

# Monash Language Exchange Program

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## 1. Introduction

The Monash Language Exchange Program has been running since 1996. The International Student Support Unit (ISSU) began the program in response to feedback from international students who were interested in meeting local students, learning more about the local culture and developing their English language skills. Local students responded to the opportunity to improve their foreign language skills, develop their cross-cultural understanding and succeed in their foreign language courses.

Students interested in the program agreed initially to volunteer one hour per week with their partner spending 50% of the time conversing in each language. The volunteers were matched with a suitable partner based on faculty, language, gender and age. The introductory email instructed the students to meet on campus and discuss their individual needs and requirements and to arrange an on-going time/place to meet.

The program was promoted to international students mainly during orientation week and in newsletters. Most of the local students involved in the program heard about it through word of mouth and through posters on noticeboards. The ISSU had also initiated close contacts with academic staff in the Japanese studies department, who allowed us to promote the program to their students during class time, which greatly stimulated interest in the program.

The main difficulty we encountered in carrying out the program was that more international students were interested in the program than local students and international students often missed out on a partner. It was also difficult to monitor the interaction between the pairs once they had been matched. We were unsure if students were actually meeting for an hour per week, if they were happy with their partners and if the program was actually meeting their needs.

Following on the success of the program new initiatives were introduced including; increasing the number of LOTE classes visited; introducing a language exchange social program; offering LOTE exchange to international students; formalizing a re-application process and referring unsuccessful applicants to similar programs offered by Monash. The ISSU also surveyed the participants at the end of semester one and distributed participation certificates.

The new initiatives resulted in the total number of language exchange volunteers matched with partners more than doubling to 186 students in Semester one, 2006. Approximately 100 of those students participated in the language exchange social program. Another 30 students who could not be matched were referred to other conversational/friendship programs at Monash. This paper will discuss the new initiatives in more detail, report on the results of the satisfaction survey and provide future recommendations for the program.

## 2. Initiatives

### *LOTE Class Visits*

In addition to the Japanese class visits that we were already conducting, we contacted academic staff in the Chinese, Korean and Indonesian departments to arrange additional visits to promote the program. We also asked our local volunteers to talk to their teacher about a class visit. As some sessional staff were not aware of the program our existing volunteers helped to create awareness amongst both staff and potential applicants in their classes. The class visits were a highly successful way to promote the program and increase participation. In one case we managed to sign up an entire class of local students to the program

A further hugely successful initiative was to make an electronic copy of the language exchange application form available for academic staff to upload onto their unit websites. The sites typically contain lecture notes

and course materials for each unit for their students to access on-line and download. This was very popular with academic staff as the language exchange application form could be listed as a further resource that students could use to improve their language skills.

#### *Language Exchange Social Program*

While the social program was initially introduced to stimulate and keep students interested in the program there were other valuable outcomes. By their participation students were able to make new friends (local and international) with similar interests outside of the one-on-one interaction with their designated partner. Importantly the social aspects of the program gave an indication on how people were progressing in the program and also attracted new volunteers to participate.

The social program consisted of community cultural activities that students could participate in with their partners/classmates etc on their own as well as structured activities that were organised by the ISSU. Academic staff, drawn by the interest of their students, also assisted us by suggesting events their students might be interested in and what times would work around classes.

Accordingly, a monthly 'Language Exchange Events' newsletter was developed and emailed to participants and academic staff suggesting ideas of things to do and activities for volunteers to participate in with their partners. As the academic staff were aware of the social activities and keen to foster the program they could remind their students about the functions.

The most popular events were on-campus daytime events, such as the cooking demonstrations, a morning tea and two free lunches each attended by around 20 people. Attendance at these events consisted of approximately 50-75% international students and 25-50% local students. The least popular activities were off-campus after-hours activities such as movie nights and day trips. With the exception of Festival Indonesia, these events were attended 100% by International students

#### *LOTE Exchange for International Students*

The language exchange application form was changed to include an option for international students to request a partner who spoke a language other than English. Such was the degree of interest and co-operation of academic staff, in most of these instances I was able to contact academic staff to find out if, for example, if they had a Korean student in their Indonesian class or vice versa. We were also very fortunate to have two local students who were bi-lingual in English and Spanish and studying Asian languages. These students were matched with Chinese and Japanese students who were studying Spanish but also wanted to improve their English.

In total there were 18 students exchanging languages other than English in semester 1, 2006. The most popular was Japanese/Mandarin with 8 volunteers, followed by Spanish/Japanese, Spanish/Mandarin, Japanese/French, Korean/Japanese and Korean/Mandarin (all with 2 volunteers each).

#### *Referrals to Conversation and Friendship Programs*

Applicants for language exchange who spoke languages that are not taught at Monash such as Thai, Vietnamese and Cantonese were referred to the English discussion groups run by postgraduate and international student (MPA & MUISS) associations as well as the International Friendship Program. The two English discussion groups are student run groups that run every week for anyone to join in. The International Friendship Program is a Monash program that links international students with adults in the community for friendship opportunities.

Referrals to these groups were also made when there was a large demand from a particular group of international students for language exchange that could not be matched with partners. This was often the case for Chinese applicants as there are significantly more Chinese students at Monash than there are locals studying Chinese. Additionally, many of the local students studying Chinese at Monash have a Chinese background and often practiced their language with relatives and family friends and were not as interested in participating in the program.

Thirty applicants were referred to other programs in semester one. Many joined the International Friendship Program and the MUISS English Conversation classes. Both cooking demonstrations were organised in conjunction with the MUISS English conversation group. Linking these two programs with social events helped bolster both programs and gave students opportunities that may not be possible otherwise.

### *Re-application Process*

We found that some students were not happy with the partner they had initially been allocated to. There was a concern that this could deter good volunteers from applying for the program again. We decided to formalise a re-application process so that we didn't lose people who were unhappy. The introductory letter was re-written to include a section on what to do if you are not happy with your partner, need more than one hour practice per week or if your partner is too busy. At the end of semester one we also invited all participants to re-apply for the program for any of the above reasons or if their partner had returned home/graduated. If they were happy with the current arrangements there was no need to re-apply. As a result 21 volunteers were re-allocated to new/additional partners.

### **3. Outcomes of the New Initiatives**

The total number of volunteers matched with partners in semester 1, 2006 more that doubled to 186 students. The most popular language with 72 volunteers was Japanese, followed by Mandarin with 38 and Indonesian with 30 volunteers. Other languages included Korean (16 volunteers), German (6 volunteers), Spanish (4 volunteers) and French (2 volunteers). There were 18 volunteers exchanging languages other than English.

Attendance at the ISSU organised social events was approximately 100 students. We also invited all language exchange participants to volunteer as student leaders in the mid year International Student Orientation program. Although many of the students who offered to help out at Orientation were international students it was great to see some of our local students volunteering at enrolment, taking campus tours, attending peer support BBQs and breakfasts during orientation week.

Participation certificates were also introduced and linked with the process of filling in an evaluation survey. Forty-one students filled in evaluation surveys and received participation certificates. The introduction of participation certificates was popular as many of the students wanted to use the certificates in their CVs etc.

### **4. Student Feedback**

Up until this year the program relied on informal feedback from students on how to improve the program. A survey was introduced so that we could find out when the students were meeting, how often they met, when they met, what they got out of the program, how it has assisted their language and cultural skills and any feedback/suggestions they have.

Forty-one students responded to the survey or 22% of the 186 participants.

<b>International Students</b>	<b>No. of Survey Respondents</b>	<b>Local Students</b>	<b>No. of Survey Respondents</b>
Indonesian	6	Studying Indonesian	7
Chinese (Mandarin)	8	Studying Mandarin	3
Japanese	6	Studying Japanese	7
Korean	1	Studying Korean	2
French	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>19</b>

### *Frequency of Meetings*

The average number of face-to-face meetings for the semester was 9 times. This ranged from 0-20 meetings. Some students commented that they found it difficult to meet due to timetable conflicts. The one student who had never met her partner face to face did have email contact that was all in English.

### *Regular Meeting Times*

Twenty different meeting times were listed ranging from Monday 1pm – Friday 10am. The most popular times were Tuesday 1-2pm (3 respondents), Thursday 12-1 (3 respondents) and Thursday 3-5pm (4 respondents). None of the regular meeting times were after hours or on weekends. Eleven students did not have a regular meeting time. Three students used SMS and email contact when they were unable to meet regularly.

### *Speaking English*

Twenty-one people spoke 50% English and 50% of the other language when they spoke to their partner. Thirteen people spoke more than 50% English and seven people spoke less than 50% English with their partner.

The students who spent more than 50% of their language exchange speaking English listed language difficulties, slow progress, shyness and convenience as reasons for doing so.

*Sometimes I cannot explain what I want to say in Japanese so I tell her in English. Also, I get frustrated at speaking so slowly in Japanese that I stop using Japanese or don't finish my sentences properly.*

Local students who spoke less English seemed to have a higher proficiency in their second language or had a partner who didn't mind giving extra assistance.

*Because my English improved very fast, and my partner does not have many chances to improve his Mandarin. So he needs more help. I like to do so.*

### *Meeting Other Local Students*

We asked the International students if they had met other local students through their language exchange partner. Eight students had met other local students, thirteen international students had not and one did not answer.

### *Learning About Australian Life*

We asked the International students if they learned more about Australian life because of this experience. It was fantastic to see that eighteen students said yes, two students said no and two did not respond.

### *Language Ability*

We asked the local students if they felt the language exchange has improved their ability to converse in their foreign language. Seventeen students said yes, two students said no. It was interesting to note that the students had developed more confidence and cross-cultural skills through language exchange. The students had also learnt skills that were not so easy to pick up in the classroom environment such as slang and informal communication skills.

*Definitely! It is giving me more courage and confidence to speak out loud as well as improving my grammar and vocabulary in a more informal environment than class*

### *The Experience*

We asked all the students if language exchange was a good experience. All 41 respondents said yes. There were many different reasons why the participants enjoyed the program, including making new friends/helping people, learning slang/informal language, understanding another culture/lifestyle and learning how their culture is viewed by others.

The international students also enjoyed learning the Australian accent and meeting local people, while the local students gained confidence speaking other languages and made contacts for future visits overseas.

*Yes, give me chance to know local people cos it's really hard to know some one, esp local students in lectures or tutes*

*Yes, It is an excellent opportunity for me to make friends with local student. And I do improve my English through the program. And I really enjoy teaching Mandarin to others and Chinese culture.*

*Yes, my partner and I have become quite good friends. I have learn a lot about the Indonesian language and culture through her and hope maybe to even meet her if I take a cultural exchange program in later years.*

*Yes it was. Not only you get to learn more about the language you also make a new friend for life!!!*

### *Additional Comments/Suggestions?*

The respondents gave us a great deal of positive feedback on the program. Many thanked us for the opportunity to join the program and meet their partner. A significant number of students would like to see the program promoted more and some students would like the program to provide conversation guidelines and information on language tools. The students also enjoyed the social program, particularly the free lunches and were pleased to be asked for their feedback through the surveys.

*I really enjoy the program as I would not know, meet or make any Japanese acquaintances without this program pairing us together. Thank-you.*

*Just keep up the good work, and make everyone aware of your program either through notices in common areas or through speeches in classes, particularly international students as it gives them a chance to make new friends if they are new to the country*

*Some people do not know what the language exchange centre is. The centre needs to extra advertisements. Always thanks so much for giving awesome chances to me.*

*I met really nice language exchange partner. Thanks so much for this program!!*

## **5. Future Initiatives/Recommendations**

Feedback from participants indicated strongly that there needs to be more promotion of the program. Widespread promotion has always been difficult to carry out due to disparities between the number of international students compared to the numbers of local students studying those languages. The biggest disparities are in Mandarin where there is at least a four-month waiting list for Chinese students to be matched with a partner. Conversely, local students studying European languages face similar waiting periods.

### *Promoting to International Students*

- Promote the program as one of several options that international students can do to meet new friends and practice their English. Other options are the Peer Mentor Program, The International Friendship Program, the MPA and MUISS English Conversation Programs and community volunteering.
- Promote the program to European students not just as a way to improve English, but also to improve Asian languages and make new friends.
- Give students whose languages are in high demand (Japanese, European and Australian students) the option of 2 or more partners.

### *Promoting to Local Students*

- Provide the option of formal training and certification to local students in areas such as cross cultural communication, mentoring and leadership training.
- Do more class visits, especially for Chinese, Korean and Indonesian.
- Set up stalls in the enrolment hall for first and second round offers and during multicultural week.
- Organise more on-campus social activities

### *Language Exchange Resource Guide*

Another initiative is to develop a language exchange resource guide. Current participants would be invited to give feedback on issues they feel are important to include in the guide. The guide would accompany the introductory letter and give tips on conversation topics, where to find language learning tools, information about how to send SMS/emails etc in another language, and on-campus support programs and services.

### *Peer Mentoring*

Encourage more of the language exchange students and their partners to get involved in peer mentoring and orientation week for international students. The peer mentoring program also offers leadership and cross cultural training for participants to enhance their skills and employability.

## **Appendix A – More Student Comments**

### **Frequency of Meetings**

*Only 2 as I live far from uni and our timetables didn't really work out. However, we regularly interact through email and text messaging.*

*I've had trouble meeting my partner as she's been very busy with uni but we've communicated via email. (0 times)*

### **Regular Meeting Times**

*We did meet on our breaks but now there's more work so we talk on line once/twice per week*

*We also communicate regularly via email and text messages.*

*No, If we are free, send message to each other, confirm the meeting time.*

### **Speaking English**

#### **Comments from INTERNATIONAL students who spoke MORE English**

*Easy to communicate in english*

*It may be because of the different language proficiency. The one who has a better language competence in one's foreign language use it more than another person. E.g. my English is better than my partner's Japanese, so we tend to use English more than Japanese.*

*Because both of us only had basic knowledge (level 1) of the language we exchange.*

#### **Comments from LOCAL students who spoke MORE English**

*Because I find it hard to speak in Chinese I'm still learning and it gives them more time to learn*

*It is easier to communicate in English and my partner needs to learn Australian phrases. However we are slowly trying to increase the amount of time we spend communicating in Japanese.*

*Mainly because it is easier to communicate (His English is better than my Japanese). I view getting to know other person (and hence learning about their country) with about as important as speaking the language. I'm not really too fussed about trying to enforce 50/50 on my partner because in the past (with other Japanese people) I find it can still the conversation. I am quite resigned to the fact that the only way I will be able to converse fluently in Japanese is when and if I am able to go to Japan where I will be forced to speak Japanese much of the time. But any practice is much better than none at all.*

*I can't say some things in Japanese*

*I'm shy with my language and my partners English is fine, we can communicate better in English, though I still do practice my language.*

*I found that my partner needed me to help him more in English, since he is a law student and struggled on finding information for his assignments. Also, we did not do 50%/50%, because I had just started learning the new language and I found I didn't really need much help at that point in time.*

*Harder to type in Japanese (email contact only)*

#### **Comments from INTERNATIONAL students who spoke LESS English**

*Because she needed the Chinese practice most of the time and she had a lot of questions.*

#### **Comments from LOCAL students who spoke LESS English**

*She speaks to me in English (my language) and I speak in Indonesian (her language), and we correct each other.*

*Because my partner says she doesn't need help with English speaking, she actually wants to help me with my Japanese so that she can get practice teaching Japanese, she is also interested in my studies of translation so I am able to reciprocate by sharing knowledge with that with her while she helps with my Japanese speaking*

*My partner already has good English communication skills however he needs help with writing assignments. Therefore, our agreement is that he helps me with language for an hour every week and in exchange I help him with assignment for an extended period of time when they are due.*

*Because she is fluent in English and needs no help at all*

### **Meeting Other Local Students**

*Yes, I met several of her friends. They are nice to talk with.*

### **Learning About Australian Life**

*Yes. I got much information about the country from my partner.*

*Yes, like housewarming party*

*Yes, but because of my exchange partner also got the Asian culture, we are bit similar in the way of living, friends and environment.*

*No, actually It might be take more time to get involve Australian Culture.*

### **Language Ability**

*Yes. However, because I only met my partner when I just started learning the new language, I didn't really notice any improvement. But I believe if I continued to meet up with my partner, it would probably have improved my ability in the language.*

*Yes. I make myself concentrate when she is speaking, and try not to tune out too much (which I am used to doing with English because I can still understand the general idea even if I am not really paying attention). I am also learning many cultural things that are not taught through a text book, or in class (if they are something to do with younger Japanese people).*

*Yes, because I feel I've greatly improved my general conversation skills and it's been interesting to learn some indo slang also.*

*Yes it does it has helped me to feel comfortable using the language in front of people and in a random conversation*

*Yes, I have learnt a lot through the language exchange sessions. I feel I understand better about the language and its use and also more about the Japanese culture.*

*Yes, I think it has helped my ability to converse in Japanese. I having a regular meeting time with my partner helps me to gain confidence in my speaking ability. Furthermore, it enables me to learn more colloquial language and ask questions about how to say things 'naturally' and more casually in Japanese, as opposed to what is often taught in classroom.*

*I think it is especially valuable as the Japanese course at Monash does not place much emphasis on giving students speaking practice in everyday language, but relies on students to find their own opportunities to practice spoken Japanese.*

*Yes, although we didn't have many opportunities to have discussions, the interaction via email definitely helped with discovering the 'norms' and 'slang' of the language. This was important.*

*Definetly, without it I would be forgetting my Japanese speaking skills that I learnt while in Japan, meeting up and conversing in Japanese helps me brush up and maintain my Japanese*

*Absolutely. It has made me more confident in expressing myself through my chosen language. It has allowed me to articulate what I have learnt that tutorials don't fully allow for.*

*Yes, very much so. Being able to ask questions about how Indonesians would speak has helped me to speak like an Indonesian rather than translating English to Indonesian.*

*Haven't really had that much contact with my exchange partner for it to have a noticeable improvement. It hasn't really helped because the language exchange partner would talk in slang Indonesian, not the formal Indonesian which I was accustomed to. Therefore, I found it difficult to understand her and had to ask her to*

*repeat things a lot. It was good though to learn some of the slang phrases, because when I get the opportunity to go to Indonesia, I'll have some understanding of what is being said.*

*Not really but I do feel that I am not losing my Japanese (based on my previous exchange partner) as I get to practice the vocabulary that I know but it doesn't really improve except maybe in giving me more confidence to speak in Japanese.*

### ***The Experience - International Student Comments:***

*Yes. I used to learn English at school and English course in my home country, but never learn it so informally as in the language exchange meeting. I had a chance to ask some questions that always interests me, for instance, how can native speakers learn huge English vocabularies; Asked them about how to say something that frequently used in my language in English; etc. I believe that sometimes this way of learning is much more exciting and effective rather than in the formal English class, as well as opportunity of making new friends.*

*Yes, because I can learn English correctly and resemble the accent as well*

*Yes because the program help us how to get in touch with others from different cultural background.*

*Yes, We, overseas students tend to stay among our native friends and speak our native language. The Language Exchange Program has given me the opportunity to speak English more frequently and understand the Australian culture better. I would recommend it to all overseas students.*

*Yes, I get to know Australia a little bit better*

*Yes. To make friends outside the own faculty was the great experience.*

*Yes. Because it is provided an environment for International student to get acknowledge more about other language/culture and making friends.*

*Yes, This is my first time to meet local girl*

*Yes, it is a really great opportunity. I can learn and exercise other country languages in a good friendship. Also make me learn how different the culture or custom between my country and other country.*

*Yes, because by meeting person, who speaks it as a mother tongue, not only learning language, but also their life style and other things.*

*Yes. I got to meet new friend and practice my English speaking and learn new culture.*

*Yes. It's a really good and fun experience. Through this program I can meet new friends and exchange some views about each other's country.*

*Yes, we have learned a lot from each other and I helped my partner get D in her Chinese Exam last semester. And she taught me a lot 'slang'!*

*Yes, because I can learn different culture*

*Yes, I can learn various useful expressions and local culture*

*Yes. That was a good experience because we can learned Each other. Not only to discuss about the subjects, but other interesting topics such as family, culture and religion. I also learned how some people look at our culture.*

*Yes, Because this program not only offers me an excellent opportunity to know Australia society, but also gives an chance to talk with Australia local student face to face.*

*Yes, we can always have a good time, talking and chatting. We give each other some good suggestions about learning language.*



### **Local Student Comments:**

*Yes – I am developing a friendship with someone who I would not normally come into contact with in my home town. I am learning about their life, their family, their thoughts, their opinions of Australia and Australian people. I also like the thought that they are learning things from me which they wouldn't be able to find out normally.*

*Yes, because I feel I've greatly improved my general conversation skills and it's been interesting to learn some indo slang also.*

*Yes, it was a good experience, as I could meet with someone who knew more Indonesian than I and who wasn't in my class. I was able to get help with phrases or words which I couldn't find in the dictionary.*

*Yes, I think it is a great experience for both the international student and the local student. Not only the language is exchanged, but you also make great friends!!*

*Yes, my language partner is easy-going, friendly and an interesting person. Hopefully we will be able to build a good friendship over time. I have learned quite a lot about Japan and I think this knowledge will help me in my preparation for hopefully being able to go to Japan next year.*

*Yes, improved speaking ability, vocabulary for casual conversation, also insight into culture/Japanese people.*

*I have met a new friend who I wouldn't have otherwise met. It is also useful to have a friend who comes from a native perspective, which gives you a greater insight into the language and the country you are studying.*

*Yes, met new people and developed language skills.*

*Yes. It allowed me to learn a bit about my partners' culture and the way his lifestyle was back in China.*

*Yes, because it improved my language skills and I made some new friends.*

*Yes I have thoroughly enjoyed the experience and definitely continue. I have not only improved my languages but have also made great friends*

*Yes, I would definitely recommend it despite having problems meeting up this time as I feel that you're able to make friends with new people and also to practice a language that you're studying and improve or just feel more comfortable and if you've finished studied it's good chance for you to stay in practice.*

### **Additional Comments/Suggestions? - International Students:**

*Well done. It is really a useful activity added with some social meeting like lunch together, watching movies, etc. Just try to frequently promote this activity, so that many students will know and join.*

*It's good already, thank you for your hard-work and also for giving us this opportunity. Congratulations to you Leanne for the success of this event. Good work ☺*

*Providing good opportunity and communication, thanks.*

*Better if the Language Exchange Program Unit provides guidelines about aspects that required to discuss between the partner.*

*I think the biggest obstacle for this program might be that there are only a small amount of students who are aware of it.*

*If there is more students involved in the program, the pending list won't be too long!! Actually just some students know there is an Exchange Language Program.*

*I'm really glad to enroll in this program*

*It would be a good idea if you have a language facilities such as books, conversation cassette, cd or dvd from different languages such as Japan, Mandarin and Indonesia that we can borrow to practice at home.*

*I am very happy to join the Language Exchange Group, although the timetable conflict with my unit timetable sometimes. Thanks for your help! I will keep support this group!*

*Thanks so much to provide such a fantastic opportunity to international students. I do benefit a lot from this program. Thanks again.*

*I really enjoyed talking with my exchange partner.*

*Encourage more local students to join the exchange program; this is a good way to introduce Australia to the World.*

*I think it quite good for international student to get better known not only of the language but the life in Australia.*

***Local students:***

*Its going very well thank you. my partner has helped me learn a lot and we are good friends now. i think this program was a very good idea.*

*Thanks for everything! The language exchange program has been great for me!*

*Thanks for the oppurtunity to provide feedback*

*It's a good program, if both students can find times to meet up which suit both of them.*

*I think get togethers are great but maybe have more of them on different times of the week because sometimes it clashes with classes*

*think the program is run well. However many people studying languages at Uni are still unaware of the program.*

*I think the program as it is works very well and leaves the success of the program mainly up to the participants themselves.*

*Unfortunately, the other events that are offered by this program(i.e. some of the movie and other outings) have not been at times which I have been free so I can't comment on them(I'm really only free on Friday and Saturday mornings and nighttime and Sunday afternoons.)*

*It is a great program, thanks for organizing it.*

*No really, everything has been great.*

*Well done Monash!*

*Very good program!*

*Loving the free lunches!*

*More BBQS! ☺*

*This is a really good program.*