

**Putting on an International Face:  
An Analysis of Japanese Universities' English  
Homepages**

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## **Acknowledgements**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Currently, Japan is attempting to transform its higher education (HE) system to contribute to the knowledge economy, and as a part of this, it is attempting to attract more international students to study at Japanese HEIs. This research addresses the development of foreign language homepages (FLH) by Japanese HEIs as a result of how internationalisation is being incorporated within the Japanese HE infrastructure. As a sociological analysis, the focus is on how the meaning of a FLH is more than its mere presence on the Internet. The meaning of a FLH is relational. Meaning is established not only through the FLH's content, but also how this compares with other FLHs, and how those reading these webpages receive this content.

There are two parts to this research. The first part is based on a visual analysis of three FLHs within a Barthesian approach to cultural semiotics. Using a narrative form of analysis, Barthes focuses on the relationship between the different elements of a sign – whether it is an image, text, or sound, which when combined contribute to the sign's meaning. To understand FLHs as displays of internationalisation within HE, this visual analysis requires defining the basic structure of a webpage, as well as the components that one would expect to find on a university webpage directed towards an international student body.

The second part of this research focuses on a Bourdieusian approach to understanding FLHs as social sites of interaction. Interviews with those involved with the development of their institution's FLHs enable an analysis of how different forms of capital influence and constrain the way those within HEIs are developing their FLHs. Then, using the same institutions as the semiotic analysis, focus group discussions with international students as readers of FLHs, facilitate an understanding of how these webpages are received by international students. A field, for Bourdieu, is both constrained and enabled by the rules which bind it, but these are not the only determinates in the field's ultimate development as it is also influenced by interaction with other fields. Accordingly, those who develop their institution's FLHs are bound by rules and influenced by educational policies in HE. However, changes in other social spaces, such as how social media and the Internet are used, also influence the social expectations of how an HEI should develop its communication strategies.

Collecting data from three sources enables an exploration of the influences behind the creation of FLHs, the messages encoded within them, and how international students receive these webpages. The relational analysis will enable the research findings to inform practice through specific suggestions for the continual development of FLHs regarding the relevance and significance of information presentation for prospective international students in the social media age.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	2
<b>Abstract</b>	3
<b>List of Abbreviations and Terminology</b>	9
<b>List of Figures</b>	10
<b>List of Tables</b>	10
<b>Word count</b>	10
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	11
1.1 Communication within the Internationalisation of Higher Education	11
1.1.1 Pressures on Japanese HE to internationalise	12
1.2 Researcher Position and Assumptions	13
1.3 Rationale for Study	15
1.4 Thesis Overview	16
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review</b>	18
2.1 Discourse on the Internationalisation of Higher Education	18
2.1.1 Globalisation and internationalisation	18
2.1.2 Competition	19
2.2 Internationalisation: From a Business to an HE Perspective	20
2.2.1 Rankings	22
2.3 Competition within the Context	23
2.3.1 The role of English	24
2.3.2 Japanese HEIs and internationalisation	25
2.3.3 The role of management	27
2.4 The Function of Websites	28
2.5 Using Bourdieu's Concept of Field as an Analytical Framework	28
2.5.1 Defining concepts	29
2.5.2 A field analysis	31
2.6 The Research Aims and Questions	34
2.7 Summary	35
<b>Chapter 3 Methods and Methodology</b>	36
3.1 The Research Approach	36
3.2 Methods	37
3.2.1 Semiotics	37
3.2.2 Denotation, connotation and purpose	38

3.2.3 Mythic meaning	39
3.2.4 The boundary for semiotic analysis	39
3.2.4.1 Structure/Content	40
3.2.4.2 Images	42
3.2.5 Basis of webpage structure	43
3.3 The FLHs	44
3.4 Steps of a Semiotic Analysis	45
3.5 Interviews	47
3.5.1 The participants	47
3.5.2 Producer participants and data collection method	48
3.5.3 Student participants and data collection method	50
3.5.4 Participants: Recruitment	51
3.6 Data Collection Procedures	52
3.6.1 Thematic analysis from interviews/ focus groups	53
3.7 Ethical Considerations: My Role in the Research	53
3.8 Summary	56
<b>Chapter 4 A Semiotic Analysis of Three FLHs</b>	<b>57</b>
4.1 The Process of a Semiotics Analysis	58
4.2 Trends in FLHs	60
4.2.1 Lower-ranking institutions	60
4.2.2 Mid-ranking institutions	61
4.2.3 Higher-ranking institutions	63
4.3. Language	65
4.4 A Semiotic Analysis of Three FLHs	65
4.5 The University of Tokyo (high-ranking)	68
4.5.1 Structure/Content	68
4.5.2 Images	72
4.5.3 UTokyo summary	76
4.6 Ishikawa Prefectural University (mid-ranking)	76
4.6.1 Structure/Content	76
4.6.2 Images	82
4.6.3 IPU summary	84
4.7 Hokusho University (low-ranking)	84
4.7.1 Structure/Content	84

4.7.2 Images	89
4.7.3 HokushoU summary	91
4.8 Summary	91
<b>Chapter 5 Encoding: The Production of FLHs</b>	<b>93</b>
5.1 The FLH Producers	93
5.2 Social Benchmarking	94
5.3 Audience & Function	98
5.4 Producer Access and Engagement	99
5.4.1 Lack of support	102
5.4.2 Implied jurisdiction	104
5.5 Containing the Explicit Message	106
5.6 Containing the Implicit Message	107
5.7 Summary	109
<b>Chapter 6 Decoding: The Reception of FLHs</b>	<b>111</b>
6.1 The Reading of FLHs	111
6.1.1 The University of Tokyo	111
6.1.1.1 <i>The informed and informative university</i>	111
6.1.1.2 <i>The homepage as a conduit</i>	112
6.1.1.3 <i>The interactivity of connections</i>	113
6.1.2 Ishikawa Prefectural University	114
6.1.2.1 <i>The informed and informative university</i>	114
6.1.2.2 <i>The homepage as a conduit</i>	115
6.1.2.3 <i>The interactivity of connections</i>	116
6.1.3 Hokusho University	117
6.1.3.1 <i>The informed and informative university</i>	117
6.1.3.2 <i>The homepage as a conduit</i>	118
6.1.3.3 <i>The interactivity of connections</i>	119
6.2 Frameworks of Knowledge	121
6.2.1 The influence of experiences	121
6.3 Authority and Trust	123
6.3.1 Access to the FLH	123
6.3.2 The range of FLH use	125
6.3.3 Information satisfaction	126
6.3.4 The presentation of information	128

6.4 Summary	130
<b>Chapter 7 Revisiting the FLH: Interpreting the Data</b>	131
7.1 The Meaningful FLH	131
7.1.1 Factors concerning ease of use	131
7.1.2 Language use	132
7.1.3 The FLH as a cultural bridge	133
7.1.4 The FLH as a display	135
7.1.5 Section summary	136
7.2 Distinctions and Tensions	137
7.2.1 A field of distinctions	137
7.2.2 A field of tensions	140
7.2.3 Section summary	144
7.3 Summary	145
<b>Chapter 8 Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations for Practice</b>	146
8.1 Implications: Answering the Research Questions	146
8.1.1 How do FLHs construct a discourse of internationalisation within Japanese HEIs?	147
8.1.2 What meanings are intended by the producers of FLHs, and how is this influenced by the context of their production?	148
8.1.3 How are these meanings of Japanese FLHs received by international Student users?	150
8.2 How can I Explain the Research Findings?	151
8.3 Recommendations for Practice	153
8.3.1 Utilising this research in my practice	155
8.4 Limitations and Future Research	156
8.5 Summary	159
<b>References</b>	161
<b>Appendix A Ethics Approval</b>	175
<b>Appendix B PGR Declaration of Academic Integrity</b>	177
<b>Appendix C Interview Questions for Producers</b>	178
<b>Appendix D Questionnaire and Interview Questions for Students</b>	181

## **List of Abbreviations**

EFL	English as a foreign language
FL	Foreign language
FLH	Foreign language homepage
G30	Global 30 project (replaced by the TGU)
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
JASSO	Japan Student Services Organization
MEXT	The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (in Japan)
TGU	Top Global Universities - specially selected HEIs by MEXT that receive extra funding to support the development of internationally focused programmes of studies aimed at international students and increase the world-ranking of Japanese universities.

## **Terminology**

Throughout this research the terms higher education institution (HEI), university, and institution are all used interchangeably to describe tertiary institutions for learning. In Japan, it is conventional to refer to the international student as 'foreign student'. This reflects on the direct translation of the term from Japanese to English. Please note that several of the participants use the term 'foreign student' in direct quotations and that here the use of 'foreign student(s)' refers to the international student.

Furthermore, the student participants in this study are primarily international students in Japan, however several Japanese students who studied abroad, and therefore were international students in another country, also participated. Unless otherwise explicitly stated 'Japanese student', the term 'student(s)' is used in reference to the student, from abroad, in Japan, purely to maintain the ease of readability.

## List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Basic webpage design and major elements	44
Figure 4.1: The <i>Paris Match</i> cover	58
Figure 4.2: Top part of the University of Tokyo's FLH	69
Figure 4.3 Bottom part of the University of Tokyo's FLH	70
Figure 4.4: Additional navigation links of the University of Tokyo's FLH	70
Figure 4.5: Mainframe of the University of Tokyo's FLH	71
Figure 4.6: Three foreign students	73
Figure 4.7: A foreign student's testimony	74
Figure 4.8: Combining past with present	75
Figure 4.9: The top-page of Ishikawa Prefectural University	77
Figure 4.10: The Graduate School link to admissions	80
Figure 4.11: A/B Errors	81
Figure 4.12: The photograph square 'News'	83
Figure 4.13: Access to Hokusho University's FLHs	85
Figure 4.14: Hokusho University's English FLH	86
Figure 4.15: Outline of Departments	88
Figure 4.16: Bottom part of Hokusho University's FLH	89
Figure 4.17: The top-page photograph	90

## List of Tables

Table 3.1: The different elements within a semiotic analysis of FLHs	41
Table 3.2: Blank assessment form for semiotic analysis	46
Table 3.3: Producers' profiles	49
Table 3.4: Student profiles	50
Table 4.1: The institutions and their rankings used for a semiotic analysis	66
Table 4.2: Identifying the denotative elements	67
Table 5.1: An abbreviated profile of the producers' HEIs	93

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

(Reflections from an international student) *When I first came to Japan it was very hard. I had a culture shock. It was not only the language, even when I tried to use something, the Internet or get documents, because I don't understand Japanese there was literally nil in the English language. When I come [here] nobody is around, it is holiday time, and everybody is away. So, I go to the website, and my survival for the next few days will depend on the webpage and the university will provide that. So, it will tell me about the university, the map of the university...where I should go and where I shouldn't go. What is accessible to me, and what is not... The map of the city. Where is the closest grocery store, ... post office, ... hospital; it will all be in there while I wait for the university to open its offices, to come in and give me the booklet for the orientation week. The basic information [will be in this booklet] where should I go, where is the bus, and how to use it, in case of emergency where is the exit. And that's not there [on the website] and there is no booklet. And if you are an assigned student, here to do research in English, this is the webpage for you. This is the requirement for graduation. But it's not there...This is the rubric for you to follow... Pre-orientated. And then, when the university opens and the programme begins you get additional information, but you've already had a chance to acquaint yourself with some good information...When I try to type in [institution name] to get some basic information, the homepage had press English...and I didn't get far...literally I didn't get far, because there was nothing there. Even going to the dormitory. You're shown the refrigerator, but there weren't any other information...this is how you turn the gas on...this is how you turn the washing machine on. I had to swallow the tears coming down my throat. That was the moment I experienced true culture shock. I was just unable to do any basic stuff. It was all like a baby.*

In my eighteen years of teaching English in Japan, I have found that many international students in Japan face problems over and above their linguistic challenges in procuring information that they require to function at university. As the quotation above, from an international student participant within this study illustrates, the root of these problems does not necessarily lie with the students' abilities to use the Internet to perform information searches. The experience described above suggests that the university homepage should have made a difference for this international student, but it did not, and instead, left her feeling frustrated and isolated.

### 1.1 Communication within the Internationalisation of Higher Education

Within higher education (HE), two factors that are influencing how a higher education institution (HEI) communicates with prospective international students are

internationalisation and advances in technology. In HE, internationalisation is understood as the process through which an HEI integrates a global dimension within its infrastructure (Knight, 2006). This is a complex process which influences a wide range of activities within the structure of an HEI including the way programmes develop, and marketing strategies (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011; Shin & Harman, 2009). Furthermore, as HE increasingly responds to public and private pressures for transparency and accountability, along with reduced funding from national governments, there is also a trend for HE to incorporate a business operational style (Hazelkorn, 2017; Marginson, 2014). When this is considered alongside the increase in international student mobility over the last decade, the way an HEI markets its programmes to these students and communicates with them is gaining in importance (Börjesson, 2017).

HEIs have not only been experiencing changes in how they market themselves due to internationalisation. Technological changes have influenced how information is searched for and obtained (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). Within the international HE market, university webpages have become a gateway for HEIs to make a connection to prospective international students (Elliott & Robinson, 2012; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012). The various ways a webpage is constructed and subsequently read contributes to how meanings are attributed to it (Callahan, 2006). Therefore, it is important that HEIs understand how their webpages are communicative to various stakeholders, including international students. Furthermore, as the use of the Internet has become part of the norm in searching for information, this has influenced users' expectations of webpage design. Internet users are expecting webpages to conform to established design construction (Murthy, Bedajit, Das, & Rahman, 2011). A webpage that conforms to design construction promotes user friendliness, through providing direction and access to specific information. As is evident in the opening quotation, international students turn to university webpages as authoritative sources of information, expecting an HEI to provide a range of information, which would facilitate them to function within an unfamiliar HE environs.

### **1.1.1 Pressures on Japanese HE to internationalise**

Within Japanese HE there is distinct political and market pressure to appear to be implementing internationalisation projects (Ishikura, 2015; Ota, 2014; Yonezawa,

2011). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) is providing grants to universities to develop educational programmes that are attractive to international students (Stigger, 2018a). This also includes a wide range of scholarships to support international students studying in Japan under the 300,000 Foreign Student Plan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.). Additionally, in many Asian nations, the use of English is understood as a “cultural resource” within a nation’s internationalisation project (Phan, 2013, p. 160). While this has influenced educational policies on foreign language (FL) development in Japan (Yoshikawa, 2016), it has also led to a perception that the use of English equates to being international (Hashimoto, 2000, 2013). The focus on increasing the international student population, and the continual efforts by MEXT to improve English education, are directly connected to the Japanese government’s attempts to develop Japan as a knowledge economy and to be active in the international education arena (Rose & McKinley, 2017). Yet, despite this push to develop as a knowledge economy within the internationalisation of HE, not all HEIs have an infrastructure to extensively support international students. This is causing tension within the Japanese HE system.

## **1.2 Researcher Position and Assumptions**

I am concerned about the level of attention HEIs direct towards international students studying in Japan, and how this is influencing how these students are developing as functioning students. Part of developing an identity as an international student is being able to develop skills to function within the HE environment. Within this context, the development of webpages in FLs – the foreign language homepage (FLH) – gains its importance. As a first step in communication, the FLH should be empowering prospective international students so that they have the necessary information that they need to make informed decisions (Zhang & O’Halloran, 2012). In the current educational climate in Japan, which is about opening the HE system to international students, I assume that the degree to which a FLH has been developed, does have consequences for international students. However, these consequences not only concern students but also have implications for the Japanese HE system. My concern is focused on the way current practices are affecting the image of Japanese HE as internationalised.

As an international faculty member in Japan, I identify with some of the experiences that international students have encountered. As a foreigner living in Japan, I have experienced the frustration of not finding pertinent information, where in my cultural knowledge I would expect to find it. Teaching in a different environment from the one I have grown out of has meant that I must understand cultural differences so as to provide students with the information they need to develop their knowledge. However, part of my additional duties within the university environment is to proofread translated documents prepared for international audiences. These documents often make use of unique English phrases, which impede comprehension. When I point out these phrases, administration is often reluctant to change the wording, as the English used is reflective of Japanese usage. The fact that the English translation is incomprehensible is inconsequential. These experiences have led me to understand that in the professional stance of an HEI, it is important to understand cultural differences in information presentation, particularly when attempting to attract international students. As the opening quotation suggests, international students are not only turning to the HEI's website for information concerning their course of study, but also are looking for information to help facilitate their transition into Japanese culture.

In this research, my primary position is that of an insider. I work within the Japanese HE system and am striving to uncover practices that are broadly concerned with how Japanese HEIs are communicating with international students (Hanson, 2013). While there have been numerous occasions where I have found that international students need help beyond my capacity as their teacher, a particular situation came to my attention in the spring of 2015. At this time, an international student entered the English Department at my university as a Master student. Upon receiving a scholarship from Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO), an independent administrative institution under MEXT, this student was told that she could choose between two different universities to study at: my university or one in Tokyo. She chose my university as it is smaller and therefore she thought it would offer a more nurturing learning environment. However, upon entering the master's programme, she found that many professors refused to allow her to enrol in their classes, which were required for graduation, because she did not have Japanese language skills. Not only were these teachers refusing to allow her to take their classes, they were

refusing to consider different study options for her (Personal communication, April 2015). This student's experiences, along with the barriers that I found as I attempted to help her, made me consider how communication is evolving within the university between administration and teachers, and between different faculties. However, this experience has also led me to assume that overall Japanese HEIs, particularly on their webpages, are not as supportive to international students as they could be. In challenging this assumption, I am also an outsider in this research. I am considering the importance of the role the university has in its communications with students under a national educational policy which is about attracting international students to study in Japan, and how this communication is influencing the students' actual experiences – an area that is not directly attached to my role within my HEI. My role in the research is more fully discussed in 3.7.

### **1.3 Rationale for Study**

Drawing from the introductory quotation and my professional experiences with international students, there seems to be variations in how students are able to access information on Japanese HEI's FLHs. I question whether the way different webpages develop is in relation to their proposed use by the university, its intended audience, or both. Webpages have become symbolic of social technological advances in modern society, yet as a tool within international HE the importance of university webpages is often overlooked (Elliott & Robinson, 2012; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). I further question whether the mere presence of a webpage is symbolic of the modern internationalised HEI, or must this symbolic value be actualised through the information placed on an HEI's webpage? One way to understand how a FLH reflects an HEI's internationalisation is through a comparison between different FLHs according to how informative international students find them, and their ease of use. The way that a website develops could be representative of how an HEI is processing change (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012). An awareness how FLHs are developing meaning could also contribute to an understanding of how an HEI is structurally incorporating an internationalisation project. Within the HE system, how a FLH is understood as communicative is garnered not only through how different stakeholders find them informative, but also in comparison to other FLHs. Accordingly, the meaning embedded in a FLH is relational to how other HEIs are developing these webpages.

There may be resistance by certain HEIs to internationalise their structures and programmes. At such institutions, they may place minimal or inadequate information on their FLH yet have a wealth of information on their Japanese homepage. My professional experiences and the opening quotation suggest that there are not only contradictions with access to information for international students, but these are influencing the students' study experiences in Japan. This has led me to consider the ways that potentially negative experiences of international students in Japan, such as identified above, could be alleviated. Perhaps part of the problems that students are experiencing stem from an initial miscommunication between the university and the student. As the Internet is an initial source for information searches, I am concerned with how these webpages are communicating to international students. I find myself questioning what the purpose of the FLH is, and how this purpose differs according to the perspectives of the webpages' developers and the international students who are using them. Therefore, I wished to examine FLHs at Japanese HEIs using a sociological analytical framework to understand the processes underlying their development and the messages that students are reading in them. As a researcher, I wanted to understand how FLHs at HEIs are a cultural phenomenon as sites of meaning, which are a contributing part of the functioning of the whole university. As a practitioner, understanding the tensions and contradictions within FLH development could inform their further development to meet the information needs of international students, which is of importance in an educational system that is attempting to develop as a regional hub for international HE.

#### **1.4 Thesis Overview**

Evolving from the situation and questions posed above, this study will address how FLHs have been developed by Japanese HEIs; how they are subsequently decoded by international students; and how this contributes to the meaning of the internationalisation of Japanese HE. Through examining different FLHs, at high-, mid-, and low-ranking Japanese HEIs, I aim to understand how FLHs contribute to an education system which is increasingly focused on attracting international students.

The thesis has been sequentially organised. Chapter 2, the literature review, begins by examining the internationalisation of HE in general and specifically within the

context of Japan. Then it introduces Bourdieu's field theory and presents the research questions for this study.

Chapter 3 first presents a deeper discussion of my research rationale. First it introduces semiotics as a methodological framework to perform a visual analysis of FLHs. Then the participants are introduced and the procedures for data collection and analysis are outlined. The chapter ends with a discussion of ethical concerns.

Chapter 4 begins by outlining how the different components within a FLH contribute to its meaning. Then, the semiotic analysis of FLHs at three different ranking HEIs is presented. This analysis provides a basis for understanding the interview data gathered from the producers of FLHs and international students.

The next three chapters present the research data from the participants. Chapter 5 focuses on the development of FLHs from the producer's perspective. Chapter 6 presents the reception of FLHs by students. These analyses are further developed and extended in Chapter 7, through a synthesis of the producers and students' responses concerning how FLHs are communicative of the symbolic value of the internationalisation of Japanese HEIs.

Chapter 8 presents reflections on my learning process, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for further FLH development. Combined, this analysis reveals the tensions and contradictions regarding information that is being made available to prospective international students, and the larger significance of webpage development within the internationalisation project of Japanese HE concerning the welcoming of international students.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Review**

This thesis examines how Japanese HEIs are engaging in the internationalisation of HE. The focus is on how Japanese HEIs are developing their FLHs and how these webpages are interpreted by international students. To set the context for this research, this chapter first reviews the literature on internationalisation with regards to change within HE and competition for international students. This includes contextualising the research setting through a review of the internationalisation of HE in Asia, and the role of rankings and competition within the internationalisation of Japanese HE. This background information is important as it influences the information found on Japanese HEI's FLHs, which also shapes the information that international students would expect to find on a university website. The review then introduces Bourdieu's field theory as the main theoretical lens of this thesis. The chapter ends by outlining the research questions.

### **2.1 Discourse on the Internationalisation of Higher Education**

Many HEIs in Asia are restructuring to enhance their global competitiveness (Choi, 2016; Yonezawa, 2010). One area where this is particularly evident is in the development of educational programmes to attract international students. Within this, many HEIs are developing and modifying their webpages, as an easily assessable public source of information (Elliott & Robinson, 2012; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). At most Asian universities English is not a medium of instruction accordingly, to be competitive at the global level and attractive to an international student body, these HEIs are developing not only new programmes to support international students, but also an infrastructure in English (Ng, 2012; Yonezawa, 2010). Within this context, internationalisation and globalisation have become key terms (Stigger, 2018b). Understanding the discourse that these terms evoke, influences the interpretation of how HEIs are developing and subsequently communicating the incorporation of internationalisation projects.

#### **2.1.1 Globalisation and internationalisation**

The definitions of globalisation and internationalisation within HE are multifaceted. Globalisation is often described as a process of increased interconnectivity between nations through the movement of people, ideas, values, knowledge and the economy across borders (Knight, 2004, 2008; de Wit, 2014). This suggests that interaction at

the global level is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Within HE, globalisation can be understood as an umbrella which influences how HEIs develop concerning the sharing of ideas, values, knowledge, and competition. Under this umbrella, internationalisation is typically discussed as the strategic response to the goals of globalisation. Internationalisation translates into the policies and practices of different bodies within a nation, including HE, that are adopted to cope within the global community (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Within HE, internationalisation is often associated with teaching and research practices (Knight, 2004), and influences educational activities including the raising of standards, increasing access to HE, and improving assessment (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). A common component of this is programme development, including study abroad programmes and the enrolment of international students (Ota, 2014; Stigger, 2018b). It should be recognised that the internationalisation process is now considered to be central to an HEI's development of education quality and social contributions, and it is understood as the intentional actions by an HEI to do this (de Wit, Hunter, Howard, & Egron-Polak, 2015). Accordingly, internationalisation is a continuing process, which changes overtime within an HE system (Knight, 2004).

### **2.1.2 Competition**

Change is the root of internationalisation, within HE, in response to increased global interconnection. This, along with decreased financial support from the public sector has placed increased emphasis on competition (Altbach, 2014; Yonezawa, 2011). Competition is increasingly found in programme development that is specifically targeting the enrolment of international students (Bartram, 2007). Study abroad programmes and educational institutions vying for top scholars are not new (Knight, 2014). However, over the last decade there has been a drastic increase in the number of students studying abroad (Börjesson, 2017; Stigger 2018b). This has partially contributed to the commercialisation of HE (Healey, 2008), in a bid to attract international students. What is different from the past, is that as HEIs are increasingly having to find independent sources of funding, attracting international students is increasingly being connected to educational policies concerning internationalisation and the financial stability of an HEI (de Wit, 2014; Stigger, 2018b). This has influenced the development of programmes of study. Whether intentional or not, the development of internationalisation projects that are based on

attracting international students, has resulted in the values of internationalisation being connected to competition through the commercialisation of HE (Hazelkorn, 2011; Li & Roberts, 2012). A consequence of this is that HE is developing business-like international commercial strategies. Yet, in developing internationalisation strategies, these strategies cannot merely be adopted within HE, they must be contextually adapted.

## **2.2 Internationalisation: From a Business to an HE Perspective**

Within business there are said to be four stages of internationalisation (Management Paradise, 2010; Melin, 1992):

- 1) Domestic – A business operates exclusively domestically.
- 2) Expansion – A business expands into markets across borders, but production remains at home.
- 3) Subsidiaries or Joint Ventures – Some production and operations have been moved across borders.
- 4) Multinational Operations – Assembly and production facilities have expanded to several countries worldwide, and decision making has been decentralised.

Most businesses, when they expand internationally, do product assessment. This means that as a business expands abroad, it utilises information, knowledge, and advice as to how its products or services should develop or adapt for targeted customers (Hitt, Bierman, Uhlenbruck, & Shimizu, 2006). To do this successfully requires that a business capitalises on the knowledge and advice of its all employees, not just management. This should mean that not only has management gained support from its employees for the internationalisation project, but also interprets the role of its employees as valuable to the project (Hitt et al., 2006). The degree to which a business gathers and utilises support from all its employees is said to be a key indicator of the success of its internationalisation project (Delaney, n.d.; Nummela, Saarenketo, Puumalainen, 2004), which subsequently contributes to the business's competitive edge in the new market.

In HE, the business approach to internationalisation cannot merely be adopted by an HEI, it must be adapted if it is to lead to successful practices. An HEI's development is influenced by its integral part of a nation's public sector and the fact that HE is subjected to governmental policies (Choi, 2016). Accordingly, the four stages of internationalisation for business must be adjusted and be "generic enough" to suit the nature and environment of HE (Knight, 2014, p. 76). Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that an HEI would be implementing several of these processes at the same time, and not necessarily in the same order. The above four stages would transform in HE to loosely become the following processes (Elliott & Robinson, 2012; Li & Roberts, 2012):

Cross-border supply – The development of Online education.

Consumption abroad – The development of study abroad programmes.

Personnel – Academic mobility through faculty or research exchanges.

Commercial presence – The development of branch or satellite campus.

In these four processes, the various ways in which internationalisation is defined can be seen. The first two processes are concerned with adjusting programmes and the movement of students. *Cross-border supply*, also referred to as "would-be internationalisation" (Yonezawa, 2014, p. 60), relates to programme mobility, which is realised through distant or online education made available to students abroad. With *consumption abroad*, which is commonly known as a competency stage, the focus is on the development of skills and knowledge by students, and their attitudes and values towards internationalisation, to enhance a nation's global competition (Marginson, 2014; Ng, 2012). This stage is characterised by the development of study abroad or exchange programmes. *Personnel* is concerned with how the values of the internationalisation of HE are being adopted by those within HE and can be referred to as an ethos approach. This is typically achieved through activities, policies and procedures such as teaching, research, and service (Knight, 2004). This can also be understood as an "organi[s]ational approach" and is often partly realised through the movement of academics through teaching or researching abroad (Elliott & Robinson, 2012, p. 159; Li & Roberts, 2012). *Commercial presence* is a challenge for most HEIs. Commitment at this level from the HEI increases dramatically, as it is concerned with institutional mobility and is realised through joint venture activities

between two HEIs (Ng, 2012). This is typically achieved through the establishment of satellite or branch campuses, and great emphasis is placed on programme development (Tadaki & Tremewan, 2013). In an assessment of the process of the internationalisation of HE, the first three approaches are most easily achieved, whilst the fourth would be the most difficult. As it requires the most commitment from the HEI, it is arguable that very few universities reach *commercial presence*.

An effect of the internationalisation of HE is that it is not just an activity to develop individuals intellectually, but rather HE has become connected to economics as an internationally-tradable product (Barnett, 2004; Hazelkorn, 2017; Teichler, 1996, 2004). The internationalisation project will not be prioritised in the same way by all institutions within a nation's HE system, therefore different institutions will display different processes of internationalisation (Marginson, 2008).

### **2.2.1 Rankings**

Quality and methods to assess this are an integral part of how HE is developing an internationalisation perspective. Within this context worldwide rankings have been gaining recognition, and this has contributed to the conception of the world-class university. The world-class university typically is a high-ranking research orientated HEI (Stigger, 2018b; Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015). These HEIs generate innovative educational technologies and knowledge across disciplines which contribute to the competitiveness of a nation internationally (Altbach, 2009; Olson & Slaughter, 2014; Stigger, 2018b).

The ranking system originally developed to provide information to students regarding different HEIs (Eaton, 2014; Hazelkorn, 2011). However, this system has evolved and now ranking bodies, such as Times Higher Education and Webometrics, not only assess education quality but also research in terms of output and impact (Salmi, 2009; Stigger 2018b). This scope of assessment has influenced the commercialisation of HE, and ranking has subsequently become equated with an institution's prestige as well as its global competitiveness (Hazelkorn, 2017; Stigger, 2018b).

### **2.3 Competition within the Context**

Turning specifically to the Asian context, a brief examination of the internationalisation of HE in South Korea (hence forth Korea) and Japan will facilitate in understanding change within these competing systems. These two countries were chosen for comparison because they share historical similarities in the impetus to develop their HE systems as international, and both are vying to be regional educational hubs.

In Korea and Japan, the internationalisation of education has been a hot topic since the late 1990s. The reason for this is often connected to the financial crises of that time (Byram, 2008; Mouer, 2004; Park, 2009). In the late 1990s, the Korean and Japanese governments both introduced a variety of policies connected to FL learning to enhance their competitive edge within the worldwide economic marketplace. The purpose was to develop as knowledge economies, and to develop their HE systems as regional hubs under the auspices of internationalisation (Choi, 2016; Stigger, 2018a). Since the early 2000s, both Korea and Japan have systematically focused on increasing the number of international students enrolled within their HEIs. The most recent of these initiatives in Korea are a series of educational funding projects, starting with the World Class University Project (2009-2012), which was subsequently merged with a series of Brain Korea 21 Projects (Byun & Kim, 2011; Kang, 2015; Stigger 2018a). Additionally, the Korean government is currently attempting to develop English as a medium of instruction for core courses at all universities (Kang, 2015).

The approach to developing world-class universities in Japan has been slightly different from that of Korea. Under special internationalisation projects, select high-ranking universities have been chosen to receive funding to develop international programmes (Stigger, 2018a). These projects include the Global30 (G30) Project (2009-2014), which was later replaced by the Top Global University (TGU) Project (2014-2023). The purpose of these projects is to develop special programmes of study specifically for international students studying in Japan, to be taught in English (Ishikura, 2015; Stigger, 2018a). While both Korea and Japan approach the internationalisation of HE slightly differently, a driving force behind the internationalisation of HE is government funding.

In both Korea and Japan, after the financial crises, the connection between English language learning and economics became more prominent. Educational policies increasingly started focusing on marketplace values. This marked the beginning of the continued emphasis on communicative English language instruction, along with the notion that students can become global citizens through developing critical thinking and creativity skills (Choi, 2016; Stigger, 2018b). These practices have enabled both the Korean and Japanese governments to utilise their education systems as a part of human capital formation (Stigger, 2018b). Yet, a consequence of this is that it is creating a division between universities (Hazelkorn, 2017; Yonezawa, 2014). On the one hand, there are the higher-ranking universities who are capable of extensive international interaction, and on the other hand there are the lower-ranking universities who cater to domestic students and have limited funds for internationalisation initiatives (Stigger, 2018b).

### **2.3.1 The role of English**

English has become a representation of internationalisation in Japanese HE. In many Asian nations, the use of English is seen as an instrument in “securing international competitiveness” and integration within the global economy (Choi, 2016, p. 147; Tsui & Tollefson, 2007). Educational policies in Japan and Korea increasingly include the ideals of creating an “educational environment corresponding to globali[s]ation”; the “strengthening [of] English education” (MEXT, 2016, n.p.); and encouraging students to develop as “global citizens” (MEXT, 2014a, n.p.; MoE, n.d., n.p.). Within this context English education has become connected to international economic competitiveness, as well as contributing to the race, between Asian nations, to become regional hubs for international HE (Byun & Kim, 2011; Rose & McKinley, 2017; Stigger, 2018a).

It is here that it is important to note the role of English within the development of Japanese international interactions. Japanese national identity or *yamatodamashi* has developed from how Japan is different from western and other Asian countries (Kawai, 2009). Japan was never colonised by western nations. Between 1603-1854, Japan entered a period of self-imposed national isolation – *sakoku* which banned international contact between most Japanese and others. This severely restricted trade. During this period of isolation, the *yamatodamashi* of Japan developed and

flourished through many traditional cultural activities, such as the tea ceremony or sumo wrestling, which even today are seen as being uniquely Japanese. This notion of cultural uniqueness and how it contributed to Japanese national identity directly influenced how Japan redefined itself after World War II (Hashimoto, 2000). After the war, Japan realised that economic recovery and international competitiveness necessitated that change be modelled on Western business structures. However, these changes were incorporated while also emphasising traditional Japanese national identity values (Stigger, 2018b).

Historically, English education in Japan has been associated with how Japan can interact internationally, while also safeguarding its national cultural values (Seargeant, 2008). This has set up the situation where English is equated with something brought into Japan from the outside (Hashimoto, 2000). This has implications for policies concerning FL and Japanese language education in Japan, as there is a conflicting emphasis between encouraging the development of international and national citizenship (Hashimoto, 2009). English has become a political tool in Japan (Hashimoto, 2000), as it is advocated as a skill to promote social change and enhance Japan's international relations within the global economy (Stigger, 2018b). This can be seen in the type of English (British or American) emphasised in the Japanese education system, which as Liddicoat (2007) notes, is strongly linked to the economic market, particularly the dominant economic power holder. In this light, English use represents challenges and tensions within Japanese HE.

### **2.3.2 Japanese HEIs and internationalisation**

The ideals of what it means to internationalise has led to a stumbling block for the internationalisation of Japanese HEIs. In Japan, the use of English, which denotes the practice of internationalisation, is connected to economic reasons (Hashimoto, 2013). Additionally, many Japanese HEIs often follow internationalisation practices already developed in English speaking nations (Ng, 2012; Yonezawa, 2010). With the Japanese government focusing on rankings and developing world-class universities, this has translated into increasing pressures to attract international students and researchers. As Japan is a non-English speaking nation, to attract international students and researchers requires the development of an educational

system that can support them (Marginson, 2008; Yonezawa, 2010). This is where the importance of special funding projects for the internationalisation of Japanese HE (the G30 and the TGU projects), as a second stage step of the internationalisation of Japanese HE can be seen, as these projects are intricately connected to increasing the use of English within the HE system (Rose & McKinley, 2017). Japanese HEIs are partially dependent upon the government for financial support to internationalise. However, this is also creating a gap between universities that are developing English programmes and those who are not. Competition to be a part of the global internationalisation of HE has led to a situation where Japanese HEIs must increasingly be visible. Thus, Japanese HEIs are beginning to realise that the role of English in HE is not confined only to programme development and research, but also to how the HEI communicates to prospective international stakeholders.

The process of internationalisation is influential throughout HE. Internationalisation has increased the hierarchical differentiation between HEIs, particularly with regards to the competition for funding and prestige (Hazelkorn, 2017). With a wider range of international study options, students are ever more concerned about gaining comparative information regarding different HEIs (Börjesson, 2017). Additionally, HEIs must consider how they are connecting with international students. This can be exemplified by the name change of a higher-ranking Japanese HEI. Kinki University, as it is still known in Japanese, officially changed its name to Kindai University in April 2016, because the university president was worried about how its name is being received in the English-speaking community (Japan Times, 2016). Although an extreme example, this nevertheless highlights that Japanese HEIs are increasingly concerned about their image and prestige abroad. Furthermore, higher-ranking Japanese HEIs are also attempting to change the scheduling of terms from a semester system, which starts in April, to a quarter system. This is to encourage Japanese students to study abroad, and to be more welcoming to international students (Nikkei Asian Review, 2014). While, “rankings have arguably and controversially become the accountability and transparency instrument” from which students gather information concerning different HEIs, image is also understood to be of importance for international students (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 13). In this, HEIs must consider how they market themselves and what they are communicating to an international audience. Within this lies the importance of the development of a

website, which must communicate effectively and contribute to the competitive edge of an HEI.

### **2.3.3 The role of management**

As with the internationalisation of business, the success of an internationalisation project within HE depends on how university leaders, administration and teachers all interact with each other. Barnett (2004) and Morrill (2007) discuss that a contributing cause to the fragmentation within HE is its massification. The management system within HE also contributes to this fragmentation (Stigger, 2018b). In Japan, management typically takes a top-down styled approach. MEXT is in the highest position of authority within Japanese education. This governing body restricts authority to the top administration of an HEI (Huang, 2016; Ogawa, 2002), which further affects power dynamics at all levels within the HEI. To complicate this, managers and administration level staff are frequently rotated to other positions within the HEI (Stigger, 2018b). While this might lead to greater surface level knowledge of the HEI, it has contributed to not only the reduction of authority and access to information, but also community building within the HEI (Ogawa, 2002; Lee, 2005).

The process of internationalisation, as noted above, requires institutional wide change. As MEXT is increasingly focusing on developing the Japanese education system as an Asian hub for HE (Rose & McKinley, 2017; Stigger, 2018a), it is important that consideration is given as to how this change can be achieved. In the Japanese HE system, the rotation of staff and leaders could be counterproductive, as with each rotation, an understanding of the position and how it fits within the larger goals of the institution must be learnt. Instead of this promoting institutional loyalty, it has been argued that rotation fosters an individual success mentality over an institutional success mentality (Branson, 2008, McCrostie in Bothwell, 2017; Simpson, 1985). In a situation where different departments within an HEI are increasingly fragmented, this mentality contributes to uneven power distributions, which influence how HEIs are developing internationalisation projects, and subsequently how they can communicate them.

## **2.4 The Function of Websites**

The Internet has become paramount in communication practices in the social media age. From a business perspective, the Internet is a tool where prospective customers can access information. Furthermore, a web search is often an initial source of information for stakeholders interested in various organisations (Elliott & Robinson, 2014). Accordingly, in business, websites are key in maintaining public relations and as marketing tools (Chang, 2011). Past research on FL webpage development by businesses typically focuses on how these pages inform viewers about the business and aim to turn viewers into customers (Terry, 2006; Viehland & Zhao, 2008). Analysis of these websites address the degree of variation in style, within the standardisation of webpage format and construction (Murthy et al., 2011); how the webpage responds to the market economy (Callahan & Herring, 2012; Terry, 2006); or the visual layout of webpages from an economic perspective (Kartal & Uzun, 2010; Viehland & Zhao, 2008). Here quality is of importance, and this is assessed in relation to webpages that others have produced.

In an educational setting the focus of website analysis is slightly different from that of a business' website. In an analysis of HEIs' websites, the focus is on understanding how the website connects to a specified audience, international students, through meeting their information needs. Past research on HEIs' websites have addressed how the university positions itself within global HE (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013), and the marketing of specific programmes to international students (Elliott & Robinson, 2012). However, there appears to be a gap in the research concerning how non-English speaking nations, are attempting to attract international students through communicating to them in English within the internationalisation of HE.

## **2.5 Using Bourdieu's Concept of Field as an Analytical Framework**

In HE, the global setting and the emergence of the Internet are influencing change. While the internationalisation of HE is often discussed as the transmission of knowledge and people across borders, the practices of many HEIs tend to be grounded in tradition (Marginson, 2008). Practices within HE must develop and evolve in response to the increased influence of internationalisation in education. Within this, distinct patterns of change can be seen, and these patterns become more pronounced when they are addressed in terms of power and inequality.

For Bourdieu, theory was a method to understand and question practice. Practice refers to the strategies and methods of interaction used by people in different social settings which are defined by their role and position within that setting (Bathmaker, 2015; Marginson, 2008). Bourdieu was concerned with the relationality of practice with regards to power in defined contexts. Analysing a variety of social practices including French education, Bourdieu specifically addressed how practice reinforces inequality (Bathmaker, 2015; Grenfell & James, 2004). While Bourdieu's early research in HE examined autonomy and independence of social practice, his later work focused on inequality through the influences on HE from outside of the education sector (Bathmaker, 2015; Deer, 2003). This focus on inequality has facilitated other researchers in using Bourdieu's theoretical concepts to analyse the influences of internationalisation in HE (Kupfer, 2011; Marginson, 2008; Naidoo, 2004).

In his field theory, Bourdieu analysed practice within different spaces of social interaction, which he referred to as fields (see below). These spaces of social interaction are bounded spaces which enables an analysis of practice, through actions – what was said or what happened. Bourdieu was interested in how practice transformed and reinforced positions within the field, particularly positions of power and status (Bourdieu, 1986; 1989). By defining practice within a bounded space, it enables analysis to focus on 'how' practice is developing, and how those within this space are attempting to maintain or improve their positions. One such practice that I am interested in, is how HEIs communicate with prospective international students. I am interested in what Japanese HEIs are communicating through their FLHs in the arena of the internationalisation of HE. A Bourdieusian analysis of FLHs would shed light on the various challenges different HEIs have in using these webpages to communicate with international students, and how this is creating and/ or maintaining inequalities between HEIs.

### **2.5.1 Defining concepts**

To utilise Bourdieu's field theory in the analysis of FLHs, it is necessary to define his key concepts. As noted above, Bourdieu was interested in stratification and domination within different areas of society. Four central notions in Bourdieu's theorisation focus on power, agency, position and position-taking (Marginson, 2008).

These concepts form the basis of how social practices can be analysed. The social world, according to Bourdieu, consists of a number of different spaces, including art, religion, work, and education. Bourdieu refers to these specific spaces of social practices as fields. Each field has its own rules of practice, knowledge, and resources which those within the field use to maintain or improve their position. Rather like a Russian matryoshka doll - wooden dolls of descending sizes that can be placed within each other - a larger field can be divided into subfields. Subfields adhere to the logic of the larger field, but have their own governing practice (Thomson, 2008). In this research, education would be the larger field, in which HE would be a subfield. Attention, in this research, will focus on one area within this subfield, the internationalisation of HE through an analysis of Japanese HEI's FLHs.

There are several different metaphors to describe the conceptualisation of Bourdieu's field, including football (see Thomson, 2008). The game of football is played in a bounded area - this is the field. Playing the game requires that those in the field follow the rules of the game, which Bourdieu refers to as doxa. How players play the game depends on their positions and their understanding of their role within the game. This is determined by habitus, the players' prior experience, knowledge, disposition, and status (Thomson, 2008, p. 68-69). As a game is competitive, players use various strategies, which Bourdieu (1982/1991; 1986) refers to as capital, to maintain or enhance their position. These capitals are economic, cultural, social, and symbolic. In practice, a field continually develops in response to changes within and outside of the field.

The four forms of capital facilitate in the analysis of practice within a field by showing the relationship of social inequality. Economic capital are resources which are immediately and directly convertible into financial assets (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital refers to general knowledge such as technical skills, verbal and artistic abilities, and level of education that players use to enhance mobility, or position, within the field (Bourdieu, 1986; Kerr & Robinson, 2016). Social capital is the understanding of the resources needed to build networks of authority and support, and connections, and is influenced by the initial position of players within the field (Bourdieu, 1986). The fourth capital, symbolic capital, Bourdieu defines in two ways. It is defined as prestige or reputation; or as a meta capital, which is the accumulated

value of the economic, cultural and social capital and is directly connected to value and power within the overall field (Bourdieu, 1994; Bourdieu 1997 in Kerr & Robinson, 2016, p. 703; Couldry, 2003).

### **2.5.2 A field analysis**

So how does this translate into an analysis of practice in this research? HE is a subfield, and within this is the internationalisation of HE. As the internationalisation of HE is redefining HE, the rules of the game are changing. Internationalisation is a force behind the development of new strategies by HE to cope with changes within the subfield. The players in international HE are no longer just those working within an HEI, but include policy makers, those within the business market (Lingard, Rawolle, & Taylor, 2005), and international students. These players each bring their own knowledge about what internationalisation within HE should be offering. This is creating a struggle within HE, where HEIs are vying for recognition of being international. One area that this struggle is seen in is in the competition to attract international students. This has led to the prominent use of English, as a tool by HE systems particularly those in Asia, to increase to their visibility at the international level (Yonezawa, 2010). A bi-product of competition and the use of English is the increasing divide in prestige between HEIs and the notion of world-class (Tadaki & Tremewan, 2013). In the ever-developing subfield of HE with regards to internationalisation, players accrue and utilise capital through the awarding of grants (economic capital), and the skills and resources available to university workers that enable them to respond to HE policies and initiatives (cultural capital), which subsequently influence how the HEI makes connections to the wider community (social capital) (Kupfer, 2011; Marginson, 2008; Naidoo, 2004; Waters & Brooks, 2011). These all contribute to the image and positioning of the HEI within the international community (symbolic capital).

Webpages are a way that HEIs are attempting to increase their presence in the international HE community. This research addresses how and what FLHs are contributing to the image of an HEI, within the internationalisation project of HE in Japan. Within this, the focus is on the players' acquisition of cultural and symbolic capital, as this contributes to the recognition of the social positioning of an HEI within the internationalisation of HE. This positioning is of importance as it is central to the

analysis of how FLHs communicate an HEI's internationalisation project as interpreted by international students. Cultural capital is the resources that those within an HEI can use to develop the university's relational position within HE. In FLH development, cultural capital would include the infrastructure of an HEI – that is, how its management system, administration, and teachers all interact and the resources available for webpage development. Cultural capital would also refer to the experiences of those within an HEI in terms of the knowledge of and access to the type of information international students would require, as well as knowledge of computer programmes and universally accepted principles in webpage structure/design. The skills required by those developing an HEI's FLH to utilise the cultural capital resources they have access to, would influence the finished product, the published webpage. How the published webpages are subsequently interpreted, contributes to the symbolic capital of a HEI as internationalised.

Cultural capital can assume three forms. These forms are: embodied – in the form of dispositions of the mind and body; objectified – in the form of material cultural goods, such as books or machines; and institutionalised – credentials that are symbolic of competence or prestige (Bourdieu, 1986). As a form of recognition (Kupfer, 2011), institutionalised cultural capital is of most relevance to an analysis of FLHs.

Recognition is important as it enables comparisons and the fixing of an exchange value, which facilitates in the conversion of cultural capital into symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Wacquant, 1998). This implies that strategies have been adopted by those within an HEI to maintain or develop (Kupfer, 2011) their institution's position with regards to internationalisation.

As a meta-capital, symbolic capital is in part dependent on the transformation of cultural capital to gain its perceived recognition or prestige. This would be concerned with how the information on a FLH contributes to the image of an HEI as informed and informative within the global HE arena. In this, it is important to remember that a field is uneven, and accordingly the "volume and the composition" of cultural capital that those within HEIs can access differs (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 48). Access to various volumes and compositions of cultural capital influences how it can be converted into prestige for a university. The different cultural resources available to those developing FLHs influence their value of recognition or prestige, the use of the

finished FLH as a source of information within HE, and how these webpages are interpreted by international students.

If FLHs are to be considered as a commercial commodity to attract international students, the information placed on these webpages must be easily accessed by students (Benson, 2006; Hesmondhalgh, 2006; Murthy et al., 2011). This would necessitate that a value is attached to the information that is found on FLHs. Value, according to Bourdieu is implicitly connected to belief, and this requires that standards, measures, and criteria for defining success have been agreed upon (Bolin, 2009). The symbolic capital in this research, therefore, develops through the interaction between how producers can develop FLHs as sources of information for international students, and their value by different players within the subfield of HE as a visual representation of the incorporation of an internationalisation project by an HEI. This, however, is also relational (Bourdieu, 1986; Wacquant, 2008) as what is considered as prestigious or well developed is measured against how other HEIs are constructing their FLHs. Accordingly, the ability to create webpages that international students can successfully navigate, as well as the purpose for developing these webpages, is influenced by how those at an HEI legitimise cultural capital, and how this contributes to the symbolic capital of their HEI as internationalised (Myles, 2010; Paolillo, 2007).

FLH development is one practice of an HEI's continued development, and this development is influenced in part by the HEI's location, its rank, the government, and internationalisation. These also contribute to relational positions of power within the HE system (Bathmaker, 2015; Marginson, 2008). The forms of capital that individuals within HEIs have or are able to access, would influence how their HEIs are able to interact within the wider HE system (Kupfer, 2011). This is influencing competition between different HEIs. Here ranking is of importance, as the reputation of an HEI is an indication of its social positioning and this also effects the distribution of resources. Within the internationalisation of Japanese HE, the history of international relationship development of the universities participating in the TGU project, has put them in a position of advantage over other HEIs. These prestigious HEIs have come to represent the established order (Bourdieu, 1982/1991; Kerr & Robinson, 2016), recognised as defining what practices are considered as

contributing to the internationalisation project of Japanese HEIs. In Japanese HE, competition is creating a situation where the different practices of HEIs concerning internationalisation can be said to be unevenly contributing to the subfield of HE. As FLHs are a part of practice in the internationalisation of HE, the ways in which cultural capital is utilised in the development of these webpages and how the webpages contribute to the image of an HEI as being international, warrants analysis.

## **2.6 The Research Aims and Questions**

There is a big push by MEXT to increase the number of international students studying in Japan (Hennings, & Mintz, 2015; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.). In response to this, FLHs are becoming more important. As a researcher, I am interested in how HEIs initially communicate with prospective international students to create a positive image of studying at their institution and in Japan. As a teacher, I am interested in how the knowledge of how FLHs at Japanese HEIs are developing, could be used to inform how these webpages could be further developed to foster a more welcoming environment for international students. Therefore, assessing the resources available to those individuals developing FLHs at Japanese HEIs, and how these are regulated by webpage conventions and the management of an HEI, could provide valuable insights into the internationalisation of Japanese HE. This would enable practical suggestions for improving communication with prospective international students.

Using Bourdieu's field theory, I will explore how FLHs are contributing to the meaning of Japanese HEIs as internationalised. To achieve this, the following questions will guide this research:

- 1) How do FLHs construct a discourse of internationalisation within Japanese HEIs?
- 2) How do the meanings inherent in FLHs vary according to institution rank?
- 3) What meanings are intended by the producers of FLHs, and how is this influenced by the context of their production?

- 4) How are these meanings of Japanese FLHs received by international student users?
- 5) What are the implications for practice?

## **2.7 Summary**

This chapter introduced the key concepts concerned with the development of FLHs at Japanese HEIs and their reception. First, internationalisation was defined as a process within the globalisation of HE and it was noted how this is influencing competition. Then, it was shown how HEIs are increasingly developing a business styled approach in response to adopting an internationalisation project, and within this how ranking, as a symbol of prestige, is gaining importance. Next, to set the context, the internationalisation of Asian HE was discussed in general, and special attention was given to both Korea and Japan. Turning specifically to Japan, the use of English was introduced to exemplify its unique role in the internationalisation of Japanese HE. Lastly, to facilitate a sociological examination of the development of FLHs at Japanese HEIs, Bourdieu's field theory was introduced. This chapter laid the foundations from which an analysis of FLHs at different HEIs can be performed relationally, and how FLHs facilitate interaction with prospective international students.

## **Chapter 3 Methods and Methodology**

The methodological approach for this research is the focus of this chapter. To analyse communication, it is necessary to identify three basic elements: the medium of transmission, the source – or the creator, and the receiver (Bignell, 2002; Hall, 1980). These three elements are at the epicentre of meaning-making, and within the analysis of FLHs with regards to the internationalisation of Japanese HE, data was collected from each of these elements. Turning first to the medium of transmission, the chapter introduces semiotics as a methodological approach. This includes a step-by-step explanation of a semiotic analysis. Next, the chapter introduces the research participants, the creators - those who are involved in developing the FLHs, the receivers - a specific group who use FLHs, and the data collection process. The chapter ends with a discussion of my position within this research and ethical considerations.

### **3.1 The Research Approach**

Recently, internationalisation has become a priority for many HEIs (Huang, 2016; Hazelkorn, 2017), and one consequence of this is that Japanese HEIs are explicitly attempting to put a visual face onto their internationalisation projects. I am interested in how FLHs are a part of the changing and evolving environment within HE. To understand this, a qualitative methodology was adopted. This entailed a descriptive-constructivist approach from which my participants' perspectives and experiences of FLHs could be understood (Cresswell, 2013), and the meaning-making of FLHs could be explored (Barthes, 1977). By taking a descriptive-constructivist approach, I allow the voice of my research participants to be heard, and in using their narratives I develop associations and meanings within my research context (Moses & Knutsen, 2007).

To comprehensively address my research objective, data collection was triangulated. In qualitative research, the triangulation of data extends the analysis and facilitates a more comprehensive understanding of the research subject (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006; Silverman, 2010). This would enable concrete suggestions (Caruth, 2013) for the practice of FLH development. Data for this research was collect from FLHs; interviews with producers – the FLH creators; and focus group discussions with international students – the receivers of FLHs. Analysis of FLHs will facilitate in

creating a visual representation of the different FLHs at Japanese HEIs. This will provide a foundation for the interview data, which will facilitate in a discussion of how FLHs are developing and being received. As a researcher-practitioner, this process is important to me, as the holistic nature of data triangulation could lead to specific recommendations for the continued development of FLHs.

## **3.2 Methods**

### **3.2.1 Semiotics**

The semiotic analysis lays the foundation for a discussion of FLHs. Semiotics is a visual analysis concerned with the relationships between signs and what they communicate to those who interpret them. A FLH is a sign. A sign, whether it is an image, text, or sound, is more than a means to illustrate. It is a discursive construction, which carries meaning, and this meaning is analysable (Lynn & Lea, 2005), as it is a representation of concepts and ideas. In any visual analysis, Rose (2012) warns that it is easy to unwittingly rely on unconscious analytic strategies. However, semiotics is a structured analytic technique that draws the researcher away from subjective visual interpretation. In a semiotic analysis, the different elements contained within a sign are addressed and their significance within the sign system are explained (Sebeok, 2001).

The semiotic analysis of FLHs facilitates an understanding of how Japanese HEIs are incorporating an internationalisation project into their infrastructure and how these webpages are influencing international students' initial experiences of studying abroad. In this research, semiotic analysis is used to answer the first research question: How do FLHs construct a discourse of internationalisation within Japanese HEIs? As there are differing and opposing schools of thought in semiotics, this requires defining the approach I used in this study and the boundary for analysis.

In the textual analysis of FLHs, I will take a social-constructionist approach to cultural semiotics. This approach addresses how language and images, as a sign-system, play a primary role in the construction of social reality (Barthes, 1957/1984; Bignell, 2002). In a semiotic analysis, the following points must be remembered (Maasik & Solomon, 2011, p. 22):

- 1) The meaning of a sign is relational. A sign's meaning is not found in itself, but in its relationship, both its differences and similarities to other signs within a defined system.
- 2) A sign has several layers of meaning. This includes its denotation (literal meaning) and its connotation (cultural associations). Semiotics is concerned with unpacking the connotative meaning.
- 3) The purpose of analysis is to assess the significance of how the connotations of the various elements within a sign combine to contribute to the mythic meaning of the sign, the way the sign has been structured to communicate a particular message.

### **3.2.2 Denotation, connotation and purpose**

A sign, as the basic unit of meaning has two parts, the signifier and the signified. The signifier is a sound or a mark (the material), and the signified is a concept, which combine to attribute meaning to a sign (Allen, 2003; Bignell, 2002). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is described by the denotation and connotation. The denotation is the literal meaning of the signifier. The connotation is the associations or emotional responses that are connected to the sign (the signified).

Barthes was concerned with how the denotations and the connotations together create a message. For example, if looking at a webpage, near the title bar you would see the signifier ; the signified, or concept 'movement/ going back' is not even questioned because we have become so accustomed to making this link to the meaning of this sign. The signifier and the signified have an arbitrary connection, yet, cultural conventions have cemented relationships that often appear so natural that we do not question their existence (Kennedy & Hills, 2009). Accordingly, a semiotic analysis is a two-stage process. The first stage is identifying the literal elements within the sign – the denotation, and then the second stage, the connotation, involves the cultural associations connected to the sign. It is by identifying the combination of these two elements that an interpretation of the sign can be attributed. To analyse how meaning is created in a sign requires analysis of these two separate elements so that the way they work together can allow the wider cultural associations to become visible.

The relationship between the different elements within signs are an integral part of language and how we communicate. A sign can trigger different connotations which are attached to it. For example, a white sandy beach in the Maldives is just a beach, - its denotation. However, as the Maldives is an expensive place to visit, it has the connotations of luxury and wealth. In advertising a particular brand of wine, where people are on a beach in the Maldives drinking wine, the advertisement would not only be denoting beach and wine, but also attaching the connotations of wealth and luxury, which by association with the Maldives are extended to the wine. This meaning by association is the mythic meaning (Bignell, 2002). Depending on the cultural knowledge of the receiver of the sign and the context it is received in, the connotations of wealth and luxury would not be associated with the wine if the image was of Brighton beach.

### **3.2.3 Mythic meaning**

A myth operates from an existing semiotic system, it takes a sign, which already has meaning attributed to it, and uses this as a signifier for a wider cultural concept (Barthes, 1957/1984), this would be a second-order analysis (Griffin, 2009). For example, one purpose of a Japanese HEI's homepage in the national language is to provide information about an HEI to the local population – a first order meaning. With the development of this same homepage in another language (a FLH), the interpretation of this image changes to an image of the HEI as international through the provision of information to non-Japanese speakers. What contributes to the myth in this research is that the FLH has become an expectation of practice, as in all Japanese HEIs should have a homepage in the national language as well as one that targets international students, but its connotative meaning has come to represent the nature of something else (Chandler, 2007; Gaines, 2010). The myth is that FLHs are a sign of the internationalisation of Japanese HEI.

### **3.2.4 The boundary for semiotic analysis**

Semiotics provides a framework from which a visual image can be assessed within an analytical structure. In exploring FLHs and understanding the connection between what students see and read, and how this contributes to the imagery of the HEI as international, it is necessary to delineate the boundary of analysis. In a visual analysis the technological and the compositional are primary elements. The

technological refers to the overall object under assessment. The compositional is more complex as it refers to the content of what is being assessed, such as colour and the spatial arrangement of the image (Rose, 2012), and how each of these are defined. Within this, part of the process of a semiotic analysis for Barthes is to define all the elements, the “minimal significant units” (1967, p. 48 in Chandler, 2007, p. 87), which combine and contribute to how the compositional elements influence the overall meaning of the sign.

How the different minimal significant units combine within a sign to differentiate it from other signs, are an integral part of how a sign develops meaning. A semiotic analysis of FLHs as signs includes how an HEI’s webpage should look and facilitate navigation (Zhang & O’Halloran, 2012). Furthermore, in the semiotic analysis of FLHs, the basic information that should appear on these pages as signs of the internationalisation of Japanese HE must be defined through the compositional categories. In this research the compositional categories were defined as: Structure/Content and Images. For each of these categories to contribute to the meaning of Japanese HEIs as having adopted an internationalisation project within their infrastructure, it is important to be very clear what the minimal significant units are within these categories. Table 3.1 outlines the minimal significant units for the compositional categories within the technological – the FLH. How the minimal significant units contribute to meaning within the compositional categories will now be explained.

**3.2.4.1 Structure/Content.** Structure/Content requires understanding what basic webpage layout is, and if the FLH under analysis follows this. However, Structure/Content also includes spatial relations, where key information is located, the number of subpages, and the appearance of the webpage. A webpage that is difficult to navigate would discourage use. It could connote a warning to international students that entering this type of institution might be difficult and the type of support they receive from the institution might be limited. The readability of the webpage is also of importance. Included within this are colour, font style and size. The use of specific colours can connote meaning by creating connections between the FLH as a visual sign and the HEI (Zhang & O’Halloran, 2013). As a

The technological: A FLH		
Compositional category	Minimal significant units	
FLH Structure/ Content	<p>Conventional placement of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Top bar information (logo, university name, search box, language navigation, other primary navigation links)</li> <li>- Footer bar information (return to top link, contact: address, telephone, email, copyright, update, navigation icon/ symbols)</li> </ul> <p>Spatial relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- right, left or center alignment, full window or half window, key information, higher/ lower within the webpage, center or on the periphery</li> </ul> <p>Inside / outside</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- key information for international students is on main page /easy to locate navigation links or contained within subpages</li> </ul> <p>Are there subpages?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- one page with all information, several pages</li> </ul> <p>Appearance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- easy to read (font type/ size, color, and contrast)</li> </ul> <p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- choice, accuracy/ proofread, machine translated</li> </ul> <p>Information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- General: about the institution, president's message/ institutional goals</li> <li>- Specific: Academics: programs, faculties, graduate school, research activities</li> <li>- Current/ prospective students, special programs, admission application/ entrance exams, fees (tuition, housing, medical), support (visa, life, studying Japanese, scholarships, careers/jobs, activities)</li> </ul> <p>Contact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- address, telephone number, email (general/ specific departments)</li> <li>- access (map/ train/ bus information), campus map</li> </ul>	<p>Extent present</p> <p style="text-align: center;"></p> <p>or</p> <p>Not present</p>
Images	<p>Photos: Alignment/ size</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- right, left, centered</li> <li>- full width of screen, framed</li> </ul> <p>Types: Buildings, things (libraries/ books, computers), Japanese cultural images (cherry blossoms, temples, Kimono, Mt. Fuji)</p> <p>People including students (Japanese/ non-Japanese), students only/ with faculty, position (full body, upper body, face), action (studying, talking, enjoying campus life)</p> <p>Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>still/ animated, focused/ unfocused</li> </ul> <p>Videos/ virtual tours</p>	<p>Connotation:</p> <p>The extent to which the ideals of internationalization have been integrated into institutional practice</p>

Table 3.1: The different elements within a semiotic analysis of FLHs

non-textual from, colour can contribute to inclusion/ exclusion as well as have emotional impacts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

The information should be accessible and relevant to the needs of the user. Here it must be noted that the users of webpages vary (Kartal & Uzun, 2010; Lynch & Horton, 2008). The users of a FLH may not only be prospective international students, but could also include foreign faculty or researchers, other universities abroad who might be interested in developing an inter-university relationship or exchange programme, or (international) investors. Additionally, language use can indicate the degree to which the institution is prepared to welcome and include international students (Tamatea, Hardy, & Ninnes, 2008). As Japanese HEIs are developing FLHs for non-Japanese students, language use can include accuracy. The semiotic analysis would consider if the language and punctuation used is correct, whether information specifically geared towards the non-Japanese student is readily available, and contact information. The degree of accuracy would indicate the level of interest an HEI has about its image, which subsequently indicates the HEI's concern for and preparedness to include international students within the institution.

**3.2.4.2 Images.** It is also important to consider how the text is juxtaposed with the types of images used on the FLH. Barthes' classical analysis of the *Paris Match* cover implies that images can convey meaning more effectively than words. The initial imagery on the *Paris Match* cover depicts a young black French soldier saluting the flag. The deeper significance of this imagery is that the loyalty of the soldier is a representation of harmony within a multicultural nation. This deeper meaning at the mythic level, as noted above for Barthes, is the viewer's taken-for-granted interpretation of the image.

For this project, I am interested in the taken-for-granted interpretations of Japanese HEIs' FLHs that the viewer is invited to make. This has made me question how the different elements within a FLH contribute to this meaning. I questioned whether a connection between the images depicted and the text is made. For example, are the images random photographs of students and the university, or do they support the information found in the body of the text? If photographs of students are included, are they close-up or full body? A close-up shot could represent intimacy (Elliott & Robinson, 2012), while a photograph with multi-ethnic students would represent the international orientation of the university (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). Images can

thus be used to make connections between the prospective international student to an educational environment which is supportive of them.

A semiotic analysis focuses on the different elements within a sign, the technological, the compositional, and the minimal significant units. How the compositional and minimal significant units are encoded significantly influence the way receivers decode a sign and subsequently attribute meaning to it. Within this, it is also important to consider how social expectation of webpage structure contributes to users' experiences. The next section will address the norms in webpage structure.

### **3.2.5 Basis of webpage structure**

To assess a FLH, it is important to first understand the social conventions of webpage layout and universal principles in basic webpage design and terminology. This is necessary as these conventions are both assumed and institutionalised within society and guide the encoding and decoding of a sign. Lynch and Horton (2008) outline that basic design conventions include considerations for user-friendliness through webpage layout and navigation patterns, as well as quickly directing the user to the information they are searching for. When users must concentrate on where to find information contained within a webpage their focus shifts from the content to searching for navigation links, which discourages extended use.

Standardised webpage structure is illustrated in Figure 3.1. Most webpages incorporate many, if not all these basic components, and these locations have become what internet users are familiar with and expect to find. Key components of a webpage should include the following points:

- The information found on a webpage should be up-to-date (Kartal & Uzun, 2010).
- There must be main links to additional information necessary for specific types of users, with sub-links to further information (Murthy et al., 2011).
- The header bar would contain the main navigation links.

- Additional links would be found in vertical left or right-side scan columns, or in drop-down lists to facilitate user access to additional or minor information.
- These navigation links should be clearly labelled.

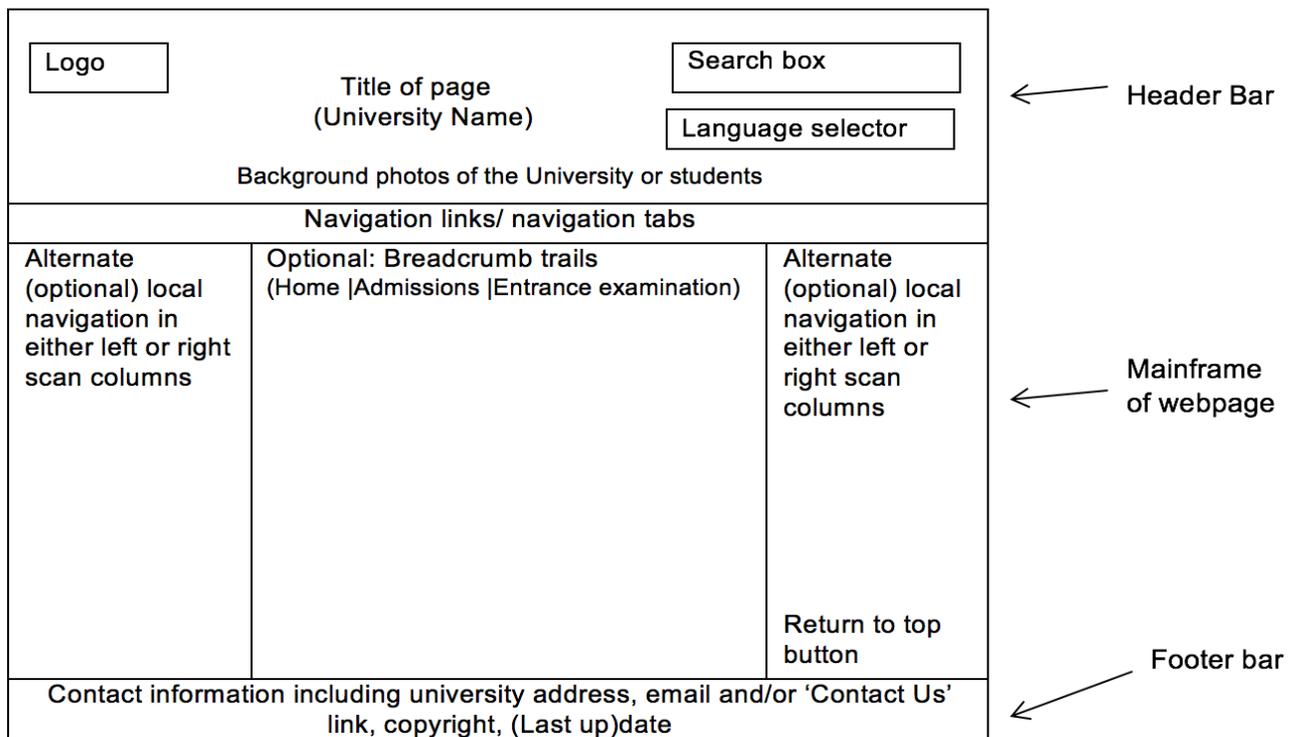


Figure 3.1: Basic webpage design and major elements (adapted from Lynch & Horton's (2008) Page Structure and Site Design, n.p.)

Acknowledging this basis of the different elements of standardised webpage structure facilitates in creating a relational framework for the semiotic analysis of Japanese HEIs' FLHs. The terminology outlined by Lynch and Horton (2008) is adopted throughout my research.

### 3.3 The FLHs

Three FLHs were chosen for a semiotic analysis. The FLHs were chosen based on the criteria that one was from a low-, a mid- and a high-ranking university. Of these, one university, which is officially a part of the TGU programme, was chosen first. Although there are many different websites that report world rankings of universities, the Ranking Web of Universities (hence forth Webometrics) was used, as it has the most comprehensive list of Japanese HEIs. Using Webometrics as a basis for the

ranking of HEIs in Japan, lower-ranking institutions are considered to fall between the range of 989-601, mid-ranked university between 600-301, and higher-ranking institutions between 300-1. In the analysis and discussion these will be indicated as low, mid, and high respectively. Acknowledging that there are differences in ranking methods, the purpose of rank here is to facilitate the analysis of FLHs at Japanese HEIs, by placing these institutions into relative positions to each other only.

To ensure that the three universities analysed were representative of their level, a systematic sampling (Rose, 2012) of the FLHs found on Webometrics was performed. Every third FLH, of four-year universities was assessed. If an institution did not have a FLH, the next one on the list was assessed. This process allowed the trends and anomalies within webpage designs to be evaluated, and enabled a relational analysis based on how HEIs display the internationalisation of their institution through their FLHs.

The three institutions chosen for a semiotic analysis, with their Japanese ranking in brackets are: The University of Tokyo (1), Ishikawa Prefectural University (305), and Hokusho University (630). As a courtesy, each university was contacted by email three weeks prior to the semiotic analysis, to inform them of this study. In the email, I explained the purpose of the study, and offered the university an opportunity to decline an analysis of their FLHs. None of the universities responded to this email. The analysis of the FLHs took place between September and October 2015, before I conducted any interviews, to ensure that others' interpretations did not adversely influence the semiotic analysis. Webpage development is dynamic and the webpages under analysis here may have subsequently changed. Accordingly, it must be acknowledged that the screenshots and discussions are representative of Japanese FLHs at the time of analysis (Elliott & Robinson, 2012).

### **3.4 Steps of a Semiotic Analysis**

Systematic sampling was used to code the information that one would expect to see on a homepage directed towards international students. This was then used to perform a semiotic analysis. The information found on the FLHs was coded and grouped into compositional categories which contribute to the meaning of Japanese universities as having adopted an internationalisation project within their

infrastructure. This process also facilitated in the identification of the minimal significant units (see Table 3.1 above). The minimal significant units within the two

Composition al category	Minimal significant units	Defined as	University of Tokyo	Ishikawa Prefectural University	Hokusho University
Structure/ Content	Conventional placement of	Top bar information			
		Footer bar information			
	Spatial relations	Alignment			
		Key information			
	Inside / outside	Access to key information for international students			
	Are there subpages				
	Appearance	Font type, size, color, contrast			
	Language	Choice of languages			
		Accuracy			
	Information	General			
		Specific: For international students/ programs details			
	Contact	Address/ telephone/ email			
		Access			
Images	Photos	Alignment			
		Size			
	Types of Photos / Quality	Buildings, things, cultural images, people. Still/ animated, focused/ unfocused			
	Videos/ virtual tours				

Table 3.2: Blank assessment form for semiotic analysis

compositional categories in turn guided the visual analysis of the three FLHs. For this, I transferred the information from Table 3.1 to create a blank form (Table 3.2) to guide my semiotic analysis of each of the three FLHs assessed. This ensured that the semiotic analysis of each of the FLHs assessed was methodologically explicit. The semiotic analysis lays the foundation for a visual assessment of FLHs and the

basis for a discussion from which the encoding and decoding of FLHs can be analysed.

### **3.5 Interviews**

This section will introduce the producers who work on FLHs and the students participating in this research, and the interview procedures. It should be noted, that some of the students participating in this study are Japanese. As these students are discussing their experiences of using Australian HEI's webpages, they are considered as international students.

Interviews were conducted to allow the participant's position within my research to be explored (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Semi-structured interviews facilitated information that I was unaware of to be brought up and enabled me to remain in control of the interview, by ensuring that my research topic was covered comprehensively and not a session where my interview participants vented their personal frustrations (Blaxter et al., 2006). However, in conducting interviews, I needed to consider how the experience could unexpectedly harm my participants – ranging from negative feelings to the issue of anonymity, and that I adequately informed my research participants of the purpose of this study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). These issues will be addressed in this section. After introducing the participants in this study, the recruitment method, data collection and method of analysis are discussed. This section will end with a discussion of ethical considerations and how this is influenced by my position in the research.

#### **3.5.1 The participants**

To understand how practice influences FLH creation and communication, the producers as the encoders and the international students as the decoders of FLHs are introduced in this section. Data collected from these participants enabled a relational analysis within a Bourdieusian framework which helped answer research questions two through four:

- 2) How do the meanings inherent in FLHs vary according to institution rank?
- 3) What meanings are intended by the producers of FLHs, and how is

this influenced by the context of their production?

4) How are these meanings of Japanese FLHs received by international student users?

Meaning can be attributed by differences in the signifying practices of a sign within its production (Hall, 1980; Bolin, 2009) and its reception. The semiotic analysis of the FLHs and the insights gained from the analysis of the production and reception of the FLHs together enable knowledge and practice to attribute meaning to FLHs within the internationalisation project of Japanese HE. This will help answer question five:

5) What are the implications for practice?

by suggesting ways that FLHs can be improved to address international students' needs more effectively.

### **3.5.2 Producer participants and data collection method**

As seen in Table 3.3, four producers participated in this research. The producers were interviewed using Skype, over a sixteen-day period. An advantage of using Skype is that it allowed for the ease of conducting the interviews with the producer participants who lived in different regions of Japan while still allowing nonverbal and social cues to be observed (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, as vision is limited, not all body language could be observed, and it was more difficult for me, as the researcher, to ensure privacy on the participants' side or to handle technological issues (Janghorban, Latifnejad, & Taghipour, 2014). To reduce these disadvantages, the producers were told that they could stop the interview at any time, with the option to resume or not, and they were asked to conduct the interview in a private room. Furthermore, I ensured that they were familiar with using Skype.

To reduce their risk in sharing their professional views and expertise, the producer participants are all referred to by pseudonyms. Additionally, they were given the interview questions before the Skype interview. The purpose of this was to allow the producers an opportunity to refrain from discussing specific questions they felt would compromise their positions. This also enabled the producers to offer more reflective

responses (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). The producers were willing to respond to all

Name	Emma	Grace	Alice	Rachel
Position/ Page development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Hired full-time</li> <li>- Main page</li> <li>- Left the job several years ago</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Committee work</li> <li>- Main page</li> <li>- Current position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Committee work</li> <li>- Main page</li> <li>- Current position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Committee work</li> <li>- Departmental page</li> <li>- Current position</li> </ul>
Access to webpage/ Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct input</li> <li>- The FLH is on university's server</li> <li>- A one person department</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Input outsourced to someone outside the university</li> <li>- Hosted on the main page's server</li> <li>- Creates content in a team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Input is outsourced to someone in another department within the university</li> <li>- The FLH is on university's server</li> <li>- Creates content in a team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Direct input</li> <li>- A separate domain within the main page's server</li> <li>- Creates content in team of two</li> </ul>
Experience in webpage development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited experience</li> <li>- Self-taught in position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extensive experience</li> <li>- Finds development of webpage is limited by software</li> </ul>

Table 3.3: Producers' profiles

questions. Furthermore, it was also taken into account that the producers would present new information, thus the open-ended interview question format allowed the producers' voice to be heard (Blaxter et al., 2006; Cassell, 2009). This process enabled the knowledge concerning FLH development to be constructed.

Table 3.3 also outlines the producers' role in their HEI's FLH development, their previous experience in working on FLHs, and the type of access they have to the FLH. Two producers work at institutions that fall under the TGU category. Three of the producers, Alice, Emma, and Grace were involved directly with the development of their institution's main FLH, while one, Rachel, was involved with the development of her department's FLH. This last interview was included as it highlights how the constraints concerning the development of the top FLH also influence how individual departments, within an institution, develop their webpages. The level of previous experience with webpage development did differ for each of the producers. Furthermore, as Table 3.3 illustrates, of the four producers Emma was the only

producer who was hired full-time for the role of creating, inputting, and maintaining her institution’s FLH. The other three producers are all English teachers and in addition to this role, they were assigned to the committee for FLH development. Alice, currently the head of the committee for the FLH at her institution, creates only the content for these pages with two other foreign teachers. Once they have created the content this is inputted by someone within the Administration Office. Grace is on the committee for webpage development, but she and the other foreign teachers on this committee are not in charge, a more senior Japanese faculty member runs the committee. Lastly, Rachel is the departmental webpage developer. In the past Rachel worked in IT, as part of a team, and had full technical support with regards to both the content and administration of webpage development. She uses this experience to develop and maintain her department’s webpage.

### 3.5.3 Student participants and data collection method

Twelve students were interviewed, in groups of three. As seen in Table 3.4, Groups 1 through 3 comprised of students originating from outside of Japan, and Group 4

The students	Countries	Group	Age
International students: ~ 2 undergraduates ~ 5 master’s students ~ 2 research students	Other Asian South Pacific Further abroad	1 to 3	22 - 44
Japanese students: ~ 3 master’s students	Japan	4	

Table 3.4: Student profiles

comprised of Japanese students who did their undergraduate degree abroad. The country of origin for the international students will not be named, as this could otherwise identify them. Two students are identified as from further abroad; as they are the only students from those geographical regions it is impossible to be any more specific. All the master and research students are studying in Japan on scholarships.

While effort was made to ensure that the international students had an appropriate

level of English to participate in this study, the nature of the research question is not a topic that most students usually talk about in English. To prepare the international students to talk about FLHs, they first completed a questionnaire and then participated in a focus group discussion. The purpose of utilising a questionnaire with the international students was twofold. Firstly, a questionnaire can be used to collect students' feelings and opinions (Dornyei & Csizer, 2012). Secondly, as most international students in Japan are from Asia (Huang, 2006), English is a FL. For all the students in this study, English is a second or third language. Language use could therefore represent a disadvantage in terms of the complexity of the conversation (Cassell, 2009). To reduce the potential effect of this disadvantage, students completed a questionnaire prior to the focus group interview. The sole purpose of the questionnaire was to help students prepare for the interview, and thus reduce the potential for unintended harm to the students as a result of participating in this research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Accordingly, data from the questionnaire was not included in the analysis, unless students referred to it in the focus group discussions.

As in a FL conversation class, this procedure of thinking then talking, gave the student participants greater control in how they developed their ideas in the focus group discussion (Yoshikawa, 2014). This consideration also contributed to reducing the perceived hierarchical power relation between myself and the student participants (Oliver, 2003), as they could understand my interest in their responses. The discussion was divided into two primary sections. In the first part, students discussed their information expectations as international students, specifically focusing on what information would have been or was helpful for them to find on a FLH. The second part of the discussion centred on a visual assessment of one FLH. Like the producers, students were asked open-ended questions which allowed them to have a voice within the research discussion, and to gain confidence in offering their own opinions.

### **3.5.4 Participants: Recruitment**

All participants voluntarily responded to open calls, in English, for participation in this research, made on several special interest groups on Facebook or through other closed social media groups. Selection of the producer participants was based on the

ranking of the institution they developed the FLH for and their degree of involvement. Those who were most involved in the development of their institution's FLH were asked to participate. The international student participants were selected based on their Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) scores and their ability to respond with comprehension to a short interview conversation with me, to ensure that they would not face any potential risk through language limitations. After receiving a Participant Information Sheet, which outlined the purpose of this study, participants had one week to decide if they wanted to participate.

### **3.6 Data Collection Procedures**

To ensure privacy, I conducted all Skype interviews with the producers and focus group interviews with the international students in my private office. Upon deciding to participate, a date to conduct the interviews with the producers, and the focus group discussions with the international students was decided. All interviews lasted between one and one and a half hours and were recorded on Audacity. The recordings were transcribed immediately after each interview. Participants were asked not to discuss their participation in the study with others, to maintain their confidentiality, and were told that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. All the transcriptions and recordings of the interviews have been stored on a password-protected computer. Any printed material has been stored in a locked drawer in my office.

It was important that I consider that my interviewing the producers of FLHs and international students might have negative repercussions for them (Chavez, 2008). To reduce this possibility all data provided, and the participants were anonymised. Although not all the participants are female, as a part of the anonymisation process, all producer participants are referred to by a female name or pronoun and all student participants are referred to either by their group (Group1 through Group4), or by a female pronoun. Furthermore, the semiotic analysis of the FLHs and the assessment of these FLHs by students, were different from the actual ones that the producers were creating. This facilitated my gaining the perspective of someone who created a webpage like the ones in the analysis and ensured that I protected the identity of the producers.

### **3.6.1 Thematic analysis from interviews/ focus groups**

The interviews were coded into themes, which were identified directly from the data (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Following the procedure for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), the first interview/ focus group in each group was transcribed, then re-read and listened to and broken down into key sentences, phrases, and words. Each response within that interview/ focus group was coded with a brief phrase or key word summary. Once this was done for the whole interview, a list of all the codes was compiled. The list of codes was analysed for similarities, redundancy, and outliers. Then, the list of codes was cross checked against the original interview data to ensure that the codes were representative of the interviewee's statements. This procedure was repeated with the remaining interviews/ focus groups in each group, except that additional themes were added to the preceding analysis where necessary (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This enabled new themes to emerge and through a constant relational comparison, previous themes were revised to ensure that they were reflective of both the data gathered and the research purpose. This process also reduced researcher bias and facilitated reflection upon the data collected. Finally, the list of codes from all the interviews/ focus groups were analysed thematically and reduced to main themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). From these main themes, overarching themes were drawn out, concerning the development of FLHs at Japanese universities, or the students' impressions and experiences of using FLHs. At this point all the interviews/ focus groups were listened to again, to ensure that the main and overarching themes were representative of what and how the producers and students were responding to the interview questions. This process, as Joffe and Yardley (2004) outline, ensures that the subthemes supporting the overarching themes are representative of the interview data. The subthemes represent the main points of data conversion and diversion, which influence the main themes discussed by the interviewees.

### **3.7 Ethical Considerations: My Role in the Research**

It has long been attested that administrators and teachers address research problems in education differently (Coghlan & Brannick, 2012; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Furthermore, as Riege (2003) explicitly states, there is no such thing as "objective or value neutral knowledge" (p. 77). As a teacher, my role and how I interact with students is very different from someone within the university's

administration. I must also admit that at the outset of this research, I knew nothing about FLH development; yet as a teacher who works closely with international students, I was aware of their and my own frustrations in searching for information on FLHs. This puts me in the position of being both an insider and an outsider in this research. I am an insider as I did my research within a population that I am a part of – Japanese HE. However, I am also an outsider, as the subculture of FLHs is not within my realm of work experience. As a researcher, I must accordingly be aware of my biases and the assumptions that I carry into this research (Asselin, 2003; Rose, 1985). My position inherently influences my perspective of how FLHs are communicating with international students. This position should not affect how I did my research; however, it does necessitate that I acknowledge my role within the research, the precautions I took in my data gathering, and how I attempted to reduce bias so that I could learn from the research to make practical suggestions for future FLH development practice.

The legitimisation of research can be closely connected to research bias. I am a foreigner, and like my research participants who were also foreigners living in Japan, I could identify with the problems that they had in finding information or, in the case of the producers, communicating with administration concerning the information needs of international students. However, as a foreign woman within Japanese HE, I must acknowledge how my organisation's infrastructure and what is acceptable/unacceptable work behaviour (Coghlan & Brannick, 2012), influences my behaviour. I often feel invisible and my voice is not heard by management or brushed-off with an expression such as 'that is not the Japanese way'. As a foreign female teacher within the Japanese HE system, I had to realistically consider whom I could access as research participants. As my position within the Japanese HE system could be described as precarious at best, given the hierarchical nature of Japanese HE and how this prevents interaction (Lee, 2005; Ogawa, 2002) I could not access higher management to assess their views. This could be the subject for future research.

This highlights the importance of understanding the research context in terms of power relations and politics with regards to the legitimisation of my research (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005), and how my position can either enhance or deter my research. Furthermore, in the future, I want to expand my role from purely teaching into

support for international students, my bias could compromise how I critically engage with the data I collect (Drake, 2010). I need to be aware of how I project my own views onto the participants and the data analysis. Here, the design of the research project is important in the rigor of my research (Riege, 2003). This, for me, was one of the important reasons for the triangulation in data collection. By compiling a semiotic analysis, and interviews with producers and students, I not only forced myself to keep my “eyes open” (Asselin, 2003, p. 100), but I have also three sets of data to support my research findings and suggestions for practice.

The triangulation of data collection allows the complexities of differences and similarities to be preserved. As someone within an HE system, where teachers are increasingly required to perform administrative duties, I could relate to the producers. As someone who has language barriers, I could relate to international students. My position provided me with an understanding of the types of challenges that my research participants experience, but not with a complete understanding (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This meant that while I knew of some issues raised by my participants, I was also aware of gaps in my knowledge. It also meant that I needed to gain trust with my research participants to ensure that they felt safe to discuss potentially charged topics with me. Here social identities and power relationships are important to consider. Concerning the producers, I was dependent upon them for information, yet as a foreigner working within the Japanese HE system, I could relate to the challenges that the producers faced in the development of FLHs which minimised the power difference between us (Breen, 2006).

With regards to the international students, power relations could have been problematic, as I am a university teacher. To reduce the impact of this, none of the students were previously known to me, and none attended or were planning to attend my university. My university is only a teacher training university; any student who indicated that they were planning on becoming a teacher, were not chosen to participate in this research. Furthermore, by interviewing students in focus groups, I could reduce my role to a moderator of the discussion on FLHs, which minimised the relational risk for the student participants while also facilitating the discussion between the group. However, power relations within in a focus group can also manifest through the participants and their perceived relationship to each other, and

this could negatively influence the ensuing discussion (Breen, 2006). To reduce this, students in the focus groups did not know each other, and they were placed in groups according to similarities in language levels, proposed study level, and genders. This facilitated in creating a more comfortable discussion environment and encouraged free responses during the focus group interview (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Breen (2006) suggests that participating in a research project should also be beneficial for the participants. The research processes facilitated not only my learning of the experiences of both the producers and students, but also their own understanding of their experiences and how this has shaped their attitudes towards Japanese HE.

Another element in this research process which facilitated my learning was reflection. Reflection is about creating a conscious awareness of one's actions and assumptions, to make them overt. By acknowledging my position within my research (Brockbank & McGill, 2007), I could attempt to reduce its influence as much as possible and focus on the experiences of the producers and international students. While discussions enable an active connection with knowledge at a deeper level; reflection facilitates in understanding how my position influences unacknowledged biases. To help achieve this, I had regular discussions with my supervisor and kept a research log. The reflective process and being aware of my research bias, enabled me to gain a greater understanding of FLH development through the data collected for analysis.

### **3.8 Summary**

This chapter introduced semiotics as methodological approach and the methods of data collection in this research. In the first part of this chapter, I explained my research approach and introduced semiotics as a methodology to analyse FLHs. Then I introduced the method of data collection and the participants. The triangulation of data - the analysis of FLHs, interviews with the producers of FLHs, and focus group interviews with students will give credibility to the analysis of FLH development as sites of meaning-making at Japanese HEIs under an internationalisation project. I concluded with a review of ethical considerations and the importance of recognising my bias within this research. The ensuing chapters will turn to the research findings.

## **Chapter 4 A Semiotic Analysis of Three FLHs**

The focus of this chapter is on the semiotic analysis of three FLHs. A semiotic analysis will facilitate an understanding of the visual representation of FLHs at Japanese HEIs. It will also provide a reference point for the discussion of the producers' and international students' interviews in the following chapters.

A semiotic analysis involves taking the ordinary and analysing it to understand the ideology behind its foundations, to arrive at the symbolic meanings of what is being studied (Berger, 2014). Here, I use a Barthesian approach to analysis. This approach uses an essay style format to explain the how the different elements within an image, and in a specific context, combine to contribute meaning to the overall sign (Chandler, 2007). As explained in the previous chapter, a semiotic analysis involves analysis at two levels – the denotation (the literal meanings) and the connotation (the cultural associations). It is necessary to separate the denotative elements from their connotations to show how meaning is being created. The first level of analysis, therefore, involves a rich description of the denotative elements of the sign and the second level of analysis makes the connections between the denotative elements and the cultural association.

This chapter begins by facilitating an understanding of how the semiotic analysis was conducted. Semiotics can be a subjective interpretation of a sign. Accordingly, it is important to be methodologically explicit to avoid unwittingly relying on unconscious analytic strategies (Rose, 2012). Furthermore, not only does semiotics offer one interpretation of a sign, to which other interpretations through other research methods could just as plausibly be made (Chandler, 2007), but how the reader interprets an author's analysis of the sign also influences the meaning attributed (Barthes, 1977). Meaning accordingly is dependent upon relationships and the conceptual system they are constructed in (Hall, 1997). The representation of a sign is dependent upon its relationship within society, and who has accepted its value as a sign (Barthes, 1957/1984). A semiotic analysis allows a narrative description of the trends and anomalies, within the different elements of webpages, to be assessed. This chapter will first provide a guided example to a Barthesian semiotic analysis. Then turning specifically to the FLHs at Japanese HEIs, trends in FLH design will be discussed according to rank. This sets the stage for the semiotic analysis in the

second part of the chapter of the FLHs of three different ranking HEIs. The analysis will focus on the compositional categories and highlight how different minimal significant units combine to contribute to the connotations of the FLH.

#### 4.1 The Process of a Semiotics Analysis

This research is concerned with the mythic meaning that FLHs are a sign of the internationalisation of Japanese HEIs. To understand the semiotic process at the mythic level, I will refer to the *Paris Match* cover, which was first mentioned in Chapter 3 and is illustrated in Figure 4.1. In his first-order analysis of this cover, Barthes (1957/1984) notes that there is a young black boy + a French military uniform + saluting + looking upward. Barthes presumed that the boy is looking at the French flag. At this first-order analysis these different denotation elements combine with the concepts, the connotations, and together these attribute to the meaning of the sign = a young black soldier saluting the French flag (p. 115).



Figure 4.1: The *Paris Match* cover (Barthes (1957/1984, n.p.).

The meaning of the sign at the first-order level becomes the denotation at the second-order analysis. In this second order, a possible interpretation of the young black soldier saluting the French flag is patriotism – this would be the connotation.

Together the denotation and the connotation combine and the meaning of the sign at the mythic level could be

that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this [young black soldier] in serving his so-called oppressors.  
(Barthes, 1957/1984, p. 115).

The saluting soldier, the concept of patriotism, and the mythic meaning of French imperialism are all elements within this photo. The two-stage process of breaking down the sign into these denotation and connotation elements, shows how they combine to attribute meaning can be investigated.

In FLH development, each element that is published on the webpage is a choice of those developing the webpage. In a semiotic analysis, the sum of these different elements influence the meaning attributed to the FLH. Accordingly, in a semiotic analysis of FLHs, what the basic denotations are with regards to the information appearing on these webpages, must be defined first. Once this has been done, analysis at the mythic level can focus on how these denotations combine with the connotations to invoke a range of meanings at the second-order level.

To achieve this, first the trends and anomalies according to the compositional categories defined in Table 3.1 (p. 41) were identified. From the initial assessment, within each of these compositional categories, a list of denotation elements was constructed. This provided a checklist of the common denotation elements published on a FLH, which was then used to assess which of these elements appeared on the FLHs analysed in this research. This provides the format for the analysis of FLHs at the first stage. Then, by taking note of the extent to which these denotation elements appear and are developed, attention turned to how they overall combine to give connotations. The combination of the denotation and connotation elements provide the bases for the analysis at the mythic level of FLHs as signs of internationalisation, which is the second stage of the semiotic analysis.

## **4.2 Trends in FLHs**

To understand how Japanese HEIs' FLHs are communicating to international students, it is necessary to understand the boundaries of analysis. The compositional categories outlined in Table 3.1 ensure the analysis is structured (Rose, 2012), and forms the basis for the trends and anomalies in FLH design to be constructed. This structure also contributes to the objectivity of the visual analysis by directing my attention to the elements that are or are not within the FLH. Assessing the trends on FLHs extended my knowledge of FLHs at Japanese HEIs and enabled me to identify the visual information that is relevant to this study (Rose, 2012). The discussion of common trends is presented by rank.

In initially accessing the HEIs' websites, all the institutions were searched for using their name, in Roman letters, on Google. From the search results, the Japanese website was chosen first, to assess the accessibility of the FLH from the native language homepage. In general, it was found that most top-pages of the FLH typically informed the user about the HEI. Nearly all institutions placed their university logo in the upper left corner. Most institutions provided navigation links on topics that include the HEI's philosophy, motto, organisation, history, and a message from the university president either in the header bar or in left or right scan columns. The following analysis is presented from my perspective as a user of FLHs.

### **4.2.1 Lower-ranking institutions**

There are several main trends among lower-ranking Japanese HEIs. Most notable was the distinct lack of a FLH. Upon initial glance Saku University, appeared not to have a FLH. However, when scrolling down the Japanese homepage a link titled, "Saku University: University guide [English]" was found in the right scan column. This navigation link connects the user to two PDF files: a message from the university's president and general information about the university. While the information presented in these PDF files may not be to gain the attention of international students, it does represent what Liddicoat (2007) refers to as informing the world about Japan, not for the purpose of exchanging knowledge but rather for providing information about Japan to the international community. Other comparably ranked institutions also had similar links to English pages placed in unexpected locations

embedded somewhere within the mainframe of the Japanese homepage. To find the English navigation link, the user must actively search for it.

The trouble with finding the navigation link to the FLH was very common at the lower-ranking institutions. At several universities, such as the University of Kochi, it was found that despite having a traditionally placed navigation link to the FLH in the header bar of the Japanese homepage, once connected to the FLH, the main navigation links appear only in Japanese. At Morioka University, there was a single long page, which requires users to scroll down. In doing this, titbits of information on the various departments could be found. Like the University of Kochi, key navigation links were presented only in Japanese. These links include “入試情報” (Admission Information) and “在学生支援情報” (Student Support) which connect to subpages in Japanese. Takachiho University appears to be an anomaly, as the English navigation link takes the user to a FlipSnack book – a digital book created out of PDF documents. On this webpage, the official English brochure of the university has been uploaded into a simulated flip-page book. However, while having an enlargement icon, this page does not enlarge enough to easily read the small print. Lastly, several universities had a navigation link for an English page, but when connected to the page, it was found to be under construction. At Ube Frontier University College, all links to the English pages were under construction, while at other universities the FLH was in varying degrees of development and only some links were under construction. Here it is noteworthy that at these universities the last update is several years old.

In summary, the international student user of FLHs at lower-ranking universities, would find it difficult to find specific information concerning their prospective course of study. Typically, the FLH was a single page, and if there were navigation links to subpages, usually they led to ‘Coming soon’ messages. The FLHs were infrequently maintained, and often the information appeared to be out-of-date.

#### **4.2.2 Mid-ranking institutions**

At mid-ranking Japanese HEIs, it was still common to find universities without a FLH. There are three other predominate features concerning FLHs at this level. As noted

above some lower-ranking institutions had links to PDF files for their FL content. The link to a PDF file was much more common among mid-ranking HEIs. This trend continues into the higher-ranking universities. The PDF files appear to be uploaded versions of generalised information brochures about the university, something that might be handed out at a university fair. Ohu University was unusual in that it had uploaded a bilingual PDF file: two columns side-by-side with Japanese on the left and English on the right.

The second trend is the direct online translations of the Japanese homepage. Before accessing the FLH, the user is notified that the following pages are online translations, and to be aware that “the machine translation system doesn’t guarantee 100% correctness” as stated by the University of Shimane. A variant within this trend is exemplified by Tokyo Kasei Gakuin University. After navigating to the English page, general information about the institution’s five departments is provided in paragraph format. In the header bar and the right scan column, navigation links in English are found. However, when connecting to these links (About Us, Admission, or Campus Life) the user is taken to a Japanese only page. Having navigation links written only in English leading to Japanese language pages is a trend that continues through to higher-ranking institutions. Sapporo City University appears to be an anomaly as it clearly noted under the navigation links “Admissions” and “About Students”, that these links will connect users to Japanese information only.

The third trend is with regards to the appearance of the FLHs. Several mid-ranking universities had extensive information available on their FLHs, either all on one page requiring the user to scroll down, and/ or through additional navigation links. The distinguishing feature of these pages is that while the Japanese homepage does fill the window, the FLH does not. They appear either as a left aligned half page or centred within the window, with blank columns on the left and right sides.

To summarise, similar to the FLHs at the lower-ranking level, at the mid-ranking level information directed to the international student was typically difficult to find. While mid-ranking HEIs were more likely to have a FLH, these webpages were usually only developed in English, and contained surface level information about the university as an organisation, not as an institution of learning. It was unusual for the FLH to

structurally be a mirror image of the Japanese homepage, but the information presented appeared to be a direct copy of the information intended for Japanese students. The FLHs at these ranking levels were often bright, shocking, or a combination of contrasting colours which made it difficult to read the information on the page. The FLH does not appear to be making a connection to prospective international students.

#### **4.2.3 Higher-ranking institutions**

The most predominant trend found at the higher-ranking institutions was the amount of information on the FLH. The higher the rank of the institution, the more information available in a FL. Unlike the other two ranks, the images on the FLHs are either the same, or similar situations to those on the Japanese homepage. Furthermore, in comparison to mid- and lower-ranking institutions there are more navigation links in the header bar, and occasionally specialised links such as “Parents”, “Visitor”, and “Researchers”. The “Parents” link includes information on obtaining visas, fees, medical insurance, housing, and programmes. The “Visitor” link provides information that is very similar to the “About (Us)” link, and the “Researcher” link provides a list of faculty/ researchers within the institution divided by department. This stage also marks the prominence of navigation links for “Prospective Students” or “Applicants”, and “Current Students” as well as information about scholarships, especially referring to MEXT’s scholarships for international students.

Access to the language box is predominately in the upper right corner. On some universities’ websites, there was inconsistency between the Japanese and FLHs in terms of the placement of the language access link or how other languages are symbolised. As noted at other ranking HEIs, occasionally the navigation link to the FLH was not placed in the upper right corner of the header bar, but rather in the right scan column or at the bottom of the page. While placing the language navigation link in the centre of the top-page’s header bar, such as at Nagoya University did not cause confusion, Tokai University placed the ‘English’ link in the left scan column on the Japanese page, which forces the user to actively search for this link. What was particularly unusual at Tokai University, is that to access the Japanese homepage from the FLH, the user had to click on a navigation link titled “Tokai Japan” at the very bottom of the English page. This navigation link did not clearly indicate it was

the link to the Japanese homepage, and it could be mistaken for additional information for international students planning on studying in Japan.

At other institutions, the URL address used to access the homepage influenced the availability of language options. At Seikei Gakuen University, the URL link accessed influenced whether the user could access the FLH. If the user accessed the Japanese language homepage (成蹊学園), they would not find a link to the FLH. However, Seikei Gakuen University has a separate English page, which could only be found from an internet search. On the English page, the user can directly access a Japanese page, but this Japanese page is not the same as the Japanese page accessed from the initial internet search.

The language navigation link is also a concern. At a few universities, including Shimane University, Japanese appears as the top choice in the language link, but it is written in kanji. Unless it is understood that “日本語” means ‘Japanese’ the user would not recognise it as a navigation link to other languages. Furthermore, sometimes the link between the Japanese homepage and the FLH is not active. At the time of assessment, the FLH for Shimane University was only accessible through an internet search in English.

There are several distinct features concerning images at the higher-ranking level. It is often possible for users to control the direction or pause the top-page photo animation by clicking on a series of circles or arrowheads. Once on the FLH, images with texts are found which either encourage users to “Encounter Japan” as stated on Kwansai Gakuin University’s FLH or see “Beautiful Japan” as found at Kochi University of Technology. Furthermore, at this level several universities offer promotional videos, although this video might be embedded within a sub-link such as “Campus Life”. Higher-ranking universities also made direct reference to the ideals of globalisation through navigation links entitled “Global Education Cent[re]” and “Globali[s]ation Policy” as at Hosei University.

In summary, at the highest-ranking institutions, it is clear that the university is attempting to make a connection to prospective students. Usually there were FLHs in

several FLs and the webpages were often similar in structure and colour to the Japanese homepage. It appears as if these universities are attempting to make students feel included within their environs.

### **4.3. Language**

As Japan, a linguistically isolated nation, is attempting to increase its international student population (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, n.d.), language deserves special attention. English was the preferred language of choice, if a FLH was available. It was very common for an HEI to have only an English FLH at all ranking levels. However, HEIs with only one FLH in another language, such as Korean or Chinese, were almost non-existent. Language choice was usually indicated in Japanese, the Roman alphabet, or in the language of choice (i.e. Korean in Hangeul 한국어). It was less common for an abbreviation to be used – EN for English, or a flag. The Chinese language either appears as just Chinese or with a distinction between simplified and traditional Chinese. When more than one FL appeared, it was either English and Chinese, English and Korean, or all three languages together. Sporadically Thai, Vietnamese, Russian, or a combination of these languages were also available in addition to, but not instead of the Korean or Chinese FLHs.

### **4.4 A Semiotic Analysis of Three FLHs**

Taking into account the trends in Japanese FLHs and the basic construction of a webpage, Table 4.1 depicts the three HEIs selected as representative FLHs of their ranking level. The meaning from the semiotic analysis of these FLHs is relational, as a FLH's meaning is dependent not only upon the relationship between the denotations and the connotation within a sign, but also in comparison to those at different HEIs.

University	Webometrics Ranking	
	Japanese ranking	World ranking
The University of Tokyo <a href="http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/index.html">http://www.u-tokyo.ac.jp/en/index.html</a>	1	47
Ishikawa Prefectural University <a href="http://www.ishikawa-pu.jp">http://www.ishikawa-pu.jp</a>	310	5595
Hokusho University <a href="http://www.hokusho-u.ac.jp/english/">http://www.hokusho-u.ac.jp/english/</a>	601	10779

Table 4.1: The institutions and their rankings used for a semiotic analysis

In advertising, Barthes (1977) states that a sign's signification, what is being indicated by the sign, is typically intentional, and accordingly the meaning attached to the sign is prominent. However, as Bignell (2005) states, meaning is understood retrospectively, and the producers of signs are often developing their signs from a different perspective than for whom they are creating the signs. The range of meanings that can be attributed to a sign, as noted in Chapter 3, varies as this is culturally and contextually attributed by those reading it. Accordingly, in the production of a sign, it is unlikely that the producers could be in complete control of the extent to which the cultural associations that the text and imagery of a semiotic analysis draws out. Thus, the meaning of a sign goes beyond the original intention by the producers, as those who subsequently read the sign may not share the same codes as the producers (Bignell, 2005).

Traditionally Japanese HEIs are difficult for international students to enter for two primary reasons. First, as it is uncommon for core classes to be conducted in a language other than Japanese, language can be a barrier. This means that the international student must have sufficient Japanese skills or that the HEI has concurrent programmes for international students, where classes are offered in languages other than Japanese. The second reason has to do with timing. At the HE level, the academic year has traditionally been a semester system, with the first semester from April to August, and the second semester from October to February. The courses in the second semester require credits from the first semester. This semester system poses challenges to both Japanese students wishing to study abroad, and international students wishing to enter Japanese HEIs. These difficulties

Compositional category	Minimal significant units	Defined as	University of Tokyo	Ishikawa Prefectural University	Hokusho University	
Structure/ Content	Conventional placement of:	Top bar information	Yes: detailed dropdown bar	Within stylistic norms	Top bar information in Japanese only	
		Footer bar information	Simple direction links	Crowded: many links found on the mainframe	Footer bar information in Japanese only	
	Spatial relations	Alignment	Right	Center	Right	
		Key information	Extensive in top and bottom header bar navigation	Limited in both top and bottom bar navigation	Only in Japanese	
	Inside / outside	Access to key information for international students	Easy to locate	Hidden/ unavailable	Only in Japanese	
	Are there subpages		Yes, many	Yes, a few. Many links are connected to the same subpage	No. It is one long webpage	
	Appearance	Font type, size, color, contrast	Easy to read; color ok  Similar to Japanese homepage	Readable- some mistakes; color ok  Very different to Japanese homepage	Readable- many mistakes; color sharp contrasts Very different to Japanese homepage	
	Language	Choice of languages	English, Chinese, Korean	English	English, Chinese, Korean	
		Accuracy	Accurate	Some mistakes	Many mistakes: parts appear to be machine translated	
	Information	General	President's message, about institution and goals	President's message, about institution and goals	About the institution, and a historical perspective	
		Specific: For international students/ programs details	Admission process, fees, additional support (visa, medical, housing, scholarship) Course programs Available on subpages	No specific information for international students Limited outline	No specific information for international students Aside from naming departments no courses are described	
		Contact	Address/ telephone/ email	Top page has links to Address/ telephone/ email for departments	Top page: Address/ telephone/ Subpage: email	Top page: Address/ telephone/ email
			Access	Yes: public transportation	No	Yes: car/ public transportation
Images	Photos	Alignment	Framed/ Centered	Framed	Centered	
		Size	Variety	Medium to small	Small	
	Types of Photos / Quality	Buildings, things, cultural images, people. Still/ animated, focused/ unfocused	Controlled, Animated, still, people – upper body, close up; and buildings, focused	People and things. Mostly upper body, close up; fast animated, focused	Buildings, people full body Still focused but distant	
	Videos/ virtual tours		Video and YouTube. No tour.	None	None	

Table 4.2: Identifying the denotative elements

mandate that the HEI recognises that international students need specific information and support, that is different from those of home students, and accordingly, that the FLH cannot be a direct copy of the Japanese homepage.

At a first-order of analysis, using the compositional categories defined in Table 3.1 (p. 41) as the basis for the semiotic analysis of the three FLHs in this chapter, Table 4.2 (above) is a summation of the denotative elements found on these FLHs. Each FLH was analysed separately according to the two compositional categories and the defined minimal significant units. While Table 4.2 shows that the FLH at the University of Tokyo is more informative than the other universities, by just reading this table it is impossible to understand how the elements found on each FLH combine to transmit a message of the HEI as a visual representation of internationalisation. Accordingly, the second-order analysis will map the first-order denotation elements with a possible interpretation of their cultural associations, the connotations. Using this Barthesian approach to semiotics, the ensuing analysis will highlight some of the key differentiations in the elements encoded on these webpages to illustrate, at the mythic level, how the FLH can be understood as contributing to the imagery of the HEI as being supportive of potential international students.

## **4.5 The University of Tokyo (high-ranking)**

### **4.5.1 Structure/Content**

This section will highlight how some of the minimal significant units within the compositional category of Structure/Content of the University of Tokyo's (UTokyo) FLH connotes the meaning of welcoming international students through the ease of FLH use.

When accessing the UTokyo's homepage the user maybe struck by a combination of traditional and modern values in education. The black background with white text in the header and footer bars are representative of a blackboard and chalk, connoting traditional values in education with regards to excellence in teaching and learning. In these areas, the traditional navigation links that users have come to expect to find on a webpage can be found (Figure 4.2:1-3; Figure 4.3:5-7). Infused within the header blackboard is a two-tier navigation bar with a wide bar of animated photos below it

(Figure 4.2:3). The upper-half of this two-tier navigation bar offers tailored information specifically for international students: the prospective student, the current student, and alumni. This recognises that international students are not a homogenous body. Rather, their information needs change at each stage of their study, and this connotes the willingness of the university to support international students before, throughout, and after their course of study. The FLH is long, requiring that the user scrolls down.

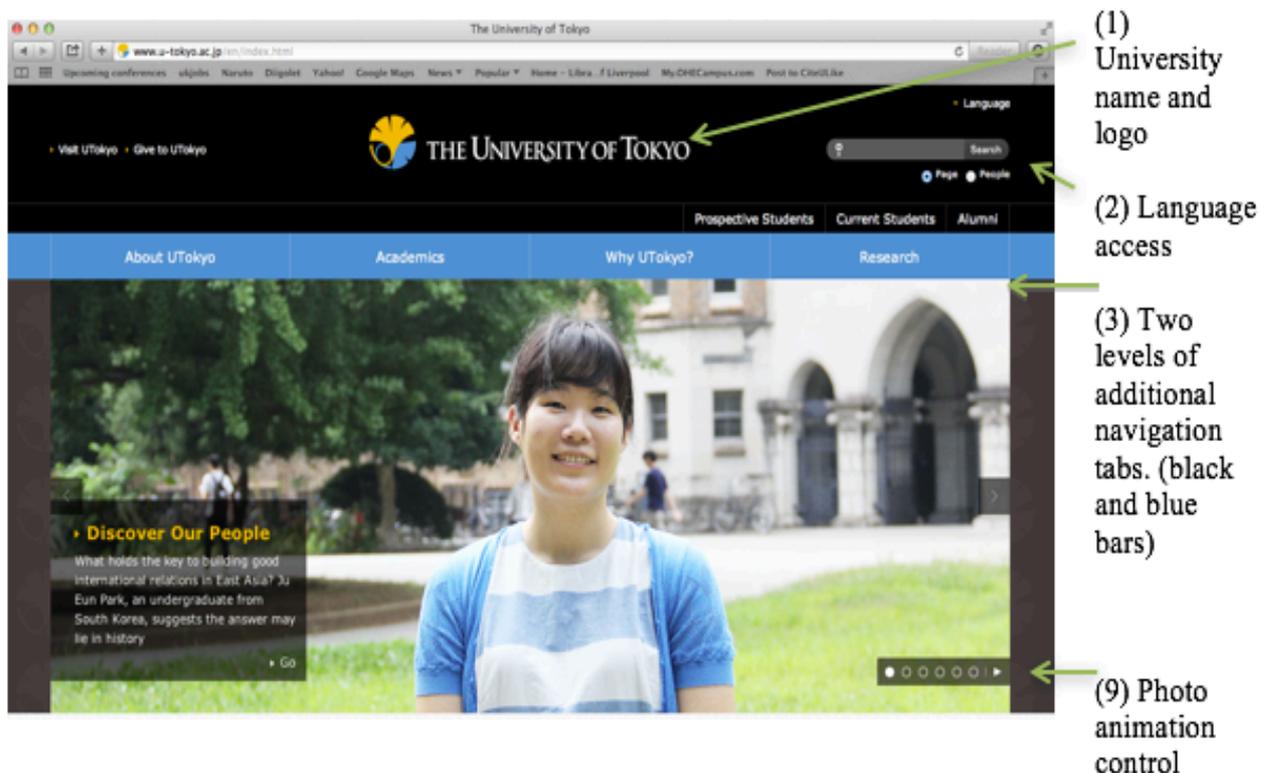


Figure 4.2: Top part of the University of Tokyo's FLH

It is the lower portion of the two-tier navigation bar that connotes usability (Figure 4.2:3). This portion of the navigation bar is a brilliant blue, drawing the user's attention to key links within the page. Blue is utilised on many FLHs, which may be due to its connotations of trust, efficiency, competence, intelligence, relaxation, and communication (Labrecque & Milne, 2012; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012). Through the meaning of blue as a colour, this navigation bar could connote aiming high, or more bluntly, ambition in studying. The links within this blue bar testify to the university's



Figure 4.3: Bottom part of the University of Tokyo's FLH

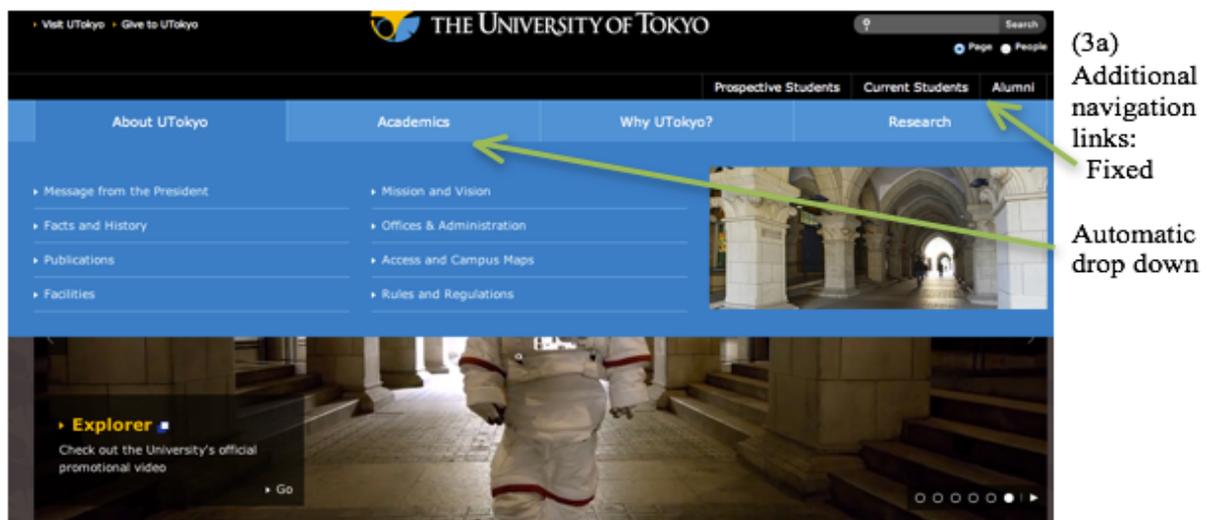


Figure 4.4: Additional navigation links of the University of Tokyo's FLH

research prowess and support for the international student. It initially appears that the “About UTokyo”, “Academics”, “Why UTokyo”, and “Research” are links for additional information. However, when the cursor is placed over these links they automatically open a dropdown bar (Figure 4.4:3a). This navigation bar is perhaps one of the most distinctive parts of the UTokyo's top-page, as in its function to provide adequate information to the international student, it has also categorised the type of information that international students might require in an easy to find format. Here the connotation is easy access to specific information; the UTokyo is able to

not only provide the information that international students would want, but does so in an organised fashion.

Scrolling down the webpage, the mainframe is a pale grey, and is reminiscent of a newspaper format (Figure 4.5:4). The top of the mainframe appears as a headline “Why UTokyo?” with links for the international student concerning information regarding programmes, the student body, and Tokyo. Below this are additional links in two columns to “News and Events”, and “Research” stories. Similar to a newspaper, each story link has a headline accompanied with a date, and a small photo. Directly below, but still within the grey mainframe, are a series of nine user-controlled animated boxes, of which four are shown at a time (Figure 4.3:8). These boxed links offer information about the UTokyo and its international and national activities. These links connote the regularity to which the FLH is updated as well as the university’s guidance in providing a wealth of information.

The bottom bar returns to the blackboard style used in the upper portion of the page (Figure 4.3). An upward pointing arrow (5) facilitates the user to return to the top of the page quickly. There is also a link for “Contact” (6), yet the university’s postal address is not explicitly shown on the top-page of the FLH. The fact that there is no

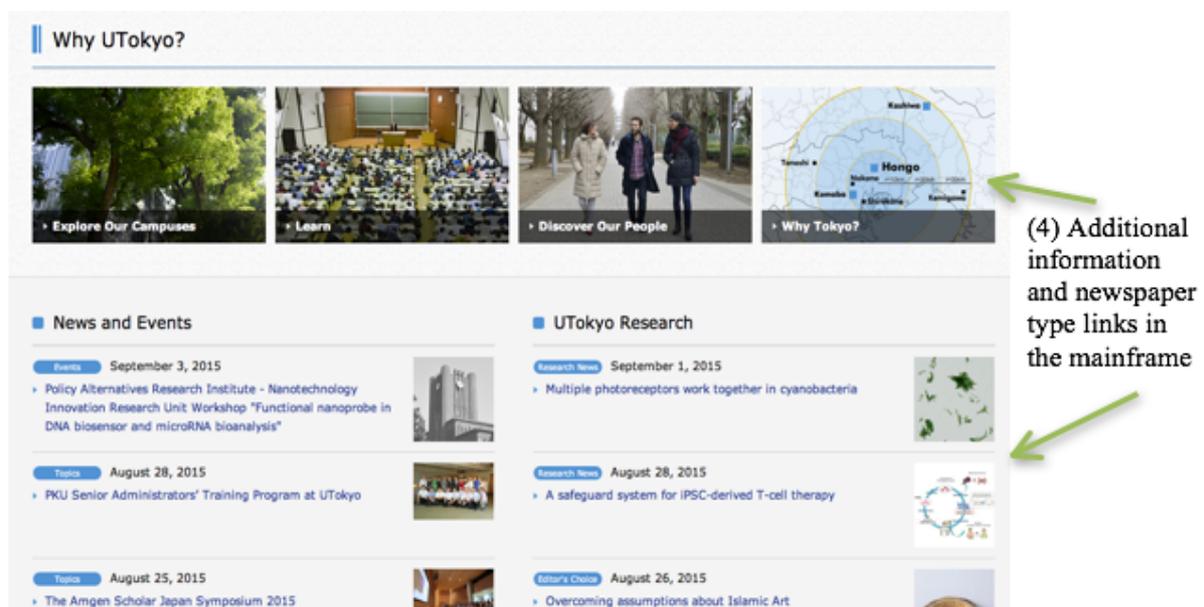


Figure 4.5: Mainframe of the University of Tokyo’s FLH

mailing address on the top-page may be symbolic of the fact that most students use email, thus a postal address could be interpreted as being out-of-date. Additionally, in this bottom bar, a navigation link for “Access and Campus Maps” (7) is found against a skeletal map of the Tokyo Metro subway system. These connote the UTokyo’s concern that potential students can easily reach the university.

There are many navigation links to additional information on the UTokyo’s top FLH, yet the user is not overwhelmed with information. This connotes that the UTokyo is concerned with their public appearance, and their priority in presenting information to international students in a user-friendly fashion. Furthermore, while the layout of the FLH is not the same as the Japanese homepage, the amount of information on both webpages appears to be similar yet geared towards specific audiences. The connotation is that the UTokyo can predict and provide for students’ information needs; they have an infrastructure prepared to support international students.

#### **4.5.2 Images**

This section will address how the images on the UTokyo’s FLH connote the degree to which international students are embraced within the university community, and the quality of education.

The UTokyo has a range of photos. A distinctive photo found on the FLH’s top-page is a long full body shot of three international students (Figure 4.6). In itself, full body photographs are unusual (Zhang & O’Halloran, 2012), but here it does have significant connotations. There are two women on either side of a man. All three appear to be international students and the inclusion of this photograph is suggestive of the global orientation of UTokyo (Zhang & O’Halloran, 2012). The women are South Asian or South Continental Asian and the male is Caucasian. Huang’s (2006) statement that the typical international student in Asia is from other Asian nations is noteworthy here when combined with Kawai’s (2009) explanation that in Japan, identity is formed through Japan’s differentiation from others, particularly other Asian nations. Within this perception, Japanese take great pride in the fact that unlike some South Asian nations, Japan has four seasons. This photograph plays on this unsubstantiated perception in its depiction of a winter scene: there are no leaves on the trees, and the background is grey. All three international students are wearing

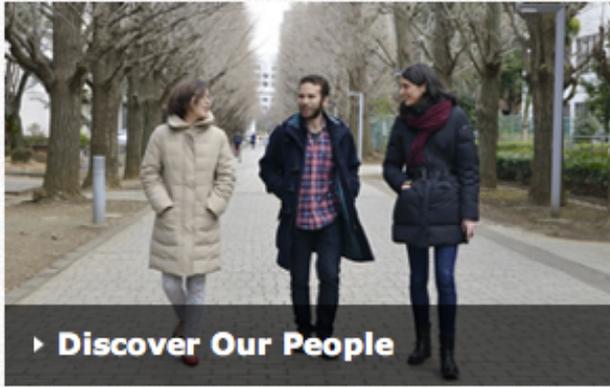


Figure 4.6: Three foreign students

winter clothing, the two students representative of other Asian nations have their jackets zipped up, and one is wearing a scarf. This depicts that winter is cold in Japan, so cold that students must dress warmly. This, in combination with the long shot, puts a distance between the user of the FLH and the university (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012). This distance and the fact that the three international students are separated from other Japanese students is poignant.

One of the boxed links at the bottom of the mainframe is titled “MPeak: Undergraduate Programs in English” (Figure 4.3:8). The UTokyo appears to be reaching out to prospective international students through programmes developed specifically in English, which is also a sign of this higher-ranking university contributing to the development of Japanese HE as a hub for international HE. Yet in doing this, it is also separating international students from Japanese students. Furthermore, if the user clicks on the link for the South Korean student’s testimony (photo discussed below, pictured in Figure 4.7), she is found to state that without a high level of Japanese she would not have been able to attend the UTokyo. While the UTokyo appears to be supportive of its international students, the fact that they appear in isolation from Japanese students in photos does lead to a connotation which questions the degree to which international students are able to integrate within the university.

Five animated photos appear in the main photo bar (Figure 4.2:9). Four of the photos highlight information concerning two of the links within the blue navigation bar. The last photo is for a YouTube promotional clip; a link for this is also found in the footer

bar (Figure 4.3:10). Embedded within each photo is a textbox explaining the photo, which also acts as navigation link to the subpage that the photo represents. The connotation of traditional and modern values in education displayed in the structuring of the webpage continues with the five animated photos. This will be exemplified with a description of two of the photos.

The first of the animated photos is an upper body photo of an Asian female student (Figure 4.7). The embedded text informs users she is from South Korea. Her smiling face looks directly at users, as if making eye contact in an attempt to attract the



Figure 4.7: A foreign student's testimony

user's attention to her story (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012). She is standing outside on a lawn. The textbox connects the user to the "Why UTokyo?" subpage. The text encourages the user to question the role of learning about East Asia through history, which can be a controversial topic, but it is spoken by a South Korean female student who is positively attesting to the benefits of studying in Japan (Kawai, 2009). This may connote a curriculum that challenges perceptions of Asian history, from which future relations can expand. This could also be an attempt to establish a relationship between the international student in the photo and prospective international students from other Asian nations. The textbox next to the student is akin to a text message from this international student to users of the FLH. Combined, these may connote UTokyo's critical awareness of its role in education in a globalised arena and excellence in learning opportunities at the university.

The fifth animated photo blends the past with the future. This photo depicts a person wearing a spacesuit walking in a covered concourse with Gothic archways and columns (Figure 4.8). The Gothic archways and columns may connote traditional educational values, which in the present will support the future as symbolised through the out-of-this-world person in a spacesuit. The textbox embedded in



Figure 4.8: Combining past with present

the photo simply states “Explorer: Check out the University’s official promotional video”. An additional link to this is found at the bottom of the webpage and for other social media sites (Figure 4.3:10). As it is unusual for a Japanese HEI to have a promotional video, let alone one in English, this connotes the avant-garde initiative of the university. The almost full figure shot of the person in the spacesuit is in the very foreground of the photo in the shadow of the arched Gothic concourse. As noted in Chapter 3, positioning within a photograph can influence relationship. The reflection of a light bulb shining on the facemask may symbolise the formation of an idea. Bright sunshine can be seen in the far background, behind the spacesuit. It is as if the person in the spacesuit is walking towards the user, to welcome them and to lead them to the path to their future. Combined these symbols could suggest that, in its research, the UTokyo is a dynamic institution, where the present meets the future. When the different elements within this image combine, the connotation may suggest a high-quality education for today, which prepares students for a global tomorrow.

### **4.5.3 UTokyo summary**

The semiotic analysis illustrates that together the compositional categories of page Structure/Content and Images unite to connote the identity of the UTokyo as a discerning institution, and one that is supportive of international students. Its educational goals, while based on traditional values in education, also reflect on preparing its student body for global citizenship. Working together, the compositional categories establish the connotation that an infrastructure to assist and guide international students exists at the UTokyo. Yet, the three photos discussed here also connote challenge. Challenge is found through facing the elements of daily life, addressing controversial topics, and through research and experiments. The FLH brings together the idealisation of studying abroad with the reality of challenges in studying. The smiling international student conjures new friendship, the winter scene represents challenge and time, and the futuristic photo of the spacesuit person connotes ideas of future and present education excellence. The pretentious spacesuit photo and the winter photo, along with the textbox of the international student all may be connotations of the ideas that the UTokyo is a serious place to study and hard work will take students from the present to the future.

## **4.6 Ishikawa Prefectural University (mid-ranking)**

### **4.6.1 Structure/Content**

This section will highlight how the range to which some of the minimal significant units within the compositional category of Structure/Content have been developed are sending mixed messages to prospective international students, which ultimately connote that international students will not find an overtly supportive infrastructure at Ishikawa Prefectural University (IPU).

As a university which focuses on the sciences, IPU could potentially be of interest to international students. How the university presents itself on its FLH is therefore of importance, as it is here that many international students will develop their first impression of IPU. When the FLH is accessed from a desktop computer, the FLH does not fit the browser window, rather there are wide spaces on both the left and right sides of the screen. There are three distinct sections within the top-page. It is only as the user scrolls down the FLH that it is noticed that the information placed

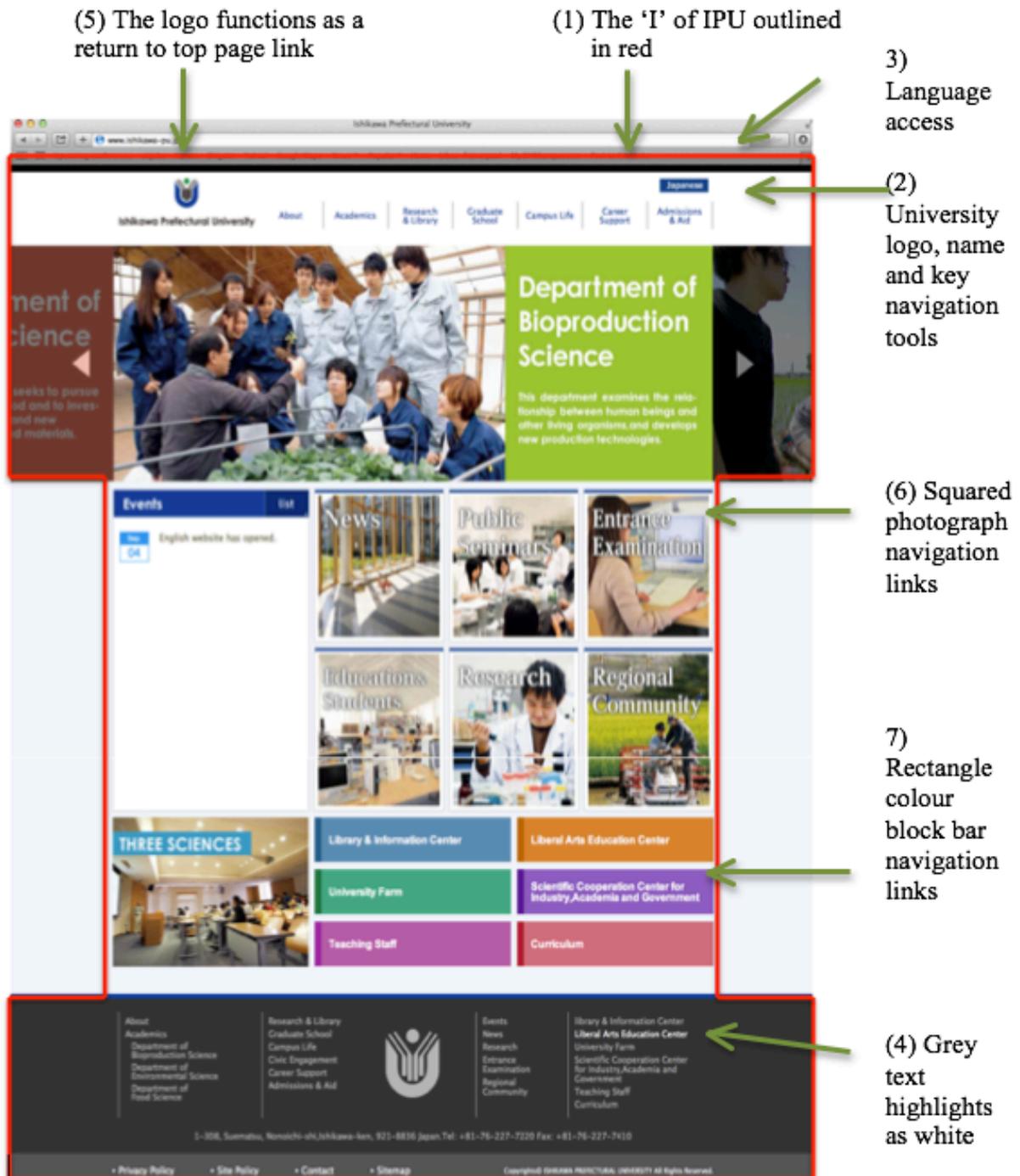


Figure 4.9: The top-page of Ishikawa Prefectural University

within this page is structured like a capital 'I' (see Figure 4.9:1). The header and footer bars extend to the edges of the browser window, while the middle section is centred in the mainframe with very pale blue blocks on either side in the left and right scan columns. The 'I' structure, perhaps in reference to the name of the university itself, may connote a sense of whimsical within the structure of an academic institution.

This whimsical connotation continues with the contrast between white and other colours. The narrow header bar has a white background. Within this section, the navigation tools appear in medium blue or black (Figure 4.9:2). The traditionally placed language access link is within a filled medium blue box, with “Japanese” written in white (Figure 4.9:3). This use of colour highlights that there is only one FL choice: English. Given that IPU is a science orientated HEI, and English is the common language for international communication (Callahan & Herring, 2012), it may be logical that the university has a FLH in English. However, given that most international students in Japan are from China or Korea (Study in Japan, n.d.), the fact that the university has not developed homepages directed towards these student populations is of significance. This may connote the degree to which the university is developing its internationalisation project.

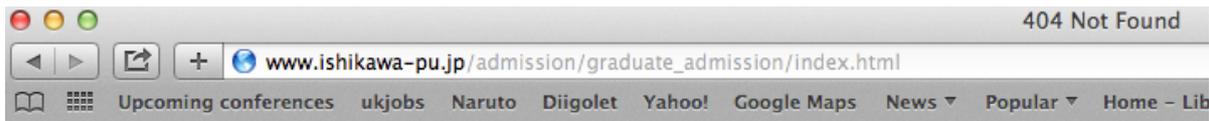
The predominate use of white for written text continues throughout the mainframe. Even in the footer bar, which has a charcoal black background, the text highlights as white when the cursor runs over the additional links (see Figure 4.9:4). The contrast of the primarily white text against colour bars or on images, not only highlights the text, but also draws attention to the images themselves (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002). Shadowing text on the photographs in the mainframe and the use of colour boxes with white text ensures the text is readable. The use of white at IPU may connote values of precision and cleanliness within a clinical setting (Labrecque & Milne, 2012). The connotation associated here might be that IPU is a serious place to study science.

The initial whimsical impression alternately diminishes and returns in the examination of the structure of the header bar. Here, the user may notice that the university’s name is not centred within the page; rather, it is located directly under the logo on the left side of the window (Figure 4.9:5). Whereas at other universities the university’s name appears prominently within the header bar, at IPU the navigation links are almost the same font size as the university name. This may have the effect of reducing the spotlight of which university’s FLH the user is visiting, thus potentially connoting a distance between the university and visitors. After connecting to a subpage, some users may notice that the university’s name and logo depress if their cursor runs over it. This depression signifies a function, and it is found that

when clicked, the logo acts as a link to return to the top-page. This appears to be a common feature on other universities websites, yet at other universities there is no depression, accordingly the user would have to be aware of this function from prior experience. The depression has a connotation value of caring, through subtly informing users of functions available within the website.

There are several instances where access to information at IPU is not available. Traditionally, users would expect to find a search box in the header bar, however, on IPU's FLH this is conspicuously absent. The structure within the footer bar initially appears to conform to convention. Here the university's contact address and telephone number can be found. However, there is no campus or access map nor is there train/ bus information. The conspicuous absence of accepted placement of links to information connote that the university's infrastructure, in terms of extensively supporting international students, is still developing.

The way the minimal significant units combine to provide information for students may connote a cautioning. The seven-navigation links, within the header are simply, yet appropriately titled. While none of these links appear to be specifically geared towards the international student, four links "Academics", "Research & Library", "Graduate School", and "Admissions & Aid", could be potentially of interest. However, upon navigating to the subpages, blocks of brochure type information are found. Instead of taking advantage of the interactive nature of the Internet, the information presented appears to discourage interaction. Moreover, not all the links are active; the "Career Support" and more importantly "Admission and Aid" links connect users to "Coming Soon" messages. As there is no update date on the website (with one exception discussed below), the user would be unsure what the timeframe for "Coming Soon" is. The link to the "Graduate School" while offering basic information about the graduate programmes available, also does not have an active sub-link for information regarding admissions (Figure 4.10). Furthermore, the



## Not Found

The requested URL /admission/graduate\_admission/index.html was not found on this server.

Figure 4.10: The Graduate School link to admissions

link to “Academics” in the header bar, which is connected to another link in the mainframe, offers only a brief overview of the programmes of study. Information is not easily found. This may connote a warning to prospective international students concerning the type of assistance they can expect with regards to accessing pertinent information.

The connotation that access to information is limited is further supported in the analysis of the mainframe. Here additional links in the form of six square photographs (Figure 4.9:6) and rectangular colour block bars (Figure 4.9:7) are found. Each photograph allows the user a glimpse of university life. It is within the colour bars and in the footer that the international student will find the “Curriculum” navigation link. It is notable that this page is not found directly within any of the main navigation links in the header bar. This might connote the secondary placement of information of interest to potential international students. Within this notion, language usage is of importance. When navigating to the “Curriculum” link, potential Master students can find limited information concerning course programmes in four departments. Within this sub-link “Divisions” is used interchangeably with “Departments”, and this inconsistency connotes carelessness in presentation. With regards to the Doctoral Degree course, the two departments listed both state information is “coming soon”. Here, it is noticed that this message is not capitalised, while in other sections, both words were. The openness to information as represented by the white lettering is in stark contrast to the limited information placed on these pages, which does not connote a university overtly concerned with connecting to an international student population.

This connotation is further supported by other small language usage errors seen on the top-page. While the six-photograph links demand attention, adjacent to the left, running the length of the picture links, is a scan column. The column, entitled “Events” has a sole link marked with a calendar notepad icon dated “Sep. 04” captioned “English website has opened” (Figure 4.11A). The use of the present perfect tense caption is of significance as it connotes that the FLH will be experiencing change over time, and that it is not yet complete. The use of ‘Sep.’ accompanied with a full stop could be a potential source of conflict for international students, as it is not a recognised abbreviation for September. It may seem trivial to question the use of an abbreviation with its punctuation. However, as noted above, international students in Japan are primarily from nations where English is also taught as a FL. This then raises questions as to purpose behind the development of the university’s FLH, and who they think will be using it. Furthermore, it is not until after the user clicks the link that they find that the English website was officially launched on September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014. This is the only place where a full date appears on the FLH, thus, there is no way to tell when the FLH at IPU was last updated. Yet, in

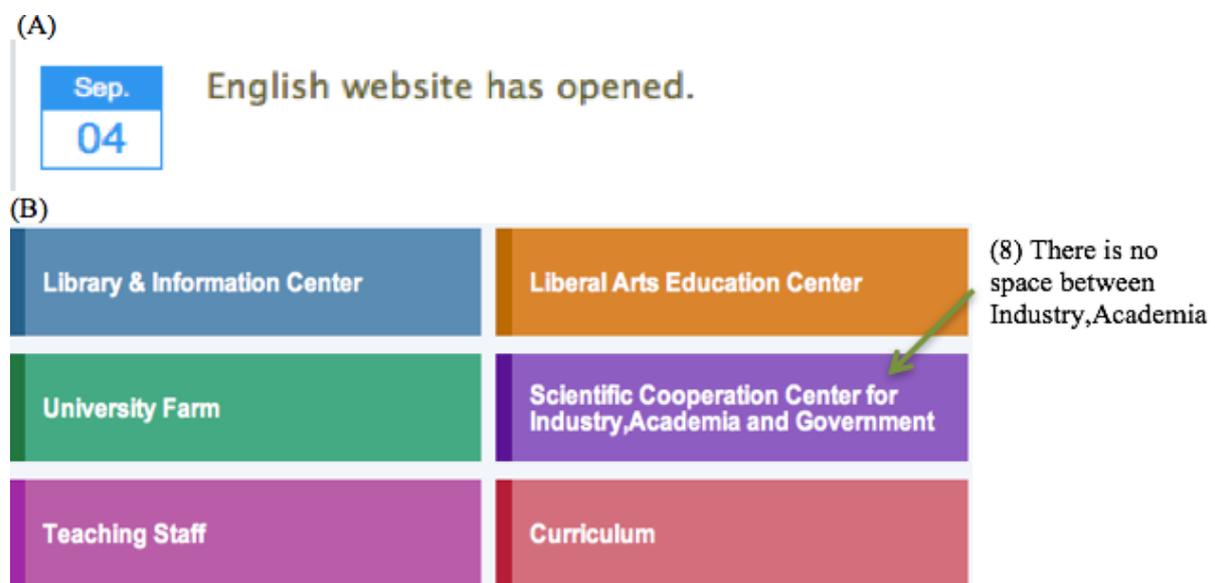


Figure 4.11: A/B Errors

comparison to the Japanese homepage, this same column is divided into two: “新着情報&トピックス” (What’s New and Topics) and “イベント” (Events). All the data appearing in these spaces have an input date (yyyy/mm/dd) accompanied with a topic headline. It therefore appears, that while the Japanese homepage is regularly

updated, the FLH is not. This connotes the nominal value IPU places on its FLH as a source of information for prospective international students.

The bright primary colour boxes at the bottom of the mainframe are eye-catching. These colour navigation links seemingly direct users to important information within the FLH. Yet, one box has a punctuation error (Figure 4.11B:8). While the meaning of the text is not lost, the punctuation error connotes a lack of professionalism.

Due to a lack of attention to presentation, either through conformity to abbreviations and punctuation, and the irregularity in the FLH's maintenance, the whimsical nature of this webpage diminishes. These points combined, even though they are small details, demonstrate carelessness. This subsequently influences the connotation of IPU's image as a scientific university as one that is not concerned with precision.

#### **4.6.2 Images**

This section will address how the images on IPU's FLH connote a wavering between the connotation of a distancing between the university and international students and providing them with a place for knowledge acquisition.

The use of colour appears to be a thematic tool and extends to the images on IPU's FLH. Directly under the main navigation links in the header bar, is a series of three animated photographs. Each of the three photographs represents a department within the university. Only one of the photographs depict a close-up shot. The close-up shot may represent the closing of distance between the FLH user and the university and may connote welcoming to students (Elliott & Robinson, 2012; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012). However, as the other two photographs depict long shots, this connotation is negligible.

To the right of each photograph is a colour block where the name of the department is written with a brief one-sentence introduction (Figure 4.9). The Department of Bioproduction Science's light green colour bar may connote nature, life, growth and safety (Hynes, 2008). The meaning of green is reflected in the image of a small class of students gathered around their instructor at a low planter box. The Department of Food Science's image colour block is orange. Orange is not as aggressive as red,

and the colour may connote warmth as well as “dynamism for advancing knowledge” (Hynes, 2008; Zhang & O’Halloran, 2012, p. 103). In this department’s photograph three smiling students are working on a scientific experiment. Lastly, the Department of Environmental Science has a sky-blue colour block. Blue is an aesthetically appealing colour (Cyr, Head, & Larios, 2010) and, as noted above, may connote trust and intelligence. The use of blue in this section of the FLH appears to connote open space, intuition, and inspiration. As this photo is taken outside, in an educational sense, this combination could connote students’ freedom to explore the world around them through science. The connection between the colour blocks and the photographs suggest the accessibility of knowledge and the interactive nature of learning; the connotation here is that IPU cares about the learning environment it presents for students. However, it is notable that in the photographs, an obviously international student is not found.

The connection regarding the approachability of studying science at IPU is depicted in all the photographs in the mainframe. These photographs depict happy Japanese students conducting experiments, working in the community, or with equipment such as beakers and computers. One photo entitled “News” uses light and shadows to send a connotation of gaining knowledge (Figure 4.12). The light draws attention to



Figure 4.12: The photograph square ‘News’

a plant and a row of chairs. The plant might connote knowledge growth, while the empty chairs connote waiting and a place to sit and study. Combined with the light and shadow pattern the overall connotation of this image could be that knowledge is accessible, and that at IPU students are guided to the path of knowledge acquisition.

### **4.6.3 IPU summary**

The overall compositional features of IPU's FLH are not in unison. The whimsical nature of the FLH at IPU, through its use of colour, appears to be compensating for the quality of information and images depicting only Japanese students. The lack of pertinent information, most notably that there are no navigation tools tailored specifically for the international student, and the small errors in language usage do contribute to the overall connotation of the FLH. As access to information for the international student is not easy, the use of white as a signifier of a value of precision loses its meaning. Even after accessing several levels of sub-links, the information a prospective international student finds is not very developed. The navigation links found within the FLH, connote that IPU understands the type of information prospective international students might expect to find on a university FLH. However, the fact that IPU has only a FLH in English and, in combination with how the units within the compositional categories have been developed, this connotes that IPU is not fully prepared to provide extensive information on its FLH. These different meanings contribute to the overall connotation that while IPU understands the importance of being communicative to international students, at this stage support for them is limited.

## **4.7 Hokusho University (low-ranking)**

### **4.7.1 Structure/Content**

This section will discuss how the limited development and range of the minimal significant units within the compositional category of Structure/Content connote to international students the degree to which they must understand the Japanese language, if they wish to be a part of Hokusho University's (HokushoU) community.

Access to HokushoU is not straightforward. If searching for the university through a search engine such as Google, the user would have to know the Japanese kanji for HokushoU, as the page title is written as "English | 北翔大学". Upon accessing the Japanese homepage, before opening HokushoU's FLH, the user would be initially intrigued. To access the FLH, the user must click on a red semicircle titled "Open Information" which is a dropdown bar (Figure 4.13.1). When the dropdown bar is opened, the only non-Japanese information found is the language choice links:

English, Korean, and both traditional (Big5) and simplified (GB) Chinese (Figure 4.13.2) written using the Roman alphabet. All other information in this section, such as navigation links for information directed towards students, graduates, entrance examination, parents, and companies (Figure 4.13.3) and an access map are written in Japanese. Likewise, so is the university logo and name with the address, telephone/ fax numbers and website address and an active link to contact



Figure 4.13: Access to Hokusho University’s FLHs

the university via email (Figure 4.13.4). Given that the FLH has not been accessed yet, it is expected that the information within the top-page should be in Japanese. However, as access to the FLH requires opening the dropdown box “Open Information” there is an anticipation for some FL information. This red bar may either connote a warning or an exploration of the Japanese culture. Which it is, will depend on the language specific information found on the FLH.

Upon accessing the English FLH, a significant amount of Japanese is still seen. The red semicircle titled “Open Information” also appears on this page. The entire webpage has a white background with a red board, which might be symbolic of Japan, as it is similar to its flag (Figure 4.14). The use of the Japanese flag’s colours connote an attempt to establish a relationship with the international user, which

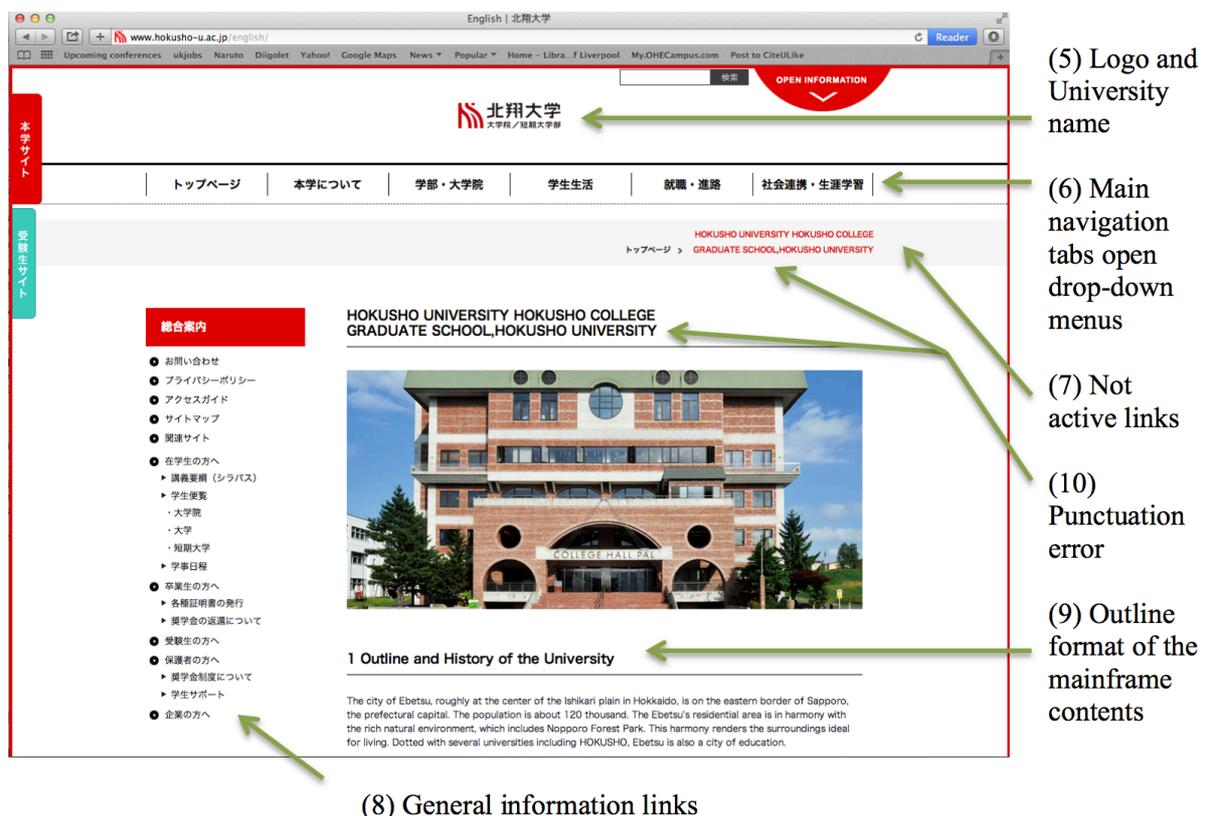


Figure 4.14: Hokusho University’s English FLH

maybe grounded between Japan and the other, as discussed in Chapter 2. Centred in the header bar is HokushoU’s logo and name written in Japanese (Figure 4.14.5). As at other universities, the logo is an active link back to the main homepage.

However, as HokushoU only has one long page for its English language homepage, clicking the logo returns the user to the top-page of the Japanese homepage, connoting that users are merely guests viewing the FLH.

The connotation that international students using HokushoU's FLH are merely guests is further cemented in the navigation links to additional information. Directly below the logo is a navigation bar containing six navigation links (Figure 4.14.6). All of these are written in Japanese, no matter which of the four FLHs accessed. These navigation links all open additional dropdown menu boxes to links to further information within the Japanese homepage. Below the main navigation bar, written in red capital block letters appear to be links to Hokusho College and Graduate School, this is preceded by “トップページ” (top-page; Figure 4.14.7). Despite their eye-catching lettering, the red colouring again may connote a warning as neither of these titles are actually links, although clicking on the “トップページ” does return the user to the top-page in Japanese. In the left scan column under the heading “総合案内” (General Information) additional navigation links appear (Figure 4.14.8). The access to pertinent information for students in only Japanese, may connote the level of Japanese international students must have if they wish to attend HokushoU.

In the mainframe of the HokushoU's FLH, an overview of the university is offered. Structured like a brochure, each of the four sections of the overview is accompanied by a number and section title (Figure 4.14:9). After reading a short history of the university, Section 2 introduces the departments of the university through a colourful bullet point outline (Figure 4.15). The rainbow-colours attract attention. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (2002) note, colour schemes can be used to mark distinction between different parts of a text. The outline format, in conjunction with the use of primary colours, could connote development. However, this colourful outline is not carried over into the brief description of each of the majors within the departments found immediately below. This could connote an arrest in development, as there is no further connection between the outline and the departmental description, thus the distinction is limited.

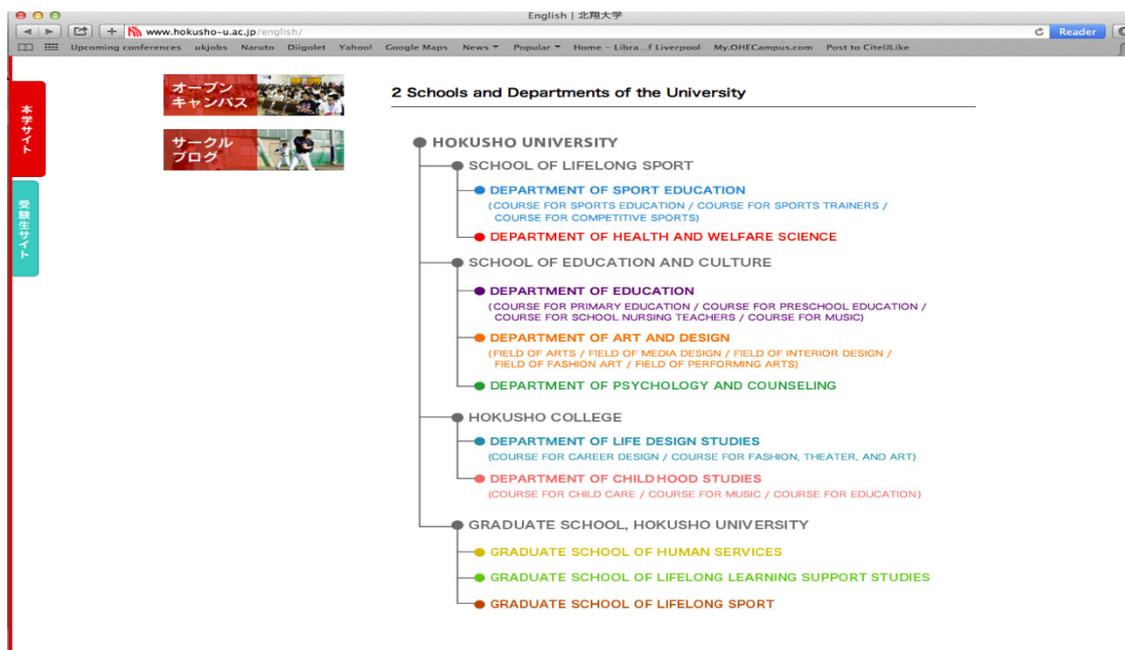


Figure 4.15: Outline of Departments

It is within the department description that carelessness is connoted with an increase in language usage errors. A punctuation error is made in two different places at the top of the FLH. The “GRADUATE SCHOOL, HOKUSHO UNIVERSITY” (Figure 4.14:10) is written all in capital letters almost as if the university is shouting its name, and additional errors occur in the description of the major programmes offered. Sentence fragments such as “From children to the elderly, from school education to competitive sports” (topic sentence to the School of Lifelong Sport: Department of Sport Education), and unnatural sentence formations “We provide numerous specialized subjects of study aimed to aid the daily lives of children, the elderly and the challenged” (within the Graduate School, Hokusho University: Graduate School of Human Services) occur. Other errors include missing articles and run-on sentences. While the miscommunication of these errors is negligible, on a published webpage they do connote the limited value that HokushoU has placed on the FLH as a communicative tool to its non-Japanese speaking audience.

The connotation that HokushoU does not interpret its FLH as a method to connect to international students seems to be countered in the development of the bottom part of the FLH. In Section 3, maps are presented, and contact information in English is available in Section 4 (Figure 4.16:11). In Section 3 there are four maps. Unlike the

access map on the Japanese homepage, these maps are not active links. This connotes the limited assistance the university is able to provide to international students. Directly under the maps in Section 4, is an active link to an email address. This is significant as it connotes that the university is open to being contacted by others (Figure 4.16.12). In the footer bar, many navigation links to additional information in Japanese are found, as well as a link to return to the top Japanese homepage (Figure 4.16:13; 4.16:14). The stark contrast between the number of links to information in Japanese all on the one page available in English connotes that

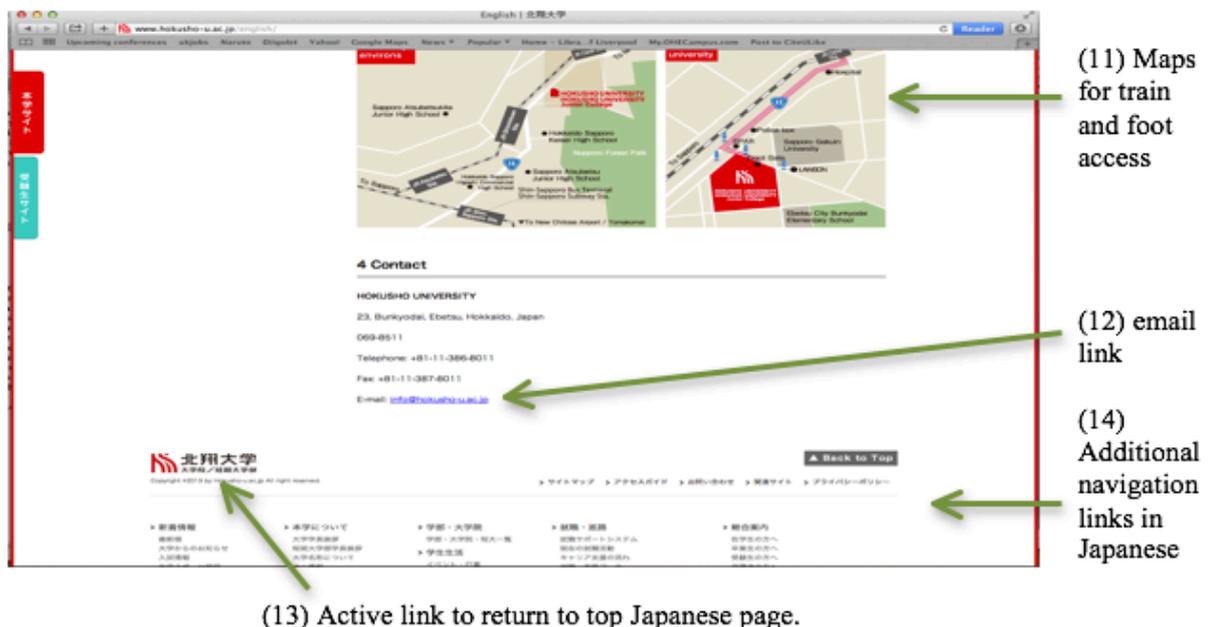


Figure 4.16: Bottom part of Hokusho University's FLH

HokushoU's system is not developed to support international students to the same standard as it does Japanese students. When the connotations of these different minimal significant units are combined, they contribute to an overall connotation that there is a distancing between the international student and the university, where foreigners are welcome to look, but are not actively encouraged to engage with the university.

#### 4.7.2 Images

This section will address how the images on HokushoU's FLH further confirm the connotation that the international student user of this webpage is merely a visitor.

Unlike the Japanese homepage, there are only a few photographs on HokushoU's FLH. As soon as the user accesses the FLH, they will notice that there is one small photograph of a building centred in the page under the main navigation bar. The only identification that this building is part of an HEI is a cement beam stretched across the main archway to the covered entrance, which reads "College Hall PAL" (Figure 4.17.15). Without accessing the Japanese homepage, it will not be understood that PAL is not a reference to a friend, but rather an abbreviation for *Place Amie Liberté*, which is the current name of the HokushoU's school newspaper. The use of the French feminine phrase here has a historical connection to the development of the university as women's institution that supported female independence. This however, would be lost on the international student, further connoting a distancing between the university and international students.

**HOKUSHO UNIVERSITY HOKUSHO COLLEGE  
GRADUATE SCHOOL, HOKUSHO UNIVERSITY**

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(15) The Banner

Figure 4.17: The top-page photograph

The connotation of distancing continues when scrolling down the webpage. Seven small photos accompany a brief description of each of the departments listed in the rainbow outline. The photographs are long shots which depict Japanese students in activities related to the departmental description. Five of these photographs depict female students only. This signifies the gender division of the university population. The people in the images may connote to whom the university maybe directing their communications towards: the young female Japanese student.

### **4.7.3 HokushoU summary**

The visual images and the text have an interrelationship, which together contribute to the overall connotation of HokushoU's FLH. As a lower-ranking university, HokushoU's priority in developing programmes for international students may not be high. This connotation is reached through the extensive use of Japanese within the FLH and by the many links that are conspicuous by their absence. Even the search box, which is traditionally placed within the header bar, is written in kanji. Combined, these discourage extended use of the FLH. Specific information for international students concerning entrance requirements, finances, and programmes is absent. The lack of use of images where the 'foreign' is integrated within the university mirrors the textual use of kanji and combined these signify that the user is an outsider. However, the fact that HokushoU does have a FLH is of significance, as this demonstrates an acknowledgement of an unstated convention within the internationalisation of Japanese HE that HEIs must attempt to be visual. The simplicity of the development of the compositional categories' elements on HokushoU's FLH allude to the early stages of development of an FL infrastructure. The fact that none of the main navigation links have English translations nor are there any subpages to additional information, even with the phrase "Coming soon" suggest that at this stage, there are no plans for further FL development. The connotation of HokushoU's FLH is grounded in its presentation, in terms of a university that has adjusted to the expectations of how a university should present itself within the global education market yet wants to maintain its educational focus on home students.

### **4.8 Summary**

The development of FLHs is not uniform. There are differentiations between the degree to which the FLHs' compositional categories have been developed at different ranking HEIs. This chapter began by analysing the trends in Japanese FLHs according to the compositional categories defined in Chapter 3. Defining the semiotic framework enabled a relational analysis of Japanese HEIs' FLHs, through the common trends. Then, attention turned towards the three institutions analysed using Barthesian approach to semiotics. As would be expected, the UTokyo, Japan's highest-ranking university, has the most detailed FLH with information specifically geared towards international students, connoting welcoming and an infrastructure

supportive of international students. As a middle-ranking university, IPU's FLH is informative, yet the missing information on sub-pages along with language usage errors might not be an encouraging sign for international students. This webpage connotes that limited support for international students is available. HokushoU has the least accessible FLH, which connotes that the development of its FLH has been reactionary in nature; it is symbolic of an internationalised HEI. The semiotic analysis of the three different ranking HEIs' FLHs, provides a reference for the analysis of the development of FLHs by the producers (Chapter 5), which focuses on the distinction of cultural capital resources available to them, and the transformation into symbolic capital through the visual interpretation of FLHs by international students (Chapter 6). The semiotic analysis accordingly provides a foundation of reference for a Bourdieusian analysis of the encoding and decoding of FLHs.

## Chapter 5 Encoding: The Production of FLHs

This chapter presents a discussion of the data collected from the interviews with the producers of FLHs. The interview data was thematically analysed and categorised into three overarching themes concerning FLH development. This provides a basis from which the explicit and implicit message of FLHs can be explored. Throughout the discussion, the focus will be on how FLHs are being developed within the internationalisation projects at universities and the tensions within this. The discussion will draw upon Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural and symbolic capitals as outlined in Chapter 2.

### 5.1 The FLH Producers

Four FLH producers working at Japanese HEI were interviewed. Three of the producers – Emma, Grace and Alice – work on the main FLH, while the fourth, Rachel, designed a homepage for her department. Table 5.1 is a summary of the key characteristics of the FLH producers' HEIs, which were outlined in Chapter 3 (Table 3.3, p. 49). In the discussion of the interview data, the focus is on the

Name	Institution ranking Page description
Emma	High Detailed pages, in English and Chinese, with information easily found.
Grace	Mid Two different FLHs are available the Internet, both only in English with limited information.
Alice	Low The link to the FLH is hidden within the mainframe. Detailed FLHs in English, Chinese, and Korean pages are available.
Rachel	High A partially bilingual departmental webpage, which is not accessible from the mother-site.

Table 5.1: An abbreviated profile of the producers' HEIs

experiences of the producers in the development of their institution's FLHs. The discussion is centred on how the various cultural capital resources the producers of FLH have access to, in combination with their knowledge and skills in developing their institution's FLH, are contributing to the inequalities and distinctions between FLHs. The constraints and tensions of FLH development influence the attributed

symbolic capital. The symbolic capital is concerned with how the producers have been able to develop the FLH as an image of the HEI and the value users attribute to the webpage as informative, specifically focusing on the international student.

## **5.2 Social Benchmarking**

The semiotic analysis of the FLHs of three different ranking HEIs indicates that the range and detail of information on the FLH varies widely. The producers interviewed indicated that this might be due to the perception of the purpose of the webpage by the HEI. They suggest that for the university, the development of a FLH maybe a social benchmark of the way prestige is internalised and subsequently incorporated into how the university presents itself to others. As discussed in the literature review, in Japan, government policies greatly influence an HEI's practice. Emma, the homepage producer at a high-status university, agrees with the idea that "the teaching and learning of English is directly" connected to ideals of participating within the globalised HE arena. In this situation, the use of English has become synonymous with being international in Japan (Ishikawa, 2011; Seargeant, 2008). Accordingly, the development of FLHs, particularly in English, by Japanese HEIs is closely attached to the social benchmark of adopting an internationalised outlook. These universities, as Emma explains, want to demonstrate that they are "global". As English is considered an international language and is the FL promoted by MEXT (Hashimoto, 2013; Ota, 2014), this is closely tied to the development of FLHs in English.

While the development of an English FLH might be connected to being international, there are other factors within the subfield of HE that are influencing the acceptance of what type of information contributes to the meaning of being international on a FLH. Government policies concerning FL education in Japan have influenced language choice in FLH development (Emma high-ranking, Alice low-ranking). However, as noted in Chapter 2, in Japan certain universities, the TGUs, have been earmarked to receive special funding by MEXT to develop programmes to attract international students (Rose & McKinley, 2017). These universities have become the benchmark for how an internationalisation project is developed by other HEIs. However, as Alice explained, MEXT is also a force behind the development of FLHs as they offer "a lot of money" to institutions that accept international students. The

Japanese government is providing subsidies to universities who register international students (Ota, 2014), and this is contributing to social expectations of what internationalised HEIs in Japan should be achieving. As the universities participating in the TGU programme are among Japan's highest-ranking institutions, it is important to note that they also have a history of international relationships, which influence their current international projects (Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015). This has subsequently led to their perceived status as knowledgeable in the process of internationalisation, which mid- and lower-ranking institutions are attempting to emulate. Yet, as Grace the homepage producer at a mid-ranking university noted, many HEIs in Japan do not have the budget to create "more than one FLH". This is where the significance of English can be seen. It appears that the limited budget combined with the notion of attempting to develop an internationalisation project has led to a situation where only English FLHs are being developed by HEIs. As they begin this, the FLH represents an initial social benchmark of being internationalised.

The sense of social expectations, as a response to the internationalisation of HE, has been a great force in the development of FLHs, yet this is limited by the university's infrastructure. As Grace (mid-ranking) explains, most mid- and lower-ranking institutions currently "do not have the infrastructure" to support international students who cannot study in Japanese. Without this infrastructure, the primary force for competition for international students evolves from incentives from MEXT (Ng, 2012). Nevertheless, it does exemplify the extent to which MEXT is exerting an external pressure on HEIs to develop an internationalisation project. This is particularly apparent in the peer pressure to develop a FLH, which Grace alludes to with her response that "other universities have one, so I thought we should too". As HEIs are at different stages of the development of an infrastructure to support international students there are distinctions between the development of their FLHs. This distinction is further connected to how the university has interpreted the expectation to develop their FLH as a link to connect with others.

The fact that higher-ranking institutions have developed their internationalisation projects over an extended period, has enabled them to use the FLH as a tool to distinguish their projects from those at other institutions. As technology develops, these institutions have incorporated changes within their structural development, and

combined with the information made available on their webpages, this is enabling their FLHs to be a sign of prestige. In comparison to other institutions, Emma (high-ranking) described that

at that time, our English website was a lot better than most of those other universities. We were putting more energy into it. There were probably only a handful of other schools that had a dedicated full-time staff who [was] working on the English homepage. And that's evident when you look at it.

This exemplifies that within the game there is the expectation that Japanese HEIs should have a FLH. Furthermore, it illustrates that producers have access to different forms of cultural capital, and this is reflective in the published FLH, which then becomes a form for comparison and differentiation from other institutions. The current education climate emphasises the development of internationalisation projects by all HEIs, including those that have not historically had such projects. For these other institutions, it seems that Emma is suggesting that the social pressure to publish a FLH, more than the idea that the webpage could be a source of distinction, is the push behind their development. This conceptualisation of the FLH directly feeds into the idea of visibility.

The university's understanding of visibility influences how their FLHs develop. The success of an informative FLH is dependent both on an investment in key information for different stakeholders and the placement of this information. The university which does not understand the importance of conformity to FLH structure risks reducing its value, as this webpage can be interpreted as being "for show, not practicality" (Grace, mid-ranking). Thereby, the FLH may not contribute to the prestige of an institution as being international. This is important for the social benchmarking function of the FLH, as to be a conduit to a university, the webpage should have several functions. This includes being global, a source of information for potential international students, and being visual to potential partners abroad. The visibility of an HEI, through its FLH, is therefore connected to the institution's idea of who the potential users of its webpages are likely to be (Healey, 2008). These factors contribute to the degree to which information is developed on the FLH and

would also be an indication of how an internationalisation project is being adopted by an HEI.

The imagined identity of potential users appears to be influencing the visibility of the navigation link to the FLH. While it is not questionable that internationalisation projects have become a part of most HEIs' institutional practices (de Wit et al., 2015), how these practices are implemented does differ. Alice (low-ranking) explained that at her institution, the FLH is "not easily accessible" from the Japanese website, nor is it found through a Google search. The link to the English page is found amongst many other links within the mainframe of the Japanese webpage. This university appears to have a weak investment in the potential use of its FLH. Furthermore, at other institutions, such as at Grace's, several different versions of the FLH can be found through an English online search. These two different versions of FLHs on the Internet negatively influence the symbolic capital users attribute to the HEI, as they adversely influence access to information and the institution's appearance. While these practices in FLH development suggest that there is recognition of the importance of being active participants in the international HE arena by mid- and lower-ranking institutions, they also suggest that these institutions have not yet successfully established how they should be presenting themselves. Accordingly, the function of the FLH as a social benchmark for the institution as internationalised, is reduced, as the limited visibility of the FLH is unlikely to positively contribute to the prestige of these institutions.

The visibility of an HEI's webpage also includes the degree to which the FLH is developed as discussed in Chapter 4. As the semiotic analysis illustrated, the information and number of subpages on the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs' FLHs was limited. Within this language use was found to be questionable. All the producers felt that the amount of FL used on the FLH, particularly English, was fundamentally a statement of the language skills international students need to function at that institution. The pages that were harder to find, or that had limited information in English, or had pertinent information in Japanese only, such as the admissions process, were reflective of the level of Japanese international students would need to function at that institution. This then suggests that there may be conflict between the mere development of the FLH by the university and the understanding of its

potential use. However, this also illustrates, as exemplified in Chapter 2, that the internationalisation of HE in Japan is understood to be a function of higher-ranking institutions.

### 5.3 Audience & Function

The notion that the FLH is a representation of an HEI in relation to other institutions and thus both a tool and indicator of social benchmarking directly feeds into beliefs about the intended audience and their functions. The development of FLHs can be understood as a means of public relations for the institution. For many universities, communication is essential in gaining partnerships, which represents a *consumption abroad* stage of internationalisation (Ng, 2012). This influences the content appearing on FLHs.

When I was creating content for [the university] I rarely felt like any of it was created at the prospective foreign student. They're getting them in other ways. So, I always felt like I was writing for other universities around the world who might be checking out our homepage. (Emma, high-ranking)

As noted above, and in Chapter 2, MEXT plays a major role in the funding of internationalisation projects in Japanese HE, such as through additional financial incentives for universities who accept international students on four-year programmes (Ota, 2014). Mid- and lower-ranking institutions are beginning to realise that the function of a FLH could be developed to attract international students, and this has prompted many institutions to develop FLHs. However, other institutions are concerned with their visibility, but not necessarily for the attraction of international students, but rather because it is “the thing done” (Grace, mid-ranking), which may represent how ranking has influenced practice within HE. For these institutions, the development of a FLH has become part of the practices of an internationalised HEI. Yet, the

possibilities of what can be done with an English webpage have not been considered by the [lower-ranking] university. (Alice, low-ranking)

It seems that the FLH may only be recognised as part of the structural accommodations within an infrastructure that is incorporating an internationalisation project.

Internationalisation is one of many projects within an HEI (Marginson, 2008). Each institution will have a limited budget for the development of their FLH. Due to budget limitations, it is not always possible for some HEIs to develop complex FLHs (Rachel, high-ranking). In these circumstances, some institutions are adjusting their Japanese homepage to provide direction for international students through creating bilingual navigation links. Here, when the navigation link connects international students to a Japanese page, it enables them to “employ other methods of understanding the content of the page, such as a translation machine” (Grace, mid-ranking). The FLH should be way for an HEI to develop an interactive relationship with the users of its webpages. However, a FLH that does not provide basic information, and only provides direction through bilingual navigation keys is not building a relationship between the HEI and prospective international students. To maintain a relationship, the producers stated that it is important that HEIs understand the different information needs of its potential international audiences, so that they can direct users to “pertinent information” (Grace). However, it can also be questioned if the limited use of English here is a political tool (Hashimoto, 2000), designed to deter international students who do not have Japanese language skills.

#### **5.4 Producer Access and Engagement**

Access refers to the producers’ role in publishing content on their institution’s FLH. How the producers accessed their institution’s FLH directly influences the information that appears on these pages and the regularity of updates. Universities in Japan do not always host their FLHs on their own server. This influences how the FLH is maintained as well as its appearance.

In this study, it was only those producers working at higher-ranking institutions that had direct access to the domain which hosts their FLH and could input data themselves. This is advantageous as the producers could regularly update the FLH and are able to incorporate their knowledge and experiences of what it means to be a foreigner in Japan, through the information that they provide. However, it is

disadvantageous as guidelines vary. Emma (high-ranking) explains that at that time she was developing her institution's FLH, she "perhaps had a little too much freedom as no-one was overseeing what I put on" the webpage. This however, is not the case now; most FLH committees must seek approval from administration. Furthermore, Rachel (high-ranking) the departmental FLH producer, describes that there

isn't a culture of standardisation. I had to make my own logos, which if I were at home, I would get into trouble for because of copyright laws.

At these institutions, there is usually a distinct division between the mother-site FLH, which is a general webpage for the whole institution, and separate FLHs constructed by individual departments. There is often no interconnection between the mother-site and the sub-domains, some producers explained, with regards to colour coordination, logos, or type of information published (Alice low-ranking, Emma, and Rachel). Furthermore, the regulations governing an HEI's Japanese homepages are much more explicit and stricter. Here Emma, described that not only does the HEI's administration give directives concerning the Japanese homepage's content, but this content also had to be "approved through various committee meetings before it was uploaded", where she, as the sole producer of the FLH, "had none of that". The method of access and control therefore are symbolically attached to the HEI's perceived value of their FLH, and its possibilities to make connections with international students.

At mid- and lower-ranking HEIs, the FLH is often on a sub-domain of the university's server, but control of this webpage is outsourced. Producers do not have direct access to the FLH to input the data; they are responsible for producing content only. These producers are assigned to work on the FLH through committee work. "To add new content requires a meeting" (Alice, low-ranking), which implies extra work for all those involved. At Grace's (mid-ranking) institution, the outsourced server has complete control of the site's domain. Once or twice a year Grace and her committee will have a meeting with the web design firm, to share ideas and suggestions for changes. What is poignant here is that in the age of social media, where change is expected, the university has no direct access to their own FLH. However, it is unusual for universities to not have direct access to their Japanese homepage, and

they usually have a department which works full-time to maintain that webpage. This suggests that these universities do not hold the value of their FLH to be of great importance, as once the content the university wishes to have published on their FLH is handed over to the web design firm, it is no longer under the university's control.

Unlike a brochure, where the university sees all the proofs before publication, with a webpage any final changes to the content made by the web design firm, such as adding navigation links or adjustments in appearance, are not seen or proofread by someone at the university. This is particularly problematic because in many cases the person from the web design firm may not be proficient in the FL of the webpage they are working on. In making changes they may make mistakes, which are then published. This is an issue, as Emma stated, because

once the content is uploaded, as far as the web design firm is concerned, the contract is closed, so to make changes to any mistakes means that the university must reopen the contract, and this would require a new budget. However, the department has most likely spent their budget in the initial page, and so they must wait for next year's budget.

The route the producers use to access their FLH and the guidelines provided to them is pivotal in how a university's FLH gains symbolic value. The access route has direct consequences for the type of information appearing on the FLH in terms of how changes or updates can be made, the use of language, the quality of the final content, as well as the appearance of the webpage. Outsourcing the lower-ranking HEI's FLH to web design firms, who have little knowledge of the information needs of international students in HE, suggests that the cultural capital resources accessed and invested in the FLH are much lower than those invested in the Japanese homepage. Here Alice strongly voices her frustrations with this system stating that she

can't imagine having a website for a university, something that should be fairly dynamic, being contracted out...to be hosted and monitored and

updated, where the university [itself] can't constantly update...it doesn't make any sense to me.

It appears that there is a distinction between the symbolic value of an HEI's Japanese homepage and the lower-ranking HEI's FLHs. With direct access, and the ability to frequently update the Japanese homepage, this homepage can be considered a conduit for information. The restricted access to the FLH raises concerns with regards to the extent to which the FLH can be considered as a part of an HEI's internationalisation project, as with limited access, information is frequently outdated.

#### **5.4.1 Lack of support**

In the development of an institution's FLH it is expected that there would be some difficulties. A significant problem was in the allocation of faculty members or administration to work on the FLH. In this study, all the producers except for Emma (high-ranking), were working on the FLH as committee work in addition to their regular duties. As the continued development of the FLH is not their full-time job, this limits how the committee members interact in the development of their institution's FLH. Additionally, this suggests that the approach to the development of the FLH, by HEIs is more casual than that for the Japanese webpage.

The ability to create any webpage does require specialised knowledge. The technical knowledge and prior experience in webpage construction that producers had in computer programming did influence the functional development of the FLH and its appearance, including how or where information was placed. Those producers working on their own in-sourced FLH found that its development depended on their knowledge of software programmes and their willingness to be creative. If they encountered a technical problem, both Emma and Rachel (high-ranking) had to figure out how to solve it on their own as "help is not always readily available" (Emma), as their Japanese counterparts used different software. Nevertheless, they both demonstrated persistence and commitment in developing their university's FLHs. Emma found that sometimes her own skills to work with the software did not always allow her to do what she wanted, and if she could not find how to do it

through a Google search, she would either have to “change [her] perspective or change [her] idea”.

Rachel concurs that the willingness of the producer to “explore possibilities” and “not being scared” of technology influenced how they develop the webpage. However, she explicitly linked a lack of budget to the limitations of how she produced her department’s FLH. Most of the producers had only a small, and in some cases no budget for the FLH, and this directly influenced the appearance and usability of the FLH. Rachel’s department only receives a hosting budget for their webpage. This necessitates that they utilise WordPress, a free website creation tool. Departmental members have requested Rachel to

do something fancy, something more gadget-y, but I have to explain that the system won’t let me.

This is in sharp contrast with the strong control and support that a university has for its Japanese homepage. As the university has the technological and human resources, and budget to develop and maintain its Japanese homepage on campus, Emma and Alice (low-ranking) outline that it appears that the development of the FLH is being negatively positioned by the fact that its content is relegated to committee work and that it is outsourced.

So far, it is possible to see that the ideals behind the development of the FLH have not fully been considered by the HEI. The producers, who not only directly input the data on their institution’s FLH, but were also responsible for updates and maintenance, understood the value of making their webpage visible and a reliable source of information for international students. Yet, they have limited access and differing forms of cultural capital resources to further develop their HEI’s webpages. Both Emma and Rachel, at high-ranking institutions, noted that the systems they use do not include a tracking function for how international students are interacting with their institution’s webpages. This shows the producers’ awareness of the need for their HEI’s symbolic capital to develop. Being able to monitor the use of their FLH would allow the producers to understand the community they are attempting to develop a relationship with. This could inform how their HEI presents information on

their top-page. If, as noted above, the purpose of a FLH is to establish a representation of the HEI in the international education arena, and if it is to be “a visual sign to demonstrate how a particular institution is different from others” (Emma), then employing an effective tracking system could boost the HEI’s understanding of the information it needs to develop for various users. Yet, the support the producers need to extensively develop the FLH is limited, which subsequently influences how the university interacts with their FLH’s user community, and within this how the prestige value of the FLH is attributed.

#### **5.4.2 Implied jurisdiction**

The producers stated that other trouble spots evolved from the fact that the FLH does not fall under the specific jurisdiction of one department within the university. Often the FLH falls under the jurisdiction of a different department from the one that created the content. This becomes problematic when the producer of a FLH is a committee member, as they must attempt to develop the FLH according to the different information requirements of various departments. Yet, as English teachers they have limited access to these various departments and limited time to do this. To further complicate this, is the fact that the university understands the producer’s role to only be an adviser. As committee members, and therefore not considered experts, the producers often find that any comments they give regarding suggestions for content or improvements are typically unheard. Their role seems “superficial” (Grace, mid-ranking). Often once committee members have created the content, they will not see the content “until it is uploaded by the [outsourced] server” (Grace). In this process, there is a large margin for errors to occur.

Emma (high-ranking), however, suggests that outsourcing could potentially be beneficial for the FLH’s development. She states that

the most creative person will be working for an agency, because of the variety of work available to them, to outsource would mean...a much more creative page.

Here outsourcing could be an example of an institution acknowledging that they do not have the human resources with the technical skills to develop their FLHs.

However, this is reduced when the university creates a contract with the outsourced design firm that is based on minimal communication and a lack of control that the university subsequently has over its FLH.

Another problem is when two different departments are responsible for the development of the FLH within the university. As Emma explains

PR developed the FLH, yet the International Department takes care of foreign students.

Aside from the initial setup of the FLH, there is not much contact between the two departments concerning the update of specific information. Problems also arise due to a lack of understanding of the needs of different users of the FLH. As Alice (low-ranking) illuminates, a subset of the Admissions Department is responsible for the input of data on her institution's FLH. This causes problems, as Admissions does not understand the value of a FLH:

they don't have marketing skills; they don't have an idea of what to search for, for the needs of foreign students. (Alice)

It appears that both the university and the producers attribute different values onto the FLH. Some producers feel that mid- and lower-ranking HEIs are concerned with "getting something up in English on the web" (Grace). This causes problems for the producers, as they must constantly fight to publish the type of information that would highlight their university's uniqueness; information that would make their university "attractive" to potential international students (Alice). Furthermore, for these universities once the basic FLH was published, the urgency by the university in creating these pages is reduced. Alice remarked "to be honest, we haven't had a committee meeting for more than a year now". She also described her university as "entering the age of technology through the backdoor", as having as few meetings as possible to ensure that the FLH was developed and published. This results in undeveloped FLHs. As far as being in the information technology age, the producers at mid- and lower-ranking HEIs felt that their universities are "always playing catch-up" (Alice).

What the producers are outlining is that the rigid management system is limiting how the FLHs develop. This reflects back to the conception of what the internationalisation of Japanese HEIs is, how the top-down styled management system controls change, and how the lack of interconnection between different departments all contribute to the extent change occurs (Ota, 2014; Yonezawa, 2010). To be seen internationally means that an institution must develop webpages in languages other than Japanese. To develop an informative webpage in a FL requires negotiation between different departments, to ensure that necessary information is published. However, as the departments are not unified in their understandings of the purpose of their institutions' FLH, negotiation is limited, and this subsequently influences how FLHs are being produced and maintained.

### **5.5 Containing the Explicit Message**

The above elements do combine and communicate a message about the university. This message is both explicit and implicit. The explicit message begins with the information and details the producers were told to include on the FLH. This develops from understanding the value of information for a variety of audiences, and who the university's potential international students are. In the initial creation of their university's FLH, the producers did have meetings to discuss what content should be placed on the webpage. At mid- and lower-ranking universities the producers were initially told to translate the Japanese webpage into English. To do anything other than this "would have required a lot of meetings" (Alice, low-ranking), and to avoid this, the committees at times, were very liberal with their translations. This however led the international staff, from the beginning, to question the purpose of the FLH. They realised that their expertise, as native speakers of English, and their cultural understanding of the information needs of potential international student users of their websites, was not going to be extensively utilised by their HEIs. Grace (mid-ranking) "suggested lots of things, [of which] very few appeared on the website at all". Accordingly, key information is not being published, and the university is not utilising the unique position of its international staff to enhance the development of their FLHs. In this circumstance, as Rachel (high-ranking) exclaims, the FLH does not become "a source of information".

Conversely, at higher-ranking HEIs, Emma outlined that her university has a great deal of information on their FLH and was concerned with how to place this information so that the international student users could easily find it. Yet despite this, she as well as the other producers, felt that key elements were missing from the information provided on their FLHs. At the lower two ranking HEIs, pertinent information such as the programme of study, as well as tuition, the admission process, and housing is available on the Japanese homepage, but is missing on the FLH. That Emma concurs that information on the FLH is missing is particularly interesting as it suggests that even higher-ranking HEIs have not necessarily recognised the extent to which, in the social media age, their webpages should be interactive and developmental.

The producers understand that the internal structure of a university influences what content appears on the FLH, and how this is potentially in conflict with what information international students would want to see on a FLH. They realise that through providing key information for different international students, it is important that those students imagine interacting with the university. Imagination is of importance as it “pushes the user to take the next step, and to contact the university” (Emma, high-ranking). When FLHs that have been limitedly developed are published on the Internet, the explicit message that the international students may read is that this university is “not really going to go out of [its] way to help you in your language” (Grace).

## **5.6 Containing the Implicit Message**

The implicit message of a FLH is developed through the way a FLH is a conduit to a university. This message is constructed through the university understanding potential international students’ information needs and is demonstrated by the ease with which students can access this information. This equates to the FLH’s user friendliness and information placement. As Emma (high-ranking) noted above, students imagining being at the university is important, as it encourages them to make contact. Most universities do provide contact information for someone within the academic affairs office with the Japanese word for “staff” @(university email address). However, as Grace (mid-ranking) outlines, access information such as a map or bus routes, which is detailed on the Japanese page, is often not “translated

and uploaded” on many FLHs. Additionally, the producers note that other information specifically geared towards the parents of international students would be helpful in ensuring that they “know where we are, about our institution, and what their children will be doing” (Alice, low-ranking), but it is not being included on the FLH. The producers also agree that having the voice of a current international student is important in further enabling prospective students to image themselves at the university (Alice, Emma, Rachel high-ranking). While the producers are aware of how the FLH is a valuable method to interact with prospective students, they also note that there is a distinct lack of international student specific information on mid- and lower-ranking institution’s FLHs.

Usability requires recognition of how the presentation of information on a FLH influences the international students’ first impressions. This requires that HEIs understand that the way they communicate to others, through the content on their webpage, also enables the institution to differentiate themselves from others. Unlike many higher-ranking institutions, which increasingly are focusing on research activities (Hazelkorn, 2017; Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015), many mid- and lower-ranking institutions have a greater focus on teaching and nurturing students. Alice describes that the uniqueness of her “institution’s programme...and location have not been capitalised on”. Usability also provides reassurance to international students. This can be achieved through continuity between the FLH and the mother-site, as noted above, in the use of logos and colour schemes. Yet, in the creation of the FLH, the minimal guidelines only briefly outline the content material. Rachel voluntarily chose similar colour schemes to “the mother-site, so that users could know that we are still apart of the university”. If a FLH conforms to webpage structure and there is continuity to the mother-site, it is because the producer voluntarily created it that way, it is not because the university requested them to. It appears that universities do not have extensive guidelines for the development of these webpages in terms of appearance, as the producers are drawing from their own knowledge and experiences in developing their FLHs.

The implicit message then becomes contained in the producer’s interpretation of their FLH’s message and their belief in its success. Movement on the FLH is important. Emma (high-ranking) explained movement displays the institution’s

“interest in international students” and their ability to provide students with pertinent information. However, at the mid- and lower-ranking institutions, FLHs are not frequently updated. Grace (mid-ranking), jokes that when the university president changed several years ago, under the section of the president’s message, only the photo changed, “the message is the same as the previous president’s”. Furthermore, many institutions in this ranking bracket publish information that is irrelevant to most potential FLH users. To get “any real information” (Grace), students would have to refer to the Japanese homepage. More significantly, some institutions do have detailed information specifically for international students, but the navigation links to the FLH are not clearly marked on the Japanese homepage, “it’s buried” (Alice). Alice blames all this on “old men” in the university hierarchy, who are limiting how the FLH is developing. Amongst the producers there appears to be a consensus that while the information on each of their FLHs could improve, it is nevertheless a “reflection of what our institution is” (Grace). The producers appear to understand the information needs of international students and where to place it on the FLH, yet they lack the authority within the system to utilise this knowledge. This highlights the discord, between the producers and the management who oversee their university’s FLH, in the different ways these webpages can be employed in making connections with the international community.

## **5.7 Summary**

The development of a FLH has become synonymous with the incorporation of an internationalisation project for HEIs within Japan. A perusal of the finished product, the published FLHs of different ranking institutions, shows FLH development to be uneven. As the higher-ranking HEIs have a history of accepting international students, they are able to use the knowledge and experiences of these relationships to influence the information published on their FLH. All the producers had a similar concern however, that in the struggle to develop an internationalisation project, HEIs have neglected to take advantage of the expertise existing within their community; management at the HEIs had not overtly consulted with the foreign academics. These academics, through their experiences, understand the information needs of those wishing to gain access to the Japanese HE community.

The different forms of cultural capital assets available to the producers varied widely, and this is affecting the development of the FLH. These tensions and challenges are magnified within the development of FLHs at the mid- and lower-ranking universities. The way HEIs are enabling producers to access and utilise cultural capital is creating a distinction between the FLHs at different ranking levels. At the mid- and lower-ranking institutions, with limited budget, time, and resources, the producers are concerned with the image that FLHs are projecting. While not perfect, the freedom to create content, direct access to the FLH, and the access to the range of resources that the producers at the higher-ranking HEIs have, is facilitating in their encoding a FLH that is much more developed with specific information that is easy to access. Yet, even the producers at the high-ranking HEIs felt that their institution's FLHs were inadequate, and without technical support or enough finances allotted to the FLH, their FLHs' development did suffer. Nevertheless, the FLHs at the higher-ranking HEIs have set a standard for what FLHs should look like under an internationalisation project, a standard to which other ranking HEIs are attempting to achieve. As FLH homepages are publicly accessible, it is important to consider how others are interpreting Japanese HEIs as having incorporated their internationalisation projects. The message prospective international students receive, through the reading of FLHs, will be addressed in the next chapter.

## **Chapter 6 Decoding: The Reception of FLHs**

The reception of FLHs by international students will be discussed in this chapter. As outlined in Chapter 3, nine international students and three Japanese students, were interviewed in four groups (Table 3.4, p. 50). The first part of the chapter addresses how students decoded the FLHs that were the focus of the semiotic analysis in Chapter 4. Then, the second part of the chapter explores students' wider responses to university webpages, through their past and current experiences, and their perception of Japanese FLHs as resources for information. The analysis of students' data focuses on how they are decoding FLHs and the way that this relates to the symbolic capital of Japanese HEIs as being international.

### **6.1 The Reading of FLHs**

This section presents how each focus group decoded a FLH that was discussed in the semiotic analysis in Chapter 4. Each group first silently looked at one of the FLHs and used the keyboard and mouse to move around the webpage. Then, they were asked about their interpretations of that FLH. Students freely discussed user friendliness, impressions of recent updates, and access to relevant information. When necessary students were also prompted to express their impressions of the structural layout of the FLH, particularly the traditional placement of navigation links and images. Students discussed the FLH in terms of whether they would consider contacting that university for more information with the view of acquiring application materials. The analysis of the FLH that each group made is presented separately, under the themes of the Informed and Informative University, the Homepage as a Conduit, and the Interactivity of Connections.

#### **6.1.1 The University of Tokyo**

Focus Group2 assessed the University of Tokyo's (UTokyo) FLH. This university is Japan's highest-ranking university.

**6.1.1.1 The informed and informative university.** The students' first interest was whether the UTokyo met their information needs. They were primarily interested in information that would contribute to their success within that university including courses and programmes, tuition, how to apply, and where to live. This type of

information is indicative of a university that has considered the information needs of its international student population and has incorporated the value of hosting international students into its structural ethos (Bartram, 2007). Finding this type of information easily, a student stated it

makes me interested in the university. But if you are on a lesser developed page, you wonder what this is; it doesn't make sense to me as a foreigner.

Another student concurred adding that with less developed FLHs that

as you go inside, you find that you have a problem with the layout...But you shouldn't have to take the extra step.

While it is expected that Japan's highest-ranking university should have a well-developed FLH, these students noted that at other universities the FLHs are not as well developed, and that some universities do not portray themselves well to an international population. These students' comments suggest that first impressions are formed with initial glances, and therefore the type of information they find is of importance (Viehland & Zhao, 2008).

**6.1.1.2 The homepage as a conduit.** The students indicated that both the type of information placed on the FLH and language use are of importance. Language use was not deemed a problem in the semiotic review of the UTokyo. However, initially students need to adjust to the terminology used on the webpage, before they felt they were making a connection to the UTokyo's academic community. As students searched for information on the subpages concerning programmes, one student made the comment that "this is good, it's in English, you feel light, it gives some general picture, some overview" (Figure 4.1.3). Another student added that at the university she is applying to there is very limited information in English on the FLH, and there is no course book.

The Japanese students have the course book available to them and the webpage, but there is nothing for the foreigners. So, you feel isolated.

This confirms Viehland & Zhao's (2008) comment that webpages are an initial gateway to the university.

The internationalisation of HE is concerned with making connections (Rizvi & Lingard, 2011). The students thought that a well-developed webpage should contribute to building their relationship with the HEI. This could be achieved through the placement of navigation keys, which easily direct users to information they require. As with the semiotic analysis, students found the UTokyo's blue dropdown bar (Figure 4.4:3a) particularly useful as it easily directed them to specific information as potential applicants.

My interest is in information about graduate, about Master's. I want to know about the course, the course requirements, the criteria for assessment...I'm not interested about how many people from Laos came to this university.

As a channel into the social network of the university, the information on a FLH is indicative of the support that international students might expect from the university. This information is symbolic of the university's value for international students within the university's environs.

**6.1.1.3 The interactivity of connections.** The students believed that the purpose of a FLH should not only be a display of the university on the Internet, but also to encourage them to contact the university. Within this, access to different social media sites, such as Facebook and YouTube (Figure 4.2.10), illustrates to students that the university welcomes interaction with them. Group2 stated that with the provision of social media sites, "you can already draw [the] conclusion that if you send a request, that they would respond". Group2 concluded that the "website speaks for itself. Who wouldn't want to come?" It is the detailed information available on UTokyo's website and the specialised information for the prospective student that made them feel included within the university.

In summary, as a higher-ranking university, it was clear to students that UTokyo has invested in the development of their FLH. This connection can be describe as

reaching the competency stage of internationalisation, as it is enhancing the HEI's competitive stance (Marginson, 2014). The UTokyo has created a link between the university and international students through the student specific information that it has placed on its website. Finding a wealth of information with accurate language usage, students can imagine support in their studies. This contributes to the symbolic value of the FLH as a representation of the UTokyo as supportive of international students, within the internationalisation of Japanese HE.

### **6.1.2 Ishikawa Prefectural University**

Focus Group1 and Group4 assessed Ishikawa Prefectural University's (IPU) FLH. This university is a mid-ranking university.

**6.1.2.1 The informed and informative university.** Many of the international students initially did not do extensive research on possible universities to attend before they left their home countries. They knew that they first had to develop sufficient Japanese skills before applying to a university. This demonstrates that international students are aware of the language skills they need to function at a Japanese university. However, it also illustrates as noted in Chapter 2, the way English use has been confined within the internationalisation of Japanese HE (Choi, 2016). The limited use of English is representative of an HE culture that is slow to adapt to changes within its student composition, and their language needs within the international HE market. Once they had the language skills, students did compare and notice differences on the FLHs of several universities. As universities in the mid- and lower-ranking levels do not have the international prestige of the higher-ranking universities, distinguishing themselves from other universities is important when attracting international students. As found in the semiotic analysis, initially the structure of IPU's webpage was found to be distinctive; students found its structure "makes it more easy...to access specific information for the departments" (Group1; Figure 4.8).

Ensuring the information that students require is easily accessible is one way that a website can distinguish itself from others (Murthy et al., 2011). Students liked the central navigation block keys in the mainframe, finding that the bright colours directed their attention (Figure 4.8.7). If information is readily available, students "feel

more affirmative about wanting to study there” (Group1). This suggests that clearly providing key information encourages students to stay longer on the FLH, which might persuade them to contact the university. However, unlike the semiotic analysis alluded, students stated that as long as the information they require is provided, language errors do not influence their perception of the HEI. “Little errors are OK...Other homepages don’t have this...so it is good for me” (Group1; Figure 4.8.7). On the surface, it appears as if the students find this FLH informative, and it is creating an interactive connection.

Once students used the navigation links to connect to subpages their impression of IPU as being informative quickly became negative. Group4 attempted to find the admission fees. They found that this information was not readily available “I have to look in many places...oh...it’s not there”. The navigation link that should have provided this information, took them to a “Coming Soon” message. Furthermore, the presentation of information under the “Curriculum” link is in block format, which makes it difficult to read on a computer screen. Group4 described that the layout of the information presented “looks like a brochure”, which offers limited information. Students are expressing that they want specific information, and they are looking to the FLH to provide it. When students make a comment “it’s not there”, a conclusion can be drawn that the information provided is not contributing to the students’ impression of the university’s as being informative, or supportive of them. Without this information, students’ impression of the FLH became negative.

**6.1.2.2 The homepage as a conduit.** The students considered that the FLH also acts as a route into the university’s social network. Students explicitly stated that they not only wanted to be informed about courses, tuition, and instructors, but they were also interested about their possible university life. The students wanted to hear the voice of current students, so that they could make connections to studying at the university themselves. Students expected a FLH to provide them with enough information so that they can “feel in control of their studies” (Group1). Accordingly, the FLH is not just about providing key information about the university; it is also a channel into students’ success.

One way a FLH can support students' success is by enabling them to connect with other students. The experiences of international students already at the university, can give prospective international students clues as to what they can expect, should they enrol at that institution.

Every year there are many students who...come to Japan. I think that there should be something about them. About their activities and who they are. I didn't find anything about them. I want to see their voice; and learn what they found here. (Group1)

This illustrates the extent of information to which international students are expecting the FLH to provide. Students want to imagine how they "will fit in" (Group1) within the university's social structure. In Chapter 4, it was noted that the UTokyo's Korean student's voice provided students with clues about studying in Japan. This student noted that even at a higher-ranking university, international students must have a good command of Japanese, however they will also find a curriculum that challenges and stimulates their learning. The students, who assessed IPU's FLH are expressing that they want assurance that they will not be marginalised within the university and studying in Japan would be a worthwhile experience for them.

**6.1.2.3 The interactivity of connections.** The students expect a webpage to be dynamic and to engage their interest (Lynch & Horton, 2008). Information should be easily found on a webpage. Students were quick to notice that the webpage had not been updated since September 2014. "Look! It is so old; it is like they made it and forgot about it" (Group4). A FLH that is not regularly updated contributes to students' negative interpretation of the university, as it does not appear to them to be professional. It also contributes to a negative image of the university, as students read that the university is not technologically savvy and does not understand how the Internet contributes to attracting international students in the era of the internationalisation of HE. As one student summarises:

It doesn't provide full information for studying, even if I look at it I would also look at another university to compare. And if you do that, if you

make a comparison, it means that you aren't satisfied with the first one, are you? (Group1)

Without attention to form, as students stated, the university is effectively discouraging them from further engaging with it.

In summary, IPU is representative of how Japanese universities are embracing the internationalisation of HE. English is seen as a tool (Byram, 2008; Stigger, 2018b). If a university such as IPU, has developed only one FLH in English, it must ensure that the information provided is not only accurate, but is also accessible and engaging. The students' responses suggest that not only must navigation links direct them to key information, but information must also be available on the subpages in an easy to read format. Students expressed that with a lack of attention to presentation, the university displays its failure to understand the importance of its FLH as a conduit to information specifically for them (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012). It appears as if the university fails to understand the significance of its responsibility to create a link between themselves and prospective international students.

### **6.1.3 Hokusho University**

Focus Group3 assessed Hokusho University's (HokushoU) FLH. HokushoU is a low-ranking university.

**6.1.3.1 The informed and informative university.** The number of subpages a university's FLH has is an indication of the development of an infrastructure to support international students. The more subpages a university has, the more specific information it can provide to potential international students. Similar to the semiotic analysis, upon accessing HokushoU's FLH, students first noticed that all the navigation links in the top bar are in Japanese only. This instantly contributed to weakening the value of the FLH. In searching for navigation links in English, one student attempted to go to a subpage through clicking on the colourful rainbow outline (Figure 4.14). She asked, "Can I click something?...So we can't. I thought the colours were links". Murthy et al. (2011) note that conformity to webpage structure influences experience. As a single page, HokushoU's FLH offers students no direction, and this set students on guard as they initially did not find the basic

information they were expecting. This weariness further increased when students realised that the general information provided lacks substance for their interests. “I would never read the president’s message. I wouldn’t read that at home either”. Additionally, when they read the FLH the incorrect language use reduced their image of prestige. The “information is in phrases” and “they are using their own brand of English, which [is] not understandable”. These statements illustrate that way the page is currently structured contributed to students’ negative impression of HokushoU; implying that the university does not understand their information needs, nor the dynamics of FLH construction. This suggests that the internationalisation projects of Japanese HEI are fragmented (Ota 2014).

**6.1.3.2 The homepage as a conduit.** When a university provides information to international students concerning programmes and various activities, it is enabling students to develop a conduit into the university. When this information is withheld, international students interpret that they are not valued as full members of the university’s academic community. Students felt that the lack of providing even basic information, such as a yearly academic calendar, inhibited them from integrating within the university’s environs. One student noted, “it is not so difficult to translate a schedule [calendar]. It is not decided today; it is known in advance”. The students who read IPU’s FLH (Group2 & 4), complained that the yearly calendar is simple, and they wanted more detail. However, it appears that on a less developed webpage such as HokushoU’s, just having an academic calendar is seen as contributing to students’ interpretation of how they would succeed at that university, and as a measure of inclusion into the institutions’ community. This suggests that the degree to which the webpage has been developed is influencing the type of information students are expecting to find.

It is important that the FLH does communicate to students how it will be a conduit into the university’s social network (Zhang & O’Halloran, 2012). The university must take responsibility for its international students and provide reliable answers to their questions. One way that students felt that the university should be enabling dialogue is through how it presents contact information. The students expressed that

the university needs someone whose job is to only help foreign students. I do not want some random person in the academic affairs office who cannot properly answer my questions. Japanese university life, that is not in my experience, and I don't know how to ask the right questions so that others can give me the necessary information.

The internationalisation of HE is a process (Knight, 2004). As their internationalisation programmes grow, Japanese HEI must reinterpret their role as a mediator for international students. As Grace alluded in Chapter 5, there is no-one who is in charge of the international students at her the mid-ranking university; the fact that FLH have been relegated to extra committee work seems to support the misinterpretation of the university's role as a provider of information. The above student's statement testifies that this is hindering their experience of studying in Japan. If it is to support an international student population, the university must proactively provide ports of entry to an information support network, so that students can integrate within the university system, instead of being marginalised. If the university does not do this, as the above quotation exemplifies, it contributes to the isolation of international students and this reduces their sense of belonging.

**6.1.3.3 The interactivity of connections.** As discussed earlier, in developing a link between the university and international students through a FLH, two points are of importance. The first is the presentation of the information, and the second is language use. The way that these are encoded into the FLH influence how the webpage promotes and maintains a connection with international students. What might be an attempt to create a whimsical webpage by the producers was not interpreted that way by those reading it. The visual layout of HokushoU's FLH (Figure 4.14) reminded one student of a child who

just found out about Word or PowerPoint and how to change the colour.  
This is what I do for fun; it is not for serious things. It is not professional.

This negative connection is further exasperated by language use concerning how the different courses of study are described. The students questioned why HokushoU used quotation marks around qualifications such as "certified clinical psychologist".

Why did they do that? First this is not a sentence, but isn't a certified clinical psychologist a real job? So why is it in quotations?

The structure of and language use on HokushoU's FLH negatively influenced students' overall experience of using the webpage – mirroring the sentiments of the semiotic analysis. A negative experience on the FLH is dangerous, as it in turn influenced students' impression of the university.

A function of the FLH should be to offer international students information about the institution and to encourage them to contact the university for additional information (Chang, 2011; Lynch & Horton, 2008). In the semiotic analysis it was thought that the provision of an email address was welcoming. However, the students in this focus group expressed that the link for contact information should be more than just an email address, they wanted it to include a contact name. Without personalised email information, students expressed that they are hesitant to contact the university.

As soon as the email address starts with 'info' you know it's not good. I would want to see the person, the name or who I can talk to within a specific school. I want a real person, not 'info'. Otherwise the start of my email is ruined...Dear comma. (Figure 4.15.12)

Students were not only concerned with image of the university, but also about the way in which the university facilitated how they, as prospective students, portray their image.

The students communicated that the lack of interactive connectivity was influencing their impression of HokushoU. The unique usage of English at HokushoU and structure of the FLH was a problem for the students. "They are trying to say they are the best for this, but it doesn't sound that way to me." This suggests that students did not decode HokushoU as a modern and international institution.

In summary, the international students who read HokushoU's FLH found the information sparse and unprofessionally presented. Similar to what was found in the

semiotic analysis, students expressed that they felt that the FLH at HokushoU was a display. Students' responses indicated that their overall impression of the university was perhaps more negative than it could have been. It is likely that HokushoU, as other lower-ranking universities, does not have an infrastructure to extensively support international students (Hazelkorn, 2011; 2017). However, it is particularly important in an educational culture that is overall attempting to increase its reputation within the global HE community that these universities are aware of the image that they are portraying on their FLHs.

## **6.2 Frameworks of Knowledge**

The students' responses to the decoding of the FLHs indicate that an HEI's webpages have become an intricate part of communication. While changes in technology have enabled this, the social context where HE is increasingly commercialised, has also played an important role in webpage development (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). As business ideologies have become a part of an HEI's practice, particularly within the internationalisation of HE (de Wit, 2014), it is important that HEIs consider what their FLHs are communicating to international students. To understand the significance of students' interpretation of the FLHs, this must be connected to how they regularly use FLHs. The discussion will now turn to how students' past experiences of using the Internet shape their expectations of what the informative university is.

### **6.2.1 The influence of experiences**

The students participating in this research, all indicated that they were studying abroad for career development. Here students are acting on their knowledge of what they must do to achieve social success in their chosen career paths. For these students, an internet search not only provided information regarding studying abroad or about a specific university, but also formed the first point of comparison between different universities (Chang, 2011; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013):

I didn't know what I wanted first, so I talked with friends, then I looked it up on the web. (Group3)

Although it is natural that students did ask other people about studying abroad, they are also initially turning to university webpages for basic introductions about different HEIs.

Students' experiences of using the webpages of universities in their home countries do influence how they perceive the FLHs at Japanese universities. The students all had different past experiences using the homepages of universities at home. One group stated that they

don't see the point of the [homepage] back home at all. Here, on the [Japanese language site] I can find much information especially about if my class is cancelled. This is a step-up to my own country. (Group1)

Another student described the homepage of the university she attended in her country as being simple and easy to navigate, yet that

it might not be up to date. But you can find the basic information, but without the all the extra flashing stuff. (Group3)

These comments illustrate that the amount of information in general, either too little or too much, and ease of use does influence the user experience (Lynch & Horton, 2008). Furthermore, for most students, university homepages in their home countries have become integral in how they understand their HE community. "When I was at home, we took our webpage for granted...whatever we needed, we could find" (Group2). This testifies to the students' expectation of shared codes of procedures in webpage structure and the placement of navigation links (Lynch & Horton, 2008).

In sum, a simply designed homepage facilitates ease of use, without the distractions of highlighting new information or rapid photo slideshows. What is of significance here, is that the use of the Internet is a part of the norms of communication for university students (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2012), and should be a part of the development of interactive relationships between them and the university. The students' comments illustrate that university webpages are a part of how they connect to a university. The FLH's design contributes to how students mark

distinctions between the different webpages they visit, and their past experiences influence their present information expectations. An implication of this is that, with the internationalisation of HE, the mere development of a webpage is no longer a source of symbolic capital of the university as modern or technologically advanced. With the increasing internationalisation of HE, and also the fragmentation within different HEI's development of their internationalisation projects (Hazelkorn, 2017), the symbolic capital that a university garners from its webpages is dependent on how these webpages are communicative and interpreted as reliable sources of information.

### **6.3 Authority and Trust**

A significant point raised by the focus group discussions, is that international students are using the FLH to gain accurate information regarding their studies, and student life within Japanese HE. A FLH that is interpreted as a reliable source of information about an HEI, encourages students to develop trust in the HEI and their future education. This section addresses how students' interpretation of FLHs, as resources of authority and trust, contributes to the image of an HEI's symbolic capital – that of being part of international HE.

#### **6.3.1 Access to the FLH**

First impressions influence the degree to which students find a webpage appealing and how they navigate on the webpage (Bonnardel, Piolat, & Le Bigot, 2011). The focus group responses indicate that how students are able to access the FLH, influences their impressions of the degree of support from the university. On some webpages, students found that the navigation link to the English page was not written in English and they

had to use Google translation to learn how to write 'English' or how to read 'English' because it was...written using Japanese. Sometimes when I open the homepage, I am on the Japanese page, and I must search for the English. But I can't find it easily because it is not where I expect to see it, and so I must search and search for the English link. You have to search for it until you get it, or you give up. (Group1)

When students must actively search for a navigation link to the FLH, they will not consider the university as overtly supportive of them.

Another problematic point for students was access to information. Many students stated that although they searched for information in English, often they could not find it, and to find specific details they had to use the Japanese language homepage. Yet, as their Japanese was insufficient, to find the information that they wanted necessitated using online translation machines. This further negatively influenced FLH reception as

Google translation...does not translate the context. The English language is very diverse. One word would mean so many things. So, it can also be a problem; what is the right meaning of what is written?  
(Group2)

As Japanese is not their first language, the international students are expecting some language barriers. However, they are also expecting some direction from Japanese universities. They find that at some universities

there are no bilingual buttons to direct me [on the Japanese homepage].  
If I had those buttons I would know where to look. (Group2)

This highlights, as outlined in Chapter 2, that Japanese universities are not embracing the ethos of internationalisation (Ota, 2014; Yonezawa, 2010). Many Japanese universities are not overtly building connections with international students through their FLH, as students are not finding the information they would expect to find. As noted above, the students indicated that they turned to a university's website not only for programme information, but also for information concerning about what their life would be like in Japan. Yet, the information these students often find is skeletal, without the details that they require. Nevertheless, the students are attempting to gain access into this social network, as Group3 noted, through discussions with other international students or through Google searches to gain the basic information they require. When students are reduced to doing this, it is indicative of a system that is not including them within the university's network. What

is important to consider here, is that as soon as students must search for a link to the FLH, they are on guard with regards to the kind of support that university will provide and how they will develop as students within that setting. It is within this, that it can be understood that Japanese HEIs are putting on a face of internationalisation, as the information international students find on the FLH is limited.

### **6.3.2 The range of FLH use**

Once students access the FLH, the degree of support is then interpreted through the extent to which they could find answers to their questions on their own. As noted, the range of students' information needs varied, this also included wanting basic information concerning the location of the university, whether it was rural or urban (Group1), to more specifically the availability of scholarships (Group2 & 3). Providing this range of information is how a university develops trust with international students and encourages them to explore their webpages.

As should be expected, accessing information concerning their course of study was a reoccurring theme for the focus groups. This varied according to the reasons students chose to study in Japan. For some of the Asian students learning Japanese was a priority, and they were most interested in the Japanese classes they could take. They stated:

I could find all these things on the Japanese website, but not on the English one. (Group1)

For other students, the purpose for studying abroad was for an intercultural experience (Doyle et al., 2010), and they wanted to know which classes were available in English. Students were also concerned with how the "programmes would align to my country" (Group2) as "I don't want to have to re-qualify again once I go home" (Group1), and "language support" (Group3). Furthermore, the yearly academic calendar, in terms of classes, holidays, and important academic dates are also necessary information to provide. The Japanese students studying abroad, similar to the international students in Japan, also wanted information regarding the "tuition fee and the profiles of the teachers" (Group4). However, only the Japanese students were interested in

how many other foreign students there were and which countries [they were from]. That shows how much support [the university is] giving to foreign students. It was not easy to find that information. (Group4)

As educational systems do differ, these comments illustrate that international students are turning to the FLH as bridge to fill the gap in their cultural understanding of different HE systems. HEIs worldwide are developing programmes targeted towards international students (Bartram, 2007). To be competitive in this market, Japanese HEIs must be aware of the range of international students' information needs, and how the FLH should be a reference for these students to understand Japanese HE. The university that provides this information is a conduit to students' social success. The university that does not do this, undermines the trust that international students have in it as a university that is welcoming and supportive of them, and could potentially be turning students away, as it is not creating a connection.

### **6.3.3 Information satisfaction**

The type of information that a webpage user finds, influences whether the user would contact a business for more information (Viehland & Zhao, 2008). This is also true for international students; their experience on a FLH influenced whether they would contact an HEI for additional details. The students in this study suggested that the information they found on the FLH was not enabling them to function on their own; as it was "shallow; surface level only" (Group2). In these circumstances students turned to other sources for information. One student stated that she

found a list of classes for the university I want to go to, somewhere on a Google search but not the [university] website, but when I came here it was wrong. (Group3)

While students sometimes found information about the instructors, this information was typically limited to their research interests, which is often not directly aligned to the courses they teach.

There is a list of teachers, and a subject like what their major is, but not really exactly what they are teaching or actually researching. I wish I had that information before I came because now it is not what it is supposed to be. I'm having to adjust. (Group3)

The students are illustrating that what they initially perceived as a potentially positive experience is not developing that way. These students' experiences in Japan now are important, as when they return to their own countries, they will become ambassadors for the study abroad programme in Japan by being "effective source[s] of information" for future students (Doyle et al., 2010, p. 478).

It is important that HEIs acknowledge that the information needs of international students vary according to the degree that they are studying for. That the students all outlined that they are dependent on other people, for information they considered they should be able to find on their own on the FLH should be of concern. It indicates that HEIs are not in control of their information dissemination. One student even mentioned that when she did ask an HEI for information she

was given the email for another Chinese student already at the university. When I got that, I knew the uni[versity] wouldn't help me that much. (Group3)

It appears that students are not finding Japanese HEIs as informative, but also that HEIs do not see it as their responsibility to be the primary source of information for international students. This is should be the very antithesis of an educational culture that is attempting to increase its international student population (MEXT, 2014b). Interpreting the FLH and the HEI as uninformative does have consequences for how symbolic capital is attributed to Japanese HE as being international.

The international students seem to be indicating that the FLHs are not an effective conduit to information. The students are illustrating that they had minimal guidance to information before they arrived in Japan and are having to struggle to get basic information even after they arrived. This is negatively influencing students'

impression of their welcome to study in Japan. In fact, one student explicitly stated that:

the only reason I study in Japan is because I got a scholarship, I really wanted to go to the US. (Group2)

This suggests that some students are attracted to study in Japan because of funding issues. As noted in Chapter 2, the internationalisation of Japanese HE is heavily funded by the government (Ng, 2012). When this is considered against FLHs that are not necessarily communicative, the sustainability of this project is questionable. At some point government funding will be reduced (Hazelkorn, 2017), and as this student implied, without a scholarship she would consider other more welcoming study options.

#### **6.3.4 The presentation of information**

A foundation of the internationalisation of HE is the development of interactive relationships (Choi, 2016). The provision of information contributes to the construction of an interactive relationship between the university and prospective international students. Accordingly, information presentation is of importance, and this can be exemplified in two ways. First, the accuracy of the translated information is the basis from which students develop their initial impression of the university.

If you feel that the translation is really good, then you are satisfied with the information you get. The inaccuracy of the homepage makes me feel like a bad impression of the university. (Group1)

Furthermore, many students commented on language usage. “Those may be English words, but [used] like that there is no meaning” (Group2). A lack of attention to the accuracy of language use causes confusion (Hashimoto, 2009) for students who are unfamiliar with the Japanese HE system, and this negatively impacts their image of the HEI.

Secondly, as many international students are accessing the FLH via the Japanese language page, they do notice the difference between the Japanese and FL versions of a university's homepage. Students noticed that that:

the amount of information reduces a lot when you go from the Japanese to the English page. (Group2)

Students also noticed that while the Japanese homepage is regularly maintained, the FLH is not.

The English version doesn't change. It hasn't changed in 18 months. Since I came it is the same. The Japanese changes...there are some special events and you can see 'new' or its blinking. The Japanese changes all the time. The English one is campus map and what else? (Group3)

The students' comments suggest that the lack of detail on the FLH, in comparison to the Japanese language homepage, is influencing their interpretation of their acceptance within the Japanese HE network.

In summary, the students' comments illustrate that Japanese HEIs are not developing a framework of shared codes between the university, as the owners, and international students, as the receivers of FLHs. This is significant as it undermines the trust that students have in the HEI. When a FLH is full of inaccuracies, and does not adequately provide basic information, students' impression is that they are not welcome into the HEI's social network (Chang, 2011). When these factors are considered together, they influence how international students interpret the HEI's stance towards their position within Japanese HE. The students' comments indicate that they feel they are an insignificant other. An effect of this, is that it reduces the potential symbolic capital value that an HEI can garner through its FLH as positively contributing to the image of Japanese HE as internationalised.

## 6.4 Summary

As Barthes (1977) notes, how a sign is interpreted is dependent upon the receiver. The analysis of the international students' data illustrates that they expect the FLH to be a reliable source of information which is easily accessible. However, students are finding that their basic information needs are not being met. This is causing tension, and it appears that many FLHs are not an effective medium of communication. Students understand that all their individual information needs will not be met through the FLH. However, they are expecting enough information so that they can form a general idea of the programmes offered and student life. Providing a range of information on the FLH is how an HEI can assist students to gain access into the social network of the university. The international HE market is volatile, and students have many study options around the world (Healey, 2008). If Japanese HEIs value attracting an international student population, this needs to be communicated through the information presented on their FLHs. The FLH cannot merely be a face of the internationalisation of Japanese HE, as the structure, content and language use on the FLH is communicative to international students. The way the students decoded the FLHs indicates that they feel unwelcome within Japanese HEI. This interpretation negatively impacts the symbolic capital attributed to Japanese HE as internationalised. The implications of this will be discussed in the next chapter, through combining the data concerning how FLHs are being encoded and decoded.

## **Chapter 7 Revisiting the FLH: Interpreting the Data**

This chapter synthesises the interview data gathered in this research. The chapter begins by focusing on the way FLHs contribute to meaningful connections when decoded by international students. The chapter ends with a discussion of how FLH development is communicative of distinctions and tensions within the internationalisation project at HEIs.

### **7.1 The Meaningful FLH**

As Japan is attempting to develop as a regional hub for international HE (Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015), universities are increasingly competing to attract international students (Bartram, 2007). Within this context, university webpage development is important. Webpages are easily publishable, and research has shown that the Internet is a first point of contact for students considering different study options (Elliott & Robinson, 2012, 2014; Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). The interview data gathered from the producers illustrates that the process of developing a FLH within Japanese HEIs is complex. This complexity was also found in the semiotic analysis of published FLHs. This section discusses how FLHs are communicative to international students.

#### **7.1.1 Factors concerning ease of use**

In its attempts to develop as a regional educational hub, international students are a valuable part of the internationalisation of Japanese HE. This can be seen in educational policies and scholarships designed to attract international students (Hennings & Mintz, 2015). Within this, HEIs must consider how international students access information regarding their potential studies. The structural layout and design of FLHs are important as they influence students' access to information (Lynch & Horton, 2008). The semiotic analysis found that access to information was not direct at the mid- to lower-ranking HEIs. The interviews with students supported this finding, and further suggested that students' degree of satisfaction with the information on the FLH influenced the amount of time they spent on the webpage and whether they would return to it. For these students, a well-designed and user friendly FLH contributed to their comfort in studying abroad, by enabling them to retrieve pertinent information concerning their course of studies.

When students employ an Internet search, they are searching for specific types of information. As noted in Chapter 6, students are turning to FLHs because they do not understand the Japanese educational system. Students are expecting the FLH to provide them with this information, so that they can understand the differences between Japan and their own educational experiences. HEIs need to be aware of this. Yet, only Emma, the producer from a higher-ranking university, was concerned with “how to direct the user to the correct information”. As students are not finding information that would assist them in bridging cultural differences between their own and the Japanese educational system, it suggests that management at HEIs have not considered the extent to which Internet searches are an integral part of information gathering for international students. While in Japan this might be tied to the rotating system of management within HEIs (Ogawa, 2002; Stigger, 2018b), it also points to the fact that assessment of the international student experience narrowly focuses on courses of study (Ng, 2012). The students interviewed noted that the FLHs’ ease of use is influencing their image of Japanese HEIs. The image that the FLHs create, as meeting the information needs of students, potentially transforms into how these webpages contribute to the symbolic value of Japanese HE as being international, outside of the formal ranking system.

### **7.1.2 Language use**

The effectiveness of a FLH is, in part, dependent on social expectations of how it should be structured (Rose, 2012). These expectations must be shared, and they influence the reception of a sign (Hall, 1997). While ease of navigation is of importance, the languages which the FLH is developed in are also of significance. The use of English in Japan is often equated to practices connected directly to internationalisation (Ishikura, 2015; Ota, 2014). Some would argue that the use of English equates to being international in Japan (Gottlieb, 2009; Hashimoto, 2013). While, English is considered to be a lingua franca, the way that English is employed on the FLH is communicative of whether the FLH was developed as a means to create connections with international students or as a sign of the internationalisation of an HEI. Thus, English use could be understood as a cultural capital resource.

In this study, English was not a native language for any of the international students. Often students complained that the English use on the FLH was “unique” (Group3),

that they “could not understand it” (Group2), and that they could not find the information they required, “because it is not where I expect to see it” (Group1). This testifies to the extent to which structural norms in webpage design have proliferated into international students’ expectations of FLH structuring (Lynch & Horton, 2008). More importantly this testifies that if English is to be used on a FLH it cannot be Japanese English, which can be intentionally vague (Hashimoto, 2009). Rather, English must be used as a lingua franca. The above complaints by the students lends support to the suggestion made by the producers, that the FLHs being developed at the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs are not being developed to attract the attention of the international student. Therefore, rather than being a being a sign of communication, these webpages are merely a face of internationalisation, perhaps as a result of competition within the internationalisation of HE (Choi, 2016). However, the process of internationalisation should include enhancing interconnectivity (Knight, 2004). As the FLHs are not positively attracting the international students’ attention, this is influencing the image, and arguably the symbolic capital attributed to the HEI.

### **7.1.3 The FLH as a cultural bridge**

The students’ complaint that finding specific information on Japanese HEIs’ FLHs is challenging, supports the semiotic analysis that FLH development has been reactionary. As this complaint was frequently voiced, it is imperative that HEIs consider their role in information dispersion. While the ranking system focuses on research and programme excellence (Hazelkorn, 2011), this ignores that the internationalisation agenda is expansive (Yonezawa, 2010). Students’ opinions affect the prestige, the symbolic capital, which they attribute to an HEI when they decode a FLH. One point highlighted from my interviews with the international students shows that they are interested in their future lifestyle. Students are interested in academic issues, the Japanese university students’ lifestyle, and the extra curricula activities offered – such as sports or club activities. These activities represent how they can integrate with students from the host country. Yet, all the international students complained that this information is not available on the FLH.

Every time I tried click on something I want in the website: teachers, students, or general information, each time I click...I can’t explain it, but

this information is so not there... Whatever detail you want to get, it's not there, it's hidden...and if I look at the Japanese page, well it was very hard to understand is that the correct section there or is that the correct section I could press? (Group2)

The presentation of information on the FLH is a representation of how positively or negatively producers have utilised the cultural capital available to them, as the way a FLH is developed influences how prospective users form an opinion of the HEI. However, the students also stated that information needs vary according to the level at which they are studying. Referring specifically to the university which she plans to enter, one student stated

maybe that [information] is OK if you are [an undergraduate] student and you have to study everything, but I'm doing a specific research, and so a generic title 'English Course' is too general for me. I need specific things that I couldn't find. (Group3)

A Japanese student who did her undergraduate studies in Australia concurs and stated that

before I left I didn't care too much, I already got general information from other students I knew, but now as a Master student it matters because you want a teacher who can teach you. (Group4)

This is significant, because while it does indicate that the information needs of international students do vary according to the level that they are planning to study at, it also reemphasises that students' information needs are not being met. The source for information at mid- and lower-ranking HEIs, the students indicated time and again, did not come from the FLH or the HEI, but rather from other international students already at the institution that they intend to enter. What is perhaps alarming, is that these mid- and lower-ranking HEIs have failed to realise that they are in control of the image that they project to international students. When a FLH does not facilitate students in accessing pertinent information, the HEI relinquishes its control of its image as a nurturing institution. In these cases, the FLH is not a link to the

international community as it is not building shared codes through information dissemination with international students.

How the producers are able to access and utilise cultural capitals and invest them into the development of the FLHs is negatively influencing the perceived prestige of the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs. My research suggests that it is not necessarily the volume of cultural capital available to the producers which is influencing how the FLHs are developing. The producers were very clear that they understood who their HEI's potential international student population are. Yet, the producers are prohibited in using this knowledge in combination with the resources already existing within their HEI, to develop an image that reflects positively on the special educational features of their institution. This further exemplifies that the internationalisation project at Japanese HEIs is heavily managed from the top-down (Lee, 2005; Yonezawa, 2010), and that the business perspective of harnessing the knowledge of all those within the system in the internationalisation project (Nummela et al., 2004) has not been utilised. While structurally, most mid- and lower-ranking HEIs cannot support an extensive international student population, this fact should not be inhibiting how management approaches FLH development, nor the way the FLH is a visual representation of the HEI internationally.

#### **7.1.4 The FLH as a display**

Under an internationalisation project, the FLHs attempt to communicate with international students, but perhaps do so in a way that the students were not expecting. The relegation of the FLH to a low position within the university, such as not integrating it within the main server of university, and not drawing on the advice from experts, the international teachers who produce the FLHs, is symbolic. It could be symbolic of the fact that, within Japan, internationalisation is understood to be an activity within the realm of the highest-ranking institutions (Yonezawa, 2011). The underdeveloped FLHs at the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs, as found in the semiotic analysis and in the interviews, are symbolic of how the producers are drawing from limited cultural capital, to create a FLH, which communicates their institution's exact position regarding the incorporation of an internationalisation project.

It appears as if the force behind the internationalisation of Japanese mid- and lower-ranking HEIs is understood not as the progression of HE, but rather as a burden. At this point, it should be remembered that Japan is attempting to attract 300,000 international students (see Chapter 2). It would be impossible for the highest-ranking universities in Japan to support this number of international students as well as a Japanese student population. Thus, it appears that there is an expectation from MEXT that mid-ranking HEIs, at least, would be accepting international students. However, it is more likely that these HEIs are accepting international students who already have some Japanese language proficiency. These students are coming to Japan specifically to gain a higher command of Japanese.

They don't really care which university; the name doesn't matter. To a prospective south-east Asian family, the universities are all the same, it is in Japan, and Japan is a prestigious place to go and study... These students know that they have to be fluent enough to cope with normal classes in Japanese, so they study Japanese before they come, but they lack the cultural understanding to cope with university life. (Grace, mid-ranking)

As suggested in Chapter 2, these students are turning to FLHs as a reference source, even before they arrive in Japan. Accordingly, management at HEIs must understand the extent to which a FLH should be an interactive tool between their institution and international students.

### **7.1.5 Section summary**

The way an HEI facilitates producers to invest and develop the cultural capital resources they have access to, is contributing to how, through the FLH's reception, these resources are transformed into symbolic capital. A FLH, as a sign, is a display of an HEI's value of internationalisation through what has or has not been published on the webpage. While the producers are not experts in multimedia communication, they are aware of many of their institutions' FLH's shortcomings. The semiotic analysis and international students' focus group data found that most FLHs, at the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs, were uninformative and that the students came away with a negative impression of the HEI. It is perhaps not in an HEI's best interest if

students feel that the HEI does not understand the structuring norms of communication on the Internet. Students interpret those HEIs as “old-fashioned” (Group2). Even with limited resources to develop FLHs, mid- and lower-ranking HEIs must be aware of the image that they are projecting. Sadly, my research indicates that when an HEI publishes an underdeveloped FLH, they are doing themselves a disservice, as prospective students are not interpreting these HEIs as supportive of them. In this light, the symbolic value of the uninformative FLH translates into merely a display of internationalisation, not as a sign of the structural integration of the internationalisation project within an HEI.

## **7.2 Distinctions and Tensions**

This section will discuss the distinctions and tensions in FLH development. The focus will be on how these influence the interpretation of FLHs, as signs of the internationalisation of Japanese HE.

### **7.2.1 A field of distinctions**

The varying degrees to which the FLHs at different HEIs have been developed is reflective of the fact that the internationalisation project of HE is not uniform (Marginson, 2008). As explained in Chapter 3, a semiotic analysis is a multi-stage process of attributing meaning (Allen, 2003; Bignell, 2002). At the first level of meaning the connotation of the Japanese language homepage is a representation of the university as modern, accessible, and connected. The FLH develops into a mythic meaning at the second level (Chandler, 2007). The mythic meaning of the FLH is in the way the HEI presents itself as internationalised to other HEIs, the Japanese government and other funding sources. In Bourdieu’s terms, this is the symbolic value of a Japanese HEI. However, the use value of this representation is heavily dependent upon the degree to which the FLH has been developed - that is, its quality. Bourdieu’s field theory, which focuses on strategic and competitive practices, enables an analysis of how differences within a field influence players’ access to cultural capital and how it is deployed (Kupfer, 2011; Thompson, 2008). These differences in turn influence how players’ attribute meaning to the FLH and how this transforms into a symbolic value.

Internationalisation is not a singular project, rather it is the purpose driven and multiple projects undertaken by individual HEIs (de Wit et al., 2015). Within a field, the quality of a product is the result of both the time invested in its development and the cultural capital assets accessible to those developing it. As the field is uneven, this creates structural differences in the type of cultural capital available and how it is accessed (Bourdieu, 1986). Accordingly, it is not just the producers' knowledge regarding FLH development but also the resources available to them that influence how FLHs develop. Furthermore, as meaning is relational (Maasik & Solomon, 2011), how meaning is attached to a FLH is closely connected to its similarities and differences to other FLHs, as these positively or negatively influence a FLH's reception. This value is partially dependent on uniqueness; and as cultural capital assets utilised by a producer become more popular with other producers, "the investments made (in time and effort) may turn out to be less profitable than was anticipated when they were made" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 51). As other HEIs develop their FLHs, and emulate the leaders in webpage development, what is considered as distinctive, changes with time. Webpage development is dynamic (Lynch & Horton, 2008); a FLH that is published and not regularly maintained, sends a distinct message to users of the HEI's position with regards to change and development, which subsequently contributes to the increased hierarchical differences between HEIs (Hazelkorn, 2017).

There are great differences between the FLHs of the higher-ranking universities and the mid- and lower-ranking universities. This may be partly explained by the fact that an existing infrastructure to support international students at higher-ranking universities is influencing how these HEIs have defined the overarching project of internationalisation. Furthermore, this infrastructure also influences the access that producers at higher-ranking HEIs have, to different cultural capital resources, to develop their institution's FLH. The lack of infrastructure at mid- and lower-ranking HEIs is apparent through the limited degrees to which their FLHs are developed, as a FLH can only display an existing infrastructure. What is apparent, is that what cultural capital resources are, differed for each of the producers, and this had very real affects for students. For international students, the type of published information is of extreme importance, as they do not have the luxury that home students have of

the possibility to explore a university before they arrive. These students are turning to the FLH as a vital communication link.

[A] website speaks for itself. They have good pictures...font, colour that is just little things...As a foreigner I would be interested in the main things not worrying about the little things. This makes me interested in the university. (Group2)

The interviews with the producers suggest that both they and the university's management are aware that mid- and lower-ranking FLHs are not a conduit to information. This raises the question of why these webpages are being published. One possible response is that this practice indicates that the purpose of FLHs at these universities is not for drawing the prospective international student body's attention. It suggests that the symbolic value of these FLHs is a reaction to the pressures of globalisation (Steger, 2009). More specifically, as these mid- and lower-ranking universities typically only have one FLH, in English, it suggests that the globalisation of Japanese HE has been strongly influenced by marketplace expectations, where the use of English is equated to internationalisation (Byram, 2008). This is evident in how the cultural capital displayed is transformed into symbolic capital. As the semiotic analysis found, the compositional categories (Table 3.1, p. 41) within these FLH are minimally developed. The interviews with students found that as FLHs often contain information that is not directed towards enquiring international students; the FLH is not seen as informative. Furthermore, as these webpages are often published, and then not regularly maintained, the students in this study were not interpreting the HEI as caring about their information needs. These types of FLHs will not encourage international students to apply, and this contributes to the idea that FLH development at mid- and lower-ranking HEIs is no more than a visual display of the HEI.

As internationalisation is a social process (Yonezawa, 2010), this influences how universities without an internationalisation infrastructure develop one. Alice (low-ranking), whose university does not have an infrastructure to support non-Japanese speaking international students, aptly exemplified this connection. She stated, "we're not really discussing what we would do if someone showed up". This confirms that

there is social pressure on HEIs to create FLHs, and that the process of internationalisation is not yet seen as profitable by many Japanese HEIs (Stigger, 2018b; Yonezawa, 2011). This is maybe a result of pressure from MEXT to internationalise the Japanese HE system (Ishikawa, 2011; Ota, 2014). However, it has led to a situation where the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs are always “several steps behind other universities” (Grace, mid-ranking). This pressure to internationalise, as Alice and Grace alluded, is effectively pushing mid- and lower-ranking HEIs to make attempts to display their still developing internationalisation project, at a very early stage. This push emphasises the differences between the HEIs that have an infrastructure to support international students and ones that have yet to develop their support systems. Nevertheless, one must question why the FLHs at the mid- and lower-ranking levels are developing in the way that they are. Regardless of whether an HEI has developed extensive programmes to support international students, the image portrayed on the FLH should be a concern for the HEI’s management.

### **7.2.2 A field of tensions**

In Japan, there has traditionally been a distinction between different types of HEIs (Yonezawa, 2010). In the current education climate, this is juxtaposed against an HE system in which the government is focusing on the development of certain universities as world-class, to promote Japan as an international educational hub (MEXT 2014b; Ota, 2014; Rose & McKinley, 2017). This has created a wider divide between Japan’s highest-ranking universities, particularly those in the TGU programme who are receiving extra funding to support their continued development of international programmes (Ishikura, 2015), and other universities. Already having extensive programmes to support an international student body, the highest-ranking universities are able to utilise both their knowledge of this student body and their experiences to further develop existing programmes for international students (Rapple & Vickers, 2015; Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015). These higher-ranking institutions, as the producers suggest, are in advantageous positions in terms of knowledge, expertise, and finances, which all contribute to their internationalisation project. Evidence of this advantage was found in the semiotic analysis which illustrated the extent to which these FLHs are developed, and it also highlighted the uneven nature of FLH development.

For a FLH to be communicative, at any ranking level, the HEI must understand its targeted audience (Chang, 2011). In developing their FLHs, HEIs should be concerned with why international students are choosing to study in Japan. For the international students who participated in this research, studying in Japan is not just about prestige; it is about gaining practical knowledge from a perceived nation of wealth and technological advancement, and being able to apply that knowledge in their own (developing) countries (Groups 1-3). If an HEI understands these reasons, it will not only benefit how international programmes develop overall, but just as importantly, how it communicates about these programmes on their FLHs; how it positions itself (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013). This is not to deny that mid- and lower-ranking universities cannot support international students. As Alice (low-ranking) stated

our university has a better instructor-student ratio, we could offer a better learning situation for foreign students.

Yet, this is not being communicated on these universities' FLHs. Instead, the limited investment of cultural capital in the development of mid- and lower-ranking FLHs is negatively influencing students' impressions of the university and giving them the perception that they are unwelcome. Students noted that undeveloped FLHs do send them a clear message, stating the

webpage is honest in that they don't want you to come. (Group 3)

This is the very opposite of government programmes and policies that are concerned with welcoming international students to study in Japan (MEXT, 2014b). HEIs must realise that international students do use the FLH to access information. Accordingly, the FLH cannot merely be a visual sign of the HEI; it must create a welcoming and receptive link for international students.

When a business develops into new markets, two points combine to contribute to its success. First, it is imperative that the business is aware of the demands and perceived needs within the new market (Hitt et al., 2006). Second, the business must rely on the knowledge and skills of all those it employs, as their unique perspectives

can give insight to potential weaknesses or complement management's knowledge (Nummela et al., 2004). The producers of mid- and lower-ranking HEIs noted in Chapter 5 that this is not happening.

We were basically asked to take the Japanese version and do a direct translation. So, within that realm we were allowed to communicate what we needed to, but going beyond what was in the original Japanese version required a lot more discussion and agreement. (Alice, low-ranking)

A FLH cannot simply be a translation of the Japanese homepage, as the information needs of international students are different from those of home students. As foreigners living and working in Japan, the producers are aware of this. However, as they are allocated to working on the FLH in addition to other full-time duties, most producers simply do not have the time it would take to convince their university's management of how the information on the FLH must be different from the Japanese homepage.

I already have a full-course load and extra committee work, if I complain too loudly about the lack of support on the webpage, I might be the sole being responsible for foreign students. I can help them, but I can't do it all by myself. (Grace, mid-ranking)

Furthermore, it is poignant that in creating content for their FLHs that none of the producers performed a needs assessment. As Alice explained, many mid- and lower-ranking HEIs have been

slower on the uptake to modernise, such as [developing] websites. They really have no clue as to what they are doing, much less than what they should be doing, in comparison to other universities.

This is significant as it suggests that there is a belief that FLHs are developing with a range of purposes, including as a form of communication with international students and as evidence of internationalisation. It highlights just how the cultural capital

resources available to the producers at the mid- to lower-ranking HEIs are different. While those working on the higher-ranking HEIs' FLH are doing so full-time with a range of resources available, those at the lower ranks are translating generalised information concerning their institution. The result for these lower-ranking institutions is that the FLH is not a reliable resource for international students.

While the sense that the purpose of the FLH was not aligned within the university's infrastructure is found at each rank of institution, it was most keenly found at the lower ranking levels. Both Grace (mid-ranking) and Alice (low-ranking) stated that from an administrative standpoint, the scope of the FLH at the mid- and lower-ranking university is interpreted as "backup for the university's brochures" (Alice). They noted that the design of the FLH discourages interaction. They suggested that the ramifications of having a website were not thought out, as the university's access to manage the FLH's content was either outsourced or done by someone in a different department. Grace and Alice recognised that webpages must be maintained through updates. If the Japanese homepage was also not regularly updated, this would suggest that the university's management lacked an understanding of how online communication works (Viehland & Zhao, 2008). However, as the Japanese webpage is regularly maintained, and the FLH is not, this points to the degree to which the FLH is devalued within the HE system. Yet, while Grace and Alice discussed that the information on their institution's webpage is limited, and to get detailed information, prospective users of the site would have to either look at the Japanese homepage or go elsewhere, Emma and Rachel (both high-ranking) stated that current international students may not be looking at the FLH. They stated that students are using other forms of social media, such as Facebook or Twitter to get information. But, only Emma noted that once the information is on these forms of social media, "it is quickly absorbed within the deluge of information uploaded". Thus, as the visibility of information is not only reduced on FLHs, but also on these other forms of social media, it is questionable as to how these sources of information are preparing students for studying in Japan. Nevertheless, throughout this undercurrent of tensions, it is very clear that an HEI's management is in control of how the producers are accessing cultural capital, which is influencing what the FLH is communicating.

### 7.2.3 Section summary

At the mythic level, in order for a sign to maintain the meaning attributed to it, the different elements that generate meaning within the sign must naturally feedback and support this meaning (Barthes, 1957/1984). As previously noted, the mythic value of the FLH is of a university that is incorporating an internationalisation project. Yet, as the producers' comments above suggest, the connection between this project and the need to meet the different information requirements of international students has not been made. It is within this realm that the tensions between the university as the owner, the producers who are developing the FLH, and the student receivers are evolving. From a western perspective, internationalisation is seen as an integral part of HE practices, and HEIs are developing their own projects from within (de Wit et al., 2015). From a Japanese perspective, internationalisation is still seen as something imposed upon HEIs from outside, particularly through governmental initiatives (Ota, 2014; Rose & McKinley, 2017). It is in this light that an institution's FLH appears as its face within the Japanese HE internationalisation project.

The data I gathered for this research, illustrates that there is a perception that the force of internationalisation stems from pressures outside of the HEI; this is influencing how FLHs are developing. The differences in the type and amount of information available, and the degree to which it is created to conform to standardised expectations of homepage structure and design influences how these webpages are perceived and the way the HEI is recognised, the symbolic capital of the individual universities. Furthermore, it appears that the university is not attempting to overtly involve all those within the organisation in its internationalisation project. Rather the internationalisation project is strictly controlled by a few fragmented departments that are not promoting group cohesion (Lee, 2005). The combined effects of this situation are contributing to the differences in FLH development. These differences are creating tension, which is destabilising the myth of the FLH, as an uninformative FLH is not seen as a natural step in the development of an internationalisation project. The FLH accordingly becomes a sign of conflict and tension between what universities offers on their FLH under an internationalisation project, and the value that international students subsequently attach to it.

### 7.3 Summary

That FLHs are being developed by all ranks of Japanese HEIs is indicative of a system that acknowledges the process of the internationalisation of HE. In the development of FLHs, the distinct role of power and inequality can be seen. A FLH can only garner prestige for an HEI as being international, if the producers are able to utilise different cultural capitals in the FLH's development through the information that is presented on the published webpage. The support for the producers at the higher-ranking institutions, from within the institution and in the form of grants from the government, facilitated in them developing a more informative FLH. The lack of this support, at the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs, was influenced by the perceived need for a FLH, and this subsequently influenced its restricted development. Here, it is questionable as to how the internationalisation project has been accepted, as at face value, the information found on these FLHs is not necessarily adding to the prestige of the HEI nor is it accessible to the international student.

The development of a FLH should be continual. How the producers access the cultural capital available to them, and are able to utilise their expertise, influences how the FLH can project the perception of the HEI as being world-class. In turn, this influences the way that the FLH can be used to create connections. Combined, these feedback into how the myth of the FLH, as a sign, is maintained. The hierarchical influence of Japanese management is seen in the tight control over how the FLH develops. The producers' limited access to effectively utilise cultural capital in the development of the FLH in turn negatively influences students' perception of the HEI, and potentially dissuades them from making contact. This interpretation of the FLH should be unfavourable in a country that is attempting to develop as a regional hub for international HE. It appears that the Japanese HEI system has yet to embrace the basic business ethos of internationalisation – that it is a cohesive project, and its success is dependent on both top-down and bottom-up approaches. Without this support, the FLHs at mid- and lower-ranking HEIs are not overtly informative; and this is perhaps an ominous warning about the sustainability of the internationalisation project at HEIs within Japan.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion, Limitations, and Recommendations for Practice**

This thesis discussed the importance of FLH development within the internationalisation projects of Japanese HE. It addressed how and what FLHs are contributing to the image of an HEI within the internationalisation project of HE in Japan. This was achieved by examining FLHs as sites of meaning-making, from the vantage point of the webpages themselves, those assigned to FLH development, and students who access these sites for information. First, a Barthesian semiotic analysis of FLHs presented one interpretation of how the different visual elements within webpages combine to communicate meaning. The semiotic analysis formed the basis of knowledge of the visual representation of FLHs at Japanese HEI. Then, employing a Bourdieusian analysis of the field, attention focused on how FLHs are developing within an HE system which is focusing on attracting international students. This thesis has addressed a gap in research concerning how the circumstances regarding FLH development influences their cultural production value and subsequently their reception. This chapter first summarises the findings, drawing on the research questions, and then it addresses possible conclusions, contributions to practice, and limitations of the research.

### **8.1 Implications: Answering the Research Questions**

The significance of this research comes from considering HEIs' current practices with regards to the development of their FLHs against continued pressures from MEXT to incorporate internationalisation projects. The research sought to contrast these practices with the needs of international students and the information that they want to access, to facilitate them to function as university students in Japan. The Barthesian semiotic analysis provided a structural analytic process for a visual assessment of FLHs. Using Bourdieu's field theory, the thesis focused on power and inequalities, and strategic and competitive practices in FLH development within the subfield of HE (Bathmaker, 2015; Naidoo, 2004). As a researcher-practitioner this analytical process was of importance to me, as it ensured that in my analysis I focused on the data (Rose, 2012). This process enables the results from the analysis to inform future practice, by considering how the knowledge gained can be applied to further FLH development. Here the discussion returns to the first four research questions:

- 1) How do FLHs construct a discourse of internationalisation within Japanese HEIs?
- 2) How do the meanings inherent in FLHs vary according to institution rank?
- 3) What meanings are intended by the producers of FLHs, and how is this influenced by the context of their production?
- 4) How are these meanings of Japanese FLHs received by international student users?

In discussing these guiding questions, question two will be addressed through questions one, three and four. This summary process enables a discussion regarding a way that these research findings can be explained. These sections combined will then facilitate me to address the fifth research question:

- 5) What are the implications for practice?

### **8.1.1 How do FLHs construct a discourse of internationalisation within Japanese HEIs?**

A significant feature behind the internationalisation of Japanese HE is the influence of politics. This is a source of inequality within the development of FLHs. Within the Japanese education system, the development of an internationalisation project has been the impetus behind educational policy changes for over a decade (MEXT, 2003, 2009, 2014b). These policy changes directed from a top-down approach, have focused on the use of English as a lingua franca to enable Japanese to interact within the global arena (Hashimoto, 2013).

My research illustrates that practice within FLH development is influenced by tensions within the subfield of HE. At mid- and lower-ranking HEIs the development of FLHs partly appears to be reactionary to the forces and practices adopted by higher-ranking institutions. The semiotic analysis found that the HEIs with the most developed FLHs were those institutions selected for the top global university (TGU) programme. The TGUs, have been allocated extra funding to develop as world-class to improve the world ranking of Japanese HEIs. Here MEXT has been a primary instigator behind change within HE, through focusing on creating world-class

institutions (Yonezawa & Shimmi, 2015). This has led to an emphasis on research excellence and programme development, which must be visible (Hazelkorn, 2011; Hennings & Mintz, 2015). The development of FLHs appears to be a part of this visual display. In an educational culture, that is developing as a hub for international HE, the practices by TGUs have become a benchmark of the internationalisation process within Japan HE. However, the mere fact that the TGUs receive extra funding to develop their internationalisation projects (Ota, 2014), is further contributing to the uneven field and the division between HEIs that are internationalised and those that are not.

Unlike the higher-ranking HEIs, mid- and lower-ranking HEIs do not have a long background in international relationships, and do not have an extensive infrastructure to support international students. As the interviews with the producers exemplified, these institutions do have pressure to be implementing infrastructural changes while also displaying their incorporation of an internationalisation project, both which are still developing. Furthermore, the producers at the mid- and lower ranking HEIs indicated that there is not a great deal of inter-departmental communication, and that leadership at their HEIs is strongly top-down managed. This, they stressed, is affecting the development of the FLH. Effectively at this level, the cultural capital the producers can utilise are limited to translations of the Japanese homepage. This is evident in the fact that these institutions have published FLHs with minimal information.

### **8.1.2 What meanings are intended by the producers of FLHs, and how is this influenced by the context of their production?**

Tension within the field is further compounded by the fact that in the production of a FLH there are two different producers, the HEI and those who are assigned to work on the webpage. As noted, there is pressure from MEXT on HEIs to internationalise. MEXT is also offering incentives such as extra funding should international students enrol (Alice low-ranking; Ota, 2014). Accordingly, FLH development may be understood as a first step made by an HEI to internationalise. In the process of preparing for the semiotic analysis in the systematic sampling, it was found that the webpages at mid- and lower-ranking HEIs are typically developed in English only, and are not extensively informative, which is reflective of this first step. As Grace

(mid-ranking) stated (Chapter 5), the development of many FLHs at these institutions is because it is “the thing done”. The development of a FLH could therefore be a form of competition within the climate of the internationalisation of Japanese HE.

The ways that FLHs communicate to international students informs the meaning of this competition. The interviews with the producers highlighted the different tensions in FLH development. The producers working on the FLHs at the higher-ranking HEIs believed that their FLH did create links to the outside community, however they also noted that the navigation on these pages could be improved. Conversely, the producers working at mid- and lower-ranking HEIs blatantly voiced that their institution’s FLHs required a great deal of additional development to be representative of an informative HEI. The meaning of a FLH appears to be directly related to how the producers can access and employ cultural capital. At the mid- and lower-ranking institutions, the producers have been limited in how they employ their knowledge of international students’ information needs, as they are only permitted to do basic translations of the Japanese homepage. The fact that their recommendations for student specific details are not being included, suggests that management are developing these webpages not necessarily to attract the attention of international students, but rather to be a face internationally. Power and position taking within an HEI is affecting how producers invest the cultural capital available to them in FLH development. In turn, this is influencing the symbolic capital of a HEI as informed and informative, as the information provided is affecting the usability of the FLH.

It was found that the way that the FLH is being utilised by the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs may actually be doing the university a disservice. This is significant as it indicates that the development of a FLH, as a competitive strategy within the internationalisation of HE and as a tool to aid and attract international students, is not being fully utilised by the management of these mid- and lower-ranking HEIs. Subsequently, the overall meaning of these HEIs as knowledgeable and capable within the international HE arena is being reduced. This is the very opposite of what MEXT is attempting to achieve through the promotion of Japan as an international HE hub.

### **8.1.3 How are these meanings of Japanese FLHs received by international student users?**

What is perhaps an important issue raised in this research, is that while the mid- and lower-ranking universities are developing FLHs, they have not considered how influential the webpage is in communicating with students (Callahan, 2006). The meaning of these websites, how they are interpreted by international students is of importance (Zhang & O'Halloran, 2013), as international students are using FLHs to understand Japanese HE and to make comparisons between HEIs. When they study abroad, international students are leaving behind a familiar culture and a familiar educational system. The students interviewed consider the FLH to be a vital link in how they adapt to the Japanese educational system, and how they become familiar with life in Japan in general. Particularly at the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs, as the semiotic analysis illustrated and the international students discussed, there was a difference in the amount of information on the Japanese homepage and the FLH. Additionally, students complained of finding incorrect information, which subsequently caused them to have to adjust their studies in a direction which was not necessarily perceived as helpful for their futures. The FLH should have provided international students with this direction.

The symbolic meaning of the FLH is garnered through the international students' perception of being welcomed into the university community. This meaning develops from the type of information found on the FLH, which would specifically support these students in an international education system. Yet, at the mid- and lower-ranking HEIs students found that the FLH did not even answer their basic questions about the HEI, nor did it offer direction as to where they could find this information. The students found that they could not rely on the university's official information and had to turn to other sources. This represents a mismatch in how the internationalisation of Japanese HE is being approached. The fact that MEXT is offering a substantial number of scholarships to encourage international students to study in Japan (Hennings & Mintz, 2015), yet the actual system to support these students at many HEIs is very much in its infancy, is symptomatic of a system which is still developing its internationalisation project. Furthermore, that the knowledge and skills of the international faculty has not been advantageously utilised is indicative of a system which is very much controlled from the top-down.

## 8.2 How can I Explain the Research Findings?

HE is not a closed system, rather it is influenced by external powers and social structures. Bourdieu's field theory facilitates a conceptualisation of HE as a subfield that is influenced by external forces including the government and economics; these in part determine actions within the field (Naidoo, 2004). The use of Bourdieu's field theory here enables an understanding of the relationship between the HE system and internationalisation, and how this is influencing different responses by individual HEIs. The semiotic analysis focused on what meaning is attributed by those who read the sign (Barthes, 1977). Together the Bourdieusian and the Barthesian analysis suggest that many HEIs are adopting internationalisation strategies at a surface level. However, what HEIs appear not to have considered is that students do depend on the FLH as a vital link to the university for specific information both before and during their studies. The meaning of the FLH as a conduit to information is dependent and develops from students' interpretation as users of these webpages. As with the example for the student at my university on a JASSO scholarship (see Chapter 1), the programme she thought she was entering, as read from the university's FLH, was very different from what was available. This required her to change her course of study in ways that she was not anticipating nor that she felt were beneficial; as indicated in the focus group discussions this is not an isolated case.

Tension within FLH development is influenced by a disjuncture between what MEXT is promoting to students on scholarships and the support that HEIs can realistically offer international students. As the internationalisation of Japanese HE is mainly geared towards the highest-ranking institutions (Yonezawa, 2010, 2014), this is creating a disparity between these and other HEIs. This leads to questions about the sustainability of the internationalisation project by Japanese HEIs. Government projects and funding are focusing on attracting international students to study in Japan for a world-class education (Ota, 2014). Yet, as the students interviewed suggested, they are not finding a world-class education; but rather an education system that is expecting them to adjust and adapt to a rigid infrastructure (Yonezawa, 2010). While the Japanese government has the finances to support an extensive scholarship programme this might not be problematic. However, as noted in Chapter 6, increasingly governments have less finances for HE (Hazelkorn, 2017),

therefore it is questionable as to how long the Japanese government can sustain these scholarships. Furthermore, the internationalisation of HE is not just confined to Japan. There is competition within this subfield, as other Asian nations are also attempting to develop as international educational hubs (Choi, 2016). Accordingly, how Japan approaches the internationalisation of its HE system is important if it wishes to develop a competitive and sustainable internationalisation project.

My research findings suggest two primary conclusions. First, HEIs must understand the significance of the FLH. As HEIs develop various projects which focus on internationalisation, it is important that the FLH is understood as an internationally visual display of the HEI. The semiotic analysis suggests that the FLHs at the mid- and lower-ranking HEI are not reflective of HEIs that are developing an internationalisation ethos perspective. This is further supported by the interview data from the producers, which indicates that the meaning of these webpages is influenced by access to the cultural capitals available and how they are utilised. These data sets combined communicate that many FLHs are a response to the internationalisation of HE.

The second conclusion develops from the first and suggests that most HEIs are not at a stage where they are structurally able to incorporate internationalisation projects. A lack of infrastructure to support international students is contributing to the uneven development of FLHs. To develop an effective FLH necessitates that an HEI incorporates information specifically for the international student body. However, without an infrastructure supportive of this, the ability of an HEI to display its commitment to the internationalisation of HE will be reduced. Different problems with the navigation of FLHs, limited information in English, and inaccuracies are among the many symptoms of a poorly constructed FLH. However, I have learnt that these problems all signify the compartmentalisation of internationalisation by Japanese HEIs. This is significant, as it suggests that changes made with regards to internationalisation, have not been considered against the overall influences that these changes have across different ranking HEIs. Thus, it can be said that these institutions are putting on an international face.

### 8.3 Recommendations for Practice

My conclusions suggest that as an internationally visual webpage, a FLH must communicate educational excellence to its users. This section will address research question five:

#### 5) What are the implications for practice?

To effectively communicate to international students, I have found that a HEI must provide direct access to specific information on their FLH. The ways in which cultural capitals are encoded into a FLH do influence how international students respond to it. I have found that the structure of FLHs is communicating precisely what is the problem with the internationalisation of Japanese HEIs. Surface changes, such as developing FLHs do not equate to structural changes. It is here that the uneven development of FLHs, as sites of meaning-making, can be seen through the mid- and lower-ranking institutions' attempts to emulate the higher-ranking HEIs in the development of their own FLHs.

The FLHs are a representation of what the institution can offer international students. However, in an educational culture that is promoting the implementation of an internationalisation project, the virtue of a FLH and its actual manifestation are misaligned. This is meaningful as I can then exemplify that the FLHs can be understood as a myth (Barthes, 1957/1984). The FLHs are communicating a message that, through their social use, is contrary to the use of websites as a public source of information (Chang, 2011). Understanding this misalignment is significant to the process of how meaning is encoded and subsequently decoded (Hall, 1980). This is informative to practice as it suggests, that HEIs must improve how information is presented on their FLH, to create a positive image of the university whether or not the intention is to attract international students.

To gain this trust and to demonstrate authority the following recommendations to improve practice are suggested. The first three suggestions are specifically for HEIs that intend to attract international students.

- i. The FLH should be considered as a part of someone's regular job. When it is relegated to committee work, the FLH is devalued.
- ii. The university must be aware of its users. A FLH's users vary, therefore categorising the information that different users' need and using navigation links to provide appropriate direction is important. Conducting a survey of international students about their reasons for studying abroad and their specific information needs would ensure that the information on the FLH accurately targets this audience.
- iii. The university must acknowledge that language use is contextual. Accordingly, the FLH cannot be a literal translation of the Japanese homepage. Without Japanese experience, it is unlikely that international students will have the contextual knowledge to understand the meaning of texts that have literally been translated. Here the university should rely upon the producers to use their experience and knowledge, as international residents in Japan, to present information clearly and concisely.
- iv. If the FLH must be outsourced, it should be written in the contract that mistakes can be corrected, even after the page is published.
- v. Open lines of communication must be created between an HEI's management and the producers developing the FLH. It is important that both the producers and management understand purpose of the FLH and what information will be included. This would ensure that the FLH, while reflective, also presents a positive image of the HEI.

The structuring of the subfield of HE in Japan is effectively reproducing established norms of practice, and how these are transformed and produced are dependent upon the social disposition of each individual HEI (Bourdieu, 1986). Accordingly, where an HEI is, when it begins developing its internationalisation project, influences how this infrastructure evolves. Here the HE system, and not the HEIs, are contributing to differences within the hierarchy (Naidoo, 2004). In the internationalisation of an HEI, the FLH is not an inconsequential appendage to a university's homepage. My research demonstrates that the FLH is consequential, and this is informative to practice. It is a public visual display of the university within an internationalisation project. The internationalisation of HEI cannot be

compartmentalised to learning within the classroom. Rather, the university must strive to interconnect all its various activities within its educational infrastructure.

### **8.3.1 Utilising this research in my practice**

Understanding the need for change influences how research results can be utilised within an organisation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2012). Like other HEIs, my university is facing increasing pressure from MEXT to internationalise. As a teacher-training college, my university works closely with the Japan International Cooperation Agency to train teachers from developing nations. The above suggestions are important for me as a practitioner. Through my interviews and focus group discussions with the producers and students, I have been able to identify some specific themes that are related to how my HEI communicates with international students. My interviews with the producers have highlighted how the compartmentalisation between different departments is limiting how all departments strive to create a better learning situation for international students. This has implications for how I should attempt to create open lines of communication between teachers and administration in my committee work. However, without undertaking this research, I might not have addressed the issue of information access as specifically as I did when I interviewed the students in this study and compiled the semiotic analysis. The focus group discussions in conjunction with the semiotic analysis have enabled me to highlight specific points of concern that these students have. This subsequently resulted in my compiling a separate research project to address how my own university could be creating better communication links with our international student population. As a result of this research I have sent a formal report to our university president and the International Relations Department, outlining the tensions our international students are experiencing. This has led to a concern to create more open communication between the various departments in my university, and how we communicate with international students, not only on our website but also in other publications, which will be addressed in the forthcoming academic year.

From a sociological perspective, my research has implications for my understanding of the Japanese HE's approach to internationalisation and what is valued. The Bourdieusian and Barthesian perspective have led me to understand the extent to

which the internationalisation of Japanese HEIs is compartmentalised. While in the literature review, the internationalisation of HE was introduced as a process, I have also found that within HE, internationalisation cannot take a one-method-fits-all approach. The globally ranked university has become a model of the internationalisation of HE. However, this research has shown that this insular approach is not necessarily within the interest of the mid- to lower-ranking universities. These universities, much like the old styled polytechnics in the UK, attract a different type of student (Bathmaker, 2015). Accordingly, their approach to internationalisation is different. This has implications for how Japanese HE approaches internationalisation. From this perspective, this research has wider implications at the national scale. As MEXT continues to promote the internationalisation of Japanese HE, other teachers in similar contexts, could potentially make use of the insights I found concerning the struggles of international university students in this age of universal access, and the need for their HEIs to respond to these struggles through the platform of the Internet. While it cannot be denied that there are structural differences between each HEI, it is important that HEIs are aware of the image they present to the international community on the Internet.

#### **8.4 Limitations and Future Research**

The term researcher-practitioner implies that research should ideally reflect-on-the-future, where research not only provides solutions for use now, but also provides the foundation for achieving future goals in HE (Wilson, 2008). In this, my research does have immediate suggestions for improvement at my own HEI. However, I would be remiss to not recognise that as a teacher, and a foreigner in Japan, that I am emotionally involved in the international student experience, and that I have my own opinions about the support these students received. My research is not value free (Brennan & Teichler, 2008). This requires that I reflect upon my position as an insider-researcher, and grasp my preconceptions regarding my research questions, in attempt to reduce research bias.

I am a practitioner, a university teacher, who works closely with international students within and outside of my department. In this role, I am aware of the types of information these students want, to enable them to progress smoothly in a new

educational environment. Yet, this positioning in this research-practitioner study does limit the research by the fact that it takes a student/ teacher perspective.

Furthermore, as I expand my knowledge as a researcher, I have had to learn and apply two theoretical toolkits in the analysis of FLHs. This expansion also includes the learning of the terminology connected to different aspects of my investigation, as well as business applications connected to internationalisation, and how these are overshadowed by my insider perspective as a teacher. To overcome this, I read extensively, and had discussions with my supervisors. Additionally, the interviews with the research participants have helped me to understand some of my own biases (Drake, 2010; Riege, 2003), by allowing me to see what I had previously taken-for-granted or providing explanations of practice. With regards to the theoretical frameworks, having a supervisor who is a sociologist and an expert in semiotic analysis, allowed me to discuss my concerns regarding my analysis and reduced some of these limitations.

In my attempts to understand FLH development holistically, my analysis is nevertheless limited from my initial standpoint as a teacher and my inexperience as a researcher. For example, as I was transcribing my first interview with a producer, I noticed that I strictly adhered to my pre-arranged interview plan. In this process, I found that sometimes the interviewee's response to a question expanded and provided a response to subsequent questions, yet I persisted in asking these questions. By following the procedure of immediately transcribing an interview, I was able to reflect on my role within the interview and adjust how I subsequently managed and facilitated interviews and discussions (Rowley, 2012).

Although I have attempted to include some management perspective, this is limited by the fact that I am foreign female teacher, within a male dominated HE system. This is a structure where, as Nagatomo (2012) indicates, foreign females rank the lowest within the hierarchical structure. While the process of my data collection attempts to present a holistic view of FLH development, it must be acknowledged that the viewpoint of management is not overtly included in this research. Furthermore, there may be other dimensions that are attributing to the inequality within the subfield of HE and internationalisation, which are subsequently influencing the development of FLHs. This could include the social value of internationalisation

and the changing role of HE in Japan. Nevertheless, this research highlights the importance of communication between departments within an HEI, regardless of the hierarchy. This gap in my research also suggests further avenues for continuing research into how communication between the various factions of the university setting is influencing the international student experience, particularly with regards to how management is facilitating interaction and communication.

I must also acknowledge that my research process may have limited my research findings. Research on the internationalisation of HE is commonplace. Typically, these studies discuss and criticise the internationalisation of HE as programme development: such as courses increasingly developing as stand-alone units (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2014); the development of exchange programmes which might limitedly foster students' internationalised mind-set; or the attraction of foreign faculty (Huang, 2006; Marginson, 2014). Another angle addresses the mismatch between a nation's educational policies on internationalisation and the structure in which these policies are implemented within HE (Choi, 2016; Stigger, 2018b). These types of research focus lend themselves to cultural analysis studies which might be juxtaposed against a content analysis or an audience analysis. A content analysis in this research might have focused on what a HEI chose to input on its FLH, while an audience analysis might have focused on the viewer's interpretation of an image. This research, however, is presenting a viewpoint in the analysis of FLHs with the purpose to understand how FLHs are developing at Japanese HEIs and are being received by international students. This inherently has an element of power-relationships concerning the authority to include or exclude information on FLHs, and the relationship between the university and its student body. These relationships are of importance as the ease to which prospective students can gain information about a HEI is just as important as the type of information which they are accessing. The type of information available is influenced by the epistemic virtues that the owners of FLHs have attached to prospective students. If there is a discord between these virtues, and access to information is not easily facilitated, then misalignment in the fit of meaning becomes of significance (Hall, 1980). Additionally, as a researcher, I wanted to challenge myself in how my knowledge developed. Accordingly, I drew away from second language acquisition theories and more familiar research approaches. Thus, while the research finding maybe limited by the research

approach taken, it is for these reasons that the analysis of FLH development and reception employed the theoretical frameworks of both Barthes and Bourdieu. This strategy facilitated in enhancing my knowledge as a research-practitioner (Caruth, 2013).

### **8.5 Summary**

The triangulation of the three sets of data has led me to understand that there is no illusion that FLHs are as informative as they could be. The use of Bourdieu's field theory enabled the analysis to highlight that FLHs are a product of conflict. Both academic prestige and political influence are powerful forces which are influencing how the internationalisation project is being implemented in Japanese HE. Together these forces are legitimising the cultural capital required to maintain dominance within the internationalisation of HE. This is of significance, as due to the push to be competitive within HE internationally, MEXT has focused on the expansion of educational programmes and channelled funding for international programme development to a few select HEIs, the TGUs. The result of this is that the producers at the highest-ranking HEIs have an accumulation of cultural capital that they are able to manipulate to their advantage. Changes with regards to the internationalisation of HE are not equalising the field, but rather, differential funding has exacerbated the differences between the higher-ranking and other ranking HEIs.

This research has led me to reflect on how FLHs, as a value of the internationalisation project, are not just about attracting international students. This research has enabled me to develop professionally by constructing knowledge from the data I collected. In developing theoretical knowledge of two analytical approaches, I have found that FLHs are about image dissemination and control, and this is influenced by relations of power and the producers' access to cultural capital. This has implications for practice, specifically at the mid- and lower-ranking levels, where the infrastructure to extensively support international students is as yet undeveloped. Importantly, it makes me aware as an HE practitioner, that the tasks of the university that may appear administrative or technical, are in fact very much aligned to the educational function of the university and shape the learning experience. An HEI that does not realise that communication is polysemic, that the meaning of the information that they provide on their website varies according to the

user, sends a message about the level to which it has incorporated an internationalisation project. Accordingly, this research provides a foundation for the continued development of FLHs, through noting the importance that HEIs consider how the production process of developing a FLH influences the published product. Meaning-making in FLHs develops from how the different elements in a FLH combine through the encoding process, and how the FLHs are decoded by users. In this process, how these codes are understood is influenced by the context of the HEI and the intentions of the university concerning its value towards the internationalisation of HE. Understanding this process would enable HEIs to go beyond putting on an international face and ensure that their FLHs effectively deliver a positive image of the university internationally.

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## Appendix A Ethics Approval



UNIVERSITY OF  
LIVERPOOL

ONLINE  
PROGRAMMES

Dear Liz Yoshikawa		
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.		
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)	
Review type:	Expedited	
PI:		
School:	Lifelong Learning	
Title:		
First Reviewer:	Dr. Lucilla Crosta	
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Viola Manokore	
Other members of the Committee	Dr. Marco Ferreira, Dr. Anthony Edwards, Dr. Kathleen Kelm, Dr. Janis McIntyre, Dr. Anne Qualter	
Date of Approval:	24th July 2015	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:		
Conditions		
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.



This approval applies for the duration of the research. If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at <http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc>.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher’s behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

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Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

Kind regards,  
Lucilla Crosta  
Chair, EdD. VPREC

## Appendix B PGR Declaration of Academic Integrity



### PGR Policy on Plagiarism and Dishonest Use of Data – Annexe 1

#### PGR DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

<b>NAME (Print)</b>	<b>Elizabeth Yoshikawa</b>
<b>STUDENT NUMBER</b>	<b>H00018875</b>
<b>SCHOOL/INSTITUTE</b>	<b>Doctor of Education (Higher Education)</b>
<b>TITLE OF WORK</b>	Putting on an International Face: An Analysis of Japanese Universities' English Homepages

*This form should be completed by the student and appended to any piece of work that is submitted for examination. Submission by the student of the form by electronic means constitutes their confirmation of the terms of the declaration.*

Students should familiarise themselves with Appendix 4 of the PGR Code of Practice: PGR Policy on Plagiarism and Dishonest Use of Data, which provides the definitions of academic malpractice and the policies and procedures that apply to the investigation of alleged incidents.

Students found to have committed academic malpractice will receive penalties in accordance with the Policy, which in the most severe cases might include termination of studies.

#### **STUDENT DECLARATION**

I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the University's PGR Policy on Plagiarism and Dishonest Use of Data.
- I have acted honestly, ethically and professionally in conduct leading to assessment for the programme of study.
- I have not copied material from another source nor committed plagiarism nor fabricated, falsified or embellished data when completing the attached material.
- I have not copied material from another source, nor colluded with any other student in the preparation and production of this material.
- If an allegation of suspected academic malpractice is made, I give permission to the University to use source-matching software to ensure that the submitted material is all my own work.

SIGNATURE.....Elizabeth Stigger.....

DATE.....March 22, 2018.....

## Appendix C Interview Questions for Producers

### Section 1. The Purpose for a Foreign Language Homepage

- 1) Do you know when your university first developed a home page in a foreign language?
- 2) How many languages does your university have for foreign language homepages?  
Were each of these pages proofed by a native speaker?
- 3) Who was involved in the development of the foreign language page?  
At what stage did you become involved?
- 4) With regards to foreign students:
  - A) Where are the majority of your university's foreign student population from?
  - B) Is there a foreign language homepage in those languages?
  - C) Does your institution have programs specifically for foreign students?
  - D) Are foreign students integrated into classes with Japanese students?
- 5) What is does your university understand the purpose of its foreign language homepage to be?
  - A) How does your institution achieve this purpose?
  - B) What outside sources influenced the development of your university's foreign language homepage?

### Section 2. Construction

- 1) In what way did your university do research regarding why foreign students may come to your institution and the kind of information they would want to see on the FLH before they came?
- 2) How explicit were the instructions given regarding the construction of the foreign language homepage?
  - A) Were you told what and what not to include?  
*Did you have a role in the decision-making process?*
  - B) To what degree did you have input in the presentation of information for both the text and images)?
- 3) How does your university use its reputation to promote itself on its foreign language homepage?
- 4) What is the perceived benefit for your institution with regards to its foreign language homepage?
- 5) Were there any specific structural constraints and practices on the formation of the foreign language homepage?

### Section 3. Design

- 1) Does your university's FLH conform to stylistic conventions regarding webpage layout? (i.e. the placement of search boxes, the university logo, etc.).
- 2) How is the foreign language homepage similar to the Japanese language homepage in terms of:

- A) Content?
  - B) Images and colour schemes?
  - C) Number of sub-links?
- 3) Are there photographs on the foreign language homepage?  
 Are there photographs of the university buildings?  
 Are there photographs of Japanese students only?  
 Are there photographs of Japanese and foreign students together?  
 Are these photographs animated or still?
- 4) How does your university's foreign language homepage differentiate itself from other universities?
- 5) Does your university make use of other social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube?
- 6) How often is the foreign language homepage updated?

#### **Section 4. The Message**

- 1) What does your university consider as key information on the foreign language homepage?
- A) Is there specific information for foreign students only, which does not appear on the Japanese language homepage?
  - B) Is the data provided on the foreign language homepage sufficient for its purpose?
  - C) When foreign students read the university's foreign language homepage, what message does your institution believe they take away?
  - D) Does the FLH make any connection between the potential foreign student and Japan as the host nation
- 2) In what way do the visual images on the foreign language homepage match the written messages?
- 3) What representations of education excellence are on your university's foreign language homepage in terms of:
- A) the university environment?
  - B) nurturing?
  - C) accessibility to information?
  - D) the exotic of studying abroad?
- 4) Does your institution ever ask for feedback from 'foreigners' regarding their FLHs?

#### **Section 5. About you**

- 1) Prior to working on your university's foreign language homepage, did you have any experience in webpage construction?
- 2) How did your institution support you in the developing its foreign language homepage?
- 3) When you look at your university's foreign language homepage:

A) What aspects do you think are successful?

Why are they successful?

B) What makes you cringe?

C) Do you believe that the foreign language homepage meets the current needs of the university?

4) Do you think that your institution utilizes to its fullest capacity to provide sufficient and accurate information on its foreign language homepage?

## Appendix D Questionnaire and Interview Questions for Students

### Questionnaire

#### Personal details:

1) What is your nationality?

2) What is your gender? (Please check one).

Male                       Female                       Other

3) Your age: ..... years

#### Studying in Japan

4) What program level will you/ do you study at in Japan? (Please check all that apply.)

- Doctor (PhD /EdD)
- Master
- Undergraduate
- Research student
- Other    Please specify:

5) What area will you/ do you study in?

6) Why did you decide to study in Japan?

7) What criteria were/ are of importance for you as an international student when choosing a foreign university to study at?

8) How long do you expect to stay in Japan?

9) What is your plan after you finish your course of study in Japan?

#### Computer Use

10) How often do you access the Internet?

11) What kind of information do you use the Internet to search for?

#### Studying in Japan:

12) How did you gather information about the university you wish to study at in Japan before you came?

13) What kind of information would you expect a university to display on its foreign language homepage?

14) Did the foreign language home page offer you all the information you felt you needed? What was missing?

## **Focus group interview questions**

### **Background to information needs:**

1) Before you came to Japan what kind of information did you want to find out regarding the university you plan to attend?

    Could you find all the information you needed?

    Was the information you needed to find, easy to find?

2) What information do you wish you had had before you came to Japan, but couldn't find?

3) Could you find a FLH in your native language?

    How did you feel about the language usage?

4) Did you look at the website in English? (If your native language does not exist as an option?)

5) Did you look at the Japanese website?

6) How did the information on the Japanese page differ from that on the foreign language page you looked at?

7) Approximately how many times did you visit the university website before you came to Japan?

    - Did you find that the information changed between visits to the homepage?

    - How did you find the content?

    - The ease of the website use?

8) Do you feel that you were sufficiently informed?

    - What information was useful?

    - What information on the website was not useful?

9) What information did you feel you need, but could not find? (How do you think the university webpage could improve)?

10) Did you notice any differences between the Japanese university website and that from of your own country's university websites?

### **Looking at the webpage:**

#### **Design**

11) From looking at this website, what is your first impression of it?

12) How would you describe its foreign student user friendliness?

13) Is the font easy to read?

14) What is your opinion of the colour contrast?

- 15) Can you find all the information that you need?
- 16) What changes to information or additional features would you suggest for this website?
- 17) Do the navigation links make sense to you?  
If no, what would you like to see changed?
- 18) Does this webpage give you suitable answers to questions you might have at studying at this university?
- 19) How would you rate the language use?
- 20) How satisfied are you with the information on this webpage?
- 21) How confident would you feel in contacting this university?

**Images**

- 22) What do you think of the images on this webpage?  
Do you think they are appropriate or not?
- 23) What other images would you like to see?

**Closure**

- 24) After looking closely at this university's website how is your opinion about it different than from when we first looked at it?
- 25) Is there anything else that you would like to add?