Japanese Food Project Process Statements

Statement by Akane Ishibashi

To begin the video-making process, we chose three international Japanese students who lived off-campus to interview and observe while cooking. In choosing the students to interview, the criteria was that they live in off-campus housing, could set aside a few hours one weekend to be filmed, and have to cook for themselves. Finding Japanese students who met this criteria was not difficult, since Eri and I know many personally. The project and objective of the study was explained to each participant once chosen so they could gain our trust that we would portray them as honestly as possible. They read the forms of consent and signed them, after having an understanding that their interviews and our footage would be used for academic purposes, and would be featured on Youtube.

Eri decided to be the person to go to the interviewee’s houses, observe them cooking, and ask them questions. We felt that they would be more comfortable speaking Japanese during the interview, and since Eri is an international Japanese student herself, she could speak to them in the language. Each interviewee was recorded while cooking their meal of choice, with a set of questions asked during the cooking process. Questions were also asked while two of our interviewees were eating the completed meal. Each interviewee was very compliant with answering the questions we formed as honestly as they could. As well as recording them cooking, footage was taken of ingredients and foods located in the participant’s refrigerator, to see how many Japanese products they had. Eri recorded the interviews and all the footage herself on a handheld camera, and transferred the footage to a flash drive. I uploaded all of the video footage to my laptop and all of the editing was done on the program iMovie.

First, we had to cut down the footage from about an hour to 12-15 minutes. We had to decide which footage was the most vital and pertinent to our question. This was a bit difficult, as there was a lot of footage to go through. We made sure to record information that we wanted to include on the wikispace, but would cut from the final video. The biggest task in editing the video was having to translate all the footage for subtitles. Eri translated the footage we would use in the final video and I wrote in the subtitles.

One benefit from doing most of the editing on this project was learning how to use iMovie. I had never used the program before this project, but now I feel more comfortable using it for simple editing. I found that the program is accessible for documentary type film projects, as I could edit clips, add text, music, and subtitles to the footage.

Looking back on the project now, if I could do anything differently, I would have considered having the interviewees speak English for their interviews. From an editing standpoint, it would really cut down on time if we didn’t have to subtitle all of the footage. Also, Jane and I wouldn’t have had to rely on subtitles to edit the video. However, I’m aware that this would change the video considerably. Phrases in Japanese are not always able to be directly translated into English with the same meanings. By speaking Japanese, the participants would be able to fully express their thoughts and answers to questions without fear of a language barrier.

It was important to us not to create generalizations, and to really focus on the opinions of our three participants. By noting comparisons between our participant’s interviews and answers, I could form a response to our starting question and get a better understanding of their feelings on cultural identity in America. This study has helped me to gain more insight into international Japanese students here on campus and how they individually adapt to life and food here.

Reflection of the Movie: Eri Kurose

The fifteen-minute video was an extraordinary experience that I personally enjoyed because I first-handedly experienced the video making process and gained valuable lessons from the video. Our group work, which studied food changes within the Japanese exchange students, was overall fascinating, but also took a lot more time than I first expected.

We had two videos that involved cooking: curry, radish salad, and cabonara. Taking the video of the students wasn’t difficult; it was monitored and taken in the natural habitat. I believe that the editing part was most grueling and demanding aspect of the project.

Our group took three videos that were about one hour long each. We had to edit the videos into fifteen minutes all together. I had difficulties editing the video because the people in the video spoke mostly in Japanese. I realize that in order to take an ethnographic film in the future, it would be better for anthropologists to study their native tongue or else they would have a hard time understanding the whole video. Luckily, one of our group mates, Eri, a Japanese exchange student, was fluent in both Japanese and English and translated the video and added subtitles. We chose subtitles instead of a voiceover so as to let the audience experience the originality of the video and understand the materials, as well. Some parts that were too long but necessary were edited with voiceover to explain the situation of the clip.

Editing the materials in order to fit fifteen minutes was tedious. We needed to edit the videos to flow instead of exhibiting blocks of clips that were hard to comprehend in the limited amount of time. Restricted time frame forced us to edit and extract the most vital information that we wanted to present.

Thankfully, our group mates were all familiar with the editing software because of the one-minute video that was assigned earlier in the year.

Throughout the video, I learned that the Japanese students had a change in diet; they were eating more Americanized food that were instant (i.e. University Hots) for the sole reason of availability of resources. The students mentioned that they cook food not for the purpose of being “Japanese” and representing their identity, but to feel at home and to create a dish that was similar to home cooking. I understood them very well because I miss my mom’s cooking, and in order to recreate her cooking, I would try to make something Korean that my mother would usually make.

Reflection of the Movie: Akane Ishibashi

The focus of the video was how Japanese International students keep their identity in their food outside of school.

In order to gain the information, we decided to ask three Japanese students to show how they always cook and eat in off-campus. Before we visited their houses, we intentionally made questions to obtain the information we wanted. For example, the questions are how often they cook, what kinds of ingredients they normally use or what they miss about home. Since they live in the US now, we thought we would be able to understand some changes they had after they came to America. We assumed that we would be able to see how they try to maintain some cultural identity.
After we decided the questions to ask, I visited my Japanese friends' house to record a video. First, I went to the apartment where two Japanese girls (if they are 18 or over call them women or young women) live together. They chose to make the curry rice, which is a fundamental and popular dish in Japan. Almost everyone starts cooking from the curry rice. I asked a lot of questions while they were cooking. When I filmed, I tried to capture the way they cooked their food instead of focusing the camera on their faces. I purposefully asked questions in Japanese because it would be comfortable for them and reveal their thoughts in ways that they cannot explain in English. It took more than one hour to finish the recording, which included both cooking and eating scenes. The reason why it was so long could be that the setting was casual and friendly, and it was my first experience filming. Because I am also Japanese, I asked questions dealing with the similarities to the idea of food and culture in Japan. It was an interesting experience because we thought about Japanese food and culture.

Next, I visited a Japanese boy (if he is 18 or over call him a man women or young man), who lives with a Japanese and Japanese-American. He chose to cook carbonara, which is pasta using white sauce. It is also a well-known dish in Japanese homes (but of course Italian!). I asked him the set of questions in Japanese again and recorded the way he cooked. Since I had already had an experience of recording with the two Japanese girls, I could shorten the length of the filming. I could cut ineffective scenes and concentrate on the main point. Also, cooking carbonara did not take such a long time. Therefore, the recording time was about 20-25 minutes. I could see similarities in the opinions of him and the two girls, and different perspectives relating to his answers.

After recording, we started editing the video. The problems were the length of movie, need for translation and skill of editing. When we first got together, the meeting was very long just in watching the movie. Since the length was too long and the spoken language was Japanese, we needed to figure out where to start working on and the editing was not productive. However, we started translating scene by scene. As we translated, we could see what to include and exclude. We really spent a lot of time deciding where to cut, since we could gather a lot of important and interesting information from many scenes. We used Akane's Mac and added subtitles and voice over. Since we did not have much knowledge about editing, it also took a long time. However, almost by the end of the editing, we, especially Akane, were familiar with the work and could manipulate it well.

Concerning our movie, we might be able to improve some parts (this is more appropriate to the reflexive statement). Although we focused on Japanese international students, I thought there may have some differences regarding gender. When I took the video, I observed clear differences about the obsessiveness toward health between man and woman. The girls particularly cared about their body weight and nutritional balance. One of the reasons they cooked was to keep up their health. On the other hand, the Japanese male often bought and only cooked easy meals. He did not really care about his health. Rather, he cared about his time to study or money spending. Therefore, if we narrowed down the gender and focused on Japanese international students, we might be able to get different interesting data regarding their gender identity.

In conclusion, we learned how Japanese international students think about their identity and relate it to their food. When we finished editing, we realized that food is really a part of a person's culture. In other words, it is natural for them to eat food in their own way, and they are not really aware that they are eating Japanese food for any reason other than that they are Japanese. The food is culturally constructed. It is ingrained in them. They grew up with the food and the certain tastes. Therefore, they naturally maintain their preferences for those flavors. Although we assumed they would intentionally put some identity to their food, we realized that they subconsciously maintain and preserve their own culture. When we think about it more ourselves, it is clear that that's true. In the end, I really enjoyed making the film and the curry rice and carbonara that I had not eaten for a long time.