you can’t hear anything. Even people screaming, you can’t here. Yeah, so...

*That’s fascinating.*

...yeah, so, um, even if there is announcement, you are not concentrating on the
announcement. You are seeing if, yeah, if it can, if it’s, I mean, if it’s safe to stand here, if
it’s safe to, yeah...

*I.*

...when you calm down, you start to think, “Well, who should I listen to?” [laughter]

*Laughter* Uhuh. *That’s maybe very important information. Thank you for sharing that
with me. Em, then, you realized that there had been an earthquake and you went back to
the dormitory...*

*Yes.*

...ehm, when you went back to the dormitory, did you try to communicate using your
phone or some other? Did you try to get information?
In fact, I even don’t need to try because everyone is saying, “My phone doesn’t work now.” So I, yeah, [laughter] I didn’t need to try anything. But one thing I, eh, ma, made me feel proud for myself is I just turn off the phone at that time…

Uhm?

...I think it’s very important because three, two days without electricity, everyone’s phone is [laughter] [Note: he makes an open-handed sweeping gesture, palms facing down, indicating finished or empty of no good]. Yeah, I don’t know why, I just turn it off, choose to turn it off. I think I should save this kind of energy for the future and, in fact, I am right. Because two days later, everyone just rush out of electricity [Note: I think this is a slip of the tongue and the participant meant to say ‘ran out of’] even if the communication goes up, they don’t know how to get, communicate with the outside world.

That’s very good advice.

I, I, yeah.

And you don’t know why you thought of?

I don’t know why but, because, you know, I saw everybody is playing on their iPhone, on their phone, because they want to try to contact this, the outside world. But I can see that you can’t do it. So I just turn it off. And two days later they all come to my place to ask to call their families…

[Laughter]

...[laughter].

Do you know, that’s really fascinating to me because one of the things I’m looking for...

Uhum.

...are simple pieces of advice...

Ah yes.

...that we can give to foreign people to prepare for another disaster in the future. That’s very simple, but maybe very clever.

Okay. Thank you.

Thank you for sharing that. I’m, I’m very happy to hear that. Then, eh, so you are no in the dormitory...

Uhum. Ah, outside the dormitory

...ah, outside the dormitory? So you didn’t go into the room?

No, didn’t.

So, you are outside the dormitory and people from, your teachers, I think you said...

Yeah.
...came. What could your teachers tell you at that stage? Could they give you any information and, if so, what language?

Eh, the teacher, they are all Japanese so they use, they used the Japanese to tell us just to stay here at the dormitory, outside the dormitory, and wait. That’s all.

Okay.

I mean, eh, I don’t know Japanese government system, I think this, kind of, like, you just cool down, now everything you can do is cool down. There’s nothing you can do really. Rescue someone, oh, I’ll do whatever, like, you can’t do anything. You just make sure you, you are safe. This is the, yeah, the most important thing at that time, because if you are safe, you don’t make trouble for e, everybody else.

Ah, I got it, yeah, so by staying calm and staying safe, you’re, it’s less people to worry about...

Yes.

...in the future. I see. I understand, I understand. Then, did you think that you should go to some sort of evacuation centre or?

Yeah, I went to evac, we went to evacuation centre in the night, at night. Eh, but, well, we Chinese student get together, got together and went to the evacuation centre, but, eh, you see at that time, the Sendai, the city, is black without any light. It’s kind of incredible, you know, because you can’t imagine New York without light [laughter] yeah. It’s something like that, and we went to evacuation centre, they have nothing at that time. I think they have some kind of supplies, but they have to save for the future. The first night anyway no one will, eh, I mean die because of the cold or the food because people have something on their hand...

Uhm.

...but they have to save for the future. So even if we went there, there are just people, eh, it’s very dark outside and just stand on the ground, that’s all. Yeah, we don’t have anything to eat, and, eh, yeah, we don’t have light at that time. And, eh, we went there maybe around 7 o’clock and at 11 o’clock in the, at night, eh, we just went back home and went to sleep…

Okay.

...but, eh, when we say we got to sleep, we just, eh, sleep near the window. You know, the house, eh, inside the house is totally in a mess. Everything totally in a. The, yeah, the refrigerator is also down. Everything is in a mess and, eh, just, eh, sleep near the window. You know, Japanese window is like, eh, this door [Note: he points to a nearby sliding door in the room and the meaning is that many windows in Japanese dwellings are French windows which also act as doors]...

Uuh...

...so you can run out any time you like…

...uhuh, uhuh, uhuh.
...yeah, and I spent the following couple of days in that way.

Alone or with?

Eh, first, eh, the first day I just stayed in my home, but later we stayed together.

We means you and the other Chinese students?

Yes, yes, study together.

I got it, I got it. Eh, just also, just to be clear, how did you know where the evacuation centre was?

Eh, well, you know, in this, about the evacuation centre, I think Japanese government really does a good job. Uhm, you can, how to say, well, if you long enough in Japan, you will have that kind of sense where is the evacuation centre. Or the big earthquake happened, people are walking that way [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so you can understand it’s kind of evacuation centre. But, I mean, for example, if you live in this area, in the residence area, you will see there is a school. Everyone, body in Japan know the school is the evacuation centre, so you can, just, eh, come to the school and, yeah, you can find your friends and family there.

So it’s a kind of a common sense...

Yes, it’s common sense.

...that people who live in Japan...

Uhum.

...have after...

Yes.

....some time.

And I don’t know if you know it or not, in Japanese, everywhere, every, eh, school or whatever, you have this kind of practice once in a year, where is the evacuation, uation centre, what you should do when an earthquake happened. Yeah.

Okay, so, on that topic, how well prepared did you feel?

Uhmm, well, in fact, exactly, I don’t know, in fact, because it depends on the earthquake…

Ah okay.

...you, you can sa, [laughter] I think it will never well prepared, I mean, it’s never well prepared because when the earthquake goes on the 9 level, it’s totally different from the 8 level, so what, how well prepared, you just can say people here can live, can’t die, but that’s all. They can’t have enough, eh, futon, enough beds, eh, I mean, enough clothes for everybody to come, yeah.
I got it. When were you able to contact the important people in your life?

Uhm, I think the sec, the third day, the second day I can go through the phone call and I called my father to say that I’m okay. And after that, I just turn off my phone again…

[Laughter]

...because, eh, we still don’t have any electricity.

One thing I’m interested in is if it was about three days after the earthquake…

Uhum.

...maybe, did your family in China have more information about what was happening?

Of course, yeah, of course, yeah, they have much more information than me about the, what happened in the earthquake.

Could they tell you something?

They can’t, they can’t. Eh, I mean, even if I called, I just say, “I’m safe now and I will stay alert and as for the other information whatever it is, just contact later.” That’s all. I save the time, I save the power, I save everything. And I’m safe. I just let them know…

So.

...because they have too ma, too many questions [laughter]…

[Laughter]

...you know, you can’t answer them one by one. It’s impossible. Yeah.

So this was just the very short, basic…

Yes.

...information you were communicating. Then, when did the Chinese Embassy contact you, or how did the Chinese contact you?

Uhm, I mean, I mean, as for China, you have to see, this is China custom, we get together, so if you know something, eh, they send a me, I mean, Chinese government doesn’t tell us, they just write it down on the website or whatever it is, but the Chinese, eh, I mean, the, my father and mother, parents, they are very worried about us, so they just checked the Internet. And whoever it is, they would tell their kids they are coming and you just tell your friends, so it’s something like this.

Ah, so it’s a kind of a, like a, a word-of-mouth community.

Yes, this is a word-of-mouth community, so.

Ah, that’s very interesting.

So, it’s not like you have to trust your government for information, no, it’s like we just solve the problem ourselves.
So does, does that mean you didn’t check any websites or anything?

My friend checked the website to see if the information is correct or not. I don’t have the access, so I didn’t check.

Okay, and that friend who, who, who checked was a Chinese...

Yes, yes, yes.

...person? Oh okay. And, so then, you said that, eh, the information came that buses were...

Uhum...

...coming to, to...

...pick us up, pick us up.

...pick you up. Eh, wa, wa, was it some central location or did they, they come to each person’s home. How, how did it work? How did the system work?

They have a central location at the shiyakusho, it means the prefecture’s place [Note: shiyakusho is often translated as ‘city hall’ or ‘municipal government building’] just in the middle of the city, and they’d all written, written on the website, so we checked the website, we know the place, and we get there.

Okay, I got it. So, at that time, when you were on the bus, you still didn’t know what was happening?

Yes, I don’t know, we, we were thinking, like, “Why are our parents so worried about us? Why they ask us to come back home? It’s okay here. Everything is just fine. Yes, indeed, the, the supermarket, the convenience store are closed for these two days, but it will soon, I mean, goes like normal days, so nothing to worry about. Why do we have to come back home?” At that time. But when I came back home I realized the tel, the television just, eh, have, broa, just have the video flashing the field, many people are dying, all day long, so they are much worried about us.

I see. And when you were, you know, in that period where you are, you know, earthquake happened...

Uhuh.

...and then you are on the bus, did you spend all of your time with the Chinese community?

For me, no, absolutely not. I know maybe most, almost of my friends, or all of the Chinese, they spend their time with their community, but I’m a little bit different, because I came here, I have many good friends, Japanese friends. So I came to his company, his, eh, like, eh, you know, his company and helped him with everything. And I also called {a professor at the participant’s university} to see if I...

Uhuh.

...if there is anything I can help. Because as for students, we don’t care about our dormitory…
Yeah.

...whatever it is, we just left. But I know their home, they have to stay there...

Yeah.

...so I asked them if there’s any help.

And could your Japanese friends or [the professor at your university], could they give you any information? Did they have any extra information you didn’t have?

This is ve, very interesting. In fact, when the earthquake happened, I can tell you definitely, our Chinese has much, have much more information than the Japanese. I don’t know why. Maybe because the Japanese is very, they are very gentle. They just wait for the government to say something. If the government don’t say anything, they just wait. Or they are very strong in this ca, they have experience this before so they are very strong in this experience, they just wait or they can save themselves. So it’s totally different from us. They, I mean, when I went to my Japanese friend’s company, they got almost all the information from me...

[Laughter]

...of course, they have their radios, and their radios on all day long, Japanese government says this one, that one, but I think that information is far from our life, you see what I mean? They say, maybe, the Tokyo is now something like this or the Chiba-ken is very bad now, but it’s far from Sendai. As for Sendai, all Chinese know, how is like this, where to buy some rice, where to buy some drink, yeah. So we have much information than the Japanese people.

That’s fascinating. So your, kind of, word-of-mouth community...

Yes.

...worked very effectively.

Effective. And the interesting thing is, eh, I don’t know it’s, if this is good to say or not, [laughter] is it correct, but when we left Japan, I know some Japanese have much more food, eh, Chinese people have much more food than, than the Japanese people, because when the earthquake happened, [Note: for emphasis, the participant taps on the table with his fingertips as if playing a piano chord] we get together to think, “Well, you three, go to supermarket to get the rice, and [laughter] you two do whatever and ever,” so, yeah. But, eh, so the Japanese, they have family here, so they ha, they have to care about their kid, they have to take care of their parents, so.

It’s very interesting. That’s really fascinating.

On the other hand, what I am trying to say is that, first the community, small community is very important, information is very important, but the, eh, the age is very important...

Oooohhh?

..if you are from 20 to 40, 20 to 40 years, surely you will, yeah, I mean, in the earthquake you are at the, this might be, I mean, you are the last one to be suffer, because you have more information, you have more energy, yeah.
Yeah, em, that’s a very interesting point. That’s one of the reasons why I ask people for their age and so on...

Uuhh, yeah.

...in the profile information. You’re absolutely right. It can have a big impact.

Yes.

Em, I’m a little bit interested in the topic of the radio...
Uhmm.

...because a lot of the reports that I’ve read said radio was extremely for useful for people in Japan in the disaster...
Yeah.

...however, speaking to foreign people...
Uhmm.

...yourself and other people I’ve spoken to, they say the radio communication was not so useful.

It’s, I think it’s totally different for Japanese than for us. There are a couple of aspects I will try to say. Well, first one, when you talk about radio, radio, I think for Japanese people, it means hope. Right? They listen to it, though it got nothing to do with him. I mean, Sendai, there are, there are some, the news information about Tokyo. But, em, listening what the government is doing, “Is the government going to save us? Is the government taking some acts, taking actions?” They very care about that. And they have the hope their government will save them and they know some day they’ll comes to them. I, I mean something like that. “Well, the road is blocked now, but from Tokyo is, you know [laughter], one by one they are going to Sendai.” Something like this. But as for foreigners, we care more about ourselves. “Can we just come back home country tomorrow? What can I eat? I can’t, don’t have anything to eat.” It’s more, I mean, realistic for us. So it’s totally different, eh, directions.

I see, that’s very, very interesting.

And also, eh, from, in my opinion, from my point of view, the Japanese have much faith in their government. [Laughter] On the contrary, so, Chinese, we don’t have much faith in the government. So we have to save ourselves…

[Laughter]

...that’s also very different thing from the very, very beginning, our thinking is different.

That’s fascinating.

Also, there are also other problems. Like language problems. Whatever you say, when in a big, during a big earthquake, can you concentrate on the Japanese language to see that they are talking about? You can’t. You can’t. Really, you can’t.
W, w, why?

I mean, for example, when you are playing soccer, can you just sit down and read a book? You can’t, because in different mood. When you are, are, you are in a big disaster, what are thinking about is you, your mind is stucked and all your are thinking about is, “What I can eat? How can I get saved? How can I communicate with the outside? As for the radio, it got nothing to doing, especially in another language. It’s very hard.

That’s extremely interesting.

So, I mean, what I am trying to say is when it comes to big disaster, something like you’re born with, it’s very important, you see, your native language, your native custom, what you’ve been doing during the childhood times, it’s very important. Not what you learn. Whatever learn, we are the same facing disaster. Whatever how many language I speak, I just want to speak my mother tongue at that time. I just want to sp, use my mother tongue because it’s precisely, it’s shortly, it can communicate a lot. That’s all, yeah. I mean, when the big disaster happened, you can’t think rationally. It’s totally in a mess. It just like an animal [laughter] you go to, um, yeah, to, sort of, animal place. So, eh, if, if I, I mean, I, I saw in the earthquake something very interesting, for example. You can made the big money during the earthquake time, you see, if you are cool enough [laughter]. Very big money. In many ways you can do it. You can help, you can made many good friends in, during the big earthquake time if you are rich enough, if you are cool down enough. But people are very, I mean, panic at that time, so. So, yeah, what I’m trying to say is when during the big earthquake, everyone is different…

Uhuh.

...it’s not uh [laughter] yeah, what, whoever you see in the normal time. It’s different. It’s very interesting that you use the phrase, kind of, going back to animal...

Yes.

...sta, o, o, other people I’ve spoken to in Miyagi Prefecture...

Uhuh.

...have said almost the same...

Oh really.

...go back to animal style or go back to caveman style...

Yeah.

...that’s very, very interesting. That’s really fascinating. Em, again, because I’m interested in, especially in, sort of, language and culture, but also in ideas of community...

Uhuh.

...em, it sounded like because you had some Japanese friends and so on, you were linked...

Yeah.
...into the Japanese community. Was that useful in the disaster?

Uhm, well, as I said before, I think, eh, during disasters not useful at all because, because, eh, in the, during the disaster what do you have to overcome? What do you have to think about? First, the food. Safety, safety. Food. Or, eh, communications and other things. All these things, your Japanese links cannot offer you during the disaster.

I got it. I got it.

Yeah.

The reason I ask about things like community is because the recommendations that are coming from...

Uhm.

...the Japanese government or NPOs are that foreign people should integrate into the...

Aaaahhh.

...Japanese community. But.

You, you, I think, you can think it this way, eh, as for my Japanese friend, he has, eh, their, his grandson, granddaughter. [Note: for emphasis, the participant taps on the table with his fingertips as if playing a piano chord] He has his relatives, his much big, bigger family. I mean, there are so many people he had, have to take care of during the disaster. I think the foreigners, you know, in a way is the last one he think of, so you can’t depend on the Japanese to help you during dis, disaster. On the contrary, you can help the Japanese a lot during disaster because you have time, you have energy, you can line up to buy things, but they don’t have time, Yeah, something like this. As for NPO or Japanese government suggestion, it’s for those who, how to say, who doesn’t have connections at all in the daily life…

Aaahhh.

...they need to integrate into the Japanese, yeah. But, I mean, they don’t know where to buy food, they can’t communicate with, eh, eh, they don’t have many friends here, just like I know one people, he’s from Hai, Haiti, I don’t know you interview him or not [laughter] eh, yeah, he said there’s only one Haiti people here in Sendai, so you can imagine that kind of circumstance…

Yeah.

...he has nobody to, yeah, care. So in that, in, in that, about, in that case, maybe, it’s better to know some Japanese friend.

I understand, yeah.

I think during the disaster, we, we, how to say, eh, you, you say you should integrate into the Japanese, you should have some Japanese fr, friends because people tend to think that the native people have more information about everything, that native people knows more than the foreigners [Note: for emphasis, the participant taps on the table with his fingertips as if playing a piano chord] but sometimes it’s not. Sometimes. Because they have so many things to care about, yeah?
Yeah, yeah...

Yeah.

...and certainly your experience, your Chinese community of friends managed to get a lot of information...

Yeah, I think much...

...and share it, yeah, yeah.

...much more than the Japanese people.

Uhm, uh, on, still on the topic of information...

Uhh...

...you went back to China and then you had to make a decision, “Should I come back to...

Yes, yes.

...Japan.” How did you get the information to make that decision?

Uhm...

Or where did you get the information to make that decision?

...you mean, why do I choose to come back to Japan again?

Uhm, yeah, not just why, but I’m very interested in topics of information, so I’d like to know how you made that decision, based on what information.

Well, how to say, uh, you see, oh, well, I will put it in this way. When you in Japan, what you care about is live, safety, food. But when you come back to China, you, I think for me, I don’t care about the information that much, you know. When, when the time I choose to come back to Japan, I don’t know much about Sendai, really, at that time...

Oh really?

...I don’t know much, yeah. I just call my friend to see it’s okay but I don’t have pictures, I don’t have everything...

Okay.

...I mean, why I choose come back to Japan, why I did choose is, the reason is that I start to think of my own life. I’m at this age in China, I have nowhere to go. If I go to Sendai, eh, China, eh, in China, I might be laughed at the friends, “You just came to Japan, have all these spendings.” And as for me, I think it’s, kind of, yeah, failure in my...

Uhh.

...so that’s the reason why I came back to China [Note: I think this is a slip of the tongue - I think the participant means from China]. Got nothing to do with information at that time...
I see.

...it’s my, eh, circumstance.

Your circumstance?

Yes.

That’s right. I understand. Uhm, so that’s, yeah, that’s interesting to me, so that means that, say for example the issue about Fukushima...

Yeah.

...that wasn’t really in your mind.

Yes, in fact, that’s it. I know it’s a little bit non-responsible for my family, for my parents, yeah, but I didn’t think much. I just choose to come back.

Has it been in your mind since that time, you know, two, two-and-a-half years have passed?

No, I never think about it. I think there are so many people living here, and that’s my life.

Uhuh, uhuh.

Yeah.

Ehm, the, eh, the other, kind of, topic that I just wanted to touch on a little bit...

Yeah, okay.

...is social media...

Yeah.

Social media? Yes, in a way it’s very useful. But, uhm, how to say, but on the other hand, it is very, how to say, social media sometimes make a mess, you know...

Okay.

Yeah.

Can you tell me more detail about what you mean there, it’s useful but it also makes a mess. H, how is it useful and then how did it make a mess?

Uhm, it’s useful is, like, we got everything, information like the bus are coming to pick us up, by the Internet or by the media. It is useful sometimes. But, eh, messed up means there, there are so many information on the website at that time, you don’t know which one to believe. I, I don’t know why but, like, if you’re Sendai, you can tell something because you are experienced in this. But if other, maybe other people, they are in New York, they, they also make some comment or they say something, but that, you can also
search the back stuff and it just pop up, and so I can see, it got, he knows nothing but he just, eh, I mean, say whatever he wants to say. This is [laughter] the bad thing because at that time people are really very stressed, very terror, so they are easy to, eh, be influenced by that kind of news. Yes.

And, may I ask...

Uhm.

...what websites did you use specifically, em, I don’t know, Weibo or which?

Uhm, no, at that time I just, eh, I seldom search the Internet at that time...

Ah, okay.

...but I asked my friend. They have there so many information of stuffs that, some say Tokyo is more, I mean, more dangerous than Sendai, some say maybe Hokkaido is more danger, dangerous than Sendai, some say it’s better to go to Fukushima, eh, no Hiroshima, to go back to China, yeah. There are those kind of inform, informations everywhere.

I see. So you weren’t using, like, Facebook or something like that. You were just mailing friends...

Yes, mailing friends.

...directly.

Yeah.

I see, I see, I see. Because, em, some people have talked about how, you know, Twitter or Facebook was useful or not useful but for...

Ah well, we are different. The Chinese, we Chinese don’t use Twitter or Facebook…

I see.

...yeah, I know nothing about Twitter or Facebook at that time. It might works, I think.

And there’s no Chinese equivalent...

I mean, the...

...communication tool like Facebook...

Oh yeah, there’s.

...you know, there’s Mixi in Japan?

Yes, I, I, yeah, we have that kind of thing, um, yeah, and, oh, yeah, we, we used that to communicate indeed. It’s helpful, I think it is helpful.

Eh, eh, wha, can I ask, what tool is it called?
Is it famous?

Do you know, we, you know QQ? [Note: QQ is a Chinese software service that offers instant messaging, online social games, music, shopping, microblogging, and group and voice chat, etc.]

QQ? No, I don’t know it.

You don’t know QQ.

So QQ is like Facebook or like Twitter or a combination or?

Eh, well, ehm, you know, let me see, WeChat, you don’t know WeChat? [WeChat is a mobile text and voice messaging communication service developed in China by Tencent, the makers of QQ. It provides text messaging, hold-to-talk voice messaging, broadcast (one-to-many) messaging, photo/video sharing, location sharing, contact information exchange, and supports social networking.]...

Okay.

Eh, LINE [Note: LINE is an instant messaging application and VoIP platform popular in Japan]. You know LINE?

No.

Yeah iPhone [Note: the participant points to my iPhone lying on the table between us].

Ah, yes, yes, yes.

In China, we have WeChat like LINE...

Ah, okay.

...it’s exactly the same.

Right.

I think we are the copy one [laughter]…

[Laughter]

...but, kind of, it’s exactly the same. And we have QQ. QQ is like, QQ is not like Facebook but QQ is, you can just take it like Twitter...

Okay.

...and we have another website like Facebook…

Okay.

...it’s *hotondo* [Note: the participant uses the Japanese word for ‘almost’] eh, almost the same…
I see.

…so we use that one to communicate. And it is very helpful at that time...

Uhum.

…it is really helpful.

Because?

Uhm, I mean, because, eh, for example, when you run, you just run. You don’t think of anything else. But when you, after the run, you are safety. You have to start think, eh, about everything: my tuition, my house [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...everything. And at that time, you already left the Sendai…

Okay.

...so you use that thing to communicate. It’s very helpful...

I got it, I got it.

...and it, eh, for example, the second day, some of my friends went to Hiroshima to run [laughter] to go back to China, and they just, eh, told us, “There are so many Chinese there…

[Laughter]

...you can never get the ticket. Just forget about it.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so, eh, yeah, we just stayed in Sendai…

Yeah.

...that’s it. And some my friends, the day the earthquake happened, they went to Tokyo, and said, “Well, Tokyo is,” eh, you know, “in a mess.”...

[Laughter]

...You, yeah, more, you see? They have [Note: for emphasis, the participant taps on the table with his fingertips as if playing a piano chord] five, eh, hundreds, five-thousand-thousand people [Note: the participant likely means five-million people]...

Wow.

...are walking back home at that day…

Yeah.

...so, “If you go to Tokyo it’s incredible.”...
I see.

...so we have all that kind of information and we just stayed in Sendai.

And so you were able to share it...

Yes, right, yes.

...among your community of friends. Eh, the, the, this is basically nearly the last question now, as, em, a Chinese student in Japan...

Uhuh.

...you have to register with...

Yeah, yes, yeah.

...the city office that you are living here and that you are resident. Did you ever receive any contact from Sendai City Office or Miyagi Prefecture Office? Did they contact you?

What do you mean by contact?

Eh, anything, well, like, after the disaster, did they email, telephone, send a letter, put a pamphlet in your door? Did you receive any contact?

Uhm, well, in fact, eh, how to say, it’s, I, I, I don’t know it’s polite or not, but I mean, what you want to ask or what your are thinking is totally different from the real circumstance, the real time, because when it happened, the first thing is, like, big problems, the Sendai’s, I mean the prefecture may get a thousand calls saying there is tsunami coming and so many people are dying, you see? [Laughter] Really, it’s really hard for them to think of us...

Uhuh.

...oh maybe they send us a, eh, message, but we never received it, but our school, they in charge of us, so they, just as the teacher came, and, to see if we were safe or not. And as far as I know, the school checked the people and just give it later to the, yeah, to the office...

Got it.

...that’s all...

I understand.

...even if I’m not the officer in the prefecture, I, I think there are so many things on their mind at that time.

Oh absolutely, ehm, I’ve asked this question...

Uhuh.

...to other people...

Uhuh.
...and they have said, “I didn’t want to be contacted...”
Yes!

...I was okay.” [laughter]...

[Laughter] Oh, I understand.

...they wanted the priority...
Yes.

...energy to go to, you know, the tsunami areas...
Yes, right.

...or the other, other people. So, the reason I am asking this question is not to criticize…

Uhuh, uhuh, uhuh.

...I just want to know if there was some communication. Also, I’m interested after 3 months, after 6 months, after one year, did you get? Eh, I think no.

No.

No news from the, eh, yeah, city.

Eh, yeah, ehm, this is where there are some differences between, say for example, Miyagi and Tokyo...

Uuh.

...eh, people in Tokyo maybe got more communication...
Yes.

...after one month or two months or three months about, “Okay, if a disaster happens, please do this, please go here.”...

Aahh.

...but that’s a difference between, you know.

Yeah, but we have some, eh, intensive, eh, practice after the earthquake in school…

Uhum.

...only in school.

It’s interesting, because that links to some people have talked about how their company was their main contact point, for you, in a way, your school was a, a main.
Yes, yes. I think it’s the Japanese style. When something happened, they have their social or their community. They are very, really depend on their communities.

I understand.

Yeah.

I understand. That, as I said, that’s pretty much it, again, unless you have some comment or something which I haven’t talked about that you think is important. Do you have anything extra?

Well, eh, th, there is only one thing is that I think if anyone who really wants to know what earthquake like or, eh, whatever, doing the, I mean, they have to really, eh, how to say, I mean, when we are safe, it’s when we sit here, it’s totally different from that time, it’s really hard to imagine, it’s really hard to imagine…

Uhm.

...yeah. And, uhm, for example, I mean, when, when the disaster came, the only thing came on, eh, into our mind is safety and then the drink, the food, so whatever it is, just this, I mean, this is very important because some, sometimes we tend to forget about it when we look back into the disaster. We think of, at that time, is that alright, what about their house, or about their something. There’s nothing exists at that time. I just, like, my friend, he’s very rich, you, he [laughter] has so many money [Note: for emphasis, the participant taps on the table with his fingertips as if playing a piano chord] The day before the earthquake! But when it happened, it’s nothing. Everything is the same. It’s incredible. I think it’s really incredible.

I’m very glad that you said that because I think what’s important for me to try to do…

Uhum, uhuh.

...is when I’m writing about...

Uuh.

...my ideas or recommendations that I remember people like you who were really there...

Yes, yes.

...who really experienced it, and remember your words of advice or your comments...

Yes.

...that in the real earthquake, you don’t think of this, you don’t [laughter] it doesn’t matter. Yeah...

I think, yes.

...I’m trying. I’m going to try to remember those points.

I, I think really it’s very precious because when you want to write something out theme, theme, you think about, “What is communication? What is this thing?” But that thing?”

But as for us during the earthquake, there’s no word like communication, there’s no word
like Japanese, there’s no word like money. It go, means nothing. The only thing first is safety…

Yeah.

...how can I get safety? Second thing is I can eat. That’s all for that time.

Ho, however one, one point I would add to that which is, eh, very important in the disaster literature, is that you have to be careful about when does the disaster begin and when does the disaster end…

Aahhh.

...so what you’re talking about is maybe the first early stages, and I agree...

Yeah, oh.

...I absolutely agree. There is no communication, there is no information, there is no Japanese in the early stages. However, when things cool down a little bit..

Yeah, yeah, yes.

...it’s still the disaster...

Yes.

...but then when things have cooled down a little bit, then, for example, communication or information or so on is a little bit more important then, I think.

Yeah, of course.

...so that’s, kind of, one of the issues that I’m going to try to be careful about...

Aahhh, uhuh, I see.

...when I’m talking about my themes. In this stage, forget it [laughter]...

Oh yes.

...but maybe, like, say for example, in, in your case, after two or three days, with your Chinese community...

Uuhh.

...it was all about communicating: “Go here for this...

Yeah.

...eh, shop, and you go and buy rice here.”...

Yes.

...information did come up then...

Yeah.
...and language did come up then...

Yes, yes.

...so that’s where I’m going to try and be clear...

Yes, play.

...I’m making a difference. But thank you very much for reminding me...

[Laughter] eh no, no, no.

...it’s important. I wasn’t there. I didn’t experience...

Yeah.

...I should try and clearly hear your experiences.

Yeah, I’m sorry, maybe I, I have been rude sometimes...

No, no, no. It’s very important.

...but I’m just showing exactly how I feel.

It’s very important, eh, also, as I said, I don’t want to forget these things...

Yes, yes...

...because...

... it’s really important...

...yeah, eh.

...eh, I think, yeah, that’s really important because when you write something whatever you do, you have, how to say, you’re subjective, you may think this one is like this, this one is like this. But in the real time, it’s totally different [laughter]...

Uhum, yeah.

...I forget my da, mum and dad for a couple of days really, yeah, because the only thing I focused on [laughter] is safety. I don’t know them, [laughter] I don’t know anybody really. So it’s different. And, eh, one point I want to say is only those who are suffering is difficult for them, but those who don’t suffering, they have, yeah, for one, I mean, for a minute, for a moment, they feel sad about all this, but after that, everything is the same...

I see.

...so, in this way, I think the people living in Fukushima is very sad. They, yeah, they have to, eh, leave their country [Note: this is a Japanese way of referring to hometown or home region. It does not refer to a nation state in this instance.] but for To, for Tokyo, I mean the Fukushima have this nuclear plant and give, yeah, the electricity to Tokyo, but for Tokyo people, they just think, “It’s okay. Well, you’re, I’m sorry for you, you, eh, you
sacrifice a lot.” And that’s okay. That’s just one moment. But tho, for those who are
suffering, they’re really suffering...

Uhm, yeah.

...that’s all.

Okay, well that’s pretty much it. The only final question, and I think you’ve kind of
answered it now, em, I ask everybody after they’ve spoken to me...

Uhum.

...if they feel stress or if they feel anxious. So just using a scale, if you could give me an
idea of your level now...

Uhum.

...after talking, how do you feel? [Note: I pass the participant the Likert Scale to fill in]
Not anxious or extremely anxious. What’s your stress level now?

Oh, stress?

After speaking.

Eh, I think I get just a little bit excited, but I’m not anxious.

Okay.

So, it’s something like that. [Note: the participant circles 2 out of 10 on the scale]
Perfect, yeah. Eh, the reason I ask this question...

Uhum.

...is because I want to check that my research process isn’t causing some harm or some
damage...

Oh, I see.

‘

...to, to other people. But, yeah, if your answer is so low, everything is okay. [Laughter] I
didn’t damage you too much.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/2 Interview with Participant 18

Researcher: Great. So that’s all of the, the paper work. Em, really, then I always just start with a very general question. Can you tell me what happened to you in the 2011 disaster?

Participant: Okay. Em, so, first of all, I’m married. Ehm, my wife is Japanese. I’ve got three children. Ehm, my daughter, my oldest daughter was born in March 10th, so for her 7th, 6th? She’s 9, so for her 7th birthday we decided to go to Disneyland. Ehm, but not on the Thursday, which was the 10th, but on the Friday, the 11th. So, em, we were all in Tokyo, not Disneyland but Disney Sea, because they have two, Disneyland and Disneysea, so we were all in Tokyo Disney Sea at the time of the disaster. We’d just gone on, off the, what’s it called, not the Ferris Wheel, the, em, the roundabout, what are those things called with the horses and they go up and down?

Oh, yeah, I think that’s, oh no, that’s not Ferris Wheel...

No the Ferris Wheel is the...

Yeah, yeah...

...the vertical, em, the usual one, you know, anyway, where you, you sit on the horse and then it goes up and then it goes down.

...I know exactly what you mean. [Note: put on the spot, I couldn’t remember the term merry-go-round to which the participant was referring.]

So we’d just got, gotten off of that and were just in, I guess, in, eh, the area beside that when the earthquake happened.

Yeah. What I’m, as you know, looking at are things like communication and information. I’m very interested to know in Disneyland, were there any announcements, for example?

There, I think, I don’t know if there was any announcements over the intercoms, to be honest, I don’t remember. But basically I thought they were very, very professional in what they did. Em, initially when it went off, ehm, nobody, sort of, knew what was happening so everybody, the Japanese, I think, led everybody and just crouched, crouched down, ehm, everybody got low. Di, didn’t lie down, but they crouched down, and we were actually beside a fountain and it was, sort of, the, I was looking at that fountain, and it was a big fountain, and there was, sort of, the, the waves were lapping out and coming over and that’s when I, sort of, realized that it was quite a big earthquake. Then the Japanese started to crouch, and then I’d say all the non-Japanese, eh, started to crouch down as well, and a lot of them were beside, started to go in beside, say, lampposts, you know, and stuff like that. So I was, sort of, keeping an eye, looking at them, because I, I couldn’t figure out how bad it, bad it really was at that time. Em, so at that time, I don’t, sort of, it happened and, you know, whatever five or ten minutes, and then there was more verbal communicating and the staff. So we actually moved to another place and within us moving there was an aftershock, within I’d say five or ten minutes. And we, sort of, stayed in that place for the, the rest of the time, and again, basically what people in Disneysea were saying was, “You can’t leave the theme park. Stay where you are.” Em, I’m not, they said, no, not you can’t, “Don’t, please don’t leave
the theme park. Stay where you are. Everybody stay on ground up till things have ca,
calm down.” And they were going around asking was there anybody feeling sick, and
stuff, because some people were feeling sick. Eh, Disneysea, I think, is on reclaimed
land, so it would have shaken a lot, so there was people that, sort of, got sick, sort of, a
seasick feeling, and stuff like that. So there was people who were nauseous and stuff like
that. But we, we, I think we moved maybe a couple times after the main one, but then I
think it was the second or third time we got in this one location where we probably spent
the best part of an hour just sitting down on the ground, and there was still tremors were,
were happening, and there was still people were getting upset about it, but my wife and
the kids were, sort of, I guess, too young to, sort of, understand, so they were, sort of,
okay with, o, okay with the whole thing. Eh, but we, we sat down and, em, I think they
were, I’m not sure were they distributing stuff, but they were standing up, you could see
them, they were communicating themselves within each other, and, em, there was a lot of
the staff there, and it seemed to be well coordinated from, from my point of view. But, I
mean, everybody was nervous, of course. But, the, eh, my point of view, they di, did tend
to do a very good job. Em, after about, I’d say, I don’t know, an hour-and-a-half, they
started saying you could now leave the theme park if you wanted to, or you could stay.
Now, I think a lot of people stayed because they were also telling us that, if you leave,
there’s no trains, the roads have been shut down, there’s no way to basically, unless you
walk or were staying in some of the nearby hotels, so they were giving information,
which was useful information, especially if you were there with young kids, and there’s a
lot of people there who said, “Well, if I get out, what am I going to do?” Eh, and I was
told later, we actually left the park - I’ll get back to that but - eh, the people that stayed,
em, they opened up their facilities for them, they gave out blankets and stuff and I believe
they, they obviously fed the people that did stay in, in, in the, in the theme park. They did
a controlled evacuation of the the theme park, ehm, so we were allowed move to certain
section where you had to wait, so there was a big crowd of people, and so you were all, I
mean, you could sort of, you were, there was a lot of, I guess, ehm, confusion and some
people were getting angry I noticed, especially some non-Japanese, some Koreans and
Chinese were annoyed why they wouldn’t, they weren’t being left out of the park. Ehm,
because what they were trying to do was they couldn’t have everybody leave, leave the
park, eh, immediately because it would either cause panic or the, you get too many people
trying to get into an area and with, because a theme park can be narrow in certain areas,
the, that, so they actually control it. So, eh, we went to, I think, about two or three
checkpoints where they stopped us and said, “Please wait. Please wait. Please wait.
Please wait.” And then left us go. “Please wait. Please wait. Please wait.” Left us go.
“Please wait. Please wait.” And go. And there was some, but I thought, to be honest, I
thought they did a really, ehm, you know, I wasn’t too worried about the, the, the whole
thing. I didn’t, we didn’t actually understand how serious it was for some reason. Ehm,
but, ehm, you know, I think Disneyland, Disneysea did a, did a, did a good job. I
remember standing up, [Note: participant clears throat] they did have a language issue
because I remember standing at one of the checkpoints, I was up near the front, and there
was a Kore, I think was a Korean or Chinese guy saying, “Go out, go out. We want to go
out.” And the girl saying, trying to say in English that we couldn’t, they can’t, and, and,
giving a reason, and she said, “You have to wait.” And he goes, “How long?” And she
was trying to say, but it wasn’t communicating well, so I, I, I, sort of, stepped in and says,
“Look, they’re, they’re holding, eh, up because of they can’t let everybody leave the
theme park, so you just need to be patient for a little bit.” So that seemed to be, he seemed
to be okay with that. But as we were also leaving, I think it started to rain, and, ehm, was
it it started to rain or started to get cold? But they started to give out these sheet covers to
start to cover people, ehm, that were outside as well, so I, I think they did, they did a good
job…

Yeah.
...in Disneyland and then Disneysea.

That’s great. I mean, obviously, as I said, I’m interested in, sort of, the language aspects...

Yeah.

...in particular...

Yeah.

...so to hear that even, you know, a very famous tourist attraction in Japan had some difficulty with the communication...

Yeah, yeah.

...is interesting...

Yeah, yeah.

...but overall, like, that was face-to-face communication...

It was.

...the staff coming over, so...

Yeah.

...it would depend on each staff member’s...

Exactly, exactly. And it’s tough, I mean, they would have, whatever, a couple of thousand staff there...

Oh yeah.

...the difficulty of them, have them versed in, you know, ehm, emergencies, emergencies like that.

Absolutely.

Yeah.

Ehm, I know as well from the geography that Disney, Disneyland and Disneysea are both by the coast, do, do you remember any tsunami warnings coming?

No, no. Ehm, no tsunami warnings. I was lucky, we were lucky, ehm, I had actually booked into the Hilton that night [Note: participant clears throat] so we were going to do Disneyland the following or some of Disneyland…

Yeah.

...ehm, so it was just a bit too much for me to go there in the one day with the kids…

Yeah.
...so I said I’d stay overnight. Ehm, so that’s why I left the park and I went back to the Hilton, but obviously the trains and everything, even the local train that would have taken me back, the Disney Mickey Mouse train was shut down. [Note: participant clears throat] ehm, but we did actually walk by the coast, ehm, by the sea, and there were these banks up, and I remember us walking along the banks and looking out to sea, and it was a big walk, it took us about a good 45 minutes to get back to the hotel. We probably took a bit of a, I mean, we probably didn’t go the, the, the fastest way, but we did, I remember walking, my kids and me walking up on the bank looking out to sea and unbeknownst to what has, had happened at all, where the earthquake was, em, we still didn’t know anything at that point, ehm, and when I got back and realized later I was like, “Fuck!”...

[Sharp intake of breath]

...I, I says that was a, that was, that was a lesson learned for me, anyway. Ehm, but, em, walking back anyway I did notice, em, because it was on reclaimed land, a lot of the [Note: participant clears throat] the, the, the land was, the water came up, so I remember pushing the baby car through, m, sort of, mud and slush and stuff like that, and I did, some of the roads were, sort of, moved up as well, and stuff like that.

Yeah. I know that part was quite badly affected...

Yeah.

...in, in places. Eh, one of my co-workers lived just at Disneysea...

Okay.

...well, you know, that area...

Yeah, yeah.

...and her whole house was completely destroyed.

Really, yeah?

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah. That was, that area was badly, badly...

Yeah, as you said, probably because it’s reclaimed...

Yeah, yeah.

...reclaimed land.

And I don’t think they opened up Disneyland or Disneysea for another two, two, three months after, after it.

That’s huge.

Yeah.

That’s huge.
Ehm, but ehm, just, on the language I, eh, I, I, I felt there, the communication between the Japanese and the organizing Disneyland, I felt was very good…

That’s great to hear.

...ehm, but, obviously, you can’t cover every aspect [laughter]...

Yeah, I know...

so.

...and what, as I said, what I am interested in are things like the automated warnings or things over, em, loudspeakers which I wonder...

Yeah.

...if, if you don’t remember them, it doesn’t necessarily mean they didn’t happen but...

Yeah.

...in pragmatic terms, if you don’t remember them they, they weren’t working.

Yeah.

[Laughter]

Yeah, I mean, yeah, they don’t, I don’t, to be honest I’d say they were working…

Yeah.

...but they just didn’t sink in with me at the time and the reason was I don’t think the, the earthquake was bad enough to have knocked off the electricity…

Yeah.

...in Disneysea, and it didn’t…

Yeah, yeah.

...em, the electricity wasn’t down. So I’d say they were, eh, but just because of what, everything, I just…

Oh no, but that’s also an interesting point for me...

Uhum.

...and one of my colleague’s is working on the, sort of, the, the language used in warnings and, eh...

Yeah, okay.

...you know, it might have just been that the way they distributed the warnings wasn’t, you know…

Yeah, yeah.
...effective for getting the message across.

Yeah, yeah.

What I'm also really interested in now is you've mentioned one or two times that you didn't realize how serious things were. How did you find out what was going on?

So, I went, we went back to the hotel, the TVs were still on, and we were looking up at the TVs and then the news was, sort of, coming in, eh, from various aspects. Now, I don't know, I know there were, the first image was actually something, ehm, there was a gas facility that had caught fire in Tokyo and I remember that was my first image of it, but then, it had moved and it was actually saying that the earthquake had actually happened in north-east, eh, Japan and it, and it actually started showing the initial shots of that, ehm, but not of the tsunami at that time. Ehm, it was, and my, my wife’s family is from that area and my wife talked to her brother, ehm, after the earthquake and he says, “Yeah, there, we’re, we’re fine.” And he also said that their mum, ehm, had, ehm, they were asked to evacuate because there some tsunami warnings coming in and they were asked to evacuate. So they, he said, “Yeah, she’s been evacuated to, to a centre.” Ehm, so they were okay. Ehm, but then the tsunami came in after the call, and she, sort of, lost communications with them. But, just sorry, just to, to ask your question, so I was there with my wife and we were looking up all, the, the screens, the hotel was mobbed [laughter]. Everybody, especially, there was people lining to check in who had reservations…

[Laughter]

...there was people that didn’t have, who thought, “Okay, come on, let’s get out of the park and see if there’s a vacancy in the, in, in the Hilton.” And, ehm, but, it was just the TVs were on and we were just sitting down just, sort of, flabbergasted looking at the whole thing.

And, again, I know this a, a difficult question to ask. Can you remember, in a hotel chain like the Hilton, were the TVs switched to Japanese channels?

Yeah, yeah. They were Japanese channels, Japanese channels. Did they have CNN? You know what, actually, I think they might have had, em, an English channel on as well…

Uhm.

...because I do remember the, yeah, I, but I’m also thinking if they did, the news probably wouldn't have had, because this was, well, maybe, this was, well, I guess they would because this was, I guess, two hours after the time it happened…

Uhm.

...we were kept in the park, and left home. Em, I do know they had different views and I think they, I think actually they did have them on…

Uhm.

...and I actually remember at that time I started, I had a Blackberry at the time and, ehm, my Blackberry was receiving texts but it wasn’t, it wasn’t, did I have? Yeah, I did have a Blackberry, ehm, but I couldn’t send emails, but for some reason I was receiving texts, so it had obviously gotten on the international news, because people were, were, were
texting me and saying, “Listen, are you alright?” But I couldn’t reply back to them because it wouldn’t send [laughter].

[Laughter] Yeah, em, that’s another sort of interesting point for me is, eh, I know there was a lot of talk after the disaster about how social media were used. Did you use any social media at that time?

Em, I wasn’t. I’m not, the, I’ve only really started to use social media myself recently so, em, it was just text and emails, to be honest, were the only, only thing, em, I actually used, so, em, no, I didn’t, I didn’t use any social media.

Yeah.

But, em, I will now [laughter].

[Laughter] Well, this is the thing, yeah, I mean, to be honest with you, so far I would say my findings are pretty, pretty mixed about social media. It really depended on where you were.

Right.

Em, it was useful, possibly, for people, say, here in To, Tokyo but...

Yeah.

...up further maybe not so much.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Your, your wife also was communicating with her family through text and?

No, no, she was, she talked to her brother initially directly after the earthquake...

Uhm.

...but then she lost communication with her family for the best part of, eh, five days, six days, yeah...

Crikey.

...so she didn’t, she didn’t know...

Oh, crikey.

...what was going on with her, with her mother and father or brother, but she knew that they had gotten out, so she had that, em, reassurance anyway...

Yeah.

...that they were evacuated...

Yeah.
...eh, and in Japan, there’s a special, I forget the number, you might know it actually, that
you can dial and leave a message [Note: the participant is referring to NTT’s 171
Emergency dial-in messaging system…

Yeah.

...and then people can dial into it, so she was doing that, eh, that didn’t, I don’t think they
actually communicated. I think, at the end of the day, her brother got, got in contact with
her and said that, em, everybody was, everybody was safe…

Yeah.

...but her direct mother, her mother and father survived, but…

Yeah.

...some relatives didn’t, but that’s, em, that’s…

Yeah.

...that’s not in the, the language issue.

Yeah, exactly, as I said, I’m, I’m, I don’t want to interfere in your personal
circumstances…

Yeah.

...I really am just looking for the, the language, eh, eh, issues.

Yeah.

Eh, one thing that I am interested in trying to figure out from, from this, this questioning
is, whe, when did the disaster end for you? If, if indeed it has?

It was, I think, it was a bit elongated for me because we had, eh, that’s why I said, my,
my experience was a little bit unique because I had my wife, right? So, from my view,
when you talk about Fukushima. Fukushima didn’t affect us at all, right? We were, we
were worrying about, I was, I was worrying a little bit about Fukushima, but I couldn’t
even bring Fukushima into the picture because my, my wife, at the time, was still
wondering how her mother and father was doing, okay? So Fukushima didn’t really, sort
of, affect us at all. Ehm, the disaster didn’t end, I’d say, the, the problem was, I think
post-three months, six months, and, and you were here yourself, Tokyo was very, very
quiet, you know, dark, everybody was nervous, the stations were, the lighting was down,
em, so it really, and there was still a lot of after-tremors as well, ehm, so, I mean, I don’t
think the, the, the, for me, it didn’t really end, I guess, until six to nine months after it,
when I felt that this is, sort of, you know, it’s gone and it’s over with now. Ehm, but the,
the, the exact disaster itself, I mean, would have stopped, would have been a couple of
weeks, ehm, you know, up to the point when my, my parents, ehm, my, ehm, my parents-
in-law, until she knew they were okay, but then, she didn’t know her relations were okay,
and then the news started filtering in that a couple of her relations had been hit by the
tsunami, they had lost their houses and then she started, you know, collecting stuff, ehm,
like clothes and nappies and stuff like that that she could see, send up, so she, sort of, got
into that and our whole house was…

[Laughter]
...full of boxes for, you know, a month, and I’m, sort of, saying, you know, “It’s about, I, I mean, everyone, I mean, everybody, the Red Cross is taking care of it now...

[Laughter]

...like, you know, the, the immediate response, like, but...

Yeah.

...we sort of need to bring an end to it as well.” Ehm, but I’d say, you know, I’d say, you know, a good six weeks after it, em, before things started to a little bit relax, but then, I guess, six months before I, sort of, felt comfortable...

Yeah.

Yeah.

...and I, I felt things, sort of, were starting to get back to normal in, in, in Tokyo. Up there was another story.

And, I know that even here in Tokyo, communication wasn’t so easy for a, for a while, how about things like with, with work, and that? H, h, how did you manage to communicate at that time?

So, so, em, communication was okay. The phone lines, I’m not sure how long they, they were down, but I didn’t get back into Tokyo until the following day because I stayed in the Hilton and I came back in and, eh, so {a mutual acquaintance of the participant and the researcher} was texting me and, em, she was mailing Ireland so, em, I, I think the problem initially with phone lines was everybody started to use them and the system got, especially it just got overcrowded as opposed to them actually going down, em, so I think communications between Tokyo and the outside world were okay. Em, the biggest difference, you know, in, in or difference in communications I thought was the reporting of the foreign media as to what was going on, compared to the reporting of the Japanese media. It was like as if you were living in two different, and I would be more on the side of the Japanese media. Maybe it’s a, a mentality about the Japanese, being with their stoicism and stuff like that. But also, you know, the sign of CNN saying like, they want to get people, you know, glued to their TV sets, so, sort of, bringing it out of proportion. So there was that, there was a huge difference there. There was very mixed messages within the foreign community because {redacted} our embassy was very calm about the whole thing. A couple of other embassies weren’t so calm. Our ambassador went to Sendai because he had permission to get on the road, because there were one or two people that were still unaccounted for. So he was very proactive, went on, went on the road, and was telling people, you know, “Calm down,” em, “relax.” Em, people were asking him what to do, Irish people, “What should we do?” And he was saying, “Well, ehm, the message is, from the Japanese government is this.” But he was then, sort of, he had to pick a country. If you were listening to the French, then, Jesus Christ...

[Laughter]

...we all had to get airlifted out of the country immediately. Em, but the UK were a little bit more calm and {the Irish Embassy’s} closest relationship with the, with the UK Embassy, so {the Irish Embassy} were, sort of, following their advice. But he was basically saying, “Look, it’s safe. Tokyo is safe. Em, but if you really want to, feel that you need to leave, please leave. We are not advising you to leave. We are not advising you to stay. We are saying it’s safe in Tokyo. Please make the decision.” Which is all really he could do, ehm, given, given the situation. Ehm, so Fukushima was happening as
well, and, em, it was, I don’t know who was, I think again it was the French, but I’ll bad-mouth the French, but they got a little bit paranoid so we all got iodine pills. Eh, have you heard that story, the, the? [Note: I had heard this story already but I wanted to hear it in the participant’s words so I just made a gesture of not knowing without saying anything that might break the participant’s flow.] So basically if it did come to Tokyo, what happens is there’s iodine in the radiation and that gets into your thyroid and that’s what causes the damage. But if you take these pills, em, the pills are full of iodine and it’s these, these iodine that fills up your thyroid and its a different isotope of iodine. This is a safe one. So, if the bad iodine comes in, your thyroid is already filled up with the good thyroid [Note: this is a slip of the tongue and the participant meant to say iodine] and it helps, eh, so we all got these iodine, so I got iodine pills, and my, the, to be honest, I think the ambassador felt that that was a little bit going overboard because, I mean, it was all the foreign nationals, you know, the, the, the, em, the embassies were distributing them to their, you know, nationals and, you know, their relatives as well, and, em, but, obviously, the Japanese weren’t doing that because they didn’t think that it was, it was an issue at the time. So really, within the foreign community, you know, people really didn’t, I think there was a huge confusion. Eh, and I’m, and I, it’s, I’m very laid back about this, this sort of stuff, and again, I wasn’t worried about the radiation thing. I could have been naive, like, I could have been completely wrong and, em, I wasn’t panicking, I wasn’t taking my family out. I, I suggested to my wife, and she nearly bit my head off…

[Laughter]

...she says, “How can we go to Osaka when we don’t know if my parents are?” So I, sort of, had to, you know, sort of, you know, swallow that, which was, which was, in hindsight, I think she was right as well. Em, but I mean there was some companies, like, were evacuating the whole, the company and their, I think the French moved their embassy to Osaka temporarily, and none of that helped the foreign community, and, em, but, again, they were listening to the, the CNN news so the foreigners that really couldn’t communicate on the Japanese, they were communicating from CNN and BBC or some of the local embassies who would have got their information probably from, you know, BBC and, and, and CNN then as well, so I, I, I felt that, I don’t think they had the correct information about, especially about the earthquake, em, anyway, I think in hindsight nobody knew, even the Japanese government didn’t know what was happening in Fukushima and what they did know, I think, they were telling what they did know, but the fact is they didn’t really know what was happening, ehm, so.

It’s, that’s a really interesting point that you’ve mentioned about the, the difference between the foreigners who could access, let’s say, the domestic Japanese media and the foreigners who couldn’t. I think that was a very significant point...

Right.

...ehm, I’ve, I’ve spoken to people, as you saw [Note: the researcher pointed to the profile data sheets that the participant had just filled out] I was like...

Yeah.

...getting people’s Japanese and English ability. Some people had no Japanese and they were dependent on...

Exactly, yeah.

...these outside sources...
Yeah, yeah. But, em, yeah, no, so I thought that was, sort of, the biggest, eh, so I felt the foreigners could get, and I mean the, and I remember talking to the ambassador about it as well and he basically says that the information we are getting from the Japanese is actually quite little as well...

Yeah.

...Ehm, and it was mainly at that time, I guess, it’s mainly about Fukushima, really…

Yeah.

...and they were getting minimal information because the Japanese government didn’t know. So it basically left, and then you had all these experts from Chernobyl and the US saying, “Look, if this had happened, then this is, this, this, and this.” And then they were extrapolating on that…

Yeah.

...and, but I mean, I, I, I, I think there was people who were, sort of, you know, predicting the worst case scenario…

Yeah.

...they were arguing from both, two heads at the, at the time.

Eh, did you feel, when things, sort of, settled down or calmed down a bit and some sort of normality returned, was there any sort of lasting impact in terms of the, I suppose, the view of foreigners or the view of the foreign community?

I’ve heard, em, I, em, yeah, so I’ve heard, sort of, two stories. I’ve heard some people - but I don’t think this would be a general statement, because I don’t think a lot of the Japanese would have known what the foreign community did - but I did know some people felt that the foreign community abandoned them to a certain extent, but I wouldn’t put that as a general statement. Ehm, eh, but also, I mean, the amount of support that the foreign community did give, ehm, more from, you know, countries donating, you know, aid to the Red Cross, or whatever, ehm, they were extremely appreciate, appreciative of that and they did recognize that. And, em, you know, also, for example, I felt our ambassador really did very well as well. He got in his car, got on the highway, he could get on, even though the highway was closed to public, he could get on it, ehm, and he drove all the way to, to Sendai to find people and he got them out, em, of, of, of Sendai. I think if you were there, then you were in a different world, then you’d probably want to get out as soon as possible…

Yeah.

...and he went up and did that and, em, you know, people have passed comments on how good Ireland was in that, in that respect.

Yeah, and I’ve spoken to, to people with a lot of different nationalities and the embassies reacted extremely differently and…

Okay.

...I think the two which have come out with the most praise...
...are Ireland and the UK...

Okay.

...for their, for their response.

Yeah, I did feel, I mean, the ambassador was, sort of, saying he, the UK seemed to be more calm and rational about it and the French just seemed to be extremely panicky about it as well.

Yeah, I have spoken to some people, Fr, French nationals, and, eh, there’s certainly now with two years, sort of...

Yeah.

...hindsight, there’s some quite negative...

Yeah.

...feeling towards the, the, the reaction. But it was, I think a lot of it was based on a lack of information or misinformation...

Yeah, yeah.

On that topic, I know that you, obviously, got information from the Embassy and from the media, did you go anywhere else looking for information at the time?

I didn’t go anywhere else, em, I, I guess, you know, just my Japa, I guess, you know, talking, talking to friends and emails and, and, and stuff like that, ehm, and I eventually went up, my wife actually went up, em, because he parents’ house got hit by the tsunami as well but it didn’t get destroyed, it just, sort of, it came in, came up to the first floor and came out again, so she just, she, she wanted to go up and help, so, em, by the time I got up there, it was, I guess, six weeks or two months, maybe a little bit more, eh, by the time I, probably three months actually, by the time I got up there as well. And that was another source of input for me, but, but as far as, you know, Tokyo was concerned, it was just the embassy and the newspapers and emails and chatting to people and TV and newspapers and that’s it...

Yeah.

...because I just had to, sort of, em, and then again, you know, the feeling of, of stuff, ehm, I did, I did side on some of the, I mean, I have, I have a car, so I said I’d queue up in the queues because there was huge queues for, for petrol, so I queued up. I made sure my car was full just in case we did need to, to evacuate and I made sure that all the water supplies and everything was, was stocked up as well. Em, and there was a certain vigilance. You could go, when I’d take the kids to the park, you could see the parents on their emails and, e, e, even today they do as well, like, em, but it wasn’t more texting people, I think it was more at that time just checking, I think everybody was just completely nervous at this stage about Fukushima...

Yeah.

...whether anything would come into Tokyo, yeah.
Yeah, yeah. And ha, has that lasted now, your, the changes you’ve made to your lifestyle about, say, keeping your car full of petrol or that or?

Ehm, yeah, I don’t keep it full but I don’t let it go down too much and we were always pretty good with the emergency supplies and stuff, but, em, but I think that, you know, that may be because we’ve got three kids, so that’s five, and they say you’re supposed to, what is it, three litres per person per day? So that’s fifteen litres per day and, just, you’re supposed to keep three days, that’s forty-five [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...that’s a lot of water. Living in a small Japanese house, it’s very...

Yeah, where are you supposed to [laughter]? Where do you put that?

...and that’s just for three days and you have to look at, my god, three days would be about, if there was a major, because, you know, you know the way the water supply place is, but there’s 36 million people here, like, I would say, so, we’ve a little bit more, we’ve close to sixty litres...

Yeah.

...but still, I’m sure I wouldn’t be, I’d be rationing water...

Yeah.

...I’d have everybody drinking maybe a liter...

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah yeah.

...a day, I, I’d be the type with, make sure I’ve stocked in beer as well [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...you know?

Absolutely, yeah.

But, ehm, it has, yeah. I mean, yeah, there’d always be enough petrol and, eh, we would be fairly, and my wife is really good as well. We, sort of, said, like, I mean, where would we go and we’ve discussed it, but I’ve, sort of, forgotten, we haven’t really sat down as a family yet, but it’s, sort of, on the cards...

Yeah.

...eh, to do it as well, like. So if I’m here and she’s there, who does what...

Uhm.

...but I mean, to be honest, I think it’s a little bit more fut, I think it’s a little bit futile because I don’t think you can predict every scenario. I think you can just predict the main scenarios. “I’m here.” [Note: the participant points on the table as if it were a map and implying here in his office in Tokyo] - I’m not going to say if I, you know, [Note: the participant clears his throat] but I could be, I guess in Osaka but, I mean - “If I’m here,”
[Note: the participant points on the table as if it were a map] “and, or if I’m somewhere in Tokyo.”

Yeah.

...you can’t say if you’re where in Tokyo, that’s a waste...

Yeah, yeah.

...so it would just probably be the, the main couple of scenarios where one, eh, one child
is in kindergarten, the other is in, the other two are in primary, and she’s at home and I’m
here and what we’d do.

Yeah, some of the things that people have mentioned to me have been really fascinating.

Just very simple advice. Like, for example, one of the people who was in Sendai said, for
whatever reason, when the earthquake happened, he switched off his phone, when he
realized he couldn’t get any calls, and that was actually a really clever idea...

That was a wise thing to have done.

...because it saved his battery...

Yeah.

...so he had battery power when, eh, the, the power or when the connectivity came back,
whereas all his, you know, fellow people and friends, they all ran out of battery by, sort
of...

Ooohhh.

...and it’s something I would have done, too: keep trying, keep trying, keep trying...

Yeah.

...and he, for whatever reason, he very coolly switched off his phone and then people
were coming to him. I, I was just fascinated by that...

Yeah.

...it was a very simple tip but it’s something...

I agree with you, yeah, yeah.

...to, to think of, you know.

What I did actually get in, now that you mention it, was I did actually get in solar
power...

Aaahhh.

...not for that particular reason, now. I, sort of, always a little bit interested in it from a
business perspective…

[Laughter]
...and also from, I guess, from an environment perspective, but also a little bit from a
disaster…

Uhm.

...perspective because it is DC, em, and if an earthquake did happen and it didn’t get
damaged and it was a, a sunny day or somewhat of a sunny day…

Yeah, yeah.

...you could actually use the solar panels to, to, people’s, so I could, like, put a, run a
cable and I could have a kilowatt of, and which is enough to charge a couple of phones…

There you go.

...so that was, sort of, a factor in it as well…

Yeah.

...which probably, in my decision, in putting in solar power, which I probably wouldn’t
have done, so.

Yeah, yeah. There’s just one other topic I’d like to quickly touch on. Some
recommendations that various, you know, local authorities and NPOs have been coming
up with for, for the foreign community is that foreigners need to be more integrated into
their local communities. This is what they say. I just wanted your opinion on that. Do you
think that would have any impact on disaster?

Yes, of course, yeah. Em, Ja, Japan is a complete, it is a community, right, I mean they
work in communities. If you ever look at the way they put the rubbish together, especially
up in, in the like, in the regions or in the, in the countryside as well, em, so it is very
important to be involved in the community because at the end of the day, you, they can’t,
I don’t think it’s practical to, to have scenarios for, like, if, if, if there’s a major in Tokyo,
right, the most important thing is that they help injured people and get water and supplies
to everybody, right. It doesn’t matter who they are, where they are. I don’t think they can
be worried about, I don’t think they can plan for how do I tell this guy, Irish guy who
lives in [a suburb of Tokyo] who doesn’t speak a word of Japanese what’s going on and
what’s, em, what’s, em, where to go for water, right? He should know that, okay, if
you’re, if you’ve come to live in, this doesn’t apply just for Japan, if you go to live in any
country, and because it is Japan, you should know that there is a possibility of an
earthquake happening or a typhoon or a tsunami, eh, and you should basically know if
that happens where to go and what to do, and you should, it’s up to you, and you
shouldn’t rely on the government to do it, so, the communication channels, I think, they
should, they should be aware of this number thing and they should also have within the
community itself, you know, a couple of people that they know, and I know it’s very
tough to do that in Japan but, for, a couple of people that they are fairly, I won’t say, you
know, drinking-term bu, bu, buddies, like, but they say good morning and good night and
they might go over and say it’s a nice day and stuff, and I know, em, that's tough to do as
well, but, I mean, I think they, they, they, they should, and I, and I think Japanese,
especially Tokyo, I think, is a little bit more difficult to get involved in the community
because it’s a big city, people are little bit more, they keep to themselves. But I know,
because when they do their, their, you know, their matsuris [Note: this means festivals]
and stuff, especially up in, you know, outside, and in, some, some of the suburbs, they
like to involve the gaijin [Note: this means foreigners] in, in, in that as well. So I think
they’re very good at bringing people in at that. I think it’s a little bit more difficult in
Tokyo because, so if I, if you were to ask me “Where is my community?” I’d go, “Wow. It’s like, where the borders of my community? Em, I wouldn’t know.” But if I’m a single, if I’m a girl or a guy who’s living in an apartment block in somewhere and say, “Well, where is my community here?” I would say it’s your ward office, where, you should know where your ward office is and they’ll have basic information of what to do in an emergency, but on the day of it itself, you basically need to know that, “Okay, what do I do? Ehm, where’s the local evacuation place if I do need to evacuate? Do I have my supplies in place and, eh, is there any local Japanese person I can go and talk to that’s going to help me?” But I think that’s, ehm, something, so I would agree with, sorry [laughter] so I would agree with what the Japanese person was saying. Ehm, but I also think from a, from a foreigner’s perspective, especially if you are a single person, ehm, where do you start in getting involved in the community? I think that’s something that the Japanese need to help with.

Yeah, and I also think that there is, just as you said, the element of, never mind Japan, but just big city life, it’s hard to get to, integrated...

Yeah.

...into a community, so it’s, it’s a problem in general...

Yeah, absolutely.

...how to, to build those links, but, em, I think that’s certainly something I want to think about a bit more...

Yeah, yeah.

...in, in the coming, kind of, months and, and, and, as part of this, this, this thesis. Just, very quickly, you mentioned about communications say from the ward office, af, after the disaster, do you remember getting any communication from, from them?

No. Not in English, anyway, no. Ehm, but, ehm, I do know that when I have occasion to go there that they do have quite a lot of information on, on what to do in an earthquake and they have a bulletin and they are pretty, em, there is information there on, if you want to go, I have never gone on their homepage, I’m sure there is an English homepage telling you about upcoming events and matsuris and, you know, international exchange and stuff. So they do that, that, that quite well. Ehm, but it doesn’t come to you. It’s something you, sort of, have to, well, which I think, I think is, is, is fair enough, if you are interested to get more involved in the community.

Ehm, I absolutely think, in terms of the community, I agree with everything that you say for residents. Absolutely. The other issue I have is with the people who are short-term visitors...

Uhm.

...that’s where I think I’m going to have to divide, when I say foreign people, foreign nationals in Japan, I’m going to have to talk about the different between residents and short-term visitors.

Yeah. So, so you mean as in two weeks on business?

Yeah, say if you were just here for business, yeah. I mean, you’d have no links with your community because you don’t have a community, you’re not resident...
Yeah.

...and you’d have probably not mot, motivation for speaking Japanese...

Yeah, yeah.

...it’s, kind of, I’m interested in both groups, but I think I’m going to have to treat them quite differently.

Yeah, I, I think so, em, I guess, you know, if they’re, and again you can’t, you can’t consider every case, but you, sort of, have to predict that, or you’d have to, you know, assume that the hotel would, would bear responsibility for the time that they are there and are booked in there. And hopefully that would be up until their flight. Now, what happens after that, I mean, if they can’t leave. There’s no flights from Japan and they’re, they’re, but what happens post their staying in the hotel. I mean, you would imagine or assume that the hotel, em…

Yeah.

...and you would imagine that they’re not taking any new bookings, right. But then again you don’t know. So that’s, that’s, that’s an issue. Em, but again then, I think embassies then play a part…

Uuhh, yeah.

...em, they would be, sort of, responsible again for the, for the upkeep of the person, not the upkeep, but for finding the person somewhere to stay temporarily…

Yeah.

...ehm, and again, everybody, in my book anyway, anybody if you travel to any country - now having said that, I don’t do it myself - say, for example, I was in China this year, I really have no idea if they have earthquakes or not…

Yeah, yeah.

...I don’t think they do, but if they did, like, I mean, again it’s, sort of, but anybody travelling to Japan should be aware of, eh, the basics, ehm, you know, what happens…

Yeah.

...what you do, and stuff. Especially if you’re, you know, out in the street, and stuff, then everybody starts panicking, “Well, what, what do we bloody do?” And, “How am I supposed to get back to my hotel?” and stuff like that. Eh.

And, to be honest, that’s why a couple of times I’ve asked about things like the PA system and, eh, that kind of thing…

Yeah.

...because it’s something which, I don’t, nobody I’ve talked to has mentioned that they heard any useful…

Yeah.
... PA announcements, which really surprised me...

Yeah.

...because you hear PA announcements all day every day...

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Em, I would say, so you never hear English announcements...

Never.

...or any other language announcements, but obviously hear, you hear Japanese...

Yeah.

...I suppose, but, it’s, it’s an interesting point because, I mean, so, I mean, you can go to the Japanese and they go, “Yes, we know it’s an issue.” But it’s one of a thousand issues as well and how do they solve, but I, but the problem with the PA system as well is, is it going to work on the day, right...

There you go

...itself, I mean, is going to, I mean, even if you put a battery, a rechargeable battery on it, I mean, the thing could still get knocked down and fall over, so you can’t be 100% reliant on, on it, as well. Em, but if they do at some point say, “Okay, let’s move away from where it’s connected to the mains. Let’s move away to, it’s, ehm, connected to, you know, a battery, a rechargeable battery, or a battery supply that kicks in...

Yeah.

...if the mains cut off, then there’s no harm, if that happens, then they lose the communication, presume that they’ve lost the communication as well...

Yeah.

...so then, something needs to be on replay and at that point, I mean, it makes sense that if they’re going to do it in Japanese, they could do it in English as well. But if you got, you know Satoh [Note: this is a common Japanese surname and might be like saying ‘Smith’ or ‘Murphy’ in Ireland], seventy-year old Satoh-san sitting in the ward office and it’s his job to, you know, give it and he goes, so, “How do I say...

[Laughter]

...’Please go to such-and-such a place’ in English, Korean, Chinese? That’s not, eh, I don’t think that’s, eh, realistic...

Yeah.

...for a person to.

Ver, very interested or very, it’s a coincidence that you mentioned, like, the seventy-year old Satoh sitting in the ward office because I went up to Tokai-mura where they have the nuclear facility, as you know...

Eh, okay.
...so that would have been, you know, after the disaster...

Yeah.

...that would have been one of the few places that did have a PA system that was working, but the accent of, of the person making the announcement in English was so heavy...

Yeah.

...it was incomprehensible...

Yeah, yeah.

...so there are so many issues to, as you said, you know, having multiple languages available is one of a thousand priorities that they have, but, you know, one of the things I’m going to be touching on is with the 2020 Olympics coming up...

Absolutely, yeah.

...it’s something that maybe might move the language and communication a little higher in the priority list.

I think it will, I think it will. I think you’re correct in your thinking there because, if they happen, and they will believe me, the Japanese, they look at security, they will look if there’s an earthquake during the Olympics...

Yeah.

...they will look at it and that’ll, and, I mean, with Abe and his ‘three arrows’ which you’re sick of hearing about a this stage as I am [Note: Abe was Prime Minister of Japan at the time of interview and his ‘three arrows’ were and economic policy of fiscal stimulus, monetary easing and structural reforms] you know, structural reform, spending loads of money [Note: the participant clears his throat] sorry, so it’s the second arrow, well, a bit both, both, you know, spending money on infrastructure and stuff looking toward the Olympics that has to be it, how do you communicate, em, so they will be, they will be, and they need to look at automation as well, ehm, and, you know, with linguistics as well, so the person is speaking Japanese, can that automatically be translated into English? [Note: the participant clears his throat] I don’t know, I mean, the people who are into, {redacted} I’d be always, I’d be a bit of a critic, I don’t think you can actually speak Japanese and have that translated correctly, eh, into English. I don’t think it’s doable, autom, at, at this point in time. But the key messages that you would want to give, they can be, you know, pre-, pre-, prepared...

Yeah.

...and once you get that out.

Eh, and you also mentioned earlier Chinese and Korean, I mean, English is going to be just one of the, the...

Yeah, exactly, yeah.

...sort of, languages that’s going to be needed...
Yeah, yeah.

...and, you know, even say in the Tohoku area. I mean, even if there had been English, many of the foreign people living there didn’t speak it...

Yeah, yeah.

...they were Chinese or Korean or, you know, speak Brazilian Portuguese or something like that...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so there’s a whole bunch of issues. That’s pretty much all the questions I’ve had. I’ve gone on a bit longer than I, I intended...

That’s fine.

...to, if that’s okay with you...

No, that’s no problem, as long as you.

...just, finally, just is there anything else in terms of, like, language or communication that I haven’t touched on that you think might have been relevant or?

Eh, [Note: the participant clears his throat] no, no. Just, sort of, thinking. [Note: the participant pauses for quite a while as he think] Yeah, no, no. The, ag, again, I, I, I probably haven’t been too much, ehm, useful to you because of the fact that I can speak Japanese and I had a link into the Japanese, so I wasn’t, and I had, you know, people asking me, I mean, there was a guy here, and he said, “My wife is freaking out about this, this nuclear thing.” And he was an ex-pat, just here, and, and, em, eventually, she left and he left then, it was just, it was just too much. So for me, the language wasn’t, ehm, such, such an issue, but for the people here, it, it was.

Well, it’s funny you should say that. That actually is extremely interesting to me because you were acting as a mediator for people because of your language abilities.

But for the people that knew, that knew me, right? Ehm, ehm, and I wouldn’t have, there wouldn’t be a huge amount of people that do know me, em, you know, I think when you’re young and single, when you have the, the, great friends, loads, thousands of friends, but I’m here such a long time now, over time they’d leave and I, you get married and then there’s a family, I mean, that’s, then so you’re around your community with your school and blah, blah, blah, so the people that I know, and I didn’t use Facebook, and I think it would have been different now today people would have asked me more, ehm, on, on, on Facebook, but there was a couple of people that asked me what did I think, and so, but I was very, and, I mean, I think the nuclear thing could have gone two ways. It could have been a huge disaster, but I was just, I guess, going on the side of em, em, you know, taking it, em, “Ah sure it will be grand.”

[Laughter]

[Laughter] Because, I mean, how can you, you have to go in to, you’d need to be a nuclear scientist, scientist to explain it, right? Ehm, like I said, it was very difficult to get, from anybody, em, you know, here are just some of the, some of the simple basic facts.

Ehm, and there was some stuff out like, “Look, the amount of radiation that is getting in Tokyo,” so I mean, they, they, so this is a good example, right, ehm, they advised the
amount of radiation one day that got in to Tokyo, you’ll remember this, the water supply
is high, and they said, “Please don’t give water to infants, to babies.” Right? But for
everybody else it’s fine. So every convenience shop you went, everybody was sold out of
bottled water. This was a couple of months now after where, you know, initially after the
earthquake, you know, all the convenience stores were cleaned out of everything, right,
but then as the stocks, it was, it was grand. I mean, it might have been rationed but
everybody went out and bought, bought, em, bottled water. Not just the foreigners but the
Japanese as well because they were concerned because the, what was it, microsieverts or
whatever they are…

Yeah.

...had gone up from five to two, two-thousand which is twenty times above the
recommended level but still the same amount that you get in an X-ray…

Yeah.

...but still it would have been just probably for an infant, it’s probably too much…

Yeah.

...and that was the, the message but still. And it was a clear message, right? I don’t know
if it’s, if it’s correct, or if it was, I don’t know, you have to trust what they’re saying is
correct, ehm, and, ehm, was it, yeah, I remember {a mutual acquaintance of the
participant and the researcher} coming in here and I asked {him}, and I gave him a glass
of water and he said would I get him a glass of water and normally we’d serve water in
glasses out of big bottles…

Yeah.

...ehm, sometimes, so I gave him a glass of water [laughter] and I says, “{redacted}
That’s tap water. You okay with that?” And he goes, “Yeah, no, I’m grand then.”

[Laughter] He wouldn’t drink it. It wasn’t tap water, it was, I wouldn’t serve tap water,
the taste, the taste of it [laughter] wouldn’t drink it. I’d drink it, and I have…

Yeah.

...because sometimes I was going for a run around the, the, the palace there and I’d stop
and have water, eh, so I, maybe I’m just too trusting in, eh, in nature, but some people
weren’t but.

I know, you’re absolutely, like, the, the, a lot of what you’re saying tallies with my own
experiences…

Yeah.

...I was, I think I was pretty much, like, “Sure, believe what they say until I know better.”

Yeah, yeah.

I mean, now I have spoken to more people, obviously, directly experiencing, you know,
things quite near the, eh, where, the, the nuclear fallout area and they had very different
opinions on it…

Yeah.
...so, you know, I was only in Tokyo so...

Yeah, yeah.

...I thought I was grand. I think it's a very, very murky area, I mean, as, as you said at one point, you know, the Japanese people probably didn’t have the information, the Japanese government didn’t have the information, so I, I, I, I’m not sure...

Everybody was in, you know, speculating...

Yeah...

...and then speculation breeds.

...so, and I think we still are to a certain extent...

[Laughter]

...I really don’t think...

Yeah.

...just my, my, my assessment would be that, like, be, be positive, be optimistic...

Uhm.

...until you’re really got a reason not to be.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And maybe just have a backup plan…

Yeah, have a backup plan [laughter]...

...[laughter] just in case.

...well, you know, I mean, you, you, you’ve mentioned as well, like, you can only plan for so many eventualities, right? Eh, I think it’s hard to plan for everything so I mean, you know, if you start becoming kind of obsessed with it...

Yeah, yeah.

...there’s no point in living here. It, it wouldn’t be practical.

I would agree.

Yeah. But having said that, I know that, you know, there were times where I did get paranoid about things...

Yeah, yeah.

...I remember [laughter] one, I don’t know why this, I had my washing, my laundry out on my balcony [laughter] the first couple of days after it, and for whatever reason, I got really obsessed that my clothes were covered in radiation [laughter]. I mean, I knew nothing about radiation. I still don’t really, to be honest...
Yeah, yeah.

...with you. But I tried to learn more...

Yeah, yeah.

...as, as the time went by, but you know. I think, yeah.

[Note: the researcher switched off the audio more abruptly than normal, but the conversation ended just a few sentences after this.]
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/2 Interview with Participant 19

[While filling out the profile data, the participant asked me a question about my experience of the disaster, so it has been included here in the transcript- this was the first participant to do so. So, in contrast to other transcripts, the first person to speak here is the participant.]

Participant: Eh, am I allowed to ask where you were?

Researcher: Eh, you can, absolutely. Ask any questions you like. I have no, no...

Oh fantastic.

...secrets what...

I, I thought more the fact that maybe you didn’t want to, eh, set it up with, eh, your own story, eh, okay.

...eh, yeah, no, I’m, eh, as I said, I’m completely involved in the whole thing...

Right.

...so I was in Nihonbashi...

Yeah, yes...

...where I both lived and worked, in Nihonbashi...

Yes.

...so I lived, I was very lucky, I was a ten-minute walk from my, eh, like, my apartment was a ten-minute walk from my company, so I had no problems getting home, which a lot of people in the Tokyo area did, as you know. Eh, and I was on the fifth floor of my building, so I didn’t get too much shaking, but I did feel it...

Right, right, right, right.

...definitely did feel it [laughter]. And, ehm, so, you know the way everyone who tells their story, there’s always something, kind of, you focus on, I focused on, {redacted}

Oh!

...{a new colleague} had just arrived [laughter]...

Oh my goodness!

...he was at the desk beside me working and, at the time - I, I don’t know why I said this - I, I just kept saying, you know, “Daijobu, daijobu”, it’s okay...

Yeah, yeah.
...I don’t know why I was speaking to him in Japanese, we were both [English speakers] ...

Yes, yes, yes.

...I just kept saying, “Daijobu, daijobu”. And I thought that was, kind of, being helpful or something. I’ve since spoken to him and he was like, “That was one of the worst things I could have done.”

Right?

He said by me saying, “It’s okay, it’s okay,” it actually made him worry more because he didn’t believe me.

Right, right, right, right, interesting.

And when I think, when I think back on it, I was probably saying it for myself...

Yeah, right, right, right, right.

...I don’t think I was saying it for him. I thought I was saying it for him at the time...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and he was, but it just goes to show that you don’t know that what you’re doing is useful or...

Yes, yes.

...I thought I was helping but, you know, it’s, it’s just fascinating. And I don’t know why I was speaking to him in Japanese. I can’t remember why...

That is so...

...it’s just the strange...

...funny.

...like, you just, I suppose I was just a bit thrown...

Uhm, yes.

...that’s all I can think of. I was just maybe, I was just maybe saying it more to myself.

[Laughter] One of our bucho [Note: this means a ‘senior manager’ in a Japanese company] at one point, kind of, shouted over, “Daijobu ja nai yo” [Note: this means ‘it’s really not okay’ in Japanese] [laughter] like, I was like, “Okay!”

Ah, man, that’s, that is [laughter].

Yeah, I don’t know where that came from.

Yeah, yeah. Oh that is hilarious.

I, I didn’t have any extreme, eh, experiences, you know, eh...
Yes, yes, yes.

...as I said, I was lucky in the sense that I could get home and I, my building went, I moved into a new building a few months...

Yes.

...before the disaster, so it was well earthquake-proofed and, kind of, all that thing...

Yes, yes.

...like, I had actually no damage. The only thing that happened is my gas shut off and one drawer opened...

Right, right, right, right...

...that was about it...

...yes.

...like, really I was very, very lucky. But, but having said that, long-term, I do think it had an effect on me, absolutely. It, it made me want to go back and start this.

Right. That’s, that’s very interesting, yeah.

I thought I was a, you know, a seishain [Note: means ‘permanent employee’ in Japanese] and paying the pension and all the very, sort of, I was here forever, I thought, but it, it did change the course of, of my career and my life.

Yeah.

[I referred to the question the participant was filling in on the profile sheet in order to try to wrap up my anecdote and take the focus back off me] Eh, the reason I’m asking for the citizenship as well is because some foreigners have taken a Japanese passport, right?

Sure, sure, sure.

So that’s why I’ve divided it in two.

Absolutely, yeah.

[Referring to further questions on the profile data questionnaire being filled out by the participant] It’s, if it’s, like, fifty-fifty, or if you use multiple languages, you know it really is just, kind of, a guideline. The, the questions about this, this, the native one, I’ll explain them later on, then. So, just on the next sheet, because I’m talking to people...

Uhum.

...who are not necessarily native speakers of English...

Yes, yes, yes.

...I’m asking everyone to just rate their level of confidence for speaking, listening, reading and writing in both English and then it’s exactly the same scales for Japanese.
Oh right, sure.

Just so I have a kind of an idea for how people speak.

Right, right, okay. So I’m a hundred percent confident in all my English. Is that what you want? It’s not about your public speaking or anything like that.

No, no...

Right.

...it really is just, it’s just so I can get some sort of an idea of what information sources might or might not have been available.

Sure, right, right, okay.

And then, just the final two very short questions there, this one is just about prior experience of natural disasters, if you have any. You mentioned the Kobe earthquake, for example.

Right, that’s true.

It’s really up to you. There’s no right answer. Whatever you want to put down.

Okay, ehm.

Also, some people I am talking to are from New Zealand or from, like, the Western side of the United States.

Okay, I’m going to go right down the scale and say two, okay. I’ve, I’ve been, I was in Japan during the Jan. 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake in Kobe. It didn’t affect me at all. Em, I’ve been in Australia where there were massive bushfires, ehm, but again, didn’t affect me personally.

No, perfect. That’s exactly the type of thing I’m looking for. And then, just have you done any other, like, research...

No.

...it’s just to show the university...

Yes.

...that I’m not, kind of, flogging a dead horse.

Sure. Okay.

That’s it.

Wonderful.

So basically, the, the way I ask everybody is just a very general question...

Uhum.
...can you, can you tell me what happened to you...

Right.

...in the disaster?

Right, right. I was, eh, heading towards, I, I was doing a pitch towards a client, and it was, eh, so, in, in advertising you actually, you go to a client and you pitch your, your wares, em, and they ask you to do the job or not do the job, whatever. And so we’d set this up for three o’clock, we, we head out to {an area in central Tokyo}, which is a, eh, a kind of central business area, eh, and I was coming out, there was myself - and this is important who I was with - there was myself, my boss, who was the vice-president of the company, a senior guy, maybe mid-fifties, ehm, and an, a, kind of, old school sales guy who was probably, again, in his early fifties. The, the three of us head out to do this pitch and, ehm, we got off the train in {a central subway station} and, eh, as we were coming through the turnstiles, eh, the earthquake hit. And my first reaction was that I had vertigo. I, I thought that I was getting, getting dizzy and about to fall down. So, ehm, and, I thought, “Hang on, I didn’t drink the night before,” and that this is, kind of, unusual. Ehm, but, em, that’s exactly what I thought it was. And then I looked around and I could see some people were squatting down and, kind of, like, “Uh, uh, uh.” [Note: the participant gestures looking worriedly above his head] You know, “Jishin da!”’, like, earth, “it’s an earthquake!” And, ehm, with that, I thought, “Whoa! I’m in the subway. The, I’m, I want to get out of the subway.” So, through the turnstile, I looked around at my boss, I said, you know, “Let’s go.” And, ehm, this older gu, older gentleman, my, my boss, ehm, put his hand on my shoulder, and he said, “No, let’s wait here. It’s safer to be here.” And I, kind of, just, just because he was so decisive, I thought that was a good thing. He said that to me in English, by the way. I just, I’m remembering now. Then, so everyone was squatting down and then it started to get more and more severe, and one of the things that struck me was, not physically struck me [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...one of the things that, that I realized was that in, in the train station, because I’ve had lots of other earthquakes in Japan, maybe I need to change that actually [Note: the participant here is referring to his answer to the question on the profile data questionnaire about previous experience of natural disasters] but it’s not a disaster...

No, okay, yeah, yeah...

...no, that’s alright, that’s alright...

exactly.

...yep. So lots of earthquake in Japan, ehm, and you can feel, you become very aware of, of the structure of the building that you’re in, and you think, how, you know, we deceive, we deceive ourselves that this room and that room are completely separate but actually they’re all part of one structure, and you see that when the front of a building falls off and it’s like, “All those people live side by side,” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so, you do, you get very aware of how the, the crea, how the walls creak and that kind of thing. The interesting thing was being in the subway it felt like it was in a, a secure capsule, that there was no, the right angles stayed right angles all the way, so it felt like, I’m sorry I have to do this physical, with my hand, but it felt like it was floating around
like that [Note: the participant gestures keeping an unmoving distance between his hands while moving around his arms in front of him], not like that [Note: the participant gestures both hands and arms moving at the same time in different directions].

 Yeah, yeah.

 And so, it, and you must have heard this, eh, before when people say it felt like that they were riding on a ship or something like that…

 Yeah.

 ...well, that’s what it was like, but the other thing that I felt that, it, I felt so secure, to be quite honest. Because I thought, this is the best place to be in Tokyo. I thought, if this goes down, then, eh, everywhere else outside of the place has gone down and I would recommend it to anyone. If you’re in the subway, stay there…

 Yeah.

 ...so that was good. Then, then, ehm, we, we, it kind of stopped. I can’t, honestly I can’t remember how long it went for, but it stopped, we stood up, ehm, and then as a, a fun little memory was these two foreigners who were obviously visitors Japan, to Japan, came screaming out of the, out of the, ehm, station, jumped over the turnstiles, and raced out of the building kind of screaming, and, ehm, all the Japanese salarymen who were, like, squatting down had a laugh…

 [Laughter]

 ...[laughter] and it was a really nice moment, it was a really nice moment. But anyway, so, we came out, we came out and, em, made our way to, to where our appointment was at three o’clock. And, we, by now, it was ten to three or something, we got closer and closer, and we found the building. The elevator’s not working. So we decided to go up the stairs - it’s on the seventh floor. So we, we’re, we’re climbing the stairs, and we’re all a little bit rattled but also a little bit excited, and the, the people was, kind of, like, like, “Woo, ooh, ooh, ohh.” Em, a little, a few people were, kind of, out on the streets saying, “Oh, what, that was pretty hairy scary.” But we walk up the seven flights of stairs and there was plaster in the stairwell…

 Oohhh.

 ...where you could see big cracks had come down from, from this building. It was quite a modern building. Ehm, and then when we got up to the floor, ehm, the company was {a foreign online business}, ehm, so they were kind of modern but also very young. Ehm, but they had propped open the doors and they had some emergency supplies out and things so I thought. “Oh, these guys have got their act together.” And so we made our way in there and we called the guy up and we said, “Oh, hi, you know, this is us from, from {redacted} and we’ve come for the three o’clock meeting.” And [laughter] he was like, “What? You came?” And he said, we said, “Yes, yes.” And he said, “Oh well, if you’re here, let’s, let’s do it.”

 [Laughter]

 So he invited us in and we went into the meeting room and, eh, of course, for the first ten minutes we were, we were just in awe about what had just happened and, “Wow, that was, how was this building?” And anyway, we got over that and then we got straight down to business, and it was business as usual. Then the second wave hit, the second
...and, ehm, it was, that was really scary, because suddenly my, my whole idea of me being in this safe little cocoon, this engineering marvel, was out the window because I was in this building that I’d already seen had cracks in the stairwell and anyway, so, shaking around and we’re doing the presentation, and, em, we, it just got more and more severe, and, eh, going through my head, I was looking out the window at some other buildings that were, were shaking across the street, and they were much older than the building I was in. I thought, “Okay, if they go down, then, I’m out of here.”

Yeah.

So, and, and, and, I’m not sure if this will feature again in, in our conversation, but a few times, I always, I set these kind of, eh, bars or like criteria that if this happens then I’m going to do this. If this happens, that was a way that I negotiated a lot of it, even, even the mo, the weeks and months afterwards. Then, it got so severe at one stage we got under the table in the meeting room. We got under the table and I love to tell this story that my boss went under the table, pulls out the presentation, and he’s like, “I was saying, we were founded in 19…” [laughter] [Laughter]

...seriously, the client on the other side of the table said, said, you know, “Wakatta, wakatta.” “I get it.” [laughter]...

[Laughter] “You get the job, you get the job.” [Laughter]...

[Laughter]...

...and, eh, any, anyway, so, we laughed at the fact that, that he would do, continue with this. And I’m not exactly sure how good my memory is of that incident, but that was certainly the atmosphere. But that’s, and, em, that he was, he was an absolute, this boss was a real samurai in the face of that danger and, cut a long story short, it got more and more, ehm, dramatic and when it, when it calmed down we thought, “Okay, let’s not be stupid. Let’s get out of here.” So we cancelled the meeting, we came down the emergency stairway. The lovely young people in the {foreign online business} gave us some water as we were leaving, and said, “Hang on to these. You just don’t know what’s going to be.” So that was a lovely thing to do. Got back down, the older sales guy, not my boss, the older sales guy was, was freaked out and, em, basically, eh, it was, the moment when we knew, by the time we came out there were lots of people out on the street. Em, some of the financial companies, there were English guys, I remember they were English, and they were out in front of their buildings with pots of beer [laughter]...

[Laughter]...and so, and so, so there was a bit of that, and there was a bit of a, to be quite honest, a festive atmosphere. It was like, “What a shake up!” We were all out on the streets... Yeah.
...people were not panicked by any means. Eh, then, but, but, the sales guy was a bit freaked out so he said, “I’m going home.” And so, he went and my boss said, “I’m going back to the office.” And I’m thinking, “Okay, earthquake, tidal waves, we’re heading back to the office,” which is, as you can see where we are now, we’re on the edge of Tokyo Bay…

Yeah.

...I thought, “That’s an interesting thing.” And I thought, “You know, like, I’ve got nothing to lose. I’m, I’m a single guy, no family.” I thought, “Alright, I’ll go back.” Eh, not that I was being so much of a martyr, but it was more that, em, there was no, eh, reason to think that there’s anything worse than, it was like, what else was I going to do? So, and if he was going to go back. So we came back together, got to this building, we, the, our office is on the 40th floor, eh, and the elevators were shut down…

[Laughter]

...So then came the moment of truth…

[Laughter]

...ehm, he decided to hike up the forty floors, and I said, “I’m going to wait it out down here.”...

[Laughter]

...so I just, I pulled up at a little room there [Note: the participant pointed to an area of the lobby near the elevators for his tower in the complex], ehm, couldn’t use my phone. Eh, I have two phones actually. Eh, I’ll show you. I have the, like, the iPhone, the regular, em, cellular phone…

Yeah.

...and this is a PHS, which is, em, a, a format that - it may be only unique to Japan now - but it's, it's actually, I, I believe that the technology is similar to a walkie-talkie. So the further away you get from the antenna, the weaker it gets. But it worked. And so I was, kind of, sharing it round and, and, but I couldn’t, it couldn’t make a call internationally on this [Note: pointing to the PHS phone] eh, so, got back here, went into this kind of loungy area in the, in the bottom of my building. And they had wifi going, and so, and you may have heard this story, I, I fired that up and I found that I couldn’t, ehm, contact a lot of websites, I think, or maybe I just went straight to Twitter. Anyway, Twitter was the way to go. I found that I was, I was talking to people on Twitter all the time, and, ehm, I managed to get a phone call through to, to my mum, ehm, back in Australia. Said, “Hi mum, ah, there’s, there’s been a, a really big earthquake but I’m okay.” And she said, “Oh, that’s nice dear. Thanks for the call. Bye.”

[Laughter]

And then, of course, flipping to that side of the world, that half of the world, you know, an hour later, they start seeing the images on TV and she freaks out and then can’t get through. But, yeah, and, so, I was on Twitter and that started something because, em, as I said to you before, I have been a journalist before so all my Twitter feeds were, just, news feeds from all, all over the world. Ehm, some Japanese, mostly in English. A lot of, eh, Eng, English-language journalists who were here in Japan, so I have all their feeds, had them all up and going, and they were recommending other sites, and things like that, so
that was, I was just adding them, getting all this information, ehm, and then, it was
probably about that time I got my first email or Tweet from a friend of mine in Japan, a
guy that I knew in Japan that doesn’t speak Japanese. And he said, he said,
“{participant’s name}, ehm, what’s going on?” And I said, I told him what I knew and he
was saying, “Okay, this is what we’re seeing, eh, in the foreign press, what are the
Japanese media saying.” And, em, you know, I, I, I do read Japanese, ehm, but I found
myself more often than not, in, in that, that panicked time, I was looking at the English,
ehm, for the context, then going to the, to the Japanese to compare. So I was looking for
key words, things like that. Eh, the, the Associated Press had mentioned something about,
ehm, radiation or, like, a, a, this was much later in the day piece, so then I was looking to
those articles and things like that. And I have, em, eh, I have some Korean family in
Japan and they were getting the worst information from Korea. They, they, they were
hearing that Kanto [Note: Kanto is the central region of the Japanese main island of
Honshu in which Tokyo is located] had broken off from Honshu…

Oh my goodness.

...and was drifting out in the ocean. So everyone was freaking out and, and the Koreans in
the, who were like working in restaurants that my, my Korean family owns and they just,
they ran out and never came back...

Wow.

...yeah, yeah. They left Japan, basically ran out of the restaurant, went to the airport or got
to the other side of Niigata and got on a ferry or something and just never came back. It
was a disaster.

[Laughter]

But em, yeah, so there was a lot of rumour-mongering in the non-English-speaking
foreign communities, best way to describe, where I found the English-speaking
community was much more relaxed, ehm, and then, as I mentioned to you before, two
things happened: one is that, eh, I had a, eh, eh, there was a British TV crew that flew in
to Japan that night, and my friend was here and she was, like, a freelance cameraman,
they picked her up and they told her to go, and she had one of these super-duper satellite
phones, and so, at about midnight, she was like halfway to Sendai…

Oh crikey.

...yeah, yeah, and where all the roads were, were blocked off, and they were, like,
borrowing gasoline and stuff to get through, and they were, they were, like, they were
ahead of the first responders. But she was calling me up and she was saying, “Listen, we
think we’re here,” and so I’m looking at the map and trying to give some remote-control
directions, but, em, they were basically, oh, oh, actually, I shouldn’t aggrandize my, my
role in that, ehm, but what happened, when it really struck home, when she called me up,
she said, “Listen, we’ve been told by the British Embassy to evacuate.” Ehm, and I said,
“What, what do you mean? Get out of the area?” She said, “Yes.” No, she, no, she said,
“Get out of Japan. That’s what the British Embassy have told us. And then, so we’re
trying to push back on that,” and she’s saying, like, “What do you know?” Because they
were, they were, they had no contact with any media or anything. And, and, it was all
about the, em, the, the nuclear…

Yeah.
...the nu, nuclear, eh, explosion and, em, the leakage. And so I was trying to get as much information as possible and I’ve, I’ve got a person that I care about who’s, who’s out there, and, and, so, I, I’m saying, “Listen, nobody is saying it here, and they’re, they’re recommending people not come to Japan, and stuff like that, but nobody’s making a directive like that just yet.” And then a few countries started to, like France, I think, and, ehm, then she called me back again and she said, “Ah, we’ve, we’ve been cut off. We have to, have to leave. It’s, you don’t even have to answer this anymore.” Ehm, and so, that was that, and they got out of wherever they were, and they went up to Akita [Note: a prefecture in the far north of Japan’s main island] ready to fly out, and by the time they had got there, they got another message saying, “You’re fine.” So, so, I’ve actually skipped ahead a couple of days here, but they were up there all that time, but there were a couple - because of my background in journalism - people were contacting me from outside of Japan, ehm, for comments, ehm, but I found myself really, really, ehm, stretching my Japanese to find out as much information as I possibly could. And it ended up being that, em, the, I found, and I said, said, that the foreign media was better, was more accurate, more, ehm, unbiased, I, I think that there would have been, the, working for a Japanese publication, I know that you don’t have the government in your backpocket, or certainly it was never in my backpocket saying don’t write articles about this because, that, you’re going to damage our reputation, but I did think they would have been a lot more cautious about creating a panic…

Okay.

...like, if you tell people in Tokyo there’s a nuclear meltdown going on, get out, there would be more injuries and death and carnage and chaos than certainly anything that, that happened. So, I think that, even if they had the information, they would just be much, much more careful about checking its accuracy…

Uhm.

...and, and the implications of “Do we release this now?” Ehm, the newsworthiness against, you know, the, the public good. I don’t know, I don’t know. But, it was the Japanese, the foreign press didn’t have that because they, they weren’t on the ground, so just get it out. So, let, let me, is that?…

Oh, it is, absolutely. No wherever you want to, where, where, whatever you want to talk about.

...oh, well, because there’s all these different little tangents and things like that…

Yeah.

...and the, eh, the, the thing that, eh, I mentioned to you about the, the, the suspension piece between the, the, the buildings [Note: the participant is referring to a kind of an elevated walkway or enclosed corridor many, many floors up joining two towers of the building complex we were in that he had pointed out to me on the way to the cafe] the other thing, too, is that, em, I just have to check - that’s good, yeah [Note: the participant looked at the clock on his phone on the table to make sure he was not running late for his appointment] a conference call at three o’clock…

Oh, okay, yeah, no you, really, you stop whenever.

Okay, thank, thank you. One of the things when I got back here, eh, with my boss who went back to work, ehm, when we came in, the ground, the ground had liquefied and so there were parts of the - because we’re actually on reclaimed land…
Yeah, yeah.

…{redacted}. So it’s landfill, basically. Eh, they, they’ve done a wonderful job of, like, compressing, but, but not, not the way that nature does it over billions of years…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so, eh, there were, there were parts of the, the, that were pushed up like that [Note: the participant gestured a vertical position with his hands] there was, like, unnatural fluids coming out of them…

Yeah, yeah.

...and things like that. And, that was, that was a bizarre thing to see.

Crikey. You know the way that you were kind of saying you were saying that you were, kind of, stretching your Japanese...

Yes.

...to get information, did you go to like government websites or?

Yes.

Oh, you did.

Yes, I did. I did. I did. I did. I went to government websites, eh, I went to Tepco website, that was, of course, later…

Yeah.

...ehm, so, I’m sorry if I’m getting the chronology mixed up here, but, eh, that’s what I did. Ehm…

And that would have been all Japanese language...

Yes.

...they didn’t have any translation at that point.

Eh, no, no. Not initially, no. All, they would have some, some really basic thing saying, you know, ehm, “The situation is under control.” Or actually, I can’t remember but, I can’t remember but I, it was, that, I was only, I was probably only looking at the Japanese, and then I got my English-language information from the English press, and, and other people that were sharing stuff, you know, things that they had heard. Eh, I also knew other very good non-native Japanese speakers that, eh, were, were sharing information that they knew, ehm, and, there was this, we, we jump, there are all these protocols that started to get set up between people like let’s not rumour-monger, ehm, let’s, let’s, kind of, cite where we’ve, where we’ve heard that information, ehm, so people can take it in context of, you know, who said that kind-of-thing, and, ehm, and things got very heated on Facebook where, eh, you know, some foreign families were, they, they decided to leave, and they said, you know, “Well, I just don’t want to take the risk with my children.” And then the other foreign families that didn’t want to leave would be like, “What, do you don’t think we care about our children?”...
...And it was, it got, it got nasty at some times. And I tried to stay out of it. But there were a couple of times I, kind of, panicked and, and, eh, and I, I was, I set this thing up to myself, a, after everything, this was days down the track, I said, “Do you leave Japan or do you not leave Japan?” And I set the bar that if the US military pulls out of Yokosuka [Note: a major naval base of the US military in Japan near Tokyo] I will pull out of Japan. That was my big thing. And at one stage they, they moved their warships offshore and, eh, I thought, “Wow, that is scary.” And I, I’m not sure if I learned this after the fact or I, I have a friend, eh, who works, who’s a high-ranking military official in the embassy, in the American Embassy, and, ehm, I spoke to him, and it was more, he said, “That’s, that’s just about the sensitivity of the, the machines and that, and there,” so he said, “yeah, it’s probably not, they just don’t want the, their machines damaged by even slight radiation.” So, I thought, “Okay, I kind of believe you.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...he, he didn’t move, he stayed here too, so, yeah.

This is one thing that, that a lot of people have talked about how in the, let’s say, non-Japanese community, some people felt better served because they, kind of, didn’t have, say, like, the government line to rely on. They just found information from each other and used it to make their, their decisions. So some people I’ve spoken to said they felt they were better off than their Japanese friends in some way...

Yeah, yes, yes, yes, yes.

...because they, kind of, didn’t feel they could rely on the, I guess, the standard sources, so they came up with their own sources to make their decisions.

I had Japanese friends asking me, eh, “Seriously, what is the rest of the world saying?” And, and they were saying it in a very genuine, you know, intelligent Japanese that were thinking, “We don’t,” yeah, he said, “We don’t know what the, the, what the line is that the government is towing or what Tepco is saying, or that kind of thing. So what, what,” eh, especially because, we’re, we’re, we’re get, we’re talking specifically now about the radiation, em, because it’s so easy to detect, you know, from, from, from outside of the city, you know, they can see what’s going on there, but eh.

Yeah, that’s an issue, I’m, I’m not even sure I’m going to be able to handle it but, like, translating in a disaster, ...

Yes.

...of course, means for the foreign nationals that are here...

Yes.

...but also could mean for the Japanese people...

It was...

...who want to see.
...it was, it was a, definitely a real thing and, em, and I had that a lot from, from friends
and even from, ehm, former colleagues and, and media people that, eh, I remember going
to a dinner with these people who were, who were, you know, heads of, I won’t say
heads, but they were, were very senior people in, like, a TV, eh, network here, another
guy in a, in a director-level position, and they were asking me, they
were saying, “What are the things that you are hearing?” And they just wanted to see if
there were pieces of information that were just, eh, that were just missing from anything.

There’s just one thing I would like to ask if you can remember. Do you remember when
you were in the subway...

Yes.

...were there any announcements...

Yes.

...and if there were, were there in other languages?

No, they were all in Japanese. That’s a good point.

The reason I’m asking is you said that there was two obvious foreign people running out
screaming...

Yes, yes.

...I’m just wondering were there any announcements in English or Chinese or Korean or?

Ehm, I remember specifically, ehm, after my boss told me, “Wait here. It’s safer to be in
the station.” Almost, almost seconds after said that, they had a, they had a big
announcement that was, not a recorded, the guy was actually, you know, he got on the
P.A. and he said, he said, you know, “Everybody, there’s been a major earthquake. Please
stay within the station. Eh, it’s the safest place to be. You will go outside and things will
drop on your head.” That was all in Japanese. All in Japanese.

That’s really interesting.

Ehm, and, just reflecting back on the two foreign guys that jumped the turnstiles, ehm,
just the situation itself and the tone of voice, of the panicked tone of voice of this guy, eh,
eh, giving the announcement would have been enough to, you know, to scare the hell out
of you...

Yeah, yeah.

...”What’s he actually saying?”

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And the other, the final thing that I just want to ask you about is
for you, when did the disaster end? If it has?

Right, right. A very good point. Ehm, it, yeah, interesting. I, it, it almost, it ended, I
would probably say, ehm, maybe a month later, yeah, yeah. It’s an interesting thing. I’m
just trying to think, eh, how am I actually judging that for myself. And I’m just thinking
was it my sense of alertness or my, my flight or fight reaction, and I think it was, that
would have been, eh, ehm, and I was, I was furiously tweeting and, and sharing
information back and forth with all these people non-stop for about that period and then,
then things got back to normal, ehm, and the reason that I stopped to, to think about that
is that in the months after that, ehm, there, a lot of things changed in terms of companies
pulling out of Japan, ehm, some of my best friends with their families moving back home,
so, for me, it really marked the end of an era, and, em, there was, em, yeah, who decided
to pick up and leave, ehm, it, I think there was a kind of a sense among Japanese here that
it was like, “Oh, you guys, you really, you weren’t in it for the long haul.” And for the
foreigners who stayed, there was, eh, there was a period of six months to a year when it
was like, you know, I just got the feeling of, the, the, respect and, like, em, “We thank
you so much for, for sticking with us.” Not that I was actually looking for that, eh, at all.
But, em, it was a very, very interesting thing. Some, like, I did get some that said, “Why
are you staying?” It was like, if the tables were turned, had no family here, up and go
home straight away...

Yeah.

...there’s, there’s nothing to be, yeah, but for me it was, em, I had invested so much time,
I thought, “Okay, when the chips are down,” you know?

Oh, it’s a tough, tough call, I mean, I, I, each circumstance is so different...

That’s right, that’s right.

...it’s so different. It’s very, but I felt what you mentioned about, amongst friends even,
and amongst people in the, let’s say, foreign community..

Uhum.

...there was tension...

There was.

...about whether to stay, whether to go...

That’s right.

...when people came back.

And, of course, there’s the notorious fly-jin [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who
left Japan during the disaster].

[Laughter]

Yes, that’s right. Ehm, and that, I’m sorry, I have to go, but I do need to tell you about
one very quick, little thing...

Yeah.

...is that, em, immediately after it happened we had a, our colleagues around the world,
em, reached out to us and they said, there was an outpouring of sympathy and, and
support and these guys somewhere, I can’t even remember what it was but it was, like,
some, one team in the [North America], one team in [South East Asia], they quickly set
up this website where people could send in messages of support to, eh, the people of
Japan, and, ehm, sorry, this is, this what you actually wanted to talk about, and, em,
basically you sent the message and then somehow it was wrapped into, like, an origami crane and so the, and so it would go up on to this thing, and so if you clicked on the crane it would unwrap again and you could see the message written inside. It was a really lovely thing. And they put this up in some amazing, it was, like, 24 hours, 48 hours, or something…

Yeah.

{redacted}

...and at that point we had all these amazing messages coming out, ehm, but of course they were all in English or Spanish or German. Mo, most of them were, and we had thousands of these messages coming through just short little tweets…

Yeah, yeah.

...and I thought, so we were actually dealing with other stuff, it was, it wasn’t a priority, but, ehm, and that’s when I contacted {the person who had introduced the participant to the researcher} and I said, “Listen, we’ve got this thing going, would your guys be interested in translating these messages?” And, em, they were so quick to, to get back on, they, they asked around and every translator on their books said yes they’d love to do that for free, absolutely. And, em, I was a little bit conscious, too, was that, that, even though it was a lovely thing to do, it was cert, it was well and truly branded as {our company} doing this kind of thing and I, I just, I, it was a little bit weird and then I thought, “Okay, who cares. It is a business. We’re doing this kind of thing and those sentiments are, are real. So let’s put it together.” And Google had that wonderful thing going as well. I thought, “Well, it’s got the Google logo on it and people, yeah.” So anyway, the end of the story was that, ehm, the, the technical side of, of getting the translators, to put the translations in there, it suddenly turned it into a major operation, and the two teams that had dedicated time to do that, they said, “We don’t have any more time.” And, eh, so yeah, that was that.

But that’s absolutely, that’s the sort of thing where I know there are technological solutions that could be put in place to make that kind of automated process easier. I know it’s terrible to, sort of, be thinking about the next time, but, as you know yourself, unfortunately in Japan, it’s a land where…

Yes, yes.

...process easier. I know it’s terrible to, sort of, be thinking about the next time, but, as you know yourself, unfortunately in Japan, it’s a land where…

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

...it’s really likely there will be, you know, another significant disaster in not such a long period of time so it’s the sort of thing that could be put in place, not necessarily just for messages of hope…

Yes, right.

...but for other purposes as well.

Yes, that’s right. I did volunteer my services somewhere, it may, I think it was on the Google site, ehm, when they were asking for help with translators and things like that…

Yeah.
...so I did that, ehm, but I think they had people much more qualified than me already, and I think they also got enough outpouring of support. That might be something, I think they set that up for, did they set that up for the Tohoku earthquake?

Yes, I think as far as I'm aware it was done, kind of, on the fly.

So which one? The Haiti?

...so the Haiti, there, there absolutely, there were things...

Yeah, yeah, yes.

...so they had begun this, kind of, Google Crisis Response in Haiti.

And that was before the?

Exactly, that was before...

Sorry, I thought it was afterward.

...about a year before and it was a, kind of, a skeleton effort, I suppose, if you like...

Uhm, that’s right.

...and then for the New Zealand / Christchurch earthquakes...

Yes, yes.

...they developed it slightly more...

Uhm.

...which again was just before, as you know, the...

Yes, that’s right.

...Japan earthquake. So they built on that slightly again...

Uhm.

...and then for the, ehm, Japan earthquake, the, the, they had, I guess, enough, eh, systems stuff in place that they could...

Uhm, right.

...quite quickly, they really had it up in, in a very short time...

It was amazing, that’s right.

...and there was huge, eh, work done on that.

And people taking photographs of the lists of names, oh, that was amazing.
And, you know, it’s important, I think, as well, in terms of, like, non-Japanese people, you want to be able to make a contribution to...

Yes, yes.

...so that’s another way that translation could play a part: it allows people without maybe the Japanese skills...

Uhm, uhm, uhm.

...to contribute, which is something I know that a lot of people have said they were glad to do.

Right, right, yes.

And I will definitely look up on the [Irish news sites] [Note: the participant had mentioned that there may be archives of him being interviewed at the time of the disaster for Irish news]...

Yes.

...to see if I can find that, eh, eh, interview...

And I’ll see…

...that would be fascinating.

... if I can find the guy, I can’t remember his name, but, but I’m sure if I look at my Google G-mail…

Yeah.

...that he would have been there. I probably have some, some contact details...

Yeah.

...and I could even put you in contact with him.

That would be amazing if you can. But just to say thank you so much...

Right.

...for giving me your time today...

Oh, no. Pleasure, pleasure.

...it’s been really fascinating to hear your experiences. I appreciate it very, very much.

And I’m very sorry, I would love to spend a little bit more time with you, but I do have to dash.

No problem at all. I completely understand.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/2 Interview with Participant 20

Researcher: Okay, so that’s pretty much it, ehm, then, if you could just tell me...

Participant: Yeah.

...generally what happened to you in the 2011 disaster.

Ehm, in terms of language or just generally.

Just, whatever, yeah, whatever happened...

Okay.

...and I mean, if there are language elements.

Ehm, well I suppose we were in the office here, ehm, so there was a fair amount of shaking. Our office is on the, a relatively high floor in the building so, ehm, these buildings are really, I think, designed to sway in the actual event of an earthquake. So the building started swaying back and forth. It was, sort of, accelerating from one side to another. It was pretty dramatic and, em, my desk is actually relatively close to a window and so, eh, once that started, you, kind of, got a sense that it was something bigger than we had had previously. Obviously living in Tokyo you get a number of small shakes, em, but this was obviously something a little bit bigger, em, and it, sort of, continued on for some time. I actually had a, a meeting, em, that I had to go to at a client’s, em, that was, sort of, coming up. So I was actually slated to leave the office, go to this meeting with a colleague, and so I, sort of, worked my way from my desk towards the middle of the room and we were, sort of, swaying back and forth like on the deck of a ship, and my colleague was actually still working try, through the whole thing, trying to get the work done. And, em, I actually filmed some of him doing that...

[Laughter]

...because I was just like, “He’s crazy.” And, eh, and, and he, and I was like, “{redacted}, you know, what are you doing?” And he was, he was just like, “Aw, I just want to get this thing done so I can get the hell out of here.” So I was like, “All right.” So the shaking finished. We decided at that point that, “All right that’s it, we’re going to go”. Because not only did we have a meeting but also clearly I didn’t want to stay in the building. Em, although I know technically you are supposed to remain in the building. Em, announcements were being made through the building and so on, ehm, you know, but {my colleague} and I, em, sort of, made our way down the stairs in the stairwell, and in the stairwell you could see the cracks in the drywall and so on, that had, that happened, Again, em, nothing really damaged, em, I think one of the things I remember about the earthquake was the, we have, em, filing cabinets along the walls of our office that are on, eh, rails just to save space, so they sort of slide back and forth, you can get to a second railing. And I just remember in the course of that swaying back and forth, all of the filing cabinets swaying to one side, slamming against each other, and then swinging back and slamming. So I just remember, and the force of that, kind of, just, that noise that they, they were making as they would, kind of, pack into each other. Ehm, but then going down through the, the stairwell was the first sign of actually seeing damage, em, with sort of - and it’s all been fixed now obviously but, but, em - seeing cracks in the drywall, seeing,
em, problems. We got down onto the ground floor fairly quickly. Ehm, we hopped in a
taxi at that time. I think, it, it, sort of, again nobody really knew what was going on, news
hadn’t, sort of, come. This was probably, you know, almost immediately after the
earthquake so we were almost immediately in a taxi. Ehm and then we were heading
towards our client’s, which was in {central Tokyo}. So we, eh, got in the taxi and started
driving and, you know, we, we saw more and more people coming out of buildings,
around us there were people standing on the street looking around. Em, I’m not quite sure
if I remember traffic lights - no, traffic lights were still working, electricity was still on.
But, em, definitely there was a sort of sense of people looking around trying to figure out
what’s going on. Ehm we’d, sort of, gotten a couple of blocks away from the office, then
a big aftershock hit, and I remember seeing the, the buildings from down on the street
level looking up now and seeing them swaying and realising what we had just gone
through. We were like, “Wow, that was, that was pretty crazy.” Eh, we, sort of, started
driving towards the client site from our office and, eh, it’s probably about a thirty-minute
drive and after about 10 minutes obviously traffic was getting really bad, nobody knew
what was going on, and we were like, “Okay, forget it. This is, this meeting isn’t going to
happen.” This is, the, this was obviously something more severe, something
unprecedented. So we decided, “All right, forget it. We’ll just go home. And since we
actually had a taxi, em, which I think got increasingly difficult to get into fairly, sort of,
we were like, “All right, well, em,” and I was living at the time in {a central area of
Tokyo}, em, my wife was working, em, in {a famous office building in that area} - so I
decided to go to {there} and I’d get out there and my colleague then took the taxi the rest
of the way. Ehm, {redacted} got to my wife’s office and they weren’t letting anyone out
of the building, ehm, for security reasons, so she works for a bank and their security
people had decided the safest place to stay until they knew what was going on would be
the building. So she was essentially locked down. Ehm, I was able to call up to her from
the, eh, lobby and she was okay. And I was like, “All right, well I’m going to go home
and check on the kids.” So I went home. Just walked home. Met up with the kids. We
had a couple of kids at the time. We have three now. But two at the time. Fairly young. And
the, eh, the nanny had, sort of, you know, taken them under a desk, and, and they were
okay. Ehm, and then I sat and just, kind of, hung out with them and then tried to figure
out what was going on. Ehm, and I think at that time, em, you know, the phone networks
were all pretty overloaded. It was very difficult to call people and find out what was
going on. The Internet, though, seemed to be working, fair, reasonably
stable. That was kind of surprising but it was relatively easy to get on to news sites, get
on to, em, Twitter, and, and things like that and, and start to try to decipher what, what
had happened. Ehm, and then I think, ehm, you know, for me, I, I’m not a fluent Japanese
speaker, ehm, so. And, and, actually we don’t even have a television. Ehm, I don’t, don’t
actually have a, you know, we don’t, eh, consume Japanese media really at all. Eh, so,
em, you know, social media, so, eh, Internet sites, things like that became a pretty big
source of information. Also, em, you know, calling, or, SMSing people or, or, or trying to
email people or, or trying to get information like that, em, even fairly quickly trying to
get back in touch with the office to, sort of, check that everyone was okay and, and, and
so on, em, try to arrange for people to be able to get home, em, you now, there were,
there were issues. Obviously, it was a little bit awkward because we, sort of, ended up out
of the office because of this meeting. Ehm, it was a, it was a bit awkward and, but, you
know, so we were able to, sort of, talk to people like, “Okay” - because I live not super
far away from the office certainly compared to a lot of my Japanese colleagues...

Yeah.

...em, you know, I was, sort of, like, “Hey, if anyone wants a place to stay, they can crash
at my place, they don’t have to walk home tonight...

Yeah.
...and so on, if there’s hotels that you can book at, or so on. Eh, I remember reading
about a colleague or a former client who actually, em, did something rather smart after
that and I think in retrospect I would probably would do something like that too which is
just immediately after the earthquake he went to the ATM and, em, and, sort of, basically
got, maxed, the maximum amount of cash out of his account, em, because he knew that
he was going to be needing cash…

Ah, that's a good idea.

...which I thought was, em, which I thought was a good idea. You now, the infrastructure
surprisingly really held up okay. So, you know, there wasn’t a problem, there wasn’t a
period where I remember, like, not being able to use a credit card or, or like any kind of
real break down in, sort of, em, basic, you know, shopping or necessities or anything like
that, so, em, there was never that sense of, kind of, desperation or whatever. And
certainly, you know, when you started to realise, em, what, what had happened in
northern Japan, then you, kind of, realised, “Oh my god, that really was, em, disastrous,
relatively speaking.” It was almost like guilty. You just, kind of, feel like, like, you were
like, “Wow, well, we were really lucky.” Eh, and so, that, that entire period for you,
know, a month or so afterwards, or even a couple of months, there was a funny kind of
guilt, I think, about, em, you know, everything is still working, the supermarkets are fine.
There’s produce, there’s milk, and, and, you know, all this kind of stuff is there and, and
meanwhile these people up north were going through so much trouble…

Yeah.

...hardship, and so many people had been killed. So, eh, it was difficult. Eh, I, I, I think,
you know, em, the focus fairly quickly after about 24 hours shifted from being, “Oh my
God, that was a terrible disaster that happened” to be “What’s going on with
Fukushima?” Eh, so, ehm, and then it became a lot of information searching and, and so
on. And, and, em, trying to get a sense of what are the official reports, what are the
unofficial reports? I think I remember at the time the Japanese government, em, started
kind of doing things in English, kind of. Eh, I remember they, they held a press
briefing, I think, or they tried to open up a Twitter account where they would tweet and,
em, initially in Japanese but then also trying to tweet in English as well. Em, in all
honesty, I didn’t, I don’t think that ever really, I, I, the official records never really, em,
became part of that, em, information flow. I think, eh, at the time, eh, my wife was
working at this, this institution, and, and, ehm, I think it was on Saturday, Saturday
evening we went out for dinner - and again, this funny kind of strange, em, period
where,em, things were very quiet, em, but everything was okay - and, so it was a
funny sort of feeling going out for dinner that night, but my wife and I decided we needed
to talk and figure out what to do and we had a couple of young children. I think,
probably, em, you know, so, we were trying to figure out what, how should we react to
this? What should we do? What would we consider? Eh, and because I think my wife
had actually started hearing that some people were starting to leave. Eh, and, we were
like, “Well, should we think about that?” Eh, you know, I remember having
conversations with colleagues and talking about, “Maybe we should rent a car and just
hold on to the car, just in case.” Because again, not a lot of people own cars…

Uhm, uhm.

...but, you know, maybe you need that or, or what’s kind of your plan to get out of Tokyo
if there’s a decision to evacuate Tokyo. Eh, so all these kinds of considerations, ehm,
were sort of, you know people were emailing each other, people were talking to each
other, ehm, you know, trying to figure out what to do. My wife, ehm, eh, we had dinner,
we had talked about it, and then she was like, “Okay, well, maybe, maybe I’ll just call my boss and see what she’s doing and so we called her boss and then there was all this noise in the background of the call when we called her, and, eh, eh, she was like, “Oh, well, actually, we’re in Tokyo Station now and we’re about to get on the shinkansen [Note: Japanese Bullet Train] for Osaka…

[Laughter]

And, and so it was like…

Okay!

…”Okay!” [Laughter] So there was a bit of that kind of sense of like, “Wow! People are getting out of here.” And, and it wasn’t, and, you know, we, we have a, a nanny now that helps us and she worked for a French, em, family and they just split…

[Laughter]

...like, I mean, there was no, kind of, left no note on the door or anything, and the nanny showed up for work one day and, you know, was just looking in the windows trying to figure out what happened and the landlord was there trying to figure out where they had gone and it, it was really, yeah, pretty quick [laughter].

[Laughter]

Ehm, so, so Saturday night they were shipping out, ehm, eh, you know, Sunday came around and my wife and I decided well maybe it was best if, if she and the kids got out. I felt I couldn’t go because I, I have some responsibility at the company and there’s people that report to me and so on, so I didn’t feel that that was something that I could do. But my wife’s position and, and she works for a much more international, kind of, eh, company. It does more international work, she doesn’t need to be based in Tokyo, so the idea was why doesn’t she just get out of Tokyo, take the kids, actually get down to Osaka, and then from Osaka. So on Sunday afternoon she and the kids left for Osaka, eh, and then they flew on to Hong Kong, em, and then lived in Hong Kong for about three or four weeks before coming back to Japan. Eh, so I, I remained. Ehm, went to a meeting on Monday morning at the company. Sort of emergency kind of a meeting. We, we, sort of, I, I think a lot of the communication at the time was done through email. I, I think, I, you know, I think by that point the phone lines were fine…

Yeah.

... and everything was okay, but the company was trying to keep in touch through email. I, I mean, speaking honestly, things like infrastructure became a real issue. Em, we have a network system which, due for security reasons, you can’t access when you’re physically not on site. Eh, we don’t have off-site backups. Ehm, you know, there’s all those kinds of problems that, hon, honestly, had something really happened the building or had it been impossible to get in, our, we would have been done, like, we couldn’t do our jobs.

Yeah.

Ehm, you know, that being said I think there is a real Japanese, kind of, spirit thing. And, you know, guys were at their desk, you know, 8.30 in the morning ready to go.

Yeah, yeah.
Ehm, and, you know, I, I found that, that was a challenge culturally, ehm, especially by that point, em, I think I was starting to see SMSs or e-mails from friends, French friends, who were like, “We’re leaving. The embassy said to leave. You should leave, too.” Ehm, you know, and, and at that time, things were moving very quickly. Em, I do remember that, em, you know, that the French evacuated, the Germans evacuated, eh, the British were somewhat hedging their bet, if I remember correctly. Ehm, the Canadians, eh, didn’t really, em, commit one way or another. I think eventually the Canadians decided to charter a bus where they got some people out of northern, em, Japan and, and moved them down to Tokyo and then further south. But there was never really an official, kind of, “This is a problem.” Ehm, yeah, I, I think, you know, in the subsequent period, well I just remember that Monday morning meeting, and we had, sort of, em, a moment of silence for what had happened and, and it was everybody around a boardroom table, all the senior people reporting, and then 9:05 big aftershock. And then I just remember, sort of, sitting there in that building there again...[Laughter]...

...swaying back and forth thinking, “That was so stupid!” We took,...

[Laughter]

...we took all the senior leadership of our company, put them in the same room together, ehm, on the top floor of this stupid building and now we’re all going to die [laughter] and that was just dumb. And, and, so, you know, and, and really, you know, I think contingency planning for this kind of stuff was not particularly deep. So I, you know, I, I contrast it to some of the other firms that, that I have some knowledge of, there’s a lot more, there’s some, but I was such a, unusual event...Yeah.

...that I think it really caught a lot of people by surprise, the scale of it. Ehmm, anyway, so, you know, in the, in the subsequent period my family was gone, em, the office was, kind of, operating in a weird kind of half limbo kind of state where I think some, some people thought it was our duty to show up and continue working even though there was nothing to do. Ehmm, you know, culturally I thought it was an interesting time. I mean I know it’s not the focus of your study but I, I think the idea of, em, eh, you know, I had individual Japanese reporting to me, sort of, saying, “I don’t understand, we’re still scheduling client meetings.” [Laughter] Ehmm, you know, th, they were trying to make deadlines and clearly the world had changed, clearly everything was out the window, but there were people that were forcing this, kind of, sense of normalcy that “Well, no. We promised we were going to deliver that report on Thursday. We’re going to deliver it on Thursday.” And it, there were some people that were just like, “This is crazy.”

[Laughter]

So, eventually things, kind of, I think even those people recognized [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...that things were really different. Ehmm, so, eh, you know, eventually the, the company shut down for a couple of days, and so on. Em, in that period, it was, it was interesting, obviously met with a number of my foreign friends, the people that were still here, eh I remember going to, eh, you know, some pubs and bars and stuff like that and, kind of, sharing this strange experience through the friend who - not entirely sure if it’s entirely accurate but - he maintains the reason he stayed was because of his dog. He couldn’t, he
couldn’t figure out what to do with his dog, so he was going to stay there while his wife
and kids got out. Ehm, you know, chatting over beers trying to find out what’s going on.
I, I think there was a lot of distrust of official records. Ehm, you know, I think anyone
who has been in Japan for a while kind of understands the press (indistinct) system, kind
of understands the connections between the press and the government and, and, so I think
anything official coming out - and particularly because things were so vague - I don’t
think the government had any idea what was going on. Ehm, you know, so they couldn’t
report one thing or another and, you know, subsequently you, sort of, realise how
fractured that entire structure was, but it was kind of obvious at the time, that it wasn’t
working. Ehm, so there became a lot of speculation. There became a lot of, em, of
different, eh, ways to try to figure out and piece together these clues about what was
going on.

Yeah.

Ehm, I remember, you know, it was an interesting time. There was, em, I remember, you
know, Western press, I remember seeing a, a Fox News reporter who had flown in to
Japan, em, on top of a building in Osaka wearing a gas mask…

[Laughter]

...[laughter] on the top of a building...

[Laughter]

...em, [laughter] reporting this thing, like, over there, you know, and you know, fairly
quickly on, I think, you now, immediately on the day, em, you know, seeing that kind of -
ah I forget - Shibuya Egg what, whatever the reactor name [Note: this refers to an
infamous Fox News report that showed a map listing a Shibuya nightclub called
‘Eggman’ as one of Japan’s nuclear reactors]...

Yes, yeah, yeah.

...and all this sort of misinformation started pouring out...

Yeah.

...so it was a very strange time. Ehm, you know, I, I remember looking at these trying to
piece it together for yourself and, and with people that you trusted, you relied on the
judgment of people that kind of knew what they were talking about, ehm, a little bit. So I
think there was em, eh, you know, when it, when it came to stuff like, em, you, sort of,
got, kind of, angry when you see these reporters, kind of, talking about the danger and
holding a geiger counter up in the air in Osaka, and you were like, “You have got to be
kidding me.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...like, it’s just, it, you know, and, and I remember there was a famous picture that went
around, I think in the AP, which was, em, when the Japanese started using helicopters to
drop water on to the reactors, ehm, which I think originally was, eh, when my wife saw
that picture in Hong Kong she was pretty bowed by that because she was like, “Okay,
they clearly have completely lost control.”...

Control, yeah.
...em, whereas I had actually, sort of, I don’t remember where I heard it or where I read about it but, clearly I heard about it I was concerned, but then people were saying, “Well, this is actually a positive sign.” That actually they are finding ways to cool, the, they are, they are moving forward with this…

Yeah.

...so it, it’s actually not a, a, a desperate measure, and I do remember, I think the, I took a screenshot of it, I can’t remember, but I think the Guardian or maybe, I think, I have a feeling the Post Online used the same picture and they just had such dramatically different headlines, and I remember one was ‘Japanese Step Up Nuclear Cooling Operation’ and then the other one something about ‘Desperate Last Stand’ [laughter].

[Laughter]

You know, and, and, then people started showing up in the Daily Mail and things like that where you sort of had, “Oh, I need to evacuate out of Japan and I need to get $20,000…

[Laughter]

...to get my ticket paid for.“ And showing up on media talking about all the terrible things that were happening, and, and there was this real sense of disconnect when your life when you went to work and you went to the supermarket and you bought groceries and nothing in Tokyo changed. Everything was fine. There were no buildings that were damaged. Everything seemed to be fine. The infrastructure was working. The phone service was okay. There was this terrible refugee problem, em, up in Northern Japan and very strange nuclear situation going on. Eh, but, eh, there was nothing in your experience that, kind of, reflected these strange reports that you were seeing, particularly in the foreign press which I think were somewhat sensationalist in, in how they treated it. Even, even papers like the New York Times and things like that. I remember, I forget, there again it was, sort of, a headline that was very, oh I remember actually, there was something about, em, an article about people in Los Angeles being screened for radiation getting off airplanes that were flying from Japan, em, and being, and there was radiation found on the plane or something like that. And then, you know, buried, sort of, eight paragraphs down in the article was, kind of, but that’s actually what normally happens...

[Laughter]

...basic solar radiation, so there’s nothing to worry about. But, but, you know, the, the headline and the first seven paragraphs are all about Fukushima and the disaster and then the eighth is actually saying, “Yeah, but this actually has nothing to do with that.” And, and so there was a real, kind of, ‘If it bleeds, it leads’ kind of mentality so again you, you sort of, had to be skeptical about that. Em, I know personally there was a couple of resources which became very valuable to me. Em, you know, Twitter became valuable, and, and, and I think, em, there was a, a real small foreign community - and, you know, I’m sure you’d probably be able to track them down even by just going back through Twitter - …

Yeah.

...ehm, of people that were translating stuff, that were actually, you know, live-tweeting press conferences, that were, sort of, eh, a group of people became, kind of, sort of, little experts, I think, almost very quickly, ehm, and, and, sort of, were, almost saw it, I think, as a kind of a service that they were doing to, kind of, let people know what was going on. I don’t think it was necessarily done for the foreign population in Japan or as specific
as that, but I think it was kind of, a sense of expression, it was, kind of, letting the world
know what was going on so, you know, they would be live-tweeting press conferences or
were doing, sort of, basic translations on what the latest announcement was or what the
news was saying, ehm, so fairly quickly I built a Twitter stream or I built a group that I
followed, ehm, that, sort of, became an important kind of barometer broadly, ehm, for “Are
things getting better or are things getting worse?” And that, kind of, became the, em, em,
the, the thing. I think there were, sort of, official events that some of the embassies put
on. I think the Tokyo American Club did something. And those were all generally quite
open so it was publicized so, “Hey if you want to hear this specialist talk about things,”
then, then you could go and listen. And again I think [laughter] I think, again just talking
about, sort of, trying to decipher for yourself what things meant, I, I remember, ehm, one of
the, eh, the aircraft carriers from the US came to, to assist in the clean up and it, kind of,
came and it, sort of, was going closer to the Fukushima Plant and then decided to leave
[laughter]...

Yeah [laughter].

...and drive to the other side of the island and park there. And I just remember that
moment was like, “Okay!” [laughter]...

Okay [laughter].

...“That’s probably not a good sign that they don’t want to park there.” And, you know,
I’m sure, abundance of caution and so on...

Yeah.

...but, yeah, things that were visible like that, and, and again there was, you know, a good
degree of skepticism about, em, the official Japanese report, and, and I think there is
something culturally in Jap, Japan which is, sort of, this shoganai [Note: a very
commonly used Japanese expression meaning 'It can't be helped' or 'There's no use (in
doing something)'] kind of...

Yeah.

...we’re going to, well, “They’d tell us if something was wrong.” Whereas, I think, em, I
have a friend who’s married to a Japanese woman and they had, eh, a lot of
disagreements at the time where he was like, “We’ve got to go.” And she was like, “No.
We’re not going anywhere. It’s fine. The government would tell us if there was a
problem. We’re going to stay here.” And she was like, “We’ve got kids.
We’re leaving.” And she was like, “No!” And so it became this real, sort of, eh, bone of
contention, I think, amongst them, and, I think, where there is a kind of “We’re going to,
we’re going to see this through” kind of mindset which I think makes it a little bit
different than I think the react, if you had, eh, an event like this which happened in
Canada or if it happened in Britain or if it happened in other places where I think people
are maybe a little bit more individualistic and more skeptical of official lines, so anyway.
Or, or, maybe people here are actually are skeptical and do realise but at the same time
there is, kind of, a sense of, “Well, we can’t do anything about it.” So there’s, sort of, a
bit more of a, eh, resignation, I think, and it’s, there’s a resilience in that. But I think there
is also, kind of, a lack of action sometimes which I can Westerners can, can tend to see as
an issue. Ehm, anyway, so, Twitter became a big thing. There’s actually a website, em,
forums and things like that, em, I have, eh, an interest in technology, so there’s a couple
of English-language technology websites that I’ve, eh, that I’ve, eh, em, sort of,
subscribed to, or part of these little communities...
Yeah.

...and a lot of these guys are people that have been in Japan for a long time and have educational backgrounds - they’re, they’re sort of, professionals but not necessarily, kind of, expats, but, but people that are, em, that are, are, are quite, you know, they’re all fluent in Japanese or, or so on, but we have a shared interest in technology or something.

Em, so, on one of those sites, one of the, and again, one of the guys was a, was a professional translator and he actually does a lot of technical translations, em, and a lot of the people did. So, em, and it happened that this guy actually had done some of the technical translations for, I believe, G.E. when they were building the reactors [laughter]…

Okay [laughter].

...so his background was also in sciences and there was another guy who was a Todai guy [Note: this means a graduate of Tokyo University, Japan’s most prestigious academic institution] so there, there was a lot of, there was a lot of, sort of, experts, and, and there was some very active discussion on the these boards about ‘how do you see this?’ or ‘what do you think about this?’ and ‘what about this?’ or ‘I read this thing. What do you think about that?’ And, you know, broadly speaking, I think we all, kind of, maybe we are like-minded which is why we are, sort of, in the group already, but I think there was, kind of, a steadying influence about that. You know, there’s a, a colleague that I work with who has a background - well, while he works in advertising - he has a background in, in nuclear physics, so yeah, like, his, you know, Undergraduate slash PhD/Masters kind of understanding of stuff just became, kind of, one of those people that you went to, “So what is a millisievert exactly?” and, and, “So how am I supposed to interpret this?”

Ehm, you know, and, and I think the, the thing that made the nuclear situation so odd, again compared to if there was a wildfires in the hills or whatever…

Yeah.

...radiation, you can’t see it, em, you can’t feel it, you don’t know, and, and it’s such an unusual problem that, em, you know, it, it’s the kind of thing that gets people very scared, eh, very quickly. Eh, you know, I think people get run over by buses and knocked down by cars and killed in car accidents at a far greater pace but it’s, kind of, routine and regular, so people, kind of, just accept that as part of just, “That’s life.” Ehm, but, you know, the idea of a nuclear reactor doing something and not being able to see what’s happening, em, really makes people very anxious. Ehm, and, eh, I was hearing stories about, em, from friends in China who were, em, reacting, you know, they, their nannies, you know, fairly uneducated, em, very well meaning but, you know, somewhat uneducated women from the Chinese countryside were wrapping scarves around the kids’ necks and things like that to keep them safe from the Fukushima radiation. I mean that was in Shanghai…

Yeah.

...ehm, you know, and then, and, and so you really do end up reading a lot of intention to, sort of, so, “What are the government saying? What are they doing?” I, I mean I had heard subsequently that the Japanese government was really putting a lot of pressure on the American government at the time not to evacuate its citizens. Em, again, this is all subsequent, but they felt that had they actually, had the Americans actually said, “Okay, everybody get out,” then that would have been a, a sign of, then, then people would have been interpreting that,…

Yeah.
…”Okay, right, got to go.” Eh, and as long as the Americans said, “Look, if you don’t have, non-essential staff go, but if you have to be there, it’s still okay.” Eh, and, you know, I think there was a lot of diplomatic negotiations on that because the Japanese government I think realised that people were reading the situation for what, what’s going on. Eh, so I think that kind of management of the message was really happening. Eh, you know, generally speaking, I think when it comes to, em, looking at Fukushima even today immediately in those months afterwards, you, sort of, get a sense of, you know, if the website or, you know, if the article published is from Dr Stephens on New Economist Platform dot org dot jp, you’re just like, “Whatever. Who is this?”

Yeah [laughter].

And, and, so, you know, fairly quickly you, sort of, get, you get a sniff for, kind of, “What’s this? What axe is this guy grinding? What is going on?” And at the same time you want to take it in, em, and certainly in those early days, em, I think immediately what happened was just you throw the floodgates open, and you just wanted as much information as you could get, and then you start to parse it for yourself and figure out what’s going on and rely on the people that you trust for, you know, who might not [laughter] frankly be really great arbiters of, of nuclear radi, radiation and understanding what’s going on with that. But at least you, sort of, rely on them in a social context… Yeah.

…and, and, and so you would be able to sit down and drink and talk about different things...

Yeah.

…and see what, em, works. So, I, I think that was, you know, largely how we interpreted...

Yeah.

…the stuff. Eh, you know, I think from the technology point of view so, you know, again this web forum became a very important, em, place for me to, sort of, get information and, and sort of share links ...

Yeah.

…and, kind of, “What do you think about this?” And that was more of a closed community. Eh, not, not really closed. I mean, it was open but it was sort, it was a member, it was a club essentially… Yeah.

…and everything was open if, if, so there were, if you had someone that you wanted to, you could forward a link and they could check a forum, it was all open, but again you, sort of, know each other… Uhuh.

...so that’s, sort of, there’s a certain amount of trust, I think, Twitter was more, em, eh, a vacuum for information just, em, anything and then I think over the course of, you know, a couple of weeks, eh, it, kind of, became evident that certain people were contributing
quite a lot and you ended up following those people. Em, I don’t quite remember at this
point, I think, you know, I think Jean Snow, em, was a Canadian, em, kind of, has an art
background and stuff and culture, kind of, or the, the, the, eh, the Dyson, em, the, or the,
em, the architecture guys that are behind (indistinct) and some of the, so. I think there
was, em, you know, there’s certain people that, kind of, rose and, and I don’t think
deliberately, but just, kind of, they were commenting a lot on it or they were contributing
a lot, I think Jake Adelstein, the, eh, the author…

Yeah.

...who’s written some, you know, and again, and so, and then people like Hiroki Tabuchi,
Hiroko, Hiroko Tabuchi…

Yeah.

...the New York Times reporter [Note: the reporter’s name is Hiroko]…

Yeah, yeah.

...em, and I, I think some of those people, also I think there was someone at the Wall
Street Journal, too, and, and, and, you know, and then just also just people in the course
of their day who would be translating things and stuff so that became, em, kind of, a more
of a collection kind of place for information. I think, eh, you know fairly quickly, I think
the international reports weren’t very useful…

Yeah.

...em, they either, you know, were playing up the disaster or didn’t really have any better
insight into what was going on because the Japanese government wasn’t really sharing
information, and I think the Japanese government didn’t have the information. Em, but,
em, you know, so they would fly these reporters in and they would stand on top of
buildings and try to say something for five minutes but they didn’t know what was going
on and, eh, em, so, you know, it wasn’t much use to pay attention to CNN or BBC. I
think there were some, I remember one time there was some kind of a report or
something and there was some, you know, ‘you can’t view this from the country in which
you are based’ kind of, like, eh, DRM kind of a thing where, em, I think it might have
been the BBC or maybe ITV or someone had prepared a, you know, ‘here’s a review of
the thing’ and I really wanted to watch it and it was just kind of, eh, ‘you can’t view this
because you’re not in our territory…

Right.

...and for the advertising reasons, we can’t serve you (indistinct).’ And that was just like,
“Okay guys, that’s, that’s,” em, you know, I, I think some, some, some organs, I think,
you know, Google reacted fairly quickly. Ehm, I think they had put in place a person-
finder thing..

Yeah, yeah.

...in Haiti. And then they quickly, kind of, deployed it in Japan. Very simple to access…

Yeah.

...ehm, you know, so I don’t really remember Google doing anything in, in the way of
information or frankly really any technology company officially doing anything in the
way of ‘here we’re going to provide these services’ but, em, that was something. I think, the was, I don’t know, {the participant’s colleague whom I also interviewed} might have mentioned it but there was a, a company {that provided a technical platform to coordinate the translation of messages of support}…

Oh, yes, yeah. He did mention it, yeah.

So, em, I mean it’s an interesting service. Like, had they been more established now, I wonder if they would actually play a larger role in a time like that?

Yeah, yeah.

Em, possibly. Em, you know, so, at the time, though, I, I think the official response to these things, em, was still somewhat official and, you know, again the odd, the oddness about being in Tokyo at the time, not really having a problem…

Yeah.

...like not actually seeing…

Yeah.

...a real issue. I, I think that might have also contributed to, sort of, a lack of, em, directed action. And, and again, I think because there was so much concern about how, eh, things could be perceived, you know, by official companies…

Yeah.

...if they started doing this stuff. I’m sure, I mean, and no exaggeration, I’m sure they would get a call…

Yeah.

...pretty quickly about, “Oh, you’re making this worse.” Or you know, you know, you know “Please back up.” Or “Try not to say.” So I, I, you know, I, I suspect there was probably quite a bit of that, em, management...

Yeah.

...of, of the crisis kind of thing going on.

How, how did you feel about, say, the Canadian Embassy or the British Embassy in their contacts with you? How, how did they contact you, for example? [Note: this participant has both Canadian and British passports]

Ehm…

Via emails or?

...I’m trying to remember. I, I mean, I think, you know, officially registered with the embassy as a resident and so on. I, you know, again, I, I kind of, em, I, I, you know, more my emb, my em, my connection was with the Canadian Embassy…

Okay.
Em, I think, em, it, I, I think what you end up spending a lot of time trying to figure out was like what is the discrepancy here between what the French are doing, what the Germans are doing…

*Uhur*.

...what the Europeans broadly are up to...

*Uhur*.

...em, chartering airplanes, flying out nationals and, em, the North Americans. And, and, em, you know, I think the Canadians were taking a very prudent kind of stand. I mean fairly, I can’t remember how, maybe a couple of weeks, maybe a week, I, I, it’s hard to remember how fast things went…

*Of course, yeah.*

...because at that time things were moving very quickly…

*Yeah.*

...em, and, eh, the Canadian Embassy arranged for, em, a lecture, eh, where they had, sort of, an open discussion and they invited people to come to the embassy and they had an expert on nuclear radiation and what was going on. Ehm, I think it was, it was challenging because I went, I went to one of those at the Canadian Embassy and, and it was a guy that had, sort of, you know, again, I think there’s a lot of these nuclear experts and, and, they, kind of, came to Japan looking for something to do. And, and, and I don’t mean that in the sense of trying to earn a fee for speaking or anything…

*Yeah, yeah.*

...but I mean, like, trying to help…

*Help.*

...but then ultimately not really being allowed to go close…

*Yeah.*

...ehm, and then, or maybe on the periphery for, for a week and then, “Okay, that’s all we’re going to do.”...

*Yeah.*

...and then coming back and then, sort of, essentially reporting back to the community. “Well, here is what we saw, here is what’s going on.” You know, I think most of the experts, kind of, said, “Look, it seems like things are at least not getting worse, em, you know, and, and, you know, here’s why, here’s why, here’s why. These are not bad things, you know, em, you know, so I, I think there was a lot of misunderstanding about something like that. It seemed that their role was more to, kind of, help educate people broadly…

*Yeah.*
...about radiation and what that means, and what’s a dangerous level, and what’s a safe level, and what’s okay, and how much radiation is in a banana and all those sort of stuff…

[Laughter] yeah.

...em, but, eh, you know, I, I think the Canadian Embassy tried to hold some educational kind of things…

Okay.

...I, I still think there was a lot of skepticism…

Yeah.

...em, I remember there was an open thing at the Tokyo American Club again where an expert had come in and talked about things and then started to get pressed fairly hard from the audience like, “Well, you know. I understand this from an academic point of view, understand what you’re saying, I understand what you’re saying about millisieverts and dah, dah, dah, dah, dah, but if you had kids here, what would you do?

Yeah.

And, and, I think that was always very difficult for those guys because to be honest with you I did get the sense that they were essentially trying to be responsible…

Yeah.

...and also, I mean I’m not sure officially, but it did feel that they were trying to send a message...

Yeah.

...a bit that they didn’t want to start having a real open, personal discussion...

Yeah.

...it was, they were there as experts, they were going to report the expert, em, you know, I remember my wife’s bank fairly quickly on had a, a conference call that people could dial into and, and, again listen to a, an expert, em, you know, talking from the US about, “Well, here’s what we know, here’s what’s going on.”

Yeah.

And, and that was actually pretty quick. I mean, I think those things happened fairly quickly...

Yeah.

...so there were some conference calls and, em, information sessions where you could go, and now that I think about it that’s actually where I think that I heard that the dropping of the water…

Oh yes, yeah, yeah.
...was actually a positive sign for this guy, because it meant that there was something...

Which is useful.

...so yeah, I mean, he gave context...

Yeah.

...to some of these things.

I know you also mentioned that you lived in {redacted}...

Yeah.

...which is in {a central ward of Tokyo}...

Uhum.

...which, you know, there’s a large foreign population.

True.

Did you get any contact from {the} Ward Office or?

I don’t believe I did, I, I.

In general about the disaster? Not necessarily about the nuclear stuff but just in general after the disaster?

I don’t think so. I mean, there very well might have been a letter or something like that [laughter], or some sort of a form or, or something. I don’t remember, em, ever having a knock on the door...

Yeah, yeah.

...or whatever, I mean, but, you know, to be honest with you the challenge of that was that I was at work, like, so, it wasn’t like, em, you know, I think maybe for a week, the week afterwards, we were, kind of, sitting in trying to figure out what was going on but after that everything was back to normal...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so it, it, there very well could have been people going around, em, but, you know, both my wife and I work. We’re not home during the day...

Yeah, of course.

...so I’m here and my wife is at her office and, you know, the kids have the nanny...

Yeah.

...and that’s, sort of, what happens, so it wasn’t really, em, it wasn’t really, eh, very well they could have sent somebody around. And I suspect they might have. I, I, know from our experience of having children here, em, you know, I think, the kus [Note: wards or cities in Metropolitan Tokyo] are pretty responsible about trying to send, em, nurses by to
just, kind of, check, “How are things going?” And it’s sort of an official service. Eh, you know, that being said, they’re organized. Right? They know how to do that…

Yeah.

...I think when things are a little bit more chaotic, then there’s a lot more, “What do we do?”

Yeah.

Em, but, em, but, yeah, I, I don’t, I don’t remember having any specific.

You don’t remember anything. Yeah, the reason I ask is because I have spoken to other people who were in {the same ward as you} and they said that they didn’t, didn’t receive anything so…

No, I don’t think so.

...they don’t remember. Just, just the reason I ask is that some of the local authorities are trying to come up with recommendations for how to help people in the future…

Right.

...and some of them say, you know, foreign people need to be more integrated into their local...

Yeah

...community. Did you feel part of the {redacted} ward community before the disaster?

I mean, to be honest, yeah, I, em, probably not. Em, I mean not in the sense of, eh, you know, I think being a foreigner in Japan, you maintain a certain separation. Em, you know, I know people that have lived here for twenty years and they still get in a taxi and they say where they’re going and the guy is like, “Wow, nihongo wa jozu desu ne!” [Note: this means ‘Your Japanese is great, isn’t it!’] [Laughter]

An, and, you know, I, I think that never goes away. Em, there’s always a, a separation and, and I think, frankly, you can say they need to integrate more, but I don’t think it’s ever going to happen. I, I think you’re not Japanese, you’re not Japanese. I, I remember, you know, reading a story about, em, eh, a ku [Note: means ward or city] where they were talking about their, em, diversity and, and how they’re trying to develop this and encourage integration, encourage more people to participate and they, they had a, a, they held up an example which was a, a foreign guy who was, em, in charge of one of the, em, large, academic, em, schools, I think, in the area, and actually might have been responsible, a sort of superintendent kind of a thing…

Okay.

...for a number of schools. Like, you know, look how open we are. We, we allow this, this, you know, person is very integrated, they are doing great, and all the rest of it. The guy is third generation Korean.

[Laughter]
Right? Like his dad was born here, he was born here [laughter], you know, his grandfather came here and, and, I mean the fact that that is still held up as a symbol of diversity is just a sign, like, Japan is not integrated. It’s just not. Em, you know, that being said, it’s, it’s very pleasant... *Uhum.*

...and, and I think people care about each other...

*Yeah.*

...and I remember reading a Tweet actually after, em, the earth, the earthquake happened, and, ehm, it was, eh, from a, it was in Japanese, it was a guy that was walking home on the train tracks and, you know, I think at that time, right around that time, I think, was when China surpassed Japan for GDP, size of the economy, so Japan went to number 3, and I think there was a little bit of handwringing, not a lot...

*Yeah.*

...because everyone, sort of, saw it as inevitable...

*Yeah.*

...but it was, kind of, official that it had happened, and I remember this guy tweeted something like, you know, “I’m walking home on the tracks. All these doors are open along the way. People are coming out with water, letting people go to the bathroom. You know, I don’t, who cares what the GDP ranking is!” You know, and, and, you know, I think Japanese do really pull together...

*Yeah, yeah.*

...but, you know, speaking honestly, there is a, kind of, ‘this is how we pull together’. And, and, ‘this is how we’re going to do it’. And, you know, foreigners don’t always fit into that. You know, I think, one of the ways I’ve, kind of, thought about it a little bit is, em, it’s, it’s, em, it’s, there’s so many forms, kind of, ways of doing things in Japan. Em, it’s a bit like a play, right? So when you go to the bank, and you stand in line, it’s almost like in my head at times the curtain opens and it’s like, you know, this is Mariko, she is going to be playing the role of the bank teller...

[Laughter]

...[laughter] you, and you start going through this pattern which is entirely predictable and entirely understood, everyone will play their role very, very well. But, you know, speaking honestly, I think Westerners are improvisors who don’t follow the script. Like, we value, kind of, “Well, I don’t know if I would do it like that.”

*Yeah.*

And, and that freaks out a lot of people because, and any, any foreigner who has lived in Japan has dealt with a bank, at some point there’s been a time where you’re like, “Could I get an extra copy of that, please?” [laughter]

[Laughter]
And, and they’re just, “No. I can’t give you, I can’t print out another copy of that.”

[laughter]...

[Laughter]

...“Why not?” “I don’t know.”

[Laughter]

“Okay, but I’d really like to.” “Okay, but could you?” “No.”

[Laughter]

“Okay, okay.” And you just end up in this crazy, kind of, Kafkaesque situation, so you
know I, I can imagine well-intentioned, wanting to reach out...

Yeah.

...and wanting to have that kind of integration. Em, I know there are some social groups
at my son’s school, em, there’s a, actually, they’re having an event, I think, next week,
where there’s, an earthquake preparation thing where they’re handing out essentially for
real newbies to Japan...

Yeah.

...here’s a one page key phrases, phone numbers...

Yeah.

...here’s how the emergency contact system works with NTT, em, you know, and then
they’re actually going to take people to Tokyu Hands [Note: a chain of shops in Japan
selling mainly household goods where evacuation packs and emergency supplies can
easily be bought] or something...

Okay.

...and go shopping...

Yeah.

...here’s the kind of stuff you need to happen...

Yeah, yeah.

...and, and so, I think there is a recognition that foreigners might need a bit more...

Yeah.

...preparation...

Yeah.

...for this kind of thing. Ehm, but no, I, I don’t think, I didn’t look to {the ward}, you
know, so...
Yeah. And it’s really fascinating that you said about, kind of, how there might be one particular way to pull together...

Uhm.

...because that’s actually come up...

Uhm, yeah.

...that there’s one way things need to be done and outside of that box is not possible and that can be really difficult culturally for...

Yeah, I mean, I can imagine, a, you know, I hope I never, knock on wood, have to see something, but, but if there was a, em, a real event in Tokyo...

Yeah.

...a real problem, I [laughter], intellectually it would be very interesting...

Yeah.

...to see what would happen...

Yeah.

...em, because I, you know, you read about Osaka, you read about Kansai...

Yeah.

...you read about people walking to work in the morning, and so on, but, but, you know, that, kind of, delay in official response...

Yeah.

...you know, while people are, kind of, under rubble...

Yeah.

...you know, I think the, the instinct, it’s probably not a good instinct, but it’s to jump in just start doing something...

Yeah.

...ehm, you know, maybe it’s still dangerous…

Yeah.

...maybe you can’t be doing it.

Well, yeah, but, I don’t know whether it’s good or bad, but it’s certainly different and it means people may be coming with different frames of reference...

Uhum.
...which can, can, like certainly in my whole project what has come strongly through is
that language is one part but really culture...

Yeah...

...has been a bigger barrier than language in many ways.

...I think, I think so. I mean, you can get information, you know, and, I mean, with,
provided that the infrastructure is supported, I mean, had the infrastructure been
damaged...

Yeah.

...then that would have been a very different thing. Like, if the Internet had been knocked
out...

Yeah.

...for a month...

Yeah.

...realistically...

I understand.

...if you don’t, I think it was, it was the information and the community...

Yeah.

...that kept me here and, sort of, was able to, sort of, assuage some of the concerns...

Yeah.

...feel I was being prudent but not reckless...

Yeah, yeah.

...em, you know, and then still be able to play the role that I, you know, my minor goal
here...

Yeah.

...so I, I think, em, but if you had no information, em, then I think it would have just been,
“I don’t know what’s going on. I’m very uncomfortable.”...

Yeah.

...so, you know, so I think that, that would have happened. Ehm.

A, as a, as a just a final quick question...
...I’m interested from everyone I’ve spoken to to know when they think the disaster ended?

Well, I don’t think it has. And, and, I mean, I, I suspect that most people think that?

Yeah.

Em, I mean, again it was such a, it was an unusual disaster because it never really started. I, I mean, there was an earthquake [laughter] and there was a tsunami, and then there was a period of grey...

[Laughter]

...and it’s still there and, and you still read, I, I think I became less, I, I do remember maybe a couple of weeks, I forget, but I do distinctly remember, “Okay, I’m not checking Twitter every minute.” Like, I am not actually worried about I am going to go to the bathroom or something. Or, I am going to go to sleep and then wake up six hours later and then instantly get back to Twitter to find out...

Yeah, yeah.

...what I missed. There was definitely a period where it did feel like that kind of hourly quickness of the information was very important…

Yeah, yeah.

...em, and there was a period where it became, “Okay, I can just check this at the end of the day.” Or I can just, you know, or some, “Oh, did you see this?” But it was, like, that, it wasn’t, sort of, I need to stay on top of this. And that was probably a couple of weeks after…

Yeah.

...so I mean the, that voracious appetite for information, I think, started to peel off…

Yeah.

...I just don’t think you could sustain it that long.

Yeah.

But eventually it became, “Okay, I think things are settling into some kind of a period of, of not equilibrium but at least some sort of sense of, em, balance for now...

Yeah.

...em, where you know, we’ll see if things are going to tip up…

Yeah.

...if things are going to go down, but, em, and we’re still in that period. Like, I don’t think.
Oh, yeah, you’re absolutely right. Many people that I’ve spoken to...

Yeah.

...have said that for them it’s not really over yet. I mean.

No, I had, I had breakfast this morning with a colleague of mine at another company and, you know, he has got a kid on the way, his wife is almost delivering, about a month away, and, you know, his plan is to go to Singapore, like, and, and, you know, I was asking him, like, “How are you managing?” And he said, like, “We’re being really careful, reading the labels, checking all that kind of stuff.” And I, I don’t think Japan fully recognises, I think, the, the perception of the world towards this thing, and, and how damaging it is, or the amount of talent that has left. Now, realistically, I don’t know if Japan relies on that but, but, if they really do want to think about integration, if they do want to think about this, there’s a lot of people that have left. And there’s a lot of people that are still leaving...

Yeah.

...and, there’s not the same people coming back, so, you know, it’s, my, my child goes, one of the older guys goes to an international school and it’s interesting because all the finance people have left, they’re all gone. Ehm the healthcare people, the chem, the pharmaceutical base seems to have come in a bit...

Yeah.

...so, eh, there’s, sort of, a new group of, sort of, expatty, kind of people...

Yeah.

...from a very different background and, again, I don’t get a sense of, they’re not really lifers...

Yeah.

...they’re here for a couple of years, a year, okay, and then...

Yeah.

...but, you know, I don’t know, and I’m not sure I think there was a, there was a window, sort of, in that period right after the crisis where there was a big question mark, is this going to be, ultimately a, you know, disaster, but is it somehow going to be a positive catalyst for something...

Yeah.

...at least. You, you know it was a terrible disaster but at least can something good come out of this in the way of more openness, transparency, speed of information distributing, you know, and, and, there was a sort of sense of, jar Japan a little bit, more it toward something more positive in the future or is it going to go the other way. Is it going to become more reactionary? Is it going to be more of that, “Who the fuck cares what the rest of the world thinks? We’re going to take care of each other.” And I don’t know, I’m, if anything, I don’t know if it has gone forward or back but I think there is, sort of, a
sense of, em, it’s not over by a longshot and, and, you know, I still think, you know,
there’s occasional article that pop in my, that get forwarded by parents or forwarded by
colleagues overseas…

Yeah.

...and, “Hey did you see this?” And my god, the, you know, the Pacific radiation levels of
cesium in the sea and they still don’t, they still haven’t, they still don’t know how to, I
mean, they're just going to have to pour concrete over the whole fucking thing and seal it,
just put it under a big fuckin’ dome, like, that’s it! Like, there’s no way they can move
anything from there. But they have got to figure out how do they stop the fission and I
think it’s still going on…

Yeah.

...in the, in those buildings so it’s, it’s a real, it’s a three-hundred year problem…

Yeah.

...and that’s never going to stop...

Yeah.

...em, and, you know, particularly in that region, I think it is really dangerous. I, I can live
here and feel okay…

Yeah.

...em, you know, we always have options to move to China or to go overseas. But you
know, frankly, I look at China, and I look at food safety, and I look at these other issues
and I, I don’t think it’s any safer…

Uhum.

...em, but it’s such a different kind of problem…

Yeah.

...so, so every place has those, those issues, but I think, you know, not being a bilingual,
fluent Japanese speaker, em, yeah, I mean, I think information was still accessible. I think
the Internet played a big role. I think Twitter played a big role. Personal connections and
connecting with those people through digital technology was important. Eh, so I didn’t,
I didn’t feel I’m not, because and also maybe because I was discounting the official word,
I didn’t feel like, “Oh I’m not listening directly to this. That’s not a problem.” Eh, and
again, I would, sort of, get it filtered through people that, whose opinion I trusted…

Yeah.

...so it was, it was okay. Em, but yeah, certainly culturally when it comes to how to react,
em, and, and if there was a real disaster, if, if you had buildings knocked down, if you
had people trapped under rubble, if you had that kind of stuff, I, I think there would be,
you know, I’m not sure, you know, I’d take care of my family, eh, but, yeah, I, I think,
eh, I think that would be the focus then just get out.

This, this is absolutely what, it has come through quite strongly that…
Um.

...maybe the local authorities or the people who are making these recommendations are seeing it from a, a Japanese perspective culturally...

Yeah.

...and, eh, there may be some issues that they are not taking into account, the fact that people from other countries may just have a different way of responding.

Well, I think so, and I mean, even, even with, eh, with certain events where there was, eh, you know, I, you know, I had, it’s, it’s very Japanese, right, so, you know, the official policy in the company was, if you want to take the time off and you want to spend time with your family, it’s fine, you can do that. Em, you don’t have to go to work, em, but, you know, you have to make the decision. If that’s the policy, everyone comes to work...

Yeah.

... because you can’t shirk the responsibility and you can’t not show up...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...if everybody else is going to show up. But, you know, I had people that reached out to me privately that were, sort of, like, “I’m really uncomfortable being here. I want to go to Kyoto. I want to get to Osaka…”

Yeah.

...I have family there.” Or I have people that I know there, whatever. And, and, but they couldn’t say it and they couldn’t tell Japanese people...

Yeah.

...em, but, you know, the company, our company changed the policy to be, sort of, “Okay, officially you have to get permission to come in, as opposed to the…”

Okay.

...and, you know, so, as soon as that happened, everybody left.

Yeah.

But, you know, I think there are those kind of societal bonds that, kind of, keep people in place...

Yeah.

...em, and, it’s really hard for Japanese to subvert those...

Yeah.

...they can’t step out of that line...

Yeah.
...and it’s, it’s tricky, so.

Yeah, so well, because as you said, not just in times of disaster, but just going to the bank
every day or the post office or anything, you’re in these sort of...

Yeah, there’s a book about…

...sort of, performances.

...that this guy has a theory that essentially it’s all about kata [Note: forms]. That to
understand Japan, it’s all about different forms of behaviour…

Yeah.

...there’s kata for everything…

Yeah.

...and, and, so once you understand the underlying forms and the expectations, then
people just are rolling through those…

Yeah.

...despite internally how they might really feel...

Yeah, yeah, that’s.

...they just feel obliged…

Uhum.

...and they have to carry this through. And, you know, I think there’s a tremendous
strength, and there’s something that I admire in that at times…

Yeah.

...ehm, but, you know, at, at times when things are kind of, I, I mean, to be honest with
you, I, I think about, I don’t know, I mean, it’s not a fair comparison really, but, you
know, New Orleans or Katrina or something like that and the breakdown of order...

Yeah.

...and the, and the, you know, the people shooting each other on bridges…

Yeah.

...and, and police going through and shoot-to-kill on rioters and looters and, I mean, none
of that happened in Japan, you know, and, and, so, there, and, it does seem to me the US
always seems to be on a knife’s edge where they, kind of, believe that as soon as the
power goes out…

[Laughter]
…[laughter] everyone is going to start shooting each other and fighting, and, and you
know people have bunkers and they have their protected compounds. They’re just waiting
for the zombie apocalypse.

Yeah, yeah.

And, and I don’t think that, that, that social con, the cohesion, it just isn’t there.

Yeah.

In Japan, it’s here, so there is a real sense of resilience. Communities pull together and
take care of each other. But, but, in a time when there is no order, in a time where
everyone is looking around, kind of, “Well, what will we do?”...

Yeah.

…em, I don’t know, I think there’s probably going to be, I don’t know the best, you know,
I mean, they talk about if after the earthquake, you know, just stay in the building because
you could get hit by something…

Yeah.

…falling off a building so, you know, it’s more dangerous to be outside than inside.

Yeah.

That goes against every instinct I had after that earthquake. I was like, “I’m getting the
fuck out of this building.” And, and, I know that’s not right, but, you know, and also,
because I had this sort of excuse that I had a client meeting, it was like, “All right, I am
going to make this meeting.”

[Laughter]

So,em, you know, speaking honestly, I think it was a combination of those two things,
but I was not fighting it, so like, “Well, they said stay in the building.”

Yeah, yeah.

Em, I was like, “No, I am going to do this. I am going to make it.” So, em, you know, we
left. And, and so I think that, I, yeah, I, I, I think, ehm, probably foreigners, I, it probably
depends on how you are here, too. Like, I mean, if you are part of the, you know, where
you’re living, what community, are you a student…

Yeah.

…are you working, or you know, the different, you know, how, like, like, my wife’s
company, they have, em, pretty serious, em, security, kind of, evacuation protocols…

Yeah, yeah.

…that, you know, if things got bad, they would pretty quickly, you know, “Here’s the
rally point,” kind of…

Where you go, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
…”get there and then we’ll take care of you.” So I would really end up relying more on those...

Yeah.

...than I would frankly that, sort of, the official {ward} representative that’s going to come by.

Yeah.

Ehm, and, and, you know, I think that’s just, so in that sense I don’t think I would ever fully integrate. Em, but, you know, that being said, and I remember there was the whole, em, *fly-jin* [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who left Japan in the disaster] kind of thing and I suspect a lot of Japanese left, too. Like, I suspect there was a lot [laughter] of wealthy people...

Yeah.

...Japanese in Tokyo that split...

Yeah.

...and it just doesn’t get highlighted and it doesn’t make for a nice story and, and certainly nobody, it’s in nobody’s interests, eh, in the establishment to talk about that...

Yeah, yeah.

...I am really certain that there were, there was nobody in the neighbourhoods [laughter] where I was walking around in Roppongi and Azabu Juban [Note: known for being wealthy neighbourhoods in Tokyo]...

Yeah, yeah.

...it was not just foreigners...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...there were nobody. And, and, so, em, the idea that we’re all hanging in this together, I think it is a bit of a myth and I think it might be maybe more class, more socioeconomic…

Yeah, yeah.

...if you’ve got the resources, people got on planes, and, em, I mean, I think, yeah, it was, it was a strange, you know, I felt staying was the appropriate thing to do…

Yeah.

...em, and that was good, but, eh, but, but certainly I don’t think it was just foreigners getting on planes and getting out. I think they were visible…

Yeah.

...em, and certainly once official, kind of, notices went up, it became, kind of, but, and, you know, I, I think also, you know, I’ve spoken to people who, who had colleagues that
really resented that, em, that, you know, people were like, “I can’t work with you anymore,” kind of thing, “I can’t trust you.”

Yeah.

Em, so in a, in an odd sense, I think I actually gained, I gained something at my company by staying. But, em, you know, I’ve seen the opposite…

Yeah.

…where, you know, people left for very good reasons...

Yeah.

…em, sensible, in a way, you know one thing that I did think about - I probably should head back upstairs [Note: we had now been talking for an hour]

Yeah, I’m sorry to take so much of your time, I really appreciate it.

No, no. It's okay. No. I think, em, you know, one thing that did go through my mind [laughter] at the time which is kind of a grim thought, but, you know, when you see, when you read history and you read about certain events in history that were coming or, you think, you, sort of, wonder, “Well, why didn’t people just react to that. Why didn’t they, you know, I mean, people must have seen the rise of Nazism, people must have thought about that and thought maybe I don't want to be in Germany or Austria at this time, maybe I should be,” you know, maybe there shouldn't, maybe there was not as much mobility at that time…

Yeah.

…but, you know, but whose, and you know, and, and you know, persecuted minorities that are, that are, sort of, like, “No, we’re going to stay.”

Yeah.

And, and that was definitely something in my head at that time where I was like, “Is this one of those situations [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…where, you know, with the benefit of hindsight people are going to be like, “Why the fuck [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…did, you know, 10,000 people not leave?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

You know, because I, I mean, I do, I really do think it’s a knife's edge thing…

Yeah.

…Like it could have tipped one - is it Schroedinger…
Oh, yeah.

...it’s a Schroedinger’s Cat thing or whatever where it’s, kind of, they opened the box.
the cat was alive so it was okay. We were fine, but if it was dead then we’re all stupid.

Yeah, yeah.

So, I don’t know. Like, I don’t know, I don’t know what’s the right way to react in those
situations. Ehm, certainly the Japanese way is we all hang together or you know, and
that’s just what we’re going to do. Em, but yeah, I, you know, I think, eh, I think, eh,
from a communications point of view…

Yeah.

...from a technology point of view, I think, you know, certainly things like Twitter, the
Forums…

Yeah.

...the Internet, had I not had that, my experience would have been very different.

Yeah, yeah. That’s one thing I’m definitely taking away from, from, from speaking to you,
for sure, that, and it tallies with what a lot of other people have said to me...

Sure...

...very much, so.

...it was good.

Well, listen, thank you so much for that.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

Note: the weekend before this interview took place, the researcher had participated in some volunteer activities in the disaster zone along with the participant.

2013/10/3 Interview with Participant 21

Researcher: So the, the way I start every, the way I start, [Note: the researcher dropped a piece of paper that he was taking from the participant] sorry about that, the way I start every interview is just very generally, tell me what happened to you...

Participant: Alright…

...in the 2011 disaster.

...sure. [Note: the participant gestures to the audio recorder on the table in front of here] Is this thing on?

Yep. It’s on.

Alright. So actually, I was {redacted} at my office. Ehm, so I’m on the fourth floor of the building that I found out later was built in the 19, 1986, so it was after the earthquake codes came in. Ehm, so I was sitting at my desk, earthquake started happening. Eh, I turned to my friend {redacted}, who you met…

Yeah.

...eh, and eh, we were like, “Whoa, this is kind of interesting.” And then it got worse [laughter]. And I work with a lot of international people, a lot of people ran out of the building. Like, em, so, anybody that was Japanese immediately went under their desk. And then everybody else just took off out the door. So I just kind of stood there next to the main pillar [laughter], watched the clock swinging, you know, like, one of the clocks, like, the round clocks just swinging, like, wildly [Note: the participant makes a swinging gesture with her hands] and realized that something like that could fly off and hit me in the head, and then got under my desk [laughter].

Yeah.

So, ehm, then of course there was the, you know, everything was, kind of, like, “Wow, that was intense.” And people came back in the building, and, he, so we were all kind of trading stories and there were some comical ones…

Yeah.

…of, like, one person was on the phone and, eh, so basically my job is sales, so he was closing the sale, and so he’s on the phone, and you can hear him going, “Oh, no, no, no, I don’t feel that…”

[Laughter]

...I don’t.” [Laughter] And, like, still talking, still talking, still talking. He hangs up the phone and runs out of the building. [Laughter]
[Laughter]

So…

Close, close, close.

...yeah. [Laughter] Ehm, and then the aftershock, actually, that was pretty nasty as well…

Yeah.

...ehm, and at that point, it kind of went from like, “Whoa, I’ve actually experienced something,” to, “This is, like.” I was on the fourth floor, and the building across from mine is, like, eh, it looks kind of like brick concrete. My building is more concrete, you know, the bathroom tile look…

Yeah, yeah.

...that a lot of buildings have, right? And we were swaying ever so slightly. And even on the fourth floor you could see both the buildings swaying, and that’s kind of freaky…

Yeah.

...something higher up, you expect that, but I wasn’t expecting that on the fourth...

Fourth...

...floor…

...yeah.

...just, to, you could literally see us moving just ever so slightly. And at that point, I was like, “Okay, Now, I’m getting kind of like, ‘okay, I’m over it!’” [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

...this is enough for one day. Ehm, and so {my colleague} and I were watching, oh, we were clicking during that hour, because the aftershock was like an hour later, we were, kind of, clicking on, ehm, because nobody knew what to do, em, the shacho [Note: means company president] of my company was in a taxi near the office going to a meeting near our office, and so the second it happened the taxi pulled over, she got out, ehm, and actually I think she was in a taxi, they were in it and they came back to the office, and basically told everybody to go home…

Oh right, okay.

...because some people want to leave, nobody knew what to do, and so basically the official decision was you can keep working if you want, but, like, because some people were like, “I need to get home to my family, and I live really far away.”...

Yeah.

...and hopefully everybody is working until six [laughter]...

[Laughter]
...you know? So, my sis, it was only, I didn’t find out until later, my sister and I always
had this, like, contact method plan where if anything serious, either, happened to either of
us, we’d get word to each other and they would, then we’d inform our parents, the other
one…

Okay.

...ehm, so I’d left a message for my sister, like, but I just got voice mail so I, kind of, said,
“Okay, everything's fine. I’m fine. Tokyo’s fine.” Eh, and then, like, maybe it’s, kind
of, we’re, like, {my colleague} and I are, kind of, watching CNN and we’re watching the
news rankings of stories, and, eh, like, at the time Charlie Sheen was, like, the one
[laughter]...

[Laughter]

...for his, like, idiotness, so he was ranked the highest for his, like, comments and things
like that…

Yeah.

...so, and then, we were kind of watching and, you know, we were refreshing and we
were watching Japan go higher and higher on the ranking, and then we knocked out
Charlie Sheen [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so in between the aftershocks and everything, em, a friend of, I work in consumer and a
friend of mine works in Asahi so I had sample beers, so we were, like, cracking them
open and, eh, emails started coming in from, I used to live in Hong Kong, so I got, like,
eh, messages from my two best friends in Hong Kong. So I replied back, yeah, oh yeah,
“I’m sitting at my desk with a beer open, that obviously means I’m okay.” [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so that went, it sent. “Alright, she’s fine.” Eh, and then as, kind of, time went on, like, it was getting, like, it was maybe what three p.m. then, kind of, four p.m., we were, kind
of, watching the news and then the, there was reports, because, of course, there were all
these different reports, kind of, coming in. There was reports that, like, eh, Fuji building,
the Fuji Television studio in Odaiba was that, like, the ball that’s in there [Note: this is a
distinctive landmark building in Tokyo - the building’s structure is made up of a huge
sphere surrounded on all sides by a square office block] had fallen down and was on fire.
Another one was about the Budokan [Note: a famous large stadium in Tokyo]. So one of
my colleagues who has a motorcycle, actually, like, went out because we had heard it had
collapsed entirely. So he got on his motorcycle and went out to check it out, came back to
the office and said, “Yeah, I couldn’t get close enough.” [laughter] So, it wasn’t exactly
the nicest, it wasn’t, you know, sensitive reactions.

How, how did you hear those stories about, like, say Fuji or the Budokan? Was it?

Ehm, Fuji came from a friend of mine, and so his friend was at Odaiba, so it was coming
through email messages...

Okay.

...eh, and then the news, it was, not quite sure what was going on in the news.
Right.

Then.

And then.

And that would have been CNN or, or?

Well, we didn’t, we can’t really stream very well in our office, like, I think they in, intentionally [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...like, Youtube’s blocked, ehm, so the Internet wasn’t great...

Yeah.

...I mean, it was fine, but we usually don’t stream news anyway...

Right.

...ehm, so that wasn’t really an issue. We weren’t getting anything that way...

Yeah.

...it was, kind of, more rumours and stories...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...all through various sources. I mean, nothing official...

Yeah.

...and then, ehm, {my colleague} just usually reads CNN, so then he was checking and checking and checking and, and so then we overtook Charlie Sheen...

[Laughter]

...[Laughter] I’m pretty proud of that...

Moment of pride.

...you know, we had a kampai of our drinks [Note: the expression means ‘cheers’ in Japanese] and that. And, em, personally, eh, there’s one friend who, because some of the people took off, and then the staff had, kind of, done a headcount, and then I realized one of my friends wasn’t accounted for, and so he was out at a meeting, and it was maybe like an hour, an hour-and-a-half after, about four thirty, five thirty, about...

Yeah.

...it was before five o’clock, and so I was like, “Screw it.” And I just called him, because I figured a desk phone is going to work better than, so I kind of stayed in the office a little bit, not sure...

Yeah.
...so I, kind of, I just called him on his, em, from my desk phone and it got through. So he was like, “Actually, I’m fine. I’m on my way back to the office. I’m pretty close by.” “Okay.” Click. [Laughter]...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...ehm, and, and so, it was still, kind of, not quick, nothing had sunk in, and I was like, “Okay, I need to,” like, I didn’t feel right that I had called and only left a message for my sister because, eh, I will probably get into this more, but she was in 9/11, okay? So she, I mean, I’ll get more into that probably, depending on your questions, but.

It’s, it’s up to you.

Eh, kind of, her reaction to that and how that affected me, eh, it will probably come out. We’ll, we’ll talk about that...

Yeah.

...Ehm, but I felt, I felt, kind of, like, “Okay, I need to speak to somebody.” Ehm, and so I called my parents and it was, like, three in the morning...

Crikey.

...that was the east coast...

Yeah.

...so three in the morning, and literally the phone rings, like, ‘ring ring, ring ring’ and my dad answers [laughter]. And typically, my dad can be home and lets in ring for like twenty minutes [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and it was like, “Isn’t he asleep?” Like, it was really strange...

Yeah.

...and he was like, “Oh, you want to talk to your mother?” And I was like, “Actually, I, I’m okay.” And then suddenly you hear my, I was like, “I’m okay, I’m okay.” And then you hear, I can hear my mother going, “What’s happening? What’s going on?” And then, eh, so she get on the phone, and she was, like, dead asleep, and I was like, “Don’t turn on the TV. Don’t listen to any of this crap. I’m alright. Tokyo’s fine. Everything.” “What do you mean, like, aaaaahhh?” [laughter] Like, “Don’t turn on the TV and don’t listen to that crap.” Like, “I’m fine. Everything’s fine. Everything’s fine.” And then, of course, she goes and turns on the TV. And she said, she was like, I mean, and then, eh, after I hung up the phone, I felt kind of bad in a way, because she sounded so terrified. Like, I had, I’d woken them up in the middle of the night, and they sounded like, my mother sounded absolutely terrified. She was like, “Well, what do you mean ‘don’t turn on the TV’?” I was like, “There’s been a massive earthquake. I’m fine. Tokyo’s fine. Everybody I know is fine.” “I think that everybody I know is fine,” you know?

Yeah.

You know, “Everybody is fine. So go back to bed.”
Yeah.

And then, eh, the horror in her voice kind of, like, haunted me a little bit. Eh, which is natural.

Oh, absolutely.

Ehm, and turns out it was good, because when she went to work the next day, and everybody knew her daughter was in Japan, so she already had an answer.

She was prepared.

Yeah, so but that, kind of, rattling my mother like that did, because afterwards I was like, “Oh my God,” like, I hated making her feel like that, right? And then I was like, “Well, I think, knowing my mother, she’s going to get paranoid about it no matter what.” So she spoke to me, and I was like, “I’m drinking a beer at my desk.” [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so everybody knows I’m okay, popping, I’ve cracked open a beer [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...ehm, after that, we didn’t really know what to do, em, so a bunch of us, kind of, wandered out, went to a bar that’s just down there…

Uhum.

...if you want to go there after? [laughter] I’ll probably go back to work then.

It’s the place to go [laughter].

Yeah, eh, if you’re interested for a drink after. Ehm, and on the way there, eh, so by this point, it was probably about five thirty, and so everybody was starting to walk home. And, the streets were getting crowded and, just by chance, a former colleague was walking down the street, he’s this tall, you know, Swedish dude, pretty easy to recognize…

[Laughter]

...we were like, “Oh, we’re going for a beer at this place. Want to come?”...

Yeah.

...and we went there, and then the staff and everybody were completely freaked out. There were, of course, people drinking and they were playing the videos, so it was the first time we’ve seen basically, like, rice fields, and nothing sunk in. And, em, so we were supposed to go out for a friend’s birthday that night because it was a Friday, and Australian friend of mine was like, “Yeah we’re,” you know, “we have to power on for {that friend}.”...
...ehm [coughs] so even though we couldn’t get a hold of anybody on phones, everybody knew we’d be down at {a pub popular with foreign nationals} drinking. So I knew if we just wandered down there, we’d run into everybody...

Yeah.

...and he lived around there so, it’d be easy, it’d be easy to track him down...

Yeah.

...even without a phone. So we go down there, we go to karaoke at, like, seven, and then everybody starts cracking, and that was really, really interesting to watch because half of the room, or four, no, about a third of the room were Japanese, and the rest were foreigners, and, ehm, so basically, the guy whose birthday, like, he and his boyfriend, his boyfriend was, em, was, I think part-time he was working at Disney, so he kind of here and away sometimes, so it’s not really his country...

Yeah.

...and so he didn’t really care, and then, like, basically, our other good friend, like, she was just like, “I need a charger, I need a phone charger.” And she started, like, really freaking out and then, basically, like, got a phone charger from the karaoke place and, like, plugged it into the wall and just sat there, like, chatting, eh, talking to her mother...

Yeah.

...different things like that, and I was like, “Oh god, she’s freaking out.”...

Yeah.

...and then there were two other girls who were just, like, not really drinking...

Yeah.

...and so you could just see everybody slowly cracking and then, you know, the, the main organizer is like, “No, no, no. We need to have fun. We need to have fun.” And like, really trying to have like, eh...

Yeah, yeah.

...and, and then, you just see everybody keep cracking, and then it, kind of, started washing over the rest of them, because I started breaking, and I was like, “Ah.” And, we’re in this, like, huge karaoke room where they have this mini-stage, because, you know, it was for his birthday, so it was all special, and then we had, like, these chandelier things, chandeliers were smacking the ceiling, like, there was a tremor and then like, [Note: the participant makes several sharp intakes of breath to indicate fear] and it was just like, “We have to call this quits.” Like, “This is getting ridiculous.” So most of the people went home. Because I think there was about ten of, there was supposed to be twenty but, of course, some people hadn’t made it or cancelled or, you know, they knew where we’d be, eh, if they wanted to join, so, so basically the, the friend who was the organizer, he was an expat here, so he had a, a nice, nice apartment...
...in {central Tokyo}, so he wanted everybody to come and stay with him, so, and I remember, I was like, “Okay, well, you know, I live in {a more suburban area of Tokyo}.” - so I walked home from work for fun…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so it takes about a little over an hour, and so it’s kind of nice, you know, beer and walking - maybe this time there would be more people walking [laughter] but I was, you know, fine with that. And so I was like, “It’s okay. I’m going to go.” And he was like, “Okay, but I’m, I’m going to go with you.” So basically, these three or four other people went back to his place, ehm, and this was probably about, like, getting late, like nine o’clock at night, or something like that. And I was like, “Alright, let’s stop a bit. Let’s have a beer for the road.” So we stopped back in {the pub we had been to earlier} again and are watching it and, kind of, talking and then, like, “Okay, you don’t need to walk me home.” And he was like, “Yeah, I do.” And I was like, “No, you don’t.” “Yeah, you do.” [Note: this is probably a slip of the tongue and the participant means ‘Yeah, I do.’] And we start walking and we get to the end of the street, and I turned to him and I was like, “You don’t want to be alone.” And he was like, “Yea, yeah.” And I was like, “Well, if you put it that way, I don’t need to go home.”...

[Laughter] Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...but he never would say that. And he was like, I was like, “You want everybody around you so you know that the people you care about are safe.” And he was like, “Yes. You could say that.” [Laughter]

[Laughter]

“Okay, let’s turn around. Let’s go back.”...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...ehm, and then we, kind of, kept drinking and went to bed.

And all of the aftershocks were still, kind of, going on through the night and that?

Yeah. I mean, his apartment is on the twenty-fifth floor, and we didn’t really notice them…

Okay.

...like, I, I think there were, but, the, I don’t know the, like, phantom earthquakes and stuff like, there was just so much that you just didn’t notice them. Slept through the night pretty peacefully.

Did any of you get, you know, that early warning thing on your phone? The, the mobile phone system?

No. I think everybody did later. [Laughter]

Yeah, I think it came in much, much more. I don’t think, most of the people I’ve talked to didn’t have it…

No.
...and if they did, they didn’t know they...

No...

...had it.

...yeah, exactly. Or.

It was definitely more on the Japanese phones, like I had a work phone which was a Japanese one. It went off all the time...

Oh right.

...yeah, but it was only in Japanese and it was, like...

[Note: the participant mimics a shrill, digital alarm sound]

...it was, like, as I said, it was a work phone, it wasn’t...

Yeah.

...like I, my phone was old, but my iPhone didn’t do any of that...

Yeah.

...at all, afterwards I found out how to do it [laughter].

I had one of the, like, old phones as well, so it didn’t have anything [laughter].

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

After it was, like, “Ooh, I want that. I want that alarm to go on my phone, too.”

So, at that stage, so you decided you guys wanted to, kind of, s, stay together that night. How much would you say you knew at that stage of what was going on in general?

Ehm, we were watching CNN at his place. I think, I’m pretty sure it was CNN because he had cable. Em, and, I mean, there were, there were, there were, the imagery was, of course, the tsunami...

Yeah.

...ehm, the famous ones of it going over the fields and then, like, coming right up to the side of a car or, you know, em, I think the one we were, we did see at work was basically just, like, a bridge and then the water rising. I think, em, like, eh, I think when we were at the office maybe we did get some images like that, but it didn’t look like anything...

Yeah.

...and then you, kind of, see a boat, like, pass...

Yeah. [laughter].

...and you were like, “Wait. What the?” Like, so, like, when we were at the bar before then you could definitely see, like, the, or at least from my memory of, like, the most
classic images of, like, eh, Chiba on fire, like the gas that was on fire, ehm, and then the tsunami coming in. And you could tell the difference, em, because it happened in the afternoon, and what was shot [clears throat] before and after, because daylight and everything, so you knew what was happening now and what wasn’t…

Yeah.

...by the, if it’s dark…

Yeah.

...[laughter] it’s not happening this instant…

Yeah, exactly.

...and a lot of the places, I’d never heard of…

Yeah.

...like I, I’d never been to, I, I had been to Sendai, but I, in, like, Mats, Matsushima, but I hadn’t been to any like, Ishinomaki or anywhere like that, so I’d never heard of any of these places [clears throat].

Yeah. And I know that you have mentioned email…

Yeah.

...as a way of, kind of, communicating and stuff, did any of you use social media at all?

[Note: the participant makes a deep intake of breath] I’m not a huge Facebook fan. So I wasn’t, I actually intentionally stayed off it. Ehm, [clears throat] and when we were at my friend’s place, I remember my friends were posting some stuff and I was just like, “God,” I was like, “God, they’re going out of control on the news. Like, they’re already, like, really going out of control on the news.” So I was already, like, pissed off at that. So, and then there was a lot of, em, like, people writing stuff and then, trying to figure out if that’s sensitive enough. And, so like, any, any time some, like, my friend was writing on Facebook, and then it was, kind of, like, “Well, like, I can’t say everything’s fine, but everything's fine for me. But that doesn’t mean everything’s fine.” Like, so…

I got it.

...what, is that sensitive enough, in a way?

Yeah, yeah.

But I’m not a huge social networker [laughter] so.

Oh, you, no, em, the reason I ask about that is because there was so much research done afterwards about how often social media was used, and I’m not convinced because when I’ve talked to people...

Uhm.

...a lot of people have said like you: ‘I didn’t use it.’ ‘I wasn’t, I avoided it.’
Yeah. Eh, I think if that was your only way to communicate, and you wouldn’t, that’s
more of a mass audience, and it’s something intimate, in a way, em, after the fact, maybe
like a week later or something like that, my sister was like, who doesn’t use Facebook
either, was kind of telling me, insisting that I had to post something that I’m alright, and I
was like, “No, I don’t.” Because a lot of the people were connected to our hometown or
different things like that. And she was like, “Well, yeah, but by not posting things, people
see things, people think nothing’s.” It’s like, well, just because I live in Japan doesn’t
mean that [clears throat] you know, like, that I need to say I’m okay, in a way. I’m not
going to feed into having to say that I’m okay. Because things are not great, but they’re
fine. So why?” And then she was like, “Yeah, but people have been, kind of, asking me.”
And it’s like, “That’s fine. They’re asking you. You can say I’m fine.” [Laughter]...

[Laughter]

...but I’m not going to put out a bold statement that says, you know, “”Everything is fine
here,” and, you know, stuff, and “Thank you for your caring.” And like, “Thoughts and
wishes go out to people.” No! Like, I’m fine.

It’s interesting, though, that you mentioned there about how things are not, not great, but
they’re okay. You mean, for you in Tokyo, right?...

Yeah.

...is that, that was the kind of...

Yeah.

...because what a lot of people have talked about is disconnect between what, say, was
being portrayed on CNN versus their experience as someone in Tokyo.

God, god, yeah, this was, this is a whole other can of worms [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...that we’re talking about. Em, [clears throat] I’m pretty disillusioned with the media in
general, eh, I’m extremely liberal [laughter] and, eh, especially in the US with, the
country’s very divided, eh, I guess the conservative and liberal, liberal views, em, [clears
throat] I st, really stopped just trusting most news sources, eh, even the, you know, the
conservatives say, you know, they say a lot of the media outlets in the US are liberal. I
don’t think they’re liberal, eh, and I think it was, what 2005, 4? When did the Iraq War
start?

Yeah, 2004, I think. [Note: in fact it started in 2003]

2004...

Yeah.

...ehm, there was a massive parade in protest of going to war, and right down, right in
New York City, that not even the New York Times had. So a hundred, you know, like,
ten thousand people march in front of their office building and they don’t cover it, and so
that broke my illusion with, of what is, what people report. And so, I think it’s all
entertainment. So since 2004 I haven’t - even something like the New York Times, which
is supposed to be super liberal and trustworthy - no! If it’s, if a parade is going past your
office and you’re not writing about it, ehm, [clears throat] clearly something is going on where somebody has been told not to write about it…

Yeah.

...and there’s a huge hush up and there’s huge, like, bas, basically from that moment, I didn’t trust any of them, so I’m, though you miss stuff, it just completely cemented it in my mind. You cannot trust anybody. And the entertainment value is all the time, that’s the only part of the news that’s ever, in the way that they, and, of course, their replaying of images, and even on CNN, this is what was horrible, they didn’t even have a correspondent here. They were reporting from Hong Kong. And asking everybody to send them their images. So it’s like, “Okay, here’s a global news source that doesn’t have one single person in Japan begging us who have portable, you know, cameras to send that stuff.” And I’m like, “Okay, this is reporting?” Of course, now, it’s, this is, you know, a lot more common now, or…

Uhm.

...this is how a lot of news stories get their images and, because everybody, because it’s a lot easier to get them that way, but come on! They had nothing…

Yeah.

...they had, like, a map...

[Laughter]

...like, literally, except for what the Japanese news was broadcasting, they had very little. And they were begging, begging, like, every few minutes, “Oh, if you have anything, send it to us. If you have anything, send it to us.” Ehm, my sister’s favourite story is, eh, I think it was on Fox, and hopefully you can still find this…

[Laughter]

...they had a map of Japan, and, eh, they had [laughter] like, so basically they had, like, Tokyo, but of course, like, even they were basically like, Tohoku [Note: the region of Japan where the worst of the disaster struck] and then also on the map when they zoomed in a little bit, there was one place that was in Tokyo called Shibuya-egg-man [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...all one word, which apparently is, like, a nightclub [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...or some, like, some sort of a club, and they had it on Fox News…

As a place!

...as Shibuya Nightclub as, like, a part of Tokyo...

Oh my god.

...so I mean, it is also what, whatever time in the morning and they are throwing together, like, graphics packets…
Yeah.

...but come on!...

Yeah.

...like that is ridiculous. [clears throat] And the difference between re, reporting from Tokyo and reporting from the area...

Yeah.

...because I was like, “If people don’t understand that then, let them watch this entertainment crap.”

Yeah, yeah. Because obviously the experience in Tohoku versus the experience in Tokyo was like...

Oh god...

...two different worlds...

...yeah...

...right? I mean.

...I don’t know if you get to talk to people but, like, it didn’t, I mean, I wouldn’t even chat that I was upset by stuff after listening to what really happened.

Well, I’ve had some interesting, like, experiences where I, I’ve talked to people who were in the tsunami-hit areas...

Yeah, yeah.

...and who actually, like, had really tough experiences, and I’ve talked to people in Tokyo...

Uhm.

...and one person in Tokyo described it to me as - I, I try to ask everyone ‘so for you when did the disaster end?’ - and this person said, “Hmm, I don’t think it ever began.” For them, for them. But then, his answer also involved, “Well, having said that, I don’t think it really has ended because of Fukushima.”...

Yeah.

...so it’s like tricky because I agree absolutely that in Tokyo, materially, we were barely, we were inconvenienced...

Yeah, yeah.

...right? I mean, maybe we couldn’t get home for a night or we had to line up for some water or something like that. We were inconvenienced. However, what some people in Tokyo have talked about is the Fukushima...
...element. Did that impact on your life?

Oh, that’s, that’s Day Two.

Oh, okay [laughter]. Okay.

That’s Day Two.

So, moving to the next scene [laughter].

[Laughter] This is what I can talk about, not that CNN stuff [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...because the next morning we wake up, em, so there’s, I think, five or six of us that slept over, and my sister and I do this thing where we usually, I mean, the nice thing about Skype is it’s not like you’re paying for it, so you can just keep it running...

Yeah.

...you can, kind of, like, watch a movie together...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...which apparently other people think is kind of weird, but when you’re, I’m really, you don’t have to worry about, so we’ll sometimes, just to let you know, like half-watch a movie together, like, we’ll talk for an hour-and-a-half, and then we’ll, like, put something on and watch it...

Yeah.

...and you know, “Okay, it’s time for bed.”...

[Laughter]

...or, like, you know, we’ll, we’ll get drunk together in different time zones [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...or, you know, well, you know, because time, you know, all we have to do is synch up times and...

Yeah, yeah.

...it’s kind of like you can hang out...

Yeah, hang out.

...so [Note: participant lets out a sigh] she was on the last train out of New York when, eh, the second plane hit, so she wasn’t in Manhattan through most of it, and, so she was, kind of, watching from afar, and then a lot of the television transmitters were on top of the World Trade Centre, so then they were kind of in a news blackout as well, so a lot of what was coming in, em, and so, and then she talked about, like, eh, the dust and
everything from the building that settled all over her neighbourhood, so there was, like, 
basically, like, ash everywhere, like, so she was living in, like, Brooklyn at the time, and 
there was the anthrax scare and then…

Yeah, yeah.

…there was an engine fell out on, like, a plane…

Yeah.

...and it went down and, like, it was all these weird things, kind of, snowballing and, eh, 
basically she was working in, she was working in, like, the, in film, ehm, as, like, a film 
archivist, it was a really low-paying job, and that’s when she, kind of, decided, “I’m 
going to go and get a Masters.” And moved to California and so she’s been there for ten 
years. But it’s still, like, it’s still a trauma for her…

Yeah.

...even though nobody in our family died or anything like that…

Yeah.

...or everybody, but it still was, kind of, a trauma, so we wake up the next morning, and 
she’s been up all night watching the, everything…

Uhum.

…like, going to town on everything, [clears throat] So we, kind of, Skype, I introduce her 
to my friends on Skype, so we’re, kind of, talking and other people are on the phone to 
other people. So she’s, kind of, sitting there watching us watch CNN [laughter]. So she’s 
basically sitting there watching us hearing the news about Fukushima, so she’s, like, 
fascinated by the fact that she’s in another country, and even though we’re in that 
country, and we’re just hearing about this now, even though we’re there, and she knows 
more than us, even though she’s in California, and it’s like, I was like [Note: participant 
rolls her eyes]…

[Laughter]

...like, “You’ve been awake all night, like, [laughter] you’re going to have to go to bed. 
This is our day, like, like, it was almost like a vic, like, really satisfying having her watch 
us for the first time hear about Fukushima, which, I don’t know everybody has got their 
own stuff, and like [laughter]…

That was her little experiment [laughter].

Yeah, yeah. Oh well, I’ll tell you more about the experiment later. Ehm, and so she was, 
so we’re kind of watching it, and it was just, kind of, like, “The what?” The, like, none of 
it made sense. It was just like, kind of like another shock and then the video on top of 
that, it was just like, “What the hell is that all about?” Like, “The hell?” And [clears 
throat] ehm, so we’re, and then, so, like, we’re talking with my sister, and then, eh, what I 
really remember is that my sister is, like, talking more about, because we were kind of 
like, “Whoa, that’s crazy that, like, the reactor is having problems.” And then, thankfully 
the computer was facing towards me, because then my sister starts going all nutso and 
being all like, “Do you understand about meltdowns? Do you understand about, you 
know, like, em, China Syndrome?” What is it, what is the…
Oh yeah...
...one where?
...the one where it melts into the core, yeah, yeah, yeah.
Into the core, right? What is that called? Like, China Syndrome?
China Syndrome, I think.
Yeah, yeah. So she’s like, “Oh, I have this website open right now and I can tell you all about China Syndrome.” [laughter]...
[Laughter]
...it’s like, slash nerdy, slash, like, you’ve really been looking into this quite a lot [clears throat] and then, like [Note: participants swirls the ice in her drink as she thinks] I think she was, I don’t know if she was trying to shock us or educate us or both or, but it was really, that was definitely a very big memory of her, of like, and thank, thank god everyone else wasn’t paying attention, because she was, like, ready to go way into that...
Yeah...
...like, meltdown of the plant...
...yeah, uhm.
...which, at the time, I was like, “Yeah, tell me about it.” And she was like, “Do you really want to hear about this? Do you really want to hear one of the possibilities that they’re talking about now on the news?” “Yeah, go on.” [laughter]...
[Laughter]
...like, “Yeah. I’m just going to let you freak out for a little while. Interesting.”
[laughter]...
[Laughter]
...then, in terms of Fukushima, em, so my friend, my Japanese friend who I said was talking about the charger...
Yeah.
...em, {redacted}, we take the same train, so we walked back, em, to {a major station in Tokyo}, and then, on Saturday, so like noonish, one, twelve-thirty or, we were, kind of, like, “I think the train...” because we didn’t want to rush back...
Yeah.
...there was no need to rush back, so if the trains are running, we checked that the trains are running, so, then again, it might be really crowded...
Yeah.
...so, okay, well, I guess noonish, it was just like, we’re not in a rush, and, ehm, actually that night, a lot of people had different plans, so, kind of, the group broke up…

Yeah.

…[clears throat] and so {this Japanese friend} and I headed home, [clears throat] the trains were running, but slowly…

Yeah.

…so we’re like, “Okay, we don’t have to walk.” [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…and she lives in {a suburb of Tokyo}, so she was like, “Alright.”…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

…I don’t have to walk. I’m happy…

Yeah.

…and I got home, so as I said, I think I got home around one-ish or something like that, and, like, literally, like, find the plug for my TV and plug in my TV [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…like, I never used my TV…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

…and plugged in my TV and, you know, was watching it, and so then the reactor exploded [Note: participant sighs deeply] and so that’s when, eh, that’s when I, kind of, realized, this is probably where the translation stuff comes in, that’s when I realized I was completely alone, and listening to Japanese news and had no idea what was going on, like, none at all. So it was like, “What? The building just exploded?” And then they’re, like, showing it in slow mo, and they’re showing everything, and I was like, that’s when I was, sort of, like, “Oh crap!” [clears throat]. So then my sister wants to keep Skyping, so I, you know, turn on the computer and just have her, kind of, she was just, kind of, running in the background the whole time, and, like, I emailed {the Japanese friend I just mentioned}, and I’m, like, [Note: making a funny voice indicating someone who was completely ignorant of something] “Em, what the hell was that?” [laughter]…

[Laughter]

…And then she was like, “I don’t know.”…

Yeah.

…and the one thing that I could pick up through that, kind of, afternoon, that time, I mean my sister was telling me things already like, [Note: the participant uses an extreme tone of voice indicating that what her sister was saying was a strong (even too extreme) reaction] “Go home and fill your bathtub full of water, like, just in case, like, all the water’s contaminated, so at least you have your bathtub full.”…
...and I’m like, [Note: the participant rolls her eyes mimicking exasperation] “Okay, I’ll do it, just so you [laughter]...

Yeah.

...[Note: the participant briefly covers her hands with her face] just to make her happy...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...ehm, and, eh, and so {my Japanese friend is} like, “I have no idea.” And then, they were saying, “Okay, we’re going to make an announcement at seven.” And so, just listening to, like, and then trying to figure out, like, “Microsieverts? Wh, what is that in English?” And then looking up radiation scales, and then realizing that, like, “I can’t even find sievert in English? And how do you spell it? And why is Google not coming up with it? Sea-bert? [Note: this indicates the problem of transfer between Japanese renderings of foreign words - the phonetic system in Japanese does not map perfectly on to English phonetics and so ‘sievert’ could be rendered something like ‘sea-bert’.]

Exactly. This was a big problem I had as well because when it’s in katakana [Note: one of the Japanese writing systems, often used to render foreign words in Japanese script] it doesn’t make any sense, necessarily. It doesn’t correspond.

So I’m, like, “Sea-ba?, seee-baa-ru-to?”...

Yeah.

...“I don’t know how to do it.” And trying to, kind of, like, that was, for me, if, if you want to talk about translation...

Yeah.

...that was the most frustrating. Because there is, there, apparently, now there’s a more standardized, international radiation levels and detection levels. After! Now I know what a microsievert is. Now I can, now there’s a Wikipedia page on it [laughter]...

Yeah.

...so that side of it was like, “Well is that a lot? Is that a little? Is that a lot?” And then it’s like, “Okay, Fukushima is, like, what, like, a hundred kilo, a hundred, two-hundred miles away? Like, blurrgh.” [laughter]...

[Laughter] Yeah.

...”What the hell does any of this mean? And some, like, my friend was hosting that party, he went out on a date in {a neighbouring prefecture} em, the other friend whose birthday it was, they were having, like, a romantic dinner, like, {my Japanese friend} and I were at home, like, watching the news [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...ehm, another friend of mine, I think his hometown is, in his hometown there’s a reactor [clears throat] so, eh, actually part of school is they go and visit it and they talk about...
...safety levels and I think he even said that in between his town it overlaps in a way, em, so he was, kind of, in the cover, in the range of two reactors...

Wow...

...em.

...this is a Japanese friend now?

No, no. This is a Canadian. Canadian. Ah.

If you want to talk to him, I don’t know if you have time, he’s, he’s pretty interesting to talk [laughter].

[Laughter]

...because he, because he knows about radiation...

Yeah.

...and so he was talking about, he was just like, “Calm the hell down.” Like, “What is your problem?” Like, “Come out drinking.” And I was kind of, like, “I don’t even want to leave the house.” Like, “I don’t know what the hell is out there. I don’t think being safe, I don’t think it’s safer inside, but I don’t want to go outside. That’s all I know.”...

Yeah.

...and then my sister is on the Skype like, [Note: mimicking a panicked tone of voice] “Go shopping. Go shopping.” [laughter].

[Laughter]

... “You need enough food to last for twenty days.” Fucking [laughter].

[Laughter] Oh goodness. That’s hilarious how technology has allowed these sort of interactions. [laughter].

Yeah [laughter] so, like, and so I run out, and so I leave Skype on, I go out and I get food, and my friends are like, “Yeah, what the hell is your problem? Like, come out drinking with us. There’s a bunch of us, like, eh, another, another friend, his friends that are in a band are in town, so, like, we’re, we’re in {downtown Tokyo} getting drunk.” And I was like, “Okay. {That part of Tokyo is} not far, but I don’t feel like leaving.”...

Uhm.

... “I just don’t feel like it.” And then the announcement was supposed to be at seven. That’s one thing I did understand. They were, they were going to tell, tell us what happened at seven. Seven-thirty, there’s still nothing [laughter].

[Note: the researcher makes a deep intake of breath]
...em, and then they announce it, and most of what I understood, because a lot of, I didn’t know genpatsu [Note: means nuclear], I didn’t know houhassen [Note: means radiation], I didn’t know any of these words. Most of what I got was the word explosion [laughter], like, Fukushima, like Daiichi, like Daiichi, ni-go, san-go, like...

[Laughter] All the good stuff.

...yeah, so I’m like, “Yeah, I, I, I know there was an explosion.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and then everybody, after they made the announcement, I think people were clapping or there was, like, a, people were happy...

Uhm.

...so I was, like, “Okay. Something good happened.” And I was, because, kind of, like, watching my phone, waiting for {my Japanese friend}...

Yeah.

...she, she said that she’d update me...

Yeah.

...and, eh, kind of waiting, and I’m like, “Okay, what else did they say?” It was like, “Okay, well I still don’t know what a microsievert is.” So I start looking into that or, you know, so like, “Okay, I understand there was an explosion.” [laughter]...

[Laughter] This much has been established.

...Yeah, right. Found that on TV! [laughter] I think if I hadn’t seen that on TV I probably would have gone out.

One thing that a lot of people have talked about is how images played such an important role for them. Like, pictures and images actually ended up being really useful...

Yeah.

...especially when the topic is complex...

Yeah.

...even in English...

Yeah.

...what I found is when I translated these things, I still didn’t know what a sievert was [laughter] even then, so.

Yeah. It’s, like, layers upon layers of words people don’t know anyway…

Yeah. So images, but, the power of the image, then, is that it can also freak you out.
Yeah. So, eh, definitely for me, I, if I hadn’t just arrived home and then seen that, I probably would have gone out, if I’d seen it later, but it was literally, like, watching the news and then they were freaking out. “What’s happening?”...

Yeah, yeah.

...and then, well, they did the zoom in thing…

Yeah, yeah.

...because it was a really far away one…

Yeah.

...and then you hear the news announcers getting freaked out…

Yeah.

...and so I was here also during 9/11, I was in Japan, and so it was, it happened on the NHK English broadcast time, and, ehm, the English translator stopped talking, like, she got so freaked out, the translator stopped talking. So it was like, “Okay, I understand that [laughter]. . . .

Something bad is happening.

...and then they were, like, dubbing over, they had like, in the, like, for 9/11, they had the English broadcasts and then dubbed over it in Japanese, so we were, like, desperately trying to hear over the English [Note: I think this is a slip of the tongue and the participant means ‘over the Japanese’]...

Oh yeah.

...and then, like, then, like, [clears throat] then had, like, NHK [Note: Japanese national broadcaster] eh, then we’d switch to NHK and there’d be the English, and the translator started translating and then, like, broke down…

Oh, crikey.

...so I was like, “Okay, I’m not really expecting any translation services after this sort of stuff.”

You know, your, you’ve had that experience, yeah.

Ehm, and then, you know, I get an email from {my Japanese friend} that’s like, “Everything is okay. It exploded, but that was a good thing. Like, it released the pressure.” And I was like, “Okay?” [laughter]

[Laughter]

... “What the hell?”...

Who’d have thought, yeah!
...yeah, and so I just, kind of, [clears throat] for the rest of that day, I just, kind of, yeah, em, went out, I got my emergency pack of food, and different stuff like that, which, of course, involves a lot of wine...

[Laughter]

...because my, my sister, eh, because in San Diego they sometimes have wildfires, and then one year the university was evacuated, and so, like, basically she and her, like, other professor buddy, like, they, they had their emergency packs and had, like, eight bottles of wine [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...between the two of them [laughter].

If you’re going to go, go happy [laughter].

Yeah [laughter], em, so I was, like, I definitely need in my emergency pack some wine...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and I think all the food has now expired from it [laughter]...

Oh, of course, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...em, and so, I think that was basically, and then Sunday, we were, a bunch of us were planning to meet up again, and we just got shitfaced, just completely shitfaced, and it was just, like, that stress relief, and it was probably one of the most hilarious nights I’ve had in Japan...

[Laughter]

...just, like, we were, we were laughing so much at just, like, stupid things and doing stupid things, and talking and making jokes and, like, to a point where, ehm, one friend that, like, [laughter] one guy told a joke, and he, like, spat all over the floor [laughter] like, laughing. So like, you know, that kind of stress relief.

Oh that was a reaction, I’d say, yeah. You needed to let it out.

Yeah, and we were just having so much fun and getting trashed and…

Yeah.

...I think we all went, and this is, like, the Sunday night, I went home at, like, I think it was, it was actually in my neighbourhood, so I don’t think I made it home, I made it home at, like, midnight…

[Laughter]

...so everybody else was much later than that [laughter]. And then, the next day, Monday, was horrible because I was horribly hungover and, em, so we basically had flex-time to get in before 11, or you call in, and, em, so I had taken the train and everything and then the blackout, so I show up to my station and I’m on a blackout, so my train is not running, so I’m like, “I don’t even know how the hell do I even get to work? Like, it was running over the weekend? Why?” So, em, so I found, so I figured out that there was a
bus that I could take to get closer to, and then I show up at work and there’s nobody. I
mean, do you want to call somebody up and ask them to change their job [Note: the
participant worked as a headhunter]. And after the radiation stuff, like, we didn’t know if
foreign companies were leaving Japan, so, do you really want to say, “Oh, why don’t you
change your job to this great company that [laughter] might abandon…

[Laughter] Yeah.

...might have abandoned Japan over the weekend [laughter]. Ehm, but as I said before,
my office is pretty international, em, there was one German guy that just took off on the
Saturday, and he never came back. Didn’t even notify the company. So about half of the
people didn’t even show up to work on that Monday. Ehm, half of the people didn’t even,
or I think for, like, all of that, there was at least twenty percent that didn’t even, like,
bother contacting the company, and, I mean, nobody knows how to react and, but there’s
no leadership from management or anything, so we, kind of, just, like, left astray…

Yeah.

...and so it was just like, “Oh we ended up listening to all the things about the radiation,
ah, and it’s going to be blowing up this way on Tuesday.” And, and, ehm, then all the
media stuff, so basically I was getting bombarded by everybody overseas…

Yeah.

...and that was driving me crazy. So in the end, my friend in Hong Kong and my sister
bought me a ticket, a one-way ticket to Hong Kong…

[Laughter]

...because there was nothing to do at work, and, like, literally I would show up to work
for two hours, not know what the hell to do, ehm, okay, reschedule the meetings, I didn’t
want to go out on the Tuesday…

Yeah.

...when the radi, when the wind was blowing south…

Yeah.

...ehm, and then you see everybody kind of back to work but kind of not…

Yeah.

...and, eh, the lights don’t work, the lights are, you know, the power, everything is
powered down, ehm, like, subways are dark, everything is dark, the windows are open on
the, the, because I take, like, the J, JRs [Note: one of the train lines in Tokyo that go both
above and below ground]…

Uhum.

...like, the windows are down and the lights are off during the day. Ehm, and then the
news is just going around the bend about Fukushima. Completely out of control. And
then there are aftershocks and different things like that, so. And then, like, ehm, my one
friend I was talking about, eh, who was the expat, like, he actually had a business trip to
Korea, so he and {my Japanese friend} were in Korea, so and then, like, my friends and I
were kind of, like, “Well, there’s nothing to do.”...

Yeah.

...so we work for two hours and go to the bar and get drunk and then try and head home
before rush hour…

Yeah.

...because the trains were not quite running and you don’t really want to take them when
they’re not quite running…

Yeah, yeah.

...and thousands of people are going home. So, and then, so basically my friend just said,
“I’ll buy you one on my mileage points.” And then my sister sent him money, and like,
one way ticket to Hong Kong, and I was like, “Alright.” So, took off on Thursday and,
ehm, I was planning to come back on the Tuesday, and I said, and he was like, “No, no,
no. Please stay longer.” I was like, “If you can get me tickets to the Rugby 7, [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...on the weekend, I’ll stay longer.” [laughter] And so he got to work…

Yeah.

...it wasn’t until Friday night, of, like, the, like, a week later, that Friday night, when we
were out, I was out to dinner with, eh, my friend and his roommate that I realized I had
actually relaxed. Like, I didn’t, I didn’t actually realize that I was, kind of, in a
shellshock, so they picked me up on Thursday night, and I didn’t even think to, like, I
wasn’t totally at the bar when I thought to email, like, eh, use my friend’s phone and
email, ehm, basically my parents and my sister, and they were fuming that I didn’t do it
the second I landed. I’m like, “What’s the difference two hours from, for you?”...

Yeah.

...like, I, I’m, like, basically, shocked so, and I’m just, kind of, like, standing there, and
everybody’s talking around me, and I’m just like, [Note: mimes taking a drink] drink!

[laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and it wasn’t until twenty-four hours after that when I realized, because my friend at the
time, he was working for [a real estate company], which is like temporary offices, so he
says, “We’re, we can put you up in the nicest office. I can put you up on the 97th floor of
a building in a really nice office.” And I’m like, “You think I’m going to go ninety-some
floors up? Are you fucking mad? No fucking way!”...

[Laughter]

… “Put me in the basement somewhere.” [laughter] “No fucking way! No fucking way!”

But, you know, that’s not what he’s thinking. He’s not thinking about, I’m thinking
about, it occurred to me that the ground’s not shaking.
Because it had been, right?...

Yeah.

...I mean, even if you were continuing your daily life, I mean, it was still, just, I, I can’t even, there was hundreds, like...

Yeah.

...there was hundreds and hundreds of aftershocks so...

Yeah.

...even here in Tokyo, that did disorient you, right? But you had to leave to notice.

Yeah.

So it wasn’t really until Friday when I realized I was relaxed...

Yeah. And you could kind of.

...ehm, and the worst thing, I don’t remember what, it was, like, a UK newspaper, I’m, I don’t know if you remember, it wasn’t The Sun, but it was one of those, eh, really trashy, trashy ones, and it was on, you’ve been to Hong Kong, right?

Yeah.

You know the Airport Express?

Yeah.

So you know how they have the news flashing, and so basically, like, so my friends pick me up and they’re hugging me, and we’re on the way back, and they have on the news, it wasn’t, wasn’t The Sun, it was another trashy…

Something like that.

...and it just says, like, ‘Meltdown Japan’. And I was like, “What the fuck?” Like, and I was like, “This is the reason why I’m fucking here.”...

Yeah.

...And they were like, “Why?” And I was like, “It’s not that fucking bad.”...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

... “Look, this is the shit.”...

[Laughter]

... “This is the fucking shit.” So I was getting very angry at the media coverage, and then it was like, and then talking to people, and they were like, “Oh.” Because I was, I was like, “Oh yeah, I’m a refugee.” and [laughter] you know, I thought that was a good joke.
[Note: mimicking an exaggerated, overly concerned tone of voice] “Oh my God, how is it?” I’m like, “Yeah, it’s fine.” And they were like, “Well, why are you here?” And I was just like, “They gave me a free flight ticket.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...Well, free ticket?

Nice, nice holiday, yeah [laughter].

I was like, “There’s nothing to do at work, so.” And eh, [clears throat] okay so I went back, that’s, I would say, the majority of, and then, like, the, the news coverage was just, like, appalling…

Yeah.

...and then, ehm, seeing, when you mentioned, like, social media, like, a colleague of mine, he posted, I was looking at. I was actually checking my Facebook when I was in Hong Kong, because I was like, “Nothing to do.”...

Yeah, yeah.

...and, eh, he posted a five-minute long video of him walking around Tokyo, and it was, like, him looking in the windows of bread stores where there was plenty of bread, and walking around and people are going around normally…

Yeah.

...and it was literally like a ten-minute long that just says [Note: banging lightly on the table for emphasis as she speaks the next phrase] ‘Things are fine here. Stop listening to the press.’ And then, ehm, so I sent to my mother, for example, photos of the grocery store near my, like on Saturday, near my house, and the, ehm, so most of the perishable goods were gone…

Yeah.

...ehm, but there was still some bread…

Yeah.

...but, like, yoghurt was gone…

Yeah.

...milk was mainly gone, so things like that…

Yeah.

...and it was literally, like, some of the shelves are cleared and then the ones next to it are full…

Yeah.

...and so I was taking photos of both, so I was like, “Actually, what, if you see images like this, they’re choosing to cut out the fact that there’s plenty.”
Yeah, yeah.

And that pissed me off as well, because all you see circulating are these, like, ‘Shelves Bare’...

Yeah.

...it’s like, “Yeah, because they need to restock.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...like, “The, the stocking supplies are stuck.” Like, “That might be coming from Tohoku,”…

Yeah.

“the supply system is messed up.”...

Yeah, yeah.

...it doesn’t mean that, like…

On the verge of, yeah...

...we’re over.

...Yeah, no, I think that that’s a huge, that’s definitely going to be a theme that I am going to have to talk about because many, many people have mentioned it, li, like yourself with kind of anger, actually, that they feel it was just, you know, counterproductive this, sort of, sensationalization or.

Yeah. And then, I mean, peop, we’re the ones sending these images…

Yeah.

...we’re the ones putting them on Facebook, and so that’s why I took quite long shots of, “Hey look, here’s a, here’s the, here’s the empty section, here’s the rest that are full.”

Yeah, and it shows how, like, now the, kind of, the citizen journalist can counteract some of the, the hype but, you know, it depends on how wide your network reaches, right? But at least with your family or your loved ones or that, they can get...

Yeah.

...you know, a little bit of relief maybe.

I remember when I came back, eh, from Hong Kong, my mother was like, “Would you, - you know, very motherly - “do you want me to send you toilet paper?” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

... “I heard toilet paper is out of stock.” I went, went back to the store, [Note: gestures taking a photo]...
Click.

...they’re not sold out, completely full, and then did a close up on the sign that said, eh, ‘Please take one per customer.’...

Yeah, yeah.

...and in fact how quickly they had the beeping thing when you bought too much water...

Oh yes, yeah.

...how did they implement that so quickly?

That was incredible.

Everywhere. That amazed me.

I’d forgotten about that. I’m glad you reminded me. I’d forgotten all about that.

And how fine everybody was with it...

Yeah.

...everybody was fine with, like, and you see, I mean, like, of course people may be under the surface they’re freaking the shit out...

Uhm.

...but it made me like Japan more. That’s one, kind of, longer term thing is that I’d been here five years, I was, kind of, planning to leave, and then seeing how over sensationalized it was, versus the reality versus the way the people in Japan actually handled it, and how, like, because I, I work, I recruit for, mainly find Japanese people, how many people reached out to me and said, “Do you need help with anything?” Ehm, there’s a woman, I don’t know like, in her forties, that, like, emailed me out-of-the-blue and was like, “Oh do you need help with translation or anything?” Or like [clears throat]
you know, people that I didn’t, weren’t close friends or anything, but reaching out, you know, like, “Okay, I know you’re alone in Tokyo, like, do you need any help? Do you need translation? Is there?” Like, and so that’s the reaction I got. So the, I’m kind of, like, all of this overblown shit just makes me pissed off...

Yeah.

...and the way people actually did react, and there wasn’t vandalising...

Yeah.

...people didn’t burn down places or...

Yeah, yeah.

...like, it is one of those things maybe in Japan, but it actually went to show how bad the media is at finding those few people...

Yeah, yeah.
...that want to cry hysterically on camera to sell, what, advertizing space?

Yeah. I know that some people I’ve talked to from, from different nationalities have had comments about their embassies...

Uhm...

...what did you feel was the, sort of...

...[clears throat] so...

...your relationship with the US Embassy?

...so, eh, [clears throat] I think it was maybe on the Tuesday, I think it was on the Wednesday when I booked my ticket the next day, eh, to go to Hong Kong, and on Tuesday they had made announcements at, I think, the French Embassy, because there was a lot of international people I worked with...

Yeah.

...so they made announcements at the French Embassy that, em, women and children of French nationals, the women and children are allowed, you know, there’s a flight, eh, or like pregnant women, and so I was like, “Okay, I need to find a Frenchman now, now.”

[laughter]...

[Laughter]

... “Now! Come on.” Eh, and the US, I didn’t contact the embassy, the US doesn’t give a shit about, like, there’s too many of us...

Uhm.

...and I’m sure I couldn’t even get through, and what am I going to say? “I’m fine.” Like, I mean, there’s like, Americans are, like, the largest population here, like, how many, how many ‘we’re fines’ are you going to get? I’ve never registered at the embassy other than, like, getting passports or so they’re too big to handle that many, so I’m, I’m pretty indifferent to that embassy stuff...

Yeah.

...and then I did hear on the Thursday there was, if you lined up in Shinjuku, there was a flight you could take, and then actually retroactively they charged you for it...

Wow.

...as it turned out, it wasn’t a huge disaster...

Ouch.

...and Americans didn’t need to be evacuated...

Ouch.

...there is, actually, my old boss, eh, he’d resigned maybe like, a, it turned out to be two or three weeks before the earthquake and, eh, he’s from Israel and he speaks very good
Japanese and, eh, I already had my plane ticket by this point, but he went around and was contacting all of us to leave, and so he’d actually gone up with NBC as a translator, and so they were, kind of, going around and he was riding around in a van, so his stories are pretty interesting, eh, he was riding around in a van with, em, basically one of the guys from GE who was the advisor when they built Fukushima, so he was this retired guy, and he told, he told, he told everybody, he said, like, “I don’t think it’s safe.” And so this was on, like, Thurs, Wednesday, the Wednesday after, and he’s up in Fukushima, he’s up, like, they’re up in Tohoku, they’re up in, like, they were on, like, he was part of the, eh, animal retrieval, and all these different things, going with different news crews, ehm, getting scanned for radiation any time he was allowed in any facility, [clears throat] but I mean the GE guy that helped advise building it was saying ‘Get out.’ So [clears throat] and they were up in, so basically, they said to him as well, “Come with us.” And so, he was gathering his stuff, and they were at, they were on their way to the airport and basically two or three of the news people were like, “The story’s here.” And so, like, ninety percent of them went back, but a handful of them stayed on, so he stayed on to translate with them…

Okay.

...because they were like, “Come on, the story's here. We can’t report this from Hawaii.”...

Yeah, yeah.

...so I did have some respect for them. [laughter]...

Yeah, yeah.

...that they actually stayed and were up there and were covering the story and not running away…

Yeah.

...yeah, but I mean, kind of, non-essential. Yeah

Yeah, it, it just goes to show that actually what I’ve, what I’ve discovered is that a lot of the people who were translating for, say, media…

Uhm.

...or reporters or that were just, em, volun, either volunteers or non-professionals, just people who happened to, usually through a friend or network…

Yeah, yeah...

...or something, like, it’s kind of interesting.

...”Can anybody translate? We need somebody now.”

Yeah. There’s a lot of pressure for somebody though, as well, like, em, if it’s, you, you don’t know what you’re signing up for.

No. He talked about one time, I think it was the following week and, eh [clears throat] they went to the milit, US military base to do some sort of interview or to, to film or
whatever and, em, they scanned them down several times, they cleaned them up, like,
they cleaned them all…

Yeah.

...and then, the, and they were waiting for, like, five hours and in the end they said, “No.”
Wouldn’t let them in. And so, like, basically, the, kind of, taxi driver, I don’t, he was tax,
he was, like, a hired driver, he was like, “Oh, actually, there’s a Japanese military base
within twenty minutes from here. Let’s go there.” And they were like, “Eh, we’ve just
been kicked out of the US one.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

..."Will the Japanese let us in?" So they drive up there and so my friend basically goes up
and explains, like, “Okay, I’m here with a US news crew, and we wanted to kind of, kind
of, come in and film and talk to you guys.” And then the guy was like, in English, he was
like, “Wait a minute.” Shuts the door, and, like, so they’re waiting there. Five minutes
later, the highest person from the base comes out, and he’s like, “Welcome.”

Wow, wow.

[Laughter] So the, I mean, the US military just didn’t want any…

It’s the diff, yeah, it’s just diff, they’ve different.

...and they came around, they gave them tours, instructed everybody to please be nice and
respectful to the news crew…

Wow.

...and he was like, “Yeah, do you think the American base would do that?”...

Yeah, yeah...

...”No way.”

...one of the tricky things that some people have talked about, I, I spoke to somebody who
was a translator, was the, sort of, the legal situation afterwards…

Uhm.

...because it was all so ad-hoc that they didn’t know what they were translating what they
were talking about and, you know the way, often if it’s a sensitive matter, you’d have to
sign a nondisclosure agreement…

Yeah, yeah.

...there was nothing...

Yeah, yeah.

...so now they’re like, “Can, can I say what I know…

What happened.
...or am I not allowed to or...

Yeah.

...you know, especially the people who were up around Fukushima area...

Yeah.

...they're, they don't know, they don't know what to say, or, I don't know, I didn't push it, because...

[Laughter]...

...I don't want to get anyone in trouble but...

...[Note: mimicking an interrogator] “Tell me everything.”

...yeah, yeah, no, like, it’s, it’s an issue...

Uhm.

...though that, like, in these disaster situations because it’s volunteers or just anybody...

Yeah.

...maybe they don’t, they, you wouldn’t think about these kind of things, but later on that could become really important.

Yeah, twenty years from now...

Yeah?

...we’re all just going to come bleeding out.

Oh yeah. Well, the, one of the people I spoke to said, em, this thing is going to be counted in terms of, like, decades, not in terms of years, like it’s thirty years, forty years...

Yeah.

...some people said, like, hundreds of years...

Yeah.

....and I was like, “Oh, man!”

To kind of answer your question about when did you feel like it ended in a way, ehm, at least for me in terms of, like, the panic and all that stuff...

Yeah.

...ehm, it was going back to the CNN thing, and so, {my colleague} and I also cheered and had a beer the second Japan wasn’t the top news story [laughter]...
...and it was like a month later.

Closed the circle very nicely [laughter].

I would say, if, if you had the, you know, of course, I have more poetic things I could say, but that was definitely…

That’s when it, uhuh.

...like, that’s when it came full circle...

Yeah, but that’s a way of...

...it was a fucking month later!

...yeah, but that’s a way of marking it, though. Absolutely, when it starts slipping out of the, certainly the international news, yeah.

We’re number two on CNN, but we were like [Note: mimicking excited screaming] “We’re number two!” Because we were also cheering the fact that we were excited that we were number one. So it was like, “Oh god, I didn’t think it would take a month for us to drop off the top news story.”

Yeah, yeah. That shows, I mean, it was something that, kind of, just kept. And, you know, periodically, it has come back in again, I mean, now, it’s, every now and then, especially because of Fukushima, it comes back in.

Yeah. Well, I mean, I think, I think legal action should go, you know, Tepco [Note: the company that operates the nuclear power plants in Fukushima] should be sued, and, you know, do you realize they’ve, like, raised our electricity bills?

[Laughter]

Have you heard this?

No. Oh, what a kick in the teeth.

They’ve actually gone through and raised people in Tokyo’s electricity bills to help pay for it.

What a kick in the teeth. Oh, I wouldn’t trust that company as far as I could throw it.

And, oh, it’s wonderful how they show their houses that they still have in, like, Kamakura on the beach that are still owned by Tepco. I mean, and Japanese journalism doesn’t really poke really deep…

Yeah.

...and if they’re picking up on that, and they’re showing these wonderful estates that Tepco still owns…

You know something’s not right.

...so [clears throat].
The only other thing I, kind of, wanted to touch on with you, again more from just a language point of view...

...not for any other particular reason, was about the volunteering and the helping out in Tohoku...

...did you find that, like, language was ever an issue in that?...

...because I know how involved you were...

...did it, did it ever come up?

When I started, you know, in the beginning, eh, going to Tohoku, it was literally everything was so overwhelming. Like, when I first went it was May, em, the roads were only military vehicles and large trucks, em, there was just debris everywhere, it was, like, it smelled horrible. That’s when everything started rotting...

Yeah.

...ehm, it smelled horrible, like, it just terrifying, it was completely terrifying and we were mainly clearing out the tsunami sludge, like the hedoro [Note: means sludge] from houses for the first, I’d say like six months or so, ehm, and only doing that, and it’s heavy, and it’s sticky and it’s smelly, and it’s toxic, and it covers everything and you smell like it, and, like, we’d go for onsen [Note: communal hot spring baths found in many, many places throughout Japan] but we’d have to drive, like, an hour outside, ehm [clears throat] and the first time I went, we were staying past Sendai, because all the areas are filled with, all areas at that time were filled with rescue workers, so there’s no hotels...

Yeah.

...so we had to drive like an hour-and-a-half, we had to, kind of, get the bus there and the bus back...

Yeah.

...ehm, and what we were doing at that time, it’s like, it was very much manual labour, so I didn’t have any problems, ehm, initially, because it was, like, pull out mud...

[Nervous laughter]

...because, like, there’d be, there’d be somebody talking to them, say, “Okay,” you know, “pull out,” you know, “pull out the floor, pull out the mud. Don’t touch the walls yet, [clears throat] and then see how long.” And then it would take two to three weeks to pull out all the mud. And then, “Do you want us to keep going? Do you want us to pull out this?” Or, and so, it was mainly, it didn’t matter who you were, like, I think {the slogan
of the volunteer group she worked with} was like, ‘Hands don’t have nationalities.’
Because literally it was just moving, like…

Yeah, yeah.

…it was just keep, keep digging out this crap until you can’t. And it, like, I remember, like, carrying bags of it and just, like, my, like, muscles were shot, because there was just so much going out. There was so much crap [clears throat] and then every, everywhere you worked, it was just terrifying, it was spooky, and like, all of it was overwhelming and especially the first time you go up it’s horribly shocking, and then after that, it becomes, not normal, but it, it’s not as, like [clears throat] intense, and so that’s another thing that I liked about going multiple times is you see it getting better and better and better…

Uhm.

...you see the, kind of, the city transforming. I had one colleague who came up in the summer in June and then came up maybe the following year in Ju, maybe, like, when, you know, it wasn’t as hot [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...[clears throat] and so I asked him, you know, “What’s the difference in a year?” [clears throat] and he said, “People are smiling.”

Wow.

That was the biggest difference, like, people are, kind of, smiling, and it’s not that. So when I was taking on more of a leadership role, that’s when I, kind of, wanted to, that’s when I started taking Japanese again so I could actually communicate in some sort of way or figure out something or ask questions or follow the conversation because it’s, like, I know *gareki* [Note: means rubble] and all these [laughter] like, but, like, ‘where does this go?’ or just ‘put it there’ or like…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...so now that part’s [laughter] so that was one of my motivations to start studying Japanese again was so that I could communicate so that when people were talking about the experiences [clears throat] I, you know, people understand so I could ask them later, I could follow, like, em, I don’t know if you, did you meet {a certain resident of Ishinomaki that had been present at the recent volunteer activity}?

Yes.

[clears throat] So he, he was, he explains to me after, like, two or three months ago, I hadn’t even heard this story, because we were at his factory on Saturday when we were cleaning [clears throat] and so we had worked on it maybe two or three months before that, and, eh, he was trapped at the top of his factory, [clears throat] and so the tsunami, and this is, like, he’s standing there pointing to it, so it’s, like, probably two, two-and-a-half, maybe three storeys high, and he was inside, and the roof was like this [Note: the participant gestures an extreme angle] and he was basically trapped here [Note: pointing to an imaginary tip of the roof] when the water started going down again. [clears throat] So you, and he’s, you know, happy, jolly man…

Yeah. Oh you wouldn’t have ever guessed.
...yeah, and so it was, like, even more disturbing listening to him, because I, like, came back and I was like, “Was that him?” Because he never said who, you know, in Ja,
Japanese you never say [laughter] so what I was wondering was was that him, like, and I also came in later, and so I was like, “Okay, my Japanese is getting better,” because I could understand all of it…

Yeah.

...and then he, like, swam back and, like, stayed on the second floor; “Oh yeah, of that building there,” and so when you are hearing stories like that, first-hand, you want to know what’s, it’s like, I don’t need to get everything, but [clears throat] and I, the, when it occurred to me that I needed to speak, like, better Japanese, we were at the onsen [Note: Japanese communal hot spring bath], and I was smoking a cigarette, and the, and of course, any time they see a bunch of white people or people that aren’t local…

[Laughter] Yeah.

...they were like, “Ah, you must be a volunteer.” And I was like, so it was like, this one guy is smoking [Note: mimicking a rough, macho voice], “Hey, where are you from?” You know, “America.” “Are you a volunteer?” “Yeah, yeah.” He was like, “Yeah, yeah, my house was flooded, like, to here.” [Note: the participant gestures above her head] And, and I was like, “Ah, taihen desu ne. [Note: means how awful] And then it was like, afterwards it was like, I even went up to {a mutual friend of ours} and I was like, “Is that the right thing to say?” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...like, “Yes!” [Note: the participant makes a gesture with her arm indicating great satisfaction at succeeding]

I hope I didn’t insult him or anything.

Yeah, yeah. Like, “Ah, sou desu ne.” [Note: means ‘Yes, that’s so’ and is a common way to indicate empathetic listening in Japanese]

Yeah, yeah.

And she was like, they were like, “Perfect.” But I, like, it just, kind of, came off really fast…

That, that shows. That’s the learning, isn’t it, though?

Yeah.

That the fact that, em, that’s that real contextual stuff, like, you just knew that in that situation that was what came out.

[clears throat] And thank god it was the right thing to say…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...but I’d say when it comes to communication, it’s stuff like that…

Yeah.
...like, I’m glad I nailed that...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...because that’s important.

Yeah, because that actually, like, links to what a lot of people have talked about in terms of, like, the future, they were, like, how important community is. So like, it’s these kind of things. Being able to interact, hear people’s stories...

Yeah.

...be, show compassion. Those kind of things help build, build some sort of a community, right?

Yeah.

Like, what I’m interested in knowing, if, if you can remember back to the time of the disaster, because it may be different now, at that time...

Uhm.

...for you as a person living here, did you feel part of your local community or did you feel part of ‘a’ community?

Well, if I was part of a community, it was definitely a foreign community...

Okay.

...[clears throat] ehm, but I, I’d see that as a positive thing, and what I mean by that is people reached out to me to see if I needed anything...

Yeah.

...to see if I needed help, if I was okay, if, and like I said, this was a woman that I, like, [clears throat] a woman in her forties that I talked with, like, I think I, like, kind of, it was like, interviewed her for, like, an hour, and, like, she didn’t end up getting the job, but, like, we didn’t even keep in contact [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so it was just like, [Note: makes a facial expression indicating surprise and maybe a little confusion]...

Really came out of the woodwork.

...yeah, so, and, and she’s the one, because she was really cool, so I really liked her a lot, and so, I was like, “[this person] emailed me. Oh, what a sweetheart!” But they were, like, a lot of the people I was talking to at the time as well were, they, they weren’t concerned about their jobs or what’s going on with the...

Yeah.

...application, they were, they were concerned about me. Ehm, and actually, when the earthquake hit, I was, I’d just finished a kampai lunch [Note: a lunch to congratulate a
client on being placed in a new job] with somebody, and she was supposed to start on Monday, and so, like, and I called her several times, and then, like, I emailed her, like, I took her email home…

Yeah.

...and just, kind of, like, “Just send me a note that you’re okay.” Because she was on the subway when it happened…

Yeah.

...and like, yeah, she was like, “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” like, “thank god, HR contacted me and said don’t come in.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

…”Oh, I know it’s your first day, but,”...

We don’t need you!

…”but, you have a week holiday.”

Uhm, uhm.

Ehm, so I remember on Monday that’s what I was most concerned about…

Yeah.

...because I hadn’t heard back from her…

Yeah.

...and then, ehm, and then she sent me a note on Monday. It was like, “Oh yeah, actually, he, the main guy contacted me.” And, like, yeah, like, it was kind of, like, it was freaky [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...she was like, yeah, I was like, she said, she was most of the way home. She was, like, maybe only twenty minutes away, and so she was, like, I think she could get off one or two stations from her house and walk, so…

Yeah.

...she was fine. But she was more like, I just remember seeing her off on the subway and then, “Shit.”

Crikey, yeah. That’s crazy.

Yeah.

I understand what you mean about, well, a lot of people have mentioned that, cer, certainly the people who lived in, in Tokyo or Sendai or the, sort of, the bigger cities said that they were part of a, a community of mostly foreigners...
Uhm.

...but, but certainly people who didn’t have the same links, like, in terms of family or that to, to Japan...

Yeah.

...would, would you say you feel a part of the community up in Tohoku [Note: the region of Japan where the worst of the disaster struck]?

I would say yes and no. Em, they definitely know me, eh, I’m not as vocal as a lot of other people, ehm, so when it comes to, like, finding jobs and things like that, I’m not, I’m not fluent enough...

Yeah.

...but they know me [laughter]. So for example, we went to the little matsuri [Note: means festival] that they were having, and everybody was like, “Oh hi.” Like, they see me every month, so, so I would say yes. Ehm, they know me as [the name of the volunteer organization she works with]...

Yeah.

...but I’m, I’m. I’m not the, like, I’m not the main person they talk to a lot or...

Yeah, yeah.

...they come over and complain or [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I can’t avoid the bitching [laughter].

[Laughter] Yeah, because the reason I, that community, I think, has come up so many times in disaster studies is because they say if a big earthquake were to happen, the first people who are going to help you are your neighbours or, like, the people around you...

Yeah.

...so, if foreigners can be in some way integrated into...

Uhm.

...a community...

Yeah.

...it’s more likely that there will be people there looking out for them...

Yeah, yeah.

...I guess, so from what I understand from your story, you just had tonnes of people who would have been looking out for you...

Yeah.
...but I guess the worry is that there would be some foreigners who come over to Japan and they don’t have those links...

Yeah.

...and they just get left behind.

I would say, it, I think that would come down to what kind of job you are doing…

Ah.

...if you are in an office setting, people in the office will take care of you, em, just because you are an employee…

A company kind of...

...even if you are like...

...systems thing, yeah.

...gaishikei [Note: means a foreign, not Japanese, company] you are part of that old school identity of that group…

Yeah, yeah.

...but if you are, like, an independent contractor, then you might get left behind…

Yeah, yeah.

...if you were working from home, you would get left behind.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, like, I know that, say, in translation, freelance translators, they often, they’re at home at their laptop and they never see anybody and all of their clients are done by email.

Uhm, so if they were going to put in some sort of protocol, they would, the community would have to make an effort for people that worked from home.

Did you ever get contacted by, ehm, like by the war, city office or, or

[Note: the participant answers by shaking her head so I verbalize her response]

No. I, I think.

Yeah, I don’t think so. Not at all, no. Because {the city I live in} has a lot of foreigners.

That’s what I would have wondered, yeah, I wondered if you might have gotten a letter through your door or something.

I’m sure there was a pamphlet or, at the ward office now. I, I hate that place and everybody in there [laughter].

[Laughter] Can I ask why?
It’s, it’s just Japanese bureaucracy in everything, and...

I understand your feelings. I understand your feelings. Bureaucracy can be a killer.

...and, and I would say it’s like you go to immigration, you really feel like you’re in a fourth-world country [laughter].

[Laughter] Yeah. That, you see, this is what, like, when I read about all this, you know, community, community, community, I was like, “Uh, okay, but how?” Like, how do you do it? It, it sounds really nice, but...

Yeah.

...I’ve, I’ve, I lived here for eight years, and I was like, I don’t know, I don’t think I ever felt part of the, I felt part fo the, like, a community of friends...

Yeah.

...or maybe related to the company, but I can’t say I, I didn’t know my neighbours, I wasn’t involved in the.

Yeah, I mean my neighbours, my neighbours are all, like, in their, like, twenties to thirties, and they’re all, like, kind of friitaa types [Note: means a kind of job-hopping part-time worker - the opposite of a permanent, pensioned employee]...

Yeah.

...so they were like, but they weren’t, they weren’t, like, “Ah, daijobu {redacted}?” [Note: means are you okay, {redacted}] like…

Uhm, uhm, uhm.

...because everyone was just, like, “What the hell?”

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, no, it’s just it’s an interesting one to me. I think it sounds like a great idea, but I don’t know how they make it happen, how they, I, I also think there’s a problem with big cities, like...

Yeah.

...you know, I’m sure if you lived in New York, it would be hard to integrate into the local community, right?

You don’t know your neighbours. You don’t know your neighbour and you might not want to. You know that, you know that they listen to music loud [laughter].

Yeah, so, it’s a tough one. It’s a tough one.

Uhm.

But I’m really glad to hear so many of the people that I’ve talked to, talked about, they, they, they had their support networks...

Yeah.
...like you...

Yeah.

...it mightn't have been the community in the sense of their little, I don't know, neighbourhood association, but it was absolutely a group of people they had who were looking out for them...

Yeah, yeah.

...so I think that's enough, maybe.

Yeah, I think so. Ehm...

Especially.

...because nobody really goes to, goes to something local like that at the end of the day.

And, like, what I found is, say, just because I'm always coming back to language and stuff like that...

Uhm.

...that often in these networks there would have been at least one person who was, like, really good at Japanese or something like that, and they would pass the information on, or there would be a Japanese person in that network...

Yeah.

...who was really good at English or Chinese or something...

Yeah.

...I think maybe that kind of...

Yeah.

...even if, unf, informal kind of stuff is probably enough.

Yeah, so for example, my {Japanese friend who I mentioned several times previously}, it's not like I asked her to help me translate, she is just the type of person that would, looks out for people...

Yeah.

...like she, she, it's just that kind of Japanese character...

Yeah.

...and so I, like, em, we were discussing in my Japanese class about, this is before the Olympics were decided, and she was kind of, like, “Do you think Tokyo is the right place?” And we were like, “Yeah, why are Japanese people down about it?...
...and, like, so we were trying to explain and defend it in Japanese, and she kept, she basically said, ehm, “But aren’t you scared of earthquakes?” Like, “There are earthquakes in Turkey.”...

[Laughter] A very good point.

... “Where the hell do you want the Olympics? Because an earthquake in Tokyo versus an earthquake in Turkey?”...

Yeah, yeah.

... “Come on. Come on. That is so much safer.” [clears throat]

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That was one thing that I felt, certainly about, just the whole thing like, if it had only been the earthquake, I’m not, I mean, I wouldn’t be here...

Yeah. And I would say...

...I, I think it would have been a miracle.

...it’s the earthquake, and it’s the tsunami, and then, the, meltdown. And then it’s like, “Okay, it there a volcano going to explode and Godzilla shows up?” Like...

[Laughter] That’s kind of like the next.

...oh no, because we were joking about that. We were like, “Okay, a volcano, as long as a volcano doesn’t explode, because then if a volcano explodes, then Godzilla shows up.”

[Laughter] But, you know, that was, people were starting to, I remember that kind of crazy stuff, they were like, “Fuji is going to go.” [Note: a large volcano located near the greater Tokyo area] This is the next thing that...

Oh yeah.

...that’s, that’s coming.

But I wanted to show you this photo. Eh, so now I am okay with radiation. This is in, eh, you met {another person involved in the volunteer organization}...

Yes, yeah.

...so we built this playground [Note: the participant shows a photo on her phone of a playground]

Oh wow.

...this is Shinchi which is near, like, Minamisoma [Note: an area of Fukushima, the prefecture in which the nuclear meltdown took place]...

Uuhh.

...it’s just, kind of, out of the radius, outside of the radius [Note: the 30-km radius exclusion zone enforced around the damaged nuclear power plant] and these kids were just, eh, hanging out nearby, so this is actually at, like, a preschool, but the kids were just, kind of, hanging out nearby and they were like, “Oh, what are you doing?” “Oh, building
a playground. It will be open tomorrow.” And they were like, “Oh, cool, cool.” So they
came by, eh, like, eh…

That’s so cool.

...ehm, so, I just thought the photo was really cool. We were at the police station. But so
this is {the other volunteer} and I at the school. [Note: the participant then shows a photo
of the radiation measuring device outside the school].

And so that’s the measure.

Yeah.

Oh my goodness.

And then, of course, I’m smoking but didn’t, you know…

No fears, no worries.

...because I mean, it was actually lower, Tokyo was higher that day.

That, yeah, that’s what a lot of, that came up a lot in the aftermath, that, you know.

And of course, I sent that article to my, to my parents when, that Hong Kong has higher
levels of radia…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah...

...I was like, [Note: mimics pressing a button] ‘Send.’

...it needed to be balanced, right? I mean, I, don’t get me wrong, it’s a scary thing...

Yeah.

...it’s a scary thing because it’s unknown, and I’m sure there is an element of we don’t,
we still don’t know what, what’s going on too much...

Yeah.

...but it was blown out of a lot of proportion. And I really don’t think that helped the
mental health of the people who, who stayed here.

Yeah, yeah. Ehm, so there is actually something that, kind of, it, it’s less and less now,
but in terms of recruitment, maybe before, like after, after the earthquake, of course, that,
like, quarter, business was really slow, ehm, but then everything kind of went back to
normal. I work in, like, you know, consumer retail…

Yeah.

...so sales were, basically died and then came back up…

Yeah, yeah.

...a few months later. So people were out and about and going on with their lives…
Shopping, yeah.

ehm, actually, people were, the complaints that some companies was that the *gaishikei* [Note: means foreign, not Japanese] companies were closed on that Saturday, and the Japanese ones were open…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...like, so it was like, “Oh, you missed a business chance.” It’s like, “Fuck off.” [Note: using a sarcastic tone of voice] “Yeah, what the fuck, I’m on a plane out of here.” Ehm, but one, one woman I introduced to a company, and, ehm, so basically, he, the, the company that she is working at now, the president is French, and, em, he, he really, he, he knew, he wanted her and had been trying to get her for a year, so I, kind of, like, approached her a couple of times…

Yeah, yeah.

...and so he said, “Any, any way you can ever, ever get her.” And then, there were rumours that she was having problems, like, at that company, and then there was, like, power struggles, management cuts…

*Uhum, uhum.*

...and all that, and he goes, “Okay, I heard this. Can you contact her again and tell her I stayed during the earthquake?”

*Ahhhh. Like a badge of honour or something.*

So, it became, especially in retail in a way, especially if there was a foreign president, because the, like, most companies I recruit for are big companies…

Yeah, yeah.

...and they have, they have stores in Sendai…

Yeah.

...they don’t necessarily have them in, like, Kesennuma [Note: one of the worst-hit small villages in Miyagi] but they have them in Sendai…

Yeah, yeah.

...and so a lot of the foreign bosses didn’t leave and didn’t, like, they didn’t go anywhere because their staff were…

Yeah.

...they needed to make sure their staff was okay and they wanted to be there for their staff…

Yeah.

...so it actually became, kind of, a selling point to people about the character of who their boss is.
And is that story getting out there now?

Not so much now…

Uhm.

...but when people ask me, like, what type of person is he…

Uuhh.

...it’s like, okay, you know, when you explain, it’s, kind of, okay, well, you know, people, he’s from this nationality so you can guess he is probably this temperament or…

Yeah, yeah.

...usually because people have worked with foreigners before. And if, you know, he’s the type of person who was here during the earthquake, eh, one company that packed everybody up, um, moved them to Osaka and then during that week there was even talk of relocating the entire office to, like, Shanghai…

Okay.

...and, ehm, and with that, so basically the girl I introduced to that company, she was living with her mother and her fiance, and they paid for the, her mother and her fiance to come down to Osaka as well and stay with them…

Wow.

...and, if they had moved to China or something like that, they were going to relocate the entire family…

Wow, okay.

...I mean, not every company does things like that [clears throat]...

No, no, that’s, that’s pretty, that’s pretty special.

...but usually when people talk about, “Okay what type of company is it.” It’s like, okay, well it’s the atmosphere, what’s beyond the surface. I tell stories like that...

Yeah, yeah.

...because, you know, somebody might, it’s not a huge company, people don’t know that, but this is how they treat their employees…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and it’s like, “Did your company do that?” And most people are like [Note: participant shakes head] [Laughter].

No [laughter].

[Note: in a mock-disappointed tone] “I had to go to work on Monday.”

Yeah, there you go.
“And half the people weren’t there?” “Yeah exactly.” “And was your, was your management there?” “No.”

That’s fascinating. Because, like, a lot of people I’ve talked to mentioned, you know, this fly-jin [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who were seen to flee Japan during the disaster] story, and.

Uhm, yeah, I try not to classify myself as a fly-jin because it was paid for [laughter].

Ah, yeah, no, yeah.

But I mean, on the other side of that, there was absolutely nothing to do…

Yeah.

…I didn’t know if the companies I was recruiting for existed…

Existed, and, yeah.

…and what are you going to do in an office? Like, I mean, I, there was literally answering emails and people reaching out…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

…[clears throat] and I think I have one meeting that I rescheduled on the Tuesday…

Oh well, yeah.

…because I was like, [Note: in a mock-whining tone] “I don’t want to leave the office.”

[laughter]…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

…and I remember taking the subway and, nobody…

Nobody, yeah.

…like.

Oh, it was, I think as well, like, from the people I have talked to, the, amongst the, the foreigners even of course there was this, like, fly-jin term or whatever, but amongst Japanese people, too. There was, ehm, some tensions…

Yeah.

…which maybe isn’t talked about so much.

And then people would go like to Osaka even or…

Yeah, like, I think…

…it wasn’t just.
...it wasn’t just the foreign people, ehm, there was, I, I, I know, this is, now, you know, particularly in relation to Fukushima...

Uhm.

...that, let’s say, people who, who left and came back, there is now tensions...

Oh, yeah.

...in the community...

Oh, definitely.

...that, like, “Oh, you’re,” kind of, “back again,” sort of thing.

Oh, now it’s.

Yeah, “Now it’s okay?” or...

Yeah.

...so it’s, it’s, it’s a more complex issue than, like, the, the, I know people have mentioned the fly-jin because it was a headline and it got...

Yeah, yeah.

...you know, through the mill a lot...

Yeah.

...but I think it’s a much more complex issue than that, and...

Yeah.

...I don’t think there’s one right or one wrong. It’s not a black and white issue, you know?

[Laughter] Luckily, working in recruitment you get to hear wonderful stories from different industries...

[Laughter]

...so one, one guy in our finance, he was a finance recruiter, one guy told him, because, like, Mizuho Bank was in the World Trade Centre, right?

Yeah, oh, yeah.

...and he said, eh, that this one, eh, this Japanese, you know, Japanese guy in banking, kind of, asked, “Oh yeah, did you leave Japan?” And he said, “Actually, no.” And he goes, “Why not?” Because this is the thing that was getting promoted a lot as well...

Yeah, “why not?”

...and, em, and he was like, “Oh, you know, my wife is here and, you know, I can’t, like, pack up and leave.”...
Yeah.
[clears throat] and he was like, “9, 9/12 [laughter] 2011 [Note: this is a slip of the tongue and the participant meant to say 2001] if you went to JFK, every Japanese person was at the airport. [laughter]...

Very true.

…it is not your country…

Very true.

…come on! Everybody left…

Yes…

...New York.

...em, who was it? I can’t remember. One of the people I spoke to has a similar story like that where they got into a bit of an altercation and said something like, “Okay, so you are a Japanese family in, posted to China, and some nuclear reactor has gone off a hundred miles up the road. What do you do?” And like, it was, kind of, when, when the tables were turned then the Japanese person, sort of, went a little bit like, “Oh, okay.”

Yeah, because this guy was like, “Well, I would have, I know I was at JFK and there tonnes of other Japanese people there;”...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

…”there were tonnes of people like me just, like.”

No, I wouldn’t, absolutely, would hate to ever be thought of as critical of people who had made the choice to leave because...

Yeah [clear throat]

...it, it was, you were working with such dodgy information as well, I mean, how can you make a decision when you really had no idea what you were working with.

I mean, a couple of people did leave my office and move away. Em, the craziest story I heard...

[Laughter]

...was, eh, he’s, he’s, he’s pretty well-to-do, eh, and, ehm, actually his wife, like, they are in Singapore now, his wife, eh, I think her grandfather is still under the ‘Missing’...

Oh.

...and so, she react, she was pretty high-strung anyway, and she completely, like, eh, and they had a newborn…

Oh.

...so, I mean, he went to, he went to Osaka for, he went to work, they moved to Osaka…
Yeah, yeah.

...for a little while, so there was a little more trauma behind all of that…

Yeah.

...but, ehm, she was even bathing that child in bottled-water [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so not just like drinking or anything like that…

Oh my goodness.

...and when they did the survey on Tokyo tap water, em, I checked the location because, I don’t know, I’m one of those people [laughter]...

Interested.

...auditing the information, and it was, eh, they tested the water, like, not, like, one chome [Note: means a subdivision of land similar to saying one ‘block’ away from my house]...

[Laughter]

...so it was like, “Alright!” [laughter]...

Good to go, yeah.

...yeah. Screw that.

But again, that’s like, that shows, you know, there, it’s a difficult balance because if you watch the news too much, you go nuts, but if you don’t have enough information, you go nuts. How do you find the information that works for you?

So another thing, this is maybe another end to my story, I didn’t Skype with my sister for another few months after that. Like, she kept wanting to, I did not, even when I was in Hong Kong, I did not. Because I was like, this bitch has made me, she’s winding me up, like, I let her get out her stress and it made me, it freaked me the shit out...

It made it, yeah, worse for you.

...and so, like, you know, I emailed…

Yeah.

...I emailed, but I would not Skype.

That’s, well, you closed the circle very nicely there [laughter]. Very, very nice.

{redacted}

[Note: the participant begins showing me some photos on her phone] Oh yeah, here’s Shinjuku Station coming back [Note: the participant is showing a photo of the tonnes of
people taking trains after the disaster], so this is to get on the train - I think you can’t really see it - and this is Shinjuku and it’s completely out the door, like, all the way…

Oh my goodness, oh my goodness.

…like, that was pretty, I got off the train, they wouldn’t even let any people into the station…

Yeah.

…there were so many people going home. I was like, “Uhh.” [redacted] Here, look [Note: showing a screenshot of a news headline from the disaster] Guardian “Japan Nuclear Meltdown Fukushima Reactor” [laughter]…

Oh. But you see, like, that’s the Guardian…

The Guardian.

...supposed to be, pretty much, [Note: the participant is now looking through her phone data for more disaster-related images] you kept a pretty good record of all these things.

Ah, it’s all, mainly on gmail so [laughter]. [redacted] [Note the participant finds a photo that shows a screenshot of live interpretation of Japanese news into English] Yeah, because this was basically some guy who was, eh, translating…

I think I remember this, this Yokosonews was really famous actually…

Yeah...

...he did an amazing.

...yeah, so she was watching that, yeah, yeah, yeah, Yokosonews, yeah.

Yeah, he, like, just sat there, he sat in front of Japanese TV and just chaku, chaku, chaku [Note: researcher makes sound of something being produced by a machine, implying that the interpreter worked really hard, fast and long interpreting] and then streamed it.

And then, when there was nothing interesting, he was reading off the Twitter stuff...

Yeah, yeah, yeah. [redacted] But, you know, the one thing I have absolutely learned is that people react very, very differently in the same situation, the same circumstance…

And, I think…

...you can’t, each, each one is valid...

...yeah, I feel the same way, because you can’t, you can’t judge...

...like, what works for you, won’t necessarily work for the other person.

...if people take off and they never leave Japan, and they never come back to Japan again, that’s how you reacted to it.

Yeah. And a lot of it is based, you just make your decisions based on what you have in front of you at the time and maybe your past stuff as well.
Yeah. [clears throat] So my friend that I was talking about, the Canadian guy who grew up in between two reactors...

Yeah, yeah.

...I mean, he hasn’t pulled it off yet, but, ehm, he said that my overreaction to the radiation inspired him to do something, ehm, so if you Google ‘Bikini Lines’, em, [clears throat] there is basically the cactus dome that you can see from, like, like, Google Maps from space...

Yeah.

...and it’s basically the atomic tests in the South Pacific and he even has permission from the tribe elders to paint the dome. So basically the idea is to make a very loud, a very large, the world’s largest mural that’s crowdsourced that you can basically see from Google Maps...

Wow, yeah.

...and it’s basically a statement against how terrifying radiation is...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...because all these people fly out and paint like a square, like, this big [Note: the participant gestures about a third-of-a-metre-squared with her hands]...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...he still doesn’t have the fi, financing for it...

That’s fascinating.

...so, ‘Bikini Lines’.

I’ll definitely, I’ll look that up.

Probably, he hasn’t really worked on it in a while...

Yeah. But as a statement it’s very, very interesting.

...so I don’t know, if you guys, if you want to donate or anything like that, em...

That’s really interesting.

...because he still would, he, he was kind of upset that it didn’t take off, he’s kind of an entrepreneur, so he has a lot of plans that don’t...

Yeah...

...that fizzle out.

...but, you know, you mentioned about, like, the radiation, it’s a touch button issue for a lot of people. I’m not so surprised it didn’t take off in a, in a way...
Yeah.

...because it’s one of those things that you mention and you can’t judge how people will react.

So there was a, like, eh, the guy I was talking about who was, like, closing on the phone, he’s, eh, Polish, and so, of course, like, Chernobyl and dahdahdah, they fucking hate the Russians…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

ehm, there was a Romanian guy, you know the stuff, the, the, thyroid…

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, the.

...so he came around and he was passing it out to everybody to drink, and then it’s like, “Don’t drink this stuff.” [laughter]...

[Laughter] Oh yeah, it was terrible.

...of course, five minutes later, like, “Don’t drink this.” So I mean, because he was like, “What? You think I fucking trust, trust the Russians? You think I trust the Japanese?”

[laughter]...

[Laughter] Oh dear.

...and it was like, “Okay, maybe I, maybe I should go to Hong Kong.” [laughter] “If this is my office?”

Yeah, exactly, if these are people who normally you would just be, like, interacting with, like, work colleagues, and they’re freaking out.

But I would say it’s definitely the Eastern Europeans were, they didn’t trust Russia, communist angst, and Chernobyl, it brings back all of that mem, memories of cover up and.

Yeah, you see, like, just to bring it a bit closer, I interviewed some people in Ibaraki. So you know Tokaimura, the, em, Tokai nuclear plant had a fairly serious accident in two-thousand-and, oh I forget, you know it was over ten years ago something like that [Note: the accident occurred in 1999] and, ehm, they were there for the...

Uhm.

...nuclear accident in, you know, {redacted} they worked in the nuclear plant so...

Yeah.

...these were foreigners, and, em, they have that memory of it and the memory of, sort of, the misinformation and cover up...

Yeah.

...and so on, so, like, over the ten years, like, they were told this, but it’s like this, and so they had a very different view on Fukushima just in general. They were like, “Nah, don’t believe a word, don’t believe a word.”...
Yeah. Don’t believe a word. I don’t believe a word.

You know, they say it’s this, they don’t know. They can’t have gotten in there. It was really, like, it was real complex for them because, I think, as I said, they had that bad experience, like...

Yeah.

...they were like...

“Nah.”

... “We believed them then, and then X, Y, Z.” but, I mean, they’re still living in {the same prefecture as the power plant}...

Yeah. I completely don’t believe any of the shit. I mean, I don’t believe it. I mean, two-and-a-half years later, “Oh yeah, it’s actually still leaking.”...

Yeah.

...and then you hear people talk about not eating, like, eh, Fukushima produce...

Yeah.

...or different, like, I usually will eat it, I’ll buy some and eat it and, ehm, then you help out fisherman and you talk about, and you’re talking to them, and they’re explaining how they, how are they ever going to recover because nobody will buy their fish...

Buy their fish.

…it’s like, and here you are cleaning his fucking house, it’s like, and my friend is from Fukushima, and he said he will overhear people joking. It’s becoming like, eh...

Oh, you see, that, eh, about that much time has passed that it, kind of, has moved into the...

...and so, eh, I told him any time if, like, another table is talking about or dissing Fukushima or making fun of something from Fukushima...

Yeah.

...tell me who it is, and I will just go up and be like, “Fuck you.” [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...like, he, he’d understand, because I will just go over and tell them off. I was like, “Next time it happens, tell me...

Tell you.

...tell me and I’ll just scare the shit out of them.”

Because probably, yeah, like, two, two-and-a-half years is probably that sort of time, like, you know, in 9/11 people started maybe making dark jokes about it probably a couple of years after...
Yeah.
...I suppose it’s that sort of time period has passed where it’s not...
Yeah, but it’s also, like, because Fukushima has become a bad stigma.
Yeah, well, I mean, you saw how with the Olympics, Fukushima was brought up in a lot of the foreign press about it...
Oh yeah.
...like, in very insensitive ways...
Oh yeah, yeah...
...the, the Tokyo Olympics.
...and actually my reaction to, like, eh, the three-armed sumo wrestler or whatever, I thought, I thought, “That’s not original.” [laughter]...
[Laughter] Yeah.
...[Note: in a sarcastic tone] “Come on, let’s insult them on another level of, beyond the insensitivity.” Like, this isn’t even amusing…
Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think, it seems to me that you have a very, you have so many more levels of perspectives on the whole thing by having the experience in Tokyo but by having been so involved in Tohoku. I think that gave you...
Yeah [clears throat].
...just different layers of experience.
And that’s another reason why I thought with talking to you, if you could come up, and see, like, I mean, a lot of people, but if you do research, yeah, of course you go, but to be a part of [that volunteer organization], I think you get a feel for the people and what you’re doing and, if it, if it wasn’t that group of people, I probably wouldn’t have kept doing it, and then they actually said that the, like, after about a year, they kind of said, well, the issue is, they need help with recruitment because people are, I mean, there was, like, a thousand people at one of the first, like,…
Yeah, to keep it going.
...and then it’s like, they still need help…
Yeah.
...and now we’re, kind of, at a point where what we’re doing isn’t necessarily official, but we’re coming up…
Yeah.
...and so we’ll probably, we’re still helping out the community in different ways, but…
Yeah, yeah.

...ehm, and going up and seeing it, and like, because people, people, some, one guy said to me, “Oh yeah, I wouldn’t go up to Fukushima.” Like, eh, “I don’t have kids and it might affect my sperm.” And this guy’s an idiot and I don’t really care what he says.

And, eh, I was like, “Actually, maybe you should because I don’t want you to...

Perpetuate [laughter].

...I don’t, I don’t want you to reproduce.” [laughter] Ehm, but you hear stupid shit like that and it’s like, eh, the way I describe it to, like, Americans is it’s like, “Okay, the Kentucky Nuclear Power Plant exploded. Do you not go to Kentucky? Do you not go to KFC?”...

Ooohhh, uhuh, uhuh.

...like, it’s a large fucking place…

Yeah, yeah.

...do you, do you not eat KFC now because it’s contaminated?

Yeah, that’s a good way of looking at it. Oh going up was fantast, eh, it was an amazing experience. It really, really was...

Yeah.

...as you said, what it gave me in particular was obviously a view of you know, the, the Ishinomaki people, but the [volunteer organization] spirit was very clear to see...

Yeah.

...and the bonds that you guys have created with each other and with the community...

Yeah.

...it was clear, clear to see. And that, you continued for two-and-a-half years, nearly three years, that’s...

Yeah.

...incredible, because I, I know. What they always talk about in all of the, sort of, post-disaster literature is how you get a bunch of volunteers for the first month, two months and then...

Nothing.

...nothing. And that’s often when it’s more needed in the, the...

Yeah.

...the six months, one year, two years, so...

Yeah.
...for you guys to have kept it up for so long, it’s, it’s...

And the thing is...

...a real testament.

...we’re just at a stage now where we decided we’re not reaching out, but if they contact us, we go again...

Yeah.

...but the, like, eh, one matsuri [Note: means festival] we helped out, like, two years in a row, they had, it was, like, it had been cance, it was the first time in a hundred years it had been cancelled, and then, like, basically the community was, like, “I don’t even really know if we want to do it.”...

Yeah.

...and so then we came in and, you know, helped out…

Yeah.

...we cleaned up the place…

Yeah.

...like, and then we went again this year, but it was more, like, unless they ask us, we won’t go…

Yeah, yeah.

...but we might, you know, if we are in the neigh, we might drive up and do a tour ourselves…

Yeah, yeah, yeah…

...pop in and say hi.

...because you have, you’ve built those bonds, like.

But it’s, like, the fact that one little community now has a matsuri [Note: means festival] back…

Yeah.

...and because they were just, kind of, depressed and didn’t know if they wanted to do it.

Yeah. You were a bit of a shot in the arm kind of thing.

Yeah, it was like, yeah, I don’t know, “Well, you need this place cleaned up? Alright, well.” We literally, like, {a mutual friend} was there, literally like picking up, like, little sharp bits [Note: exaggeratedly gesturing going over a piece of ground with a fine-tooth comb] “But what if a child falls over.”...

[Laughter]
“Fucking hell. How many times do you want us to go over this?”

That counts.

But now, I mean, you can tell [our mutual friend], now they don’t need to do it.

She’ll be happy to hear that, she’ll be happy to hear that.

Yeah, because she was, like, “Fuckin’ fuck. Yeah, whatever.”

[Laughter] She’ll be happy to hear that. Listen, I have taken so much of your time. I am really sorry. I didn’t intend it to go this long, but thank you for sharing everything. It was really, really interesting. Ehm, this is the last [Note: the researcher passes the Likert Scale about post-interview stress to the participant]...

Alright.

...this is just to make sure that I haven’t made you feel worse.

[Laughter] Okay. [Note: she quickly writes minus one on the scale (the scale only went from zero to ten) without hesitation.

Cool. Ehm, [laughter] because I’ve asked everyone to do this. Most people are very similar but some people haven’t talked about the memories...

Yeah. I mean it was, it was, yeah.

...and they didn’t feel so great afterwards, and just one of the things that the university helped me to put in place is we have counsellors set up so that we could, that if somebody just looked like they weren’t doing that well or certainly stated that they weren’t doing that well, that we’d...

Oh that’s great.

...put professional...

Yeah.

...assistance in place, so...

Yeah, that’s wonderful.

...but luckily.

Oh yeah, I mean I think as a foreigner, any time, like, you went home, you had to talk about it...

Uhum.

...ehm, my friend that I, my colleague that I was mentioning who went up, like, a year later and he talked about the difference, ehm, he’s from Tunisia, and, eh, he is somebody, his, his grandfather, somebody close in his family died, and this was maybe in, like, April in 2011, and they are at the funeral and everybody is asking him about Japan…
Oh crikey.

...like, [clears throat] that’s what people wanted to talk about...

Oh wow.

...and it was like, “Well, okay. Maybe later.” [laughter]...

[Laughter] There’s a funeral going on here. [laughter]

...like...

Yeah.

...we should be paying respects, ehm...

Yeah, but of course...

...but I think as a foreigner, you have to talk.

...in April, of course, it would have still been, like you were saying, you were still number one in the [laughter].

Yeah, we were ranked number one. Goodbye Charlie Sheen.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

Note: we began this interview over lunch, so I tried to talk more than I normally would at the start to give the participant time to eat, and I did not follow the order of first questions that I had established in other interviews. The disaster related conversation begins about 1,500 words into the transcript. (I have put the first passage of this conversation in bold print.)

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Researcher: I thought with the disaster they would be more eager to encourage, you know, non-nationals to, to come in, but if the vis, you know the visa is always the first step, right? That’s always the first wall to, to climb and, if people are only getting one year contracts, eh, sorry, one year visas, it means they’re pro, as you said, only getting one year contracts, they’re not feeling very...

Participant: No…

...stable in their careers and.

...and it probably will put them off a little, sort of, investing too much into the language, and thus integrating, thus being able to understand a bit better, thus being able to, to function better…

Yeah.

...to be more productive in whatever…

Yeah.

...it is they are doing. No, I think, I mean, in, in fact, I don’t think it has much to do with the disaster at all. It may…

Yeah.

...my impression is rather that this country, especially with Abe [Note: the Japanese prime minister at the time of interview] is going in a direction that most people in the west have absolutely no idea. Abenomics, if people know it abroad, that’s just, it’s not his main thing. His main thing is changing the constitution, getting rid of Article 9 [Note: the article outlawing war as a means to settle international disputes], he is changing the schoolbooks getting rid of the apologies [Note: apologies for various Japanese aggressions in the Imperial and wartime periods]...

Yeah.

...kind of, em, and, em, although I’m employed in a project that’s kind of guroobarujinzaiikuseisuishinjigyou [Note: means project to promote the growth in global human resources] that is just still a, a remnant…

Uhm.

...I think five, five years down the road there’s no, not going to be any such, the relationship to Korea is worse…
Uhm.

...of course, to China. I think this country is heading in a very, very funny direction and it has very little to do with going more international...

Yeah.

...now that doesn’t mean that people are all going to disappear, but ehm, ehm, it’s very strange.

You’re absolutely not the first person to, eh, talk about things in those terms. Ehm, I know as well, I spoke to one person who really wanted to point out how Japan seems, to this person anyway, as it is closing in on itself...

Yeah.

...again, you know, a, as it has done in it, it, its history in the past, and one of the things that he talked about was how young people are travelling abroad less and less...

That sounds stupid.

...yeah, so, like, it is one thing if the old generations are, you know, maybe feeling a tendency to close off, but if the, the, the younger, sort of, let’s say, student, student level are also doing that, that’s, that’s, I mean, it’s something which...

Uhm.

...you know, will absolutely inhibit any sort of globalization...

Yeah.

...or internationalization.

I mean, right now I’m in a project that is supposed to promote going abroad. I mean, we have a very ambitious goal. 60% of all students in the gaikokugogakubu [Means: department of foreign languages] will be going abroad, which is not going to happen, because we do not have the spaces and they are not being very flexible in their, I’ve dug up quite a few opportunities, because, like, with the German, they have two exchanges, usually they send three, three, I suppose we could talk them into taking five for a few years, but I mean, that, out of a cohort of, say, fifty-five to sixty students per year...

Yeah.

...that is still nowhere near sixty. That is 10%...

Yeah.

...so, but, eh, we’re working on it...

Yeah.

...and I think at that university, they’re still doing a lot of good. And it’s good because, eh, it’s, it’s not a bad university for languages and those students are getting keener
because if you’re being offered options, you’re, kind of, being told, “Okay, this, you can
grant money, you can get support, ehm, you can get support throughout your stay,” ehm,
it, it does help, but I mean, I’ve met at other universities, I’ve met students who are
studying a language, I mean, it’s not even that were pretty proud of it, although they were
fourth year…

Yeah.

...that’s not the, the main thing, although that is also slightly worrying…

Uhm.

...if you can get a degree in a language and you basically don’t speak it at all, and you
speak it less than I now speak Japanese, well, ehm, but it was the, the, the complete and
utter disinterest in actually going there. So if you actually do the language and, the, I
mean, token gesture, you could, you could tell me, “Oh, I want to see Neuschwanstein, I
want to see this.” And you don’t ever have to go. But just in the pretend. Be flexible in
your mind. Be somewhat creative up there [Note: the participant points to his own head]
and just, kind of, say, “Oh I’d really love to. I’ve got some places I’d love to go.” And
most of them never have gone anywhere before…

Yeah.

...but, ehm, so that’s weird.

Yeah, it’s interesting that you mentioned about, say, grant money or support or
something, this, this person who is, as I said, who had, you know, very similar views was
so shocked that people would get offered full scholarships to go somewhere and still not
go. Ehm, I don’t know whether it comes down to fear, or the, disinterest or what it is, but,
you know, as he, very generous financial support…

Uhm.

...so that, you know, at least money would not have been as issue...

Uhm.

...for not going and, eh, yeah, they, they didn’t go. So.

Well, I mean, I’m, I’m not an authority on this, but from talking to people about this, and
I’ve been reading in English about it, it seems that going abroad for a lot of Japanese
companies is not an asset at all, but rather a, maybe, disadvantage, so if you want to get
signed by one of the big companies, if you want to go Sony or Toyota and you have been
international, it’s not, I mean, maybe later on if you, kind of, if you move up the ranks,
they might send you to America…

Yeah.

...but not before because I mean the, the, the inherent danger is that you will become un-
Japanese…

Yeah.

...that will have become, eh, like me, threatening the, sort of, coherence of the system…
Uhuh, uhuh.

...because I just work differently, but then this is interesting because, I mean, my, the project is called, you know, Global Promotion…

Yeah.

…it’s a bit of weird title in English, but never mind that, ehm, and I also, you can’t push too much, but I said, “Right, you know, you’ve got to go a bit more, of course, I’m working here for you and this is your university, it’s your country,” but actually it’s not your university, it’s the students’, “and you’ve got to show a bit of, sort of, willingness to, sort of, say, ‘Right, okay, we’re employed eight, six foreigners and, sort of, we’ve got to deal with them’ as well.”...

Uhm.

...so you can’t expect them to, because if you just want people who are, can’t speak the language but do some interesting research in, in German theatre, then employ Japanese people by all means…

Yeah.

...talk at the students in Japanese about topics that they are probably knowledgeable at the end, but who can’t do the language and are definitely not prepared to go abroad.

Yeah, yeah, ehm, that sounds very similar to my own experience of, that compromise always went. I had to compromise in every situation in, in these, sort of, globalization issues, which, you know, if you are working and being employed is fair enough, but...

Uhm.

...there is absolutely, it does need to go a little bit both ways, I think, for it to work well...

Uhuh.

...for it to work well because otherwise, I think, you can end up feeling antagonized. I felt very cosmetic. That I was employed just to say, “We employed some foreigners.”...

Uhm.

...without actually doing anything...

Uhuh.

...concrete towards, you know, becoming an international company.

Yeah, well, in, in my case, it’s obviously, they do, of course, they take me, they took us in for the language teaching…

Uhuh.

...and I think all of us are well qualified to that well and being somewhat more communicative than most Japanese and even some other candidates. {redacted}
So anyway, to, to, kind of, get back to the disaster, how, how did it actually, like, what happened to you in, in 2011?

Oh, it, it was very calm. We were at a cafe in {fashionable suburb of Tokyo} having some cake, yeah, gateau, maybe…

[Laughter]

...and then, oh, because it, I mean, there had been earthquakes weeks…

Yeah.

...weeks before and, eh, it was, kind of, I don’t know, I mean I never had earthquakes before ever, but at some point I, kind of, got to liking them. It was, kind of, it was a bit funny. It’s like surfing…

Uuuhhhmm?

...it was like, [Note: the participant spreads his arms and gestures a surfing motion] “Whoa, haha, haha, it’s moving. Look at this. Haha.” And as long as it goes, eh, sort of, horizontal…

Yeah.

...they’re not so, apparently not that bad…

Yeah.

...it’s only once it starts moving, sort of [Note: the participant gestures a vertical, jumping motion with his hands], and I think that happened in very few instances (indistinct), so we, kind of, got used to it, and then it was just, kind of, it was just a bit, but you did, we did realize this was longer, pretty long, I don’t know how many minutes, three, four, five?

Yeah, something like that, yeah.

Ehm, at some point, eh, people were, some people were, kind of, going, were going out, but then I thought with all these pylons and all these, sort of, eh, cables, I think it’s safer inside. At the very end, we, kind of, actually went under the table, but that was a bit of a, I didn’t quite fit.

[Laughter] Of course, {that suburb} is, like, eh.

Well, no, it was, the table was small. I don’t know, it was just not high enough. I just couldn’t really fit under the table…

Yeah.

...but it, it, and stuff started shaking in the kitchen and then it was over. So we had no idea. We were two stops away from home, and we, well, I pretty much decided I was going to walk anyway. It was a nice day…

Yeah.

...so, we did. So we, of course, we saw that trains were not running…
Yeah.

...but, eh, the magnitude of it, we had no idea. So we came home, and we did have a telly but we were never watching television. And even now, we don’t. I think I should start. I’m just always, eh, appalled by the abysmal quality of Japanese television, but I think I will just have to swallow that. But ehm, I mean both, [redacted] my wife, is better but nowhere near good enough. So we just, eh, had to go online. I mean, Internet, luckily was working...

Yeah.

...ehm, and, ehm, it was, and then I, I went to NHK, the English channel, but what you could see there was some pictures and you, all of a sudden, towards the evening it was becoming apparent that the problem was not actually the earthquake that much...

Yeah.

...but rather the tsunami...

Yeah.

...and obviously by that stage, nobody knew what kind of magnitude of an impact it would have. I don’t think it involved, we never got it at all, I mean, I’ve never been up in the area, I’ve never seen it so...

Yeah.

...but it was pretty repetitive and then, of course, these, sort of, eh, also when you go on to the BBC World page you can look at some videos, but it’s not live, so it just loops, and there it was something like, it was a loop, but it was always the same kind of information. We were pretty calm. I mean, like, in our flat, it was the ground floor, it was like the, the honey fell down...

[Laughter]

...from the, the, eh, the fridge, eh, the Ikea mirror that was kind of leaning against the wall kind of moved a bit, but I was preparing for my Japanese test on Monday [Note: the earthquake took place on a Friday]...

Oh [laughter]. [Note: as the participant was still trying to finish his desert, I began to speak here, even though under normal conditions I would not have intervened yet at this stage of the interview] This is, this is what’s really interesting to me that in Tokyo, life pretty much went on. You had to think about what you were going to do the next day. If you had an appointment or, yeah.

I mean, I was going to some really very expensive and shitty language school, and I probably wouldn’t have passed, but I had this stuff I, so I was studying, I mean, of course, once it, kind of, Saturday came, Sunday came, I was thinking, “Well, maybe this is not going happen.”...

Yeah.

...eventually there was an email, even though it was the weekend, from the school, “Oh, no, no, no. We’ll, it’s going to be cancelled.” And then, slowly but surely, ehm, eh, yeah, the whole, eh, Fukushima Daiichi thing started…
Yeah.

...and then, that was the point when the Germans went totally mental. If there, if there, if there’s anything that is like a red piece of cloth for a, what do you call? Spanish, in Spain?

Oh, the bull?

Bull! Germans, it’s nuclear. Germans go absolutely, well, by and large…

Yeah.

...they go paranoia mode once it’s anything to do with nuclear. I mean, they are freaking out, and people were freaking out…

Yeah.

...on say Facebook, ehm, phone calls, and so since I had that ticket for the 15th [Note: the participant had talked about having a ticket home to Germany before I had switched on the audio recorder], I was thinking, “Okay, well, what are we going to do?” So we booked a flight for {my wife} which was with Emirates, but that was in the evening of the Monday. So we decided, “Okay, we’re both going during the day and then she can take her flight and I will take mine in the morning.” Now, but that was the Monday when everything shut down…

Yeah.

...there was no trains anymore…

Yeah.

...we were at a hotel in Shibuya and, eh, we were pretty early, I mean, it was like, probably, ten in the morning, and they run buses, so the limousine buses [Note: an airport shuttle service] but there was no buses and they said there was no drivers. So we made our way to some central bus stop in Tokyo which I think is on the Hanzomon line, which was actually pretty calm, I mean, you, the Hanzomon line was running…

Yeah.

...and, eh, it was just the connection to the airport, and that was to me, to my mind, it was absolutely crazy. I mean, how can you, eh, I mean, no matter whether people want to leave because of that, but you can’t shut up [Note: I think this was a slip of the tongue and the participant meant shut off] the, the airport commuters…

Yeah.

...so why not have the airport trains running or even more of them…

Yeah.

...because people may be coming in to help the disaster. I don’t know, it was just, and then once we got there, of course we were at different terminals at Narita [Note: the main airport serving Tokyo - the two terminals of which are a bus or train-ride apart]…
Oh, yeah.

...ehm, and then my wife was listening to, I think, announcements in, in Japanese, and she realized that they actually did say that from 6 o’clock that afternoon, that evening, there would be no more flights because people can’t get there. What kind of a logic is that? So, you’re not flying the people who are there out because the people can’t get there? Eh, so I said to her, “Okay, well, hang on. I’ll check with Lufthansa.”

Because by that stage, eh, I mean, on the Sunday the, the in-laws had been pretty frantic, right?

Yeah.

I rang them, and they said, “You’ve got to, no, just get a ticket.” So I said, “Okay. Lufthansa, what have you got?” And they said to me, “Oh, do you want to go on the Munich flight today?” And that happened to be the last flight out of Narita for a good four, five, six weeks for Lufthansa. I said, “Yeah, sure.” And then I was, told my wife the amount, because there were all these, sort of, things about outrageous, ehm, amounts of money...

Right.

...now, of course, it was more expensive, it was about a thousand for, eh, Euros, for one way. So that’s, kind of, double...

Yeah.

...what you.

Well, yeah, it’s, it’s not too bad, actually, yeah.

It’s more. Exactly. So I felt not hard done by...

Yeah.

...then, eh, the plane wasn’t anywhere near full, but I think that’s probably because of the, the issue with the, the...

Commuting, yeah.

...commuting. And then, she didn’t have a re-entry visa [Note: a former immigration necessity - residents of Japan needed to have paid for a special seal in their passport before leaving the country to be allowed back in].

Aaaahhhh!

I did. A re-entry permit.

Permit. Yeah, that was back when the system was still in place.

So, we, well, it’s not like we were both missing it, but that was stressful, that was very stressful, yeah.

Oh, crikey. Di, did you realize that before you left that?

Yeah, we knew...
Oh, you knew. Okay so.

...but we had no, there was no time and no chance to go...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, what can you do...

...to, to.

...yeah, what could you have done? Because, I mean, basically, that thing is just a tax, right, I mean, that’s all it has ever been but it really is enforced...

Yeah.

...you absolutely had to have it, you had to have that stamp in your, your passport...

Yeah.

...and without that you’re not going to, you can leave, but they won’t let you back in.

Well, not on the visa.

Yeah, well, yeah. You had to get a new visa [exasperated laughter]. Oh crikey.

Yeah, and, ehm.

So you had this, kind of, in the back of your minds as you were leaving that, eh, this was possibly going to be a bit of a, a pain.

Well, I never, I never thought it was, I mean, I’m not very, ehm, eh, prone to be, developing paranoia about nuclear things. I, even now, I don’t, I mean, you can’t, eh, after we came back, I couldn’t read enough to really deter, you know, determine where it was wrong, and to be perfectly honest, I wasn’t really too fussed. I mean, who knows? Ehm, but as we say in German, leben ist lebensgefährlich, so life is dangerous, you know.

[Laughter]

It’s what it is, I mean.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I think, too, young children or maybe pregnant women, fair enough...

Yeah.

...and going to Fukushima and the university [Note: the participant had told me before the audio recorder was switched on that he had been about to start a job at a university just outside Fukushima] being sort of, two stops on a commuter train outside Fukushima, she, so basically towards south-east, which is exactly where the fallout was...

Yeah.

...that, to me and mostly to my family just didn’t sound like a very good idea at all. Of course, I could have been very popular, not just, kind of, going back because I hadn’t even.
You hadn’t even started, right? Yeah.

That’s the thing, and that’s why, what made it a bit easier for me to say, you know, of course, if you have family there or if you’re from wherever, and all, you, you, you’re not going to leave people alone. And there was the reverse, I mean, there was a Japanese from Germany going back and sort of...

Yeah.

...to see their families, see that they’re well...

Yeah.

...ehm, but, eh that kind of made it not really easy, I mean, I still have a, a bit of a sense of guilt towards the university...

Yeah.

...because they got me the first visa and all that...

Yeah, yeah.

...but it just, in the end, it wasn’t on the menu.

How was the situation with contacting them at the time when all of this was going on? Because I know Tokyo, contact was pretty smooth, but parts of Fukushima had a lot of difficulty with their communication systems...

Uhuh.

...were you able to, kind of, contact the university easily or?

Email, email.

Ah, email. Okay.

No, we did email. I just said, “Okay, ehm, I have my flight scheduled on this, now, alright...”

Yeah.

...and I should be back as expected but, eh, let’s, you know, kind of, see what’s going to happen.”

Yeah.

Then, ehm, yeah, my, ehm, but while I was away, while I was a fly-jin [Note: a derogatory term for foreigners who left Japan during the disaster]...

[Laughter]

...yeah, I mean, you get all sorts of attitudes. I thought fly-jin was maybe a bit harsh, ehm, of course, the Germans, well, the French, I mean, they even chartered flights to get their people out. The Germans just expect you to pay...
...eh, actually, what I said about news, there wasn’t that much, but at the same time, sometimes when it’s too much, it’s too much. So if you have too many points of view, if you have too many different hair dryers to choose from or television sets, it’s too much. So maybe news at all wasn’t that, wasn’t the problem. The problem was more on social media, people on Facebook all going like, “Ah, are you still there?” So that kind of thing. And the German Embassy did abysmally. They were so bad because all of their posts, they had been, I think on the Friday, they were on the shinkansen [Note: Japanese bullet train] to Osaka. So it was just the Japanese staff, some volunteers and young people who were still there. Ehm, I got one email about eight, nine times. So somebody, kind of, being, thinking that this hasn’t been sent off, which wasn’t informative at all, at all. They even had to call, sort of, town hall meetings later on in May. I did go to one, not because I was particularly worried, but, and the entire community, the schools, they fucked up badly. The, the Goethe Institut, they, they lost almost half of their students, so they were, like, on twelve-hundred and they were a year later seven-hundred...

Wow.

...because they fucked up so badly...

Yeah.

...because they just did not communicate, the school, German school in, in Yokohama, they have lost people because they, they only took care of, and this is very German, only took care of the cohort that is, sort of, the highest, eh, Gymnasium, and the Realschule in German [Note: types of secondary school] they were flown out, flown out to Cologne, to, you know...

Yeah.

...get their Abitur, their Leaving Cert, but, eh, the others weren’t, they just.

They were just left to do their own thing or?

Well, no, it’s like, classes didn’t happen because Goethe Institut is, sort of, state-funded. They could officially not open until they had given the okay, had been given the okay. So the people were there. Most of the teachers were there, the Japanese were definitely there, they were just, kind of, I don’t know, doing stuff, rolling thumbs [Note: the participant makes a gesture of folding his hands and twiddling his thumbs] drinking coffee. Ehm, but, so, and, and I really thought, I mean, of course, these, these embassy folks, they’re, they’re, they’re smug, but I thought, I mean, I, well, I, I understand people with kids and they were enraged about schools, but I really thought, “This, the smugness.” And they fucked up, and they really fucked up, and they didn’t admit it one bit. They said, “Oh yeah, well, you know, we dealt with it in, within reason in the situation.” No, you didn’t. You just did very, very, very badly. And telling people they have no money to spend. “Yeah, you’ve got to save more if you live in a country like Japan.” [Note: participant rolls eyes]


Yeah.
Eh, you’re not the first person to have a negative opinion of their embassy. A lot of the nationalities I have spoken to have had quite negative comments about the way their embassies reacted. And mostly, as you said, in terms of things like information and communication...

Yeah, it was none!

...yeah.

There was nothing. And, eh, I think you can’t blame the, most of, a lot of the Japanese staff can’t speak German…

Yeah.

...eh, and only leaving the young people in charge, so whenever it’s about the party and, eh, getting to the funds, it’s the high, eh, the big-wigs, and then once it’s, like, shitty in Japan, they piss off and the others are left behind. I know some people who really they helped out because, like, say half-Japanese, half-German…

Yeah.

...volunteers, and they had, they helped, and a, a, at no stage did I feel the urge to call them…

Yeah.

...but just, I mean, even that email, I mean, I was just like, “This is no new, this is no new information. You send it to me eight times or sixteen times or something ridiculous. And it’s the same email, and after that, for three weeks nothing?” Not a single, at least. At least three weeks…

...not a single email, and I mean, I had been registered so I, you know…

Yeah.

...I get a, I get a reminder every three months, ‘Please update your information’…

Yeah.

...and I had been doing this…

Yeah.

...so.

That’s very unsatisfactory.

Uhuh.

And you also mentioned about, like, social media being, kind of, not that useful to you really, in, in fact it might have been counterproductive…

Oh, counterproductive because the people on Facebook was kind of going crazy.
And when you say the people on Facebook, were they people that you knew here in Japan? Were they?

No, no, no, mostly friends or not necessarily people very close but rather, well, I mean, it’s always like this, “Oh, something happened in Japan. Oh my god. I think my neighbour’s daughter-in-law’s, eh, son is currently there, so we need to check.” Fair enough, I mean, that’s, so people I have had no contact with for ten years, fifteen years or so, I mean, all of a sudden, they come on, “Oh, are you still in Japan?”...

Yeah.

...and, eh, I think that is a positive because it’s like, “Oh, right, great. They, they actually do care although you’re not best friends or whatever. But after a, a, because Germans are so paranoid about nuclear things. Nuclear is really, that’s the, the, everything goes into irrational mode…

Okay.

...really it does go into irrational mode…

Yeah.

...ehm, and I have a lot of friends here who have been here, long-timers in Japan who are active in the, sort of, anti-nuclear power, sort of, very small scene that was bigger right after but, eh...

Yeah.

...and, actually I have problems with, not, not with, they are friends of mine, but I have, eh, yeah, it’s a kind of, it’s a very, I think it’s very narrow-minded…

Their thinking.

...yeah, I mean, Germany has no nuclear power any more, but they buy lots of nuclear power from France and from Czech…

Yeah.

...and possibly even Poland, so they can have the risk and the danger…

Yeah.

...but we can’t. I mean come on...

Yeah.

...so.

It’s a bit of a double standard.

Yeah, and, but, em, no, I think that was more, I mean, especially in terms of my wife because she didn’t want to come, she wasn’t particularly, I mean, it’s not that she didn’t think at all, but she wasn’t particularly scared…
Yeah.

...and there was one person on her scholarship who did the complete reverse. I mean, he was a bit of a funny character, he also was on, on shows and television, so television shows and he, kind of, I think they, got himself an agent and, but he was doing the reverse, he was going out, he was partying the nights away, em, on purpose…

Okay.

...because it was pretty empty and people, even the Japanese at some point weren’t doing so much and, of course, once we returned, I mean, there was a bit of a, I don’t think there was a shortage, but it was just not everything in the supermarkets…

Uhm, yeah, yeah.

...mostly water and rice and stuff…

Yeah, yeah.

...but I mean, of course, some of the Japanese, most people tend to have small living spaces, but must be terrible hoarders, I mean, where would you put all that water? I mean, fill the bathtub with water? Okay, yeah, for the loo.

Yeah, yeah. You know the way as well, just to quickly go back to something else you, you mentioned right back at the start when you were trying to find out about things, you, you mentioned going online...

Uhum.

...and you mentioned a few websites like, eh, for example, eh, like the BBC or NHK. Did you notice any difference between the various nationalities’ media? Like, your experience of Japanese media or German media or other countries’ media?

Actually not so much, but I think you may have heard this, I think in this particular case, although I don’t think the UK is prone to being very paranoid, em, the BBC was pretty similar there. They were pretty, I, uh, no nowhere near the German newspapers but, ehm, NHK then in contrast almost, I’m not, I’m not saying it was so positive, but it was almost somewhat positively calm…

Uhm, uhm

...because there was some stuff, well they downplayed it, I mean, always, you know, every day now you have another, “Oh, we have another leak in Fukushima.” Well, it’s probably been there for six weeks or whatever…

[Laughter]

...who knows?

Yeah.

(indistinct) Then again no-one knows, it’s in its own way a very corrupt society. I mean, if you are, sit on the right committee in the, in parliament, of course the, so, yakusa [Note: Japanese mafia] or the building conglomerates are going to pay you very handsomely,
probably double what you receive by the state, if you only call the right decisions. It’s
not, it’s not a mystery…

Yeah.

...even if I don’t understand Japanese well enough, I can read about it and I can, kind of,
suss it out, eh, I mean, that’s another thing, of course, I could not go out and talk to
people about it unless they have English, em, I could not access the, well, did not access
the Japanese websites because it wouldn’t have been, you know, any help and
newspapers, and I thought, “Well, newspapers are newspapers.” They come out once a
day, but television, eh, seemed the more straightforward choice. Eh, but, and also, I
mean, as I said, the media, I think, what’s the problem there is that, eh, well to put it very,
very direct, excuse my French, opinions are like arseholes, everybody’s got one…

[Laughter]

...and, mind you, there was lots of opinions about anything and everything online, eh, and
at some point, you couldn’t keep from not, eh, I mean, as, as, as long as we, kind of, were
on the way to the airport and we weren’t quite sure what was going to happen, of course,
I did, I was really, kind of, on it. Then, once we were in Germany, of course, I didn’t have
the, eh, the contracts, you know, I couldn’t, I couldn’t use my phone, and I even lost a job
through not answering my phone in the middle of the night because they were offering
me something {redacted}…

Ah, okay.

...but because I hadn’t answered the phone, they had rang, they rung someone else, so, of
course, it wasn’t full time, but it would have been something else…

It would have been a job, yeah.

...ehm, but at some point I felt really I can, I do not want to watch any news any more, I
did not want to even open up Facebook, I’m actually quite happy watching silly German
TV shows or reading a book or just going for a walk, because, of course, the media was
all so existential because I wasn’t really going to go to Fukushima, although I was
thinking about it for a while, but that meant, and that was, what it meant was that I would
have to start again from scratch, clawing, and luckily I had made some contacts, and there
was a language school and that was the first thing, and then, slowly but, I mean, I think I,
and people have been telling me that it happened rather quickly, I was teaching last year
at some pretty good universities {redacted}…

Yeah, yeah, wow, wow...

...so I got into English…

...yeah, yeah.

...but I have been networking and, eh, I do think, at least in terms of teaching, and I think
I’m skilled enough…

Yeah.

...I mean, I don’t all do, don’t always do the right thing and the best…

[Laughter]
...it’s not always the most exciting teaching, but I am making an effort…

Yeah, yeah.

...and, eh, so, ehm, yeah, but right then, it was like, “Okay.” I could have said, “Well, I’ve got nothing here, I’ve got nothing anywhere else, so I might as well stick around.” But somehow for me Japan has always been a challenge. Now I’m not up to certain challenges in terms of mentality sometimes, I just can’t, can’t be, it’s too much, and I just, I don’t need this really, but, ehm, it’s always been a language issue…

Yeah.

...and I’m never going to get very good, and I speak what I, Japanese call *yabanjin nihongo* [Note: means speaking Japanese like a savage, i.e., not refined Japanese]...

[Laughter]

...I basically ignore most of the particles and I’m pretty much all over the place when it comes to *desu, masu*, plain form, eh, other things. I’m trying. It’s getting a bit better.

Ehm, also, although I have a bit of a problem, now I can communicate with my personal trainer or the karaoke guys, because they have no English. But it’s difficult, sort of, constructions…

Yeah.

...like, I have a few relative things, but it’s just getting a bit better…

Yeah.

...but that’s the thing, I want to keep getting better…

Yeah.

...I want to just do something. And at the same time, I know I am not going to dedicate anything full time in terms of just like proper studies…

Yeah.

...or even I can’t and I don’t want to take six months out and go to some language school because I have my share of experience there and I think six months there could even be just giving them a lot of money, ehm, not necessarily benefitting very much from the way they teach…

It’s possible, yeah.

...so I think if you are a skilled professional whose language ability is, I mean, because I’m always doing it right, but I know, I know what works for me…

*How to learn, yeah.*

...for me…

Yeah.
...and I definitely don’t want, what I don’t, I don’t need people telling me, “Oh, you weren’t here. Why haven’t you done your homework?” “I paid you fucking two-hundred thousand yen. Shut up.”

[Laughter]

It’s my prerogative. If I don’t homework, I don’t do homework. Leave me the fuck alone.

Yeah [laughter]. I understand...

So that’s the...

...I understand.

...and, ehm, I mean, I’ve had some good, I had a good teacher, look, she’s in Tokyo, right, even I like kanji [Note: Chinese characters], I somehow enjoy them...

Yeah.

...even though I know nothing about the, sort of, on the left or top right and [Note: an example of some of the conventions for how Chinese characters are written]...

[Laughter]

...I know it’s there, but I don’t know how to interpret them...

Yeah, yeah.

...and I also tend to know, I think I’m at that stage where I rather know sound than meaning...

Right.

...so I can have a guess at sound, but I am not really sure of the meaning...

I see, I see.

...but it’s, but it’s part of the experience of being here. Of course, the intercultural, everyday, but I mean, that kind of thing is helpful definitely...

Uhm.

...to know Japanese on a normal way, in a normal situation...

Yeah, yeah, uhum.

...but I think even then because we, we, of course, I didn’t ask many things, just, “Why is the bus not coming?” and then okay well, “You’ve got to go to this spot and then take the bus.” And there were so many buses running there, so that was no, I mean, it was hectic, I mean, Japanese, they, they sometimes, especially women, they like to run, don’t they, on the last two-hundred metres to the station, it’s like [Note: makes a gesture of running awkwardly]...

[Laughter]
...it makes no sense, but fair enough. But you are showing that you, kind of, it’s a bit like
the poor kuroneko guys [Note: a Japanese logistics/delivery company like DHL] who are
supposed to run just to show dedication…

Yeah.

...poor guys, I mean, their job is hard enough.

In, in the humid, humidity and, eh, thirty-something degrees.

And wearing that, sort of, super plasticky uniform…

[Laughter]

...which I’m sure has no heat-tech or whatever it’s called…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, it’s a thought. So it, like, was it, was it, it doesn’t sound then that it was
a tough decision for you to come back.

No, no, it wasn’t. I wasn’t finished.

Yeah, you had this challenge still remaining. And for your wife as well, she felt the same
way?

Uhm, not quite so much because, well, she was very pissed off at the German institution
that sent her there. I think that they didn’t deal with it that badly. Nothing compared to,
and they, they, they paid everything in the end. They paid that flight, they paid certain
expenses, but some people, but they allowed people to quit within, and I suppose, like,
maybe about a third actually did quit, so that’s the magnitude of people’s, sort of, how
crazy they got. Ehm, she didn’t, but it was mostly, I said, “Well, we haven’t really
achieved, you know, we have hardly even been there.” And, eh, I, I’d been doing a lot of
networking…

Yeah.

...and I just, I wasn’t sure but I start, I started to get somewhere. Of course, at that stage,
we could have disappeared. I think if we disappeared now, it would probably be more
stupid. But, ehm, at the same time, after three years, you could, you might also be able to
say, “This doesn’t really work.” And I, like, if anything came out, like she’s unemployed
right now, and she has, would probably say, “Okay, well, fair enough, the earliest stage
that I can make, let’s go somewhere else.”

Yeah, yeah.

But I still Japanese tugging at me a little bit, so…

Yeah.

...I don’t want to…

That was the motivating, one of the motivating factors anyway.

Uhm.
Then, one thing I have been asking everybody is for, for each person, when did the
disaster end, if, if it did end?

Uhm, I think for me, once I, I secured two days in a language school in Tokyo, back in
Tokyo. Because that was, like, a sign for me. It might have been early in May.

Okay, so March, April, May, about three months? Less, slightly less?

Uhm, It was kind of this thing for me of, “Okay there is a, a bit of future here and it, it’s
probably going to, it’s going to take time…

Yes.

...but it’s looking good. I can even somehow benefit from some people having
disappeared entirely. That was very, for a short period only, I think. Uhm, what other? I
mean, of course, where there is disaster for some, there is always opportunity, but
sometimes unfortunately in that its come to people just making money off people. But say
the labour law, the new one…

Yes.

...have you heard about that, the university thing?

Yes.

I’m going to go, actually I don’t know that much about it, but, eh, I’m going to go
tomorrow, no Sunday, my union has a little, you know, session, but I mean, it sounds so
funny to me. I’m not planning to really be around then…

Yeah.

...but, ehm, no, it’s the, in five years time, well, yeah, from now on, in four years time in
teaching is going to go absolutely mental because all the people who have been on
hijokinkoushi contracts [Note: part-time teaching contracts] forever, five years, seven
years, whatever, fifteen years, twenty-two years, they are going to lose them because the
universities cannot offer them new contracts, so even all the good jobs at Waseda, Kyodai
[Note: major Japanese universities] for hijokinkoushi…

Yeah.

...but also for fixed-term stuff…

Yeah.

...like what I’ve got now, they are all going to be out in the open and it is going to be
madness, it is going to be absolute and utter madness because I think, in some respects, in
terms of some teaching, and that is more Japanese nationals but also some foreigners who
have gotten really, well, maybe they speak really good Japanese by now, but they do the
same as Japanese do teaching at students in Japanese about something…

Yeah.

...it’s maybe not such a bad thing, I know a colleague or friend who, before I moved here,
would have had quite a bit of a changeover, but, eh, I clawed my way into {a certain
university in Tokyo} for English, ehm, eh, then {a university outside Tokyo} for German, {another university in Tokyo} two days for English…

Oh wow.

...now the {university outside Tokyo}, my, my friend and colleague there, and I mean, he is so unhappy with some of the part-timers because that’s the thing here with part-timers, they just wast, waste people’s breath, like, if I look at their German students, even if they make a lot of progress, they cannot read and translate Kafka in Year 2. They just cannot or they can but they don’t benefit at all. And then in third year, it’s social theories…

[Laughter]

...and that is because nobody really knows what they are doing. They have got contracts, and they probably have been getting them forever and it’s basically, 90% is hot air and not helping and benefiting anybody, and now it will be maybe a little bit of a good thing, but unfortunately I think it is just going to mean a lot of things are just not going to be put out at all…

Yeah.

…and they are going to go like, em, the dean of the economics, business and economics faculty at {one university in Tokyo} said, “Oh let’s get rid of the natives. We don’t need our students to speak. They are okay with reading and writing, aren’t they?”

[Researcher sharply inhales]

And this is probably what is also going to happen…

Yeah.

...so I think for more people than not, it’s going to mean that the market share is going to be even smaller. It’s just going to, especially if it’s moving towards less internationality.

Yeah, this, this ties in very strongly into all of those trends we were talking about where it really does seem to be a kind of a closing in again…

Uhm.

...it’s, perhaps, eh, eh, partly the earthquake but I think there were other things in motion even before that and maybe just the earthquake spurred some things on.

Uhm. And I mean, I really can’t judge that but from, of course I’ve, I’m aware now that Japanese, sort of, coherence with, within systems in Japan seems to be very, very, very different and I will probably never understand it, and I think in my environment, I can probably get away breaching some of it as long as I put, as I not just perform but maybe rather put in a bit of an extra effort…

Yeah, yeah.

...and create something for someone. So I may be destroying something here [Note: gestures with hands to one side of the table] but I am also building something else…

Yeah.
...now, of course, if you are a company, that kind of an approach may not work at all, it, you know, if you get a format, as a position in, and they are just going to create havoc, maybe their reasoning is, “Okay, we, actually it went really well for us when the, we were rebuilding and we did it the Japanese way.”

Uhm.

...because sometimes I know that they’re not, not that creative but they have been taught not to, and I sometimes wonder how are Japanese actually creative, how did they do this, how does Sony still do? Though all those companies have all been going down...

Yeah.

...downhill a little bit...

Yeah.

...but I think Sony is probably still strongest in some markets...

Yeah, yeah.

...ehm, well, a car or something they’re still...

Yeah.

...and, eh, yeah, maybe we foreigners in, in certain areas are det, maybe, I don’t know, maybe we are detrimental...

Yeah.

...so you know, the, the thoughts and, sort of, creativity processes that need to be there...

Yeah.

...ehm but, at the same time, I come from a very universist background, background, and I would also say there are lots of Japanese who think lots of different things and there are so many who, who volunteered and wanted to help and wanted to help foreigners and, I mean, there’s so many, I mean, I have never been to a country with so many free or virtually free language classes. Of course, a lot of the people have no idea what they are doing but they’re, they mean well. So there are all these people out there and, eh, I think it’s, you know, just, maybe they are only ten, fifteen percent, maybe they are twenty or twenty-five, but just, eh, just having that future for them that they would have to, kind of, go quiet again and disappear into not being seen because now is the new uniformity again...

Yeah.

Yeah.

...ehm, I don’t know. I think once you reach a certain level of enlightenment in, in, in, doesn’t matter whether it is science or those sorts of things, once you know about something, it is thus making you much more happy and thus maybe more productive, not just productive but also more productive in your relationships. You can’t go back...

Yeah.

Yeah.
...you can’t close the door again. You can’t just, I mean, but then, then again, I mean, a lot of the, sort of, Muslim world is doing it. They’re just kind of saying, “Oh well, we don’t care.” North Korea is doing it…

Yeah, yeah.

…”Huh, human rights?” “And Poles, by the west, oh, we never liked them.” [Note: this prior sentence was said with great sarcasm]...

Yeah, yeah.

...our judiciary, I mean, we traditionally, like, that’s what Abe says, traditionally we have no concept of the people in power being, being, kind of, subject to the third, the third power. “No. Why would we want that?” So, I think it’s difficult. But maybe to some extent we are a factor of interest…

Yeah, yeah.

...it could be.

Yeah, I, I’m, I do want to pick up on the volunteer stuff you mentioned. Em, a lot of the people I’ve talked to have mentioned that there were, there were lots of Japanese people who supported them after the earthquake in terms of just giving advice or offering translation, offering assistance. Did you and your wife have enough time to get any?

Yeah, well, I mean we had friends, eh, who mostly remotely, sort of, did help. Eh, not necessarily with any kind of super, em, life, but rather with general problems that had to do with, most of it could have been normal lifetime situ, or normal life situations…

Yeah.

...in Japan, mostly they were under the auspices of some kind of bigger, grander sort of scenario, eh, but those were people, like, we’d known before, kind of, friends…

Yeah.

...ehm, and it was mostly to them, em, I did have some encounters in the gym where before I had never spoken to anybody really and I wasn’t keen necessarily…

Yeah.

...but then people started expressing more of an interest, “Oh, you’re still here?” Some old man in the sauna, or you hear a sort of a, “Where are you from?” and eh, eh, that, that wasn’t about help…

Yeah.

...but, em, I think there was a, I think there was a slight, yeah, you could feel a bit of a welcoming, so, they, because people were talking, and they’ve been used now to foreigners for thirty, forty years, so lots of, quite a lot of them, and, eh, especially once you tell them, if you tell them that you are not American…

Yeah [laughter].

...if you are German, it is a bit like in Ireland, they are rather more happy…
Yeah, yeah.

...un, unless they tell you that, “Next time, we do it without the Italians.” And they buy you lots of sake…

[Laughter]

...which didn’t happen to me, but some people on my wife’s scholarship they met this person for lunch, this old geezer, I just had it in Galway in a pub once, he was like, “Oh, when are you going to bomb the Brits again?” “Yeah, right, I’m just having my pint here actually sort of, yeah, fair enough.”...

[Laughter]

...no, there wasn’t, there wasn’t an air of, sort of, general more welcomeness. I think you, maybe you really had that if you, well, if you had stayed like the whole…

Yeah.

...sort of, ehm, people I have been talking to there, they have been saying, “Yeah, people would almost literally walk up to you on the streets and thank you that you were still around.” Ehm, and that’s also why I think it sh, it can’t go the way they are closing up.

Yeah, there are people who want to, to...

Yeah.

...and did you get any support, you or your wife get any support from, like, I don’t know, like they city office or the ward office or anything like that, because obviously you have to register when you arrive in Japan?

No.

No, we just dealt with them and that was not in my, one of my friends who, kind of, oh and sometimes I paid my, my, my teacher later on to accompany to, sort of, to, to, in case something would go a little bit funny.

But they, like, didn’t send you any information about disasters or anything or?

Well, prior, yes, of course, no, we, we got the general {ward} brochure and that was in English about, my wife had training because they went to, they, kind of, went to a, an earthquake centre, but that was part of the work, but nothing out of the ordinary, nothing that was specifically after the, the earthquake. No.

Ehm, the reason I ask about that is because one of the recommendations that keeps, kind of, coming up from local authorities and NPOs and that is that in order to support foreigners in the next disaster…

Uhm.

...foreigners need to be integrated into the local community. Eh, but, I don’t know how realistic that is as a, as a recommendation or as an aspiration even.
Yeah, that’s a good question. Eh, I accidentally joined the neighbourhood whatever it is at my danchi [Note: means a housing estate or apartment complex]…

Yeah.

…and it was, kind of, I think she threatened me, she had two little kids with her, and it was a lot easier paying eighteen-hundred yen then, and I had no idea what I was getting into. Well, now I am just getting this thing once a month and I have got to sign or I haven’t got a stamp [Note: personal seals are the official way of notarizing documents in Japan but many non-Japanese do not have a seal and use a signature instead]...

Yeah.

...so I, kind of, refuse to, well not, super refuse, but I haven’t got one, and then I think the last time I made, I made a real mistake, I can’t read that stuff, I can, kind of, glance at it and say, and I think I filled something in when I wasn’t supposed to, and I said I could do it, and they were starting to ask me, and I was like, “Jesus Christ.” One month I was supposed to hand things out and collect them, and, em, that is not desirable at all. And my wife, kind of, goes, “Yeah, why did you even join?” And I say, “Well, at that moment, it seemed like a good idea and it seemed like the, em, the, the, the path of the least resistance…

[Laughter]

...ehm, I don’t know, I really don’t know. I mean, to some extent, I think offering people, all they can do is offer. Eh, but I have to admit, whenever this stuff comes from, comes from institutions, it can, it tends to be a bit, eh, stiff. It tends to be, “Oh, I don’t really want to go there.” Eh, festivals or parties are probably a good idea…

Uhm.

...to just, kind of, “Okay, well, let’s do something.” And there is lots of stuff. Like, the weekend when we’re not here but they have this sort of ‘One World’ or not one world but ‘Globalness’ Festival in, in {a famous park in the city}...

Yeah.

...ehm, give people the option, offer them stuff they can read in, in whatever language is closest to…

Yeah.

...don’t always just assume that everybody has English, eh, most Westerners do but some people don’t. Eh, and don’t go overboard, because I mean, personally, the, the way Japanese explain things, even though you have been to a place many, many times, and this, and maybe especially because you are a regular, they make you aware of that little step that there is every single time, and that to me is almost an insult because they are sort of, “He’s stupid. I need to tell him.” Of course, it’s meant completely the other way around, but it, can, it can register as something, I mean, a lot of things that Japanese need little pictures for, to me they are common sense. And if, I {redacted} I mean my wife is even worse, she has no patience for that kind of silliness whatsoever. Eh, I sometimes play along and sometimes I don’t understand and that, kind of, is, not, is, is well then in that situation…
Yeah.

...but I don’t think I could, eh, kind of, spend, like, an earthquake training with Japanese, eh, without either, eh, starting to swear a lot, and then go into a swearing fit, or laughing my head off.

[Laughter] Because of the different cultural approaches?

Well, because of the, to me, there would be silliness. All the sort of things that tell you would be utter silliness. I am not a child and I just, “Okay, give me the information. And, eh, give me the recommendations and then I’ll make my choices.”...

Yeah.

...And I think that’s why, em, necessarily, the, the aim cannot, I don’t think, can’t be, and I think they should be realistic there, “They all have to do the same and do it in a Japanese way,” because that then wouldn't, there is always a question: what is integration? And that’s, that’s, I don’t think that is integrating at all, that is rather, em, em, disenfranchising. It’s, it’s, it kind of, can make things worse, and I could see why that could be true for a lot of communities, not just the Western communities...

Uhm.

...eh, ehm, so I think offering choices, maybe, kind of, giving people an opportunity to somehow join in, eh, but more on the sort of level, “Okay, well, there’s some nice people there and they, oh I would be, I would really like to be in this, eh, eh, group of people carrying around this shrine,” what’s it called again?...

Oh, the omikoshi. [Note: a Japanese portable shrine that is carried around local streets during certain festivals]

Omikoshi. “Oh, yeah, that looks like a bit of fun, and, eh, probably get seriously drunk when doing that.”

[Laughter]

Could do that.

Yeah.

So, like, I mean, you know…

That would be.

...that kind of thing...

Yeah.

...but, em, and, and, I think one other way would be, sort of, to, eh, I mean, of course, they can’t control it, but, em, eh, work much more closer with, eh, the embassies, kind of, because you, they may know a bit better how to address their folks, if they do a good job.

But this is, this is the thing, yeah, I think there’s, there’s a need for the embassies to, to be here [laughter] if there is a disaster. One, one of the things that a lot of people have
mentioned is how the embassy staff, the senior embassy staff, just like you were saying, so...

Yeah.

...the response systems didn’t get, there were plenty of plans in place, but they didn’t get carried out.

And also, I mean, of course, that probably for poor countries or small countries is maybe even worse, but, eh, if you compare the embassy plus, I think, five consulate generals that Japan has in Germany and here they only have, okay for me it was not far away...

Yeah.

...but they have Tokyo, the embassy, and they have the consulate general in Osaka...

And that’s it.

...and in a country that is a lot bigger than Germany...

Yeah.

...and has a lot more inhabitants...

Yeah.

...so people are, can live in the, in the remotest areas...

Yeah.

...of the country, ehm, and also I, I, I personally, I don’t see how, I think there’s more Germans well, maybe not in total, but I think percentage-wise, there should be, probably would be more take an interest, express an interest in Japan and Japanese, in going to Japan, ehm, and the other way round is largely, okay, ehm, the romantic...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...sort of route down there, and there’s a ‘tick-the-box’, “Okay, that’s it, I have been to Germany. I have had some sausage.” And so, it is, kind of...

Yeah, yeah.

...logically it doesn’t make sense, for them to have that many consulate generals...

Yeah, why do, why do they need it?

...uhm, and I think they, you know, countries like Germany can afford it, they should rethink...

Yeah.

...maybe having something in Kyushu...
...maybe having something in the North…

Yeah.

...sort of, Aomori or.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, I think, one, one of the things that is clear to me is that this topic is like, it is like I have been peeling an onion, there are so many different layers. I am only going to be able to talk about one small part…

Yeah.

...but it’s extremely interesting to hear all of these, these other things. That, that’s pretty much all I have unless there is anything you think about, like, language or culture or how you communicated or how you got information that you think might be relevant that I haven’t, kind of, touched upon in any way?

Uhm, well, not, not really, the only thing, because I think in a situation of crisis, people refer to the, kind of, the behaviour or patterns that they, they feel most secure with and they know best, ehm, saying that, having said that, I don’t think, the Japanese weren’t very Japanese, the ones I was in contact with, just in the situation where we, kind of, asked for help or advice, now then again, these are people with multiple language skills and who, who spent time abroad or maybe for a lot longer, ehm, so I think, actually, that worked rather well, but I mean, I think that’s also an interhuman, usually these kind of things, they transcend even boundaries of not having a common language, if, if, if you are in that situation for, more often than not, I think, it’s more along the, sort of, societal, slightly overarching administrative level, and that’s what’s, where they worry much, but they always need procedures, they need plans, and that need that everywhere…

Yeah.

...and I don’t think that’s the answer…

Yeah.

...uhm, and I mean, some of the things we cannot, because they are policy and, and, and politics, we cannot influence at all, I mean…

Yeah.

...of course, we can say, “I’d like them not to have nuclear energy.”

[Laughter]

Is it going to happen? Eh, I think language isn’t really so much of an issue there…

Yeah.

...ehm, and, you know, I think the, I’m pretty sure the NHK news in English were, at least, slightly shorter, but I don’t think in essence that they were very different. I thought it was just their policy to, in Japanese, and say, “Okay, let’s not have people panic, so we don’t broadcast the worst, worst pictures.” But then, of course, I mean, are you going to show, I mean, I just recently watched a film about photographers in South Africa, ehm - well worth watching, actually, The Bang Bang Club - and, eh, they were, you know, re-enacting some scenes that sh, seriously, probably should not be in a newspaper, when you
have a mutilated body that is burned and beaten to death and both, and a bit of
everything. Of course, every newsagency, television station, they, they do censor, they do
say, “Okay, we pick this picture over another.” Eh, and we, we portray something in
such a fashion rather than in another…

Yeah.

...and we make, we do that on purpose. Whether it is political or because we have a
certain philosophy. Eh, so I think, I really don’t think language is such a big, eh, a big,
big issue in there. Eh, but then again, I think I was very surf, I think I had very surface
connections and I think that was maybe an asset. Maybe if you have kids in school and,
eh, your wife is doing everything all the time, and you have too little Japanese, and, es,
especially in Tokyo, there’s, I think, well, even I know people in Fukushima who don’t
have much Japanese, but if that is the situation and you have your entire life there, and
you have got serious pragmatic, practical problems that will arise from this and this and
this, and for the kids, they are not going to play outside, and so on, especially if they are
young, you can’t explain it to them…

Yeah.

ehm, and there, not getting the information, there, not, sort of, being really able to, eh,
and that was partly my decis, why I decided not to go up to Fukushima because I thought,
“If something happens, even if they drive with an announcement, those are not going to
be in English.” And there, language would have been an issue. Eh, so I would be totally
reliant on others ringing me, thinking of me, ehm, “Oh, he’s ringing, he’s ringing because
something has happened.” And that’s, so, I wasn’t in a very vulnerable situation, at least
not in every respect, but I also chose not to put myself in a situation where I would have
been worse, at least that was my reasoning.

Yeah, that’s, that’s really, that’s, as I said, that tallies with what a lot of other people
have said to me, and a lot of it is geographic…

Uhm.

...the, this, one of the reasons why I tried to speak to people from a variety of different
places, where you were based and the, sort of, the threats you were exposed to, whether
they were real or not, the threats you felt exposed to...

Uhm.

...had a huge impact on your information needs and on, by relationship to that, your, your
language needs.

I think in that, in that respect, Tokyo is, is, more, is, is better now to those not being
particularly skilled in Japanese because, although some things may break down, but you
can still get to the airport somehow…

Yeah.

...or you can, you could, could even pay a taxi, of course, you would need a lot, a lot of
money but, ehm, it is, somehow it is possible, somehow it is, it is well connected and you
are, it’s not like being stuck in, in, in a car or on a bus somewhere on the motorway not
knowing when you can go, so I think, and that’s, of course, it’s also another, you know,
that’s why companies go there, because the infrastructure is best and, eh, but, ehm, I
mean, now I see the benefits of somewhere that, it’s not Tokyo, but still, of course, it is
inaka [Note: means rural with a slight derogatory nuance in this context] compared to Tokyo…
Yeah.
...but, ehm, I’m pretty thankful, appreciative of being here. I am learning a bit more, although my world is still largely German and English…
Yeah.
...at work, but, ehm, it’s just the necessity is, is a bit bigger...
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
...and eh, I really don’t get people, you can’t live in a community, just you cannot live in a country for fifteen years plus and not be able to speak the language. That is just, you can speak it very badly, fine, but if, unless you have no interest, and no, none whatsoever, that’s not going to happen…
Yeah.
...so I think bottom line is they, they really don’t care, just, they, they could be on Mars…
Yeah...
...and they...
...they live in this kind of bubble of...
Yeah.
...whatever they make.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/6 Interview with Participant 23

Researcher: And then, like, really the way I start the interview is just very generally tell me what happened to you in the 2011 disaster [laughter].

Participant: Ehm, right so, I was, I lived in a dorm in with, eh, Japanese college students, actually, and a few people who went to university with me when we were studying in {a well-known university in Tokyo}. Ehm, and they were mostly French so, em, we spoke English and, I didn’t write it down, but we did speak a bit of French as well. Em, but, myself and another girl had joined the kyudo club, archery club, so we were actually on our way back from morning practice. And we were in, we were about three or four flights underground inside {a subway station in central Tokyo}, em, and suddenly there was this, just, blaring alarm, and we were looking at each other going, “What’s going on?” And everyone downstairs waiting for the train, em, started going crazy, like, you know, running up the stairs and, em, and then it started to shake, em, it was a bit, it was a bit surreal because, ehm, all the stones seemed to be grating off each other. It was very, em, we were, we were quite deep underground. So then, I suppose we did panic a bit, but we tried to, we kept it together and walk up the stairs, like - there were old people, like, pushing other people out of the way, so that was very, em - we stopped to help a woman with a buggy, ehm, so we carried the buggy up for her while she, she carried the, her child up the stairs. Em, and then, we, we just, everyone was, kind of, standing around upstairs and just watching all the, the buildings shaking, and there was a big rollercoaster {nearby}, and just everything was shaking and, eh, there was no phone reception, also, obviously, so we didn’t know what we were, eh, what we should do. So, we hung around probably for about half-an-hour to an hour, em, and then decided that, em, we would walk home, em, because, eh, initially, at first, it was very, we couldn’t get any information, em, and, I’m not sure it was because of the language aspect, I think it was because everyone was asking, everyone was asking the guards the, who worked in the station where we were. They were not able to answer, like, when will the train come back, what’s happening, so we started to walk the, usually about a two-hour walk from there to our dorm, but the streets were packed, the, just, it was, like, a, just, a sea of people, so probably took about three to four hours. Ehm, and we, just, we walked back and, like, the a, the afterquakes were happening, em, - the aftershocks, sorry - and, em, we still had no idea about the tsunami, and we were walking past, eh, I think a car dealer’s, every shop on that road had their televisions turned out to face the windows so that people could see what was happening, and that was the first time that we saw, em, anything, but then again, like, we, kind of, we, we weren’t really getting that much information because all these headlines were in Japanese and kanji [Note: the Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system] and, just, em, yeah, em, so we, just, kind of, walked and we stopped at every station and we were like, “Are the trains working?” “No, not yet.” “Okay.”

[Laughter]

So, we did eventually get back, em, and we saw some really amazing things along the way, though, like, not, em, people with injuries and stuff being, like, escorted by the police and, em, obviously the buildings are earthquake, eh, proof but, eh, some have, like, bricks then on the facade and the earthquake, obviously, shakes the bricks loose so they fall and, I suppose, hit people and, em, buildings, scaff, we walked under some scaffolding, like the geniuses that we are…
...and the next thing we heard this massive, just, clanging noise and we realized why the,
they wear helmets. Em, we didn’t do that again. Ehm, yeah, that was, that was basically
it. We just walked home.

And then, once you got home...

Yeah.

...what did you do? What was, because you said there was no phone reception, right?

Yeah.

So what was, what was your first, kind of...

Ehm...

...goal once you got home?

...ehm, Internet. Well, check to make sure nothing was broken in the house, eh, the, the
gas was all right and stuff like that and, yeah, just get the, get my computer on, get, em,
checking seeing what was happening, em, online, have a look at, yeah, and go around
knocking on my neighbour’s door, “Are you okay?”

[Laughter]

It was great. Yeah. Em.

And, wh, can you remember what sort of websites or what online did you actually look at
to get information?

Em, for news, I was sticking to, really actually at first it was just anything you could get,
you ju, you di, I didn’t really have much head for, “Is this reliable or not?” I was just like,
“What’s happening?” Ehm, probably BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera...

Okay.

...ehm, eh, my dad is a bit of a nut about, em, reliable news sources. So.

So you felt it was important for you to, kind of, compare different news sources? Is that
what you mean or?

Em, because, yeah. em, I was having a look at some of the Japanese as well, but I wasn’t
satisfied at all with what I was getting from it, so, and, I don’t, I don’t know why, I
suppose it’s just natural that you, you do look at more than one, ehm, so, then I was
seeing that there was differences in figures and stuff, so, em, I said I would stick to, em,
probably what I felt was more reliable. Em, Facebook, not, not for news, but Facebook
for contacting people, making it. A lot of people actually got in contact with me to check
that I was all right so I, em, I replied as well, just.

I see. And just to go back, you said that you weren’t satisfied with the, the Japanese.
Could you expand on that a bit more?
Em, well, okay, first, first of all, I wasn’t satisfied with my own level of Japanese to understand the stuff, so I felt like I might be missing things. I was, obviously, very stressed out so, you know, not able to process it properly. Em, also, just, em, I don’t, it was slow, it, it was really slow. The TV, had the TV on, em, was the one thing, em, and I, I ne, I had a TV, but I never turned it on...

[Laughter]

...not in the year I was there. So the TV was on, em, but the TV was really just replaying footage of the tsunami and saying, you know, so, “We don’t know how many are dead,” basically. And no-one knew but I felt more, I felt more comfortable in hearing that in English than [laughter] I did in Japanese. So.

“It’s very funny that you should say, you know, “I had a TV but I never switched it on.” I’ve heard that so many times [laughter]. People like, “Does this plug even work? [laughter] “How do I get this, how do I switch this thing on?” “They changed, they changed to digital maybe.” [laughter]

[Laughter]

Yeah.

It’s, but it’s interesting that in such a situation, you go to the TV, I mean. Do you - uh, this is really not, not necessarily arranged, it’s just something that’s coming to me - do you know why you went for TV or? Was there, was there something about it or?

Eh, it was, just felt secure as well, and just to have the TV on. I was, I think I was still checking the Internet but the TV was on as well, em, yeah.

Oh, eh, just to, to let you know, that’s what most people have said, that they were using both, like, they’d have the, kind of, online and looking at the, the TV, if they, if they had power and if they had a connection and all that kind of thing, they were looking at the TV the whole time. It’s interesting that you should say that, kind of, feeling of, your, I’m still just trying to figure out, because I did the same, I went straight to the TV but I’m not sure why. Like, I didn’t go to the radio. [Note: On recollection, I did use the radio, in fact, but only after using TV and Internet first.]

Yeah.

Did you think of that or did you use that or?

I didn’t have, I didn’t actually have a radio, em, no it was, it was very, like, “What, what’s, what can I get to now?” So...

Yeah.

...just turn it on, em, yeah.

And, of course, I’m fascinated by the Facebook thing because it’s very mixed. Some people have said it was great...
...some people have said it was a nuisance. I, I, I don’t know, y, y, you, it seems, for you, was it useful?

Yes, yeah. Definitely. Ehm, em, eh, if not necessarily for me, definitely for other people to get in contact with me. Ehm, em, I, I think other people were actually more - this is going to sound bad - I think other people were more scared about it than I was. Em, {redacted}, my, my friend who I was with at the time, she’s, eh, French, but she’s, she had been studying in Canada for a long time, so, em, I don’t know, I feel like she had had some, maybe, some experience with, eh, earthquakes or disasters, I’m not sure, but she, she was panicking when we were underground and I was looking at her, kind of, going, “It’s fine. It’s okay. It’ll be fine. It’ll be fine.” And I was holding her hand saying, “It’s, it’s fine.” Em, I, I, you see, it didn’t hit me for a while, for a good while until, like, yeah, until after, I, I suppose, the, the, the, the death toll came in, like.

Oh, that’s absolutely, that tallies with what a lot of people have said that different people reacted in different ways and at different times, like, some people were very panicked on the day and then got, kind of, better and better as things went on, and some people were, you know, outwardly fine on the day and then got more nervous as the, the disaster progressed, so I think there’s no such thing as one, sort of, normal reaction in that, that, kind of, like, a natural disaster circumstance. I’m really interested in the alarm going off in the subway.

Can you remember - again I know it’s asking a lot to think back, but - was there any announcement?

This is the thing, it’s, it’s a little bit blurry now. I think what it was, was, was it was someone, I think before even an alarm went off it was some, some man, you know, the, the standard old man train voice saying something, but, he, he sounded, he sounded a bit, a bit, not panicked, I suppose, but, em, eh, he wasn’t that, it was difficult enough to catch it, like, it’s all, I used to find it, like, very difficult to catch things the first time round on the PA system at the train stations. Em, and then, of course, everyone panicked so there was no chance of, of hearing it really, em, and then there was like, eh, I think there was siren kind of noise, but, and then, not too long afterwards everywhere started shaking.

But, ehm, the alarm, yeah, I’m pretty sure there was a PA announcement because a lot of, people started panicking before the siren even started going off, so.

I suspect that that’s the case because I’ve spoken to people who were in the metro at the time and they’ve s, said much the same thing as you. There was a station guard or somebody came on in Japanese, you know, with a panicked voice...

Yeah.

...or somewhat panicked or strange voice and, like, no other languages even though, you know...

Yeah.

...I’m interested always in the language aspect...

Yeah.

...I’m a little bit surprised, I thought there might be, sort of, recorded messages or something that they might have but not, not.
I don’t, I don’t think they do at all, yeah. I probably would have caught it if it was in English, I’d say.

Well, yeah, I, but this is the thing, we’re talking about, kind of, ifs and buts now at this stage so we, who knows, I really agree with what you said about something like the, kind of, comforting nature or hearing something in your own language. Like, you might have understood things in Japanese, but even if you understand it, when you’re stressed…

Yeah.

...like I was stressed, I’d lived in Japan eight years - uh, no, that’s not right because at that time - I’d lived in Japan six, eh, six-and-a-half years or seven years at that stage so I could speak Japanese…

Yeah.

...I could read Japanese but I wanted information in English just...

Yeah.

...for that comfort feeling because I was desperately stressed. I was definitely, I, I wasn’t sure I was catching things in Japanese...

Yeah.

...and then it changed to the nuclear story...

Yeah.

...and I couldn’t understand the Japanese of that...

Yeah.

...I, kind of, like, I’d like to, sort of, move into so, maybe, the next day, what was? So the Friday was the day the earthquake hit...

Yeah.

...you were back in your dorm, kind of, catching up with the other neighbours...

Yeah.

...maybe contacting people at home. Then, what happened as, as it moved into, kind of, Saturday and Sunday?

Well, em, you could start to see, like, that there were very, ehm, I suppose very different, em, mentalities that different people had. Ehm, like, amongst the, the, the foreign students, anyway, because we, kind of, did, we, kind of, did stick together the, the foreign students, and everyone, and the Japanese people in their groups, because a lot of the, the people also had, they had family in northern Japan so, em, a lot of people left the dorm, even by the next day. Em, some people, some of the foreign students were, eh, being advised to go back to their country already at that stage before the…

Wow.
...em, or, em, just, yeah, didn’t feel safe because they, this is such a bad, em, shock after
the earthquake. Em, this wou, could have been towards the evening of the next day. Em,
I’m not completely sure what I did the next day. I think I made, hmm, the, because the
powerplant stuff came out the next day, didn’t it?

Yeah.

So, em, I think the, uhm, yeah, some people were being told that they should go home. So
some people said, “That’s it. I’m, I’m going to, I’m going to get a ticket and leave.” And,
eh, a French girl, eh, a different French girl…

[Laughter]

...there was a, a few of them [laughter] em, in the dorm and I decided, we didn’t, we
didn’t want to leave yet, but we didn’t want to be in Tokyo because it was a bit too close
so we decided we would go to Okinawa [laughter]. [Note: this is a Japanese prefecture
made up of Pacific Islands about 2,000km from Tokyo.]

[Laughter]

Stress sends you, I think, do crazy things. So, we, [laughter] night bus tickets to
Hiroshima and then another night bus ticket for the next night to Fukuoka, or two nights
later - we were going to spend two days in Hiroshima. Who would go to Hiroshima when
there is a possible nuclear? My, everyone thought I was, I was, yeah, we were, I suppose
we were a little bit out of touch with, em, reality [laughter]. And we bought plane tickets
to Okinawa, em, so, we spent the day, kind of, discussing that and, and I suppose just
talking to people at home. Eh, I went to the supermarket. Nothing in the supermarket. I
have, I have photographs actually of empty shelves, like, em, no, no water first of all. No
bottled water. Em, because they told us not to drink the tap water. Em, not bottles of tea.
No, no Coca Cola. There was n, n, no form of liquid. Eh, no food, really, like, no fresh
food obviously. A lot, very little dry food. No nappies…

[Laughter]

...ehm, the supermarket was, was scarily empty, there was, there was nothing there. It was
so low. It was, also, that was part of the reason we decided we needed to get away
because we needed to go somewhere where we wouldn’t have to worry about where we
were going to get food. Eh, eh, so, yeah. That was, for that night that I think, that we
were going to, or the night after, maybe? And, and we did. We got on the, we did get on a
night bus…

Yeah.

...and we went to Hiroshima and we met up with some other foreign students from, who
had studied at [the same university as the participant] who were currently, they were
touring Japan at the time and they had been in Osaka at the time of the earthquake and
they said they were, they were actually at Spa World…

[Laughter]

...they felt, they felt nothing, they said, not even a, a, a tremor. So that was, we did, we
actually felt a little bit relieved when we heard that. We were, “So that’s not so bad.”

Yeah.
Ehm, but that same morning when we arrived and went to the hostel and met up with
them, we were all going to go to Miyajima, ehm, they got a phone call from their
university, em, {a university in the US}, ehm, I can’t remember which one but, em, they
were being told they had to come back because of the nuclear, em, so they had to go back
to Tokyo because of the nuclear thing. Ehm, and, of course, some idiot put out that, em,
fake warning about the, the cloud of radioactive something going to the Philippines and
one of the girls is half-Filipina and she was, she was in tears, she was, like, distraught I
think, like because didn’t BBC pick it up or something? Em, eh, so that got, I was still, I
was still, like, “We’ll just go to Okinawa [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and it’ll be fine. We’ll just go to Okinawa and we’ll wait there. I just don’t, I don’t want
to go home.” Because I felt like if I went back to {my university in Ireland} they might
not let me come back to Japan. Ehm, and, I’m a bit stubborn.

[Laughter]

But my, my French friend then started to panic when we were all together and the people
from {the US} seemed to know and did know so much more about it than we did because
of, em, because of the, their university sends a huge amount of foreign students and
they’re responsible for their foreign students. Ehm, so, they, they had heard all this stuff
about the nuclear disaster because we had been travelling through the night so we hadn’t
really checked the news in a while. Em, so then she panicked and she said, you know,
“I’m going to, I’m actually just going to go back to Tokyo with them and I’m going to,
eh, go back to France, I think.” So, em, so then we all ended up going back to Tokyo
[laughter]...

[Laughter]

...that night after arriving on the night bus that morning...

Oh dear.

...em, yeah. Em, it was very subdued, it was, em, the shinkan, the shinkansen [Note:
Japanese bullet train] stat, the shinkansen part of the train stations were so crowded, and
they were like, “We’re never going to get a seat.” Em, and we realized that everyone was
leaving Tokyo [laughter] so the train was empty going to Tokyo, em, and, yeah, eh, just,
kind of, got off there. We all wandered back to our respective homes. We said goodbye
and then wandered back to our respective homes and, em, that was, kind of, when I was
talking to my parents and I said I would leave Japan. Oh, I talked to {my university in
Ireland} first and then made them promise that if I left I could come back [laughter].

[Laughter]

Em, and, yea, I, and, to be honest, it was, it was, quite, quite a lot of it was not being able
to get information. Em, I mean, I had the Internet source but just not being able to talk to
anyone about it as well because all of my friends were leaving. I said I would leave
because I didn’t want to be alone at the dorm, em, in, I suppose, the state that I was in at
the time because, em, eh, yeah, what was it? My, so my dad had got on, my dad actually
is a diplomat so he was in {a country in Europe} working at the embassy and he said why
didn’t I, em, fly out to him instead so he got, he organised everything, got the ticket
booked and, em, he told me to go to the embassy the next day to get, em, because I had
registered for the embassy mailing list...
Uhuh.

...but I think it didn’t get, because I was picking up a package as well at the time from the embassy and I think it didn’t get, it didn’t go through, it didn’t get processed properly because I didn’t get any communication from the embassy. So my dad sent me in anyway to get the iodine tablets they were giving out in case of a nuclear meltdown which I went and I got when I was at home. Em, and subsequently found out that the Japanese government didn’t tell anyone that there was a meltdown so I had this iodine tablet

[laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and I was going, “Look, I’m going to take it and see if I’m fine now.” [laughter]

[Laughter]

Should have just taken it and seen, like.

[Laughter] But, em, it’s interesting about the communication from the embassy, em, this is something that has varied very much from nationality to nationality, em, some embassies gave a lot of communication, some embassies didn’t give so much. But, as you said, if, if your registration hadn’t properly worked then the Irish embassy may have been trying to get in contact with people but just you weren’t on the.

I think, you see, I think they did contact people, ehm, I think, because I had never gotten the, em, subsequently to filling in the form and handing it in, I had actually never gotten any emails, so I figured that it was, em, that it was, eh, a no-go, that, that…

Yeah.

...it just hadn't been processed. To be honest, em, I only registered for the mailing list because my dad is a diplomat and he was like, “Register. Go in and register with the embassy.”

[Laughter]

“Register with the embassy. None of your friends have done it. Go register.” So I registered. Ehm.

As it turns out it didn’t [laughter] it didn’t do too much good, but I think, in principle, would you say you changed any of your behaviours...

Yeah.

...since the, em?

Well, I definitely registered this time [laughter]. [Note: after the earthquake, the participant had returned home to Ireland, graduated, and then returned to Japan to take up employment]

[Laughter]

Eh, yeah, em, yeah, I, I heard the Irish embassy was pretty good actually. That, I didn’t get the email, but that being said, em, the person who knew that I was studying in Japan
in the Irish Embassy in Tokyo, em, because he knew my father, did email my father straight away and say, “Is she alright?” And my dad said, “Yeah, she’s fine.” So.

Okay, so from that, kind of, other network...

Yeah.

...they would have.

...I’m sure even if, em, if, I’m sure he would have, the embassy would have made an effort to get in touch with me even though I wasn’t registered properly. Em, it’s because they knew I was in Tokyo, so.

Yeah. So, em, you said {your university in Ireland} like, you contacted them first or did they contact you first?

They contacted me first. They, em, they were pretty great. They contacted.

Can you remember how?

Email.

Ah, email. Okay.

Em, there, they probably would have tried to call, like, but there were no phones, so.

That’s the thing, yeah. Yeah. This is one thing that a lot of people have said that they were, kind of, dependent on online communication...

Yeah.

...certainly at the early stages, and if they hadn’t had that, it would have been a very different...

Yeah, it would have been very...

...situation.

...very hard.

Yeah. Em, so you’re in {the country in Europe where your father was based}, then...

Yeah.

...what I’m interested in asking about - I’ve asked this, I think, to everyone - for you, when did the disaster end...

Eh...

...if it did end?

...uhm, I think I was in {that country in Europe} for about three weeks, three-and-a-half, and I went back to Japan but, em, I feel like, there wasn’t really, I mean, there was clearly a start point for me, but there was never really and end point because, because it just took
so long to sink in, what was happening. Em, maybe, probably about the time that I, I
negotiated with my parents to let me go back [laughter].

[Laughter]

Ehm, so about three weeks, three weeks later, I’d say.

Yeah.

Ehm, because, because my, obviously my parents did not want me to go back at all, em,
and a bit selfish, em, I realize now. At the time I didn’t realize I was being selfish, but I, I
really did want to go back. Em, I was worried about really stupid things like my stuff
was, it was there, what am I going to do without my things [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...they’re probably going to throw it on the road.

But these things become important to you, you know. And, how, how did you get the
information to make that decision to go back?

Ehm…

Or did you get information to decide to go back [laughter]?

...it was totally backed up by research. No. I, I think I just, we, we were keeping an eye
on, eh, yeah, em, BBC, CNN, and things. My dad really wasn’t keen on me going, to go
back and I think he might have actually had, em, other sources but he didn’t want to tell
me because he didn’t want to worry me. Ehm, for example, like, em, eh, the embassy in,
in Tokyo, I feel like they had more information about people and the, the American
Embassy in Tokyo as well, and, and different places. So he wasn’t keen on me going
back because he knew that there was, em, the nuclear pollution? - is that, is that a -
radiation! Nuclear pollution? [Note: the participant briefly covered her face with her
hands in mock embarrassment]

[Laughter]

He knew there was radiation issues, ehm, but I was, I was, kind of, at this point it was, it
wasn’t really relying on the most, the most reliable sources, I was going for the source
that was backed on what I wanted to believe. It was totally like, “I’m going back.”

Eh, the, but, I think from what a lot of people have said to me, there were places you
could get information but some of it was contradictory and some of it wasn’t very clear,
so a lot of people just took what they could get and made their own call, made their own
decision, so. Like, one of the things that I’m struggling with is whether language really
did make a difference at all in people’s decisions. I’m not so sure it did. I don’t know, in
your case, do you feel language was a factor in your decision-making processes?

Eh, uh, I feel like, maybe, to, to some extent. Eh, where language chipped in more was
probably, ehm, the fact that the Japanese, the Japanese sources were giving, eh, or, the
‘reliable’ [Note: at this point the participant made an air quotes gesture around the word
reliable] - I don’t want to use…

Air quotes [laughter]!
air quotes on a, on a tape but the ‘reliable’ Japanese sources were just so different from all the Eng, the English-language sources. Em, so, it, that was probably the only thing that, that really, that probably gave me pause more than the negative reports did. The, kind of, the Japanese, it, they did seem to be lying about it, because, em, the, the information was so different and that actually worried me more than hearing that the situation was bad from English sources. Em, so if anything, that probably made it, that’s probably what kept me away for about three, three-and-a-half weeks. Yeah.

Yeah, I think, the, the that seems to be a lot of the people who’ve talked about, like, language as an issue, it has been to do with their interaction with media...

Yeah.

...that seems to have been one of the main things. You, you mentioned Facebook, I know, did you use any other social media in the, in the disaster?

Ehm, no I don’t, em, I don’t think so. Eh, I, I was, the, chiefly I think just to communicate, communicate with people. I didn’t, wasn’t really in the mood to be on, like, on Twitter hashtag earthquake. Eh, it was, em, [laughter] it was, I was, just, just to talk to people, let people know I was alright, em, see what other people were doing. I was very, I was very reliant on, em, I wanted to know, I was probably just so annoying, I was like, “What are you doing? Tell me your plans. I’m going to base my decisions off what you decide to do.” Em, one of those people. I suppose I was just looking for someone to reassure me and, if you weren’t reassuring me, so I was getting more like, “Aahhh!”

Very, very interesting that you should say that because, em, a lot of the, sort of, local government associations in Japan or NPOs or that, they’re saying that in a disaster, people need community. One of their recommendations for future disaster preparations is that foreign residents should be more part of their communities. So it’s just like there what you were talking about there about...

Yeah.

...reassurance or what are you going to do or what’s your plan?

Yeah.

At the time of the March 11th disaster, did you feel part of your local community?

No. [Laughter] No. Em, I, I’d say most, at least in m, my case and I think for most of the, the foreign stude, the exchange students in my dorm, we barely, kind of, felt part of the dorm community...

[Laughter]

...nevermind the, the, eh, the local community, yeah. Em, I’d say probably the only time we went to any local office is when we went to {the ward office} to, to register for our, register our domicile, or address.

And why do you think that was that you didn’t feel part of even the, the dorm or the?

It was, it was the language definitely. For sure, yeah, em, the, the dorm manager? - I sup, the, the person in charge of looking after the dorm - was, kind of, a middle-aged Japanese man, he was very nice but, em, terrified of us. Just, Eng, terrified of English and just that we couldn’t speak Japanese and I think he was expecting, like, that we would be able to
speak Japanese and it was, we were the first, it was the first year there had ever been non-
Japanese people in the dorm, so it was a bit of a shock for him as well because, em, they,
they all, like, after the earthquake, though, they all, like, where they were like, “Are you
okay?” Just trying to communicate, I mean, it was still in Japanese, it was still a struggle,
but they really, they did try and, em, afterwards when I went back, there was, there were
only two exchange students who went back. Eh, and the, the other girl was, kind of, off
away and, like, kind of, doing her own thing, em, but the, the, this, the dorm manager?,
the guy made a, like, made a real effort to introduce me to, because they had a new batch
then of Japanese students come in who were starting first year in university, so, he was
trying to get me to socialize [laughter]. Yeah, it was.

*In a way, it sounds like you might have been more part of the community after...*

...the disaster [laughter] in a way.

For sure, yeah. Em, I, I got to know the Japanese girls, I used to eat dinner with them
every night then, em, yeah.

*That’s interesting. That’s very interesting. Did, did you feel any reactions towards you
from the Japanese people in your life based on what you did during the disaster?*

Ehm, well, I, I got one “Oh, thank you for staying in Japan” [laughter], you know,
because, I think because so many people left and it was, it was, like, it was actually off an
old woman who I, I didn’t, I had never met before on a train and she was like, “Thank
you for being in Japan.” And I was like, “Okay. You’re welcome.” Em, eh, yeah, people
were, I feel like people were a) surprised, because I had one girl - now this is, em, eh, {a
well-known Tokyo university}, so they, em, are big in English, em, Faculty of Liberal
Arts, they call it, all their lectures are in English and they’re basically, it’s the place to go,
I think, in Japan if you want to learn English, em, study English in university, so they all
had some kind of experience abroad, being in contact with a lot of exchange students in
my faculty, but - she said, “I don’t know why, why you’re here. If I could get my family
to, I, I could leave and go live with, with my aunt, but I couldn’t get my family to leave
and that’s the only reason that I’m still here.”

*That’s interesting.*

I heard that off one girl and other people agreed with her. They thought if they could
move their entire family somewhere else, somewhere safe, they would have. Em, so,
yeah, kind of, half, I suppose, half of people were surprised, there was a lot of grate,
grateful, is that? I was like...

*Uhm.*

...but it was, kind of, I was just selfish, I didn’t want to leave.

[Laughter] Yeah, but, I, I think, em, that rings true for a lot of the, the people who did
stay in, in Japan. They felt it was, kind of, almost like a badge of honour, in a certain
way. Em, I know some people I have spoken to have talked about it as almost, like, a
business benefit or something, that they did better afterwards or...

Yeah.

...they’d be introduced as so-and-so, she stayed.
Yeah, yeah. Em, that, that did happen, em, jobs. Got a lot of job offers for Eng, teaching English because…

[Laughter]

...ehm, obviously, a lot of the teachers in Tokyo left, em…

Never even thought of that.

{redacted}

But, these are other, these are other, kind of, consequences of the disaster which I am also interested in. I think it is fascinating how there were lots of, obviously, hugely dangerous things to focus on but the were, not necessarily positive things, but just unexpected kind of things.

Yeah, yeah.

Um. Ehm, I’m also interested, I know you mentioned how {your university in Ireland} contacted you, did you get contact from {your Japanese host university} after the disaster?

I, I don’t actually think so. I might have gotten contact, like, a few, eh, that’s a hard one. I’m not sure, I don’t think so. If I did, I didn’t reply [laughter].

[Laughter]

Ehm, I think we got contact about that, a couple of days later that the university would be closed on certain days and stuff. It was all very, like, I feel like it was administrative stuff more than, “Hello, are you alright?” Ehm, I suppose they, they leave it up to the home...

Yeah...

...university.

...maybe it’s not their job, you know.

Yeah.

In a similar vein, did you get any contact from {your} ward or?

I don’t think so, no. Ehm, maybe they contacted the dorm and made sure the dorm would check that everyone was okay. That could have been it. Ehm, I might have gotten some, kind of, like, flyer, a Japanese flyer or something in my mailbox but, em, eh, it could have come in, also, the period of time where I was gone afterwards, so if it had been three or four days before I got anything there was a, a good chance, but, em, the, the dorm manager probably thought, “Oh, you’re not coming back.” It was, like [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I don’t know, yeah.
Yeah. But, I mean, you know, some people have talked to me, you know, “Oh, yeah, I might have gotten some Japanese pamphlet or something but I probably threw it away or something.”

Yeah.

I’m not sure that the way they communicate in the ward offices is a way to really get the message across yet.

Yeah, no. Especially not when they know that you’re, em, that you’re, you’re registered as not being a Japanese per, you’re registered as a, coming to Japan to study, em, and that’s, I mean, nine times out of ten, that’s studying Japanese…

Yeah.

...so it is a bit crazy to send someone a, a flyer in all Japanese, yeah, em.

I, I think it very much depends on the ward as well, like, from what I understood from talking to different offices and that is if, if they have money...

Mmm.

...and usually volunteers they’ll put it in multiple languages...

Yeah.

...or Easy Japanese.

Yeah.

Have you ever come across that Easy Japanese? Have you heard of it or?

No, is it?

Eh, basically what it is, so instead of giving you all of the, you know, kanji [Note: the Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system] and so on, they give you the kanji but also, like, the furigana [Note: another Japanese script inserted specifically to aid the reading of Chinese characters] or...

Um.

...you know, on, on, overhead...

Yeah.

...or they avoid using technical terms and using easier...

Yeah.

...basic terms and stuff like that. Em, a lot of the, the international, kind of, associations are focusing on it now because they’re not sure that English is an effective language to do the communicating with foreigners in...

Yeah.
...which, you know, maybe that’s a good argument because depending on where you
are...

Yeah.

...maybe Korean or Chinese or Portuguese would be more. [Note: the waitress comes
over to the table at this point and excuses herself in Japanese as she takes away our
empty coffee cups.]

I would say, especially, in, in, in {a town in West Japan near where the participan now
lives} you see a lot of Portuguese because there’s a huge Brazilian population. Em,
Filippina as well but they, em, they’re usually pretty good at English [laughter]...

Yeah.

...so, yeah, but.

Yeah, it’s just a consideration because they can’t translate into everything...

Yeah.

...like, they can’t accommodate for everybody, em, maybe it’s very, em, in a way it’s, kind
of, presumptuous of people...

Yeah.

...you know, like me coming from the West, you think, oh you must put it in English. It’s,
you know, maybe that’s not the best way...

Yeah.

...I’m still not tot, so sure about Easy Japanese either.

Yeah.

I’m not sure how useful that might be because even with furigana and, you know, that,
kind of, basic, more basic language, but I still think that might be quite challenging for
some people.

Yeah.

I don’t know. I don’t know whether that’s really the way to go. Kind of, the last question I
have is, kind of, going back to the community thing again. If you wanted to, to become
more part of the community, how would you go about it?

Eh.

Is there a way? Like, what do you think works?

Ehm...

Or would work?

...yeah, I, I would say what, kind of, works is, em, going queueing outside the city office
[laughter]...
...no, em, if you, it does require a certain level of Japanese, em, you, you can go, I know now, you can go and you can talk to people and you can find out, they do activities or things and participate and volunteer, but at the time, I, I was clueless. I had no, I didn’t know if that was a thing. Everyone talks about Japanese communities but at least when I was in, in Tokyo, em, I didn’t, I didn’t really experience that much, I didn’t see it that much. Ehm, so.

So when you were in Tokyo, what was your community?

Probably, em, people from school and people from, yeah, em, foreign students at the dorm and some old friends that I had made in {my university in Ireland}, Japanese friends. Em, so that was, and, eh, other friends from {my university in Ireland} studying in different universities and their friends, that kind of, yeah.

Yeah.

We had some Japanese friends because there was an interna, there was an international society at, eh, {my Japanese host university} but we, we didn’t really participate in it that much because it was, it was very much a “Let’s speak English” club...

[Laughter]

...em, but there was a, I have a good friend, {redacted}, from that group who, eh, she and a couple of her friends threw together a Wikipedia, like a Wiki, Wikia, of all the, the information and they did their best to translate it after the earthquake in fact. It’s gone now. I was, I was trying to find it for you, em, a couple of days ago, but, eh, obviously, it’s come down in the…

That’s really interesting.

...yeah.

That’s actually something that quite a few people have talked about how, you know, maybe I’ve, I’ve said or asked them, “Oh, did you have any experience of translation?” And they’d be like, “No.” And then when they think about it, they’d be like, “Oh well, but my friend did do such-and-such.” So, like, they were just basically as Japanese people, they were taking?

Taking, em, ah, I think, eh, just the Japanese government sources, I suppose. The, em, and the news, newspaper, just, headlines, articles, anything I suppose they could get their hands on, just translating it, em, safety information and…

Yeah.

...em, and these were, these were just college students…

Yeah.

...they were just, kind of, doing their best to, because they were part of this international club and because they had a lot of friends, it was really nice.
Oh yeah, it’s. it’s come up again and again, as I said. Just, you just reminded me and I was nearly going to forget to ask you, but did you check any government websites yourself?

Eh, MOFA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs had some stuff in English but it was, it was pretty poor. Not, not great anyway, from what I can remember. It was all, it was stuff that you could get anywhere else really. Em, I, I had a go at, do you know it had those emergency, the, the pages up with the information and the picture of Japan, like the little colourful, I don’t know, the earthquake epicentre and the little rings of earthquakes, but I was just like, it was all in Japanese, I was like, “I can’t do this, I’m, I’m too.” I was too stressed, I think to, to, to make sense of it so.

You’re actually, no, I’m really interested in this topic actually now because out of 23 people, you’re the first person to say they checked a government website. I’m wondering why.

Eh, yeah, I felt like they would know what they were talking about.

[Laughter]

It was like, I don’t, I, that’s a good question actually, because who knows, if, if something happened in Ireland, I doubt the government would be, “Let’s update our website.”

[Laughter] Em, yeah, I don’t know, it’s just that, it just, I thought it would be a good, I thought they would have, like, good information and it would be up-to-date and, em, yeah.

And so you said, “I thought they would have good information.” What was your final assessment of the?

Ehm, it was, it was hard to interpret, it was, they did have quite a lot of information but I couldn’t really, I couldn’t really understand it and then the English information that they had, the, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ehm, was just the, not a lot, there was a lot in the Japanese, there was not a lot in the English but the Japanese was very dense, em, I was just having a lot of trouble, like, figuring it out, yeah.

I’m so glad [laughter] I asked you about that now because I could have gone thinking that nobody ever checked a, a website. Em, because actually quite a lot of the ministries did do some sort of, eh, an English language...

Yeah.

...or Chinese language, or Korean language, or Portuguese language translation but, just like you said, if you compared the Japanese, let’s say, source and the, the translated version, it was a fraction...

Yeah.

...similarly, it also took quite a lot of time for them to get their websites up and running, some of them are still up there...

Yeah.

...so I have been able to see what day they got uploaded and some of them were up to three weeks after...
Yeah.

...so, you know, for somebody like you, you were already on the way back nearly
[later...]...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...at that stage, never mind anything else. But I’m really glad I asked you that now
because, em, like, it was something that I had been, kind of, interested, interested in. I
wonder, would your family background have made any difference, do you think?

Definitely, ehm, I’d say so, because my, because both my parents are civil servants,
actually. Em, and, yeah, I suppose, my dad also is, em, he loves web design and he loves,
hes the Internet, well, hes computers, so I’d, I probably have this, kind of,
feeling that, you know, government websites are, should be very together, well run, em,
so, yeah, and especially when I saw the Ministry of Foreign Affairs one, I, I was like,
“Aw, this will, this will be, this will be good, this will be.” I was a bit disappointed then,
but, em, yeah, that was...

[Laughter]

...because, em, I’d say because my dad is a, a diplomat as well, em, like, I was checking
the Irish, actually, when I think about it, I was checking the Irish Embassy websites as
well, but, em, nothing, em, I know the, the, there was a little bit of information about the
St Patrick’s Day Parade being cancelled...

[Laughter]

...ehm, em, I had been in Harajuku a few days before and they had the, the little, they had
the little, they had little Irish flags and Japanese flags...

Yeah, yeah.

...all along Omotesando, so that was cancelled. Em, but mostly it just, kind of, the, I think
there was something on the, the embassy website about “Please get in contact with us,”
you know, “Are you okay? If you’re in, eh, some kind of situation where you can’t get in
contact with people.” And, but, em, yeah, there was just not a lot of information going
around...

Yeah.

...em, and I found out, I think that was how I found out that the Irish Embassy in Tokyo’s
website was just very infrequently updated [laughter]. I was like, “Uhh.’ [Note: she made
an exasperated gesture raising her hands above her head] This was updated 2008...

[Laughter]

...what? Uh, yeah, em.

But I think, like, what you said a little bit earlier on, em, a lot of the reason why there was
n, no information from the, sort of, foreign side is because the Japanese side didn’t have
it either...

Yeah.
...or weren’t giving it or, you know, I think there was just generally a lack of information, especially, ah, I mean, certainly about the nuclear issue...

Yeah.

...em, but possibly even about, say...

Yeah.

...figures for deaths and stuff. It took a long time...

Yeah.

...for all of that to really start to filter through. I think that’s pretty much all I have unless there’s anything you think I haven’t covered that might be relevant in terms of how you gathered information or how you communicated with people.

No, I, yeah, I think that’s pretty much it.

Yeah, it was really interesting to hear because, as I said, some of what you said really tallied with, like many, many other people but then one or two of your interesting points which thankfully I didn’t forget because I would have been raging with myself now.

Because, as I said, you’re the first person who thought to, to check

The following is my recollection of some conversation that took place with the participant just after I had switched off the audio recorder and just before we parted.

The participant said that she felt foreigners actually did better in terms of information than the Japanese because they had access to other viewpoints and sources. She had Japanese people coming up and asking her what she knew. Especially when Japanese heard the foreigners were leaving, an element of them were like what do you know that we don’t. She also said that even if the information in Japanese had been translated for her she might not have considered it because she had lost trust in the official Japanese line and just did not believe what official sources were saying.

The following section was added by the participant after member checking.

“The only thing I thought of that I might have mentioned to you was that, looking back now in hindsight and with a deeper understanding of English learning in Japan, I do find it odd that there wasn't more information out there in English from Japanese sources; and that there wasn't more support from the university in Tokyo I was studying at. As I said before, I wouldn't have necessarily implicitly trusted Japanese sources even through English, but the lack of them was ominous and perhaps did impact my feelings of isolation and danger after my other foreign friends had left Japan. Now that I know that most Japanese people have at least a certain level of English, the course of events is more shocking to me.”
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s
identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant
passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/7 Interview with Participant 24

Researcher: So that’s it for the paperwork. In terms of the actual interview stuff, I usually
cut every interview with pretty much the same basic general question. I just ask people
to tell me what happened to them in the 2011 Disaster, so just start there and we’ll work
from there.

Participant: Should I give my background and how I started and all that.

Yeah, wherever you want to start.

Okay, so I arrived in Japan on the JET Program [Note: a government-run scheme to
employ foreign teaching and cultural-exchange staff in Japan - Japan Exchange and
Teaching] in 2007 in August and one of the first things I guess that our supervisors said
to us is that you have to be ready for a big earthquake because in Miyagi Prefecture it
happens about every 20 years. So that was one of the first things I remember about
moving to Sendai. I didn’t know where Sendai was when I arrived in Japan, well before I
was given the placement, em, but, em, yeah that was one of the first memories I have
about going to Miyagi is that there was going to be a big earthquake. So that was in 2007.
Em, we had had small earthquakes throughout and I think from the start at orientation in
Sendai we, em, had this earthquake simulator called Gurada that we all went on to see
what, you know, what an earthquake was like because obviously, em, back home we’re
on the Richter Scale and here they’re on like the, the scale that lots of people don’t
understand. So we’re like, “Okay.” We’re getting in there and it’s like ‘5 kyo’, like a 5
and strong one and, em, we’re like, “Okay, that’s alright,” and then it went up to 7, so we
all got to try and see but we were all seatbelted in so we were all just like, “Okay, so if a
big earthquake is going to happen, this is what it’ll be like.” So that started off at
orientation, em, every year throughout Sendai there would be specific orientations and
times for people to learn what to do in, in a disaster. So from the start we went on the
Gurada but at Sendai Orientation as well we were told to make a disaster prevention bag,
so in case of an earthquake we needed these specific things in a bag and you put it in your
genkan [Note: the space just inside your front door] so that if an earthquake happens you
grab it and you run out and, em, go to. In Sendai, because we knew this was going to
happen, a big earthquake was going to happen, we were all split into specific groups, em,
there were 70 of us living in Sendai and depending on where you lived you were placed
in a specific group. If you. For example, I lived in a group with, let’s say, 10-12 other
people. If a disaster happened, we were supposed to meet at a central location in our
neighbourhood, and then the 12 of us would meet. One person. We would all bring our,
our bags with us and then one person would be the leader and they were the ones to
contact the Board of Education. Now during an earthquake obviously everyone uses the
phone, right? So only one person was allowed to make a call. Em, and they would contact
the BOE, the Board of Education and leave a message saying these 12 people are safe.
Em, so that’s what, everyone knew what to do if a, if a disaster was to happen, but
through, throughout my time in Sendai up until 2011 we didn’t. Every year we would go
over the same things. Em, but we didn’t really need to use it, so a lot of people would
forget to make the bag or forget to, emh, put more food in, that type of thing. But
everyone had, like, photocopies of their passport, photocopies of, em, important
documents and put in waterproof bags, emh, they had the 10 yen coins because we know
that if there’s a disaster you can only use, well, you need 10 yen coins to use the phones.
Emh, okay, so that was for the JET Program side. For work personally, I worked at {an
office of the Sendai government}. {It} also did those types of orientations for foreigners
in Sendai because lots of foreigners that move to Japan don’t necessarily know what an
earthquake is or have experienced an earthquake. So {the office} would help foreigners
in the city with that type of information. And so, not only did I do orientation with the
ALTs in Sendai [Note: Assistant Language Teachers working on the JET Program] I also
did a lot of them with foreigners in Sendai that don’t speak Japanese. I did translate into
English a lot because there are a whole bunch of, em, students in, em, Sendai. Sendai is
well-known as a, em, I guess a university city. So, em, a lot of foreign students are in the
city and so they would come to, em, the disaster prevention days, and we would teach
them, em, how to, em, like use a fire extinguisher to, you know, going on the Gurada and,
em, so, yeah, that’s the main experience. I think, I think it was two days, oh yeah, so in
2011 February 22nd, if I’m correct, there was the earthquake in Christchurch, so from,
from that day a group of my coworkers and myself put together a group so that we could
fundraise for Christchurch because we wanted to help people in my hometown and
maybe send money home from Japan. So we had formed a group, we had put together a
few days where we were going to go out in the city and ask for donations and two days
before March 11th, so March 9th, there was a really big earthquake. I think it was 6.5 to 7
on the Richter Scale, I think. Em, and we were all sitting at our desk and it didn’t last for
very long but it was the worst earthquake I’d felt and everyone was, like, looking around
and I didn’t quite know what to do, but I was like, “Should I get under my desk?” because
most of the time I would be the only one looking around when earthquakes happened
because my co-workers were still on the phones when, when it was shaking so much, so,
em, during those times when I worked at {the Sendai government office} we had a plan
that if there were customers inside the {redacted} centre we had to make sure everyone
was okay, so even though it was, it didn’t last very long, we had to go and make sure that
everyone was okay, evacuate the building, make sure that everyone was fine, and then
allow everyone to go back in. Em, so, on that day I remember thinking, em, well I will
need some type of insurance in case something big happens. Like I didn’t really have
house, like, contents insurance, so I had been looking at that on the day of March 11th.
Now, the same, the next day, we were supposed to go out to Sendai City to ask for
donations so we had a lot planned and then obviously the Great East Japan Earthquake
happened on March 11th and then we, I think, we were very lucky in Sendai because we
knew what to do and straight away after the earthquake, I mean it went on for such a long
time, I was actually preparing a photoboard of the Christchurch Earthquake for the next
day so that we could go out and get donations, so that work actually stayed on that table
for a month and like going back into the same room, because we used the room for the
next month, but going in there and seeing that on the table, yeah, so that, that was quite a
lasting memory as well, but, em, yeah, so, I was in a room with one of my best friends in
Sendai and he was helping me make the photoboard. Started shaking and he was like,
“It’s okay, it’s going to stop.” And it didn’t stop, so I was just like, I actually couldn’t
really speak or breathe because I honestly thought the building was going to fall down on
us because what happened in Christchurch, all the buildings fell down, so I was waiting
for the buildings to fall down and then it didn’t and then he took a seat - he’s about 60 to
70, I think - but he took a seat and he, he was like, “It’s okay. It’s going to stop. It’s going
to stop.” So I was just standing there and I was like, “It’s not going to stop. So we need to
get out of here.” We, we went out of the room and everyone else was kind of screaming
and freaking out, and, em, we went and hid under, like, a desk, but the computer fell
down on him, so we were just trying to make sure that everyone was okay and then it still
kept going and going and going. It seemed like forever and then, finally once it kind of
died down, we all evacuated outside. Now it was really cold on that day and it actually
started snowing, em, for like thirty minutes after the earthquake and we were all in, like,
shortsleeve shirts and what not, but we all went outside and we had to make sure that
everyone evac, had evacuated the building, and there were a lot of, em, meetings on,
going on and conferences at the {redacted} centre, so. Because everyone was outside and
then everyone got on their phones and we were all kind of like, “Okay, that was a really
big earthquake,” but I don’t think in anyone’s mind we kind of thought, “Okay, what’s
going to happen next.” We were just like, “Okay, that happened. It stopped. There was no major damage. You know, the building didn’t fall down. Em, now what do we do?” kind of thing. Em, and then people were looking on their phones and we just started hearing about, like, the tsunami, about people, about lots of people being. I remember one source of news was, like, lots of people being washed up on a beach and we were just kind of like, “What?” We were all standing outside there thinking what was going on. So, I knew once that had finished, we had to get information out. As the job, as, my job {redacted} was to support foreigners in Sendai, so we were taken straight to the radio station because we had to start, em, translating into English. So, eh, every month they would do, how to prepare for a big earthquake or what to do if such a disaster happened, so we did it in Japanese, Chinese, Korean, English, and I think they did do it in Easy Japanese or the Easy Japanese ended up happening a lot later once they realised that it should have been done in Easy Japanese. Well, the Japanese that they did use, they tried to make it easy but I think they really made it a lot easier for, em, those who had just come to Japan. So, yeah, we spent the, like, a good three or four hours at the radio station, just constantly giving out the information. Now, my family found out that I was okay because the ALTs in Sendai heard me on the radio, because I think, during, the earthquake happened during school time so no one could go to their, em, designated refuge area. They were all at school so, em, if they didn’t take the day off, then we knew that they were at the schools and they were fine. So I was at the radio station, and a few of the ALTs, we all know that if an earthquake happens, turn on the TV or turn on your radio. And a lot of the ALTs in Sendai were given, like, wind-up torches, radios, chargers, so they were all listening to the radio station and so they were hearing the English announcements and that’s how my family found out that I was okay because the ALTs found out and then they were using Facebook to get that information out. Em, I didn’t, I didn’t really use Facebook before the earthquake and I didn’t realize how important it was going to be because it was just so easy to get information out. Em, so, em, so yeah, I was at the, em, radio station. We finished up there, went home, everything, like you know, we had no power, it was cold, em, everything was everywhere. Couldn’t stay there so we had to stay at a refuge centre, em, and I think it was, oh, there were so many people. I mean, we couldn’t even lie down. You were all just sitting there trying to figure out was going to happen next, because all you, you would hear a lot of stories coming through. Em, and I think we were lucky to be in the central part of the city because, yeah it was a really big earthquake, but. Yes there was damage, but it wasn’t as big of damage as what it could have been, and I think it’s because they were prepared for it, because there was a big, big earthquake a long, long, time ago that, you know, I guess they learned from, from that, so, em, yeah, stayed at refuge centre and then it was back to the {redacted} centre and that’s where I spent most of my time. Long, long, long, time, actually. It was just getting information out to foreigners, especially from Japanese to English, but we had a group of, say, 20 foreign students that worked closely with the {redacted} centre and they all spoke different languages so we were all placed together. The Japanese would be given to us and we would all start translating right then and there and then getting that information out. Em, as long as it was understandable, that was the good thing, but there was just so much information coming out that obviously it was really important to have it in English the most because a lot of, say, French speakers or German speakers can also understand English or some of them can, so it was good to have the information in English. So, yeah, a lot of the time was translating, we were also getting calls from overseas to, to see if we knew of people that were okay. Em, a lot of those calls were in English, em, and then, yeah, just providing information for the consulates, the embassies, and, em, I think a lot of the foreigners that know of the {redacted} centre, they would come for information, so we just had all the information available whether it be through radio. {redacted} I used to go to three to four radio programs anyway, and a couple of them were specifically about em, like if, like if there was a big disaster. So, em, having, like, that there already, I guess that information helped them, so we would go to those radio stations and, eh, and then a few others to make sure that the information was getting out. And then they would
just keep playing it. Em, and so, we would have the radio on at, at work to make sure, you know, that the information was correct. But we had to keep updating it. It lasted a long time. We were going to the radio station every day, em, because the information needed to get, to get out there, em, and I can’t even remember how long it went on for but most foreigners in Sendai, I guess, left to go home or went to a different part of Japan. Eh, my co-workers were like, “You should go home. You should go home.” But I was like, “Well, what am I going home to? I am going home to the same thing.” [Note: remember, this participant’s hometown was Christchurch] “You know, my parents don’t have anything either.”

[Laughter]

So I was, like, I wanted to stay and help because I was, after the earthquake in Christchurch my co-workers were so helpful, and they’d actually given a whole bunch of money to my family because my dad’s house was, em, quite badly damaged in the earthquake there. So even though they had been affected by a big earthquake themselves, they didn’t want the money back, they wanted to support my family, so I wanted to stay in Sendai and help. And just because it was fourth year on the JET Program so I had made so many friends and I was really good with my co-workers, so I wanted to stay and help them out and yeah. Where should I go from here? [laughter]

Oh no, I mean, it’s, it’s really it’s up to you. There’s, there’s a couple of things I’d like to, to just focus in on a bit just to make sure I’ve understood correctly.

Uhum.

So, when, ehm, the earthquake happened and you guys pretty much evacuated the building...

Uhum.

...em, you said that you sort of started checking for information. So that means, was, on your mobile phones?

We all tried on our phones, so some could get through, some couldn’t. But a lot of my Japanese co-workers were looking on the Internet or looking at news websites. Em, I didn’t even think to look at my phone. I, I was just like straight away, I can’t use my phone. So, em, yeah, I just remember standing there waiting for information from, from them, but they were all getting information through. I think people were trying to call people. I just knew that it was probably going to be impossible so, em, at that time, yeah, I didn’t really use my phone. It wasn’t until that night when. I had my, em, my wind-up re-charger, so...

Yeah.

...I charged my phone and rang home and thankfully got through. So...

I got it.

...em, so, I was able to talk to my family the same night.

That’s quite unusual, actually, for some of the people I’ve been speaking to but as you said, your family already knew you were okay because of the radio.

Right. And I think, yeah, because of the radio and people using Facebook.
Okay. Yeah. If you could talk a bit more about that. I'm, I wasn't a big Facebook user before the event either...

Uhum.

...I don't know that I'd still be a big user now, but definitely I see its usefulness.

Yeah, I didn't use Facebook for work purposes because I would get questions on Facebook from people where I wanted it directed to, like, my email. So I refused to use Facebook but I did have a page.

Yeah.

So after the earthquake, well once it had passed and I looked through all my comments and that I saw that a lot of my friends back home would be writing to see if I was okay. And I didn't even realise that they knew where I lived.

[Laughter]

I, I just thought that knew I lived in Japan...

Yeah.

...I didn't realise that they knew I lived in Sendai so, em, a lot of people that knew that I was okay would write on there to say that “{the participant} was okay, I've heard him on the radio.” And then, obviously, my friends would be like, “Oh, thanks for commenting, “ and what not, so after the earthquake I think a lot of people started using Facebook. I mean, in Sendai because there is 70 of us, we had all g-mail addresses so we could all, we were, we had a e-mail, a g-mail group where we could mail each other as well. So we would either use Facebook or the g-mail, em, accounts to get information through to each other.

Yeah, that's one thing I was going to kind of ask you about because from talking to the various people I've talked to, it seems to me like there's two ways that social media was used. It was used to, kind of, communicate with your network or it was used to gather information. Sometimes it was used for both.

Uhum,

Ehm, for you which was the more useful aspect?

I think gathering information...

Okay.

...because after the earthquake we did a lot of volunteering and we, a lot of the ALTs didn't speak Japanese, so the only way to make sure that we knew where to go, what to bring and, like, what time to be there was through g-mail...

...that group, okay...

...and everyone sent mails telling, you know, “They need volunteers here, this is how you volunteer.” A lot of the, I mean, I translated application forms because you had to apply to volunteer as well, so just having that information available for everyone I think made it
a lot easier. Em, I know that a lot of people wanted to evacuate through Yamagata. So we had a lot of help from Yamagata who translated a lot of documents from Japanese to English to make sure that people knew routes to get to Yamagata to get out.

Right.

Em, because a lot of people at that time were wanting to evacuate as well.

Yeah.

Em, so, yeah, I think information-wise. And it just continued, through Facebook and through, em, the e-mail accounts, but em… Yeah.

...yeah getting information out, and where to go for, like, water and what stores are open, whether people need, like, to, like. I had, em, at my house - you either have city gas or you have a private company. If you had a private company, you could get your gas on a lot sooner than city gas so I was, I thankfully had an apartment with, em, the private company, so I had gas pretty much the next week, like, so which means I could have hot showers...

Yeah.

...so giving that information away, kind of thing, allowed people to, you know. Because some people had city gas, so they didn’t have hot water for a very long time.

Yeah.

So, em, I think just sharing that type of information. And we were a very tight-knit group. So I think we were luckier than maybe some of the foreign students because we were in a group. We knew where to get that information from and we knew who to go to. Whereas maybe a lot of the foreign students or, em, especially the ones that, em, didn’t speak Japanese, I think it would have been more difficult for them to get information unless they had someone that they knew in, their, their, I guess, group. Because in Sendai what they try and do is if you’re Brazilian they try and have a Brazilian leader in the neighbourhood so that if something happens that they have the information to disseminate. The same with the Filipinos. Em, the same with Chinese and Korean. So I think they have used that a lot more since the earthquake, em, because we needed to know what communities were where. With the international centre we would go around each designated refuge area to see if there were foreigners there and what support we could give them. Most people went to the designated refuge area but then there were a lot of people that - we found out afterwards - decided not to go because: one, they just thought it would be easier for them to stay at home; two, they didn’t really speak Japanese and so there was, they didn’t really want to go for that reason; and then three, they just didn't want to burden anyone, you know, I think they may have thought they were okay with food at home so, em, they could leave the food for other people, but I think for Japanese people, they know that if there’s a disaster, whether you’re okay or not, you still go to the refuge area. So a lot more people went to the refuge area. I had friends that stayed at home during the first two nights just because they didn’t want to go to the refuge area. Actually the night that we went to a refuge area, we were looking for those people in our neighbourhood. There was no-one there so we thought either they are at school and they were safe or they decided to stay at home or they are at another refuge area…
...so we went knocking around people’s doors. They weren’t home so we assumed they
were at school which is where they were and they ended up staying at school and helping
the school for the next week or so. Em, and some of them were at, they were at schools
quite far away. They had no way to get home, so they were at the school the whole time.

It’s really interesting that you brought up the aspect of the refuge centre because a, kind
of, a theme which has emerged from talking to a variety of different people is there may
be some cultural differences going on here about group action versus, kind of,
independent action.

Euhm.

Ehm, some of the people I have talked to have mentioned how they wanted to get
information but then they wanted to make their own decisions based on that information.
So that might have been one of the reasons why some of the people I spoke to avoided
maybe, like, the refuge centres or the other more group-oriented...

Euhm.

...places, but then as you said, too, you mentioned language might be an issue...

Euhm.

...distance, other practical things. I don’t think it’s as simple as just saying culture is the
reason.

I mean, I didn’t necessarily want to go to a refuge area, and I knew that we were all going
to be just sitting there together anyway. But then again in my apartment I couldn’t walk
anywhere. Everything was everywhere. So I didn’t really have a choice but I guess I felt
comfortable there because I was with another person [Note: I think the implication here is
another foreign national] and we both spoke Japanese, so I think we were also lucky in
that respect as well. Em, culturally, I do think that that is the difference between why
Japanese and foreigners went. I think the {centre the participant worked for} had asked if
that was some of the reasons why people decided not to, and I think, especially we got
from, em, those that, em, maybe don’t eat meat or don’t, em, they want to pray but they
don’t, to pray it was just best for, I think they decided to stay home for those specific
reasons. Especially if you, like, em, you are a Muslim, you need halal foods, so I think a
lot of them were just like, “No, I can’t eat any of the food anyway.” So it’s just that, ehm.

Yeah. I think, certainly, the people that I spoke to didn’t mean it in a critical way of the
refuge centres because they recognised it was a disaster and, as you said, often they had
stuff at home. But I do think there were, yeah, like that, maybe, lifestyle reasons or, you
know, other cultural reasons that may have prevented people. It’s a very interesting topic.
I had never really thought about it before, but definitely for some of the people mentioned
language was an issue, too. They felt they would go to a refuge centre if there was
somebody in their community...

Yes.

.or group who could speak Japanese.

Okay, okay. Because we had, if a foreigner went to a refuge centre they were given, we
had a range of information in different languages for that reason. So, if they spoke
French, then they would get the French application. They could fill it all out. And then when, the, the [centre the participant worked for] went around, because they would go around daily to find out what new foreigners at that specific one so that we knew what specific support to give that specific, em, refuge centre with those foreigners. But yeah, like you said, they may have, even if they did get information, they may have wanted to make their own decisions on what they did from then on out.

Yeah.

A lot of my foreign friends were told to go home so they went home.

Yeah. One other thing that also maybe was specific to this disaster is I feel about the nuclear, eh, situation.

Uhuh.

I think that that...

[Laughter] I didn’t even bring that up!

No, no, but I think that that changed some of the cultural things that were going on at the time as well based on information. Ehm, I. From the people I’ve spoken to so far, a lot of them talked about how there was a big disconnect in the information they were getting on the Japanese side and on, let’s say, their home country’s side or on overseas media. Did that impact on you in any way?

Honestly, no. No matter what, I mean, because a lot of my coworkers said to me like, “Where are you,” like, “You can go home. Where are we going to go?” And I was just like, I felt so bad for that, I was just like, “I don’t know where you’re going to go.”

Because I never really thought of leaving at all and I know that there was that information coming from overseas and from Japan. I trusted in the New Zealand Embassy. I knew that if they wanted me out of Japan, they would tell me to leave. So, I, if something, if I was going to be told to leave then I was willing to go if the New Zealand Embassy was to tell us that but they said that we were, were safe, so I was willing to go by that. And my parents were okay to have me in Japan helping out so, em, no, I, even though there were the, was the information coming from overseas which - I don’t know where they were getting that information from because I didn’t even realise that that’s what was going on until I had people like, “You have to leave, you have to leave.” But a lot of people in Sendai I knew decided to leave based on that information…

Yeah.

...so, em, I mean, I guess I will find out later on if I’m going to be affected, right? So,

Oh, yeah, em, I think, you know, one of the things that’s come, become clearer and clearer to me is that there was neither, neither side seemed to do it very well. Like, the Japanese side. some people in the, of the foreigners that I’ve spoken to have criticised the Japanese, say, information, for being maybe an underreaction...

Uhuh.

...and then those very same people have criticised their, their national media, let’s say, or the overseas information as an overreaction...

Uuhh.

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...so these people felt that neither side was serving them very well.

Right. Well, I was in, I would constantly be looking at the homepage for the US Embassy because New Zealand was following what the US Embassy was doing, so that’s where I got my information from. Em, I know that even though there were a lot of people that still got that information, they were still concerned and so they decided to go, em, like, to a close country like Taiwan or Hong Kong or down south to Osaka. Em, but, a few people who went to, like, Hong Kong and what not, I had to tell them, like, the rates there and here, it was higher there so, it was kind of like, well, I mean they were doing it for themselves and they were doing it for their families, and I do understand that. At the same time, I was like, “Well, I don’t know whether this is going to affect me in the future.” But I was still willing to stay and help out, so I didn’t really think about that at all…

Yeah.

...and, yeah, I totally forgot about it, that I didn’t even bring it up.

Yeah, no, that’s interesting. The, the, that’s why...

...didn’t factor it.

...no, em, but this is also another reason, if you remember, why I said I prefer to speak to people one-to-one...

Right.

...if possible, because sometimes what you focus on is really your experience, so that tells me an awful lot that you didn’t even, by yourself, you didn’t even bring up the...

Yeah, right.

...nuclear issue at all. It’s fascinating. Whereas some other have almost led with that.

Yeah, I mean, it was there, but, like I said, the New Zealand Embassy sent all of the New Zealanders in the Tohoku Region io, iodine tablets…

Okay.

...so we were, we were notified of what to do if we were to be evacuated, em, but, yeah, I, it never really crossed my mind on leaving, I just really wanted to make sure that everything was fine in Sendai and to help out as much as possible and then think about it later. Em, I had planned a trip home in June, I think it was. I think it was around June. Eh, this was even before the earthquake…

Yeah.

...and so I, I knew that if I was going to go home, I would be going home in June and so I was willing to wait it out. Plus, I was actually looking after one of my co-workers who was in hospital as well so that happened throughout the whole process. So it was just a whole bunch of, you know like all things at once and, em.

Just in terms of the embassy, how did they communicate with you? Eh...
We got, we were lucky, the New Zealanders were lucky. We got phone calls and I got phone calls from a number of people. Like, I was surprised at how many people were ringing to see if we were okay. Because there were only. In Sendai City that I know out of all the Kiwis, there was only around 13 of us in the city.

Wow.

Yeah, but, I think three, three of us, four of us stayed behind. So they wanted to know who was in the country, em, and if we were okay and I think, em, going back to the Facebook, saying that I was okay. There was also the Google Finder...

Uuhh.

...I think that also helped out a lot and that’s how people would know people were fine as well. Em, but, yeah, I was rung by the Embassy a lot and they were just keeping us posted with information. I knew that there were buses leaving from Sendai to go to Tokyo, and, so, they wanted us on the bus. But they had a bus for the New Zealanders, but the Canadians didn’t get one so the Canadians were all on, well the Canadians that we knew were on our bus because their embassy did not do a good job in providing them information. I mean, they were told to fly out of Fukushima, first of all. And then they were told to, em, fly out of Sendai [Note: Sendai Airport was completely washed away in the tsunami and this was a major news story even at the very early stages of the disaster] and so I, I think the Canadians that I knew weren’t happy at all with the information that they were given, but, em, yeah, I guess the New Zealanders were lucky because they made sure that we were there, and so that’s why I guess I has trusted them, that if they wanted us to leave that I would be notified to, to leave, so, yeah.

Ehm, it seems to me that the, the relationship with the embassy is a pretty important one after a disaster because I have spoken to people from 12 different countries at this stage and it’s been a huge difference. Some people have been very satisfied and some people have really not been satisfied with the way their embassy, especially, gave them information.

Uhum. When we first came on the JET Program we had an embassy night and at that night we were asked if we would sign up at the embassy. So that’s how they had our information...

Yeah.

...but I think, oh, I mean I hadn’t been there for, like, in my fourth or fifth year…

Yeah.

...so, I think they may have had old information or something but it was people that they knew in the city…

Yeah.

...which is how they knew who was going, because when I was rung they were like, “Do you know any other Kiwis in the city?” And I guess because we are a small population we kind of do know…

Yeah.
...who’s going to be there or not. So, em, I think that’s how they found out numbers as well.

I think you might have hit on an interesting point there because I’m from Ireland, and Ireland, Irish people are a small community in Japan as well, and most of the Irish people I spoke to were fairly happy with the way the embassy worked, possibly because the numbers were fewer and it’s just easier to do that kind of, you know, networking and finding, finding people whereas maybe people from Canada or the States or Australia were not very happy.

Yeah, I think the people from the, the States, they had to pay for their bus down to Tokyo, I think. I’m not quite sure how that worked, but, em...

[Laughter]

...they also all went through Niigata all the way down to Tokyo so it took a long time whereas the New Zealand bus just went straight through Fukushima, they were just like, “You know, we’re going to get you to Tokyo.” So, em.

Yeah, I think, you know, with this sort of a situation there’s probably no right and now wrong...

Right.

...there’s just what’s kind of maybe what’s less, less wrong or whatever, you know. It’s always tough.

Yeah. Hopefully we can all learn from the experience which is what I think happened after the earthquake, especially in terms of working in the {redacted} centre and also {the Sendai government}. I think they kind of knew what they should do during the earthquake and then they realised maybe that there was something that they could have worked on. Getting information out was a key thing but, I don’t know whether it could have been faster. I mean, there was so much information going out, and so making sure that it was always up to date...

Yeah.

...because it was constant, so, em. And we would have to get information from City Hall which would be in Japanese, sent to the {redacted} centre, and then they would have to be like, “Okay, time to translate it all.” And then all of that had to go up on the, the website. And, so that everyone had that information available, and then to the radio station, ehm, and then it would all be printed out and put on boards so that people coming to the information centre had that information. But it would be forever changing, like...

Yeah.

...where to get water from, like what to do if you don’t have gas, like that type of stuff, so, ehm.

That’s what I was kind of going to ask you about because obviously I’m, my main focus is in translation and you were one of the key people in this process of translating the information. First of all, I’m interested in the idea of, you were the translator, but you were also, kind of, a victim in a certain - I don’t want to use that negative word, but - you were also one of the people very interested in the content of the information.
Right.

Did, did that pose any difficulties for you?

I was, I guess I’m lucky, then, because once I got the information in Japanese, I knew the information so I could give it to whoever I wanted to, and that was the most important thing was getting the information out to people. Like I said, in the group of seventy, all I had to do was read the information and I could send an email out to those seventy people. So, we were okay with the information, it was getting it out to everyone else and we’re not quite sure how we got the information out and who it got to, but we are hoping. I think most people knew of the {redacted} centre anyway who was living in Sendai, so if they did have a problem, and they didn’t get it from their Japanese friends or their friends that speak the same language as them, then they knew to probably come to the {redacted} centre. Ehm, yeah, so, yeah, I guess I was lucky getting the information first-hand and then getting it out there. It was just getting the correct information. That was also key. Ehm, because, you know, I’m not a ‘translator’ translator so you just had to make sure what the, the information you were giving is correct as well.

How did you do that?

Working with my coworkers and having good communication with them, I think, helped. They all, Japanese people say they don’t speak English but they understand a lot, so it was always making sure, and checking with them, and checking the Japanese against the English because it came to us - and all those other languages - and some of those foreign students had been in Japan way longer than I had so obviously their Japanese was, was really good, but, ehm, yeah, we could translate and what not, but we don’t know who the information got to. I think that is the main thing. I think they tried to do questionnaires after the earthquake or a bit further down in like, to see who did get that type of information, and I think they sat down and had meetings with those specific groups, like I said…

Uhum.

...em, we’re classed as an easy group because we know that if we want them to have information it just comes from one person and is sent to all of them, so I think we had a meeting with the {redacted} centre and they asked about the experience…

Yeah.

...and what could have been done better but I think when it comes to, like, the Brazilian group, the Filipino group, I think we all had different needs, and maybe that’s another reason why people didn’t go to, ehm, the refuge centres because as foreigners they group you as one whereas we’re completely different, you know, in culture, so, what one country may need another may not, and that type of thing, so, ehm, yeah.

That’s absolutely fascinating. Eh, you’re not the first person to have said that, actually, that, you know, foreigners are grouped all as one but sometimes there can be more in common between the Japanese and a certain foreign group than between the foreigners…

Right…

...the so-called foreigners.
...because a lot of Japanese people would say to me, “Oh, you were there in 2011, you must never have been through an earthquake before.” I’m like, “No, I’m from New Zealand, so”…

[Laughter]

...like I, I didn’t, didn’t, but that’s, they were still, like, “You must have never felt something like that.” But I didn’t, but I was also well prepared…

Yeah.

...so, you know, I did have my bag at home…

Yeah.

...em, and it had the food and that, and we had to take all of that stuff, too, to the refuge centre that night, so, em, it did do as well, and I had photocopies of everything, like my passport and that, and I had my ten-yen coins…

Yeah, that’s the thing…

...at the end of the day, all the phone boxes were free...

Yeah. [Laughter]

...so, we didn’t need the coins any more. But I did find that people would leave the ten-yen coin at the box if you did have to pay, and it just goes to show how nice Japan is, and how much they thought about everyone else, because I did feel like I was part of one rather than being a foreigner on the outside. I was included because I chose to stay here, and to this day my co-workers will say that to me, they can’t believe that I stayed on (indistinct). I don’t think it’s that big. I just chose to stay on because I wanted to help. But they think it’s something really big and they would say that to me up until I left and be like, “We’re thankful that you stayed to help out.” But I don’t really think it’s that much of a big deal.

Yeah.

Yeah, em, yeah.

Ehm, just also we were talking about how, like, foreigners are grouped all as one, one other thing which I’m kind of struggling with a little bit is I think I can’t, when I’m doing my thesis, I don’t think I can talk about foreigners all as one in another way, either. For example, I think there’s a huge difference between a resident and a short-term visitor, like, if someone was in Sendai just on a business trip, or a tourist, I mean, it’s a big tourist, well, Miyagi anyway would be, was a big tourist location in, in Japan. At the {redacted} centre, did you have any experience of people who weren’t residents?

We had to have had tourists as well, but I’m assuming with tourists the, I think their first, main important thing is to leave. And I think provide, if we, because we had an English hotline, so I’m hoping that people knew of that hotline and they would ring up, because it was just asking for information: “How do I get out of here?” And it was through Yamagata or going up to Akita Prefecture and flying out from there, so, ehm, tourists?

There’s a lot to be, because if you reside in that place, you, you know where things are, you know who is going to help you. If you are a tourist then you just trust in where you are staying…
Yeah.

...or, yeah, I guess that’s the main thing. Or, an international centre…

Yeah.

...I, I guess. But I don’t know if everyone knows where it, or if there’s an international centre so, I’m guessing a lot of the tourists, they would want to leave straight away...

Yeah.

...so they were, em, because I know on the night of the earthquake, em, people were getting in taxis and taxiing to Tokyo because they knew what was, like, the impact it was going to have, so we were just trying to get a taxi down the road, kind of thing, and they were like, “No, we have to take people to Tokyo,” so, em, “you can’t catch a taxi.”

[Laughter]

So we were walking down the streets…

Yeah.

...with our torches, em, yeah, so, I’m guessing if they were a tourist in Sendai, they, they were just looking to, to leave as soon as, as soon as possible.

And probably, as you said, maybe, through where they were staying. Like, their hotel or, like, the embassy. But I don’t know. The embassy might not know that they were there, so that is tricky.

Yeah, that is actually a very good question. I didn’t come across any, but I know that at the {redacted} centre we had the, the US Embassy. They would bring in a team so that they could make sure that the Americans in the city that they knew of were okay and also giving away information. Em, a lot of countries decided to have buses to send people out.

So, em, yeah, I remember New Zealand sent a group of, em, people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to come and, and see us after the earthquake, but we were grouped with Australians, so the Australian Embassy was there first, so we all met with Australians and New Zealanders and they were giving the same information to both countries, so we kind of knew what was going to happen if people chose to leave, em, and they used to, I think they expected everyone to leave, I think, but, em, people stayed, stayed behind for their own reasons.

Yeah, yeah, of course. Actually, that’s kind of linked to, em, something which I was hoping to ask you about. Eh, so that, you know, the earthquake happened, and then the tsunami happened, and then the nuclear disaster happened and some people chose to leave and some people chose to stay, and a lot of stuff went on...

Uhum.

...what I am asking everyone is to try and tell me when did the disaster end?

Oh, that’s a good question, because I was trying to figure out how long we were providing the information, but I went home in June, and I guess the main part of, like, I won’t say main part because we were still volunteering when I got back, em, and I was still trying to provide information when we got back because, if you had a partially-
damaged house or if you had a fully-damaged house, you need a specific certificate, so it
was, it went from that type of information to providing information afterwards, and some
people may not have had gas at that time, so I was also updating people on when the gas
may come and if you receive a notice on your door what does this notice mean...

Of course, yeah.

...like that type of information, so I, I finished up {my job with that government office} in
August 2012. We were still getting information out, and I think to the, towards the start of
2012, or one year after, I think it became, “Let’s start preparing, or using the experience
to make things stronger and better in terms of getting information out there.” Because it
was one of the most important things, and we are, we were still a bit unsure on who got
the information other than the groups that we know of.

Yeah, yeah, your own, kind of, networks or whatever.

...yeah, so, we, I think we knew that it was important for the networks. In terms of the
ALTs, we knew that Facebook was a lifesaver, also that Google Finder and Twitter. So
on the Sendai JETs website they have like a, the, they link the Twitter to the homepage so
that if anything like it goes on again, em, we can Tweet to say, “This person is fine.” And
so, they were supposed to let their families know of the homepage so that if anything
happens, then they can check that. Em, we also have a Facebook page, but it’s only for
Sendai JETs, so I guess for families, they are directed to the website...

Yeah.

...em, but for the Facebook page, it’s also the same thing. I am still on that because I am,
was a, was a Sendai JET, but if there is, em, an earthquake there, people will be like, “Did
you feel that one? Is everyone okay?” So, people are still sharing.

It’s kind of a community.

Right, and then there is the gmail group...

Yeah.

...em, that they use all the time, em, so that was one way for them to get their information
out.

I definitely understand what you mean about the, there’s a need to know who got the
information and how it went out, but as, you know, again, coming back to the idea of
translation, I’m interested for you personally doing this job that you did where you were
taking Japanese information and translating it into English, what could have made your
job easier?

Uhm, what could have made it easier? I would say having more people but I actually
don’t think that that is actually a good answer, because if you’re the one that’s translating,
you know what you have translated and you know to keep the information and how to
match it and how to keep it the same, because we had, when I wasn’t there, if I was at a
radio station, we had other, exchange students translating on my behalf, but their first
language wasn’t English. So, yes, it would be put into English, but it may not have been,
it definitely wouldn’t have been how I would have translated it exactly, and it, I don’t
know if it would have gotten the meaning across, but it was in English so if they needed
to explain it, they could explain it, and if a phone call came through, they could explain it,
but when you are reading something and it is about, like, a certificate that you need, this
specific thing, like, it needs to be, like, perfect English, I guess, and as long as, I won’t say perfect, as long as it is understandable, but I guess sometimes there is little things that don’t come across, I, I, I guess. Yeah, so I would say it would be nice to have a team of translators or, if you did have a team, to separate them into doing specific translations. Eh, because [my co-worker and I], we were the only two native speakers that worked at the [redacted] centre, so all of the information usually came through us and so it was easy for us to get that information out. When other people had to take over for us, we would still have to come back and check that English and then it would have to go up again, so it was just, it really depended on what information they want to get out there. If they, if they don’t, if it’s in English and they don’t mind, then that’s perfectly fine, and I guess you can only do so much, so, em, having the information in English is better than not having it in English, but at the same time, if you get something wrong, then that’s when problems start to occur.

I don’t want to put words in your mouth…

Um,

...just tell me if I’m wrong, but what I was maybe hearing from you there is that consistency was a difficulty when there were a lot of people involved in the process. Is that what you meant, or am I interpreting that wrong?

Yeah, now I’m trying to think about that, yeah, whether there’s, that’s what I was saying, because I do believe having a group of people would make things easier, but at the same time you can get mixed up, so, I guess, yeah, the consistency in, in getting information out there, I think, is important. But I also think that having the information in English whether it is right or not is also important as well, so. I mean, I couldn’t be there every single minute of the day…

Of course not.

...to do everything. So, I guess, having the information in English whether I liked it or I didn’t...

[Laughter]

...is still, it was still there. And they would take over for me at the radio station as well…

Yeah.

...and their, their spoken English was perfect, so that was perfectly fine. It’s just, you know, written and speaking is completely different, so I think consistency is important.

Em, also, em, you’ve kind of touched on something I wanted to ask you about. There was a lot of pressure on you and your colleagues...

Yeah.

...in terms of just the amount of work that you had to do, how did you cope with that pressure or de, deal with that pressure?

It was stressful, I’m not going to lie. I think the fact that I didn’t die and my family didn’t die. To this day, I, I realise, like, now that, before 2011, I would always think that I’m like stressed over nothing. I think once that happened I was like, “Look, my family could have died, and I really, I could have died.” I mean, I was just lucky to be in the city. So,
em, and there were people on the JET program that did, there were two of them, em, that passed away in the tsunami, so, em, I think knowing that and also knowing the fact that I was helping in some way, em, and it is one of the reasons why I was sent to Sendai was to help out and forge that, that relationship between my country and Japan, but not only that, just being a foreigner living in Japan as well, so, em. Stress-wise, eh, yeah, I’m not going to lie, it was really stressful. I lost a lot of weight, em, and it was just crazy busy but I think speaking of family, and speaking to others that were there during the earthquake, and also volunteering. I am passionate about volunteering so I think that was a way for me to, you know, give back as well and help out in some way. Em, but there was a lot of pressure. There were times, like, for example, where I had to, em, on the spur of the moment - I wasn’t given any notice - but I had to go and interpret for the mayor that was talking to the US Army, and I don’t know, like, words, like the specific words that are going to come up and the vocab that they are going to use, so, em, I cringe thinking about that now because it was one of the - {in the job I did}, you’re not fluent at Japanese so there is no way you are going to be able to do anything like a hundred-percent perfect, but you do your best, but they were all in their army suits and she was dressed in her nice, like, and I’m just in casual jeans and what not, so I just cringe about that because {in that job}, it was, it was like the worst possible situation to be in, but I got it done and it was finished with, but, em, lots of pressure to make sure that things were correct, but I mean, em, yeah, and stress. Stress, stress, stress, stress. Yeah, but I guess knowing I was going to see family as well, that helped. Em, because I hadn’t really processed, em, the Christchurch Earthquake. Because I was completely, like, heartbroken when I saw that on the Internet, so, em, I hadn’t really processed that, and going home didn’t really help because everything was completely, like, closed off…

[Laughter] Yeah.

...in Christchurch. And I think if you do go back there now, you will be surprised at how slow they have been. Yeah, I mean, I have been home - once the earth, once, after the earthquake, I realised how important family is, so I had only been home once during my five years, and now I have been home, like, two to three times a year, yeah, so, and I’ve seen the, what they’ve done in Christchurch and it’s just taking a lot, I mean they have to, to completely destroy everything and then rebuild, so, em, ten, give it ten years.

It is clear that you had a very different set of circumstances because a lot of people that I have spoken to went home, like, they maybe had the holiday booked or something like yourself, or they chose to, to go home for a period of time...

Uhum.

...and for them, going home maybe meant relaxing. In, in an Irish person’s case, going home to a completely peaceful environment where everything was kind of normal and it was like a pause. But unfortunately in Christchurch...

Right.

...it was going from one disaster setting to another.

To another. Yeah, so, I think the main reason I wanted to go home is that I had not let any emotion out and I just wanted to go home and cry. That’s what I said to my family. I was like, “I’m probably going to go home and I’m probably going to bawl my eyes out,” but that’s, I just need to get it all out because I didn’t really want to show that here because I didn’t lose any family members and, em, I didn’t lose my house, and that type of thing, and when you meet people like that, and they were really thankful, like, once they found out where I was from, they were really thankful that I was there volunteering. But I was
just like, “I don't, oh, you don’t need to thank me because, like, you lost everything.” And so, em, yeah, that. Looking back on that type of stuff was not, was not nice.

_Ehm, in terms of volunteering, do you think language in any way acts as a barrier to foreigners volunteering in Japan after a disaster?_

Yes and no. For the ALTs in the group that I was a part of, no. Because we made sure that we had all of the information given out so that they could go by themselves if they wanted to and give all of the information together with the English and the Japanese. A lot of the volunteer plac. places were starting to have the information in English because they knew how many foreigners wanted to come and volunteer but, em, yeah, we made sure that we provided information. I think it was a barrier for specific people, but I know friends that don’t speak any Japanese, but they don’t let that get the best of them, and they made sure they went out there, and they were one of the main people at giving information out and making sure that every person knew what you do when you go there and you fill out these forms and you get all of this information and you wait for them to call out the jobs and put your hand up and if they chose you, you go and do that job. So I think knowing step-by-step, and also we would always go as a group. Em, and we knew where the buses left and we knew what time to be there, and I think being with other people also helped. But we would meet a lot of, em, foreigners from throughout Japan always coming. And I think one of the most surprising things when we would go out to, like, Ishinomaki or Kesennuma or Natori [Note: some of the worst affected towns] they would always be surprised that we, from Sendai, that we would be going from Sendai to volunteer because they would be just like, “Why are you?” because...

[Laughter]

...most of the other people were from like, Kyoto or Osaka or...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...Nagoya. They were all coming up to volunteer. But they were like, “Why are you helping out? You’re from Sendai.”

[Laughter]

But, I don’t know, we just didn't really think about that because I guess being on the JET Program, we want to give back to the community, so I think that’s why a lot of people from the JET Program wanted to, to help out. Because we got given so much and it’s one way, because of the language barrier, it’s one way we can give back without having to speak. But then again you do have to do all the, the procedural stuff beforehand to be able to...

Yeah, but then the actual physical work...

Right.

...or some of that sort of thing. I mean, if you have a pair of hands that’s...

Right.

...kind of enough.

I think a lot of people come here and maybe live here and they let language get the best of them. But you don’t actually have to speak that much. You can still communicate with
someone through gestures and what not. But it’s just whether you chose to do that or not, and so, yeah, the people that I know that don’t speak Japanese that well did volunteer a lot and was able, were able to get a lot of information. Yeah, that’s, when I think about that question. I just look at them, and well it wasn’t a problem for them and it really shouldn’t be a problem for most people but I guess some people did have problems with not knowing the language.

Yeah. Basically the last question I have for you, it’s just to pick up on a word you’ve used a couple of times now in different settings. You’ve talked about community...

Okay.

...different types of community and community of, you know, JETs, community with the local community, community of Japan...

Uhhum.

...and, before the disaster, so before 3.11, did you feel part of your local community?

With, ehm, preparing for a disaster, we’re told to get to know your neighbours. In case of a disaster, you, I think in Kobe, a lot of the time it was neighbours helping other neighbours just to pull them out of the rubble and what not. I didn’t know my neighbours, em, and I think most of my friends didn’t know their neighbours. Although I will say, after the earthquake, random people were very friendly, so they did help out, but in my local community, the people I knew were my foreign friends and the places I would ca, like, always go to. So the people, those were the people I would speak to. Other than that, no I didn’t, I wouldn’t say I had a very strong local community, but that’s just in my neighbourhood, yeah? My, I guess, my coworkers would have been my next, like, stron, strong bond other than my foreign friends, but em, yeah, in saying that though, like when we’d go, like when I stayed at, like, the refuge centre, we’d be given food from, I mean, we stand out, right? As foreigners, so, em, yeah, people were really friendly, wanting to give us food, wanting to help in some way, but, yeah, I guess, in my local community, I didn’t, I guess I wasn’t a part. Well, I didn’t have strong bonds, yeah.

Well, the reason I ask is because it comes up in the Disaster Studies literature all the time and, exactly just what you said there about Kobe, you know, a lot of the first emergency assistance providers tend to be the people you live near or people passing by. But I’m just not completely convinced that community means your neighbours in all cases. It could mean, like you said, your coworkers because, you know, you’re spending 8,9,10 hours...

That’s...

...a day with them.

...that’s true because if I did need anything or I did have questions or I needed information, I would go to them because they were my closest source. Like, I just moved to Tokyo two months ago and you’re supposed to say hello to your neighbours and give presents...

[Laughter]

...I don’t know who my neighbours are, so if an earthquake happened here, it’s actually the reason why, when we moved to Tokyo, most people live like an hour away, it’s the reason why I chose to, I actually can walk home from here [Note: the cafe we met at was just by his office]. The reason why was because if a big earthquake happens here, then I
need to get home. Because I remember after the earthquake in Sendai, I, you can walk anywhere in Sendai, so I could walk home. Sure, everything was everywhere in my room, but the next day when it was light I went home and cleaned everything up, and then I could stay at home from then on out. But, yeah, that was the reason why I kind of live down the road, because I, I just, if I had to go through that experience again, yeah, I want to be prepared, and I know that everyone lives so far away, people are going to need somewhere to go to if they, like, want a shower and what not. So, em, yeah.

So you have, kind of, changed some of your behaviours based on the experience?

I think a lot, I think, after the earthquake, I changed a lot. Because I just saw the bigger picture of things. Now I try and not worry about the small things, because at the end of the day, like, I don’t die. I mean, “I’m not going to die over it.” I just keep trying to tell myself that. “I’m not going to die if it happens.”

[Laughter]

Ehm, yeah. I think seeing the broader picture. Also, you do have to be prepared for it because I spent a year after the JET Program {working in another role where} my job was to get information to those 70 JETs. And part of that was putting them in the disaster groups, em, making sure they had the information, making sure they go their bags prepared, what to put in there, and just also giving, I mean, even though it’s a year, two years out, they still want to know about that because it happened in Sendai. A lot of people say it’s not going to happen for a long, long, long, long time, em, but it could happen in Shizuoka, it could happen in Tokyo. So I guess moving to Tokyo, I’m aware that that’s happened and that’s also why I don’t want to catch the subway or the trains, you know. I’d rather bike to work which is why I also live close, too. Em, yeah, you just have to be prepared. But I guess you never know when it’s going to happen and, I mean, in Christchurch, we never thought that a big earthquake was going to hit there. We always thought that Wellington was going to be hit. Like, ever since I was a child when we’d get small tremors and just go back to sleep. But we always were told that Wellington was going to be the one that was going to be hit by the earthquake, so then when, I think, it was one in September, I think there was a big earthquake September the year before. So 2010 in September. And I was called from one of my good friends and she said, “Look, there was an earthquake in Christchurch. You need to ring home and see if everything is okay.” My family were like, “Yeah, we’re perfectly fine. It shook a lot but it’s okay.” And then the one happened in February and not being able to contact my dad, yeah, I panicked big time because I, I didn’t get in contact with my dad for two or three days. Yeah, so I thought something had gone wrong but I contacted my mum and my sister the first day, so I knew that they were fine. It was just getting in contact with my dad. And not being able to contact someone, yeah, that’s (indistinct) it’s horrible.

Christ, I can, I can only imagine. I can only imagine. But I totally see what you mean. It’s not an exact science. I mean, they said the same about Kobe. They said an earthquake would never happen in Kobe, like, that was supposedly the safe part of Japan. So you just don’t know, but.

Walking down the streets in Sendai though you will, after the earthquake, it was, there was damage but there wasn’t major damage so they were prepared for that.

Yeah.

And I guess they had had a very big earthquake previous to that so I guess that’s what they had learned from.
Yeah, and if there hadn’t been the tsunami, I, I wouldn’t be here for a start. I mean, I think.

I didn’t really touch on the tsunami either, did I?

Yeah, well, but, again, this is why I like to let people just tell their, their own stories, you know, because for you, you were very focused on information. Like, that was your job, that was what kept you going. I mean, do you want to talk about the tsunami? Is it something that?

I don’t, I don’t know because the earthquake affected me, and, but, the tsunami affected a lot of my co-workers and a lot of my friends and so, I’ve never really talked about it because I don’t, I, I don’t know what to say to them, you know, like, they lost family members and what not. So, em, yeah, we haven’t really talked about the tsunami and. Because when I went to volunteer, I went out to the sea and, em, heard stories of, like, people having to carry people on their backs out and what not. I mean, I had a friend who had to, em, be evacuated by helicopter. But because I personally wasn’t there, I guess, maybe, that’s why I didn’t really discuss that, and also with, em, Fukushima, I didn’t really discuss that because it wasn’t really a factor, so yeah the earthquake, I guess, was the thing that affected me the most, yeah.

Oh, absolutely. I think that that’s why, as I said when I was talking to you earlier on, like, in such a big disaster, different people focus on different things because they experience different things. That’s why it can be kind of hard to bring people together to talk about it because, you know, you would talk about the earthquake and another person would be like, “Why are we talking about the earthquake? It was all about the tsunami?”

Actually, we tried to do that with the group of 70. We all tried, we would have ALT meetings every month so one of the meetings, it was long after the earthquake but we, we brought in a counselor in case people wanted to talk about their feelings but I think most people by the time were just like, “Um, yeah, we all had different experiences. We can’t express that because we’re going to take away from someone el, we don’t want to take away from someone else’s experience.” Because, yeah, there were a few people that were, like, stuck at their school with, like, the water coming up to the purple level [Note: in Japanese tsunami warnings, purple is used to denote the largest possible tsunami waves] and what not, and so their experiences way outweigh…

Yeah.

...what we went through, so I think a lot of people felt that so they didn’t want to speak about it at all, yeah.

Yeah, I a, I ag, having said that, I do think that every person’s experience is valid and, you know, based on your own circumstances, you could be more terrified by an earthquake than another person by the tsunami. It’s, it’s a very difficult issue. But I do think that that group kind of thing can be a bit tricky. That’s pretty much all I have. Just in case there’s anything you think I haven’t touched on that might be relevant in terms of especially translation or language, culture, that kind of thing?

Um, translation? No, I think. I mean if you have any questions or anything.

No, you see, yeah, no, I really, like, em, the way I’ve been trying to, to do it is to let people tell what they want to tell, and usually by doing that, it ends up that you talk about all the things I want to hear anyway...
Alright.

...so you pretty much did...

Oh yeah? Cool.

...ehm, like, you don’t, like, say you or another person, you don’t tell it in the same way, and you don’t get there in the same direction but a lot of the things you mentioned, other people have talked about in a quite a similar way and like, obviously, I’m particularly interested in you as a person because you were one of the people doing the work of the translator, you know, or the work of the interpreter.

Yeah, we, we lucky at {the Sendai government}. They have two Japanese workers that had studied overseas. So their jobs were to translate into English. So, not only did we have the native speakers we also had them as well and they would be translating a lot for City Hall, so it was a lot of the technical English...

Yeah.

...and, em, and we would also check their English. But, em, I guess we were lucky to have that help as well. Because City Hall is completely different, because once the earthquake had kind of, like, had been 6 months to 7 months, that’s when the information on how you go about getting, like, subsidies and...

Yeah, very technical stuff yeah.

...that type of stuff. So it’s not stuff that, like, we could ask exchange students to do, but like the information for the radio station, yeah, it could come from the, eh, exchange students.

In City Hall or in the {redacted} centre do you have any, kind of, specialised translation technologies? You may not know of these things but just I’m wondering did you, they have things, for example, called translation memories?

Okay.

It’s a type of computer software where say you as a person make a translation. So you as a human you write in, “Okay, well this type of subsidy, I’ll translate it as blah, blah, blah.” And then another person can come along, and the next time they see that Japanese word, your previous translation pops up.

I wish! Okay, so I think that’s where we may have had difficulties because what one person translates doesn’t necessarily mean that another person will use those specific words. So, coming from a British-English background especially when we’re supposed to have an American-English or use American English at City Hall was difficult {being} from New Zealand, so we knew what we grew up with using, and I found out that the English that I do use is a lot different to what Americans use. So, em, we were lucky to have the two translators at City Hall that had both studied in America. So sometimes we would argue about certain things...

[Laughter]

...because I just didn’t know what the American English or British English because…

You were used to,
...yeah, so, em, we didn’t have kind of technology but it would be good because what we realised is specific terms had to be kept the same, so if one translator, and one of us did one translation and then they did another translation, then we’d have to go through to make sure that it was the same words. And those words did come up like, oh I can’t even think of it now, but, like, one of the subsidies...

Yeah.

...had to, like we just had to keep it.

You see, I didn’t want to be putting words in your mouth, but when I mentioned consistency, that’s one of the things that translation studies specialises in. This, there’s all sorts of technology - some of it is free on the Internet, like...

Uhum.

...there’s a, a translation memory software called Omega-t which you can download for free and that will store things for you and help you reuse them and...

Oh, I wish we had known that!

...yeah. [Laughter] Similarly, I don’t know did you use any machine translation like Google Translate or?

No. We, I, I don’t even know why we didn’t even think to use that type of stuff. We were just, yeah. Based off our own knowledge and using a denshi jisho [Note: ‘electronic dictionary’ - widely used in Japan], yeah, and our co-workers because if it came to context, we just asked them to explain to us what they meant and then we would write something out and they’d be like, “Yeah, that’s what I was meaning,” kind of thing. So it was like working together with another person, but, yeah, like, talking about specific words we used for the earthquake, after myself and the other New Zealander had left, they replaced us with Americans. So I worked with one of the Americans for a year and a lot of the times he would be like, “Why is this English being used?” And I also found the same thing, like, em, with the American before me had used all of these earthquake-related words and I would be like, “No, I want to change it.” And he would also be like, “No, I want to change it to what I want it to be.” But they were all, specific words were already set, so they had to keep it whether they liked it or not, and that will continue.

Yeah.

So, em, you do have to be really careful in how you translate things. I was, em, I remember. And it’s not just based on English speakers, it’s based on what the Japanese higher-ups think of your English, because I remember, I had to translate something. It, I can’t remember the Japanese, it was something like, in English it was “Moving Forward as one Sendai”, but I didn’t like that, and I didn’t want it to be that, but the higher-ups didn’t like my first one that I had said. You know, maybe it could be less, like, they wanted it to be something that they thought sounded good, and yes they may have had an English background, and now that I do look at it, I’m like “Yeah, it does translate what they were trying to get across,” but at the same time I was like, “It could have been changed to something else.” Yeah, so, em.

Oh, this is, that’s very interesting because there’s a whole, like, theory behind all that kind of, those decisions...
...like, how you take one language and map it onto another and, yeah, maybe that’s what they, sort of, that’s how it maps, but that’s not, sort of, not the feeling, or.

But then again, even if, em, they knew about translation, my other coworker, {redacted}, but I think we were both, had completely different translation skills so, em, we would use different English and so it was best to keep one person doing specific translations and another doing the same thing so you didn’t mix it…

Yeah.

...because once it got mixed, you could tell. My friend used to say you could tell my writing style…

[Laughter]

...so they knew if it was me or not...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...em, but I guess that is the hard thing about translation.

Yeah.

Yeah.

I think, also, the, just the other thing you mentioned, there’s definitely ways that time could be saved. Like say, you said that there was certain words that kept coming up that you would have to use again and again, some of those software systems, they plug it right in there for you, you just hit and it pops up and, like, you just hit enter and you…

Because we…

...type away.

...we fell back on the two that worked at City Hall. They had worked there for a very long time, so they knew, when it came to translations, if there was a new translation that came up, if they had seen it before, they knew where to get it from. So we relied heavily on them because we hadn’t been there that long and we didn’t know where everything was stored so, em, yeah, that experience, but if they lost them two, I don’t know where, they would have all of the information but it’s nice to know that you can fall back on someone with experience, so when they look at one thing, they know what the word is straight away.

Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, but, yeah, if we did use that technology, it would have been great, but, it’s hard working for, like, em, {the local government} and, and they had specific rules about, em, privacy, and that type of thing. Like, not being able to, some schools they can’t access gmail, so that cuts them right out of, like, getting the information from the email, so they have to check it when they get home. So that’s why, em - I didn’t say this at the start, but - everyone is told to get a Softbank phone [Note: a major mobile carrier in Japan - in
2011 their phones tended not to be smartphones] in Sendai because through Softbank we can call each other for free. We can also message for free.

Yeah.

Em, but, after the earthquake we started telling people, “You should get a smartphone.” Because you can access Facebook, you can access e-mails. Em, and, yeah, eh, you may not be able to use your phone after a disaster, but at least you have it there so when you can, because I would be trying to send through messages just all the time, and you didn’t even know if it was going to send through or not. So, em, we tried to get more people on, buying smartphones.

Em, one thing that several people have said to me, especially in Tokyo, but also in some other areas, if they didn’t have Internet in the disaster, like, if they hadn’t been able to get some sort of a Net connection, they might not have stayed in Japan when they did.

It’s true, yeah, because they only other way was through TV, but I don’t know if you’ve seen the TV if, when there’s been an earthquake and it comes up on the screen, and if you don’t understand Japanese you’re like, “Okay, that’s a map of Japan, that’s all coloured. And you don’t know what’s going on, there’s, kind of, numbers on the screen.” Yeah, em, but now, I don’t, phones have this terrible ring to it...

[Sharp intake of breath]

...yeah, it totally freaks people out when they all start going...

Oh [Laughter].

...and you’re like, “okay.” So, em, yeah. I mean, it is good to have, I think, they have been learning from it, so they’re updating and what not...

Yeah.

...I mean it can only be, be good...

Yeah.

...but, they’re going to, yeah, they’re going to need it in the future in case something like that happens again.

I’ve spoken to a few people about this, about the, I think I’m traumatised by that early-warning alarm. It’s the most terrifying sound. I think I’m more scared of it than I am of an earthquake.

Yeah, because you’re waiting for it.

Oh, it’s an awful feeling [Laughter].

I’ve only had, since the earthquake, we’ve only had, like, a couple of really big ones. And one of them was when, yeah, the alarms...

[Mimics alarm sound]...

...everyone’s alarm went off...
...oh, that gives me chills.

...and I was in the office, and we’re on the second floor. I was the only one with my bag on my shoulders ready to run out. Yeah. Everyone else was just going about their work and yeah, just.

I don’t know how they do it, I don’t know how they do it. I, I, I kind of, the most traumatic feeling that, as you said it’s kind of, “Okay, what’s coming?” [Laughter]

Brace yourself and get ready for...

...yeah, yeah, yeah...

...something bad to happen.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, I had a really interesting suggestion from one person I spoke to that - I don’t know how technologically this is, might be way out there - you know when they send out those, em, early warnings, like, it says in now English or whatever, you know, “You should prepare,” you know, “an earthquake is coming.” Or, “Earthquake centred on this place’s seismic intensity.” He was suggesting why don’t you put a link to, let’s say, {some} information centre in that la, like, that warning. So, like, go to www.blahblahblah...

Yeah, there’s the, after the earthquake a lot of people would check the link, the [Note: the participant thinks to himself]. What is it? The meteorological…

Oh the.

...Japan site, or the, I don’t know what it’s called, but, em, that has all the key information in English so we made sure to send that...

Just go to that.

...so if they needed to know more information…

Yeah, yeah.

...em, yeah, otherwise Facebook [laughter].

Yeah, yeah, no, but, em, it’s, it’s been absolutely fascinating talking to you because, again as I said, every, you know, 24 people now, in many ways everyone is completely different, but there are some things, there are some themes which are definitely emerging for sure…

Uhum.

...and you’re, you’re one of the people I’ve spoken to who really was translating in the disaster. I spoke to one interpreter who was up in some of the worst-hit areas interpreting officially…

Uhum.

...and, like, you know, this, this person is a professional interpreter and talked about how difficult the, the, the job was, so for someone who wasn’t trained professionally, I think it’s amazing work that you did, and I don’t know how you kept it up for so long...
Um…
...I, that’s...
...I don’t actually know either…
...yeah, but…
...I just got through it.
...you got through it. Yeah, you just did it, I suppose. You know, there are some people who are like that, like, you just...
It’s definitely life-changing...
...kind of, put your nose forward.
...like, I can tell you that, definitely life-changing, but, I guess, when I try to explain it to my friends and family back home, they don’t, just don’t understand because they just weren’t there so it’s difficult to explain, explain what was going on. Yeah.
Well, I didn’t, as I told you, I didn’t have a dramatic experience, as I said, my company did…
Uhum.
...I was involved in that but, like, me personally, I didn’t lose anyone, I didn’t have any drama or anything in my, my life, but one thing that really hit home with what you said is I realized the importance of family to me…
Yeah.
...I didn’t think my - this sounds really awful, actually, me saying this, but - before, I didn’t think my family was that important. Like, I, I love them and thought they were important to me…
Yeah.
...but like, I’d lived away from home for a long time. Not just, just in Japan. I was like, well, “I’m never going back to Ireland,” kind of thing, just, “I’ll see them when I see them.”
Yeah.
And it just changed. I, I, I actually, I stayed for a year-and-a-half after the earthquake but then moved home…
Oh.
...and now I live five minutes away from them [laughter].
[Laughter]
That may be too much. I’ve gone the other extreme. But it really hit home when you said how family, you realized how family was.

Yeah and I guess you do realize the people close to you that are li, - even if they’re not your family - how close they’ve become. Because my co-workers became so close, and even up until now, they’re still fundraising and trying to, like, make an exchange kind of program between New Zealand and Sendai, because, yeah, I, I’m really happy that it’s continued. I mean, it’s difficult to do. We all have full-time jobs, so for them to keep it going, and I don’t live in Sendai any more, so for them to keep it going, and trying to make sure that the New Zealand name is out there. because {the foreign staff now} are American, so for that reason, you know, it could be lost there…

Yeah. It changes the dynamic. {Well} I am really grateful to you.

No, no, no. You’re welcome.

Just, just the final thing is, you, you know, em, I hope I haven’t dragged up any difficult memories or anything for you and you’re not feeling any... No I think...

...extra stress.

...after the earthquake it was, em, I had a chance to talk about it, so I think leaving as it is, I mean it’s still, I have friends that are still affected by it, but, yeah, I’m, I’m, I mean, I don’t know, not moved on but, yeah, I’m not as affected. Because I was heavily affected and it took a while to process everything and get back on to like, em. One random thing that I did from the earthquake, I used to cook every day before the earthquake. I still haven’t cooked since the earthquake. Isn’t that really random? And I don’t know why. Food was a big thing that we did not have for the longest time. And I think, yeah, we didn’t have electricity or water, but food was a major, like. When, I also won’t, I don’t waste food now at all, and I will sit there even if I am going to be sick and I will eat other people’s food and they are like, “You don’t have to do that. We paid for it,” and that type of thing. But I don’t know, I just kept that from the earthquake. I was like, “I had no food.” And, yeah, and you don’t waste food anymore, because I would just, you know, leave food there, you know, paid for it, whatever, it’s going to go in the bin. But not having food, this sucks big time. And having to, like, last on, like, I mean sure, emergency food is not going to be the tastiest food, right? But having to live on that, yeah, [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...it wasn’t fun. It was not fun at all. So, em, yeah, it’s almost been two year, two, no it’s been more than two years, hasn’t it?

Yeah, two-and-a-half.

And I haven’t cooked…

That’s very interesting.

...I don’t know why, but I’m sure it’s something psychological or something. But, em, yeah, I don't know, I haven’t cooked. I’m sure I could just go home and cook now…

Yeah.
...but just, like, I don’t know. Yeah. So, em, yeah, I don’t think I’m as affected as I was, but, yeah, everyone was affected in their own way.

Yeah, yeah. Absolutely. Em, one of the things the university was really strong about was making sure that we had counsellors in place in case anyone...

Okay...

...did feel.

...I actually did, have spoken to a counsellor.

Ah, okay.

We all, we, we were all made to, em, to go and talk to counsellors, and I think that was, when I went and talked to the counsellor, mine wasn’t even speaking about the earthquake, mine was talking about work, the Christchurch Earthquake - because I was still, it was the Christchurch Earthquake...

You hadn’t processed that.

...yeah, so mine was focused on that, so I think having it all together as one wasn’t so great, but having it all as one I could process it faster maybe.

Yeah.

So, em, yeah, but one of the first things I wanted to talk to them about was the Christchurch Earthquake because I was like fully heartbroken just watching it on, because I would go to work and for the first three or four days I wouldn’t do any work, because I’m just sitting there watching the news trying to figure out, “Okay, well, what’s going on back home?” But, em, yeah.

So, yeah...

[Laughter]

...yeah, no, this is a really clumsy like, I really actually have grown to dislike this question intensely...

Okay.

...it’s just the way I worked it is just after speaking to me I wanted to make sure people weren’t feeling extra stress because of me...

Okay, okay, okay.

...em, I’m not a counsellor...

[Laughter]

...so I’m not sure I can tell people are feeling extra stress so I thought beforehand, “Well, I’ll just ask them...

Yeah, right, right, right.
But now I’ve come across it, it’s an awful question, but if there is some way you could, sort of, say how you’re feeling now in terms of having spoken to me. Basically the agreement I made was that if a person circled a certain number or above we’d introduce... Okay. ...the counsellor. But like that’s. I’m in, yeah, I’m not anxious. Em, because I guess part of my job I have to kind of counsel... Okay. ...a lot of the people that went through it and you know, you have, we learned techniques on how to counsel people, but how do you go about that when they’ve been through all really different experiences, so, em, yeah, I don’t really talk about my experience as a whole because I don’t think it’s, like, that important when it, when I know... Yeah. ...what my friends have been through, so, em, yeah, I didn't really speak about it. So when it came to that one where I’m online with that group, it, I was supposed to be there to translate for these Japanese students, and then they found out I was from Christchurch and then they found out that I was there, so they, instead of asking the students, they were asking me... [Laughter] ...and then afterwards they were just like, “Can you say that again?” and... [Laughter] ...I’m, I’m on the freaking radio... Yeah, yeah, yeah. ...so I was like, “Ah!” Because I didn't realize it was going, like, all out on air, but, I mean, all I was talking about was Facebook and Twitter so, yeah. Yeah. Oh I’m hugely grateful to those people [laughter] because that’s how I found you so it was, eh, it was absolutely... [Laughter] I know... ...a lucky chance for me. [Note: this participant was not introduced to me. I found his name and contact details online and cold called him.] ...because it comes up all the time and that picture of me holding the... I know, I know. ...the sign.
It’s a little bit scary, isn’t it, how, like, the Internet now is a way of finding people halfway across the world and.

If it’s a good thing [laughter] then it’s great, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

But like I have a, I don’t know, I have this, em, essay that I wrote when I got a scholarship way back when when I was an exchange student here in Tokyo, and my friends now they’re just so like, “Oh, remember that time?”...

[Laughter]

...and I was like, “You didn’t have to say that. So obviously you googled me.” [laughter]

Oh dear, yeah, I, I know that certainly I’m more cautious about what I put up under my own name and...

Uhum.

...and I would have, kind of, prided myself on having a fairly tight control of what’s going out there. But even when you, you think you do, like random stuff comes up, and I remember one of my friends telling me - I’ve since managed to take it down - “There’s this awful photo of you on the Internet.” And I was like, “How? What? I didn’t put it up.” Somebody else had put it up and put my name on it and I was like, “That’s, that’s the danger.”

It’s getting it down, though, right?

You can’t always, even, I was quite lucky, like, because I knew the person who had put it up so I was able to say, “Look, you have to take that down.” Em, but sometimes, you know, it could be out of your control or whatever. But then, you know, you mentioned say the privacy laws in Japan. That’s a whole other bundle of issues, like, I think - I mean, this is nothing to do with my, my thesis now but - having spoken to some people in different situations, the privacy laws actually acted as a real barrier to the response in some cases. Ehm, there was information that, say, this office had, that they weren’t legally allowed to share it with another office. It could have helped in the response.

It’s quite sad, isn’t it? They could have all shared the information but because, yeah, I mean...

Well.

...I think that’s, when it comes to foreigners living here, we tend to share information anyway...

Yeah.

...but just don’t use it in that way, but at least know of that sort of stuff.

And, and one thing I also feel is, you know, we may be brought up in a more, like, “Look, I’ll share it, but I’ll take responsibility for it” kind of environment. So we maybe will make that call in a disaster, “Look, I know this is against the rules, but you know, I as, let’s say XYZ manager, I’ll put my head on the line for it.” Whereas maybe in certain institutional circumstances in Japan that culture isn’t there so they have difficulty in
saying, you know, “Let’s go ahead and just do it anyway even though it’s not the
procedure or the rule.” So, but I mean, it’s always easy for me as somebody two-and-a-
half years down the line coming in and saying, “Oh, you should have done this, you
should have done that.”

[Laughter]

I really want to avoid that in my thesis because at the time it’s a disaster...

Um.

...I mean, people are dying, people are floating out to, to sea, you know. You do what you
can. You do the best you can. And I think Japan did an amazing job...

They did.

[redacted] Like, I think one thing I am still working through in the whole thing is it may
come around that some of the preconceptions that I had about say “You must translate
this,” or “This needs to be done” might not be, might not hold true. Em, we didn’t talk
about it at all because it just didn’t come up but a lot of people have talked about how
important pictures and diagrams were, especially in relation to the nuclear disaster.

That, you know, these were people who could speak both, both languages very fluently,
but even when they translated microsieverts into, into English, they still didn’t know what
it meant [laughter] so in that kind of a situation, you know, translation is one layer but
then actually explaining the information is another layer and then a lot of people talked
about images and, so maybe rather than, you know, translating into multiple languages
or putting everything in Easy Japanese, it might be good to just have better images to, to
communicate certain information.

That’s just what I was going to say. That’s one thing {the centre I worked for} started
doing after the earthquake, there is a lecturer in - this is probably not right, but - Iwate
Prefecture, I think. He - no, it’s not Iwate. It’s somewhere, sorry - he focuses on how to
get information out in Easy Japanese, so I think {the centre} took a couple of courses
with him and the information that they give out now is not in Japanese but Easy Japanese
or it’s given in Japanese and Easy Japanese as well.

He’s not in Hirosaki by any chance, is he?

Oh, yeah, yeah, that’s it.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

So, em, he’s, he went and spoke, because I think after the earthquake they realised it’s
great to put it in Japanese but not everyone understands those specific words, so I’ve seen
Easy Japanese and I think it’s great because there are a lot of people that have lived in
Japan that don’t necessarily use that type, those types of words. They use easy
Japanese…

Yeah.

...and they may be really good at speaking the language but they may not know what that
word means.

Exactly.
Yeah, so.

Exactly. It’s a really interesting topic and I know that one of the motivations behind it is, like, is it fair to translate things into English in an area where most of the people, let’s say, speak Portuguese or, you know, Chinese or Korean or something like that…

Uhum.

...so like the Easy Japanese may be just more kind of a balanced way of providing information.

In Sendai, I don’t know if this is like other, oh yeah I guess it is other parts, we knew how many of that specific, you know, country was in Sendai so I think for them, because they knew of those specific people it was easy to find them. You know, like, “We’re looking for that person…”

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...from that country. Anyone know?”

Yeah.

Okay, so, em, I think the harder ones were Koreans and Chinese because there were a lot in Miyagi Prefecture and Sendai City that are married to Japanese that have been here for a long time…

Yeah, yeah.

...so getting information to them unless they are in a community of Chinese or Koreans because they, I don’t think, they probably get their information in Japanese, yeah, so.

Yeah. Oh, em, that’s, that’s a huge issue for me. How am I going to define what is a foreigner in Japan? That’s, I’m already struggling with that because, you know, for example I had that question on the other sheet about your nationality and your citizenship...

Uhum.

...if some of the people - and some of the people I have spoken to were born in one country but now have a Japanese passport that means the government recognises them as Japanese...

Right.

...so should I? But they self-identify as foreign.

Yes…

So, I don’t know [laughter].

… well, I, if I had Japanese citizenship, I would still be a New Zealander...

You see, so this is really the tricky thing...

...I would never consider myself as Japanese.
how, I don’t know how I’m going to do it. Em, I think it’s, there’s going to be no perfect way. I’m just going to have to draw a line in the sand and say for my study, yeah, a foreigner means blah blah, or whatever. But it’s something I never even thought about, like, what I’m finding is the more, the deeper I get in, like, you know, you said about how foreigners were all classed together but you know for you, you know, maybe you had less in common with some of the other foreign groups or they had less in common with you than with you and the Japanese so that’s a tricky one as well, and then also as I said, like, the short and long term...

Yeah.

...that’s a huge difference. But it’s terrible, you know the way, like, people find humour in things, eh, about, a story about the subway where long-term foreign residents were in the subway, and an announcement was made in Japanese, and the station announcer was so panicked in his voice that some obviously tourists ran and jumped over the turnstiles and, like, ran screaming from the subway...

Woah!

...and, like, the long-term residents laughed a little bit because it was so comical but it was just they couldn’t understand, there was this man making a very panicked-sounding announcement in Japanese and they knew nothing about it. And then an alarm happened and then, you know, the shaking happened, so.

Well, that’s like even my friends that don’t speak Japanese that well now, they’ll post on Facebook, they’ll be like, “What just happened?” Like, I suppose one of my friends in Osaka does that actually. He’s like, “Okay, there’s lots of police around, what’s going on?”

[Laughter]

And I’m like, I just like, “Did anyone feel that? Like, where is it? Where was it located?” But yeah, you should try to find that information from Facebook, so.

Facebook’s a fascinating one. It’s a fascinating one. Ehm, I came in a little bit suspicious of social media because there had been lots and lots of talk about it in all manner of disasters like Haiti and, you know, the Christchurch Earthquake and various disasters and I was starting to feel a bit, “Hmm, is it really that helpful?” And now from talking to people most people, em, it’s not completely set, some people didn’t have a good impression of the panic-mongering kind of, em, the false information that could easily spread but overall most people seemed to find it pretty useful.

Yeah, I guess, we, we had the same thing. There may have been, like, panic emails to everyone but, I guess, people were like, “Okay, hold up. You have to step back, look at this information and this information. You can’t just say those types of things.” So, I guess, most people knew what was happening, so they were just trying to make sure that, you know, we didn’t have everyone panicking over it, so, yeah, in that context I guess, we, we, I think we were really lucky but I know that there’s seventy of us. I don’t know everyone that well…

Yeah.

So there would have been other communities that were way stronger than our community but we got the information out to us, so.
Yeah, I think there is something about a kind of a critical mass of, like, community as well, like, there’s maybe thirty or forty people who you can sort of know and trust and they form, like, the core of your information sharing or information gathering, and then the other sort of outer stuff you, kind of, make an assessment on case by case...

Right.

...kind of thing. Because a lot of people have talked about how now the social media let you kind of rank the groups you are in like circles or whatever so that okay this is my group that I really trust or so, it’s, it’s, I mean I could write probably a thesis on just that topic alone. I’m going to have to...

It sounds really interesting. I can’t wait to read it.

...I’m fascinated by it. I’m fascinated by it, but the problem is it’s a bit of a Pandora’s Box, like, there’s so many things I want to talk about but I’ll only be able to talk about a little part but that’s why I said I didn’t want to destroy the

[Note: the interview recording finally ends here but we went on to talk for another hour just chatting about other topics not related to the research project.]
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/9 Interview with Participant 25

Researcher: So basically, the, the way I start every interview is just to ask people in general tell me what happened to you in the disaster and...

Participant: Okay…

...whatever you want to say.

...ehm, so, in the disaster I was at work across the road, and it was two, yeah, just after lunch, two thirty or so, and, just that week, we, we had been having quite a few earthquakes and quite a few long ones…

Yeah.

...and then this one started, and there weren’t many people in the office, there were three back office ladies, one assistant, me, one sales guy, my boss, and I said to the girl, kind of, sitting opposite me, I said, “Get under the table.” And I went under the table. She and I went under the table and then my boss came out and said, “We’ve got to leave.” And then we ran down the stairs and this, which I don’t think you’re supposed to do.

[Laughter]

[Laughter] Ehmm, and the stairs are quite, the rail is quite flimsy and it was moving and I was just swearing my head off. I just remember going, [Note: the participant mouths] “Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.” ...

[Laughter]

...and my boss was like, “Calm down.” [Laughter] And then we ran out to the, ehm, what’s it called, so, safety area which is a school play, eh, a sports field near our office. And people were just line, on the street, ehm, standing in the middle of the road. Yeah, watching buildings, I suppose…

Yeah.

...yeah.

And, like, you had been in Japan for some time at that stage...

Uhm.

...why was it that this earthquake, kind of, got that reaction from you?

It was really long. Normally, you know, you just sit at your desk and just hope it, kind of, calms down a little bit…

[Laughter]

...but it didn’t. Just got worse and worse, and things were moving, things were falling over, and, ehm, stuff was falling out of cabinets and then, so we went, that’s when we
went, and my boss came out and said, “Let’s leave.” And that’s, like, you know, if your 
boss is saying that, and the boss is supposed to be the calm person, yeah.

It’s a sign [laughter].

It’s a sign, yeah.

And so, as I mentioned at the, at the start, what I’m really interested in is how people 
communicated or how they got information so, you know, by the time you had gotten to 
the, to the, sort of, evacuation area, had you communicated with anyone at that stage?

No. No, not at all. We were in the evacuation area and we were looking up at our 
building, there was someone still in that building who had been in the toilet, so we could 
see him and we were, kind of, waving at him to come down, but that was the only kind of 
communication. There was no, nothing else. And then I went, when we were back in to 
the office, even at that time, no-one, we were all on the field and there were, eh, you 
know, heaps of other people from the surrounding offices. No-one was, we were just, 
kind of, sitting on the ground and looking around, looking up at {a very, large modern, 
skyscraper that dominates the nearby skyline that was} going like this [Note: the 
participant gestures a strong, side-to-side swaying motion with her hand] and there were 
people in the top, the very top glass windows, and it was really scary to watch that. But, 
no, we didn’t even communicate with people from other offices who were on the same 
sports ground. We were just in our group. I think that’s what happens in Japan 
kind of, stay in your group. And that’s what we did, when we walked out, and then we 
couldn’t use our phones…

Ah.

...so, one person, ehm, the, one, the sales guy who was there, who wasn’t in the toilet, he 
was in the office, was trying to call people, because at that time, I, we had {business 
associates}, or we had a {business associate} here who was out in Saitama, I think. So we 
were trying to call them. And just trying to, he was trying to call people, our sales team. 

So, when you say you had a {business associate} over, does that, mean, like somebody 
from Australia?

No, an Italian guy...

Italian?

...was over, but he was completely calm about the whole thing, apparently. [Laughter] 

[Laughter]

Normally you imagine Italians would be like, “Hey, what’s going on?” But, I know they 
took a while to get back. But, em, we couldn’t communicate, we couldn’t, well there was 
no phone, no phone lines were…

Yeah.

...working. So, em, we went back to the office and decided to go home because the office 
was still, it was still moving. The ground was still shaking, and there were still 
aftershocks, and I called my sister in Australia from the landline…

Aaaahhh.
...and I said to her, “Just to let you know, we’re okay.” [laughter] and she was like, “What are you talking about?” [laughter] And this was probably, oh, em, I can’t remember what time, it wasn’t straight after, it was perhaps, eh, it would have been, there would have been half-an-hour’s time difference and they, it was a Friday and they were getting, they were at a pub, they were getting ready to go the pub for Friday night drinks. So, maybe it was 4:30, I don’t know, I can’t, I can’t remember, but around…

A little later on, anyway.

...later on, yeah. And then, she said, “Oh, okay then. Good.” And then she turned on the television and she was like, “Oh my god! Are you okay?” And I was like, “Yeah. I’m going to walk home now.” And then on the way home, trying to call my, em, husband, who wasn’t my husband at the time [Note: the participant’s voice cracks and her eyes water slightly] I couldn’t get through, and then text messages started coming through, and maybe this was about 4:30, text messages were coming through, like, ‘2:38 Are you okay? Are you okay? Dahdahdahdahdah.’

So everything was blocked up?

Yeah.

The whole, the whole system was blocked up.

Yeah.

I’m really interested in when you said, so, you were on the phone to your sister in Australia and she was the one who turned on the Australian TV…

Yeah.

...was that the first time you had, sort of, I don’t know, come into contact with the bigger picture, like?

Yeah, yeah. I mean, I didn’t realize how big it was at that point…

Yeah.

...she was just like, “Oh, there’s been an earthquake,” obviously she’s watching it on TV but, it wasn’t until I went home, walked home and, em, people were like [Note: the participant stops and begins to shed tears] oh, god, sorry, I’m sorry. I don’t know. Why is that happening all of a sudden? Sorry. There were so many people, and I couldn’t, I couldn’t, em, I couldn’t call anyone. And it didn’t get to and then I finally got that message, and I was like, “Ah, okay.” Fuck, I’m sorry, Patrick.

No, don’t apologize...

[Laughter]

...please.

So anyway, em, then there was just stream, people streaming out on the street, and I live in a very central area, I live in {redacted}. And I am never going to move out of {that} ward because it’s the ward that, if, if there’s an emergency, it’s where the, the Diet [Note: the Japanese parliament building] and everything is, so we’ll be inside! [laughter]...
...but, em, so I was just worried about is my TV on, off the wall, on my bed…

Yeah, yeah.

...what’s broken. You know, no-one, it was, it, it was a worry because I couldn’t get through to my husband who was, em, working in a restaurant on the 35th floor of a building in {central Tokyo}. And, and, the next day, well I was thinking that the next day I had a, a {work event} in Yokohama, and would I be able to get there? Just ridiculous things like that. I, we, no-one had any idea and people were trying to use their phones, and I think you could see people walking and talking, but, it, yeah, people were just, eh, and I, I’ve never seen that many people out at once on the streets walking along. So, yeah, at that time, no idea of what was going on. And then I went home and my friend Skyped me and the, the, my building was shaking the whole time and but she was talking and telling me stupid stories about what was going on, so just to, kind of, take my mind off it, because {my boyfriend-now-husband} wasn’t home. I went to the shops, shops, the closest supermarket, heaps of stuff had fallen off the shelves. I went to the convenience store. Most people had obviously bought something for, going on the way home, and then, eh, I didn’t, I think I turned the television on, but I, I can’t remember what was being shown. And I don’t think we, I, I think maybe there was tsunami stuff, but not much, and, eh, eh, there was just a map, I think, perhaps just a map of Japan with, you know, the constant of, em, eh, message coming up on screen, like, there’s an aft, there’s been an aftershock here and and earthquake here and nothing, no footage of actual tsunami, from what I remember.

So that channel you would have been watching, what channel?

I think it was NHK, yeah.

NHK, so a Japanese language, eh, channel.

Yeah. And I don’t, I don’t have, em, BBC or anything like that. I’ve only got just normal Japanese TV. And I know you can put it on, the news, you can put on to English version, but I was just watching the Japanese one.

Yeah, and actually, I’m not so sure, em, that origi, initially all of that translation was available anyway, because it was such a fast-moving…

Yeah, yeah, perhaps it wouldn’t have been.

...thing. I think it took a while. What they were doing, from what I understand was, ehm, they were doing a sort of a, like a broadcast in English every, sort of, half hour…

Oh, right.

...but it was only, kind of, a summary thing…

Right.

...they weren’t, like, simultaneously translating. So then, the next day, like, you would have woken up and started again, did you end up going to the, the {work event}?
No, I [laughter]. No. Next day, I went online and I checked. I was just watching, eh, yeah, online the rail routes if there was any disruption, and there was disruption, and I, I didn’t want to go, so I was just looking, trying to find information that said you don’t have to go [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...basically, so I was checking and they [laughter], and I thought my {items to present} probably didn’t end up there anyway...

Yeah [laughter].

...because I sent them the, like, there was, like, no way they ended up there and, and then finally I find the information saying, ah, it’s been cancelled. But, even then, I didn’t, I don’t think I knew, I was so concerned about the {work event}, I didn’t, I don’t even think I, the, I mustn’t have, there mustn’t have been news about, eh, what was going on in Tohoku because why would there be a {work event of this casual nature} if that had just happened. I was concerned about the trains and being able to get back. My friend had a birthday party dinner organized, and I said, I hate doing, like, last minute cancellation, but I said, “I don’t know if I can come back home.” Because there were so many disruptions, but she ended up going to her, but I mean, she’d booked it, it was near her house, and she could walk home, or whatever. So she ended up going with some friends, but I didn’t go...

Yeah.

... but, em, I, I think the main news items were just news presenters saying there’s been an aftershake, aftershake, aftershake? Is that right?

Yeah, aftershock.

Maybe I should change my thing [laughter] [Note: the participant is referring to the self-assessed English ability score she had given me at the beginning of the interview.]

[Laughter] It’s going down!

Oh, jeez! Ehm, yeah, so, ehm, yeah, I, I think there wasn’t much, and those, em, AC commercials. And, like, warnings and the map of Japan and, you know, spots where there had...

Yeah.

...they had an earthquake or an aftershock…

Yeah.

...yeah, so that was about it.

It was pretty, like, the information wasn’t really that useful to you as someone in Tokyo?

Ehm, not all, em, I mean, the information was where there was an aftershock and that was it…

Yeah.
...I don’t, I mean, any other information - oh, rail information came up, too, perhaps -
yeah, I think that came up but, em, I don’t think anything but the train, really. I slept in
my clothes for what might have been two weeks. I slept with shoe, jeans and shoes on. So
I could run out and my husband was “Don’t,” he was so calm and relaxed…

[Laughter]

...he was like, “Don’t be ridiculous.” And had, had the world’s quickest showers all the
time…

Yeah.

...it was just, super quick with everything in case I had to escape.

Oh, I’ve, I felt exactly the same way as you…

Yeah.

...em, I had been in Japan, you know, not, not as long as you, but a fair amount of time,
and I’d had a fair amount of experience of earthquakes, but I did the same thing. It was
quick showers and, I think because of the aftershocks, were so many…

Yeah.

...in a, you know, that two-week period, let’s say, after, there was a lot of aftershocks…

Yeah.

...and you just, kind of, never knew…

That’s right.

...is this next one going to be another big one?

Yeah, exactly, exactly.

Yeah. And different people react differently…

Yeah.

...that’s one thing I’ve really noticed.

Yeah, like he was super calm. I mean, some people were, my friend, {redacted}, went
home to Canada. And my sister was like, “You’ve got to come home. Bring {your
boyfriend-now-husband} home.” And I was like, “I can’t go, go home and what? Worry
about everything?” Because seeing more stuff that’s going on, like, thank god the
Japanese networks didn’t broadcast half the stuff that was going on. Thank god.

Otherwise it would have been terrible. You know, that, in that sense, information we got,
I think we got so much information from overseas about what was actually going on that
it was scary. But if they had broadcast footage of the tsunami over and over, like, it would
have been terrible. I think. Eh, but, yeah, I mean for two weeks, yeah, I slept in my
clothes, I walked to work, walked to and from work, I didn’t have a bicycle at the time,
and peop, our office was pretty much half shut because we had people living in Chiba…

That’s far.
...I mean, I could walk…

Yeah.

...so that’s no problem but even, you know, the, it’s brand, our office is brand new, so, of course, it was moving like this [Note: the participant gestures a swaying motion with her hand] all the time…

Oh, yeah.

...so that was annoying.

I’m really interested in that idea of the difference between what was reported in the Japanese media and what was reported in overseas media...

Uhm.

...because I think that’s one thing that foreign nationals kind of had that the Japanese people maybe didn’t have...

Yeah.

...this access to the two different, I guess, ways of...

Yeah.

...telling the story. Eh, you, you were saying that you were glad that the Japanese side wasn’t showing so...

So much, yeah.

...yeah, were, were you watching Australian media or?

Em, I was going online or, em, yeah, going online and just reading the Sydney Morning Herald or something like or sometimes watching, em, CNN or that kind of thing. So, and, my mum would send me articles about Australians, of Australians interviewed, Australians in Japan interviewed, and there was one where this sensible girl who, em, gave an interview and - a girl I know actually, at the time I didn’t know her, but - em, she gave a really sensible interview and I remember reading online about this woman who said she hadn’t had food and it was chaos and it was just ridiculous, so, you know, at one point, you know, people were, Australians or people overseas were emailing me and sending me messages on Facebook, like, “Are you okay? What’s happened? Do you have food? Are you going to come home?” Because they were, in, they were shown, I suppose, real live footage of what happened but then, I suppose, the foreign press did make it a more juicy story, with interviewing idiots who’d be like, “Yeah, we’ve only got one rice ball, rice ball.” And it was, it was just, like, that was ridiculous. In that sense, [Note: the participant uses her hands to show one place on an imaginary scale] they had a kind of skewed view of what happened, and then [Note: the participant uses her hands to show the opposite end of the same imaginary scale] we had this kind of this [laughter] view, so I, that used to make me angry. So I wouldn't, I’d get really annoyed reading foreign reports of what was going on so I tended to just try and just read some stuff and try and not get angry and watch Japanese news.

I got it.
Yeah.

*Then, as an Australian, how do you feel your embassy dealt with...*

It was, it was...

*...the situation?*

...quite good. Ehm, they rang my sister actually and said, because I’ve never signed up for anything, and this was before I was involved in {a certain Australian group in Japan}, or no, I, I was a member but not on the committee thing and, ehm, they called my sister and said, you know, "{your sister} is in Tokyo. She should sign up with this safe traveller thing." [Note: the participant is probably referring to http://smarttraveller.gov.au/] So I did. I, we got, ehm, updates...

Okay.

...ehm, and people, so I got updates through them, and... By, by email or?

...yeah, email, yeah. Yeah, ehm, and I got updates through people who had networks in Japan, ehm, people who had been here for a long time and, I don’t know what they were doing, they got involved with, ehm, got together and, kind of shared information so people who I knew were, well, one guy I know who has been here forever, American guy, he doesn’t speak Japanese but he had a whole heap of information from other people, so he was sending out email every day, like, “I have water, if you need this, if you need that, let me know,” and...

Uhm.

...yeah. But then again, I didn’t know, because a lot of the foreigners who organized these volunteer things were just people trying to help, but not Japanese speakers, so that’s where I thought, you know, how, how much of this is completely true or do you have a complete grasp of the situation or that kind of thing.

*That’s a really interesting point for me. Obviously, as someone who’s interested in, like, the language aspect of it all, these people are trying to give you information...*

Yeah.

*...but can you...* 

Exactly...

*...rely on it.*

...yeah, exactly. So this network of people, yeah, and a, another guy I know who was, ehm, heavily involved - [Note: the participant speaks to herself trying to remember something] he started a foreign, ehm, can’t remember what it was called, foreign aid, or something like that - some group that was sending, ehm, the main guy in this group, actually, could speak Japanese and he runs a beer import company here. So he was organizing stuff with this other English guy who I know can’t speak Japanese. This English guy was organizing a lot of things. And that’s when I thought, “Hmm. Are you, is this the right information and
are you doing the right thing?” Because you can’t just bowl into somewhere and be a
non-native speaker, or a non-Japanese speaker and, I mean, if, if, your hearts in the right
place but you’ve got to be able to be able to communicate with the people and you don’t
want to get in people’s way. Do you know what I mean?

Oh, I absolutely know what you mean, em, I know that the people I’ve spoken to, the most
successful, kind of, volunteer efforts or aid efforts were the ones who partnered with...

Yeah.

...local organizations...

Yeah.

...and that’s actually, they talk about that in all disasters, like, not just Japan. The best
way to help is to partner with somebody on the ground...

Yeah.

...that knows the language, who knows the lie of the land...

Yeah.

...because you’re absolutely right...

Yeah, you can’t just bowl in there.

...you could go in and cause more trouble.

Yeah, yeah. And the last thing they need is for all these foreign people hiring trucks and
rocking up with water and, you know, and just being, just, not having enough information
and being misinformed and going in and, kind of, disturbing the balance of what was
going on.

For you personally, what did you feel was, what information was lacking for you now
that you look back on the disaster?

Ehm...

If, if there was any information lacking.

...I don’t think there was, uhhh, I think, ehm, I’m not sure, I think there, the, one girl, I
went to dinner with one girl after and she said just, like, pretty much a month after that
happened and she said, she complained that people, em, were saying that we ran out of
water in Tokyo, dahdahdah, and she said, “You do realize that’s because the water bottle
comp, company, main water bottle company was in Tohoku and that got bowled over and
that’s why.”

[Laughter]

And so, but that, you know, we didn’t know, and I wish we had have known because, I
mean, I thought there was no, no that there was no water, but it was just because people
were buying stuff and keeping it at home. I mean, we didn’t do that, just because I
thought that’s, that’s greedy and you can’t just, I live in a tiny apartment [laughter]...
...like, you can’t just buy water and what are you going to do…
Yeah.

...if you get crushed with, [Note: the participant gestures with her hands to show a high pile] water’s there…
[Laughter]
...and there was [laughter], you know, you’d get it from somewhere...

Yeah, yeah.

...ehm, so I thought if people had known, if, like, the foreign community had known that, maybe they would have, em, kind of, spread the word to others in Australia or whatever that, “Oh, well, you know, we’re fine. This happened.” Or, I, I, it’s stuff, it’s stuff like that, or what kind of, you know, we saw devastation, we saw lots of old people and some schools washed away but to what extent, how big is, is the area, and what, em, what companies, eh, what factories were affected and, because, you know, down the track you hear, “Oh, Toyota couldn’t make something because they had.” “Oh I didn’t know there was even a factory in Tohoku.” You know? That kind of stuff. Not just, you know, I mean, not just, not just people but what else was destroyed, because people just see a bunch of old people sitting around going, “We’ve lost our home.” Okay, but how else has this affected Japan? Were whole factories wiped out? You know?

And that would have helped explain...
Yeah…
...a lot of other stuff for you? Yeah.
...I think so, I think so. So in that, was lacking, I think.

And just to confirm, that woman you had dinner with who told you about the bottle factory, was she also a foreigner?

She’s Japanese.

Oh, she’s Japanese.

Yeah, yeah, Japanese.

Ah, okay, so in other words...
Yeah, sorry, so she had information from somewhere…

Right, right, right.

...and I don’t know how she got that information but I suppose someone told her.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Ehm, one question which I’ve asked everybody is, for you, when did the disaster end?
Oh, when did it end? Good question.

Laughter

I don’t think it has.

Okay, yeah.

Yeah...

That’s interesting...

I don’t think it has.

...you’re not the only person to say that.

Ehm, i, it, yeah, it’s still, ehm, I mean I still think about it all the time, and things that have happened in my life from then have, are, like, pre-earthquake and post-earthquake, and, you know, “Oh, we did that after the earthquake,” or, you know, that was, “My business went like that after.” You know? Or people say when you meet people the first time, ehm, you talk about it, like, ehm, people will say - I also have another thing which I do {where women get together and have lunch every month} it’s around the world and I organize it here, I, I took over organizing it last year. So new people come and it’s a nice way to meet, ehm, new people and, you know, sort of, share information, that kind of thing. So when new members join up, someone introduces a new member, you know, they say who, you know, how, were you here for the earthquake?...

Laughter

...[laughter] People ask that...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and, “Oh, I came after the earthquake,” or “I went home,” or, you know, “We did this.” People will, you, you still talk about it.

It’s kind of a defining.

Yeah, exactly. And there are still efforts, you know, charity efforts still going on, and you, you still see, you know, boxes by the till in shops, you know, ‘Please put your change in here and we’ll send it to Tohoku.’

Uuhh, uuhh.

Or, ehm, the charities this year that we picked for the {the group I am involved in}, we do events and we raise money - and the two charities are TELL, Tokyo English Life Line...

Oh yes, yeah.

...which has, you know, after the earthquake just not only English speakers, but, you know, they need speakers of all sorts of languages now, and, and, they were, what, I think they were, they really need help because I’m sure their, em, resources are just overstretched. People are still, you know, I suppose have, kind of, post-traumatic stress disorder, or something like that, I don’t know. But, em, and, eh, a Fukushima, eh,
abandoned dog, or animal charity that cares for abandoned, well, not even abandoned, you know, animals whose family, parents have died or…

Yeah, yeah

...whatever, so they’re directly related to the earthquake, I think, those, aren’t they?

Yeah, yeah. One thing I’m interested in, em, you haven’t mentioned Fukushima or the nuclear issue...

No.

...at all. Is there a reason for that?

Ehm, I, I don, don’t worry about that. Ehm, what can I do about that? You know? That’s, I’ve never been one of those people to forward information on Facebook or, you know, ehm, forward horror stories, because I, that’s not the way, that’s not helping. Ehm, and, I do, I’m really, ehm, one thing I do though is I’m very conservative with my electricity use [laughter]...

Aaaahhh [laughter].

...since then. And I, I went and looked at a, em, house, a, a mansion [Note: this means a high-spec apartment in a Japanese context] that’s not up yet, but, like, a model room in, em, Toyosu area and one side overlooks Tepco building [Note: Tepco is the power company that runs the Fukushima nuclear plant] and I said I did not want to look at a freaking Tepco building...

[Laughter]

...that’s the last thing I want to look at, like, Tepco are a disgusting company. But, I don’t, not I don’t care, but I don’t concern, I’m not concerned with radiation levels. I mean, radiation levels, you cannot escape radiation in the world. And it’s Japan. I’m sure if it were China or somewhere like that, I’d be out of there, but I, and maybe this is silly in a way, but I think in Japan - I mean a lot of things have been covered up, and whatever, but - people do their job, except Tepco people, people...

[Laughter]

... [laughter] but people, you know, I have faith in the people trying, doing their best to, em, you know deal with that situation and, yeah, I, I’m not into sharing horror stories about what’s going on. I bought Fukushima peaches, I didn’t, and this was just after the earthquake, I didn’t tell my dad that, eh, my dad and mum were visiting me. It was very difficult then to fly over actually, that’s another story, but I bought Fukushima peaches, so that’s what we had to eat...

[Laughter]

...[laughter] and I, I don’t, I don’t think, “Oh shit, that’s Fukushima.” I think, “Okay.” And maybe that’s stupid but I, I think, ehm, they’re, you know, bloody let Japan get on with it, stop getting stuck in [laughter] to the government and just let them get on with it and deal with it and stop spreading horror stories is my opinion on that.

Yeah, em, I think, you’re, you’re not the only person to have, eh, that sort of opinion. I was just interested why you hadn’t brought it up, brought it up at all, but that’s, that’s
really clear now. The last, kind of, topic that I wanted to talk about is a lot of recommendations that say, like, the government, local governmental authorities or NPOs or that are making for future disasters involve the idea of community...

Yeah.

...they say that in order for foreign residents or foreign people to be better supported in future disaster, they need to be part of their local communities. I just wanted to know, at the time of the 2011 disaster, did you feel a part of your local community?

Ehm, yes. Because I live in a building, em, a small, it’s six stories, em, and there are three rooms on each floor. And the f, what, ground floor is a small izakaya [Note: this is a Japanese-style pub] on one side and the other side is a soba restaurant [Note: this is a traditional noodle restaurant] and the izakaya, the lady who, em, runs the izakaya, the izakaya is tiny, like half this room [Note: the size she means by this is only about 20 metres squared]...

Yeah.

...but she is, ehm, {redacted} she is part of that community, and she, ehm, is very, eh, she’s been in the neighbourhood for ages. Her daughter lives there, and she, kind of, sees me as her special, kind of, Australian daughter living in the building. So at that time, my boyfriend wasn’t living with me, but he moved in in April just after that, yeah, but she, but he was staying with me during, after this earthquake period...

Uhuh.

...ehm, but she was really, eh, concerned with, people were concerned with how I was going as a foreign person in Japan, and that was a really, quite a lovely thing. People I didn’t really know in my community, I would just have passed, you know, we’d nod or whatever, would say, “Oh, are your parents worried? Are you going to go back home or are you okay? And she was like, “If you ever need rice or dahdahdahdahdah, please let me know.” So I felt part of the community. Em, and I really think, eh, having been here and having Japanese language, Japanese language ability really was so helpful, because I, yeah, I, em, I can’t imagine people living in areas where there’s only foreigners who, you know, expat housing and whatever around that area but, you know, people did live there, or around.

Do you think, would you have been able to make that link with the, the owner of the izakaya if you didn’t speak Japanese?

Oh yeah, I think she would have just barked at me in Japanese and given me something [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...or [laughter] you know, I think…

It’s just her character.

...it’s her character, yeah, yeah. But em, no, and my, even my office, ehm, not, i, in, that’s a different community, say, that, we bonded a lot more. Before I was the, the foreign person who’d come in, even I’d been at that company for three, three year, or almost
three years at that point, and, you know, everyone gets along fine, but it was, ehm, peop,
my boss was like, “Do you want to go home?” And other people were like, “Do you want
to go home? Are your parents worried?” And so people were really concerned and we
really bonded a lot, I think.

Yeah. I think some really good stuff came out of...

Yeah.

...such a negative...

Yeah.

...terrible...

It did, yeah, yeah.

...disaster, for a lot of people and it’s important sometimes to focus on those good
things...

Yeah.

...as well which is why it’s nice to, you know, when you’re talking about what, how to
prepare for the, maybe the next possible...

Uhm.

...disaster, it’s nice to think of the good stuff as well.

Yeah, I think so. And I think Japan, even though when I was walking home, ehm, after
the earthquake and people, kind of, single-minded, doing, trying to view their phones, or
whatever and, ehm, I didn’t feel completely alone. I, I don’t know. Maybe because there
was so many people on the street. I’m not sure. But I, you know, it was like we were all
in the same boat and we all, no-one knew what was going on, it was an earthquake, that’s
it, and, “Right, we have to walk home. There’s no trains. So, you know, off you go.”
type-of-thing. Uhm.

That’s pretty much all I have...

Ah, okay.

...unless there’s anything else that might be relevant...

Ehm...

...in terms of language or culture or?

...well, I think in this case that things like the {Australian group I am involved in} and
those kind of groups were really important in, ehm, keeping people up-to-date with
information, but I, also, the divide in, and it wasn’t just Australia, I went to the Border,
no, Immigration, I had to get my pa, eh, visa renewed and I was pretty much the only one
[laughter] getting a visa renewed. There was a huge line up of people, mos, mostly Asian
faces in the crowd, Chinese, I imagine, getting, em, eh, re-entry permits - this is when you
needed re-entry permits - ehm, yeah, that was massive, and there were, the building was
shaking, and there was a loudspeaker, someone on the loudspeaker saying, “Please stay calm and stay where you are.” In English and in Japanese.

In English and Japanese?

Yeah. Ehm, at the ward off, ehm, ehm…

Immigration.

Immigration. Yeah, but, eh, I can’t imagine how, what people would have been feeling being new to Japan or, eh, not understanding anything. But I think sometimes, in that sense, people were just like, “Oh,” and just get on with life. I know some people who did that. They were going out every night, you know, walking past their local restaurants seeing no-one going out, and then people who were like, “Oh my god, I’m leaving.” So…

Yeah.

...and, yeah, so perhaps sometimes ignorance is bliss.

Yeah, well, I’m also interested, say, in the case of how you mentioned, like, you had a {business associate} over from Italy. He seemed to be calm...

Yeah.

...perhaps he was calm because he just had no reference.

Yeah, I think so. And, eh, he was, I, I, I think because he’s probably been in situations where, you know, something’s gone on, he travels around the world, {redacted} I’m not sure of his role, but doing something, but, eh, he travels around the world, so I’m sure he’s been somewhere where…

[Laughter]

...something’s happened before, so he’s probably like, “Oh yeah, what are you going to do? Panic?” Yeah.

And I think there’s a difference i, if you are over, maybe, with people who are there to help you, like, you know, contacts in your own company or that, versus being completely, like, a tourist or something...

Yeah.

...where you’d have no...

Yeah.

...maybe no contacts at all in the country...

Yeah...

...that could be tough.

...I think so, but I think again perhaps the, the calming influence of having the AC commercials and no tsunami footage made the, the Japanese people calm, which kept the people not knowing any language calm, because if you, if you were there not being able
to speak any language and everyone’s going nuts, that would have been a disaster. If people around you are calm and going on about, you know, their daily routine, their daily job, well, and my, my mum and dad came over at the end of March…

That’s quite soon.

...yeah, well they had, they had booked to come because like, I was engaged but my fiance was going to ask my dad if we could get married. My dad didn’t know...

[Laughter]

...and my mum wasn't going to say. So he was, like, “We can’t go, This is happening, this is happening.” And so he was, he’s a complete worry-wart about everything like, “Come home. What are you doing?” And my mum was like, “Don’t be stupid. We have to go there.” And Qantas weren’t flying in…

Oh crikey.

...but Qantas, but, it was ridiculous because Qantas staff were handing out let, ehm, letters to people saying ‘because of the devastation in Tokyo dahdahdahdahdah’, and I was like, “What devastation?” And they came. They were like, “What devastation?” And I said, [laughter] “Well, Disneyland, ...

[Laughter]

...Disneyland’s not open these days and that’s about it. That’s the only devastation in Tokyo.” There was, it was just bullshit. And that made me really angry because people were like, “Oh my god, yeah, Qantas isn’t flying because it’s unsafe.” And I’m like, “No. It’s not, it’s, un, you know, you are flying in a plane. But you’re worried about coming to Tokyo? Eh, doesn’t make sense.” Anyway, they came via Singapore and all these weird places and, but, I was so glad that they could come to see what was actually going on, not what they were being shown: radiation levels, all that bullshit and people, ridiculous people being interviewed and devastation. Nothing.

Yeah, I, I don’t know if this will be, end up being a focus for my project but I’m really interested in, I may try and do something else on the, the way the news was so wi, wildly different...

Yeah.

...like completely framed up the, a completely different way.

Well, people were saying to my parents, “What are you doing letting your daughter stay in Tokyo?” And they were like, “That’s where she lives.” And they, like, basically, “Are you nuts?” Or “Why are you even going there?” And they were like, “Okay.” [Laughter] You know, because of just the, what they were being fed: radiation and dahdahdahdahdah...

Yeah.

...and they had no idea.

There was a huge disconnect I think...

Yeah.
...between what was, what people were experiencing here in Tokyo and what was being reported. Not just by Australia, of course...

Oh yeah.

...but by pretty much every...

Everyone, uhm.

...foreign source, I think...

Yeah

...em, from, I’ve spoken to people from twelve different countries and that’s mostly the same story...

Uhm, uhm.

...that everyone has talked about. And, actually, like with yourself; there’s a little bit of anger.

Yeah, it, I, it, that, it’s, it did make me angry. And, ehm, I went home in Christmas, must have been 2011, and we had our engagement party at my parents’ house and, em, I made, you know, I made a bit of a speech, my dad made a speech and I said, “Please come to Japan and see.” Because people even then were going, you know, “What’s happening, and I said, you know, “It’s fine. Please come. Please come spend your money. Japanese people want to see foreign faces, you know, please come.” And a lot, twenty-five people came, actually [laughter]...

Okay, wow...

to my wedding last year...

great, great.

...yeah. And it was, that was just wonderful. It really was, because, because of that, just, huge gap in what the actual situation was and what was being broadcast. Ehm, but, eh, yeah, I, I think in terms of, em, what was going on, I mean, you can’t, you’ve just got to get on with your life and, at that point, we were just getting up and going to work and going about our day, thinking, you know, information was going around and, but then again, as I said, it was these foreign people doing stuff, so, “Yeah, okay, you’re telling me this but I’m in my office at work doing stuff, so, em, you know, glad you’ve got all this water to take up to Tohoku but I’ve got to get on with my job. And I got in trouble, I sent out an email saying, ehm, like, a mail magazine to my customers, em, in, not straight after, straight after, I sent an email saying, with messages, you know, from our {suppliers} and tweeted the, you know, relief efforts, you know, {redacted} it’s not just people who’ve been devastated but people who, em, I mean, there’s different ways, you’ve got to channel the money in different ways and, em, so, you know, we gave out a, a lot of information about what we were doing in that respect and, you know, looking after our, em, industry, I suppose, {redacted} and I wrote and said, “It’s spring,” or something, and, you know, “we’ve got to get out and go and have dinner somewhere and have a bottle of wine and get on with things.” And someone wrote and said, “How can you be so insensitive? What about Tohoku?” And I said, “Well, I’m shocked that you’ve written that.” This guy is actually a really good friend of mine now and he said, “I didn’t
expect a reply.” And I was like, “Well, how could I not reply to that?” So it was a, and
the, his response was, I suppose he didn’t really think about, he just wrote it, and I
thought, I was really careful in what I wrote, because you know, we were, people were
being, it was just really sad watching business people, businesses, like, closing and
people not going out and, for me, that’s really important. Get on with the job, spend
money, pay tax, get moving. Not just stand there and feel sorry for people because that’s
not going to do anything to help anyone and so that was the aim of that, but then, you
know, that’s a, I suppose, a communication problem in itself, too, isn’t it?

Yeah, but, em, similarly, you know, I think you can’t lump all foreigners together.
Different people have different ways…

Yeah.

...of, of behaving and I think it’s really valid what you’re saying that one way of
responding to a big thing like this is get back on track...

Yeah, get back to work, yeah, exactly.

...get back doing, as you said, paying taxes and...

Yeah.

...if everything stops, nothing moves...

Where does that leave you? Exactly.

...on then and, yeah, so, I mean, I think because you, definitely you were in a situation
where you felt Tokyo was safe and relatively normal, maybe apart from the aftershocks, it
was a valid decision...

Yeah.

... to go and just start...

Exactly.

...living your life again. Yeah.

And it was just sad. I was trying my hardest to go out and have dinner and [laughter] you
know, these people were standing there, staff at, in empty shops, and, and even in, you’d
go to Mituskoshi [Note: a big department store chain in Tokyo] and, you know, ten
people were standing there…

Yeah, which would never be the case, right, usually it’s, I mean, certainly the centre of
town is active all the time...

Yeah, exactly, so.

...but I think it’s come back now. Do, do you?

Yeah, a lot, it really has, there’s a huge difference…

Yeah.
...and you could see that after a year and after two years, just lights on...

Yeah.

...they came back. The amount of foreign people, like, just visiting...

Yeah.

...or people coming back, people who, my, my membership have, of {the foreign groups I’m involved in}, increased...

Yeah.

...and you see that, people coming back, and its really changed.

I think it took about a year or at least a year from what I feel...

Yeah.

...anyway to, to, it wasn’t that quick but...

No but, em, no it wasn’t.

...yeah now two, two, two-and-a-half year’s have passed so.

Yeah.

Well, really thank you so much...

Ah, sorry, sorry, sorry

...I’ve taken much more of your time than I intended to, no, I really appreciate it.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/9 Interview with Participant 26

Researcher: So thank you, that’s all the paperwork [laughter] that’s all the hard, eh, hard stuff out of the way. Eh, the way I start every interview is just very generally, tell me what happened to you in the 2011 disaster. That’s it [laughter].

Participant: [Laughter] Okay, well, ehm, so I, I came to Japan in 2004, September of 2004, and, ehm, well, at first I was working in an Irish company for two years, ehm, and then I joined, ehm, an American company, ehm, which, which went bankrupt, and it got bought over by a Japanese company. So, eh, I, I’d been working there since about, well, I guess the bankruptcy was in 2008, eh, September, so I’d been working at that company for almost three years, ehm, and at the time I was working in {an area of central Tokyo} we have an office building there. {redacted} I work as an IT engineer {redacted}, ehm, and, yeah, at the time of the earthquake I was, well, normally I work on the eighth floor in that building, eh, and at the time of the earthquake, ehm, I was in the convenience store on the ground floor [laughter], and I was just shopping for snacks. Ehm, and I was just walking around the aisles and I noticed people were, you know, stopped in a weird way, and I, I didn’t really understand why. I tried to keep shopping, and people were, kind of, in the way [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...I didn’t really know why. Then I stopped for a second and I realized that the ground was shaking and there was an earthquake. Ehm, and it was pretty strong even on the ground floor. Eh, and looking out the window, we could see that the buildings in front of us, they were shaking. Ehm, and our building is, is a huge building made of glass…

Ooohhh.

...ehm, and the convenience store, well, it’s, the exit is right outside, like, in front of the glass. Ehm, and so I was a bit worried that, that the glass would be crashing down or, I don’t know, that, that something would break and crush us or something [laughter]...

Yeah.

...ehm, and there was a woman outside, and she was standing in front of the, the convenience store, and she didn’t really know what to do. She was kind of looking up at the buildings and stuff, and, well, I was kind of worried that, that a big glass would, would break and, and kill her, and well, the, the other Japanese people in, in the store also had, thought the same thing, so, so they called her over and told her to come into the store, eh so she did. Ehm, and, yeah, well, so, eh, at that point, it felt, I knew it was a very strong, unusually strong earthquake, ehm, and I, I thought that if, if this wasn’t the epicentre, then, wherever the epicentre was, if it was far from Tokyo, they would be screwed. That was my feeling…

Yeah.

...ehm, and, so eh, I wasn’t sure what to do, eh, I figured I, I shouldn’t go back up to the office, maybe I should, maybe the lifts are not working or something, and so I went outside, ehm, the building, outside the front entrance, ehm, and a lot of my coworkers started coming down. And I think that they did take the stairs down…
Wow, yeah.

...ehm, and, well, we, we all gathered and just stood around and didn’t really know what to do. Ehm, so after about maybe half-an-hour or an hour, ehm, well, we, we decided to, to go back upstairs...

Okay.

...and so, so we went back upstairs, ehm, I think the lifts weren’t working so I think I had to walk. I’m not sure about that actually. And then, eh, in the floor of the office, we, we have flatscreen TVs, eh, and someone switched on the news, and we could see the, the live pictures of the tsunami, ehm, so it was incredible. We were seeing the, the live pictures of, of, eh, the north of Japan getting destroyed, eh, taken from a helicopter. Ehm, it was bit surreal. Ehm, yeah, I suppose, maybe one of the first things I did was, ehm, I checked, eh, on Yahoo. I usually use Yahoo to, to check what earth, earthquakes there were and how strong they were. Ehm, actually, before that I probably called, eh, my girlfriend. Ehm, but, eh, I think mobile phones didn’t really work at the time, so, eh, I couldn’t reach her. So, well, I think, I tried checking with Yahoo, the Yahoo site, but, eh, I can’t remember if it was working at that time, so, eh, well, there were so many people checking, I think. Ehm, and, yeah, well, using the, the mobile phone didn’t really work, ehm, I think I had better luck using the office phone. Ehm, I’m not sure what phone, I think it’s probably Docomo [Note: a major Japanese carrier], like, internally it’s, like, Cisco IP phones, but, eh, I’m not sure how it connects outside...

Uhum.

...ehm, but, yeah, I, I called my family in Spain...

Okay.

...eh, and well, I told them that there was a really big earthquake, but I was okay. Ehm, they weren’t too concerned. They didn’t really understand about the scale of it. I suppose I didn’t either. Ehm, and eventually I was able to reach my, my girlfriend, em, and she was in her family house {near Tokyo}. She was okay. I think some, some fell, fell on the floor, eh, fell off the shelves and so on. Ehm, and although I think it took a while before I could reach her, a few hours. Ehm, I also called, eh, my girlfriend’s parents, and eventually I was able to reach them, and they were stuck on a train on their way {home}. Ehm, so, eh, I think they were stuck on the train four hours and eventually they, they had to walk...

Oh.

...out of the train and walk, ehm, home. Ehm, so yeah, they were trapped four hours. And, yeah, I can’t remember who I was able to reach first. Maybe I talked to the parents first and then eventually I was able to reach my girlfriend and I told her that her parents were okay. Ehm, and [laughter] coincidentally, ehm, that day my girlfriend had taken my, my house key...

[Laughter]

...[laughter] and she was stuck in, in {her family home outside Tokyo} because obviously the train service wasn’t working...

Ooohhh.
...ehm, so, well, [laughter] there was no way I could get into my house, ehm, so I called the, my building maintenance and they have, like, a 24/7 service, and, well, I spoke to them in Japanese and I told them I didn’t have my key and if they had a spare key they could give, or if they could, could open the door for me…

Yeah.

...and they said, ehm, well, it was, it wouldn’t be possible, their, their computer was shut down at the moment because of the earthquake, and after that I tried asking them where their office is, if I can drop by and pick up a key or something, eh, but they, they said no, nothing could happen today, that their computer had shut down, ehm, it’s not going to happen, and they said a lot of people have to sleep at their offices and stuff, so, I mean, it’s a disaster, that’s what you have to do, I guess [laughter]. Or it’s stay in a hotel or whatever.

And that was all in Japanese that you spoke to them?

Yes, that was all in Japanese. Ehm, and so, well, so I talked to a friend from work, ehm, and he said I could sleep in, in his house, ehm, so I decided to do that instead. So maybe later in the evening at around six or seven p.m., ehm, we started walking to his house, eh, he lives in {downtown Tokyo}. Ehm, so we thought about having a drink in, in {his neighbourhood}, but it was pretty dead, ehm, there was no-one really out. Ehm so, we just went to his house and, ehm, yeah, I can’t remember what we ate, but, ehm, I was able to stay on his, on his sofa. And then, I think the next day, [clears throat] trains were running again. Ehm, was it the next day? But eventually I, I was able to, to meet my girlfriend and get my key back [laughter]…

[Laughter]

...get home. Ehm, yeah, and walking to my friend’s house it was pretty surreal because there were so many cars stopped because of the traffic and, and, and thousands of people walking home…

Yeah.

...no, it was pretty surreal, yeah, it was like a zombie apocalypse or something like that…

Yeah, yeah.

...ehm, so that’s what happened during most of the first day, eh, I guess language-wise, well, the news on TV was in Japanese, ehm, I didn’t really understand much of the audio or the text, ehm, eh, but well, the pictures spoke for themselves mostly. Ehm, and, well, I checked, well, checking the, the websites online, ehm, I think I, I mostly checked the Yahoo one and maybe also tenki.ne.jp, ehm, and yeah, well, that’s, that’s where I got some of the information. Ehm, I’m not sure how long it took them to, to figure out the magnitude of the earthquake and so on, but, yeah, ehm, yeah, well, I guess online, the Internet seemed to work fine…

Yeah.

...except for some websites. Ehm, but yeah, that was a good thing, I guess. Ehm, well, that pretty much covers the first day, I think.

Yeah.
Do you have any questions or anything?

Eh, no, ehm, like, what I am really interested in is where you felt you had enough information or where you felt information was lacking...

Uhm.

...so in terms of the first day, it seems to me like you had enough information. Am I right in saying that or?

Ehm, yes [Note: the participant said this yes in very long drawn out way indicating he was not sure he wanted to say yes] well, I suppose, the, some, I had some questions around whether trains were running and when, when trains would start and so on, ehm, I’m not sure if I had enough information around that. I think the general impression was that trains wouldn’t start that day, ehm, but I, I’m not sure where, where I got that information.

Yeah, that’s what I was about, just about to ask...

[Laughter]

...how did you? Did you check websites or did you ask colleagues or?

Yeah, I think it was more of a word-of-mouth thing, ehm, other colleagues probably checked somehow, maybe Japanese-speaking colleagues. Eh, and I guess the conclusion was the trains weren’t running and they weren’t going to start any time soon.

Yeah.

Ehm, maybe also people speaking to their relatives over the phones, and so on. Eh, so, ehm, that’s one thing.

When you went back to your friend’s apartment {redacted} did you look for any more information at that stage or did you just, you know, call it quits for the night?

Ehm, I probably checked things online a bit. Eh, and I, I think I messaged a lot of people, ehm, I think I communicated over emails and maybe Google Talk and things like that. Eh, yeah, like, for example, I had a friend who injured his leg, ehm, maybe one or two months prior and he was in a hospital in Japan. Actually that might be a good person to talk to...

Wow, yeah. [Laughter] That would be some experience, I could imagine.

...and, well, so he experienced the earthquake in the hospital, but his Japanese is pretty much non-existent, so he didn’t really know what was going on and he couldn’t really reach anyone to tell him. He was stuck in a hospital bed without really knowing anything so...

Oh my goodness [Note: the researcher covers his mouth with his hands]

...I chatted to him a bit, ehm, yeah, he was, was a French guy I work with, ehm, and, yeah, I don’t really remember exactly what we chatted about, like, I guess, actually I think I chatted to him a bit later about Fukushima and so on...
Uhm.

...maybe one or two days later, but I think we were in touch.

On that topic, how did you start to find out information about things like Fukushima or the scale of the disaster?

Uhm. Eh, actually, what day was the earthquake on?

So, it was a Friday when it happened, so you have would have had the Saturday and Sunday probably off work, I imagine?

Uhm. Eh, yeah, I think I had Friday and Saturday off [Note: this is a slip of the tongue, I imagine, as the participant had clearly stated that he was in work on the day of the earthquake, Friday] Eh, I’m not sure how long it took for the Fukushima stuff to, to come to light, but, eh, well, eh, maybe I was talking to, to my girlfriend about that, well, she, she’s Japanese so, eh, she was able to check, eh, local news sources. Eh, well, I think I was checking, eh, overseas news sources maybe, and well, looking at the overseas news sources, the, the picture looked pretty grim. Eh, while luckily in Japan, eh, I think, well, I think Tepco [Note: the company that runs the damaged power plant] was denying or was lowering the, the sever, I mean, they were making it appear a lot less severe than it really was, and maybe the government was doing that, too. And, maybe be the news sources were, eh, eh, well, writing about, in, in that fashion also. Eh, but, for example, different embassies started telling their citizens to, to go back home, eh, and at some point a few days later, eh, I decided that I should also go back home, partly because, well, I’m here on my German passport so I, I, kind of, pretend to be German here [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...so my, my German embassy told everybody to, to return no, or to leave Japan. Eh, so that is something I was, and also my, my family, em, was very concerned. They had been reading the local news and, well, European news, and which, well, it expressed a big concern over the possible radiation leaks. Eh, and we, we had some, eh, discussions inside of the company, eh, with, with senior management, eh, and they said they, they understood concerns and they said, eh, they understood if people wanted to, to leave the country, eh, especially people with families and so on. Eh, so, eh, I talked to my manager and he said it’s probably okay if you leave, eh, I, I can do most of the, I can do all of my job remotely, pretty much, so I, I thought that shouldn’t be a problem really…

Uhm.

...ehm, I suppose it’s good to be in Japan in case the, the links to outside of Japan break down, then, well, you can’t really work remotely…

Yeah.

...ehm, I asked my manager where I could go, if I should go to Korea or somewhere nearby and he said it, it didn’t really matter. Eh, so I decided to go back to Spain to my family. Eh, eh, yeah, so I did that. Eh, before I went back, I think I had work on, on Monday, eh, and, eh, I went into the office. Eh, and one, one thing I remember which is a bit weird, eh, and, yeah, eh, basically, I remember, eh, standing at the window of my office and looking outside. It was a sunny day, eh, and well, eh, I suppose allegedly a radiation cloud was, was over Tokyo, but, eh, even before I read that, em, I, I could kind of feel in my lips, like, I was getting sunburnt. I think my, my lips are a bit sensitive,
like, when I, if there’s strong sun, I, I can feel maybe something like I’m getting sunburn. Just looking outside the window not in direct sunlight, I got that feeling. I thought, well, that’s kind of strange. And later on I read about the possible radiation cloud over Tokyo, so, eh, I’m not sure if I somehow sensed the radiation…

Wow.

...ehm, I think I am slightly hypochondriac though…

[Laughter]

…I’m not sure what happened there but, I think maybe, maybe I sensed something.

Interesting. Yeah. I’m interest, very interested to know, then, where did you read about the radiation cloud after you had had that experience. Where was that information coming from?

Okay...

If you, if you can remember.

...ehm, well, my, my favourite news source, I guess, is BBC News. I think at the time I was probably also checking BBC News. Eh, a few days later, ehm, Tepco [Note: the company which runs the damaged nuclear power plants] and the Japanese government, they, they set up websites, em, with very specific information on, ehm, what radiation levels were being measured in different parts of Japan, ehm, so that’s something I followed pretty much every day…

I see.

...ehm, I don’t remember the address of those websites. Do you know them?

Yeah, yeah, I, I absolutely do, ehm, however I know that they, they were translated, eh, into Eng, so you were looking at the English?

Well, ehm, I looked at both versions. I think the Japanese version was more up-to-date, ehm, so I was also checking, so I was probably checking that more. But, eh, I think the English version was also quite up-to-date. Maybe the English version was, was missing some very specific regions, like smaller locations around Fukushima. Eh, so I, I was looking at that in Japanese. Eh, yeah, I think there was two main websites I was checking. Maybe one was run by the government and maybe the other one was run by Tepco. I’m not sure.

I believe that’s the, the websites that most people would have accessed. [Note: the websites I was thinking of were run by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) http://www.mext.go.jp/english/radioactivity_level/detail/1303962.htm, which has since been taken down and the Fukushima Prefectural government fukushima-radioactivity.jp/, which is still up and has been made perfectly bilingual. The IAEA website was also regularly consulted http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/tsunamiupdate01.html]

Okay. Do you know the address?

Ehm, I have it in my records. I can’t remember what it is offhand. Yeah.
Yeah, I thought, well that was very interesting and, well, I thought that that, that was very useful information to have and, ehm, maybe even for years to come people would need to live around the radiation and, and really watch, eh, where, where it’s spreading to and,
and what kind of, eh, food or drinks could be affected…

Uhm.

...ehm, and, yeah, well, I, I thought maybe there’s not enough resources in English and, so most of the stuff I do is making websites, so I also had the thought of, of making, of using that information provided by the government and Tepco and, eh, displaying it in a useful way to, to, so, so people can consume it, eh, in a more useful way. Well, eventually I didn’t do anything with that, ehm, and, I suppose, once I left Japan, I, I was less worried about, ehm, the radiation. I was worried for my girlfriend and her family and my friends who had stayed, em, but, my, my girlfriend at the time, she had to fly to the US, so she was in the US, for a few weeks, I think. Maybe two weeks. Eh, but yeah, so, so I was following things from overseas. I was in Spain for maybe around a month and, eh, yeah, eventually it sounded like, eh, my company wasn’t too happy with people being overseas, yeah. So I decided to come back. Eh, yeah, yeah, so most of the people in my company also came back around the same time. Eh, I, I had been working from Spain, ehm, I, I tried to almost keep Japanese hours with the work so it was pretty tough to, to work, ehm, so I was working some strange hours…

Yeah.

...ehm, ehm, but well eventually I came back because, well, it sounded like the company wasn’t happy and maybe things were a bit more under control. The, the impact was understood much better, and I guess it looked like people were actively checking for radiation. Eh, ehm, but one thing that happened was that my, my company was giving out the, the yearly bonuses at around that time and they decided not to give bonuses to people who left the country and I was pretty upset about that. I’m pretty bitter. I still am a bit bitter about that, I think, because I feel like I worked hard and, and I feel like I got the okay from the company to leave and well the embassy was telling us to leave and, ehm, well I think I could work happily with most people, ehm, and well even senior people were sending their family away. If the same stuff had have happened again, I think I would have made the same decision because with the information that we had at that moment in time, I think it was the correct choice. Eh, so I’m a bit bitter that they decided to punish me and the others because of that, even though, I mean, it wasn’t a good year for bonuses, but, but giving us zero is, is an extra insult, I think.

Yeah, in addition to the bonus, did you feel any other reaction from people about your decision to go back?

Ehm, I think people that stayed were probably a bit unhappy that, that other people left. For example, my, my boss is Japanese and he decided to stay, em, but, yeah, I think he, he wasn’t too pleased that I had left, but he, he understood it. Eh, so I, I guess maybe we were seen as traitors, em, by, by people who stayed. Eh, maybe some people didn’t really care either way, but maybe people who were really dedicated to the company, em, they were not happy that, that we had left and well, I suppose, in gen, in general, em, maybe there was a feeling that, like, all the foreigners suddenly left and they were, I don’t know, they were jumping ship, eh, when they didn’t need to, and, yeah, reading online, I think they called them fly-jin [Note: a derogatory term used for foreigners who left Japan during the earthquake]…

[Laughter]
...yeah [laughter]...

Oh wow.

...yeah, and yeah, so, ehm, there was, ehm, but I, I didn’t really regret it and I didn’t really care too much because I, I felt it was the right decision.

Ehm, one of the elements in your decision I think to, to go back was the information you received from the embassy. Eh, what is your opinion of the German embassy’s behaviour?

Ehm, that’s hard to say, ehm, I think recommending that, that people leave the country seems like a last-ditch call, ehm, ehm, and it is something that shouldn’t be done lightly, ehm, but maybe having the information that, eh, they had at the time, ehm, well, I, I think I understand the decision, and maybe with that information, maybe it was the right decision. Ehm, I think the potential fallout could have been really big...

Yeah.

...and it was hard to understand the, the real fallout, the potential fallout...

Yeah, yeah.

...and even at that point, I think the, the general feeling by foreign, the foreign community was that the government, the Japanese government wasn’t telling the truth and maybe Tepco [Note: the company that runs the damaged nuclear power plants] wasn’t telling the truth because, well, both sides of the story seemed to be so different. I mean, maybe both sides are not telling the truth, but I don’t know, it’s good to be on the safer side, I think. Ehm.

I’m, I’m very interested in that point you said that members of the foreign community felt that Tepco wasn’t telling the truth or the government wasn’t telling the truth...

Yeah.

...why do you think the foreign community felt that particularly?

Ehm, well, I think they, they probably followed the foreign news, eh, outlets and also have contact with relatives outside of Japan who also watched television and used their, their local news sources, and I think that that greatly influenced, em, the foreign community. Em, I, I think, I feel that my family was a bit too, eh, panicky...

Ah, right.

...ehm, but, ehm, well, I suppose I understood their concern, and maybe my feeling was leaning towards, well, leaving the country and, and I was worried about future fallout, and so on. Ehm, so yeah, I guess I took the side of the, the foreign community.

Yeah. Ehm, you also mentioned checking various websites. Em, I’m interested to know did you check any Japanese government websites?

Ehm, I think I did. Ehm, I think the government had a disaster website with different, with a few different links, ehm, but I don’t remember very well, but I think that’s one thing that I checked.
Can you remember what language you would have checked that in?

Ehm, well, I probably would have, eh, clicked on English links if I saw them, but I may also have made an effort to, to understand the Japanese, ehm.

Yeah, that’s another element that I’m interested in in your experience. It seems that you, you tended to, maybe, go to the foreign sources first, but you did also go to...

Yeah.

...to Japanese sources.

Yeah, yeah. Especially the radiation levels websites. That, that was very interesting and, well, maybe some foreign sources maybe had that information somewhere but, eh, I think, well, it was most live and up-to-date on the Japanese news sources.

Was your Japanese level sufficient to understand that information about radiation in, in Japanese?

Ehm, I think it was, ehm, the, the main language aspects in there were the name of the location which, eh, I mostly understand. Ehm, well, I, I guess I understand all of the major locations in Japan, eh, I can read those…

Yeah.

...ehm, and, well, in particular, I cared about Tokyo so I can read that…

You know all of those, yeah, yeah [laughter].

...[laughter] well, yeah, the different wards of Tokyo and that was fine. And then, well, the other information was the radiation levels. Ehm, which, well, it’s just a number, so I can understand it, ehm, and well, the, the unit of measurement, I think it was something in katakana [Note: one of the phonetic syllabaries used in the Japanese writing system, often used to write words of foreign origin] so something starting with ‘b’ I think, em, but I can’t…

Yeah.

...but those were the main things, ehm, on those sites…

Yeah.

...and I was okay with that. And, well, and I, I think my level of Japanese goes a bit beyond that. Ehm, at the time I could probably around, maybe, five-hundred kanji [Note: the Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system, about two-thousand would be needed to read a newspaper, for example] ehm, and I, I wasn’t actively studying Japanese but, em, I passed the Japanese Language Proficiency Test Level 3 [Note: a standardized ability test composed of five levels with Level N5 being the easiest and N1 the hardest - when the participant took the test, there were only four level, 4,3,2,1, with Level 4 being the easiest] I think in 2006 or so…

Yeah.

...before they, they changed it to five levels, but since then I didn’t really study. Ehm, I studied a bit for Level 2 but, eh, I never really went ahead and did it. So my Japanese
wasn’t terribly bad. Ehm, and I also used, eh, language tools online to, ehm, understand things better. So for example, one tool I, I really like is, em, eh, Jim Breen’s Language Tools. Ehm, there’s several mirrors of that website, ehm, and, eh, for example with the text glossing feature, you can just copy and paste a paragraph of text and for the *kanji* [Note: Chinese characters] you don’t understand it, it gives you an explanation of what it is. Em, eh, so, so that’s something very useful. I still use it today sometimes. Ehm, I also liked using the Excite’s Japanese-to-English translation. You can translate URLs there.

And also the Google Translate, eh, ehm, tools. I’ve only started using the Google Translate stuff in the last few years. I’m not sure what I was using mostly at the point of the earthquake, but, yeah, I think the Google Translate stuff is, is really good. Ehm, and also I think I was using Firefox and they have a plug-in called *rikai-chan* [Note: a popup dictionary] where, that lets you mouse over, eh, Japanese characters and it, it takes information from J-DIC which I think is the same source that Jim Breen’s site uses, ehm, so it, it’s very useful to, to understand things better. Ehm, so yeah, those, those were the tools that I used to, to understand Japanese sites.

Those kind of tools are really, really useful. Ehm, I’m interested to know also, when you were in Spain, did you continue to check Japanese sources as well as, ehm, English-language or other language sources?

Yeah. The, the main stuff I checked, I think, was the radiation levels. Ehm, for, for news, I think, I, I don’t have enough level to read Japanese news, and using those tools doesn’t really give good results sometimes. Well, I, I guess you could go *kanji* by *kanji* [Note: means Chinese character by character] but it would take a long time with my level of Japanese so I didn’t really bother reading Japanese news. I may have looked at English Japanese sites like, ehm, what is it, Japan Today, ehm, and Japan Times, I think. Ehm, yeah, but I was looking, for, for general news, I, I usually check BBC news or other sites...

...and maybe I checked things like Independent.ie...

Okay.

...maybe because my mother checks that a lot [laughter].

[Laughter] You want to be on the same page.

Yeah, yeah.

I’m interested to know as well, and I have been asking everybody this. Generally people have quite different answers. For you, when did the disaster end? If it has ended.

Ehm, I don’t think it has ended. Ehm, I’m still worried about possible radiation poisoning. Ehm, I think that it, it’s un, unlikely that, ehm, my health is seriously affected by the radiation, but I think in my mind all it takes is one radioactive element to be consumed and that to, to decay inside your body, and that to make a change to your DNA, and that’s the cause cancer. Ehm, maybe because I am slightly hypochondriac [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...but, ehm, I am a bit worried about that, so even if the, the leaks are mostly controlled, there are still radioactive elements, well, all over earth especially in Japan, em, and so I
think there is a higher chance that you could get some kind of disease, well, maybe cancer
specifically because of that. Eh, I have an Irish friend who in 2012, I believe, or maybe
end of 2011, em, he started getting strong pains in his joints and he went to the hospital in
Japan and they, they said they had to do extensive tests which needed him to be in the
hospital for one or two weeks, so he decided to do that in Ireland, eh, so he went to
Ireland, and he was diagnosed with leukemia, eh, so, and, well, he, he’s being treated
for that. His, his type of leukemia was very rare, ehm, at the time, there was some very
special medicine that he would taking which would counteract the effects of the
leukemia, and taking this medicine, he was able to completely get rid of the symptoms,
and so he was able to come back to Japan. Well, he was teaching English at the time and
he was able to, to continue teaching English. Eh, but eventually, ehm, the medicine
stopped working for him, so he had to go back to Ireland and, well, some of his
symptoms got worse and he had to go through chemotherapy, em, and, well, I don’t
know, his health, it was quite up and down, but at, at the moment, ehm, he doesn’t have
any symptoms, but the doctors are worried that it will come back, ehm, he is going to
have a bone marrow transplant in one or two weeks, ehm, and so hopefully that, that will
help. But anyway, ehm, one, one thought in, in my mind and maybe in people’s mind
was, ehm, it’s possible that his leukemia was caused by the Fukushima incident. I think
his doctors, well, I’m not, I can’t really remember what they said, maybe they said it’s a
possibility or they said it’s, it’s unlikely, I’m not too sure. Ehm, but, I think in his case, it
wasn’t hereditary. It was a mutation in his DNA, so I think there, there’s a chance, ehm, it
was caused by Fukushima. Ehm, but well, eh, maybe it’s, you can’t really know. You’ll
never know.

Di, did he have some reason, like, was he par, living particularly near Fukushima at the
time or?

No, he was living in Tokyo…

Tokyo.

...ehm, yeah, I don’t he, he’s the most healthy guy. He doesn’t do much sport, any sports,
ehm, eh, and maybe doesn’t eat super healthy…

Okay.

...ehm, I guess that, that goes for me too [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...yeah.

Well, like you say, it’s, it’s very difficult to know whether these things are...

Yeah, uhm.

...are, are related in some way or another. Have you changed your behaviours in any way
based on the disaster?

Ehm, yes, well, a, after the incident, ehm, I think especially sushi and, well, fish in
general, ehm, was a concern. Ehm, I think I read that it, it’s more likely to be
contaminated. Ehm, so I, I stopped eating for sushi for some time, ehm, also when, when
buying stuff, I, I try to read the, the origin of it, ehm, it, in Japan, well, it’s all written in
Japanese, ehm, so, eh, I think it was a bit limited what I could read. Ehm, maybe my main
concerns were Fukushima and maybe Iwate. Ehm, I remember one time, eh,
coincidentally maybe after a month, after the incident, once I came back to Japan, we went to, to a chicken place near work and my co-worker asked the, the staff where was the chicken from, and he said it’s from Iwate, eh, actually this, this was several months after the incident, eh, and, well, we never went to that place again [laughter]. Eh, I think my co-worker was more worried than I was, but, and I don’t think that’s the only reason we didn’t go back again, like, eventually we changed location, the office changed location, so that’s one, so maybe it was just, well, we just happened not to go again, but, ehm, yeah, I guess me and my co-workers, we had concerns about the origin of food, and well, if it was contaminated or not. I, I considered buying some kind of device to measure radiation… Oh really?

...ehm, but eventually I decided not to. Eh, I think, I saw people, other people had bought such a device and, well, maybe it wasn’t that useful, I mean. Even if, if there’s traces of radiation, they are, they are so small, maybe, maybe you can’t really make a useful detection and, well, there’s a lot of background radiation anyway, so… That’s true, right.

...but yeah, I don’t know how you’d solve that.

Ehm, also one of the other kind of aspects which I’m interested in, like, we talked about how the embassy behaved, as a foreigner, you have to register with your city office when you, when you come to Japan. Did you receive any communication during or following the disaster from where you lived?

Ehm, well, at some point, I decided to register with my embassy, ehm, I don’t think they had my information before that. I think I probably saw on their website that you could register, and, and I followed the steps online. Other than, well, I think my company compiled some, some news, ehm, especially directly following the incident, ehm, to distri, distribute to all employees. Eh, other than that, ehm… Like, the local government or the ward office or those. Did they ever contact you?

[Note: the participant shakes his head so I verbalize his response for the recording]

You don’t think so.

I, I can’t remember. They, they might have delivered some flyer on evacuation zones and stuff, but, well, they do that anyway, every so often, em, so I, I don’t remember exactly if they did something following the, the earthquake, yeah.

Was that information useful to you?

Ehm, well, I suppose, ehm, I was slightly nervous being in Japan for some time, ehm, so I made sure to read about evacuation zones and actually I think at work we got a special, ehm, like a small booklet with information on, on, on what do you and readiness for earthquakes and so on. Eh, so I, I maybe my main interests were, well, where is my evacuation zone and, ehm, yeah, so at work we have a, an emergency kit, em, but it, it doesn’t really contain many things. I think it is just like one or two things. It is a tiny bag, ehm, I’m not sure if we got that following the earthquake, we might have had it all along… [Laughter]
...[laughter] yeah sorry.

Yeah, oh no, sometimes I know as well in, in my office we had, like, a backpack, eh, kind of on the back of our seat...

Yeah.

...yeah, but when, when the earthquake happened we all looked in the backpack and everything was out of date, the food was gone past, even, you know, the long-life water was past its date [laughter] and everything so...

Yeah, yeah.

...it's more, yeah, I'm sure they are much more cautious now, but at the time of the earthquake, I think a lot of those procedures had gotten a bit fuzzy.

Yeah, yeah. At my previous company, eh, before it went bankrupt, we had a backpack, it had all that stuff...

Yeah.

...like water and food and the, a cool device that you could wind with your hand and, and charge, use to charge your phone, and use as a radio and a flashlight, ehm, so well, some time after the company went bankrupt, ehm, they were selling those, those bags, so I bought two of them at the time, ehm, so, I made sure to keep one at the office and one at home, ehm, and well, that I think that was something good to have, eh, in case, well, I needed it.

Did you ever use radio as a communication tool?

No, no. Eh, because all, all the radio is in Japanese, well, there might be English stations, but, ehm, well, eh, I think I used my smartphone Internet access, em, rather than radio and maybe TV sometimes. Ehm.

I, I know you also mentioned websites. Did you use any social media?

Ehm, I think I used Facebook. Eh, I don’t post a lot of things on Facebook, but, eh, I, I look at what everybody else is up to and, ehm, I, I think people sent me messages and posted on my wall checking if, if I was safe [laughter]. Ehm, so yeah, Facebook. Ehm, I don’t use Twitter or any other social media.

What was your opinion of Facebook at the time?

Well, I think it’s, it’s a useful way to, to keep in touch with, with everybody. You could easily check, well, everybody’s status. Ehm, and well, yeah, maybe it’s a good way for family and, and acquaintances from overseas who maybe you haven’t talked to recently, but, they, they know you live in Japan and they, they want to know if you are okay. It’s a good way to advertise the fact that, that you are alive...

[Laughter]

...without having to put too much effort into it.
Right, right, I understand. Eh, the last thing I, I want to talk about is just based on some of the recommendations that have been coming out from the local government or from various NPOS, they say that, in preparation for the next disaster...

Yeah.

...to help support foreign residents that the foreign residents need to be integrated into their local communities. Did you feel integrated into your local community before or at the time of the 2011 disaster?

Ehm, I, I guess not completely. Well, maybe partly. Eh, I don’t really have much contact or any contact with the neighbours in my building, for example, eh, but, well, I live in {a part of Tokyo known for having a high population of foreign residents}, and I, I did live there at the time and still do so, and they, whenever they give out documents, I think they, they always do it in both languages, in English and in Japanese, eh, so, even like for earthquake readiness things, they give it out in English, so that, that was one good thing, and I, I use the community support centre sometimes, eh, so, maybe that, that makes me feel slightly more part of the community. Eh, but, I mean, there, there, there’s always a big gap, eh, well language-wise, and, and being a foreigner, well, you, you’re always seen as different, and it’s a bit hard to, to really integrate with, with Japanese people. Eh, maybe it, it’s my own fault for not really speaking Japanese well enough, but, eh, yeah, I definitely wasn’t completely integrated. But, well, there was some feeling of integration, maybe because of, well, the things I’ve mentioned. Eh, actually another interesting thing that happened to me was that maybe at around March, well, my, my lease for my house was, on my apartment was due to expire in, em, April I think, so I wanted to, to move to a different place before it expired. Eh, so I had been looking at this apartment, and I had pretty much decided to move there. Eh, I had talked to the real estate people at my company. They, they spoke English and I was using a real estate agent who, who didn’t really speak English, but who was a friend of my girlfriend. And I think my Japanese was good enough to, to, eh, talk to him about, well, which place to move into, and so on. Eh, and, and he was talking to, to the actual apartment owners that I wanted to, to move into. Eh, and well, as we were finalizing everything, eh, eh, the earthquake happened and I had to decide, well, I hadn’t signed anything yet, so I had to decide in the next few days if, if I wanted to move in or not…

Uhm.

...and in the end I decided not to move, eh, so, yeah, it was a really nice place, but yeah [laughter], I missed out on that, I guess. Eh, I guess, my concern was that the radiation thing would become something big and, eh, maybe also a bit pess, pessimistic, I had some doomsday scenarios in my head…

[nervous laughter]

...that people would eventually need to evacuate Tokyo…

Yeah.

...and, and property would go down a lot, well, the value of it. Eh, and the place was a bit expensive…

Yeah.

...ehm, slightly over what I was comfortable paying…
...so I thought, “I don’t want to get stuck with an expensive place, ehm, if suddenly everything collapses,” and because I was going to be in a foreign country. Ehm, if I had to stay in Spain for months then there was no point in, in renting out an expensive place…

Right, yeah.

...so I, I decided to cancel, ehm, my move and pay the, ehm, contract renewal fee for my current apartment…

Yeah.

…which was much cheaper. And, yeah, so.

Well, you mentioned about the possibility of, ehm, Tokyo being evacuated. I mean, now, several years later, we know that that was realistically on the cards at some, some parts of the, the story…

Uhm.

...I mean, governments have to think like that…

Yeah.

...they have to prepare for slightly doomsday scenarios, so I was never surprised to hear that they were forming a plan of, kind of, what if…

Yeah.

...and I was glad to hear that they were…

Yeah.

...doing so, but if it had gotten to that, my goodness…

Yeah.

...I can’t imagine what it would have been like.

Yeah. I guess, it’s, it’s a bit strange. Like, when the earthquake happened, ehm, and everything that followed, it’s like if a war starts or, or something, it’s a massive thing that’s happening and it’s something you, you don’t expect and it really changes your, your perspective on things sometimes. Ehm, like, you see a lot of things happening on TV, but well, I never feel its something that’s going to happen to me, and then when it does happen, it’s, like, I’m a bit disoriented, I guess, and surprised. Eh, like, when, when my company went bankrupt in 2008, ehm, that, that was very shocking and I {redacted} I wasn’t really expecting bankruptcy, ehm and, yeah, it happened just in a few days, really, and me and my co-workers were, were left standing there and wondering, like, [laughter] what to do and what will ha, happen to our jobs, and so on. Ehm, so I, I think that maybe it, it’s not a na, natural disaster, but, em, it helps me realize, it helped me realize that, well, I mean, shit happens, and sometimes, well, unexpected things happen, em, and yeah, for example, if a war breaks out with North Korea or, or with China, I think it’s, it’s
a possibility, em, and, yeah, I guess, I, I don’t want to be mentally unprepared if those
things happen. Eh, so yeah, I think the earthquake was a bit like that too.

Yeah, that’s fascinating. I’m wondering, is there any, is there any possibility that your
experience [of the bankruptcy] influenced your decision making in the earthquake?
Would, would you say that was possible?

Ehm, well, I think, well, like I said, it’s, it’s maybe it helped me mentally prepare for it,
em, ehm, yeah, it was a big change that, that had happened suddenly and maybe, I mean,
losing a job is not a big deal, but it felt like something really big and, maybe, part of
history, ehm, and so, so maybe it, it did, I think it did, maybe, mentally help me to, ehm,
well, when the earthquake happened, to better accept what had happened.

That’s really interesting because, as an outsider looking at your experience, I would have
wondered, oh, did it maybe make you more pessimistic.

Yes, I think it did.

Oh, you do? [laughter]

[Laughter]

[Laughter] that’s kind of the opposite [laughter]

Oh, you think it would make you optimistic?

Well, no, but, eh, you were saying that it kind of helped you be mentally prepared…

Well…

...that sounds like you’re kind of tough, toughened up by it.

…well, yeah, but, I mean, well, I, I think I’m pessimistic by nature…

Okay [laughter].

…[laughter] and, but it makes it easier to imagine, like, doomsday scenarios…

Okay, right, right, right, I see what you mean.

...and, and instead of thinking, “Oh, that’s never going to happen to me. That’s going to
happen to someone else,” ehm, maybe I more think that, “Oh, that could happen to
anyone. That could happen to me.”

Yeah.

Yeah, my life could completely change tomorrow. I might have to leave Tokyo or walk to
Osaka or something, I don’t know.

Because you’ve been implicated in two quite historic events, you know…

Yeah.

...in, in a short space of, of time, so.
Yeah, yeah.

*That’s really interesting.*

Yeah. No-one died with {the bankruptcy} {redacted} I don’t want to, ehm, well, say that my experience was the same…

[Laughter]

...ehm, I mean, it was very different, but I think it probably affected me in a similar way…

Yeah...

...that’s what I feel.

...that’s something I have never really thought to ask other people. Like, I’ve only asked them about natural disasters. I never asked to, I never thought to ask maybe about, just, life-changing events…

Yeah.

...you see, so that might also be, that might be something I, maybe, need to follow up on...

Yeah.

...maybe I need to, if, if it comes to decision making, if that, if I end up…

Uhm.

...really focusing on how people...

Sure.

...made decisions, maybe not just natural disasters but other significant experiences in their life…

Yeah.

...could be a factor too but…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...I’m not sure. Eh, I don’t know this. I’m just, kind of, thinking aloud…

Yeah, yeah...

...now, but.

...I guess I didn’t really think about that too much but, yeah, I think maybe it’s, there must be, I think there might be some connection. Maybe it’s an insignificant connection…

Yeah, yeah.

...but it’s something maybe.
Yeah, and I don’t want to be putting words in your mouth or anything…

[Laughter]

…it’s just when you, when you said it, eh, I just suddenly wondered, eh, if that might have, have been a factor, but, yeah.

I think for me personally it’s likely that it was. At least to some degree.

Yeah. That’s pretty much all of the, the questions that I have unless you think that there is something else relevant to do with language or especially translation or interpreting that I haven’t covered.

Ehm, ehm, I can’t really think of anything. My memory isn’t too good really at times…

[Laughter]

…but [laughter] ehm, yeah, I guess I covered most of the…

Yeah, that’s great...

...important things.

...that’s really it...

But…

There is, oh sorry?

...yeah, ehm, well, if you have any follow-up questions, for example, I can probably check my Internet history at that time, maybe emails, texts, and things like that.

Yeah, that might, eh, ehm, that would be definitely something that I would be, eh, interested in, but more at a, kind of, a later stage when I am more focused on what it, what it is that I am asking. I don’t want to give you extra work now needlessly…

[Laughter] Sure.

...because, eh, ehm, at the moment, I’m still, I’m just gathering the data and trying to figure out where to go from here…

Yeah.

...because, as I said, you are the twenty-sixth person I have spoken to. I still have quite a few more people to speak to…

Uhum.

...I’m not a hundred-percent sure, there are, there are some themes which I think are emerging, ehm, based on the different things that people have said, but it’s not clear to me really yet.

Do you, when, when are you leaving?
So, I leave, eh, the 14th of October, so less than a week.

Okay. Eh, well, I have, eh, maybe some expat friends and maybe in particular the guy who was in the hospital, if you have any interest in?

Absolutely, do you think he might be free? Like, it’s kind of a short deadline, like, I’d be free, I think, Friday, I’d be free pretty much any time or Saturday maybe-ish.

I think he is probably free at lunch time or after work, I imagine.

Okay. If you think he might be free, say, Friday lunch time or something, I’d love to, to speak to him, because I am especially interested to speak to people who, maybe, didn’t have your language abilities...

Okay.

...because that, in terms of translation...

Yeah.

...or cultural barriers or language barriers, that’s really interesting so.

That’s one person that comes to mind. Eh, another friend of mine, he’s from Jamaica and I think he was in {the office of a major international financial services firm} at the time, eh, maybe on the 30th floor in a meeting…

Wow.

...ehm, and, well, eh, I guess he’s a pretty tough guy, eh, but, and it’s funny, when he talks about it, eh, he, he says, like, well, he was instantly out of the conference room and he ran…

[Laughter]

...faster than he has ran in his life, and he said he’s seen some shit in his life, but…

This was [laughter].

...he was scared, he was really scared about that. He just.

That would be fascinating. I would absolutely love to speak to either of those people if you think they might be free. Maybe if you just check with them and see, and just let them know that I’m only here for a, a short time, eh, we could probably work something out.

Yeah, and he is my friend who lives {downtown Tokyo} and whose house I stayed in.

Ah, okay. Yeah, eh, if, if you think there would be a chance, please do, do check with them, and, the, the only day, so to, tomorrow is Thursday, right?

Yeah.

Thursday, I absolutely, unfortunately, can’t do because I am presenting at a seminar in Toyo University...
Oh, really?

...but, em, the Friday, I think I’m pretty much free all day so I could do a lunch time or I could do an after-work thing if you think that might be a chance.

Okay, well, I…

If you just check with them and, and, and, and see, yeah, that would be great.

...well, you do have other people to talk to?

Yes, I do on the Saturday and Sunday…

Okay.

...but I could probably, you know, schedule around things or, or something, if, if, I’m trying to get as much done as I can before, before I go, obviously because this is kind of, not a once-in-a-lifetime chance, but you know what I mean…

Yeah.

...like, it’s, it’s an expensive trip…

Yeah.

...I don’t think there’s much chance I’ll be, be back again…

Yeah.

...and, as I said, I’m particularly interested to hear from people who might not have had language abilities like yours and the, kind of, intermediate level, just, just because in terms of translation, there is perhaps more likelihood that they would have encountered it…

That’s true.

...in some way so. Yeah, please by all means, eh, check and see, see what they say. That would be great.

Note:

After switching off the audio recorder, I remembered to ask the participant to mark the Likert Scale for post-interview stress, but unfortunately, I was unable to record his comments while doing so. He basically just said that he did not feel any particular increased stress as a result of me interviewing him (aside from some standard social anxiety at meeting a stranger to talk about himself in an unusual way). More significant, he said, was his surprise at how much he ended up remembering about the disaster and how much he ended up talking. He had thought before coming that he would only have enough information to give me a brief account lasting a few minutes. He felt happy that he ended up being able to help me as he thought he would have had nothing of value to say. I assured him that his responses had indeed been of great value.
This transcript has been anonymized in parts to attempt to protect that participant’s identity. Changes made to the transcript have been signalled by enclosing the relevant passage in curved brackets.

2013/10/13 Interview with Participant 27

Researcher: My methodology is pretty much to just ask people to tell me their story...

Participant: Okay.

...and you can choose to talk about whatever you like...

Okay.

...I mean, the reason I am kind of interested in getting all sorts of background information or...

[Note: the waiter arrives with the participant’s food and he thanks the waiter in Japanese and spends a few seconds arranging plates around him]

...the reason for that really is just so it will, kind of, help me, I guess, interpret whatever linguistic stuff I hear about...

Okay.

...so please don’t feel kind of constricted to talking about only, only linguistic stuff, just tell me whatever interests you or whatever you think is important...

Okay.

...but just again to let you know that the things I am particularly looking into are how people communicated and how they got information...

Okay.

...those are the two, two...

Parts you want to focus on.

...yeah. So, like, really in terms of the questioning, I’m not very directive or anything, I just...

Leave it open.

...want to know, yeah, just want to know what, what your experience was and...

Okay.

...sort of, work from there. Like, if there’s things maybe that you know, I pick up on or that I’d like more detail, maybe I’ll ask you that, but pretty much it’s just once, once you’re happy to tell me what happened to you in the 3.11 that’s, that’s good enough for me.

How far into the post-disaster do you want me to go?
Well, you see, this is actually one of the questions that I have asked everyone...

Uhum.

... when the disaster ended for them if it has ended, so that's pretty much up to you. Most people have given very different types of answers for, for that, and some people have only focused on one day, some people on much longer periods...

Okay.

...so really, well, maybe we’ll start with that, for you when did the disaster end, if it has?

It hasn’t. On the day of the earthquake, I was in the subway, the Marunouchi Line, between Yotsuya and Shinjuku, Yotsuya-sanchome and Shinjuku-gyoenmae. And the train stopped between the two stations, quite frightening...

Uhm.

...and so we stood there for about twenty minutes until the train started moving. Got out, and went up to the ground. Saw that all the buildings were empty, everyone was on the street. So I rea, realized, you know, I mean, I knew it was huge, biggest thing I’ve ever experienced. That night I couldn’t get home. Even though hundreds of thousands of people walked home, I got a hotel room at Shinjuku and decided to wait it out, and it was a terrible night because every hour there were huge aftershocks...

Uhm.

...no gas, no water. It was just a place to sleep and that was fine with me. The first train home in the morning, that was at 6am, as soon as I got home, I turn on the Internet, and started reading the New York Times...

Uhm.

...because I trust the New York Times for information. I know some of the journalists there, and it has a reputation of honesty and transparency. And so, I started reading that they were putting seawater on the, the reactors to keep them cool. I immediately bought a ticket to the United States...

Uhm.

...because I knew very well how many lies Tepco had made in the past, and I knew very well the danger that existed, and I knew where the prevailing winds were going, and I had watched CNN at the same time, and they were talking about, “in two days the winds were shifting south”. And I said, “I’m out of here. I am out of here.” And so, I left two days later. I wanted to stay another couple of days and see what happened, and I saw the panic buying, I saw the gas lines, I saw the hoarding of food. I said, “Yeah, I’m, it’s, I’m going.” And so I left on the 14th of March, and on the 15th of March, the first plume of radiation came over Tokyo, and I missed it by twelve hours. The second plume came over on the March 21st, if you look at the research...

Uhm.

...nothing was stated publicly, no-one was informed that it was coming, and it, that was another reason why I left, because I understood what was going to happen. I know that Japan does not create transparency and honesty in a crisis. It, they don’t respond quickly
enough. They spend too much time forming consensus, and you don’t have time in a
crisis to form consensus. So I left for two weeks, I came back on the 28th of March. In
hindsight, I probably wish I’d stayed away another couple of weeks, but I think the bulk
of the radiation had come out by then and the prevailing winds were not over Tokyo
anymore. And so I came back. What I started doing is reading a lot of, obviously English-
only information…

Uhm.

...because Japanese information, I didn’t trust and not only that I can’t read Japanese very
well. So I started listening to, you know, NHK [Note: the Japanese national broadcaster]
in English, because I think they built a lot of credibility during the crisis…

Yeah.

...and I knew some of the people who worked there. But I was reading a lot of blogs like
those were the two blog sources I started reading because there were some very talented
and knowledgeable people offering stuff. And I was trying to read through what was,
what was hyped, what was sensationalism…

Uhm.

...what was reality, and who, it was very interesting how many people because experts…

[Laughter]

...in this crisis, and, and most of them don’t know what they’re talking about. So you had
to read through it, and just, I started writing my own, you can look on {a major online
news blog} and type my name in in that period and you will see I wrote about twenty
pieces…

Wow.

...so feel free to look. So what, so in terms of communication based on my own
experiences as media in crisis trainer, I felt that I had to make my own judgments based
on my own experience of how the place works from twenty-five years here…

Yeah, yeah.

...and I was accurate...

Yeah.

...and, and I was, you know at the same time, what was going on were the fly-jin [Note: a
derogatory term for foreign nationals who left Japan during the disaster] scenario. The
foreigners who left were cowards, and they, they were wimps, and, of course, just
because Armageddon didn’t happen, doesn’t mean that it couldn’t have…

Uuhh.

...and, in fact, everyone was very lucky that it didn’t…

Yeah.
...because what has come out since, and two or three months after the crisis, the amount of radiation that came out startled the mind, right? I’m very glad that I left during that time…

Yeah.

...in addition to that what has been very clear is, and I wrote about this, and I used a pseudonym too on some of my writings, and that’s where I really said what I thought. But I felt when the state was faced with the issue of existence, that they would choose survival over telling the truth...

Uhm.

...so rather than tell the people of Tokyo that clouds of radiation were coming and causing mass panic, the alternative is not to tell them and keep the state moving…

Uhm.

...keep the economy moving…

Yeah.

...so that’s what I think they did…

Yeah.

…I can’t prove it, but that’s my take…

Yeah.

...so as the months went by it became very clear that, that, the beef scare, the, the food, food contamination from, from contaminated hay, there were lots of cases of school children being fed contaminated food…

Yeah.

...tonnes and tonnes of issues going on, fish being contaminated, the amount of radiation flowing through the rivers and coming out of mouths of the Arakawa river, for example, and into Tokyo Bay which had become heavily contaminated. I haven’t eaten fish in two-and-a-half years here…

Okay, wow.

...and I went a long time without even having a salad...

That’s interesting.

...I was importing all my food.

Yeah, and, like, as you mentioned, you cho, chose this restaurant because it’s, you know it’s…

Yeah...

...imported.
...I don’t know where this comes from [Note: pointing to a side salad that he did not eat] but I know where the spaghetti and the tomato sauce comes from…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. [Note: here again I start to try to talk for a longer time than I normally would to try to give the participant some time to eat his lunch] And then, a lot of the things that you mentioned, other people have talked about in, not in the same way but in similar ways, eh, I know, say for example, the issue of the fly-jin, that has come up with, it was something I was interested in...

Well, let me tell you a story about that. I was furious about the whole thing, and I go, “You’re kidding me. We have foreigners chastising foreigners for leaving a foreign country in a crisis.” And you could, and I mean, it’s the most insane thing I ever heard. And I thought to myself, “This is ridiculous.” A friend of mine in NHK in April of 2013, no, 2011, sorry, about a month after the crisis (indistinct), she said, “We’re doing a story on fly-jin. Do you want to represent the people who left?” I go, “Ah, yep!”...

[Laughter]

… “I will do it.” And I went on, and she did a story with somebody who stayed...

Yeah, yeah.

...and, and I definitely went on the record talking about that…

Yeah.

...I felt it was very important. It was one of the most ridiculous things I’ve ever seen in my life…

Yeah.

...how ridiculous…

Yeah.

...that, and, and even if, like it was Japanese saying it, it would still be ridiculous…

Yeah.

… “It’s a nuclear crisis, guys. Open your eyes.”

That’s absolutely one of the, the elements that’s becoming clear to me...

Uhm.

...even at this early stage...

Yeah.

...is that, you know, I’m saying that I’m looking at foreign nationals’ experiences, but you can’t lump all foreign nationals to, to, together, I very clearly have to define what I mean by foreigner.
Oh yeah. Everyone forgets the Japanese left in huge numbers too. Is anybody calling them cowards? I mean, the whole thing is nonsense.

Yeah.

It’s insane. It pissed me off…

Well.

...so that’s why I was happy to go on the air…

Yeah.

...what was also interesting is that that was one thing that happened, but by about July and August of 2011, I felt that the, the real issue was no longer the nuclear plant, it was food.

Oh, I see.

And so I started a blog on Facebook…

Yeah, that’s what I had seen, yeah.

...called {redacted}. And what has been interesting of that, that site is, initially there was, there was talk by some people, “Well, you’re, you’re taking away from the focus on Tokyo Radiation Level [Note: the Facebook group]. We should stay together and have one place where everyone talks.” And I go, “Well, what for? You know, I don’t think the issue is going to be nuclear anymore. I think it is going to be the aftermath.”...

Yeah.

...so I started my own site {in} 2011, and, you know, at the time, Facebook was calculating things very differently than they do it now. They don’t show you the numbers anymore…

Oh.

...but I was getting, I mean, I was getting, I was getting ten, twenty-thousand hits a day…

Wow.

...at least…

Wow.

...and it was getting into cumulatively, you know, into the millions…

Yeah, yeah.

...of people watching, and so I became, what I decided to do with the site was try to limit my commentary, and I think people are smart, let people read and make their own decisions. I mean, I did, I did, there were some emotional moments, you know, when I would see things and I would just go like, you know, like, “This is outrageous.” But I, in my position, I work sometimes for the government, so I can’t criticize the government, and I actually had, my employer pulled me in a couple of times and said, “What are you doing?” And I said, “I’m not saying anything that’s not in the press.” “Yeah, but you
work for the government.” And I said, “Yeah. But I’m not saying anything that’s not in
the press.” So I said, “Has anybody heard anything? Has anybody said anything?” “No.”
“So then what’s the problem?” “Well, I’m uncomfortable.” “Well, I’m not uncomfortable
and I’m doing it, so.”...

Yeah.

...I felt that these issues, it’s not about me…

Yeah.

I said, “There’s a larger calling here.” So what I did was I decided to keep it, if you look
and go all the way back and look at the thousands of posts that I put up, you’ll see that it
has transformed into…

Uhm.

...what it is now which is pretty much leaving the commentary aside…

Yeah, yeah.

...but I mean…

Well.

...well still, and every day, I’m, like, rolling my eyes, like, today, you know, the United
Nations did its independent searching saying that, that the estimation of exposure to the
workers at, up at the Fukushima plant is, is reduced by twenty percent from reality. The
just, sort of, I call it ‘Surprise of the Day’, you know, because it happens every day, right?
So, so, so the website I think has become a trusted place where people can go for a quick
summary of the issues related to food…

Yeah.

...and I don’t think anyone else is doing it, and I don’t care if they do…

Yeah.

...but I don’t think they’re doing it the way I’m doing it...

Yeah.

...and it’s trusted. I’ve had, I’ve met people, like, someone will introduce me and say, “I
told them about your blog.” And they would say, “Thank you.”...

[Laughter] Yeah.

...“I read it every day. I really appreciate it.”...

Yeah.

...that kind of, so I’ve also done, I’ve been on two, two {major broadcaster} shows in the
United States…

Okay.
...on it, and, you know, I think the issue at this point is dying down. People are getting what I call radiation fatigue.

Oh, yeah.

People are tired of worrying about it…

Yeah.

...so what’s happened, and I think they know that this would happen over time, is that people stopped worrying about it…

Yeah.

...but the problem is still there, and when I read that they say that it’s leaking in the port of Fukushima, but it’s not going out in the ocean, I’m thinking to myself, “What are you talking about?”...

Yeah.

...but Greenpeace is out there measuring…

Yeah.

...and Greenpeace hasn’t found, I mean, the, the solution to pollution is dilution, you know the famous saying? And the dilution is happening…

Yeah.

...so there are traces of cesium but, of course, there are two-hundred different kinds of radionuclides that are not being measured, right? Including strontium eighty, eighty-nine and ninety, etc., right? And so, so the issue then becomes one of do you want to stay here and live your life like this…

Yeah.

...or do you want to leave? And then people, it’s fascinating, but I’m sure that it’s part of your research, to see the justification people say, because a lot of people who did the head-in-the-sand thing, “Well, this is where I work, and so my business is here, and my family is here, so what can I do?” There is a lot of that, right? And then there’s a lot of, there’s a lot of, “Well, you know, it’s not that bad.” It’s kind of bad…

Yeah.

...and then people with children are really confused. I mean, I have a woman who lives around the corner from me with a kid, she’s Japanese, and I started telling her, she reads my blog, she goes, she goes, “I don’t want to live here anymore.” I said, “well, there’s a lot of people like you.”

Yeah.

So it’s a very big issue now for people with children…

Yeah.
...people who are a little bit older worry less about it. I’m not sure it’s justified.

Well, I’ve definitely heard that said that, you talked about, you know, the different justifications...

Tonnes of them.

...for, for staying. One of the things I’ve heard fairly repeatedly is, “Well, from what I, from what I understand, the effects will only kick in in twenty, thirty, forty years, so I’ll nearly be dead by then anyway, so.”

How about the ‘It’s better than China’?

[Laughter]

“I used to live in China, so it’s better.” I mean, have you heard that one?

[Note: the researcher nods in agreement]

Interesting, yeah.

...really, it’s the stuff. And I don’t think anyone has done research on it...

Yeah, that’s interesting.

...that would be really original for you to do something...

Yeah. that’s the thing...

...I’d love to read it.

...that’s a fascinating topic, actually, yeah.

You should think about that.

Yeah.

People would, people would...

Yeah.

...people would read about that.

I know as well, one other thing that is fascinating to me is when you talked about, kind of, the head-in-the-sand or the radiation fatigue...

Right.

...that absolutely has come up, not just among the, the overseas nationa, the foreign nationals...

Right.
...but among Japanese, too...

Oh sure.

...I went up to {redacted} Ibaraki...

Yeah, okay.

...so, as you know, they had their own accident previously in 2004, 2001 or 1999 or something like that anyway...

Yeah.

...1999, I think it was. Anyway, so they had their own history and some of the foreign nationals that I spoke to were there for that accident...

Yeah.

...and then subsequently here and, just, they were talking about this as you mentioned, kind of, radiation fatigue...

Right.

...because one of the people that I met there would have been a big surfer, because it’s a bit of a surfing community {along parts of the Ibaraki coast}. And...

A foreigner?

Yes. And, he hasn’t surfed since...

Surf’s up, dude.

...hasn’t surfed since.

Right.

What he was talking about in terms of the radiation fatigue is he noticed that, so 2011, nobody was at the beach...

Uhum.

...2012, pretty much nobody was at the beach, I would say, he said pretty much nobody was at the beach. If there were people at the beach, there was nobody in the water...

Oh.

...and then 2013, there was a big change...

Yeah.

...it seemed that, maybe people were just.

Well, cesium 134 has a half-life of two years, right? So, so, it still doesn’t mean much because it’s still there. But for some reason, all the, automatically, everything was okay.
But he also mentioned, the reason I picked up on this part is he mentioned exactly what you said about all the other nuclides that are not measured [laughter]...

There’s two-hundred of them.

…it was just so, he was like, “Yeah, fair enough.” You know, some of his Japanese surfer friends said, “Well, the cesium levels have been measured and are, you know, fine or whatever.” But he says, “Okay. What about?”

So, you know what this comes down to, Patrick? Back to my theory: survival of the state…

Uhm.

...that’s what this is all about...

Yeah.

...that’s what this is all about.

Yeah. Well, if, if.

Why, you, do you think for a minute they couldn’t, they couldn’t test more food if they wanted to? If they wanted, to have the resources and the money assigned to it that they couldn’t. Why don’t they do it?...

Uhm.

…(indistinct) Do you know the percentage of food that’s tested?

I don’t, I don’t.

Take a guess.

Well, I’m assuming it’s low...

Yep.

...let’s say two percent.

One, less than one.

Aaaahhh. Okay.

Do you know the sample sizes of what’s tested?

I have no idea.

Nobody does because they don’t make it public. This is what we’re dealing with.

Uhm. I know as well that, em, you talked about in, sort of, relation to the way the state operates, the idea of consensus. That’s something that’s, kind of, interesting to me, too, in terms of my study looking at foreign nationals...
Yeah [clears throat].

...because you talked about how in a crisis, you know, consensus is, slows everything down...

That's right.

...a lot of the foreign nationals that I spoke to, especially the people in the worst-affected areas, didn’t want to go to the communal refuge centres...

Right.

...they wanted to be able to make their own decisions...

Of course.

...well, you.

Especially after the, the government tells people in Iitate [Note: a village in Fukushima prefecture about 40km away from the damaged plant that was outside the compulsory 30km evacuation zone, but in which a voluntary governmental evacuation was carried out based on high radiation levels] to go north and puts them in the middle of the cloud…

Uhm.

...why would you trust the state? The state has done nothing but lie. Tepco [Note: the company that runs that damaged Fukushima reactors] has done nothing but lie. Why is Tepco still in charge of calling the shots up there. And actually it’s not, it’s the state that is, because it is funded by the taxpayer…

Uhm.

...which means it is funded by the government, which means the government is making the decisions. It, it, anything that defies logic goes back to my original theory…

Yeah.

...survival of the state.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know as well, like, some of the, you know, you mentioned about, say with your blog, your way of addressing the issues now is to give people information and let them make their own decisions...

That’s right…

...that seems to...

...people are smart.

...that seems to work well for the foreign nationals that I have spoken to...

That works well for females with children.
...yeah, yeah. I’m also interested in this idea of Japanese people, because, you know, translation obviously, my original focus was going to be translating from Japanese to, let’s say, English, Chinese, Korean...

That’s not a story...

But...

...that’s not a story.

...what I’m interested in.

...not to pooh-pooh your research, but that’s not the story. The story is, but I don’t know what your focus, your focus is on linguistics...

Yeah.

...but I mean, then maybe that’s a story from a linguistic point of view...

Yeah.

...but the interesting story about what’s happening is the destruction of trust between the state and the people. To me, that’s a really interesting story. You ask Japanese if they trust the state...

Uhm.

...I don’t think so. I don’t really think so.

Yeah.

Trust has been destruct, destroyed.

Kind of, linked to that one thing surprised me so far, it mightn’t sur, surprise you, it surprised me that a lot of foreigners that I spoke to felt that they were better off for information than Japanese people...

Yeah. I know, when I tell Japanese friends that I run a blog, and they read it, they freak when they see what’s going on in English. They freak. And I try not to put the fluff out there. I don’t, I try not to do sensationalism stuff, em, [Note: the participant asks the waiter for water in Japanese] I try to keep it to, to important articles related to the topic...

Yeah.

...sometimes I fail, but I want people to, to realize, I want the blog to be balanced, but there’s not a lot of positive news. So when I find a positive piece, I put it up there. I’m fine with that. But people are forced to make critical decisions, and, and, you know what happens in November, up there? They start taking the rods out of, of Pool Number 4...

Oh, yeah. This is a very delicate...

Thirteen-hundred rods.

...very, very delicate operation.
Thirteen-hundred rods.

Yeah.

And if anything goes wrong, it is eighty-five, potentially, eighty-five times worse than Chernobyl…

Yeah.

...in terms of radiation release. I mean, it’s not just a Japan problem…

Yeah.

...it’s a survival of the globe problem. And that’s just one fuel pool out of all the nuclear plants that are around the world, right? I mean, it’s a huge issue on a larger scale, right?

Yeah.

So, I don’t want to pooh-pooh what you’re doing. I think what you are doing is important. But, but I’m a political scientist, and so what’s interesting is how do you, how do you rebuild trust when the trust has been broken inside a state.

That is an interesting topic.

And how do you do that in a place where there is a history of broken trust? So if you go back to World War II, it reminds me of World War II when the Japanese public was lied to about the state of affairs and the state of Japanese war effort, etc. This is sort of repeating itself...

Uhm?

...you know, because people are not allowed up there, and information is not transparent, how do we actually know what’s going on. It builds suspicion, it builds distrust…

Yeah.

...so, the system, my hope was that after they screwed up after the, you know, the initial months, that they would realize that they need to rebuild the trust, but they haven’t…

Yeah.

...they haven’t done it…

Yeah.

...and I don’t think they will. I don’t, see the problem is most people here just carry about, just care about Prada bags and Louis Vuitton shoes, I mean they, they’re not too deeply interested in what, what’s going on. So I don’t know about Ireland, but I know in the United States where I come from, it would be a big issue...

Uhm

...and the, the, there would be huge protests if when they lied for, for the last two years about leakage into the ocean, that the, the president of Tepco takes a 10% pay cut as punishment...
...I mean, believe me, in America, that man is not only gone, but he’ll be sued, right? So be, the way in which the reaction is happening here is a whole other topic…

Uhm.

...of incredible interest.

Absolutely, yeah. I, to be honest, you know, I have found that this whole topic is a, kind of, Pandora’s Box, that, you know.

Speaking of, speaking of which, are you here on the 16th?

I’m afraid I’m not. I leave tomorrow, the 14th, Monday...

Okay...

...tomorrow.

...there’s a, there’s a guy in, it’s interesting, because of all the work I’ve done the last two year’s, I’ve met a lot of interesting people in cyberspace, etc., and there’s a guy, Robert Rand, who has just finished making a movie called Pandora’s, oh what’s it called, shit, I’ll have to look it up. Pandora’s, not box, but Pandora’s wish or something like that

[Note: the name of the movie is Pandora’s Promise], and it’s about a movement of protesters termed pro-nuclear…

Oh.

...and he’s made a movie about it and it’s sort of a pro-nuclear movie…

Oh, wow.

...and I have tried to stay away from, from the whole issue of nuclear issues…

Yeah.

...I’m not trying to take a side on it…

Yeah, yeah.

...right? Because that’s not in my interests…

Yeah.

...but it’s pretty interesting stuff.

That’s fascinating.

[Note: the participant starts searching through his smartphone] Let me pull up, let me pull up the, I’ll see if I can find it. I didn’t, I hope you didn’t take offence to my comments before…

Oh, no, no, no.
...because what you are doing is very important…

No, I…

...but…

...I think, no, but, the…

...I think it signals great things…

...the only thing I would say is that I can only talk about what I am informed about...

That’s right.

...and I’m not a political scientist...

That’s right.

...so I won’t be telling that story. I think a political scientist would tell that story

[laughter] a lot better.

Yeah, maybe so…

Yeah, so…

...depending on who is doing it.

...yeah, I can only tell, you know, the story that I’m equipped for.

So I think the, the story for what you are talking about and the fact that I am not doing Japanese media except the English version of it. I’m doing Jiji and Kyodo and NHK, you know, I’m going off the wires every day…

Yeah.

...but that’s just a translation…

Yeah.

...and I don’t know if it’s a good translation. I think the, the, the issue is if Japanese were reading on a regular basis what’s being written not only in English but in other languages, like Korean and German or French or whatever, Chinese, Korean, I think it would be very uncomfortable.

You see that is a huge story for me, in terms of the linguistic stuff, I think, and there are, you know, political reasons behind why information isn’t transmitted, too, like, you know.

It’s, you know, NHK has a very particular role in disaster response in Japan and has a very particular relationship with the state...

Right.

...and so they present…

Funded by the state.
...information, yeah, so preven, they present information in a certain way and they pre,
present certain information and that feeds into Kyodo and the other press agencies.
Right.
But one thing I would like to touch on a little bit because you’ve talked about trust a
couple of times...
Uhum.
...a lot of the foreign nationals I’ve spoken to spoke of a breakdown of trust in their own
media, their own domestic media, let’s say, people from the US being angry with the way
the disaster was pors, portrayed in the US media.
No, I’ve heard about those stories, like, somebody saying that there was a nuclear plant in
Shibuya, right? I mean, there was a whole movement during the crisis, and, and, some
English teacher started a website talking about this which I found out after the website
was going on that was, sort of, judging the journalists credibility, that it was some
English teacher who has not even a journalism degree and has nothing to do with it. I just,
sort of, rolled my eyes at it. But that person called, it was called the, I think it was ‘Wall
of Shame’. Did you ever read about it?
I didn’t, no. I haven’t heard about it.
You can go and look...
I’ll have to look for that. Yeah, I will. I’ll have a look for that.
...it’s pretty interesting. That they put the New York Times on the Wall of Shame, and I
just thought this, this was, like, trash. I don’t believe in a thing they say. To put the New
York Times on the Wall of Shame for bad reporting? I completely disagreed. That doesn’t
mean the New York Times is perfect or the Economist is perfect or the Financial Times is
perfect, but I would believe what those people, or the Wall Street Journal...
Yeah.
...I would believe what those people write a lot more than I would the Nikkei [Note: this
is the Japanese equivalent of the Wall Street Journal]...
Yeah, what, what...
...I mean, come on.
...why would, why would you say that? Just to clarify.
Well, because, talk about, I mean, anything that’s planted in the Nikkei, is, is payback for
something else, or, or, or strategic. It’s not impartial news. If you look at the, the way in
which media is distributed, and the kisha club [Note: means press club] creation which
was to, hopefully to give news out in a, in an impartial and e, equal way at the same
time...
Yeah.
...but it, you know, I just went to a great talk by New York Times Martin, Martin, Martin Fackler a couple of weeks ago, and he had written a book about, this in Japanese, about how the media responded during the crisis which you should take a look at…

Uhm.

...Martin Fackler, he’s, he’s got a book in, in, he gave the example of the Japanese media are like baby sparrows in the nest opening their mouths waiting for mama to feed them. I thought he was absolutely right, I had a good laugh at that.

Yeah. You also mentioned earlier on that, you know, you, you, one of the reasons why you trusted, say, the New York Times or other, you know, I think you mentioned the Wall Street Journal as well, is because you knew some of the people...

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...who worked in these organizations. Those people, you mean you knew people here in Tokyo...

Yeah.

...like your, so, as, again, this is, I come back to translation because it’s what I am interested in, would you know, those people, do they speak fluent Japanese or do they...

Some of them are Japanese.

...okay. So they, they themselves are Japanese and speak fluent English?

Some do, some of the journalists who are foreigners do, some, some of them don’t.

Yeah, because for me, the interesting point is, you know, if you’re trusting, let’s say, an English-speaking journalist who is getting their information through some form of mediation...

Right.

...how, how much do you know about the mediation? I’m interested in that whole topic, though, of I guess, if you’d like to call it news translation as well...

I don’t know much about that.

...it’s just interesting to me because, as you said, trust was a, a, kind of, a key word...

Right.

...that, that came up, I think, you know, if, if you’re, if you’re familiar with the language of the place you’re reporting on, that maybe gives you the ability to...

Well for me, what’s more, what’s more interesting…

...access certain things.

...is some of the blogs that were coming out with, with information. You know, mother, women’s groups, mothers’ groups, that kind of thing. You know, there was one a couple
of weeks ago I posted on my {redacted} site about what they are finding out in, in terms of numbers of cancers or numbers of, of, of tainted foods.

That's interesting...

Yeah.

...so this is a kind of a citizen journalism...

Yeah, yes.

...type of thing. And you’ve mentioned, like, obviously Facebook...

Well, the state has, has said that they are monitoring social media to keep pressure on it, right, so, so that’s something everyone keeps in mind.

Aaahhh, that’s, that’s, yeah, that’s quite, that’s quite chilling actually.

Well, for, how is it any different than in America with the NSA?

Oh, well, yeah.

I mean, I think anyone who writes anything, whether traditional media or social media...

Yeah, yeah.

...knows that they are being read, so, like, I have thought about that…

Yeah.

…and I don’t care.

Yeah, yeah.

I, it’s not an issue for me...

Right.

...I mean, you know, part of the reason I don’t care is because my career is winding down. I have made my money, and I’ve done what I wanted to do, and I don’t need to be so cautious.

Okay. In terms of social media, were there any other avenues in addition to, say, Facebook that were useful to you or...

Well,…

...just Facebook?

...yeah, I mean, I go through about ten or twenty sources every day…

Okay.

...you know, Kyodo, of course, NHK, Asahi, Weekly, Mainichi, Yomiuri, in, in English…
Yeah.
...the Japan Times, Japan Today, Reuters, you know, all kinds of, CNN, I go to all kinds of sources...
Oh, yeah, you do.
...and I spend about a half an hour a day. I’ve got it down pretty…
Yeah, yeah.
...like, I scan every item, because, you know…
Yeah.
...just, I’m busy, right…
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...okay? And, “Oh well that kind of looks interesting. Let’s take a look at that.” And, you know…
Yeah, yeah.
...so I do it early in the morning…
Okay.
...I want to start with that. It has become a hobby for me, but it has become a hobby with meaning…
Uhm.
...because it helps a lot of people...
Yeah.
...and there have been several times where I’ve just said, “You know what? I’ve made the point. Everyone who knows, who reads it knows.” But then I realize that I’m getting new people from all over the world every day, and I have thirty-six hundred people now that, at least, that are ‘liked’, that have ‘liked’ it…
Yeah, yeah, yeah.
...but a lot more reading it in, in, in about seventy countries…
Yeah.
...so, the power of the Internet.
Yeah, that’s, yeah, that has definitely come across strongly in the, in everybody’s story. If they hadn’t had access to the Internet, I don’t think as, the people I spoke to who stayed would have stayed.
That’s right. And, and, I know people who have left, I’m thinking particularly of a Frenchman who left immediately, very bitter, he started another website, called ‘Evacuate Fukushima’, on Facebook which has about four-thousand followers. I know lots of different people, I know another, the Japan Kids, ‘Tokyo Kids and Radiation’ left a year-and-a-half ago. And they were very interesting. He’s American from Miss, [Note: the participant mimics a southern drawl while saying the next word] Mississippi...

[Laughter]

...thirty years old with a Japanese wife and two boys, and he rigged up his own measurement device to, to test food, and the started getting people sending him soil samples and turf samples, and so he left, and so you, sort of, think like, “Does he know something that I don’t know?” You know, with two little kids, thinking like this is, this is, and they, they, they were radical. They spent four-thousand dollars on a machine that took isotopes out of water before they drank it...

Crikey.

...they were very, very interesting people, they, they...

And yet, they left.

...they started a petition in Suginami Ward [Note: a suburban area of Tokyo] to get the playgrounds cleaned up, five-thousand signatures...

Aaaahhh...

...very, very interesting couple...

...wow.

...but he went back to Mississippi and struggled to find work and, you know, but he made his choice...

Yeah.

...he had a good job here, they were making good money, but then he said, “That’s not what it’s about.”

Yeah, a lot of, a lot of people who mentioned in the, sort of, reasoning for why they’ve stayed, a lot of things would come down to, to the job or...

Well, it comes down to money.

...yeah, yeah, yeah, not having.

But it’s coming down to me about I’m getting tired of looking at my food every day going, “Where the fuck is that from?”

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Has that been tested?

Yeah.
Who tested it? What method did they test it with? What was the sample size?

Uhm.

What did they test for? I’m tired of asking the questions...

{redacted}

Yeah, I think that, that this is where, this is one of the reasons why I wanted to ask people when the disaster finished for them, if it had, and just to let you know, almost everybody has said it hasn’t.

No and...

There, there were one or two people who have said.

...families, families have broken up that are living in Okinawa [Note: the prefecture of Japan geographically furthest away from the disaster zone] and the husband stays...

Yeah.

...or Osaka. The husband stays here and goes down on the weekend...

Yeah.

...there’s lots of that going on. There’s lots of that going on.

In terms of the information during the crisis, what did you feel about the US Embassy?

The what?

The US Embassy.

Well, I felt they were more accurate than the Japanese sources. You know, the 80-km...

Yeah.

...area versus the 50-km or 20-km or whatever the...

Yeah, yeah.

...Japanese government said, it was, was in the end accurate. Not completely accurate. But in terms of real threat or real danger, immediate danger. I felt it was accurate. I also felt there was a movement if at all possible not to call for evacuation...

Okay.

...if you look at the Germans and the French, within a couple of days, they ordered people out, the Germans and the Fre, and they were chastised heavily...

Yeah.

...the kindergarten closed, you know, I mean, it, it, it has been a fascinating experience. I don’t blame them at all. I think they did the right thing. I kind of wish the American government had done, I think there were plans to have planes ready and stuff...
Yeah.

...but how do you evacuate seventy-thousand people…

See, that’s huge, yeah, huge.

...let alone thirty-million people in Tokyo Metropolitan Area, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

You can’t. You cannot evacuate this place.

Which comes back to what you were saying about survival of the state versus transparency and truth.

Even if they could, they wouldn’t do it…

Yeah.

...there’s no way.

Yeah.

So, so, so for me, when is the next big aftershock? It hasn’t happened yet. For me, when is Mount Fuji [Note: an active volcano located relatively near Tokyo] going to blow?

There, there are a lot of threatening, you know, if you look at the Nankai fault, which goes all the way down pretty much to the coast, that one is ripe for something. So it could happen now or it could happen in a thousand, I don’t know when it’s going to happen…

Yeah, yeah.

...but I, then the question is: Do you want to live in a place where there are earthquakes all the time?

Yeah.

Do you want to live in a place where you don’t know if there will be a tsunami? Do you want to live in a place where, if there is a big earthquake, food will be cut off?

Uhm, uhm.

And when you are in an evacuation centre, who is going to eat before you? Japanese are.

You know, I don’t know that I want to live like that.

Yeah.

{redacted}

And it’s unfortunate because it has changed Japan for my lifetime.

Yeah.

And I think if anyone starts doing research on seriously what’s going on with the soil, you know, I posted something today you should look at. It was posted I think earlier this
year, that’s, there’s a professor that came out and said two-hundred-and-fifty
kilometers around the plant is contaminated. That includes Tokyo...

That includes Tokyo, yeah.

...and there are micro-hotspots in that area.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

So, so, when you get cabbage from Chiba [Note: a prefecture bordering Tokyo to the
east] has is been tested?

Yeah.

Has it been tested?

Yeah.

It comes back to the same questions: what kind of, of dosimeter or, or scintillator or
something was used? Who did it? Was it a government employee or farmer? Farmers are
testing their own food...

Uhm.

...is that a conflict of interest? Well, of course it is. Troubling questions [laughter].

Yeah. And the, a lot of it comes back to the fact that, I think, maybe the key word from,
from speaking to you is a breakdown of trust.

Yeah.

That seems to be the main...

I noted that.

...that seems to be the main thrust that, yeah. I mean.

Ask people [Note: knocking gently on the table between us for emphasis] when you
interview them if they trust the Japanese government.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Did you ask them?

I asked, I asked a few different, trust did come up in various different things. What, what I
was surprised by was how lack of trust for the media came up more often.

For me, I don’t think that’s an issue. Anyone that says there’s, there’s a lack of trust in
the media. Japanese media or foreign media?

Both actually.

That, that means that there is a conspiracy by all media and everyone participates in
writing the same thing. It’s bullshit. It’s complete nonsense. There’s no, I would believe it
on the Japanese side more than I would on the U, on the foreign side. There’s no way
there’s a conspiracy to hide the truth. There’s no way. I don’t believe it...

Yeah.

I don’t believe it. Read the New York Times. They come out all the time questioning the
state, questioning the system. They came out with a great piece two years ago called the
Cultural Collision talking about how the system works in favour of industry. There’s,
there’s tonnes of evidence that they are writing the truth…

Uhm.

...I just think that they are. That doesn’t mean that all journalists are doing it. I’m not
talking about the Japanese media.

Yeah.

I know several journalists who came here. I did a, I was on a piece on, on {a US station}
in March this year, and I met her in, in February this year when she was here, I actually
brought her to this restaurant…

[Laughter]

...and, and she did a piece on the two sides of the troubling issues. If you want, I can send
the link to you.

That would be great, yeah, I’d appreciate it.

I did something probably no-one else that you, you’ve, has had, at the height of the crisis,
I started researching on the Internet, I started finding who, people who were authorities
on this issue. I came across a couple of names of people. One was a Professor Emeritus at
Oxford, Wade Allison. Have you heard the name?

No.

He is a very interesting guy. He is about seventy years old now. And he’s sort of retired,
professor emeritus, and he, he says there’s nothing to worry about with any radiation, you
couldn’t possibly eat enough to do damage, chromosomal damage to your body. That’s
one side of the story...

Yeah, yeah.

...and there was another professor at the University of Idaho, Tokuhiro Akira, and I met
these two guys in cyberspace and we became friends, and I said, “Look, come over to
Tokyo. I’ll organize with the American Chamber, a big talk at the Tokyo American
Chamber.” And they came over, they, they spent their own money, and they came over
and I organized a press conference for them and I organized the event, and we had 160
people there that night, I remember it was October 2nd or 3rd, there’s also, that’s also on
the Inter, on the…

Yeah, yeah.

...on the, the, the Web, if you want to look at it, I can try to send you the links. And, I
remember distinctly they were on the panel, we got the spokesperson for the Japanese
government to sit on there too, Shikata-san, and, so he sat there, this woman stood up,
“Are you telling me you would feed this to your grandchildren?” He took the mic and said, [Note: mimicking a curt or terse tone] “Yes.” Nobody would believe him. So there’s a feeling that we’re, we’re all being damaged and that there’s, we’re doomed, and that there’s, but the experts are often saying there’s not much to worry about. The thing, you do your own research and you see that no one can definitely say if it’s safe or not safe…

Uhm.

...no-one. There’s no-one that can say that. They can say from their position, but they can’t say for sure…

Uhm.

...so every time that you hear it’s safe, you, you, you go on to another website or another person that’s an expert who says any kind of radiation is damaging. And then they’ll say, “No, but you know in Denver, Colorado the background radiation is, is higher than what you’re getting or if you fly over to New York, you’re getting more radiation on an airplane.”...

Yeah.

...yeah, but that’s external radiation, it’s not internal radiation. So it’s always, it’s never-ending…

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

...it’s, it’s radiation fatigue.

Yeah, yeah, I know, I’m, I’m that’s also another, sort of, thing that even has emerged, I mean, not, obviously radiation is, is the major one, but I think a general disaster fatigue is also…

Yes...

...there in that people talk.

...which works in favour of the state. What happened to the anti-nuclear movement?

Uhm.

When it was 160,000 strong a year-and-a-quarter ago? Where is it now? It’s gone.

Yeah.

You know, there were very disturbing videos of people who would hold up signs at these political rallies, you know, and ‘You’re killing us’ or ‘Down with nuclear power’. The police would come and take them away, surround them. They’re on tape. It’s a very ugly side of Japan.

Uhm. This is one thing that has definitely, I think the crisis seems to have brought to surface some issues that were probably bubbling away underneath…

That’s right.

...just social issues…
...everything bubbles away underneath here…

Yeah.

...who talks about the issues?

Yeah. This, this is, kind of, like, the final topic that I have touched on with everybody, em, the idea of a community. This, I’m obviously looking at it from a, a language point of view, but just in general, a lot of people say that either being connected to your local community or not connected to your local community can have a strong impact on your experience of disaster. It could be, gen, generally they talk about a positive experience if you’re well-connected with your local community.

How is it a positive experience?

This is, so, they say by being connected with your local community, there’s more chance that there will be somebody there to look out for you, there’d be more access, you’ll know where to go to do things, you’ll have people to help you.

Really?

Yeah, this is what I want to ask people about. This is what is said in the literature. Do you?

No, I don’t agree with that. I’ve done everything on my own. I don’t, I don’t think that being, I mean, I met people who were groups who had similar thinking, and I would go to some meetings and listen to them, and in fact, there were several meetings that I helped organize, we had panel discussions on the topic from fellow Facebook pages and stuff, that’s also on, on, in the Internet, I could send you a link, too…

Please do, yeah.

...but I did everything on my own. That’s not to say that having a community is a bad idea. But I don’t know what a community is going to do that I can’t do on my own. I can do my own research. And would rather do my own research. At least I know what the sources are. I used my brain to make my own decisions. So for me, the community thing is not important. I would argue the opposite. I would argue that, that the power of the group stifles honesty. I would argue that business people here who have businesses to operate and belong to, like, a chamber of commerce don’t want to make waves because they don’t want to hurt their business and they don’t want to hurt their reputation. I would argue the opposite.

That’s very interesting. That’s very, very interesting.

And so, I have a feeling that, and the example of my business where I work, my boss saying to me, “I’m uncomfortable…”

Yeah.

...with what you’re doing.” “Why? Has anybody said anything?” “No.”…

Yeah, yeah.
Uncomfortable. Well, that’s an example of being cautious and not saying anything. You know, it’s like your neighbour disappears…

Uhm.

...and everyone in the neighbourhood knows that the neighbour is not there anymore, but nobody says anything…

Yeah.

...so for me, I don’t buy that argument. I think it’s dangerous.

That’s interesting that you should de, describe it in those terms because another kind of, I guess theme that I have noticed is that rather than maybe linguistic barriers or issues, cultural barriers or issues seem to be much stronger.

Oh yeah…

Would you feel? You’d feel?

...definitely. Oh, you know, deru kui wa utareru, the nail that sticks out gets hammered down [Note: this is a very famous Japanese proverb] I mean, that says it all. And it’s very powerful here, it’s very powerful. It, it’s more powerful in a place like Singapore where there’s F.U.D., Fear Uncertainty or Doubt, and people self, self-regulate themselves on what they say. But here, here you can’t have a discussion with, with somebody in Japanese. How deep can you go? If you say, “Ano, Fukushima ni tsuite dou omoimasu ka?” “Iya, muzukashii desu.” “Nani ga muzukashii?” “Iya, mou, iroiro desu ne.” “Ja, katte ni chotto gutai teki ni setsumei dekimasuka?” [Note: Sharply inhaling breath through teeth “Iya.” [Note: the encounter spoken in Japanese here is intended to show the stereotypical evasiveness characteristic of trying to talk about controversial issues in a Japanese cultural context. The encounter might translate as something like “So what do you think about Fukushima?” “It’s hard to say.” “What’s difficult about it?” “Well, it’s a complex problem.” “How is it complex? What do you mean exactly?” Well, you know yourself, the way these things are. The encounter transliterates as “So what do you think about Fukushima?” “It’s difficult.” “What’s difficult?” “No, well, it involves various things.” “Well, just for me could you be a bit more specific.” “Not really.” [Sharply inhaling breath through teeth is a Japanese cultural signal for not wanting to or not being able to talk further on the topic in hand] I mean, that’s, that’s how it goes here, right?

Yeah. That’s very, very interesting.

I find Japan dangerous from that perspective.

And yet you lived here for twenty, twenty-five years, I think.

That’s right.

Is, has the disaster?

Because I don’t have to play by the rules here. I have what’s called a gaijin menkyo [Note: it’s the idea of a free pass given to foreigners]…

[Laughter]

...I have my own licence. Nobody expects me to act Japanese…
...so I don’t have to, and therefore I have the freedom to do what I want. Actually, Japan is a wonderful place to be completely free. You have the right to be left alone in society. We all have the right to be left alone. That’s what you can do very well here in Japan.

That’s very, very interesting. That’s very, very interesting. Do you mean all people who live here or foreign nationals who live here?

I mean anybody has the right to be left alone. I mean, how many stories have we heard about people collecting benefits from the state after somebody dies…

...because nobody checked up on them for twenty years. I mean, it’s the classic example.

That’s true [laughter]. That’s true, that’s very true.

But that’s also, that’s a plus. It’s very interesting, but it’s also dangerous.

Right? So, so at what point do people speak up. I think the crisis was an interesting example to see, to show, to see a coalescence of society stand against what they’re feeling. So basically now, everyone has got radiation fatigue, everyone wants to go on with their lives. They don’t want to worry about it anymore...

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

...and until, I mean, you know, there’ll be more, there will be more evidence of…

Yeah.

...pollution of the food chain. It’s going to continue to come up…

Yeah.

...and there will be more cases of cancer, and there will be more cases of deformities.

Insects being defor, I mean, you just name it…

Yeah.

...it’s going to continue. So, the question is do we want to be around for that?

Yeah.

Is this the way you want to live your life? {redacted}

And also this particular type of continuing crisis, it crosses borders as well...

That’s right, sure.

...as you mentioned.
I love what the Koreans did two weeks ago, banning. It was like, “Fuck you guys.” Now the question is do they have evidence that there is tainted food because, if they have, they haven’t shown it. So how much of it is political nonsense and how much is reality? But it’s, it forces them, and I wrote this in my blog, it forces the authorities to be transparent. It’s a wonderful thing. When the United Nations comes out with the re, report today, stating that they are lying about talking about the levels of exposure for the workers, and it’s the United Nations basically saying that Japan, you are lying, this is big for Japan…

Uhm.

...they’re going to, and especially now with the Olympics, it’s a wonderful thing to keep pressure on this, on the authorities. If there was anything to clean up the mess as best they could, it’s the Olympics now. It’s a wonderful thing.

I actually am glad, very glad you mentioned that because I completely forgot to ask you about that, what was your opinion, yeah, so when you heard that Tokyo got the Olympics…

Yeah.

...you actually felt, “Okay, this is a good thing.”

It’s a good thing for the disaster.

Yeah. Were you at all surprised that they?

Yeah, they threw more money at it than anybody else did. That’s how they choose the Olympics. It’s all about money, right?

[Laughter]

So, but, but for them to get up, they were very good about answering the issue of, you know, “New York has more background radiation than Tokyo does. Hong Kong has more background radiation than Tokyo does.” You know, it was very interesting. And everybody bought it. But the question is…

[Nervous laughter]

...how long will people buy it? Now, you know, if you go on, if you go on the website of, it’s not a, it’s the one about testing that waters that I mentioned [Note: clicking his fingers as he tries to recall the name] it doesn’t matter, anyway, if you go on their, their website, they’re printing what they’re finding in, in the ocean, and so there is evidence of certain kinds of bottom-feeders that are higher levels of radiation than other kinds of fish, and, you know, there’s all kinds of articles on that. But people have biases when they write…

Yeah.

...em, especially non-journalists. But the thing about social media is, you’re a journalist and I’m a journalist and he’s a journalist. Everyone’s a journalist. Everyone’s an expert.

Yeah...

It’s crazy.
...it’s really hard for me, because I am interested in the idea of, like, how people gathered information, it’s really hard for me to start to make a call on the value of social media...

Well, that’s right.

...it’s hard to, part of me thinks, “Okay, yeah.” I’ve, I’ve directly asked people was it useful to them, and many people have said it was a lifesaver, it was useful...

Right.

...but then, there are other sides of the story where it created confusion, lack of, trust broke down, maybe people were overwhelmed.

Which is more why I like to read traditional media because they are professional journalists who do their research...

Yeah.

...you know, Martin Fackler [Note: New York Times Tokyo Bureau Chief] talks about the fact that during the crisis he went up to Fukushima and all the journalists were invited up, and they all went over here [Note: gesturing to one side of the table] and he was like, “Well, I want to go over there.” [Note: gesturing to the opposite side of the table] “I want to go and talk to this guy walking along the street.” Nobody would do it but him. So anyway, he would leave the group where they were taking him and showing him everything is okay, and he would go off to the side. Right, to me that, that kind of person is somebody I trust. That doesn’t mean they are not lying or they can’t make a mistake, but all the time you can tell from what people write if they’re not professionals in terms of understanding of nuclear issues, but they are professional writers who know how to do research anyway, so.

Yeah, no, it’s, that’s, it’s a fascinating topic. I don’t know whether I’ll be able to deal with it in this particular thesis project, but the idea of the, sort of, social media versus traditional media is, it’s, it’s, a big question...

Oh it’s a huge issue because...

...in the disaster probably related to all topics.

...because, but it’s a huge question over all because...

Yeah.

...traditional media has rules and social media does not...

Yeah.

...the rules for social media are still being written...

Yeah.

...and that’s why it’s dangerous.

Yeah. And yet, you know, it has been beneficial for you, it has helped you to get a message out there.

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Well, it has helped. What I am doing is taking traditional media and putting it on social media.

Right, right, right. I see what you mean.

I’m, I’m just, I’m just, a vehicle for translating what’s already been out there.

I got it, I got it. That’s an important, actually I’m glad that you said that, that’s an important distinction.

With a little commentary…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but you.

...but those one-liners, you know, people like the cynicism…

Yeah, yeah.

...they like, it’s healthy skepticism.

Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That’s no, actually, yeah, that’s been very useful. I’m glad you, I’m glad you did mention that. And, and I’m also surprised, again, I get surprised by things people say because I am coming in with my own biases and prejudgments. I assumed you wouldn’t have been happy with the Tokyo Olympics, but the way you describe it, it’s a way to keep pressure on them, yeah.

Absolutely.

Things may have to be more transparent in response to.

Well, as the years go by now…

Yeah.

...and it’s, if there are more stories and issues, then they could lose the Olympics…

Yeah.

...that’s not without the realm of possibility. And you think they want to lose the Olympics? No way.

Yeah.

I don’t want to be in Japan after 2020. All, fiscally the place is going to fall apart. The debt levels are going to continue to rise with Abenomics [Note: a neologism for the economic policies of Japanese Prime Minister at the time of the interview, Shinzo Abe] and funding of these things. I would not want to be around Japan after 2020.

Yeah. It sounds like there’s a lot of darkness on the horizon.

There is, and then, the sales tax is going from 5 to 8…

Yeah, that’s.
...but that it actually has to go, the value-added tax has to actually go up to what it is in France at 23%.

Yes, yeah.

That’s what it is going to go. I would say by the time the Olympics is done, we are at 20%. You watch…

Yeah.

They have no choice. They have to do it.

Yeah.

So this is the thing, right? Abenomics, everyone thinks it’s so wonderful, why is it wonderful? They’re taking Japan deeper into debt. This, they’re, they’re doing what the Fed does. They’re printing money to buy their own debt. It’s insane…

Yeah.

...right? And at what point does the market say it’s not sustainable anymore? Well, they said it in Greece and they said it in Cyprus…

Okay.

...the market decides, not the government.

And I’m always interested in, like, the communication or the information aspect side, I think the Abenomics and the Tokyo Olympics have been very well spun.

Yes.

Very, very well spun.

Dentsu and Hakuhodo [Note: two major Japanese advertising agencies] did a great job.

[Laughter] Did that surprise you at all?

No, no. I mean, that’s PR. {redacted}…

Yeah.

...I understand.

You know how it works.

It’s very interesting stuff.

Yeah, it’s, yeah, as I said, going back to that, kind of, Pandora’s Box image, there’s just so many interesting aspects to this whole, you know, event and the phenomena that have come out of the event. I won’t be able to talk about anything but a fraction of these things, but…

Maybe it’s a second or third project.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, you never know, and that’s, that’s why as I said I very clearly wanted to say from the get-go that I don’t intend to destroy it or...

No, you shouldn’t.

...because I think there could be other useful things, you know, there may be other stories that could be told.

So out of the 27 people or whatever that you’ve spoken to, does anybody have my story, I don’t think so.

No, no. There are people...

Starting their own blog, bringing speakers over, you know, writing in, in {a major online news blog}.

No. There are people who have made contributions in other ways or, you know, done different things, but absolutely nothing in terms of, as you said, those particular steps.

I didn’t think so. {redacted}

Yeah, yeah. And like for sure, one thing that, one thing that you’ve said that I want to look more into as well is looking at, you know, the Japanese people not being able to get the information or not wanting to get the information. Like, you mentioned about mothers now reading your blog or, yeah, they’re getting...

Half of the people on my blog are Japanese. I get the numbers and the prefectures...

Yeah, yeah.

...when I go on my Facebook as an administrator. I’m disturbed that the way in which testing occurs on a national basis is not made transparent. I’m disturbed that it’s not consistent. I’m disturbed that there’s no, no independent testers on a systemic basis, double-checking what’s going on. There’s none of that.

Yeah.

It’s very upsetting.

Yeah, it’s, as I said, I think the disaster brought to, to the surface issues about life in Japan...

Yeah.

...that maybe have been, kind of, like, as I said before, bubbling away.

That’s right.

Well, that’s pretty much all I have, unless is there anything that you think might be relevant in terms of information gathering or communication that I, you know, we haven’t touched on or that might have been relevant to your experience?

I think people have a brain. Use it and then use it in a way that’s good for them. That’s my feeling on that.
2013/10/22 Interview with Participant 28

Researcher: Then really, the way I start every interview is just by asking the same basic, general question...

Participant: Yeah, of course.

...tell me what happened to you in, in the disaster.

Right. Well, em, I was at school at the time, at my job as an assistant language teacher. Eh, it was the day before, eh, the third-grade graduation ceremony, so, eh, there were no classes in the afternoon. All the kids were running around the school putting up decorations, and basically organizing the whole thing. So I had sort of been floating around the school and talking to the kids and helping out where I could and, eh, but at this time I was back in the staff room sitting at my desk…

Yeah.

...eh, and, the building started to shake. We’d had a few, em, decent-sized earthquakes in the week before, so we were all, sort of, thinking it was another one of those. Eh, but it just kept going, it just kept going and going. Eh, apparently, it went for, like, four minutes or something. Yeah, I couldn’t have told you that at the time, I just, you know, I didn’t think of it that way, but yeah, it really went for a long, long time. Eh, and, yeah, so you had, sort of, time to realize it was an earthquake, think about whether it was serious enough to get under your desk, realize it was, sort of serious enough to get under your desk, get under your desk, and then, sort of, reali, think about whether you should be getting out from your desk and, you know, just, kind of, sitting under there. And then it just started, you know, the whole time just increasing, increasing in intensity. Eh, so yeah, eventually it stopped and the staff room was a total mess, emh, and luckily there were some of my English teaching colleagues, eh, Japanese teachers in the staff room, so I asked one of them, “What do we do now?” So we all did the usual disaster routine. We got out of the building and all the kids were starting to line up outside the building, some of them were crying, some of them were laughing. Eh, yeah, it was, it was pretty intense. Eh, there were cracks in the walls that we could see, and plaster had come off, and all that sort of thing. Eh, I was really amazed at how well the building stood up, and all over Sendai, though. Like, there were hardly any buildings that, that, eh, had fallen down or anything. It was mostly roof tiles and, eh, brick walls, and that sort of thing. Eh, and, yeah, we, we just sort of waited outside and, em, then it started to snow [laughter] so we took all the kids inside the gymnasium, and then there was another aftershock, and so we took all the kids out of the gymnasium, ehm, and then after I don’t know how long, I’d been on my phone texting, eh, my wife, {redacted} who, eh, was teaching at another school, so we didn’t know, kind of, what had happened elsewhere. But, of course, the cellphone network was totally overloaded at that point, so I didn’t hear back from her. Eh, and yeah, eventually all of the, the Japanese teachers, kind of, took groups of kids in the direction of their homes because, eh, it’s quite a suburban school, so everyone lived really nearby…

Yeah.

...so everyone, kind of, scattered out that way, eh, and I was left with the, the tea lady and the, eh, the school janitor and the principal. Eh, and the principal said, “You’ll be okay to
get home?” And I was like, “Yeah, I think so. I’ll just walk.” Ehm, so I just walked home, which was about a thirty-, forty-minute walk. And then, obviously, the buses had stopped, this was how I normally go home. Eh, yeah, so walking home, yeah, notice a few tiles had come off the tops of houses and, yeah, there were a few walls and things had, sort of, fallen down but, kind of, things were remarkably intact still. Eh, got back to my apartment. Ehm, just it was sort of starting to get dark, em, and {my wife} wasn’t there, which was a bit worrying. Eh, because her school is only five minutes’ walk away. Ehm, so, got in there and the apartment was a total mess. Everything had fallen out of the cupboards. Our kitchen was covered in broken glass and bits of, em, food that had come out of jars and stuff. It was not nice, eh, and our lounge was kind of the same. Everything had moved. Books had come out of bookshelves. Eh, so, I grabbed a torch, put on my coat, and - well, I was already wearing a coat - ehm, put on some warmer clothes and set out towards {my wife’s} school to try and find here. But luckily she was just walking up the street as I got out. So that was a relief, a big relief. Ehm, and then there was another New Zealander, actually, living just around the corner from us, em, who was new to Sendai that year. Eh, so we went around and checked on her, and she was quite shaken up. So we all went back to our place and we, eh, kind of, tidied up as much as we could, which, kind of, included just clearing a few, kind of, stepping holes…

[Laughter]

...in the junk, because it was so dark at that point and there was no power. Eh, so we couldn’t really do much else without it. Eh, and we just, kind of, slept in our clothes with our shoes by the end of the bed. And our friend, yeah, we had a little futon that we put on the floor for her. Ehm, and yeah it was pretty uneasy night but, em, yeah, just some aftershocks happening. Nothing too big, luckily. Em, yeah, the buildings really, kind of, wobble when you get those aftershocks because I think they’re really built to, to, sh, to shake with the earthquakes rather than stand up, withstand them. Ehm, yeah, and then from there, do you want me to keep going or?

Yeah. Oh, just whatever you want to talk about...

Sure, sure.

...really there’s no structure.

I can keep going, for sure. Ehm, from that point, eh, the next day, some more friends of ours came round and we, sort of, set, we tidied up the house and, sort of, set up a little base for about five of us, all just staying together and making sure we all were, kind of, supporting each other, I guess. Eh, and we were lucky because two of our American friends who were staying with us had been there for about six years, I think, so they were quite good at, em, speaking Japanese, which was, you know, we’d only been there for a year-and-a-half, so we weren’t the best speakers. We hadn’t studied Japanese before, or anything like that. Ehm, an eventually the power came back on the next day, eh, we, sort of, celebrated a little bit [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...and turned on the TV, and then realized that there’d been this massive tsunami that we really didn’t know anything about. Ehm, and we were able to change, charge our cell phones. Oh, I didn’t mention that - my cell phone went dead pretty much straight afterwards because I’d, just, been running it down to the bottom of the battery and, ehm, it was just, kind of, unfortunate, you know. Luckily, {my wife} was able to get on Facebook, eh, and let my family know that I was okay, because obviously they were pretty worried about me. Eh, because everyone here [Note: in Christchurch] just saw
Sendai, tsunami, and, you know, put two and two together, I lived in Sendai so I was probably dead, basically. Eh, [laughter] which is kind of horrible to think about. Ehm, but yeah, luckily she was able to get on Facebook for me and let people know that I was okay. Facebook was really good for that purpose. It was a really good way to get in touch with people. Ehm, yeah, so, getting the power back on was, like, a really sobering thing because we found out, just, what, the total extent of the disaster. Eh, yeah, so, okay, and obviously then there was the Fukushima reactor problem as well which, sort of, em, flared up into our minds at that point. Eh, and so we spent about a week, eh, in Sendai in our apartment, em, mostly with those same people, em, just, kind of, gathering food together, em, the supermarket down the road was really pretty cool, like, the workers there went back the next, within a couple of days and they, kind of, brought some stock out, eh - this was, like, a basement supermarket - they brought it up into the, em, kind of, the courtyard of the shopping mall area, and people formed a queue and you got some, like, one item of this and one item of that, and, em, do it that way. And so we all just, sort of, gathered, sort of, supplies, so bottled water and green tea and that sort of thing, ehm, cup ramen…

[Laughter]

…and that sort of thing. Ehm, yeah, and we spent, kind of, five or six really nervous days, eh, watching the BBC on our phones basically, em, looking for updates on the Fukushima reactor, not really knowing if we should be trying to get out of Sendai or if we should stay where we were, we, eh, we kind of figured that we, from what we know, we didn’t need to stay inside or anything, it wasn’t that serious yet. Em, but, yeah, it was definitely a huge worry, em. {my wife} and I registered at that point with the New Zealand Embassy which were giving out daily, em, kind of travel tips, I guess. Not travel tips, but, em, what would you say? Status updates, I guess?

Yeah.

Eh, and they were saying, you know, “It’s okay. It’s okay. You don’t need to, we would advise people not to enter the area but you don’t need to leave if you don’t want to.” Em, yeah, and what else happened? Media from New Zealand started getting in touch with me. Eh, because pre, previously I’d worked in newspapers so there were a couple people who knew how to get hold of me. Em, and that was okay, at first, but then I, kind of, got sick of, em, people, sort of, taking things out of context and there was one particular news crew that had come over and wanted to meet with us and, ehm, this happened on a particularly stressful day when, eh, some Australian, Australian friend and his Japanese wife, eh, had a car, we didn’t have a car, and they said, em, “Look, we’re going to drive out to, eh, Yamagata and see how far we can get. Do you want to come with us?” And we, sort of, said, “Ehhhhh, okay. Yes?” Because we didn’t really know if we’d have that option again…

Yeah.

...if they left without us. Ehm, because the highways were closed, eh, bullet trains were not functional, and, ehm, yeah, so went with them to Yamagata, em, and then, yeah, there wasn’t really anywhere to stay in Yamagata because everybody had been doing that. Ehm, and we, kind of, got there and realized we’re, kind of, driving this way, we don’t really know how far we’re going to be able to get, we don’t really have anywhere we can stay, maybe we should just turn around and go back, because we’ve got supplies and we have somewhere to stay, and we’ve, you know, we’re pretty safe where we are, we think. So actually we turned around and went back to Sendai, em, so it was really stressful and this news crew, kind of, caught us right when we were going through this weird, kind of, time of thinking we were going to escape and then deciding, maybe, it
wasn’t such a good idea. Eh, and they actually met us on the road to Yamagata, I think, or
to Sen, back to Sendai and we said, “Yeah, we thought about leaving, though we are
actually going to go back.” And they were like, “Oh, okay. Eh, yeah, we were going to
be going in, but our news crew said we weren’t allowed. We’ve to go back to Tokyo.”
And we were like, “Why, why did they say that?” And they were like, “Ah, it’s just, you
know, TV, the TV company said.” And we were like, “Oh god, is there something we
don’t know?” But anyway, they kind of threw us up and then filmed us and, kind of, it
felt like it was trying to be quite emotionally manipulative. Like, one of those human
interest stories for the news, and I really didn’t like that.” So we, kind of, tried to, kind of,
distance ourselves from the media from that point. Although, I did do a couple of radio
correspondence things for the national radio program here which was actually really cool
because it was live and they couldn’t, eh, they weren’t trying to bait me to say
particularly emotional things for their reader, their viewership or anything like that. I
could just, sort of, say what I wanted and, yeah, so I felt quite good about that. Eh,
anyway, ehm, yeah, so we eventually went back to Sendai and, by that point the, the
Embassy had, em, in collaboration with the Australian Embassy had sent some people in
to Sendai, eh, and they held a little kind of conference, I guess, for everyone, all the New
Zealanders and Australians who were there and they really reassured us about
the situation, which was really cool. Em, we heard some terrible stories about the
Canadian Embassy and how badly they handled it. There was Canadian friends of ours,
basically they rang them up and the Embassy told them to go to Sendai Airport and catch
a flight out but, of course, the airport had been washed away. So they said, “Oh okay,
well in that case you should go to Fukushima Airport. That’s the closest one.”

[Laughter]

So, yeah, I was really pleased that our embassy was on to it and knew what they were
doing. Yeah, basically they reassured is that it wasn’t a problem, em, being in Sendai,
they were still sending people in to help in Sendai, and if they needed to get us out they
would. So that was really cool. And then, I think, the next day, ehm, they organized a, a
bus, a minibus, em, to go to Tokyo and said, “If anyone wants to get on it, they can. It’s
not an evacuation, but if you want to get out, you can.” Eh, and so I rang my school up
and said, em, this was the school holidays at this point, and said, “Look, if it’s okay, I’m
going to go down to Osaka for a while.” Because we had friends there that we could stay
with. Em, and they said that that was okay, so, em, yeah, {my wife} and I jumped on this
bus and some of our Canadian friends came with us [laughter] which
was cool of the New Zealand Embassy to do [laughter]...

[Laughter]

...eh, and we all just, em, yeah, headed down to the highway to Tokyo and then got the
bullet train from Tokyo to Osaka. We stayed for about two weeks, em, with our friends
and just to, it was, kind of, for our own peace of mind, and for our families’ peace of
mind as well. Eh, yeah, yeah, eh, and that was good because, yeah, as I said, the
southern part of Japan, kind of, hadn’t been altered at all…

Yeah.

...really, just business as usual, ehm, yeah, so it was good to get away. Em, and yeah, we
didn’t really have any intention of leaving Japan, we didn’t think it was that serious, em,
so yeah, we just, kind of, hung out there for two weeks and then, em, by that point the
bullet train was back up and running, so we went back to Sendai and back to school. Em,
yeah. Eh, the week before school started again, I think it was, the two of us tried to do a
little bit of volunteering, because with the, the, ehm, assistant language teachers who
were still there had been organizing that so we went out to Ishinomaki for a day, and, em,
it was, like, horrible thick, like, mud under people’s houses and that was pretty, em, yeah that was pretty sombre, ehm, just what, like, it was where the tsunami had come in, it hadn’t, ehm, washed the houses away but it had just, sort of, flooded people’s houses, maybe a metre-and-a-half up to people’s first floors. So, yeah, there were boats in the middle of the street and the streets were just lined with people’s belongings basically. They just were throwing absolutely everything out, and it seemed like they weren’t, kind of, being picky. It was just everything, everything goes. Ehm, and yeah, the next day we went to Niigata, and was it Niigata? No, that’s not the right place. Ehm, I can’t remember where it was, just another coastal town, and they had set up, sort of, a shelter. In the shelter they were, had volunteers where they were giving out all these bits of food and, em, and, yeah, we didn’t manage to do really any volunteering there. I think possibly because the, of the language barrier. They wanted, they were, sort of, giving out jobs and we were, sort of, trying to pick up what they were saying and then figuring out, “Oh yeah, we could, we could do that one.” There were enough people there that they had more jobs than people, I think [Note: this is a slip of the tongue and the participant meant to say more people than jobs, I suspect] so, em, after that we went back to school and it was, kind of, business as usual, as much as it could be, I suppose. Em, yeah. Does that? Yeah.

Absolutely, no, all that you’ve talked about... That’s all of the stories.

...is absolutely fascinating. Ehm, there are things that I’ve, that I would like to go back to a little.

Absolutely, yeah, yeah.

Ehm, but just seeing as that’s the point where you stopped...

Yeah.

...what I’m interested in and what I’ve asked everybody is when did the disaster end for you, if it has ended?

Yeah, em, that is a good question. Eh, I suppose for me, ehm, I think I felt confident enough, the only issue for me was the nuclear fallout, I think, eh, and I felt confident enough in the information we were getting that it wasn’t a problem where we were in Sendai. So I think when we went back to Sendai, I would say, [laughter] well, it’s hard to say because I mean there were constant aftershocks, you know, even for months afterwards, so I suppose, yeah, I was going to say then, yeah, but maybe it was a lot later. I’m not sure. I couldn’t put a date on it, yeah, but I guess as long as there were aftershocks, it was still, kind of, a nervous thing every time. Eh, and I, there were definitely a couple of big aftershocks at least where we wondered if it was going to be another big earthquake, eh, yeah, it, sort of, just, just stopped short of the point where, eh, so I guess maybe a few months.

Yeah, yeah, no the aftershocks are, I think, a very valid point about how long the disaster went on...

Yeah.

...for, for people...

Yeah.
...similarly in Christchurch too...

Well, yeah.

...I think aftershocks were a big issue.

People who were outside of the place don’t really understand that it’s, it’s an ongoing thing. Eh, yeah, and it was, sort of, at the point where you got, where you were, you were getting one or more, you know, could be a dozen aftershocks a day, of varying magnitudes and, yeah, it’s a funny thing where it sort of becomes part of your daily routine, but you never really get used to it because you’re always, it puts you on edge straight away. Eh, yeah, and they can be, sort of, little shallow rolling ones or they can be really sudden jarring ones, ehm, yeah.

And, of course, they’re happening at night time too...

Yeah.

...it doesn’t just happen in waking hours so it can be very disorienting when they’re happening, disturbing your sleep as well.

Yeah, well the first, the September earthquake here [Note: referring to Christchurch] happened in the middle of the night, it was, it was, kind of, a lucky thing because a lot of the ci, city was damaged...

Yeah.

...but there was no-one here to...

Yeah.

...everyone was at home. Ehm, but, yeah, it’s worrying. I think by the time we got back to Sendai we weren’t sleeping in our clothes anymore but we definitely had a bag by the door that we could take with us if we needed to and that sort of thing. Yeah, so, I guess, the dis, I suppose you would say the disaster was over but we were always prepared to have to face it again. Yeah, you know, which you’ll notice here. [Note: he means here in Christchurch]

And then, as you said, the nuclear element added another dimension.

Yeah, yeah. Em, yeah, it was tricky because everyone was say, was saying, “Oh, the Japanese isn’t telling wha, people what’s really happening.” And, yeah, it was pretty worrying. You, you still see the odd thing come up on the news about, I saw one last week, I think, about abnormal readings and things that have been reported there and, yeah, it’s hard to know what to believe, but I guess, we, sort of, had enough faith in our embassy and the fact that the situation was being monitored by international scientists as well as Japanese scientists. That, yeah, we felt confident enough to be there.

I’m really pleased to hear that you were satisfied with the embassy’s, em, sort of, actions because I’ve spoken to people from Canada [laughter]...

Yeah.

...and other nationalities who really were not happy...
Yeah, yeah.

...em, you mentioned that you registered with the embassy, had you been registered with them beforehand or something or?

I, I’m actually a little fuzzy on the details of this. I feel like we may have been registered. We, definitely, we had been to the embassy when we first arrived in Japan, we had been to a function there, so I feel like they must have known we were there, ehm.

Because I’m interested to know if they contacted you first or you contacted them when the disaster happened.

I think, my father contacted them on my behalf immediately and then I emailed them as well. I think my emailing them just got me signed up to their daily, ehm, status updates.

Status updates. Yeah, the Irish Embassy did the same thing...

Yeah.

...we got a, kind of, I can’t remember if it was daily actually, but we got a pretty regular - actually it probably was daily at the start, yeah...

Yeah, yeah, yes, yes.

...and then maybe it was weekly or monthly or something like that. Eh, I’m also interested, as you know, so I’m interested in things like communication and...

Yeah, of course.

...information gathering, and so on. So a couple of things I’d like to go back to see if you can remember...

Yeah.

...when the actual first earthquake hit, you would have been in school. Do you remember any, sort of, you know the P.A. system they have, like, these loudspeakers all throughout Japan, do you remember any announcements or messages...

No...

...over that system?

...no there weren’t any as far as I remember. Eh, I think the power went out almost immediately. I suppose they would have reserve power for that sort of thing, but no, I don’t remember any. Eh, I think there was just, people knew the emergency evacuation, and so all the students and teachers knew to meet outside in the, eh, parking lot, I guess. Yeah. And it was a suburban school, so it wasn’t, like, in a heavily populated area. Em, yeah, yeah, I don’t remember any.

Yeah, that absolutely tallies with what everyone else in the, sort of, I’ve spoken to people who were in {various parts of Miyagi} and most people have, have said that they don’t remember any announcements. One slightly worrying one was I spoke to somebody in Chiba who was on the coast and they don’t remember any tsunami...

Oh really? Yeah...
...warning which should have happened.

...I was going to say that, that, the coastline, yeah...

Yeah, they were right, they were walking along the coastline with their, their family...

Wow, yeah.

...so I don’t know, but that could be just a question of memory, but...

Yeah.

...anyway. Ehm, another, kind of, couple of issues that I’m really, really interested in is...

Yeah.

...say, so I know you tried to text {your wife} pretty much as soon as the event had happened and then your battery ran out...

Yeah, yeah.

...so, you never got through at all to anybody or?

No, I wasn’t able to. Ehm, no, I think the, the network was overloaded with people texting each other, which was probably the reason why it didn’t, the text message wasn’t received. She didn’t get it till hours later. Ehm, yeah, and I don’t, I’m not sure that I was able to access the Internet straight afterwards. That might have been a network overload as well. We were definitely able to, to in the hours afterwards, though.

Yeah, and just one thing I wanted to confirm was when you were accessing the Internet that was on a mobile device?

It was, yeah. It wasn’t a smartphone, it was one of the shells, but it had Internet.

Yeah. Ehm, and I know that Japanese phones also have a TV, like, the one-seg TV, did either you or {your wife}...

Yeah.

...use that or?

...No. No, we didn’t. Em, I don’t know why that was. I can’t. No, I don’t think we did, I don’t think we tried to.

Okay, yeah, no, em, it’s just, like, obviously, what I’m interested in are aspects to do with language and culture, and a lot of the Japanese people did use the one-seg TV...

Yeah, yeah.

...I don’t know, maybe it’s because they’re used to it, they use it in their everyday lives.

Yeah, we didn’t use it very often, eh, day-to-day anyway, so, maybe we didn’t think of it at the time in the confusion or yeah.
Well, this is clearly one thing that’s in the disaster literature that when a disaster happens, you use the things you’re already familiar with...

Right.

...so perhaps as somebody who wouldn’t have used the TV on your phone in your regular life, it just wouldn’t occur to you, maybe, to use it in...

True, yeah...

...in times of disaster.

...eh, yeah, eh, we had, em, our American friends who came to stay with us later in the week actually visit, visited us on the evening because they had a car as well, they were just, sort of, driving around, they were living in the area, ehm, and just to see how we were, and I think we turned on the radio in the car because they were the more fluent Japanese speakers that, sort of, eh, gave us a rundown. But I think, em, I think we felt reasonably safe where we were and having Christchurch go through all that stuff just a month before, eh, I think we felt like we kind of knew what we had to do in, in the situation. We made sure we had drinking water and, em, we had a bit of food, and, yeah, and then we were able to get the power the next day, so, we turned on the TV straight away after that. Yeah.

Th, these two, em, issues are really, really interesting to me and they are probably going to be a bit of a focus in my, my, eh, thesis: the issue of the radio - eh, not many people have mentioned radio.

Yeah, I think we did turn on the radio, eh, we tried looking for maybe an English-language broadcast or something like that but, as far as I remember there wasn’t one. There were a few odds it was, like, a short, recorded message that was just repeated. Yeah, so we didn’t really use that very much.

So, that would have been, like, an emergency radio that you had or just a regular?

I think that was just a regular radio - that was once the power came back on, yeah, yeah.

And then I’m really, really interested in the topic of your American friends listening to the radio and maybe explaining things...

Yeah, yeah.

...to you. Do you remember any of the topics or what kind of information was being talked about at that stage?

I think they were, it was mostly a case of us watching the tsunami footage and they were, sort of, picking out the body counts and that sort of thing from the information, so, yeah, trying to figure out what city, what towns had been hit and that sort of thing, yeah. Ehm, yeah, as I said, with, we didn’t really feel like we were in any particular, immediate danger, so, we didn’t, I don’t think we were really looking for, like, evacuation notices or anything like that.

Yeah, that’s, kind of, what was actually going to be one of my next questions. Did you and {your wife} ever consider to going to one of the refuge centres?
Well, ehm, we were, we knew that our closest, em, kind of, emergency meeting place was a park down the road, eh, and, well, we were in our apartment with a roof over our heads so we didn’t really see, eh, a benefit to going down to the park just to see what was happening, you know? And yeah, we had some, we had some food and drink, as I said, so, yeah, there wasn’t an immediate emergency in terms of that, so, yeah, we had, sort of, made contact with the people that we, a bit kind of like a buddy system, I guess, with, eh, the ALTs, the assistant language teachers that were in our area, and, kind of, knew everyone was okay, ehm, so yeah, yeah, yeah, just to answer the question, our local emergency centre was a park, so didn’t really think that would be of benefit to going down there, yeah.

[Laughter] Yeah, no, ehm, a, a, almost everyone I’ve spoken to, eh, didn’t choose to got to a, sort of, communal refuge centre...

Yeah.

...ehm...

There were some people that did. Eh, where would they have been? I think if they were further on the east, on the eastern coast, there were some people who did spend at least one night at a refugee shelter, but, and that might have been people who were in more remote places and didn’t want to be by themselves.

Yeah, I think what you mentioned, that kind of buddy system or making your own, kind of, refuge cen, communal refuge centre...

Yeah, I think it was like that, yeah.

...with people you knew seemed to be a real theme for a lot of the people that I, I spoke to, not just in Miyagi, I spoke to people in Ibaraki and Chiba and Tokyo, this kind of idea seemed to repeat in a lot of the stories, em, they told me. Em, then kind of moving on, em, I know you said that once the power went on, you, you, kind of, went online that was...

Yeah, we were able to charge our phones, eh, we still didn’t have a phone line, so cell phones were the only way we could access the Internet. Eh, so we charged our phones, put on the TV, ehm, yeah.

I know you mentioned the BBC...

Yes.

...were there any other websites that you...

Ehm...

...thought to go to or?

...we did. Ehm, I think the B, the BBC seemed like, kind of, a trusted resource to us. Eh, we probably did check several other ones but we kept going back to the BBC one because they seemed to be the most up-to-date and, kind of, non-sensational, I guess. Because a lot of, I think, a lot of news sources went the sensationalistic route of, eh, using the word meltdown in headlines and, you know, that wasn’t very helpful for us. Ehm, yeah, yeah, that was quite a problem actually, like, because a lot of our friends, once we were on the Internet, our friends, Facebook was saying, em, “This is the next Chernobyl. You have to get out. You have to get out.” And we were saying, “Well, actually, no, I don’t think it is.
It’s probably not really helping you, helping me for you to, kind of, say that to me because I can’t actually get out of the city real easily so.” It was a pretty stressful time.

That’s really fascinating to me because I’ve had this again and again from people about social media being a bit of a blessing and a curse.

Yeah, I would say so.

Could you expand on that a bit more?

Well, yeah, just for those reasons. Eh, it was really useful immediately because you can, if you update your profile and say, “I’m okay,” then anybody who’s interested can see that they don’t need to worry about you, which is really good. Em, and, yeah, there’s also the case of people who able to get on the Internet, other people can tag their name and say, “Look, I’ve seen such-and-such. They’re fine.” So yeah, it, I’m sure it was amazing for just about everybody’s families back home. Eh, but, yeah, then there was the, the point of, eh, being, sort of, kept up-to-date on the situation by perhaps your least-educated friends who don’t really know what exactly was happening but have read, eh, the Daily Mail or whatever [laughter] eh, yeah, do I guess there’s a flip-side to it.

Did you use any other social media? You mentioned Facebook, I know.

I was emailing my dad. My mum doesn’t really use the Internet so she was just getting information from, I guess, him. He was keeping everyone updated. Em, yeah, so I was emailing the Embassy and emailed Dad and that would probably be the extent of it, I guess, yeah.

Em, in terms of the, sort of, websites that you went to...

Uhm.

...did you go to any Japanese websites?

Eh, did we? Em, it wasn’t probably very helpful for me because I couldn't read Japanese very well. I could do katakana and hiragana [Note: two scripts in the Japanese writing system that are relatively easy to learn but not the predominant scripts used in the Japanese writing system] fine, but, eh, kanji [Note: the complex Chinese characters used in the Japanese writing system], I was still really a beginner at them and that, so, I was definitely not at newspaper reading ability, em, yeah. Eh, and then there was also the, kind of, the thought that the Japanese media might not be the most unbiased, em, yeah. So I, kind of, chose to go to international sources for that reason, I suppose, as well as the language thing.

Did you consider going to any, like, government ministry websites or anything?

Ehm, well, as I said, I was in, in contact with the Embassy, eh, so I was, kind of, relying on the status updates. Because I had, I had called the as well, so, yeah. I guess, I didn’t really need to be on their website constantly. Yeah.

Sorry, I meant Japanese government...

Oh, Japanese government?...

...eh, websites.
...eh, no, no. I didn’t really, really do that, no.

Oh, the, the, the reason I just asked it, nobody did, yeah. [laughter]

Right! [laughter]

Ehm, and yet, like, just because this is my area of, of interest, I know that the minist,
various ministries spent a lot of time translating, eh, information into various languages,
not just into English...

Right, right.

...but nobody knew about it...

Right, yeah.

...nobody knew to go there.

No. I, I was certainly not aware of any websites.

Yeah. This is really interesting to me, because it’s one of the things which is, kind of,
coming out as a bit of a theme that it’s not just enough to do the work of translating, you
have let the people who might need it know.

Yes, yes. Undoubtedly true, yeah.

Uhm, and so, again, as I said, what you said tallies with almost everyone that I’ve spoken
to, even...

Yeah.

...they just never even thought to go there because they didn’t see any reason why they
should...

Yeah, yeah.

...and yet, as I said, there was possibly, I mean, I don’t know about the content or the
quality of the information, it may not have been that useful to you at the time...

Uhm.

...but, well, as I said, they spent the time and effort doing it...

Yeah, yeah.

...but nobody seemed to, seemed to know about it.

Right, so just in general, I didn’t really know that.

Yeah, no, a, as I said, eh, this is, eh, a fairly common, common theme, so it’s one of the
things that’s come across...

Uhm.
...that you’ve to do the work but then you have to let people know that you’ve done the work.

Yeah, yeah.

I’m also, like, interested in the idea of the media representation of you as someone experiencing the disaster...

Right.

...you had this kind of special relationship in that you were involved with the, the media...

Yeah, yeah.

...in your, your former life...

Yes.

...did you feel, em, I guess, you talked about, kind of, manipulation and, maybe, them framing...

Yeah, yeah. Eh, yeah, I, sort of, felt that most about the TV crew that wanted the, kind of, you know, soundbites for the, for their, whatever show they were putting together. I never even saw the, what they...

That’s what, was it a New Zealand TV crew?

...it was, it was a New Zealand.

So all of the media that contacted you...

Yeah, yeah.

...were New Zealand based.

Yeah, eh, it started with, eh, a former colleague of mine who was a reporter who got in touch with me and I was happy to talk to her, and she wrote a story for the [local paper of a town two hours away from Christchurch], a pretty small town, and I think that got picked up by, eh, Fairfax, FNZN, or with one of the [Note: after the interview, I checked and it was with Fairfax] ...

One of the agencies, yeah.

...yeah, eh, so that, kind of, was circulated around New Zealand news strips, eh, New Zealand newspapers.

And she would have contacted you by email or?

By Facebook. We were Facebook Friends, yeah, so, eh, there was that and then, I think, from there, I think another one of my friends works in television in Auckland and I think, eh, someone contacted me, contacted me on Facebook and said, “This person said that, that you were in Sendai.” And I just, I didn’t really want to talk to them. But, eh, I can’t remember how national radio got in touch with me but, eh, that seemed like, because national radio is, kind of, like, quite a respectable...
Yeah.

...em, it’s like the New Zealand governmental radio, so I was happy to talk to them and that was on {a certain} afternoon programme and so, I think for about, it might have been three days in a row, eh, in the first week after the thing I was, kind of, their correspondent of sorts - I think they had someone else there as well but, eh, they were talking to me every day for about three days [Note: I checked the archive after our interview and it was for three days] just getting the situation and, eh, yeah, by the time I’d, kind of, decided I was going to stay in Sendai a while, I think they decided that the news story there was, kind of, done and so they didn’t contact me again, but, so I was happy to do it, and, em, actually, when I got back, a lot of people said, “I heard you on national radio. It was really good to hear what you were going through and how the, what the situation was like,” so I’m actually really glad that I did that one in particular.

Yeah, I’m really interested in the, kind of, citizen journalist, em, in disasters because a lot of the time, you know, other journalists can’t get into the area.

Yeah, yeah. Ehm, yeah, and people did send news crews over, as I said, em, but, I’m not sure how, whether they got into Sendai itself in the end or if anyone did. I don’t really know. Eh, as I said, I haven’t really seen any New Zealand news coverage that was of the time because I was in Japan then and, you know, it hasn’t been replayed since, so.

Yeah, because I, I, again I’m always coming at things from a translation perspective but any news crew that goes over probably needs some sort of translator or cultural mediator...

Yeah.

...at some point, and some of the people that I spoke to did actually show news crews around...

Right, right.

...but they had mixed feelings.

Yeah, yeah, eh, as I said, I really think that the crew that spoke to me were looking for, eh, emotional soundbites rather than, kind of, useful information from me about the situation, so I kind of resented that, I think. Yeah, asking questions like, “What do you want to tell your family back home,” and that sort of thing. Yeah, I didn’t really like it. And especially putting us on the spot after immediate, like, telling us just before we went on camera that they weren’t allowed to go in to Sendai, and that sort of thing, and, yeah, it was a particularly stressful time for us, so yeah.

Oh yeah, I think there was huge, there’s huge ethical issues where, eh, in terms of, kind of, the way reporting is done...

Yeah.

...in times of disaster and, ehm, I also think as well that, eh, it’s, kind of, highlights that issue you mentioned a bit earlier on of how, you know, you didn’t feel you could, kind of, trust the Japanese media so much...

Right.

...and yet the overseas media, like maybe your domestic media...
Wasn’t, yeah.

...also, you, in the other kind of extreme, it was being sensational or.

Yeah, well, they were either getting second-hand information or they were, in other cases, fishing for a particular angle, yeah.

So what does that leave? There’s [laughter].

Yeah, well, exactly. Ehm, you have to go, I was trying to look for scientists and people in-the-know. Actually it wasn’t from the media but, em, one of the, an American woman who was doing, who was also an ALT, there were about 70 of us from all over the world, there were 70 or 80 of us. Eh, and one of them, her father was, eh, a scientist with a particular, eh, who was in a particular field of, eh, radiation, that sort of thing, and he, she, sort of, forwarded an email to the group saying, “My father has said obviously he’s not happy that I’m here, but he feels pretty safe about me being here, so that’s probably a good thing.” Eh, and actually, my brother works in radiology in {a hospital in New Zealand}, eh, and he was visiting Japan at the time, eh, he’s been in Sendai the week before and he’d just gone down to Osaka, eh, and he was kind of reassuring me as well saying, you know, because there were stories about milk being contaminated or spinach or things that, particular types of foods that were susceptible to, em, absorbing radiation and he was saying you’d have to drink, you know, thirty litres of milk in ten minutes…

[Laughter]

...to get the sort of, three-hundred litres, or something just ridiculous in order to get any, kind of, noticeable level of radiation. Eh, so, you know, that was, that was really good to get, kind of, eh, kind of, scientific information from people who had [laughter] an interest in getting you out if they wanted to, I suppose.

That’s fascinating, ehm, one of the themes which is also appearing is, I thought I was going to be talking about how foreigners were so particularly vulnerable and they had such a vulnerable position compared to Japanese people in the disaster because of language. I’m not sure that’s the case.

Yeah, yeah. Ehm, yeah, like, when you mention this is all about, em, sort of, the language aspect of it then I, kind of, thought about how much Japanese I spoke in that week and it probably wasn’t very much the week afterwards. Em, going down to the supermarket to get supplies and things would be, kind of, using my everyday supermarket Japanese, you know, and, em, there was a particularly big aftershock where {my wife} and I, it was at night and we got our torch out and, kind of, walked around the neighbourhood just to check and see if everyone was okay, and it seemed like it was fine, so, yeah, it was, it was, sort of, a case of people popping out of their doors and being like, “Daijobu?” [Note: in English, it means ‘Okay?’] “Daijobu.” And that was, sort of, it and we went back home and, yeah.

And that, sort of, links into the, kind of, final thing I wanted to ask you about. Em, a lot of the NPOs and local authorities are now coming up with recommendations and advice for what to do in preparation for the next disaster, and one of the things they talk about is how, em, foreign residents need to be more integrated into their local communities. So, kind of, linked to what you just said there, did you and {your wife} feel part of the local community before the disaster happened?
I would say our neighbourhood wasn’t a commun, much of a community, especially from our perspective. We lived in an apartment building that was four apartments. Ehm, yeah, two stories, two on the bottom floor, two on the top floor. And we, honestly, in the two years we were there, we saw our neighbours in that building maybe less than ten times, eh, just, kind of, popping in and out, barely said a word to each other. We sort of had met the couple, the old couple that lived behind us in a house, eh, and we, sort of, said hello to the family that lived across from us in the mornings if we saw them, but I don’t think they were that friendly to be honest. Ehm, so yeah, there wasn’t much of a community feel. I guess there was one lady down the road who, on the first day that we got there, helped {my wife} find her way back home when she was lost…

[Laughter]

…and we said hello to her when we saw her on the street but, yeah, we didn’t, yeah, we had that New Zealander living literally around the corner from us so, em, there was that, em, but yeah. But I mean aside from that, em, {my wife’s} school was really nearby, so, like, I took an Aikido class at a gym, kind of, eh, maybe ten minutes, five or ten minutes bike ride away. So we were sort of involved in some things, em, but, yeah, there wasn’t really a big neighbourly feeling going on.

Just to confirm, all those people you were mentioning, they would have been Japanese people, do you think?

Eh, yes…

Yeah.

...yeah. Apart from the New Zealander.

Apart from that one, yeah, yeah.

Yeah.

Em, it’s a difficult question, I know, but if you did want to integrate foreign residents more into a community like the one you lived in…

Yeah, yeah.

...can you think of any, any way to go about it, or, what might have been the barrier?

Well, I think, em, the main barrier is probably that Japanese people tend to keep to themselves, in my experience, em, I’m not sure that it was our, it was the language barrier that was preventing us from having much, kind of, interaction. Eh, yeah, and like I say, I can’t really confirm that a hundred percent, but, yeah, it was just kind of suburban area, ehm, I know, you know, it’s, it’s kind of similar to here, like, you might know your immediate neighbours, you might not even know their names…

Yeah, yeah.

...necessarily. You might just say hi to them in the morning and then, beyond that, yeah, you don’t really know, tend to know anybody, I guess, unless there’s some sort of circumstances otherwise.

Yeah, yeah.
Yeah, so how you would go about it? I don’t know. I, I guess we, you could try and get people involved in community groups like sports groups or, you know, like an Aikido class like I did, ehm, that sort of thing. Yeah, it’s difficult, like.

It’s a tough one...

Yeah.

...oh, and I, I, absolutely agree with what you said there about, I’m not sure that it’s just a Japanese thing. I think it could be, like, a city thing...

Well, yeah...
...or a suburban thing.

...sure, or a suburban thing. Anywhere in the world.

I know in my apartment block in Ireland, I, I certainly don’t know anybody’s name...

Yeah.

...I’d say hello to people when I see them but...

Right, yeah.

...I don’t know them, and I wouldn’t call, I wouldn’t knock in on their door or anything like that...

Yeah, exactly.

...so I have to be very careful that when I talk about this, I don’t, like, say, “Oh in Japan, you know, you can’t.”

Right, you don’t want to do that. Ehm...

Yeah.

...yeah, I think you’re probably right...

Yeah.

...it is just, just a thing about living in a big city, em...

Yeah.

...it’s probably a lot different in a smaller town...

Yeah.

...eh, especially if you’re the only foreigner, you probably are integrated more into the, to the community...

Well, also, what I’ve heard from...
...just because you’re by yourself.

...you and what I’ve heard from other people in their stories is that you were part of a community, but it wasn’t necessarily your neighbours. It was...

Yeah, it was...

...people like the Americans...

...yeah, absolutely...

...the Australian with the Japanese wife and the other New Zealander...

...it was those people we were talking to.

...but you did form a part of a community...

Absolutely, yeah.

...you, you formed your own response so. I’m not sure necessarily that you need to be part of the, sort of, your neighbourhood...

Right.

...but you need, you do need people to call on.

Yes, yeah. Oh absolutely. It would have been really, really difficult if we hadn’t known anybody at all.

Uhm. There was also one other issue, I, I said the community one was the, the, the last question, but, just to, kind of, go back, sort of, rewind a little bit, I did want to check up on when you were talking about, ehm, the idea that, eh, you know, with the media, ehm, sort of, manipul, not manip, maybe pressuring you, did you get any sort of, I don’t know, did you sign any sort of disclosure or anything like that?

No, no. Yeah, like I said, my reporter friend just asked me if I wouldn’t mind answering, you know, talking to her and so I think she, yeah, she called me on my phone, eh, and, eh, that was fine. I was happy to do it. Em..

But say with the TV crew?

With the TV crew? No, eh, no, I don’t think we signed anything actually, thinking about it.

That’s interesting, because, I mean there’s a lot of work in the disaster literature about, kind of, abusing...

Right.

...disaster, I don’t want to say victims because, like...

Yeah.
...that’s a very loaded word, but people who are suffering in a disaster, and it’s interesting how, you know, they didn’t, you didn’t have to, sort of, you didn’t have any ownership over your story.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Ehm, yes, and I, that was, kind of, the problem I had. Like, I was, I was really pleased to do the radio thing because I knew it was going live to the air so it couldn’t be edited, it was, kind of, going to be into the, yeah, I guess the fact that they couldn’t take quotes and use them out of context.

Yeah, yeah. Ehm, there, there wasn’t - these are just coming to me now - your relationship with your work, did you feel that they gave you some information or helped you out during the period?

Eh, I’m trying to remember what sort of contact I had with them. Ehm, yeah, well, I mean, so, my school itself, I think, they spoke to, just about what the situation was with work, but this was a few days after the, the earthquake and, yeah, they said it wasn’t necessary for me to come in straight away. I think, I think they went back to school really soon, like, a week later or something like that. Most of the teachers there. Which I thought was crazy, like, I heard stories of, like, teachers leaving their kids at home to go to work because it was, kind of, expected of them. Em, but having said, like, aside from that, our actual employers were the, were the Board of Education, and so they had two, eh, a New Zealander and an American, who were, kind of, eh, our immediate supervisors, I guess, and they were definitely in touch, ehm, making sure that everyone was okay, em, so, yeah, in that respect, yeah, I guess we were, we were looked after by our employers.

I’m, I’m glad to hear that because I’ve spoken to people who were employed by, say, Japanese companies or...

Right...

...and they never heard a word.

...I can imagine that happening. Yeah, and I mean, I don’t even know what else it would be like, what it would be like for other people on the JET program [Note: Japanese government-run Japan Exchange and Teaching Program to employ foreigners mostly to teach in Japanese schools] in different areas because there were varying, kind of, levels of interaction...

Right, right, right.

...depending on where you were. But yeah, Sendai had quite a good, kind of, support network in the first place...

Yeah.

...em so.

I think that’s, kind of, one of the learning points as well, like...

Yeah, absolutely. Like, if we didn’t have that, I would have been, I don’t know what I would have done. Yeah.

And, similarly, I’ve, I’ve said this to other people, from hearing people’s stories, if you hadn’t had the Internet...
Yes…

...I don’t know what your experience would have been like.

...it would have been quite different, yeah, I think. Because we, well, yeah, we would have been going from Japanese TV and Japanese radio totally, I suppose.

Yeah. I mean obviously you can’t imagine those...

Yeah, yeah.

...would, would, what if’s, they don’t work, so, I mean, there’s no point in even speculating, but it’s just...

But, yeah, that, it, it was...

...it’s interesting.

...totally invaluable.

Yeah. That’s pretty much all I have just in case there’s anything you think is relevant to, like, language or culture or translation that I haven’t talked about.

Right, ehm, not that I can think of. Em, yeah. I think that’s probably all I, yeah. As far as I can recall...

Yeah.

...at this moment.

Well, as I said, I’m hoping to, kind of, focus things...

Yeah.

...and maybe come back to you with some more, it’ll be nothing, it’ll be nothing, sort of, as long-winded...

[Laughter]

...as what I’ve asked you here, I’ve taken way more of your time...

It’s totally fine.

...than I intended to. The last question I have, I’ve really struggled with. It’s very clumsy.

Okay. [laughter]

So, ehm, what I was, what I was worried about was that, you know, me coming along, sort of, two-and-a-half years later or whatever, asking you about your experiences, would I somehow re-traumatize the people that I, that I, I spoke to, and, I’m not a counsellor, and I was like, “How the hell am I going to figure out if I have caused somebody more stress or whatever?”...

Uhm.
...and so I just, I apologize for this being so clumsy but, I just basically said, “Well, okay, I'll just ask.” [laughter]

So, rate, rate my anxiety at the current moment. [Laughter] Yeah.

Exactly.

Ehm, I would say maybe a one. Yeah.

What, the reason I ask this question is because, with the University, we put counsellors in place and we agreed that if people ranked over a certain number, we would introduce, the couns, English-language counselling.

Right, right.

Ehm, you know, some of the people that I spoke to had pretty different experiences to you and I was afraid that they might...

Yeah, sure.

...potentially be, you know, re-, re-, re-traumatized. Luckily, nobody circled the figure that I was afraid of [laughter]...

Yeah, sure.

...eh, one person came close, which was scary, and we did actually introduce the counsellor, but they were just like, “Oh, I don’t need it.” Eh [laughter].

Yeah. I mean, the thing is like, we were just, we were incredibly lucky, and I wouldn’t even, I mean it was a really stressful time for me at the time, but it’s, I just, sort of, count my blessings that we weren’t living on the coast or, eh, that the nuclear fallout wasn’t, kind of, sweeping across the country and, yeah, so, I mean, I’ve talked about with lots of friends since, and they all wanted to know about it so, yeah, it’s not a big deal for me...

Did it...

...to talk about it.

...did it feature as a, a, an element of your decision to come back to New Zealand?

No, eh, we’d already, em, declined to re-contract, so, yeah, we saw out the rest of our contracts and then we came home as we intended to do.

As you intended to do.

Yeah. Like, lots of our friends had decided to stay on and decided to stay on, like, yeah.

That’s, that’s again, I came in with some preconceptions which have been overturned, like, I thought that, em, I thought that people would feel quite sorry for themselves or that the stories would be these stories of, like, “Oh it was so terrible,” or, and, don’t get me wrong, people did have some very bad experiences, but time and again everyone has said, “There was somebody worse off than me.”...

Yeah.
...or, you know, “I didn’t have it so bad. Some people here had it much worse than me.”

Well, absolutely, yeah.

It’s really interesting because I think there’s a danger for researchers coming into a disaster to only focus on vulnerability and not to think about all these other things like amazing resilience or ways of coping...

Right.

...positive things that come out of, come out of it, too, so.

Yeah. Probably there were people who had re-contracted and decided that maybe they would actually go back at the end of this year instead. I’m sure that must have happened. Ehm, but, yeah, there were, as I said, plenty of people that stayed on for another year or another two years or are still there now.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, listen, thanks a million for your time. I really, really appreciate it.
APPENDIX F: Codebook of coding definitions
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference number</th>
<th>Code name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>First appearance in thematic map</th>
<th>Number of sources coded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Accurate information ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the absence of accurate information in their experience of the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Accurate information PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of accurate information in their experience of the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Actionable information ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the absence of actionable information in their experience of the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Actionable information PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of actionable information in their experience of the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Advice or lessons learned</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to a place of concrete advice or other lesson learned for how to prepare for, respond to, or recover from a disaster in a Japanese context, as a result of their experience of the 2011 disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Alarms and sirens</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to alarms and sirens being used to communicate information in the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Assumptions about disaster</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to something that is taken for granted about disasters. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Assumptions about foreign nationals in disaster</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to some way in which an assumption is made about how foreign nationals experience disaster or to something that is taken for granted about foreign nationals in disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Awareness of framing</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to being aware of framing taking place in the news and other media when they were gathering information in the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Beginning of the disaster</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to when the 2011 disaster started for them (i.e. the beginning of what they look on as their disaster experience). This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>‘Believe’ type trust</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to having belief in something or someone in relation to the 2011 disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Changed habits</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to changing the way that they regularly behave as a direct result of their experiences of the 2011 disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Changed habits of communication</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to using a method of communication in the disaster that they had not used much prior to the disaster or to not using a method of communication in the disaster that they had used often prior to the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Changed habits of information gathering</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to using a method of information gathering in the disaster that they had not used much prior to the disaster or to not using a method of information gathering in the disaster that they had used often prior to the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Characteristics of disaster-related information</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node relating to the characteristics, features or qualities of information in the 2011 disaster that participants talked about. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Communal and organised response and recovery</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to making use of a communal and organised response or recovery service. (i.e., response or recovery involving forethought, e.g., efforts run by an official responder or similar like a refuge centre.) This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Communicating NEGATIVE</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to someone communicating in the disaster for any reason other than to improve their awareness of the disaster situation. This act of communicating is connected with a negative experience (either explicitly stated or implied). This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Communicating NEUTRAL</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to someone communicating in the disaster for any reason other than to improve their awareness of the disaster situation. This act of communicating is connected with neither a negative nor a positive experience. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Communicating POSITIVE</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to someone communicating in the disaster for any reason other than to improve their awareness of the disaster situation. This act of communicating is connected with a positive experience (either explicitly stated or implied). This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Complexity</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to themselves or to other foreign people in Japan going back to being complacent about disaster preparedness after the 2011 disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>'Confidence in type trust</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to having confidence in something or someone in relation to the 2011 disaster. This is an Inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the fifth phase of data analysis directly relating to contextual issues in this project. This is an Inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Cultural barrier ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to a cultural barrier relating to life in Japan in the context of the disaster that might have been expected but was absent. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Cultural barrier PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of a cultural barrier relating to life in Japan in the context of the disaster. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Cultural barrier PRESENT for participant</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of a cultural barrier relating to life in Japan in the context of the disaster that directly impacted on their own personal experience. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
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<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Cultural mediation by another</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to someone mediating the disaster culturally for someone experiencing the disaster. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Cultural mediation by the participant</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to how they themselves mediated the disaster culturally for someone experiencing the disaster. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to culture. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Culture of disaster in Japan</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to a characteristic feature of the culture of disaster in Japan. This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Disaster culture</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to a culture of disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Disaster preparation, response, and recovery</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to preparation, response, and recovery in disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Earthquake</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the fact that the earthquake was relevant to their own experience of the disaster. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Effect of the interview process</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to how my conducting an interview with them affected them. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Ending of the disaster</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the disaster ending for them, either temporally or functionally. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>External factors</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to a factor not related to the disaster that influenced the decisions that they made during the disaster on how to respond and recover. This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>2-in</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to leaving Japan in the disaster, to the &quot;fly-in&quot; phenomenon (a derogatory term for foreign residents that left Japan during the disaster) or to some other equivalent term to describe foreigners who were said to have &quot;deserted&quot; Japan or been &quot;traitors&quot;.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Focus in response or recovery</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the thing that was their focus at the response stage or at the recovery stage of the disaster. (E.g., family, contacting home, food, getting out of town, getting back to normal, etc.) This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Foreign nationals are a community</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to their belief that foreign nationals in Japan should generally be considered the same and have much in common. This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Foreign nationals are not all the same</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to their belief that foreign nationals in Japan should not all be considered the same and do not necessarily have much in common. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Guilt</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to feelings of guilt as being relatively okay while others were much worse off in the disaster or guilt at coming away relatively unscathed from the disaster while others suffered more permanent traumas. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Independent and ad-hoc response and recovery</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to not making use of a communal and organized response or recovery service and instead responding or recovering in some independent or ad-hoc way, (e.g., refuge centre and going-it-alone instead). This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Information gathering NEGATIVE</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to someone gathering information in order to improve their awareness of the disaster situation. This act of gathering information is connected with a negative experience (either explicitly stated or implied). This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Information gathering NEUTRAL</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to someone gathering information in order to improve their awareness of the disaster situation. This act of gathering information is connected with neither a negative nor a positive experience. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Information gathering POSITIVE</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to someone gathering information in order to improve their awareness of the disaster situation. This act of gathering information is connected with a positive experience (either explicitly stated or implied). This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Instances of belief</td>
<td>Any instance in a participant interview where the participant explicitly mentions belief or a variant of the word in relation to their experience of the 2011 disaster. (Any use of belief where the participant was addressing the researcher or expressing some uncertainty about an assertion they were making in the interview has not been coded here.) This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Instances of communicating</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together the positive, negative and neutral instances of communicating from the participants’ accounts. I am taking communicating to be any other communicative event not included in information gathering. I am taking information gathering to be any communicative activity in the disaster whose main purpose was to increase someone's situational awareness of the disaster context. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Instances of confidence</td>
<td>Any instance in a participant interview where the participant explicitly mentions confidence or a variant of the word in relation to their experience of the 2011 disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Instances of faith</td>
<td>Any instance in a participant interview where the participant explicitly mentions faith or a variant of the word in relation to their experience of the 2011 disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>First appearance in thematic map</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Instances of information gathering</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to language. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Instances of reliance</td>
<td>Any instance in a participant interview where the participant explicitly mentions reliance or a variant of the word in relation to their experience of the 2011 disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Instances of trust</td>
<td>Any instance in a participant interview where the participant explicitly mentions trust or a variant of the word in relation to their experience of the 2011 disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Instances of trust model</td>
<td>Any instance in which X (any foreign or Japanese resident in the disaster zone at onset) trusts Y in context C for performing action A (executing tasks) and realizing the result o (that includes o or corresponds to her goal gX). This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Knowledge of response and recovery ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to NOT knowing how to correctly respond to or recover from such a large-scale disaster or to NOT having some prior training in how to respond to and recover from such a disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Knowledge of response and recovery PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to knowing how to correctly respond to or recover from such a large-scale disaster or to having some prior training in how to respond to and recover from such a disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Language</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to language. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Linguistic barrier ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to a linguistic barrier relating to Japanese in the context of the disaster that might have been expected but was absent. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Linguistic barrier PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of a linguistic barrier relating to Japanese in the context of the disaster. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Linguistic barrier PRESENT for participant</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of a linguistic barrier relating to Japanese in the context of the disaster that directly impacted them on their own personal experience. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Linguistic mediation by another</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to someone or something mediating the disaster linguistically for someone experiencing the disaster. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>Linguistic mediation by the participant</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to how they themselves mediated the disaster linguistically for someone experiencing the disaster. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>Memory STRONG</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to being able to remember or to remembering clearly about their experience of the disaster. This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Memory WEAK</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to not being able to remember or to not remembering clearly about their experience of the disaster. This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to methodological issues in this project. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Native language NEGATIVE</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the negative impact on a foreign person’s experience of the disaster of communicating or gathering information in (one of) their native language(s). This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>Native language NEUTRAL</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to a foreign person’s experience of communicating or gathering information in (one of) their native language(s) in the disaster but without mentioning any positive or negative association. This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Native language POSITIVE</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the positive impact on a foreign person’s experience of the disaster of communicating or gathering information in (one of) their native language(s). This is an <em>in vivo</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>News translation</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to the broad theory of news translation. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Non-verbal non-pictorial communication or information gathering</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to using some non-verbal way to communicate or gather information in the disaster, e.g., using body language, using sign language, or copying the actions of others. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Nuclear</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the fact that the nuclear event was relevant to their own experience of the disaster. This is an <em>a priori</em> code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Other disaster intercultural communication</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set directly relating to other forms of intercultural communication (aside from translation and interpreting) that appeared in the data set. These data speak to the ethics of whether translation and interpreting were good in the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Panic ABSENT</td>
<td>The participant makes reference in their account of the disaster to an absence of panic where it might have been reasonably expected, in relation to themselves and to others. I differentiate panic from stress and other negative feelings by focusing on the idea that panic is overwhelming and prevents reasonable response whereas the others do not. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Panic PRESENT</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to the presence of panic in their account of the disaster, not just their own panic, but others' panic also. I differentiate panic from stress and other negative feelings by focusing on the idea that panic is overwhelming and prevents reasonable response whereas the others do not. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Partner (Japanese)</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to having a partner of Japanese nationality. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Partner (non-Japanese resident in Japan)</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to having a partner not of Japanese nationality who is resident in Japan. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>75</td>
<td>Partner (non-Japanese resident outside Japan)</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to having a partner not of Japanese nationality who is resident outside Japan. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>76</td>
<td>Personal judgement</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to making up their own mind (using their own judgement) about an issue in the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>Pictorial rather than verbal codes NEGATIVE</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the negative impact on a foreigner's experience of the disaster from communicating or gathering information using pictures, graphs or diagrams rather than verbal codes. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>Pictorial rather than verbal codes NEUTRAL</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to communicating or gathering information using pictures, graphs or diagrams rather than verbal codes. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79</td>
<td>Pictorial rather than verbal codes POSITIVE</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the positive impact on a foreigner's experience of the disaster from communicating or gathering information using pictures, graphs or diagrams rather than verbal codes. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Polyglotism</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the fact that they themselves spoke Japanese to communicate or gather information in the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81</td>
<td>Principal perceived hazard</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node relating to the three hazards (earthquake, tsunami, nuclear) that led to the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>First appearance in thematic map</td>
<td>Number of sources coded</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>82</td>
<td>Relationship NEGATIVE</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the negative impact on their experience of the disaster of interacting with another party (individual, institution, etc.). This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>Relationship NEUTRAL</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to interacting with another party (individual, institution, etc.) in the disaster but without mentioning any positive or negative impact. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84</td>
<td>Relationship POSITIVE</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the positive impact on their experience of the disaster of interacting with another party (individual, institution, etc.). This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85</td>
<td>Relationship with a significant other</td>
<td>This is a tree node gathering together any node in the data set relating to whether or not the participant had a significant other (girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, wife, etc.) at the time of onset of the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>Rival explanations</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the fifth phase of data analysis that could present an alternative answer to the final research question in this research project (why is translation important?). This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Rural residence</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to being resident in a rural area at the time of the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>Sensationalism in news media ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to a lack of sensationalism in the news media in the disaster where they might have expected it. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Sensationalism in news media PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to sensationalism impacting on their opinion of the news media in the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to not having a partner. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>The participant makes reference to the ways in which they were made to feel stress or some similarly negative feeling during the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Suburban residence</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to being resident in a suburban area at the time of the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93</td>
<td>Timely information ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the absence of timely information in their experience of the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference number</td>
<td>Code name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>First appearance in thematic map</td>
<td>Number of sources coded</td>
</tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Timely information PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of timely information in their experience of the disaster. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>Tone of voice</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the tone of voice of the person delivering a message in the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>Topics needing cultural mediation</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to an instance during the disaster where information needed to be mediated culturally. The mediation does not necessarily have to be for the benefit of the participant. This is a reference to the content of the information not to their opinion on the mediation act. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>Topics needing linguistic mediation</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to an instance during the disaster where information needed to be mediated linguistically for a foreign national in the disaster. The mediation does not necessarily have to be for the benefit of the participant. This is a reference to the content of the information not to their opinion on the mediation act. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98</td>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the fifth phase of data analysis directly relating to translation and interpreting issues in this project. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99</td>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the fourth phase of data analysis directly relating to trust issues in this project. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Trustworthy information ABSENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the absence of trustworthy information in their experience of the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101</td>
<td>Trustworthy information PRESENT</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the presence of trustworthy information in their experience of the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>Tsuunami</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to the fact that the tsunami was relevant to their own experience of the disaster. This is an a priori code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103</td>
<td>Urban residence</td>
<td>Reference by the participant to being resident in an urban area at the time of the disaster. This is an in vivo code.</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>Various codes no longer being pursued in this project</td>
<td>This is a tree node collecting together any node in the data set that was no longer considered after the fourth phase of analysis. While interesting, these codes did not help to answer the research questions in this thesis and did not fit into its central narrative. This is an inductive code.</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX G: Reference list of secondary data
In addition to the primary data analysed in this thesis (anonymised member-checked interview transcripts, anonymised interview record sheets, participant profile data, the researcher’s autoethnographic account, anonymised logs of data gathering and data analysis, and instances of trust corresponding to the Castelfranchi and Falcone [2010] model of trust), the secondary data below have also been explicitly referred to in the participant-led and interpretive analysis chapters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Data</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Section in thesis</th>
<th>Source</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>First emergency warning broadcast on NHK Television in Japan on March 11, 2011</td>
<td>Television news broadcast and accompanying video transcript</td>
<td>4.5.5.1</td>
<td>The transcript of the original Japanese broadcast is available here: <a href="http://sekihi.net/stones/19338">http://sekihi.net/stones/19338</a> [Accessed 14 October 2014]. The broadcast has been archived here: <a href="http://www.nicovideo.jp/watch/sm13889097">http://www.nicovideo.jp/watch/sm13889097</a> [Accessed 14 October 2014]. The researcher’s translation of the video transcript is available in the thesis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Historic disaster-related information portal of the Cabinet Office of Japan</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>4.5.5.2</td>
<td>The website is available here: <a href="http://www8.cao.go.jp/teiju-portal/jpn/etc/disaster/index.html">http://www8.cao.go.jp/teiju-portal/jpn/etc/disaster/index.html</a> [Accessed 14 October 2014].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>First e-mail from the Irish Embassy to its citizens in Japan on March 16, 2011</td>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td>4.5.5.3</td>
<td>This e-mail comes from the researcher’s private records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Anonymised chat string between users of a Facebook group set up to support foreign nationals experiencing the 2011 disaster</td>
<td>Social media content</td>
<td>4.5.5.5</td>
<td>Reference to the source of the content is not provided here to protect the anonymity of the users.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>E-mails to loved ones and blog entries created by the researcher in March and April, 2011</td>
<td>E-mails and social media content</td>
<td>4.4.1</td>
<td>These e-mails and social media content come from the researcher’s private records.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Documentary excerpts broadcast on NHK Television and archived in the Japanese National Diet Library reporting on the experiences of foreign residents in the disaster zone in March, 2011</td>
<td>Television documentary excerpts and accompanying video transcripts</td>
<td>5.4.2</td>
<td>Transcripts of these reports translated into English by the researcher are available in Appendix H. View the footage in Japanese for: the Chinese subject here <a href="http://tinyurl.com/nvmjaot">http://tinyurl.com/nvmjaot</a>; the American subject here <a href="http://tinyurl.com/naaeo67">http://tinyurl.com/naaeo67</a>; the Filipina subjects here <a href="http://tinyurl.com/pcgn6yb">http://tinyurl.com/pcgn6yb</a> and here <a href="http://tinyurl.com/qx822uq">http://tinyurl.com/qx822uq</a> [Accessed 5 June 2015].</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Searchable archive of posts to a professional translation and interpreting forum in the Japanese locale, Honyaku Mailing List, from the time of the disaster</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>5.7.1</td>
<td>The archives can be consulted here: <a href="http://tinyurl.com/njtljye">http://tinyurl.com/njtljye</a> [Accessed 5 December 2014].</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Historic disaster-related information portal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>5.7.2</td>
<td>The Ministry of Foreign Affairs portal for foreign nationals in the 2011 disaster can be viewed here: <a href="http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/incidents/familylinks.html">http://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/incidents/familylinks.html</a> [Accessed 5 December 2014].</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Historic crowdsourced and machine-translated crisis map from the 2011 disaster made using social media content and GPS information</td>
<td>Crisis map</td>
<td>5.7.2</td>
<td>See <a href="https://www.sinsai.info/">https://www.sinsai.info/</a> [Accessed 20 March 2015].</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Screenshot of a vlog by a foreign resident at the time of the 2011 disaster showing a still from his Facebook page</td>
<td>Social media content</td>
<td>5.7.4</td>
<td>Reference to the source of the content is not provided here to protect the anonymity of the vlogger.</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX H: Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) modelled trust instances
Foreign residents could have searched for information from many other sources by themselves, but they were not willing or fully able to devote this effort to the action.

Foreign residents may have predicted that P8 and her foreign colleague would lead the disaster response initially.

Also, I started being busy with my customers who were in a big hotel in Tokyo.

I thought, "Okay, I look at my Japanese, eh, colleagues and see what they are doing.”

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**Instances in Participant Interview Data Matching Trust Model** (noted in red text where Translation was likely)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instance</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Translation likely?</th>
<th>Trustor</th>
<th>Trustee</th>
<th>Likely predictions</th>
<th>Likely goal</th>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>P19</td>
<td>Japanese resident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Japanese Staff worked in a way that would not harm the embassy or its citizens</td>
<td>Complete the translation and broadcast in English</td>
<td>Language and culture might have been obstacles to smooth communication between the mayor and the US military representative</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>P19</td>
<td>Japanese resident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Japanese Staff's local knowledge would have been concerned about a lack of the embassy's expertise</td>
<td>Complete the translation and broadcast in English</td>
<td>Language and culture might have been obstacles to smooth communication between the mayor and the US military representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>P18</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Foreign translator's local knowledge would have been concerned about a lack of the embassy's expertise</td>
<td>Complete the translation and broadcast in English</td>
<td>Language and culture might have been obstacles to smooth communication between the mayor and the US military representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>P18</td>
<td>Japanese resident</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Japanese Staff's local knowledge would have been concerned about a lack of the embassy's expertise</td>
<td>Complete the translation and broadcast in English</td>
<td>Language and culture might have been obstacles to smooth communication between the mayor and the US military representative</td>
<td></td>
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**Possible predictions**

- The embassy's local Japanese staff would have been concerned about a lack of the embassy's expertise.
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**Likely predictions**

- His employer may have predicted that the local knowledge of the local Japanese staff meant their expertise was necessary.
- His employer may have predicted that his staff was better equipped to handle the situation.
- His employer may have predicted that the local knowledge of the local Japanese staff meant their expertise was necessary.
- His employer may have predicted that the local knowledge of the local Japanese staff meant their expertise was necessary.

**Willingness**

- P19 may have predicted that their colleague and shared experience of being in the same place would ensure the boss would not find his translation efforts harmful.
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**Risk**

- There was a lot of pressure to do it quickly. There were times I did, for example, when I had to rush the process. I wasn't given any time to think through it and interpret for the mayor who was pushing to do it, and I didn't have the time to do it properly. It was very stressful. It was a lot to juggle. It was a lot to manage.

**Delegated action**

- His boss may have had better information about disaster response than P19's employer had. P19's employer may have had better information about disaster response than P19's employer had.
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<td>P16</td>
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<td>Yes; Japanese resident</td>
<td>Yes; foreign resident</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Canadian journalists who arrived in the disaster zone</td>
<td>P16</td>
<td>Other members of the Bangladeshi community</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Interview passage**

There definitely were some PA announcements, and they were impossible, utterly impossible for me to understand, because I was, kind of, stuck, you know, like, cradling kind of, like, the participant then covers his mouth with his hand and produces some incomprehensible-like sounds over the systems, but, like, the Japanese people around understood. (Researcher: Yeah, this is interesting for me. You said, “It was translated for me.” Can you be more specific?) (Listener: What? If they’re the people but, like, was it a stranger? Was it someone you know?) Okay, the company. Again, it was, it was a... they... the people from the company.

**Likely goal**

Respond appropriately, Support back on the disaster, Respond appropriately to the instructions in the evacuation centre

**Delegated action**

Translate tsunami warning coming over the PA system into English for him, Navigate the disaster zone

**Competition**

Skills

P12 may have predicted that his Japanese colleagues would be able to speak sufficient English to translate the warnings for him, therefore, translation may have impacted here.

P16 may have predicted that the owner of an Australian pub would be able to speak sufficient Japanese and English to translate for them, therefore, translation may have impacted here.

P12 may have predicted that the member of the Bangladeshi community would be able to understand and communicate in Bengali, therefore, translation may have impacted here.

P12 may have predicted that the member of the Bangladeshi community would be able to understand and translate English-language reports, and would devote time away from the task to translate the reports.

**Willingness**

P12 may have predicted that the relationships with co-workers with his English-speaking Japanese colleagues would ensure they would not lead him into harm or harm others.

P16 may have predicted that the owner of an Australian pub would be benevolent and not put them at greater risk.

P12 may have predicted that the member of the Bangladeshi community would feel a shared status as foreign residents and shared experience of the disaster and that this would prevent them from doing him harm.

**Unharmfulness**

Benevolence

There were no explicit cases of the skill threshold and the warnings themselves here, therefore, there was entirely dependent on colleagues’ translation.

P12 lacked the Japanese skill to be able to understand Japanese instructions or announcements given in Japanese, therefore, translation may have impacted here.

P16 may have predicted that the member of the Bangladeshi community would feel a shared status as foreign residents and shared experience of the disaster and that this would prevent them from doing him harm.

**Morals**

Sanctions

Strong

P12 says explicitly that he lacked the skill threshold and the warnings themselves, therefore, there was entirely dependent on colleagues’ translation.

P12 lacked the Japanese skill to be able to understand Japanese instructions or announcements given in Japanese, therefore, translation may have impacted here.

**Weak**

P12 would not know where or when a tsunami was coming, this location happened to be beside a major river and near Tokyo bay, or how to respond if one occurred.

The risk they faced was that they would not get their story out there.

P16 lacked the Japanese skill to be able to understand Japanese instructions or announcements given in Japanese, therefore, translation may have impacted here.

**Dependence**

Risk wasted effort

P12 would not know where or when a tsunami was coming, this location happened to be beside a major river and near Tokyo bay, or how to respond if one occurred.

The risk they faced was that they would not get their story out there.

P16 lacked the Japanese skill to be able to understand Japanese instructions or announcements given in Japanese, therefore, translation may have impacted here.

**Context**

Opportunities

Happening to be around English-speaking colleagues at the time of the disaster presented P12 with an opportunity to have a translated experience. Meeting an English-speaking Japanese resident who was the widower of a man who had died in the disaster presented P12 with an opportunity for the reports to accomplish their goal of giving him information.

Obstacles

Language and culture might have put P12 in greater danger of being caught in a disaster. The language and culture might have put P12 in greater danger of being caught in a disaster. P12 may have predicted that the member of the Bangladeshi community would feel a shared status as foreign residents and shared experience of the disaster and that this would prevent them from doing him harm.

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<td>10</td>
<td>His Japanese wife's family could have neglected to communicate vital</td>
<td>Yes; Japanese resident</td>
<td>Yes; foreign resident</td>
<td>Yes; Japanese wife's family and their Japanese contacts</td>
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By focusing on the interpretation offered by the members of this forum, P20 may have felt that the members of the forum had greater technical and technical information for G.E. when building the damaged reactors may have impacted here. 

P20 may have predicted that the member of the forum who Translated disaster-related information for him - therefore, Translation may have been delegation of information gathering to his family.

P20 had an even better interpretation of the nuclear disaster information available to them but he was not willing to devote this effort to the action.

The risk the responders faced by not being assigned useful tasks was sitting but it was reduced by being part of the process in which the trust of French responders in Japanese local authorities (e.g. in future disasters) was reduced.

The French responders may have predicted that the Japanese local authorities would have the logistical skill and disaster experience to figure out what tasks needed to be done where, when, and by whom. However, as they were already aware of the logistics of rescue operations, they may have predicted thatJapanese local authorities would be concerned that the French responders be able to do their job and contribute to saving as many lives as possible.

P9 may have predicted that his Japanese wife's family would be able to communicate important information from Japanese sources to him in English - therefore, Translation was part of this dependence.

The French felt that they were manipulated, in a sense. They couldn't find a corpse. We couldn't find nothing, so they, they asked me, "Tell them, ask someone else!" But we couldn't find anything. We searched, but anyway, there's, eh, international relations behind that.
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**Interview passage**

When I first woke up to disaster waters, I thought the disaster was because of me. I was one of those people [laughing] judging the information, and then I thought, "the water, like, one chance [Bite means a solid at first and then to say no, I'm not like, 'Alright' [laughing]"

And then I just started. You know, the whole first job [meaning], 'increasingly,' [laughing], "Initially, solays, eventually in Japanese, the staff room was a total mess, and they had some of my English teaching colleagues, all my Japanese teacher in the staff room, so I reached out of them, 'What do we do now?' So we all all do this, in a caller route. We got out of the building in a way the kids were inning line up outside the building. One of them was saying, 'some of them were laughing, flies, ails, it was pretty intense.'

Researcher: How did you understand the radiation story? [Bite laughing] Because I know how it's dangerous for my health, so I decided to read about it on the Internet. And then I did a comparison between what's happened in Fukushima and what happened in the nuclear reactor in Japan. (Bite laughing) And the real was the level of radiation and what we were allowed to expose, and what's the line. I've started to read it, like, all this information at that time. (Bite laughing) Can you remember where you found that information, what language that information was in? The language was both English and Japanese. The website, for the level of radiation. [Bite] He then started checking his phone browser history to find out the website and it was one hosted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. (Bite) I started to check, to check, to check.

**Obstacles**

Language and culture might have prevented P21 from fully understanding the risk in Japan. Being an English speaking person and having some Japanese ability should be a safe haven, as long as the disaster exposed me to other Japanese. (Bite) The risk he faced was that the measurements would be wrong or misleading. As the information was not only in Japanese but in English too, he might have thought it was less effort to go to this source than to spend time verifying the access that other sources would have to reliable measurements. (Bite) The website that was in P15's browser history was an official Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology website. [Bite] He might have thought it was less effort to go to this source than to spend time verifying the access that other sources would have to reliable data. (Bite) The risk he faced was that the measurements were either wrong or misleading. If he was one of those people who told others to decrease the risk, that he would have the danger of downplaying on himself.

**Dependence**

Every day I started to check, to check, to check. And then it just started, you know, the whole first job [meaning], 'increasingly,' [laughing], "Initially, soays, eventually in Japanese, the staff room was a total mess, and they had some of my English teaching colleagues, all my Japanese teacher in the staff room, so I reached out of them, 'What do we do now?' So we all all do this, in a caller route. We got out of the building in a way the kids were in ning line up outside the building. One of them was saying, 'some of them were laughing, flies, ails, it was pretty intense.'

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In the interview passage, the researcher asked how the interviewee got the information. The interviewee responded that they had a community member who could speak good Japanese. They explained that this person was someone who could help them understand and communicate important information from Japan. They also mentioned that this person had previously helped them by translating information from Japanese to English.

The interviewee mentioned that they had found this person through a network of friends and former students who had access to Japanese news. They also noted that this person had been in Japan for a long time and had access to Japanese news through their car navigation system.

The interviewee went on to say that they had been able to find this person because they had access to a community member who could speak good Japanese. They explained that this person had been able to help them understand and communicate important information from Japan.

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Risk unexpected harm
Risk wasted effort
Weak
Sanctions
Morals
Benevolence
Know-how
Skills

The risk to foreign residents was that the authorities would fail to measure the radiation levels correctly or fail to communicate those measurements adequately. Thus an absence of Translation in this case could have affected the levels of trust that foreign residents and other foreigners had in the Japanese government. Community residents may have predicted that the sanction for the Japanese authorities of not communicating vital information would have been exposure to greater danger and that trust in the Japanese government would have been reduced. Thus an absence of Translation in this case could have affected the levels of trust that foreign residents and other foreigners had in the Japanese government.

P18 lacked the skills and resources to measure water radiation himself, and he couldn’t do this for him. As P18 spoke fluent Japanese, Translation did not form part of his prediction, but in describing the ‘clear message’ to foreign residents and in saying that ‘you have to trust what they’re saying is correct’, P18 implied that if he had had the skills and resources, he would have counted on the Japanese authorities to do this for him. Having acquaintances and personal contacts with specially skilled people helped P9 to make his prediction, but in describing the ‘clear message’ to foreign residents and in saying that ‘you have to trust what they’re saying is correct’, P9 implied that if he had had the skills and resources, he would have counted on the Japanese authorities to do this for him. Having acquaintances and personal contacts with specially skilled people helped P9 to make his prediction, but in describing the ‘clear message’ to foreign residents and in saying that ‘you have to trust what they’re saying is correct’, P9 implied that if he had had the skills and resources, he would have counted on the Japanese authorities to do this for him.

Bicultural volunteers could have neglected to communicate vital information or forgotten to help the German citizens that they freely chose to represent. For instance, these volunteers could have neglected to communicate vital information or forgotten to help the German citizens that they freely chose to represent. For instance, these volunteers could have neglected to communicate vital information or forgotten to help the German citizens that they freely chose to represent. For instance, these volunteers could have neglected to communicate vital information or forgotten to help the German citizens that they freely chose to represent.

Workers in the trust model plant

The risk was that, in listening to these people, P9 would respond appropriately and increase the danger to himself.

Workers in the trust model plant

The risk was that, in listening to these people, P9 would respond inappropriately and increase the danger to himself. If he was listening to these people, P9 may not have noticed the clear message that ‘you have to trust what they’re saying is correct’. He may not have noticed the clear message that ‘you have to trust what they’re saying is correct’.

Workers in the trust model plant

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Workers in the trust model plant
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instance no.</th>
<th>22</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data source</td>
<td>P14</td>
<td>P6</td>
<td>P16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation likely?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No, but perhaps news translation</td>
<td>No, but perhaps news translation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustor</td>
<td>P14: Japanese friends in Aomori</td>
<td>A Japanese government office</td>
<td>P16: The PR company he worked for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>P14: Japanese friends in Aomori</td>
<td>P16: The PR company he worked for</td>
<td>All and outside the worst hit area but still in Sendai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview passage</td>
<td>Some first contact I made was, eh, with any friends in Aomori (Note: a prefecture is the second of Japan above the municipality level and what I'm going to do, eh, because, eh, at that time, I knew that was on a national, world scale, because usually when there's an earthquake there's no news of it, so I got a few of my friends in Aomori to post on my Facebook account that I was okay. And we were feeding the Twitter feed of the Japanese government office in English and figuring out what was the PR office doing on English and if it was doing...if it was doing anything, and the fact that the government office was the one that was doing the PR feed that was our client; so that foreign nationals could get access to information.</td>
<td>After four or five days, we were able to set up Internet. That's like, especially because we were outside, one of my friends was in a section of the university located in central Sendai. He was alone, he sometimes used to use netishis, he supplied us all the information about Fukushima</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely goal</td>
<td>Reduce parents worry</td>
<td>Have interested foreign parties understand the government office's view of the disaster</td>
<td>Respond appropriately to the disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delegated action</td>
<td>Create their English Twitter feed</td>
<td>Access and update P14's Facebook account</td>
<td>Find information on the nuclear disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>P14 may have predicted that his best friend in Japan would know how to use Facebook and communicate with his loved ones in an appropriate way</td>
<td>The government office may have predicted that the staff of this firm, including Participant 6, were skilled in technology, communication, and language, because it had previous experience of their work as existing clients and knew that the firm had international staff</td>
<td>P14 may have predicted that his friends outside the disaster zone would know how to select and communicate relevant information in an appropriate way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Know how</td>
<td>P14 may have predicted that his best friend in Japan would be concerned with helping maintain good family relationships with him and educating the worry of his loved ones</td>
<td>The government office may have predicted that the staff of this firm, including Participant 6, would be concerned to do a good job to maintain the business relationship and earn a fee</td>
<td>P14 may have predicted that their status as friends would ensure that the friend in question would care about the well-being of P16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likely predictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unharmfulness</td>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>Dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>P14 may have predicted that his best friend in Japan would not want to harm him</td>
<td>The government office may have put the staff of this firm, including Participant 6, under some contract to ensure that sanctions were in place if things went wrong wrong</td>
<td>The company could have tried other ways to let people know he was alive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk Failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk was waste effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Risk unexpected harm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The risks to his online reputation and information security from giving away his Facebook password to another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P14 could have searched for information from other sources by himself, but was not willing to devote this effort to the action when the opportunity of a friend with an internet connection existed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>P14 had online phone connections and could tell that the people from abroad were trying to ring him but couldn't successfully connect with them (he did not have a smart phone), but the opportunity was that he could connect with trustworthy friends to whom he could delegate an action</td>
<td>All and with access to Internet who could speak Bengali and English and who had access to news sites presented P16 with an opportunity to delegate some information gathering, but new translation was also a part of this process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This context involved Translation in that the PR company were going off English-language news feeds (news translation, again this meant of course the PR company was going off the news translation) and the vulnerability was that the PR company would mess up</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P16's friend could have neglected to communicate vital information to P16 or the PR company he worked for</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>Infrastructure damage</td>
<td>Language, and culture might have been obstacles to the Japanese government office getting their message across to interested foreign parties in linguistically and culturally appropriate way</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
If the New York Times is in information I know some of the journalists there, and it has a reputation of honesty and transparency. And so, I started seeing that they were putting something on the site, the reactor to keep them cool. I immediately bought a ticket to the United States because I knew very well how sensational and fake that made in the past, and I knew very well where they were going.

We were feeding the Twitter feed of the Japanese government to RICO that was our client so we were picking up information because it was our official so that foreign nations could get access to information.

As a teacher, I made it think about what you're going to do when you're with students, you're walking on the street and, you, at my school, I often walked with my students to school. What do you do, you know, I talk about, I look at my environment a little bit differently. What kind of things can go wrong, so, yeah, changing your perspective on things is a bit.

Update the Twitter feed of their Japanese government office client

Yes, but perhaps news translation

Yes

No; but perhaps news translation

Yes

No; but perhaps news translation

Yes

No

P14's students may have predicted that he would not lead them into greater harm

P6's students may have predicted that they were too young and inexperienced and lacked the necessary skills to lead the response

P6's students may have predicted that P6's professional code would ensure that they would honestly and transparently find and transmit useful information through their agency feeds

P6's students may have predicted that P6's ethical code as a teacher would make him concerned for their welfare

P6 and his co-workers may have predicted that their professional skills as journalists would have meant that they would find useful information, analyse it, and report it well

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P1 lacked specialist skills in construction or experience of disasters of such a scale to estimate the damage and risk of staying in the building alone. Things had not fallen over, but there were cracks, like, in several places in the walls and all the boards had moved apart, and on the wallpaper, wallpaper had moved apart, and, apparently, because I went downstairs to the reception desk and talked to the girl on the reception, there is a reception desk in the building right - the elevator was working, back up working, but they had been down. But, they told me that that, a lot of the other rooms also had the same cracks. But, because I went downstairs, look, is the structure of the building okay? And this said that the structure of the building was okay. It was only the boarding in front. It's not the actual, there was none on the concrete, or anything, with any of the other actual structure has been damaged. And I said, "Okay." The Japanese foreign community here is sort of, it's a, it's quite small group that's been here for a long time. They all stuck together through this and, and the people that I think were the key contacts and the, the two-year contacts and just told other people that this had never been Japanese, Japanese, or, uh, well, it means I guess the official information, the useful information in the newspaper was actually with the, with a newspaper. It was, it was, it was, this was not a big deal. Then, which petrol station was going to open that day and, and this, and, and this, and this information all came by just, just your friends, the language and, and, that was, that was also, all, because I speak the language, a few Japanese people called and said, "If you need petrol tomorrow, the petrol station down the road from your place is opening and you're letting you get much amount of fuel, or they're letting you fill your tank," or whatever. So, um, I think, yes, most of the information, word-of-mouth.

**Likely predictions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Willingness</th>
<th>Un-harmfulness</th>
<th>Risk worth effort</th>
<th>Risk unexpected harms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P5 may have predicted that the receptionists' employers would have given them better knowledge of how to respond to a disaster</td>
<td>P5 may have predicted that they would be more willing to give away information to P5</td>
<td>P5 may have predicted that their desire to help others would make them more likely to volunteer</td>
<td>P5 may have predicted that they would be more likely to volunteer</td>
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<td>P5 may have predicted that they would be more likely to volunteer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Likely goal**

Prepare appropriately

**Delegated action**

Get supplies of food and fuel
But, you know, I had people that reached out to me privately that were, sort of, like, "I'm really uncomfortable being here. I want to go to Kyoto. I want to get to Osaka, I have family there." Or I have people that I know there, whatever. And, and, but they couldn't say that and they couldn't tell Japanese people... I was lucky in that sense. Em, I had a Plan B. Eh, as I already mentioned, I look after the, the guys that work out at the nuclear power plant there, eh, the project manager at the, at the time had basically reassured us that, "Anything big happens, make your way towards the plant because they will be taking us out in helicopters." He said, "Your family will be allowed to board the helicopters." I said, "Sweet!" And it would have been the easiest thing to drive because everybody would have been heading the other way [laughter].

I don't know where this comes from [Note: pointing to a side salad that he did not eat] but I know where the spaghetti and the tomato sauce comes from.

But, you know, I had people that reached out to me privately that were, sort of, like, "I'm really uncomfortable being here. I want to go to Kyoto. I want to get to Osaka, I have family there." Or I have people that I know there, whatever. And, and, but they couldn't say that and they couldn't tell Japanese people... I was lucky in that sense. Em, I had a Plan B. Eh, as I already mentioned, I look after the, the guys that work out at the nuclear power plant there, eh, the project manager at the, at the time had basically reassured us that, "Anything big happens, make your way towards the plant because they will be taking us out in helicopters." He said, "Your family will be allowed to board the helicopters." I said, "Sweet!" And it would have been the easiest thing to drive because everybody would have been heading the other way [laughter].

I don't know where this comes from [Note: pointing to a side salad that he did not eat] but I know where the spaghetti and the tomato sauce comes from.

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<th>Instance No.:</th>
<th>31 32 33</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data source:</td>
<td>P20 P10 P27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation likely?:</td>
<td>No No No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustor:</td>
<td>Japanese employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustee:</td>
<td>P20 Friends in the local nuclear industry Certain Japanese restaurants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Likely goal**
- Be safe from worse events
- Keep him from being exposed to internal radiation

**Delegated action**
- Ask for permission not to come to work as expected
- Evacuate him and his family
- Use safe ingredients to prepare his food

**Likely predictions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>The Japanese employees may have predicted that a foreign boss would have detailed plans and strategies in place to evacuate staff in case of a nuclear disaster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>The Japanese employees may have predicted that a foreign boss would have detailed plans and strategies in place to evacuate staff in case of a nuclear disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>The Japanese employees may have predicted that their status as employees in his charge would have ensured that P20 was concerned for their wellbeing and wanted to reduce their stress if he could</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmfulness</td>
<td>The Japanese employees may have predicted that their status as employees in his charge would have prevented P20 from doing them harm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals</td>
<td>P27 may have predicted that the restaurant staff would know how to set up processes that ensured he got the ingredients he advertised ending up being used in the final dish</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
<td>P27 may have predicted that the legal sanction he could bring on a restaurant for not using the ingredients advertised ensured the safety of his food to some extent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk failure</td>
<td>P27 could have eaten only food he prepared for himself but he likely reasoned that going to certain restaurants he deemed trustworthy under certain contextual conditions cost him less effort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk wasted effort</td>
<td>P27's ability to speak Japanese presented him with an opportunity to confirm the ingredients that were being used in his restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk unexpected harm</td>
<td>P27's ability to speak Japanese presented him with an opportunity to confirm the ingredients that were being used in his restaurant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Allowing class with special ability to intervene on their behalf without facing the same cultural sanctions presented the Japanese employees with an opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>P27's status as the longtime owner of a popular pub and restaurant who had looked after the employees for a long time presented an opportunity for P10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Trustor**

| Translation likely? | No |
| Trustor: | Japanese employees |
| Trustee: | P20 Friends in the local nuclear industry Certain Japanese restaurants |

**Likely goal**
- Be safe from worse events
- Keep him from being exposed to internal radiation

**Delegated action**
- Ask for permission not to come to work as expected
- Evacuate him and his family
- Use safe ingredients to prepare his food

**Likely predictions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>P27 may have predicted that the nuclear company would have detailed plans and strategies in place to evacuate staff in case of a nuclear disaster</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>P27 may have predicted that his friendship with the employees would have ensured that they would be concerned for his wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmfulness</td>
<td>P27 may have predicted that his friendship with the employees would have prevented them from harming him</td>
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<tr>
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<td>P27 may have predicted that the legal sanction he could bring on a restaurant for not using the ingredients advertised ensured the safety of his food to some extent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>P27's ability to speak Japanese presented him with an opportunity to confirm the ingredients that were being used in his restaurant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instance no.</td>
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<td>P10</td>
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<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation likely?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust or</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>P10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Trustee | The embassy of her country (keep anonymous) | Welsh friend resident in the same place in Japan | Members of the Sudanese community in Japan |

| Interview passage | One interviewee probably would have gained relevant information had the embassy backing. I had the connection to them and, I had, I, I probably was very fortunate in knowing that if something really awful happened, somebody, oh, would look after me, right? Which is different from maybe an average person who didn’t have any family in Tokyo. | It was only the Welsh friend of the interviewee who had battery power still, and his wife was still working amazingly, and I got through other than Skype. And then, such a good friend, oh, he had been around and checked on my family which was a great relief. | The Sudanese Embassy |

| Likely goal | Support their citizens in the disaster zone | Ensure that the embassy would have detailed plans and strategies in place to evacuate staff and citizens in case of a disaster | Members of the Sudanese community in Japan |

| Delegated action | Check on the safety of P10’s wife and kids and report back | Evacuate her | Support their citizens in the disaster zone |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competence</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>The embassy may have predicted that the embassy would have detailed plans and strategies in place to evacuate staff and citizens in case of a disaster.</th>
<th>The embassy of her country (keep anonymous)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know how</td>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>If the embassy did not want this information to be shared, P10 would have wasted his efforts.</td>
<td>The embassy of her country (keep anonymous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Unharmfulness</td>
<td>If the embassy did not want to harm P10, they may have predicted that this information would be shared.</td>
<td>The embassy of her country (keep anonymous)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependence</th>
<th>Strong</th>
<th>The embassy would have used government official resources to assist P10 and his family.</th>
<th>The embassy of her country (keep anonymous)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weak</td>
<td>Risk &amp; lubricant</td>
<td>P10 would have been able to contact the embassy and receive assistance, but the embassy may have predicted that this information would be shared to ensure all Sudanese in the disaster zone were kept safe.</td>
<td>The embassy of her country (keep anonymous)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk waste of effort</td>
<td>P10 would have been able to contact the embassy and receive assistance, but the embassy may have predicted that this information would be shared to ensure all Sudanese in the disaster zone were kept safe.</td>
<td>The embassy of her country (keep anonymous)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk unexpected harm</td>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>P10 could have tried to arrange a plan for evacuating independently, but he was counting on the fact that his special relationship with the embassy would have ensured that they would be concerned for his wellbeing.</td>
<td>Members of the Sudanese community in Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>Infrastructural damage blocked 2G and 3G communications between P10 and his wife</td>
<td>Not all Sudanese citizens (including Participant 15) might not have received information from the embassy prior to the disaster, so this may have helped to move the embassy away from relying on friendship networks to inform all their citizens in the disaster zone.</td>
<td>Members of the Sudanese community in Japan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>Unpredictable harm</th>
<th>If the embassy did not want to harm P10, they may have predicted that this information would be shared to ensure all Sudanese in the disaster zone were kept safe.</th>
<th>The embassy of her country (keep anonymous)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Sanctions | Risk unexpected harm | The embassy may have predicted that a feeling of national pride would have ensured that member of the Sudanese community were concerned for the safety of fellow countrymen. | The embassy of her country (keep anonymous) |
| Morals | Risk waste of effort | The embassy may have predicted that a feeling of national pride would have ensured that member of the Sudanese community were concerned for the safety of fellow countrymen. | The embassy of her country (keep anonymous) |
| Benevolence | Risk unexpected harm | The embassy may have predicted that a feeling of national pride would have ensured that member of the Sudanese community were concerned for the safety of fellow countrymen. | The embassy of her country (keep anonymous) |
| Unharmfulness | Risk unexpected harm | The embassy may have predicted that a feeling of national pride would have ensured that member of the Sudanese community were concerned for the safety of fellow countrymen. | The embassy of her country (keep anonymous) |

| Weak | Opportunities | P10 could have tried to arrange a plan for evacuating independently, but he was counting on the fact that his special relationship with the embassy would have ensured that they would be concerned for his wellbeing. | Members of the Sudanese community in Japan |
| Risk & lubricant | Obstacles | Infrastructural damage blocked 2G and 3G communications between P10 and his wife | Members of the Sudanese community in Japan |

| Opportunities | Risk unexpected harm | The embassy may have predicted that a feeling of national pride would have ensured that member of the Sudanese community were concerned for the safety of fellow countrymen. | The embassy of her country (keep anonymous) |
| Obstacles | Risk unexpected harm | The embassy may have predicted that a feeling of national pride would have ensured that member of the Sudanese community were concerned for the safety of fellow countrymen. | The embassy of her country (keep anonymous) |
The Bangladeshi evacuees and other Chinese residents in Sendai tried to inform their embassy, the Bangladeshi embassy, actually the entire community was trying to make communications with their embassy to rescue them from there. This is China custom, we get together, so if you know something, eh, they send one, I mean, Chinese government does not tell us, they just write it down on the website or whatever it is, but the Chinese, eh, I mean, the, my father and mother, parents, they are very worried about us, so they just checked the Internet. And whenever this, they would tell their kids they are coming and you just tell your friends, so it's something like this. But we could see the helicopters coming in and dropping water. Myself and the new co-worker goes, "What the fuck is going on here! We've heard nothing from no-one." The embassy had, rang us. No, actually. I rang the embassy, because they just didn't know who was there. I rang them and I goes, "Look, here's this fella, this fella, this fella, this fella, We Yeol days. We have no information. But this is your contact numbers. I gives this, this, and this, I had all that."

Respond appropriately to the disaster

### Opportunities

- They could have evacuated by themselves and ad even agreed a plan of the exits. Last thought it was less easily to have the embassy make the plan
- They could have searched for information in many other places

### Obstacles

- They would not know how to respond to the disaster if no information was forthcoming
- They could have evacuated by themselves and eventually did so but may have thought delegating an evacuation to the embassy would have achieved a better result
His friends and acquaintances

The New Zealand Embassy

The Dutch Embassy

You just wanted as much information as you could get, and then you start to parse it for yourself and figure out what’s going on and rely on the people that you trust, you know, who might not [laughter] frankly be really great arbiters of information in radiation and understanding what’s going on with it. But at least, sort of, rely them in an aid context, and so you would be able to sit down and drink and talk about different things and see what works. So, I think that was, you know, largely how we interpreted the stuff.

I guess the New Zealanders were lucky because they made sure that we were there, and so that’s why I guess I trusted them, that if they wanted us to leave that I would be notified to leave.

The Dutch were not so panic, panicking or, because we heard, “Oh, the French, they want everyone to leave the country.” I received a message more about, that it would be, if you wouldn’t have a urgent reason to stay in Tokyo, it would be recommended I leave Tokyo and maybe go west Japan, something like that, they said, and I thought, “Okay, I have urgent reason because my work is here so [laughter]. And maybe someone later they sent another mail and it was also similar, reassuring and, oh, oh, but he mail I forwarded to my family and my, my boyfriend to make them feel reassured.
The German Embassy

The US Embassy

VP of the government agency that the participant worked for

I think recommending that, that people leave the country seems like a last-ditch call, and it is something that shouldn’t be done lightly, but maybe having the information that, eh, they had at the time, well, I, I think I understand the decision, and maybe with that information, maybe it was the right decision. I think the potential fallout could have been really big.

But my friend in Saitama, he’s from the same area as me, he told me about it. He was saying you can take your family on the plane. So I don’t know if he contacted the embassy. It wasn’t a big worry for me, but just knowing that, I felt safer. That was good information, that could have gone, I could have taken my family to Hawaii or somewhere in America or something.

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String

Weak

Dependence

Risk failure

Risk wasted effort

Risk unexpected harm

Opportunities

P26 counted on his status as a citizen of Germany as an opportunity to delegate some of his decision-making in the disaster

PL counted on his status as a citizen of the USA as an opportunity to get evacuated from the disaster zone

PL had no phone connection, but the opportunity was that she had working Internet connection and could connect with a seemingly trustworthy contact in Ireland, whom she could rely on to take care of the situation.

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Context

Opportunities

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PL counted on his status as a citizen of the USA as an opportunity to get evacuated from the disaster zone

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It's just I got English, eh, all through other friends, like, American guys in the nuclear industry, eh, another Japanese guy who studied nuclear, eh, physics in Tokyo University (an ex student) gave me a lot of stuff that I couldn't find, but a lot of it, you know, and I, sort of, you know, taken them under a desk and, and they were okay.

We had a couple of kids at the time. We have three now. But two at the time. Fairly young. And the, eh, the nanny had, sort of, you know, taken them under a desk and, and they were okay.

My wife's company, they have pretty serious security, kind of, evacuation protocols and, you know, if things got bad, they would pretty quickly, you know, "Here's the rally point," kind of "get there and then we'll take care of you." So I would really end up relying more on the company I worked for, that sort of, the official (official(official)representative that's going to come by.

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Skills

P11 may have predicted that these nuclear experts would have better experience, resources, and contacts to help them make the decision on evacuating.

Willingness

P11 may have predicted that their bond of friendship would ensure that they would care for their family.

P20 may have predicted that the nanny's professional ethics would have ensured that she/he would be concerned about the wellbeing of children in her/his charge.

Unharmfulness

P11 may have predicted that their bond of friendship would ensure that they would not want to do him harm.

P20 may have predicted that the nanny's professional ethics would have ensured that she/he would be concerned about the wellbeing of children in her/his charge.

Strong

P20 and his wife were both at work when the disaster happened and so could not look after the kids in the immediate aftermath of the disaster.

Weak

P11 could have decided to evacuate independently but may have thought delegating the decision to the nuclear experts would have achieved a better result.

Risk failure

If the experts got the decision wrong, he could have found himself in worse danger.

Risk wasted effort

If the company did not evacuate them, they could miss other evacuation opportunities.

Risk unexpected harm

If the nanny made a poor choice in how to respond, their kids could end up in greater danger.

Having friends in the nuclear industry provided P11 with an opportunity to delegate some of his decision-making in the disaster.

P20 counted on his wife's status as a valued employee of this company as an opportunity to get evacuated from the disaster zone.
The previous owner of the school he now runs

And that, the previous owner was in America, she was American and she said, "I declined, so" and she went to stay with her family. So one month I had to come back. So I thought, "Okay, I'm the only teacher, I will run the school while she is back." So for me, I was thinking, "Okay, I'm the only teacher. Be safe from harm. Run the school in her absence."

Skills

She may have predicted that, as an existing teacher in her school, P9 would have the skills to keep the business afloat.

Know-how

She may have predicted that, as a long term resident of the village, P9 would have the local knowledge and good reputation to keep the business going in her absence.

Willingness

She may have predicted that P9 would want the opportunity to earn extra money and reputation.

Unsafe predictions

Skepticism

Competence

- Morale
- Sanctions

- Weakest

- Risk of failure
- Risk of wasted effort
- Risk of unexpected harm

Context

Opportunities

The fact that a worker was still there in Japan who had the skill to continue the business gave this woman the opportunity to stay away from the disaster zone to keep herself safe.

Obstacles
APPENDIX I: Anonymised log of data analysis
2013/12/2
I spent most of November just transcribing. I have a goal to have 14 interviews transcribed by the end of December and all done by the end of March. I have been writing memos as I have been going along. The main realization I had today is that my first coding needs to be simply based on my three ‘how’ research questions to make sure that I have data to answer these points. Therefore I want my initial codes to be finding all the instances where participants talk about communication tools, information gathering, translation, and interpreting.

2013/12/6
While I was out jogging tonight I got real inspiration for my project - I saw the outline of the whole these based on the way case studies seem to be written (from what I’ve read so far about case studies anyway). The main point I realised is that I need to make vignettes or some sort of way to thickly describe the context before introducing my themes. This seems standard to case studies. I also want to include my own ethnographic account in these vignettes to make the thing ethnographically-informed.

2013/12/10
A big realisation today was that I haven’t actually moved that far from my initial project proposal. It might seem that my project has changed a lot since my initial proposal about social media, but if you look at the minutes of my meetings with [my supervisor], from the very start the questions were about establishing what was communicated in the disaster and what were the translation needs. This still relates to my current two ‘how’ and one ‘why’ questions. I might need to make this argument in my viva.

2014/3/3
I have tried a few different methods of transcribing so far. At first, I thought it was going to be easier to use the dictation software (Dragon) and then clean up the transcript. But after trying this for a few participants, I found it was more time-efficient to just listen to a slowed playback and type (using NCH dictation software and hotkeys) because creating the sense of dialogue on paper took more typing and editing time. Either way, it still seems to be taking roughly one hour to transcribe five minutes of interview data.

2014/3/24
While I am transcribing, I have been feeling the need to include all my yehs, but I am mostly not using yeah to mean I agree with what the participant is saying. I am mostly using it to mean yeah I am listening to you. This should be borne in mind when trying to interpret my immediate reactions to what participants say. It is part of my ethnographic listening strategy to try and keep them talking and to not overtly disagree too often as this would bring the focus more strongly back on me and my opinions. However, in some of my interviews, some of my longer interjections were just to give the participant some time to drink their coffee, regroup, take a breather, etc.

2014/4/4
While transcribing, there have definitely been times where I have felt a pull to correct some grammar or some internal logic inconsistency (not just for the non-native speakers, mind). I have really tried to avoid this urge. Instead my solution has been to immediately follow the passage in question with a note explaining what I thought the participant meant usually phrasing it as a slip of the tongue.

2014/4/9
Today I decided my analytic strategy for data analysis. I will operationalize thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006). I had a really good training in NVivo today from qdatraining.eu and the trainer emphasized the importance of making your strategy explicit in the methodology so that the reader can better evaluate your findings.
2014/4/16
Listening back on all these interviews again, I think there are some clear examples in my transcripts of evidence showing that my participants could not remember stuff very clearly at the beginning but do remember much more by the end (an advantage of the ethnographic interview methodology). For instance, Participant 24 asks himself at the beginning of his transcript ‘what happened then?’ but goes on to talk in great detail. Another example is Participant 15 saying he received no information from his university at the start but then telling of some very useful face-to-face counselling from his university in great detail at the very end. I have also really been struck by the importance of very detailed listening in transcribing. For example, in Participant 27’s interview when at first I thought he said “It’s not my interest”, but on repeated listening, I realized he was saying, “It’s not in my interests” which changed the meaning or the intention of his communication considerably.

2014/4/17
I think knowing that the participant will be reading and signing off on my transcripts is making me consider elements I perhaps would not have considered. For example, I have been thinking about how to describe someone crying. I do not want to offend the participant or make them think that I was judging them or highlighting what might be perceived as weakness by some readers. I decided to try the euphemism of shedding tears, regaining composure, collecting himself, etc.

2014/5/8
Today was great - I attended an ethnography workshop from Martyn Hammersley. Along with validating some of the methodological choices I have made so far in this project, his talk verified that thematic analysis was a common approach to analysis in ethnography, even going so far as to run through an example analytical situation in the workshop. I now feel totally convinced that this is the right analytical approach for me and it builds on my decision to use it based on it being popular in case study too.

2014/5/20
I had a big realisation today when thinking about how I’ve been borrowing from disaster studies and communication studies and various other disciplines, but what I have to remember is that I am trying to get a PhD in translation studies. I have to remember that I am just borrowing debates and literature and concepts from them and I will have to defend these choices, but I am still trying to get contribute to conversations in translation studies. That’s why I think a really important decision for me will be deciding the theoretical framework I end up using to tie my whole thesis together because I think this is where I can reorient my argument back onto the things that interest scholars of translation.

2014/6/3
Today I learned (by trial and error, unfortunately) that it is not possible to use more than one classification for the attributes you want to apply to your case nodes in Nvivo. I thought I could organize my attributes under a few headings, but this meant that each time I updated one of the new classifications, anything I entered for a previous classification returned to the default unassigned. It did not take too much time to merge all the attributes under one classification - the time loss really came in manually re-entering all the attribute values. But at least I was able to figure out how to order the attributes so that they followed the same order as my hard-copy profile data sheets. It was better to learn this lesson now while I am still only in Phase 2 of the formal thematic analysis project. One thing that this is reinforcing about the analysis process for me is how long everything takes with 28 participants and with interview data that are so long. One slip makes a lot of extra processing time. I have started formally coding in NVivo my list of initial codes identified in Phase 1 (re-reading and familiarization). As it is not possible to keep many codes in one’s head at one time, I have decided to just do about 6 or 7 codes at a time and work my
way through the list of candidate codes in progressive cycles. This number of 7 is justified by the fact that most adults can store between 5 and 9 items in their short-term memory. This idea was put forward by Miller [Miller, G. (1956). The magical number seven, plus or minus two: Some limits on our capacity for processing information. The psychological review, 63(2), 81-97.] and he called it the magic number 7.

2014/6/5
What seems to be a trend so far is that ‘Information gathering negative’ is the node with the most entries (by quite a big margin). I am concerned that this might reveal I am in some way biased towards looking for a finding like this, but I am really just trying to use only the rule-for-inclusion that I established in as systematic and consistent a way as possible, so I really do think that this represents the fact that participants may have talked more than anything else about the negative aspects of gathering information to gain situational awareness.

2014/6/7
Today, I found myself wanting to further refine or improve the codes I had made on June 4 above. As I have been going along coding the transcripts, I have tried to be really rigorous about dividing instances to try to improve situational awareness (what I have termed information gathering) from all other instances of communicating mentioned in the interviews. This has been going well. But what I found myself struggling with was being consistent in whether I thought these instances were having a negative, positive or neutral effect. For this reason, I sharpened up my inclusion rules to say that the act of communicating or information gathering was connected with a negative or positive experience (either explicit or implicit) rather than saying it led to a positive impact on their experience of the disaster. I think this rule is more reasonable and more what I am trying to capture. (I wrote a memo in NVivo detailing the change so that I have a record for how my nodes developed over time.) Sharpening the rule in this way led me to want to create two new subnodes for all six of the communicating and information gathering nodes in Cycle 2. Specifically, I want to break the coded data down into nodes for ‘how the act was carried out’ and ‘why it was positive or negative’ e.g. lack of power, lack of connectivity, or better response to disaster. By just doing this, I think by Cycle 2 I should be able to show a very detailed and useful picture for how my participants gathered information and communicated in the disaster going a long way to answering two of my research questions and allowing me to usefully explain the context of my case in the context chapter that I am due to write over the summer.

2014/6/10
Today I think I came to a conclusion about how I am differentiating between communicating and information gathering. I have developed a typology of disaster communication (simplified from the one I developed for IAMCR and based on the primary data I have gathered) and it now includes five communicative functions: warning about the disaster; instructing people how to respond; developing situational awareness of the disaster; administering the disaster; supporting others through the disaster. So basically, if someone is communicating in order to develop situational awareness of the disaster, I am terming that ‘information gathering’. All other communicative acts, I am terming ‘communicating’. Also, counting the instances of “codable moments” (Boyatzis 1998: 3) has been tricky. I have basically tried to only count it as one codable moment if it is not interrupted by a long digression or by a significant interjection by me. Thus repeated instances of talking about the same relevant topic only interrupted by minor digressions or interventions are being counted as one moment. I am doing this to try and avoid unnecessary repetition and get more of an overall feel for the level of talk people devoted to codable topics (i.e. this should help me see if they kept returning to one topic throughout the interview).
2014/7/3
After attending the training school on ethics last week, I am starting to wonder if ethics is starting to appear as something that will be a theme in my work. Or more so, is ethics the beginning of an answer to my final research question - why is any of this translation stuff in a disaster important. Does translation have a part to play in a globalizing and urbanizing world to help to ensure ethics and justice in times of disaster? So some of the things I need to start thinking about are could ethics be the thread that ties my theme chapters together seeing as ethics comes out so strongly in anthropology? Can translation help to bring justice to disaster-affected populations?

2014/7/4
I think the act of coding now about linguistic and cultural barriers and mediation is starting to clear up one thing for me. In my first impressions after the interviews, I had been saying that culture came across very strongly. But what I think I can say now with more confidence is that cultural barriers came up frequently in participant accounts, but that cultural mediation did not. In other words, this may have been a gap that was not filled for participants. On the other hand, linguistic barriers came up even more frequently, but so too did instances of linguistic mediation. So does this perhaps point to a need for some suggestions needed on how to culturally mediate a disaster for people in Japan?

2014/7/7
One thing I am realising that I will have to emphasise about the fly-jin phenomenon is that it was foreigners calling other foreigners fly-jin, not only Japanese calling foreigners this derogatory name. This intra-group hostility is an important feature and underlines my argument in my thesis that all foreigners cannot usefully be lumped together or treated as one homogenous group when trying to prevent, prepare, respond to and recover from disasters. I also had some difficulty today with the way I have broken linguistic and cultural mediation into providing and receiving. I am not sure this differentiation is justified and I may need to get rid of it and make just two codes instead of four. But for now, I have tried to solve the problem by refining the rules for inclusion to show where the point of view is focused (on receiver or on provider?).

2014/7/8
I have been thinking about the start and end of the disaster for my participants a lot. One thing that strikes me now is that perhaps one of the lessons learned from the disaster that I can give to others is to follow your instinct to prepare when a significant (but not devastating) earthquake or natural hazard occurs. Many participants talked about how the earthquake two days before made them think about disaster preparedness but how they did not act on it and wish now that they had.

2014/7/13
Now that I have completed a more significant amount of coding, I am starting to see the value of the coding density bar in NVivo. (Basically it is like looking at all the highlighted marks you might put at the side of a hardcopy page - more marks means more coding around certain passages.) By looking at the passages that are very densely coded, I will be able to see what codes overlap and explore potential relationships between codes. I have made a note to myself to go through all these coding densities systematically when I finish Phase 4 of coding.

2014/7/14
When talking about accuracy being a problem, overwhelmingly this seems to be related for foreign mass media bringing out this whole sensationalism and panic-mongering thing again and the role of translation in this whole inaccurate propagation of information that foreign residents were exposed to. Perhaps I could call on the literature from Christina Schaeffner and Luc van Doorslaer to discuss this in the thesis.
2014/8/19
It seems too that the panic fallacy theory in disaster studies is really being borne out in my data and there is a strong sense that panic was absent when it might have been expected especially among the Japanese but also among the foreigners.

2014/8/21
I realised today that, when I have completed all of the Phase 3 or 4 coding, I must look at all the codes and really ask myself again, “Which of these codes really help me to answer my research questions?” (Maybe with an emphasis on including the codes originating with the participants.) This will help me to show that I was following the Braun and Clarke idea of starting with participant-led coding. I think I also need to be careful when I am deciding what codes to focus on to remember that I am trying to answer questions ultimately about translation and its importance and this could mean a focus on different codes than if I was trying to talk about the importance of learning Japanese yourself as a foreigner in Japan. Another point is that I must recognise that memory is coming up as being frequently mentioned in the interviews. I can look at the various reasons why memory is weak or memory is strong in the hope that this will show that the weak occasions are for insignificant details but the strong occasions are for important data.

2014/8/22
I may need to write about the different customs and behaviours of different embassies - Chinese not contacting citizens directly but relying on word-of-mouth to spread information, US or Ireland driving up into zone, Australia and New Zealand running town hall meetings etc. I have also been thinking about how to show the depth of my findings in the data. Maybe I can show that the final themes I chose came up again and again when I looked at the data from several different directions or maybe I can use some graphs or charts.

2014/9/5
As I am coding, I am reading Pym (2012) On Translator Ethics. Basically his whole book is trying to use ethics as a way to explore the question ‘Why translate? (as opposed to the often-asked ‘How to translate?’)’ The book is making me think about some very interesting ideas which I may try to apply to my thesis. For example, the idea of what is actually a translation (Pym 2012: 74-75) versus pseudo-originales (e.g. much news content) could be very useful in dealing with the information my participants received. Another good point made by Pym (2012: 44) is about the three main purposes for ethics in Western thought: survival of the society or institution concerned; general happiness; recognition of the right of each individual to participate in social life. So it is about more than just right and wrong. And maybe the third category about participating in social life is where I could link ethics to my topic.

2014/9/6
I may have to rethink my claim in some of my memos (e.g. the presentation to Jay) that foreigners were more independent in their responses. Looking at the data now after coding there is a strong sense that many foreigners did take the independent path, but that work and other communities of foreigners did provide organised and communal response strategies for many of my participants, and for most it was more like a mixture of some initial communal and organised response followed by a more independent and ad-hoc strategy. On another topic, I have been thinking about, escaping and the desire to get out of a building (even among people who know this is not the safest strategy in a Japanese context) has come across very strongly in the data - especially in the node ‘Focus in response or recovery’. This may also end up being a lesson learned that will need to be communicated to official responders.
2014/9/9
I am really starting to think that the benefits of translation versus polyglotism is an issue that I am going to have to deal with in my thesis. I may have to say that in X context or for X type of communication, translation is preferable, but in Y context or for Y type of communication, polyglotism is preferable. For instance, it may be that for interacting with Japanese people as a volunteer or as a fellow victim, showing empathy, etc., polyglotism may be better. It is also interesting to me how the ideas of the importance of preparation and of empowering foreigners to support others came across strongly in the ‘Advice and lessons learned’ nodes. I think I can show that translation can help to achieve these aims, link this to an ethics of translation, and perhaps suggest concrete ways to go about implementing such aims. The benefits of social media also came across surprisingly strongly considering I did not try to focus on them in interviews and often actively spoke about how I had mixed feelings on them. In concrete disaster studies terms, ‘stay inside’ is probably the main learning point which I can contrast interestingly with the many accounts of wanting to get out. This is where cultural mediation comes in and may be the main cultural mediation point that I will make in the thesis.

2014/9/10
Another interesting quote from Pym (2012: 86) is about trust. Talking about professional translators: ‘Increasingly, they will have to realize that what they sell is their seal of approval, their trustworthiness, their responsibility.’ Seeing as trustworthiness of information came up as such a category for me in my data, perhaps this is another way of answering my final question and arguing for the importance of translation.

2014/9/13
I am noticing a real tension between foreigners not being all the same and foreigners being a community. I think it is becoming clear that participants could see (and refer) to a ‘foreign community’ but still recognise that there were great differences in views on and reactions to the disaster within that ‘community’. So I think I am going to be careful to say that referring to foreign nationals resident in Japan does not preclude members of that community from holding very different opinions or having very different experiences. (The gap between entries here corresponds to the period where I was busy teaching, going to UCL and IPCITI, and writing up my context and translation chapters.)

2014/11/28
While I was reading some secondary sources today, I realised that I need to think about the idea of trade-offs and priorities with respect to translation and the phases of the disaster and the need - therefore - for linguistic and cultural issues to be integrated into an overall disaster management policy. This idea was inspired by reading the following (from http://dwl.gov-online.go.jp/video/cao/dl/public_html/gov/pdf/hlj/20110501/28-29.pdf):
During the emergency in Phase 1, the policy objectives are very clear: saving lives and assisting survivors are more important than anything else. There’s no need to worry about trade-offs with other policy objectives. However, in Phase 2, policy objectives must be prioritized, considering trade-offs. There becomes a demand for a policy that is both coherent and economically rational. Particularly difficult problems are the following points to consider.

2014/11/30
Now that I am through a few more rounds of analysis, I think the whole thesis is coming down to the category of trust. This is a category that has appeared time and again from lots of different perspectives and across a lot of different codes. For example:

- how translators and translation in disasters is concerned with the establishment of trust and the provision of trustworthy information;
● how a lack of trustworthy information may have led to sensationalism and rumour, and the framing of the disaster in different ways;
● how foreign people fell back on communities of friends and other foreigners over other services probably because of the bonds of trust;
● how you don’t trust your own Japanese abilities under the stress of a disaster and want information confirmed;
● how trust relates to the ethics of translation and what is right and wrong and good and bad in times of disaster;
● even how, in a natural disaster, you have lost trust in the environment (built and natural) around you;
● and even how trust was a category for me in my methodology in getting the participants to trust me, having to establish trust quickly, and finding ways not to lose that trust as the process went on.


2014/12/3
Today I just noticed that there would seem to have been a slight preference among participants for the Translation work done by Japanese nationals. I am a bit surprised by this. This goes somewhat against what I have been arguing up to now in various seminars, conferences, etc. It would seem that it was not just foreigners helping foreigners as I had thought. This realisation came to me looking at a Table cross-referencing relationships in the disaster with linguistic and cultural mediation. I may need to mention this in the viva as some idea which changed and that this was as a result of the Braun and Clarke methodology of multiple phases and coming at the data from multiple directions.

2014/12/15
I am now really trying to hone in on trust as a concept. I am reading several works to get a sense of what models, concepts, categories, relationships, etc. are already out there. One thing I need to be clear on is definitely going to be whether I am writing a chapter about what trust tells us about translation, what translation tells us about trust, or both. From my early reading so far, it seems that the first step in the chapter will need to be to show that there was uncertainty and vulnerability among foreign residents and to show how they were uncertain and vulnerable. Can I make the argument that a translator was ‘...a kind of trust entrepreneur who actively shapes context in a trust-enhancing manner?’ (Möllering 2006: 75)

2014/12/16
A big part of trust seems to come down to not fully knowing or controlling others’ actions or intentions: ‘The infant’s anxiety can be generalized to the problem of ignorance that actors face in any social encounters with others whose actions and intentions they cannot fully know or control (Giddens, 1991). Generally, trust presumes a leap to commitment, a quality of faith which is irreducible’ (p. 19’) (Möllering 2006: 117). How does this relate to my study? If I do use a heuristic, I would be aiming more for normative not predictive insight - using my empirical study to come to some conclusions that enable me to give some advice to my audience - not simply grasp the empirical reality but shape it by making a case for things that should be done or changes that ought to come about. (See Möllering 2006: 133 for more on this idea of normative insight.)

2014/12/17
I am reading more and more about trust to see if it will help me with my final research question. ‘On the contrary, trust is needed precisely because all guarantees are incomplete. Guarantees are useless unless they lead to a trusted source, and a regress of guarantees is
no better for being longer unless it ends in a trusted source. So trust cannot presuppose or require a watertight guarantee of others’ performance, and cannot rationally be withheld just because we lack guarantees. Where we have guarantees or proofs, we don’t need to trust. Trust is redundant’ (O’Neill 2002 Lecture 1). The following could be a good quote: ‘How can we avoid the news as represented or (mis)represented, if we have no other sources?’ (O’Neill 2002 Lecture 1). ‘Our ambition is not to place trust blindly, as small children do, but with good judgement. In judging whether to place our trust in others’ words or undertakings, or to refuse that trust, we need information and we need the means to judge that information. To place trust reasonably we need to discover not only which claims or undertakings we are invited to trust, but what we might reasonably think about them. Reasonably placed trust requires not only information about the proposals or undertakings that others put forward, but also information about those who put them forward’ (O’Neill 2002 Lecture 4). ‘We place and refuse trust not because we have torrents of information (more is not always better), but because we can trace specific bits of information and specific undertakings to particular sources on whose veracity and reliability we can run some checks’ (O’Neill 2002 Lecture 4).

2014/12/18
I need to make very clear that I am restricting myself to looking at how trust and translation interacted in relation to how foreign residents communicated and gathered information only - that I am not looking at how trust impacted on their other actions in the disaster because that would be beyond the scope of the thesis.

2015/1/6
Trust is acknowledged in the literature as being terminologically and conceptually slippery. What are the concepts that I need to differentiate trust from? I must list them in my thesis and show how trust has been operationalised by me. For now, it seems to be concepts like cooperation, confidence, belief, faith.’

2015/1/8
I liked this definition of trust from (Rousseau et al. 1998: 395) ‘Trust is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another.’ They also emphasise that trust is often viewed as stable or static in theory but empirical observation suggests that it is a dynamic phenomenon. I must remember that my theorising should not be attempting to establish causal relations as my methodology is not suited to such claims. Rather I should be using theory for different purposes - perhaps descriptive or normative. I think, whatever happens, the angle I will have to take in my analysis is the role that information (and therefore translation) plays in the whole trust concept. Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) have a really good lit review of the trust literature and a very interesting but complex model. Most importantly, their model is holistic and they seem to be claiming some sort of universality – it’s not all about economics, or game theory.

2015/1/9
I had an a-ha! moment in the shower. I have been reading a lot of theory on trust recently and have been struggling to see how any of it is going to help me show that translation was important in the disaster. But then, having come across the Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010) model yesterday, it suddenly seemed clear that I should at least look through all my primary and secondary data to empirically test their model. When I have these, I will at least be able to say whether their model is instructive or not. Furthermore, I suspect that doing this will allow me to look for intersections between these incidences and instances of Translation. In doing so, I hope I will be able to show that Translation was an important factor in trust or that its absence led to a lack of trust - perhaps the answer to my final question will be something along the lines of Translation was important because it was a factor that correlated with the presence/absence of trust.
Today, I thought some more about the possible structure of a trust chapter - what I would need to write about (in addition to adding trust to my literature review). By setting out to examine the phenomenon of translation in this thesis, I have found that issues of trust have correlated with this phenomenon in different ways (in relation to: the provision of trustworthy information and establishment of trust in Translators; to sensationalism and rumour; to falling back on bonds of community; to language abilities; to ethics; to the natural and built environment; to my methodology). However, according to the trust theory outlined in the literature review chapter, terminological and conceptual confusion is rife. So then, the first step in the chapter would be to show what I do have in the thesis so far - instances of reliance, confidence, belief, etc. Then the next step would be to show where in my data I can confidently say that trust was present as per Castelfranchi and Falcone (2010). By using this model as a lens to examine my data, I should then be able to clearly pinpoint where, how and why translation and trust intersect in my data. And all of this should go to be answer to the research question why translation was important. I have spent most of the last couple of days just going through my data and applying the model. I think I have been able to find ample instances of the model in my data so far.

I have thought some more about how I want to structure the chapter and how I want to handle the ethics, news translation, and other important stuff. I take the view that the main function of a thesis is to attempt to explain something academically interesting and worthwhile and thus to contribute to academic knowledge and to the conversations going on in academia. In order to do this, I feel it is important to convince the reader of the explanation that you think is most plausible and most compelling and, by corollary, you should consider but in way refute other rival explanations. This is what I intend to do in this chapter, and I will show that ethics, news translation, and translation ecology are three rival explanations for the importance of Translation in the 2011 disaster and other disaster contexts that I will acknowledge but refute in order to focus my explanation on trust as a way to see the importance of Translation.
APPENDIX J: Japanese source texts referred to in Section 4.5.5
緊急地震速報です。次の区域では強い揺れに警戒してください。宮城県 岩手県 福島県 秋田県 山形県です。揺れが来るとわずかの時間しかありません。怪我をしないように自分の身の安全を守ってください。倒れやすい家具などからは離れてください。また、上から落ちてくるものに気をつけてください。緊急地震速報が出ました。宮城県 岩手県 福島県 秋田県 山形県です。怪我をしないように身の安全を確保してください。倒れやすい家具などからは離れてください。今、この国会でも揺れを感じています。先ほど...国会の中でも揺れが続いています。揺れがまってから10秒以上経過しました 次第に...

国会中継の途中ですが、地震津波関連の情報をお伝えします。今、東京のスタジオも揺れています。東京のスタジオも揺れています。緊急地震速報が出ました。宮城県 岩手県 福島県 秋田県 山形県に緊急地震速報です。また今東京渋谷のスタジオも揺れを感じています。東京渋谷のスタジオも揺れています。

強い揺れを観測した地域の皆さんにお伝えします。落ち着いて行動してください。揺れが収まってから火の始末をしてください。

現在、東京渋谷のスタジオが大きに揺れています。東京渋谷のスタジオが大きく揺れています。

建物の倒壊や山崩れ、崖崩れの恐れがあります。

上から落ちてくるもの、倒れてくるものから身を守ってください。

揺れがおさまってから火の始末をしてください。
NHKでは新しい情報が入り次第お伝えします。テレビやラジオのスイッチを切らないでください。午後2時46分ごろ東北地方で強い地震がありました。震度7が宮城県北部です。震度7が宮城県北部。

また、震度5弱が山形県、震度6強が宮城県中部、福島県中通り、福島県浜通り、茨城県北部、震度6弱が岩手県沿岸南部、岩手県内陸北部、岩手県内陸南部宮城県南部などとなっています。

Source text referred to in Section 4.5.5.2 of Cabinet Office website

3月（がつ）11日（にち）（金）（きん）に、東北地方（とうほくちほう）を中心（ちゅうしん）に大（おお）きな地震（じしん）がありました。 地震（じしん）についての公式（こうしき）の情報（じょうほう）は、以下（いか）のホームページ（ほーむぺーじ）で見（み）ることができます。正（ただ）しい情報（じょうほう）に基（もと）づいて、落（お）ち着（つ）いて行動（こうどう）をしてください。

チェーンメールにご注意を
東日本大震災に関連して、チェーンメール、電子掲示板、ミニブログなどで、誤った情報が流れています。報道や行政機関のウェブサイト等の信頼できる情報源で真偽を確かめ、これらのチェーンメール等に惑わされないようにしましょう。
また、チェーンメールを転送することは、いたずらに不安感をあおることにつながります。チェーンメールを受け取った時は、すみやかに削除して転送を止めてください。

節電へのご協力のお願い
今回の地震によって、東京電力及び東北電力管内の電力供給設備に大きな被害が出ています。電気の使用に当たっては、極力節電いただきますよう、皆様のご協力をお願いいたします。

Source text referred to in Section 4.5.5.4 of Sendai City pamphlet

消防局防災安全部防災安全課
（仙台市災害対策本部事務局内）
（代表）022-261-1111
財政局税務部資産税課
（直通）022-214-8144
「り災証明書」・「り災届出証明書」の申請を受け付けます

平成23年4月1日

東北地方太平洋沖地震とそれに伴う津波により、住居等が被害を受けた方で、各種支援制度を利用するために「り災証明書」・「り災届出証明書」が必要な方の申請を受け付けます。

「り災証明書」・「り災届出証明書」について

1. 「り災証明書」は、建物の被害程度を証明するもので、被害状況の調査（建物被害認定調査）が必要となります。この調査結果に基づき被害程度の認定ができたものから、「り災証明書」を順次発行します。
2. 「り災届出証明書」は、被害の届出がなされたことを証明するもので、建物に限らず、被害を受けた動産なども対象となります。「り災届出証明書」は申請受付の際にその場で発行します。

申請手続き

申請に必要なもの

- 官公署発行の写真付の身分証明書（運転免許証、パスポート、住民基本台帳カードなど）
  ※震災により、ご用意できない場合はご相談ください。
- 被害状況がわかる写真（可能な場合）
- 委任状（ご本人、同居親族等以外の方が申請される場合）

申請受付

場所　【建物・動産被害】各区役所・総合支所固定資産税担当課
本庁舎8階「被災者支援相談窓口」

【火災による被害】 各消防署

時間　各区役所・総合支所、各消防署 午前8時半～午後5時
本庁舎8階「被災者支援相談窓口」午前9時～午後4時半

（「仙台市政だより4月号」では平日のみと記載しておりますが、各申請受付場所ともに、当分の間は土曜・日曜・祝日も受け付けます。）

お願い

- 「り災証明書」発行のための建物被害認定調査を順次実施していますが、今回の地震、津波による被害が甚大であることから、申請から発行までに時間がかかる見込みです。ご理解を賜りますようお願いいたします。
調査員が被害調査に伺う前に建物の修繕等をされる場合には、後日でも被害の内容を確認できるように、必ず修繕前の被害状況を撮影した写真と工事の見積書や明細書等を保管いただくよう、お願い申し上げます。
「災害届出証明書」でも各種支援制度が受けられる場合があります。各支援機関等ご確認のうえ、ご活用ください。
APPENDIX K: Translated transcripts of reports referred to in Section 5.4.2
NHK report on Chinese national who experienced the 2011 disaster in Fukushima

The report can be viewed here:
http://www9.nhk.or.jp/311shogen/map/#/evidence/detail/D0007010428_00000

Anonymised source text:

×××：「地震、地震」と大きい声がして、歩いて外に行くのが難しかった。揺れて歩けなかった。大きい物が、コロンコロンと落ちてきて怖かった。急いで外に逃げました。

NA：福島県××市で暮らす中国出身の×××さん。日本語がよくわからないため、地震や原発事故の状況を把握できませんでした。あの日、×××さんは自宅近くのスーパーで買い物をしている時、大きな揺れに襲われます。

×××：びっくりでした。駐車場に行ったら、車が揺れていて、もっと怖かった。

NA：地震の後、最も困ったことは、やはり言葉でした。当時は、今よりも日本語を話すことが苦手で、スーパーでの避難指示もわかりませんでした。

×××：緊張して（避難指示が）あまり聞こえない。地震があったのがわかるだけで、他のことは何もわからない。

NA：中国語が堪能な夫に、ふだんは頼りきっていた×××さん。しかし、市役所に勤める夫は、震災の対応で家に戻ってくることができず、2人の子どもと生活しなければなりませんでした。

×××：子弟は、ママが外国人なので、パパと一緒に外出すると安心します。パパが一緒に行かないと、子弟は、ママと一緒に行かないです。

NA：さらに×××さんを困惑させたのが、原発事故の情報です。テレビを見ても、何が起こっているのか、わかりませんでした。

×××：“シーベルト”の意味は、当時は全然わからなかった。どのくらい危険か、わからなかった。

NA：電子辞書を頼りに何とか理解しようとします。しかし、震災によるストレスで、急に視力が落ち、辞書や新聞を読むことが難しくなりました。

×××：外国人は、自分の国ではないので、もっとストレスがたまります。

NA：そうした中で×××さんを支えたのは、同じ中国出身の友人、×××さんです。×××さんは日本語が堪能で、震災の後、×××さんにさまざまな情報を伝えました。

×××：原発でわからないことは友だちに相談した。
彼女に電話して、「一緒に避難しますか」って。「（原発から）煙が出ているから、すごく危ない状態だよ」って。

いろいろ教えてもらったことは、少しわかりましたので、一緒にいると安心します。

NA：こうした経験を今後の災害に生かそうという取り組みを始めたのが、福島県国際交流協会です。外国出身住民１００人のアンケートをとり、証言集をまとめました。

NA：（文面）爆発の意味がわからなかった。みんな忙しくて、誰も詳しいことを教えてくれなかった。

専務理事：このＳＯＳカードというものを作りました。

NA：震災前は、外国人の立場に立った視点が足りなかったと、独自につくったのが、この「ＳＯＳカード」です。災害が発生した時に、日本語が苦手な外国人が、カードに表示されている絵を指し示すことで、状況を把握できるようになっています。

日本は、いつも小さい地震がたくさんありますので、日本語が少ししかわからない外国人を助けてほしいです。

Target text (translated by the researcher):

Chinese national: I heard someone shout, ‘Earthquake, earthquake!’ I was walking, and it was difficult to get outside. It was shaking, so I couldn’t walk. I was afraid because large objects were falling down around me. I rushed outside.

Narrator: This is ×××, from China living in ××× city in Fukushima Prefecture. She couldn’t understand what was going on during the earthquake or nuclear disaster because of her lack of Japanese ability. On the day of the earthquake, a violent tremor hit while she was doing some shopping in a supermarket near her house.

Chinese national: It gave me a fright. When I went to the car park, the cars were shaking and I got more scared.

Narrator: The biggest problem she faced after the earthquake was language. At the time, her level of Japanese was lower than it is now, so she couldn’t even understand the evacuation instructions being given at the supermarket.

Chinese national: I’m shaken, so I can’t really hear (the evacuation instructions). All I know is that there has been an earthquake. The rest, I didn’t understand at all.

Narrator: Mrs ××× would usually have asked her husband, who is fluent in Chinese, but he works at City Hall and had to help with the disaster response, so it was just her and her two children at home.

Chinese national: The kids feel better, because mum is a foreigner, going outside if their dad is with them. If their dad is not there, they don’t go outside with me.

Narrator: What confused Mrs ××× even more was the information about the nuclear accident, and she didn’t understand what was going on, even by watching TV.
Chinese national: What does ‘sievert’ mean? At the time, I had absolutely no idea. How dangerous was it? I didn’t know.

Narrator: She struggles to understand using an electronic dictionary. However, under the stress of the disaster, her eyesight suddenly worsened and reading a dictionary or newspaper became difficult.

Chinese national: Foreigners are, because it’s not their country, under more stress.

Narrator: It was a friend, also from China, who supported Mrs ××× through all this. This friend is fluent in Japanese and provided Mrs ××× with a variety of information after the disaster struck.

Chinese national: I asked my friend’s advice about the nuclear stuff I didn’t understand.

Chinese national’s friend: I called her on the phone and said, “Will we evacuate together? “There’s smoke coming out (of the reactor) so it’s a really dangerous situation,” I said.

Chinese national: She explained all sorts of things to me, and it helped me understand a bit better, so I feel better if she is there.

Narrator: One group that has started to learn lessons for future disasters from experiences such as these is the Fukushima International Association (FIA). They surveyed 100 foreign residents and collected their testimony.

[Showing the testimony document onscreen] “I didn’t understand what the explosion meant.” “Everyone was busy so nobody had time to explain in detail.”

FIA representative: We produced this SOS Card.

Narrator: This ‘SOS Card’ was developed independently by the association before the disaster at a time when they had not yet a sufficient number of foreign viewpoints. When a disaster occurs, foreigners with low Japanese ability can point to the the pictures on the card to come to some understanding of the situation.

Chinese national: Japan always has a lot of small earthquakes, so I want the foreigners who can only speak a little Japanese to get help.

NHK report on US national who experienced the 2011 disaster in Miyagi

The report can be viewed here:
http://www9.nhk.or.jp/311shogen/map/#/evidence/detail/D0007010286_00000

Anonymised source text:
×××：こんな悲惨な光景をこれまで見たことがなかった。津波のせいで、こうなったとは、とても信じられなかった。地震というものを知らなかった。あの大地震が初めての経験だった。

NA：宮城県×××市の小中学校で、英語を教えている×××さん。来日して１か月半、日本語も×××市のこともよくわからないときに震災に襲われました。
×××さんは、市内の自宅から×××島にある小中学校に船で通っています。あの日、小学校の職員室で授業の準備をしていた時、突然、大きな揺れに襲われました。

×××：激しい揺れが何度も襲ってき、座っていられなかった。本当にぞっとしました。怖かったんです。

NA：×××さんは、アメリカの×××州出身。大きな地震とは縁がなく、津波の知識もありません。島から出ることができなくなった×××さん。小学校に隣接する中学校の職員室で、避難生活をすることになります。

×××：一体何がどうなってしまったのか、状況を把握しようとしました。同時に、みんなが話していることを、わからないながらも懸命に聞き取って、みんなが今何を考えているのか、必要としているものは何かなど、そんなことを懸命に知ろうとした。でも、日本語がよくわからないので、状況と言葉を同時に理解するのは難しかった。コミュニケーションをとるのが大変だった。途方に暮れてしまいました。

NA：×××さんが、当時の気持ちをつづった日記です。震災から２日目。×××さんは、学校の中に引きこもっていました。３日目。海の方へ向かいます。津波が、どんなものなのかを知りたいと思ったからです。そこで見たのは、想像を超える光景でした。

×××：こんな悲惨な光景をこれまで見たことがなかった。津波のせいで、こんなようになった、とても信じられなかった。とてもむなしい気持ちになりました。たくさんの建物が消えてしまい、元に戻らないと思うとむなしくなった。

NA：４日目。ようやく心に余裕ができ、教え子たちが避難している体育館に向かいました。体育館に入ったとたん、子どもたちが駆け寄ってきます。子どもたちは口々に「英語を教えてほしい」と×××さんに言いました。子どもたちは、子どもたちの好きな英語の本を読んで聞かせます。

×××：こんな状況の中で、子どもたちに英語を教えるとは驚きでした。でもそのことが、英語を教えるという、自分の仕事への自覚を目覚めさせてくれた。私は、英語を教えるために、ここにやって来ました。こんな状況の中でも教えることが可能で、うれしかった。

NA：５日目。ようやく船に乗れることになり、×××さんは島を離れ自宅に戻ります。海に近いアパートの部屋の中は、津波に襲われて、ひどい状況でした。

×××：アパートは、海からは少し離れていたので大変だろうと思っていたのでもう被災していました。以前のままだったものと思えが。

NA：その後、5か月間、避難所や知り合いの家などで過ごしました。震災をきっかけに、多くの外国人が日本を離れました。しかし、×××さんは、日本に残り続けることを決めました。それは、大勢の人たちに支えられる中で、自然と出てきた答えでした。

×××：「×××、君の分だよ」と言って、物資が詰まった6つの段ボール箱をくれました。一度は断ったのですが「たくさんあるから使って」と言われました。
箱には「友だちから」「×××のです」と書いてあって、本当にうれしかった。
私は本当に幸運でした。もし、みんながいないで一人だったら、寂しくてつらくて、震災でここがくじけて、今の自分ではいられなかった。みんながくれた優しさを、みんなにお返しできればと思う。

Target text (narrations translated by the researcher, US national’s comments transcribed directly from the broadcast report)

US national: My first time just seeing with my own eyes, and I just can’t believe that a tsunami is capable of doing all this. I haven’t really felt earthquakes before, so this was my first real experience with one.

Narrator: This is ×××, who teaches English in the elementary and middle schools of [one of the cities worst-affected by the disaster] in Miyagi Prefecture. The earthquake struck when he had only been in Japan a month-and-a-half and when he knew little Japanese and little about the city he had moved to. ××× commutes by ferry from his home in the city to the school on [a nearby island]. On the day of the earthquake, he was in his classroom in the elementary school preparing for lessons when suddenly an extremely violent tremor hit.

US national: The shaking was very violent, lots and lots of moving really, and I couldn’t really sit still very well, and just kind of, like, really frightening.

Narrator: ××× is from [a Midwestern state of the US] so he was unfamiliar with severe earthquakes and had no idea about tsunamis. Stranded on the island by the disaster, he took refuge in the teachers’ room of the adjoining middle school.

US national: I am trying to understand the situation as it’s unfolding, as it’s going on, and, at the same time, I am trying to listen to the language to be able to understand what it is they’re thinking and what it is that they need or don’t need, etc. And it’s difficult because you are trying to balance, in a sense, two things really: the situation and also the language. And with less language, it’s hard for me to be able to communicate sometimes - just confused really.

Narrator: This is the diary where ××× kept a record of his feelings at the time. Day 2 of the disaster. He still hasn’t left the middle school. Day 3. He heads out toward the sea. He wants to see what the effect of the tsunami has been. What he saw was much worse than he had imagined.

US national: And my first time just seeing with my own eyes, and I just can’t believe that a tsunami is capable of doing all this. At the same time it’s just so sad. It is just so sad, the fact that these buildings that were once there, they’re gone, they are all gone. And it’s not going to change back.

Narrator: Day 4. He finally feels strong enough to go see his pupils taking refuge in the gymnasium. As soon as he entered the hall, the children rushed towards him. They each said to him, “We want you to teach us English.” He read one of their favourite English books to them.

US national: Just kind of, like, surprised. Like, ‘It’s not class, but okay.’ It made me be able, be able to teach them and be able to do my job. And that was one thing I came here to do, was to teach English, and I was glad, so I got this small moment to do that.
Narrator: Day 5. At last, the boats are making the crossing again and ××× can leave the island and return home. His apartment located near the sea had been hit by the tsunami and was in a bad state.

US national: I thought maybe it might be okay because the apartment is, like, a little way away from the water, so I thought maybe apartment [sic] would be okay. I still wish today it was the way it was but it isn’t.

Narrator: For the next five months, he stayed in a refuge centre or with friends. Many foreigners left Japan because of the disaster, but ××× decided to stay. He felt it was only right after all the kindness that so many had shown him.

US national: There were about six boxes that they gave me and they were like, “Oh, ×××. This is for you.” And I was like, “Oh no. You need it.” So they were like, “No, no, no. We have plenty of stuff. Please take it.” And on the box, it said, you know, ‘For ×××. Tomodachi kara - from your friends’ and ‘××× no desu - ×××’s things’. And it was just so wonderful. I think I am very lucky. I think I would just have been lonely and sad and just be like, like, “How could things have turned out this way?” Yeah, I wanted to repay them for their kindness in, like, any way I could.

*NHK report on Philippine national who experienced the 2011 disaster in Miyagi*

The report can be viewed here:
http://www9.nhk.or.jp/311shogen/map/#/evidence/detail/D0007010292_00000

*Anonymised source text:*

NA: 平成23年3月11日、宮城県×××市は巨大な津波に襲われました。

×××：（津波が）千年に一回来るという話、聞いたんだけど。まさかね、私が日本にいる間に来るとは思わなかった。

NA: フィリピンから26年前に来日した×××さんです。日本人の夫と7年前に離婚し、近所づきあいもあまりありませんでしたが、震災をきっかけに人とのつながりが広がりました。地震の時、薬局に来ていた×××さんは、パスポートを取りに急いで自宅へ戻りました。

×××：パスポートがあれば、いつでもフィリピンに帰れると思って、万が一のこと何かあった場合は。

NA: パスポートを手に、すぐに高台へと向かいます。自宅のあった×××は、×××湾と×××に挟まれた平地にありました。地震直後から、避難する車で大渋滞が起こり、身動きが取れなくなります。

×××：車はそっちもいっぱい、こっちもいっぱいになって、もうどうにもならないんだよね。
NA：地震から40分後、津波が×××をさかのぼり、あっという間に×××さんのすぐそばに迫りました。

×××：そこ、空じゃないの。もう海、水、黒。ドア開けようと思って、一生懸命こう…開かない。

NA：×××さんは、開いていた窓からなんとか脱出。近くのマンションに駆け込む人たちのあとを必死で追いかけます。

×××：「私もここに入っているんですか？」と聞いた時に、「何言ってんの。早く！しゃべるんじゃないか、もう逃げないと危ないから」とか（言われた）。

NA：×××さんは、マンションの3階まで駆け上がります。そこには×××さんの家族を含む11人の日本人が避難しています。夜、×××さんたちは燃える町を見つめながら、寒さと孤独に耐えていました。×××さんは周りの人たちに必死で話しかけます。

×××：不安でたまらないから一生懸命、朝まで声かけてるの、私。「みんな大丈夫ですか。みんな頑張ろう」とか。だから、「諦めちゃだめよ」とか。

NA：翌朝、目にしたのは、変わり果てた町の姿でした。

×××：いつもだと7時とかはもう明るい。あの時は、もう朝なのに暗いよね。暗みがちょっと違う。なんか地獄みたい。

NA：朝7時半、ようやく救助がやって来ます。それでも×××さんは不安でした。

×××：みんな日本人でしょう。私だだがフィリピン人だから、たぶん迎えに来ても、私は一緒に連れて行ってもらえると arregloたんけど、声かけられたの、「行いましょう」とって、すごいうれしかった。この時になったら、やっぱりフィリピン人でも外国人でも関係なくなると思った。

NA：震災後、×××さんは積極的に人と関わりをもつようになりました。今度は自分が×××の人たちを助けたいと、介護士になるための勉強をしています。

×××：「助けて」と言ったら助けてくれるよね。そう今思ったの。ここだと何とかなる。だから×××にいるって決めたの。

Target text (translated by the researcher):
Narrator: March 11, 2011. ××× City in Miyagi Prefecture was hit by a massive tsunami. [Note: this was one of the worst-affected cities in the disaster zone.]

Philippine national: I had heard that a tsunami comes once every thousand years, of course, but I never dreamed that one would come while I was in Japan.

Narrator: This is ××× who came to Japan 26 years ago from the Philippines. She divorced her Japanese husband 7 years ago and wasn’t friendly with many in the neighbourhood, but the disaster has ended up strengthening her relationships with others.
The earthquake hit when she was on her way to the pharmacy, so she rushed back home to get her passport.

Philippine national: I thought if I had my passport, at least I could always get back to the Philippines, just to be on the safe side.

Narrator: Passport in hand, she headed for higher ground. Her apartment was located on the plain between [one of the worst-affected bays in Miyagi and some nearby mountains]. The roads were jammed with other cars full of people trying to escape. Nobody could move.

Philippine national: There were cars everywhere I looked. I was trapped.

Narrator: 40 minutes after the earthquake, the tsunami reached up as far as ××× and suddenly it had enveloped her.

Philippine national: This wouldn’t open. It was just sea…water…everything was black. I tried to open the door, I pushed as hard as I could, but it wouldn’t open.

Narrator: ××× managed to get herself out of an open window and ran for her life after a group of people fleeing toward a nearby apartment building.

Philippine national: When I asked them, “Is it okay if I come in, too?” They said, “What are you doing! Don’t talk, move! Quick! Get in here. It’s dangerous out there.”

Narrator: ××× ran up to the 2nd floor of the apartment building. 11 Japanese people, including the ××× family, had escaped the tsunami there. In the evening, as they watched the town in front of them ablaze, they did their best to cope with the cold and the isolation. ××× did all she could to keep talking to those around her.

Philippine national: We were all so scared. I had to do something. I just kept saying, “Is everyone okay? Hang in there.” “We can’t give up.”

Narrator: The following morning they saw what had become of the town.

Philippine national: Usually it would already be bright by 7am, but that day it was still dark, a strange darkness. It was like we had found ourselves in hell.

Philippine national: By 7.30am a rescue party finally arrived. But ××× was still worried.

Philippine national: I thought, “They’re all Japanese. I’m the only Filippina. Maybe they won’t take me along.” When they said to me, “Let’s go,” I was so happy. I thought, “When it’s a disaster, it doesn’t matter if you’re Philippine, or a foreigner, or whatever. Everyone gets rescued.”

Narrator: After the disaster, ××× made a special effort to become more involved in the lives of the people around her. She is training to be a careworker so that she can help the people of [her town] from now on.

Philippine national: If someone needs help, you help them, right? That’s what I think now. I can be of some help to people here. That’s why I’ve decided to stay in [her town that was devastated by the disaster].
NHK report on another Philippine national who experienced the 2011 disaster in Miyagi

The report can be viewed here:
http://www9.nhk.or.jp/311shogen/map/#/evidence/detail/D0007010293_00000

Anonymised source text:

NA: あの日、巨大な津波に襲われた宮城県×××市。市内に暮らしていた70人以上のフィリピン人も被災しました。14年前、フィリピンから×××市に嫁いだ×××さん。夫と2人で暮らしています。震災の時、フィリピン人の仲間の安否確認に奔走しました。

×××：やっぱり水産関係でみんな仕事出勤だったから、たぶん誰か死んだかなと思いました。

NA：自宅で大きな揺れに襲われた×××さんは、はだしで外へ飛び出しました。

×××：地球終わりかなと思いましたね。「神様」と言って、すごい泣きました。

NA：隣のおばあさんに声をかけて、夫と3人で地域の集会所に向かいます。しかし、人でいっぱいだったため、70メートル先にあるドライブインに車を止めました。その直後、津波が市街地を襲います。

×××：でっかい水と流された建物と見たときに、それすごいパニックになってしまいました。

NA：×××さんは山の斜面を登り、何とか逃げることができました。夫とおばあさんも無事でしたが、集会所は津波に飲み込まれていました。

NA：毎週、市内の教会に通っていた×××さん。顔を合わせていたフィリピンの人たちのことが心配でした。2日後、避難所に張り出された名簿で、友人の名前を見つけます。

×××：例えば×××さんとか、「ああ無事だな」と言って、ほっとしたですね。安心しました。でも、まだまだ知りたい友達いっぱいあるから。

NA：翌月、全国から教会の信者に支援物資が届きました。×××さんは神父に頼まれ、自宅を拠点にしてフィリピンの人たちに配布します。できるだけ多くの仲間に届けたいと、市内に住むフィリピン人の名簿を作成しました。

×××：メールして、例えば「知っているフィリピン人いるの？名前ちょうだい」とか、「電話分かる？」って。

NA：連絡がつかない人の所には直接足を運びました。1か月後に名簿が完成し、市内に75人の仲間がいたことが分かります。それまでの知り合いは20人ほどでした。
NA: 震災後、フィリピン大使館には家族や友人からの問い合わせが相次ぎました。大使館から連絡を受けた市役所は津波で被災。外国人の名簿が流され、安否確認が遅れていました。市の国際交流業務を担当する×××さんは、手がかりを探していました。偶然出会った×××さんに名簿を見せてもらいます。

市の国際交流業務担当：まだ震災から１か月半の混乱期ですよね。「その中でも、ちゃんとつながっているんだ。この人たちすごいわ」と思いました。「日本人、こんなのでできるかな、外国で」と思いましたよ、本当に。

NA: 震災後、仲間の輪が広がり、頻繁に集まるようになりました。フィリピンから遠く離れた×××市で生きる仲間として、絆を深めています。

×××：やっぱり私たちの家族は、みんなフィリピンにいて寂しいじゃないですか。本当のお姉さんみたいなとか、妹みたいなとか、それでつながってますね。1つの家族みたい。

Target text (translated by the researcher):

Narrator: ××× City in Miyagi Prefecture [Note: this was one of the worst-affected cities in the disaster zone], a city hit by the massive tsunami on that fateful day. More than 70 Philippine nationals living in the city were affected by the disaster. This is Mrs ×××, who came here from the Philippines 14 years ago to be married. She lives here together with her husband, and during the disaster she worked hard to confirm the safety of her Philippine friends and acquaintances.

Philippine national: As everyone here is involved in the fishing business, they were all out at work, and I thought it was fairly likely that some of them had died.

Narrator: Shaken by a violent tremor in her home, Mrs ××× dashed outside barefoot.

Philippine national: I really thought it was the end of the world. I said ‘Oh God!’ and burst into tears.

Narrator: She and her husband called in on an elderly neighbour, and the three headed together to the local assembly hall. However, it was so crowded that they carried on and to a roadside restaurant 70 metres down the road. It was just after stopping there that the tsunami engulfed the centre of the city.

Philippine national: I really started to panic when I saw all that water and buildings being washed along.

Narrator: Mrs ××× scrambled up the side of a hill and managed to narrowly escape the water. Her husband and neighbour also made it, but the local assembly hall was swallowed by the wave.

Narrator: Mrs ××× attended a church in the town every week, and she was worried about the other Philippine people she knew from there. Two days later, she saw some friends names on the lists posted at the evacuation centre.

Philippine national: For example, I’d see a name like ××× and think, ‘Oh, she’s safe,’ and it would be a great relief. But there were still so many other friends I wanted to know about.
Narrator: Every month, relief goods would arrive from members of the church throughout the country. Mrs × × × was asked by the priest to use her home as a base and pass the goods on to the other Philippine nationals in the community. As Mrs × × × wanted the goods to reach as many people as possible, she began to make a list of the Philippine nationals living in the city.

Philippine national: I’d send a mail and say, for example, ‘Do you know anyone from the Philippines here? Can you give me their names,’ or ‘Can you give me a call?’

Narrator: She called in person at the homes of the people she couldn’t get through to. After one month, the list was finished, and she now knew that there were 75 fellow Philippine nationals living in the city. Up until the disaster, she had only gotten to know about 20.

Narrator: The Philippine Embassy was flooded with calls from concerned family and friends after the disaster. The Embassy contacted the town hall, but it had been damaged by the tsunami, and the list of foreign nationals had been washed away. This held up the process of confirming the safety of foreign residents. The person responsible for international exchange at the town hall, × × ×, needed help, and by chance she ran into Mrs × × × who showed her the name list she had compiled.

Town hall representative: This was still the first six weeks after the disaster when everything was totally chaotic. I thought, ‘She managed to contact all these people when everything was still such a mess. She is amazing.’ I really thought, ‘You know, I wonder if a Japanese person could have managed to do the same overseas?’

Narrator: Since the disaster, Mrs × × ×’s circle of Philippine friends has widened, and they now meet regularly. The bonds of community between the Filipinas living far from home in × × × City are being strengthened.

Philippine national: You know, it’s hard for us. Our families are all back in the Philippines. But we’ve become a real family. We’re so close that they’re like my sisters now.