
Feature Article

Support for the English Needs in a Small Japanese Port Town

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In 2013, the Active Local Tokai Ambassadors (ATLAS) English Club was started at Tokai University's Shimizu, Shizuoka campus with the aim of helping students improve their English and social skills. The students participate in projects supporting the English language needs in Shimizu. They work with the town office, port authority, and local citizen volunteers to provide assistance to passengers from foreign luxury liners stopping at Shimizu port. The ATLAS English Club advisers noticed problems that stemmed from the lack of language skills and information about the locality among the students and volunteers. This resulted in difficulty providing help to the passengers. In 2016, the ATLAS English Club advisers held a seminar for local citizens and volunteers, and surveyed the audience about the types of English expressions they felt they needed to learn to help the international visitors. Then, they made recommendations to the town office and created an interpreters' guidebook to assist the volunteers who help at the port area. This paper introduces the Tokai University ATLAS English Club and local English support for international tourism in Shimizu, Shizuoka, Japan, and then outlines the first stage of the project to create better support for the English volunteer community in Shimizu.

Ahead of the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, the Japanese government has recognized the potential for international tourism to improve local economies and is implementing methods to promote Japan as an international tourist destination (Osumi, 2016). Japanese scholars and business groups have also been aware of the growing popularity of Japanese pop culture products abroad since the early 2000s

(Mandujano, 2013) and more recently, the Cool Japan policy has been adopted in an effort to foster a positive international image and increase tourism. Cool Japan advances an image to people in foreign countries that Japan is a cool place to visit not only because of its rich culture, but also due to the growing appreciation of popular culture products such as anime and manga (Mandujano, 2013). Cool Japan also provides opportunities for communities, such as small port towns, to promote themselves as more groups of international tourists come to Japan for port calls on luxury liners. Because these towns, such as Shimizu, Shizuoka, do not have the financial means to provide professional English support, they look for local residents and students with English skills to volunteer. This paper introduces a university English club called the Active Tokai Local Ambassadors (ATLAS) English Club, as well as local citizen volunteer activities that provide English language help for international luxury liner passengers and the first half of a project to research and develop support for the students and local citizen volunteers to improve their English skills.

Luxury Liner Tourism

The international luxury liner industry is taking advantage of Japan's efforts to promote foreign tourism. According to Maarit Aartoaho, a Japanese tour agent for the Princess Cruises Company, interviewed in Hakodate, Japan:

Luxury liner companies are also taking advantage of the cheap airfares from abroad. They are promoting cruises as an inexpensive and trouble-free way to see Japan without the burden of language barriers. Being able to fly into Japan cheaply then board a ship with English-speaking staff benefits tourists who want to visit Japan as well as local port communities, which are often in small Japanese towns. Passengers can fly into a major metropolitan airport, spend a few days sightseeing then board a luxury liner. From there, the ship sails to several smaller Japanese ports before moving on to Korea or another nearby Asian destination. The ships offer chances for passengers to disembark at the small ports and take day trips on tour buses arranged by the ship's tour company to local spots of interest. Passengers can also opt to see small

town Japan by wandering through the local area by themselves (personal communication, June 30, 2016).

International passenger ships stopping in small port towns provide the towns with the opportunity to show tourists local sights that are vastly different from what the tourists typically encounter in big cities such as Tokyo or Osaka. It also helps boost the local economies of the small port towns by providing business to local tour and taxi companies and by visitors patronizing local shops and restaurants.

Shimizu Port Tourism and Tokai University

In 2014, ten luxury liners carrying international passengers stopped at Shimizu Port in Shizuoka city and the number is increasing year by year. To support the passengers when they disembark from the ships, the Shimizu Town Office and the Shimizu Port Authority provide an information table with maps of the local area in several languages. Local shop owners, taxi companies, a bank, and the post office also set up booths at the portside that sell local products and provide services. Free Wi-Fi access, tea ceremony demonstrations, and trying on kimono can also be done inside the port terminal building. Since the local people who set up their shops and services at the portside do not have strong English language skills, the town office and port authority recruit local citizens to volunteer as English interpreters for the passengers through advertising in local newsletters. The ATLAS English Club from Tokai University also takes part in volunteer interpreting activities when the ships come to the port.

ATLAS English Club

Students at Tokai University Shimizu Campus major in marine sciences and technology, but some students are interested in learning English and practicing their English communication skills in real-life contexts. To support these students the ATLAS English Club was established in 2013. Following that, the Shizuoka City Association for Multicultural Exchange (SAME) office at the Shimizu Town Office was contacted by the ATLAS English Club advisers in 2014. Discussions between the ATLAS English Club advisors and the Shimizu Town Office began,

leading to cooperation with the Shimizu Port Authority, and in October 2014 several students began to volunteer as portside interpreters when the international luxury liners made port calls in Shimizu (Gough & Kato, 2016). Consequently, the students also began developing original projects to support the luxury liner passengers. They received a Challenge Center Grant for Student Projects from Tokai University and created an English language map detailing how to take the city bus to the Miho no Matsubara seaside woods, part of the Mount Fuji World Heritage Site (Gough & Kato, 2016). Later, they developed student-led tours to Miho no Matsubara, as well as Minowa Inari, a well-known shrine near the port.

Port Activities

In the first two years of the student volunteer activities, the two ATLAS English Club advisers accompanied the students during volunteer activities to provide support. During this time, the advisers observed of the portside activities when the international ships arrived and identified some areas where the services could be improved. For example, while the town's services for the passengers expanded over time, the town officials and volunteers did not have a clear idea of the passengers' needs or what English skills were necessary. One reason for this is that the passenger demographics change depending on the luxury liner company. This results in differing English support needs depending on which ship makes a port call. For example, passengers on some ship lines tend to be older and wealthier and use taxi services or take bus tours pre-arranged by the ship's travel company. These passengers do not need the local volunteer interpreters' services, but are interested in the Wi-Fi access when they return to the port. Other luxury liners tend to appeal to younger, middle class passengers who often travel with their families. These passengers are more interested in walking around the town or taking public transportation to see the local sights. They ask for directions to the local shopping spots and have questions about local sites and famous products. The volunteers at Shimizu Port are not trained and do not understand the differences in needs among passengers depending on the type of ship they arrived on. The ATLAS English Club advisers noticed that the volunteers were not familiar with bus timetables and routes, nor with the shops at the portside shopping mall and

surrounding neighborhood. Also, the ATLAS English Club students are not from the Shimizu area and do not have much knowledge about the local history and sightseeing spots. As a result, there was sometimes a mismatch between passenger needs, the English services, and volunteers' knowledge of the local area.

The ATLAS English Club advisers also observed some discrepancies between the expectations of the local citizen volunteers and the student volunteers. One local citizen volunteer enjoys giving long explanations of details about the local history or famous places to people who are unfamiliar with the Shimizu area. This shows his pride in the local area but does not consider the visitors' needs. Passengers disembarking from the ship tend to want specific information about transportation, Wi-Fi services, or places to visit and they want the information in a timely fashion. In general, they are not interested in spending a lot of time listening to a historical description of the area. Other local citizen volunteers are simply eager to enjoy the experience of interacting with people from around the world and showing the passengers aspects of Japanese culture: for example, experiencing tea ceremony, teaching how to do origami, or trying on kimono. On the other hand, the students are mainly interested in developing their language skills and designing original projects, such as the map or tours that involve using English to assist the passengers. They are also interested in providing helpful information such as how-to login to the free Wi-Fi service, how to exchange money at the bank, or how to get to the shopping center nearby the port. Thus, while the town, volunteers, and students are eager to provide English services for the visiting luxury liner passengers at Shimizu Port, there is also a mismatch concerning the aims and expectations of the volunteers from the various groups.

Developing English Support for Shimizu Port

From their observations, the ATLAS English Club advisers realized more English support is needed and decided to create a research project to help Shimizu better serve the English needs of visiting international passengers at the port. This research project began in the 2016 school year and will expand in future years as the ATLAS English Club advisers continue to work with the Shimizu office, the local citizen volunteers, and the ATLAS English Club students. The aims of the

2016 community outreach research project for international luxury liner tourism in the town of Shimizu was to understand what kind of support can be given to local citizen and student volunteers who help at the port when international luxury liners arrive. The project also aims to help them develop their skills to be successful volunteer interpreters. The project had two parts. The first part was to research the kinds of English language support offered to passengers at other ports and understand English language needs of the two volunteer groups in Shimizu. The second part of the project will be to produce a volunteer interpreter handbook after an analysis of observations, meetings with the local port authority, and conducting a Shimizu volunteer survey (see Appendixes A & B) at a seminar presented to local citizens and volunteers at the Shimizu Town Office.

Method

June 2016. Preliminary research was conducted in Hakodate, Hokkaido in June 2016. Hakodate was chosen because international passenger ships have been stopping there for about ten years and students from a local high school volunteer to help the passengers. The high school students received an award for their activities from the Japanese Tourism Board in 2015, so the ATLAS English Club advisers wanted to investigate the students' activities to learn about hospitality that can be applied to Shimizu port. When they visited Hakodate, they observed portside activities when the *Diamond Princess* ship made its port call because the *Diamond Princess* also makes port calls at Shimizu port. The ATLAS English Club advisers also interviewed a Japanese Princess Cruise Liner travel agent, port officials, and an English teacher from the high school about their activities when the ships make port calls.

The ATLAS English Club advisers first noted several differences between the conditions in Hakodate port and Shimizu port. First, Shimizu port is close to the town center, shopping, and the local train lines, but Hakodate port is far from the town center. Therefore, free shuttle busses are provided by Hakodate town to help the passengers get to the downtown area and local places of interest. Another difference was the number and type of booths on the dockside at Hakodate. Since Hakodate is an established port town with a booming tourist

industry in the downtown area, there were fewer booths on the dockside than at Shimizu. In Hakodate, there was a ramen noodle truck, one or two local shop booths, and an information booth. On the other hand, in Shimizu there are typically more than ten such booths, a bank with currency exchange, a post office, and free Wi-Fi service.

Finally, the high school students' activities were quite different from the activities the Tokai University students engage in. The high school students in Hakodate mostly provided a warm welcome to the passengers through a dance activity and handmade origami, and gave basic information using local maps. The students took visitors on a tour of their high school on occasion, but it was organized by the school administration, unlike the ATLAS English Club tours, which are student-organized. Observations of transportation, restaurants, maps, and road signs around Hakodate town showed it to be a place with substantial support for people who are unfamiliar with the Japanese language. For example, city buses had simple, graphic signage accompanied by English explanations to explain how to pay the bus fare, restaurants had picture menus with the menu items names spelled out in roman letters, and local maps and road signs included the names of places and travel routes in roman letters or English.

September 2016. The second part of the research took place in the university's 2016 summer break, which fell between early August and late September. The ATLAS English Club advisers prepared a seminar for the Shimizu town office and local citizens who were interested in the international luxury liners and portside activities when the ships arrive. The seminar began with a presentation to discuss the ATLAS English Club advisers' research aims. Next, they reported on Hakodate's port side hospitality and local support for international tourists. After that, they led an hour-long group discussion about the audience members' experiences or perceptions of possible language issues involved with volunteering. Finally, the ATLAS English Club advisers conducted a volunteer needs analysis by surveying the participants (Appendix A). From the volunteer needs analysis, they found the Shimizu town office and port authority did not make their expectations clear to the local citizen volunteers and the volunteers were confused about what they should do to help passengers. The

ATLAS English Club advisers further found that the volunteers wanted to know in advance what the town office and port authority expect of them. The local citizen volunteers also wanted more information about international passengers' needs and how to prepare for using English to meet the specific purposes of helping them.

December 2016. The ATLAS English Club advisers began to develop a volunteer interpreter handbook. As a first step, they asked ATLAS English Club students to enter the survey information into Google docs. Then, after data entry was completed they planned to categorize the information into eight categories according to topic before translating, organizing the guidebook contents, and sending it to a printing company. Developing and testing the handbook with the local volunteers will be the second step of this stage of the project.

Conclusion

This research project will continue as Shimizu continues to promote itself as a destination for international luxury liners, and recruits volunteers to support the English needs of the community and the visiting passengers. The handbook will include useful information and expressions such as for giving directions and explanations on how to use public transportation, as well as useful vocabulary for chatting with the passengers. There will be a print version of the handbook and a PDF version that can be downloaded from the Tokai University Shimizu Campus homepage. In addition to the volunteer handbook, the ATLAS English Club advisers will develop future training seminars to explain passengers' needs, discuss the town office and port authority expectations for volunteer interpreters, and to teach useful English for helping passengers.

In 2017, the ATLAS English Club advisers plan to teach an elective English communication class that focuses on a project to create a visitors' tour guidebook, with several theme-based tour routes explained in English. For this project, the English communication class students will research and make mini tours to unique local places. These tours will be compiled into a print, PDF, and i-Book tour guidebook that local citizen and ATLAS English Club volunteers can use to provide helpful information to international luxury liner passengers

visiting Shimizu port.

The international tourism industry in Japan is expected to continue growing ahead of the Olympics and beyond 2020. Since small towns cannot afford to pay professional interpreters to help with international tourism, they will need to rely on local volunteers to support their foreign language needs. The Tokai University ATLAS English Club advisers' research and community outreach activities in Shimizu can serve as a model for other small Japanese communities that hope to encourage international tourism. It is an example of the creation of a successful relationship between the Shimizu town office and the local university. The example and model presented in this paper can be adapted by other university professors and English groups in Japan who wish to establish a relationship with their local community and provide support for local English needs.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by a To-Collabo Grant from Tokai University and the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) projects under the University Reform Action Plan.

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Received: January 13, 2017

Accepted: September 28, 2017

Appendix A

Volunteer Survey A

アンケート A *研修会終了時に回収します。

Volunteer Survey A (people who have volunteered)

ボランティア通訳をしたことがある人にお聞きます。→ 経験のない人は裏面へ

Please answer these questions about your volunteer activities to help foreign tourists in Shizuoka.

静岡市内でボランティア通訳を経験した人に質問です。

1. Why did you want to become a volunteer to help foreign tourists?
なぜ外国人に対するボランティア通訳をしたいと思ったのですか？
2. How many times have you volunteered?
何回ボランティアの経験をしましたか？
3. Where did you volunteer?
どこで行いましたか？
4. What did you do?
何をしましたか？
5. What did you like about volunteering?
ボランティアをして良かったことは何ですか？
6. What was difficult for you?
何が難しかったですか？
7. What kind of English skills do you think you need to be a volunteer to help foreign tourists?
外国人観光客のボランティアをするにあたってどのような英語スキルが必要だと思えますか？
8. How can Wendy and Kazumi help you learn these English skills?
本日のプレゼンター2名に期待することは何ですか？
9. What kind of English services do you think Shizuoka City should have to help foreigners?
静岡市は観光客に対して今後どのような英語サービスが必要だと思えますか？

Appendix B

Volunteer Survey B

アンケートB *研修会終了時に回収します。

Volunteer Survey B (people who haven't volunteered)

ボランティア通訳をしたことがない人にお聞きます。→ 経験のある人は裏面へ

1. Why did you come to the presentation today?

なぜ今回の研修会に参加しようと思ったのですか？

2. Do you want to volunteer to help foreign tourists in Shizuoka?

今後、静岡で観光客相手にボランティア通訳をしたいと思いませんか？

丸をつけてください。

Yes

No

3. What do you want to do to help foreign tourists?

外国人観光客にどのようなことをあげたいですか？

4. How often do you want to volunteer?

どのくらいの頻度でボランティア通訳をしてみたいですか？

例) 年に1回

5. What do you think would be fun about volunteering?

ボランティア通訳の何に魅力がありますか？

6. What do you think would be difficult about volunteering?

ボランティア通訳の何が難しいと思いませんか？

7. What kind of English skills do you think you need to learn to be able to help foreign tourists?

ボランティア通訳をするためにどのようなスキルを学びたいと思いませんか？

8. How can Wendy and Kazumi help you learn these English skills?

本日のプレゼンターに期待することは何ですか？

9. What kind of English services do you think Shizuoka City should have to help foreigners?

静岡市は観光客に対して今後どのような英語サービスが必要だと思いますか？