"Re:Radio", The Place Oriented Internet Radio to Enhance the Cross-Cultural Understanding in Japan

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Abstract. The number of foreigners who visit Japan is increasing lately, however most of the services or products for foreigners are designed based on their superficial understanding and do not meet their true needs. This research's goal is to propose place oriented Internet radio called "Re:Radio", as a new media to help foreigners understand Japan at a deeper level, by providing individually customised contents. Specifically, the dialogue between a guest and personality is used as main contents. Listening to the contents at the place induces listener's self-reflection, which helps further understanding of the place. This paper introduces the concept and implementation, and the experimental results conducted in Tokyo.

Keywords: Internet radio · Personality · Dialogue · Cross-cultural understanding

1 Introduction

As transportation technology has developed in the modern world, the mobility of people has been rapidly improved and the number of foreigners who are visiting Japan is increasing [1]. Recognising diversity and building cross-cultural understanding is a crucial activity and lots of different approaches are attempted in various communicative settings. In multinational companies, cross-cultural training is introduced often as an effective occupational training tool [2]. Numerous textbooks are published to teach intercultural competence as criteria of business or academic proficiency [3]. Most universities have study abroad office for international students; offering supports via student service advisors or peer mentors when needed [4].

We have to be aware of the fact that each of the foreigners who are coming to Japan are one individual and we should not generalise them by nationality, race, and religion. However, most of the current services or products launched for foreigners in Japan are based on their superficial understandings. For example, foreigners encounter place-oriented problem such as having difficulty buying tickets at the train station, normally due to the poor usability of ticket machines only available in Japanese.

To support the better quality of living for foreigners in Japan, creating new media to provide them opportunities to understand Japan at a deeper level is meaningful. As far as the former researches and literatures are reviewed, there is almost no example of using Internet radio as a tool for building international understanding in Japan. In this research, we will propose a prototype of place-oriented Internet radio called "Re: Radio", which helps foreigners to recognise Japan from a cross-cultural perspective by providing uniquely customised contents. To achieve this, we will find the issue that improves design of the system through experimental fieldwork.

2   Concept of Re:Radio

2.1   From Mass to Personal

Conventionally, radio programs have been arranged one-way from personality to mass listeners, and interactive programs like accepting song requests or talking with listeners via phone are not dominant among radio contents. On the other hand, the aim of Re: Radio is to offer opportunities for foreigners to get the better idea of Japan by listening to individually customised contents. The important keyword is "dialogue", which enables listeners to reveal what they really think through the conversation with a personality. In order to enhance mutual understanding, it is essential for the personality to interact with listeners and try to have as constructive a discussion as possible.

2.2   Place-Oriented Dialogue

The dialogue is place-oriented, which means what they talk about or how loud they talk varies depending on which place they are at. The guest, who is later invited to be a listener of Re:Radio, have a free conversation about a certain place with the personality. Later on the personality reflects on the dialogue and creates unique radio contents specifically designed for the guest. Once the guests go back to the place where the original dialogue was had, they can listen to the edited contents again and reflect on the memory of the place. This self-reflection process allows the guest to recognise if there are any new findings or clues to the further understanding of the place.

2.3   Accumulation of Self Reflection

The contents of Re:Radio is originally customised for the individual, but since it's connected to the specific place where it was recorded, anyone who went there can listen to the contents once it's opened. By repeating this process, a pile of self-reflection is accumulated and eventually it forms a character of the place. It is drawn by many different realisations and recognitions, which is the illustration of place's dynamics. The name "Re:Radio" includes many "Re", such as reflection, recall, remember, realisation, recognition, and importantly, re-entry of the place.

3   Implementation of Re: Radio

The personality records and edits the dialogue with the guest, then creates the customised radio contents for the listener. The guest listens to the contents again, reflects and evaluates it. Evaluated contents are shared with many other listeners and accumulated self-reflections will be the foundation of new dialogues for another individual listener. By repeating this cycle, the contents of Re:Radio will be enriched (Fig. 1).
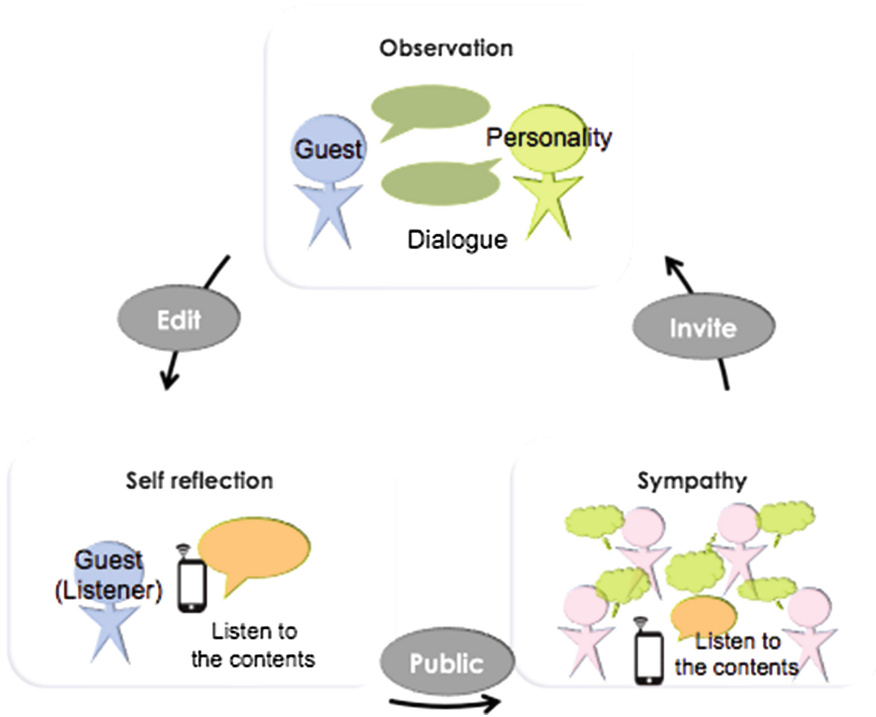

Fig. 1. Cycle of Re:Radio
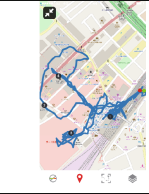
4   Experiment

Lynch introduced the concept of five elements of city, which are path, edge, district, node and landmark [5]. As Re:Radio has characteristics focusing on specific places, landmark was chosen as a suitable element. We conducted fieldwork experiments twice, for two different guests using the same scheme to explore how the cycle of Re: Radio works. In the first fieldwork, guests and the personality walked around certain places and the conversation happened and was recorded. In order to reveal the architecture of effective contents design, we tried to select the guests who have various cultural backgrounds, as well as their length of the stay in Japan.

Subsequently, the personality created individually customised contents for the guests by editing recorded data, putting in background music and narration. Several points were chosen where notable conversations happened then contents were mapped on the webpage using Google Maps API. After the contents were successfully mapped in the system, we conducted the second fieldwork.

Guests and the personality walked the same route as the last time and guests listened to the contents connected to the certain landmarks. Guests filled in a questionnaire to evaluate the concept of Re:Radio and the contents afterward, asking how the contents contributed to their self-reflection about the place. First and second fieldwork details and samples' attributes are below (Table 1).

Table 1. Fieldwork Details and Samples' Attributes

Guest	FR		SG	
Fieldwork Date (L:First/R:Second)	December 12th, 2014	Februrary 12th, 2015	January 29th, 2015	February 11th, 2015
Time	14:30 - 15:00	14:00 - 15:00	10:30 - 14300	10:45 -11:30
Location	Keio University Campus		Sagamiono Station	
Status	Researcher		Undergraduate	
Nationality	France		Singapore	
Sex	Male		Male	
Age	27		22	
Route Taken				

5   Discussion

5.1   Fieldwork Result - Guest FR

Guest sample FR (henceforth FR) studied abroad and took his master degree in Keio University, and has been living in Japan since 2011. Since his Japanese language proficiency is very high, the first fieldwork was done in Japanese.

FR showed the personality a tiny shrine in the campus premises. In the New Year, many Japanese visit shrines in their vicinity. It is called "初詣 (hatsumode)" means "the first shrine visit", asking for a good luck in the year. During the New Year holiday most Japanese students go home and the campus is nearly empty, but FR was working on his master dissertation and remained on campus. FR told the personality he came this shrine and did his hatsumode here, asking for good luck for his dissertation as Japanese do, even though he is a French Christian.

Based on the conversation that happened in the first fieldwork, personality made content. The shrine was chosen as a landmark and the personality added the narration of its foundation history, with traditional Japanese music. The atmosphere of the shrine is very tranquil and instrumental healing music seemed to be suitable as background music.

5.2   Fieldwork Result - Guest SG

Guest sample SG (henceforth SG) is an undergraduate fresher of Keio University, SG arrived in Japan in September 2014. Since his language proficiency is beginner level,

the fieldwork was done in his native tongue English. SG guided Sagamiono station to the personality where his university dormitory is located.

During the fieldwork SG told the personality he lost his gloves the other day and wanted to buy a new ones in Uniqlo, which is a famous Japanese fast fashion brand, at the shopping centre attached to the station. He asked the staff if there are any, however it was almost the end of the season and they were all sold out. SG tried a couple of other shops but none with good value for money was available. SG then walked into the downtown, introducing his favourite ramen shop around town. He told the personality until he gets a part time job in Japan he is very financially instable, hence for him ramen is filling and reasonably priced as a daily meal, so far. He also said there are many ramen shop in Singapore but the taste is more authentic in Japan.

The personality made two contents for sample SG based on the first fieldwork. First, the shop front of Uniqlo was chosen as a landmark, and the narration about Japanese fast fashion circumstances was inserted. As SG seems to be a ramen fan, the personality wanted him to explore Japanese ramen culture by the second content. There is a museum-type complex called "Ramen museum" about 30 min from his house, where he can try various types of ramen such as miso, shoyu and his favourite flavour tonkotsu. Visitors can purchase traditional Japanese snacks and souvenirs, and its retro atmosphere of the Showa period is something SG might want to experience. Background music that is actually used in the Ramen museum is added to the content.

5.3 Discussion

In the second fieldwork FR and SG listened to the contents and had additional conversation with the personality. FR understands a decent level of Japanese culture and knows how things work in Japan. In the fieldwork, the choice of route was totally the guest's responsibility and the reason he decided to introduce a Japanese shrine to the personality means something. Supposedly it is because FR has spent relatively long time and interacts with locals more compared to other foreigners, so he regards himself less "foreign" in this country. When FR started to listen to the content, he seemed to be a bit surprised, saying *"You actually took time to edit the conversation and put background music to make content only for me? That's great."*

This shows he was aware of the personality's effort and expresses his gratitude. Showing appreciation in return for something that was done for somebody is a shared notion amongst Japanese and FR's remark also is a clue that he fits in with Japanese culture well.

> *"It was interesting to have some additional and cultural information about the conversation. It wasn't too long, just good. Background music was also good idea and made the content more pleasant to listen to".*

On the contrary, SG has just arrived in Japan last September and everything is new and exciting to him. He seemed to be in the "honeymoon period", a typical state which studying abroad students normally get through [6]. The conversation in the first fieldwork was mostly about the difference of lifestyle, food and social systems between Singapore and Japan. These topics made the personality put in some mini stories of

Japanese fast fashion brand the growth, or an introduction of a new place of his favourite food. The personality wants to help him have new perspective and motivation of walking around a Japanese city on his own, rather than just giving a new knowledge about places.

> "I recalled (almost) the full conversation. Immersion might be better done in famous location such as Akihabara".

Nevertheless, we need to figure out in what context this SG's feedback was given after the second fieldwork. In the follow-up questionnaire, he gave us a clue about what the thing matters to him.

> "Foreigners think of Japan, usually stuff like anime, shrines, memorable places. Why would anyone be specifically interested in Sagamiono? If I were a foreigner visiting the website, the first place I would click would be in order of 'well-known".

This feedback is very symbolic. Presumably SG comprehends Re:Radio as a tool to promote "immersion" rather than the introduction of deep Japanese culture, and thought Akihabara is a suitable city in which that would be accomplished. As the contents were not originally exemplifying implications represented in the famous city such as Akihabara, we ought to clarify the reason for this is happening.

6   Conclusion and Future Studies

Why are these two guests' feedbacks so different? Is this a matter of location selection? Nonetheless both of the places where the original conversations were had are not so "touristy" hence what we may assume it is a difference of their length of stay. Unlike FR who has spent a long time in Japan, most of the tourists or studying abroad students who are new in Japan might feel as SG does. If so, the target listeners of Re:Radio will be people like SG, and original contents should be connected to so called "touristy" places, not too local ones. Although these contents are the entrance to ostensible Japanese culture at first, in the long run they should be the trigger to come to know the real culture and give listeners new a perception of Japan. In this experiment we only conducted the first two processes of Re:Radio, yet before we move onto the third process we need to illustrate the direction of the contents which is reachable by the guests and figure out the ideal place for content designing. Specifically in the third process, how we approach the listeners to produce mutual cross-cultural reflection is the key, and the proposal of the criteria to measure whether listeners could enhance their comprehension of Japanese culture will be undoubtedly important. In addition, further exploration of available system configuration is needed, using the user experience design [7].

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