



## Socialization and Language Acquisition: Cases of Novice-Level Study Abroad Participants

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This presentation is about my teaching experience in the CLS program, which was eight weeks intensive Japanese language program supported by the U.S. Department of State and hosted at the Himeji Dokkyo University in Hyogo Prefecture, in Japan. My teaching was intended to scaffold novice-level students' socialization and language learning outside of the classroom.

## + Scaffolding in a Study Abroad Context

■ **Scaffolding:** “a process in which a more knowledgeable (or expert) speaker helps a less knowledgeable (novice) learners by providing assistance.” (MacCormick & Donato, 2000 as cited in Lightbrown & Spada, 2006, p. 131)



### SA contexts

#### ■ Cultural Difficulty



- Gender roles (Polanyi, 1995; Talburt & Stewart, 1999)
- Politeness (Burn, 1996)
- Teacher-Student Relationship (Brecht & Robinson, 1995)

#### ■ Language Difficulty



Benefit

Interaction



(Freed, 1996)

Cultural Learning

Scaffolding

Language Use

**Maximize the students' learning in an SA environment**

According to MacCromic and Donato (2000), scaffolding refers to “a process in which a more knowledgeable (or expert) speaker helps a less knowledgeable (novice) learners by providing assistance.” In an SA context, students are repeatedly and vulnerably exposed to the target culture. In fact, studies show that cultural difference in gender role, politeness as well as teacher-students relationship would affect negatively SA students' interaction with NS.

In addition, students' pre-SA language proficiency affects students' interaction during study abroad. Freed's (1990) research shows that students with lower proficiency level seek less interaction with NSs than those who have higher proficiency. However, the same study shows that beginner and intermediate level students benefit more from the interactional activities than the lower level students (Freed, 1990). Therefore, scaffolding students' culture learning as well

as language use for interaction with NSs is crucial to maximize the students' SA learning, especially for novice learners.

## + Critical Language Scholarship-Japan Institute in Himeji in 2013



### Classes:

- Level 5 Class (Advanced)
- Level 4 High Class (Intermediate-Mid to High)
- Level 4 Low Class (Intermediate-Low to Mid)
- **Level 3 High Class** (Novice-High)

Four classes were offered in the CLS program in the summer of 2013. Level 5 class is the highest class. Level 4 high class is the second highest, and the third highest is Level 4 low class. The lowest class is Level 3 high class where I was in charged of in the CLS program. The levels next to each class were the students' language proficiency levels on the Oral Proficiency Interview test scale (ACTFL, 2012). All students who participated in the CLS program took informal OPI tests prior to the program.

## + The Context of Level 4 Class

- 5 Students
- Pre-OPI proficiency<sup>1</sup>:
  - Novice-High - Intermediate-Low
- Experiences in Japan prior to the CLS program...

The OPI scale

Superior

Advance High

Advance Mid

Advance Low

Intermediate High

Intermediate Mid

Intermediate Low

Novice High

Novice Low

An academic-year SA experience

A short trip experience

The first time in Japan

In Level 3 high class, there were 5 students out of the 29 CLS participants. Their pre-OPI proficiency was ranged from Novice-High to Intermediate-Low, and their experience in Japan before the CLS program varied. One student had study abroad experience, and two of them went to Japan for a short trip experience, and for the other two students, the CLS program was their first time in Japan.

## + Class Schedule

<b>Class Schedule for a Day</b>		
9:30	Conversation Class	Application
10:30	Conversation Class	Rehearsal
11:30	Lunch Time	
1:00	Reading & Writing Class	Basic
2:00	Reading & Writing Class	Application
3:00–	Community Activities / Meetings with language partners	

The table above is the class schedule for a day. In the morning, students had two conversation classes, one hour for each. In the application conversation class, students reported the day's assignments of "Action!" (cf. Takeda, 2014 for detailed description of "Action!"). In the rehearsal conversation class, students practice language and gesture use in a cultural manner through acting out scenarios (cf. Takeda, 2014 for more detailed description of each conversation class). After lunch, they had reading and writing class for two hours. In the basic writing and reading class, students practiced written communication of the language they have learned in previous conversation classes. In the application reading and writing class, students prepared for the upcoming program events through reading materials and also wrote reflection and/or thank you letters for the local people who participated in the program events.

## + Class Schedule

Class Schedule for a Day		
9:30	Scaffolding for interaction with NSs.	Application
10:30		Rehearsal
11:30	Lunch Time	
1:00	Reading & Writing Class	Basic
2:00	Reading & Writing Class	Application
3:00–	Community Activities / Meetings with language partners	

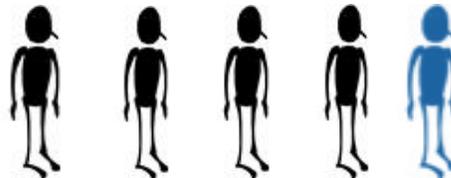
Two examples of formal instruction in Level 3 high class are presented in this presentation: one of the examples is scaffolding for interaction with NSs in the application conversation class; and the other example is scaffolding in cell phone use in a reading and writing class. The next three slides present the example of a reading and writing class.

## + Scaffolding in Cell Phone Use



- Cellphone emailing is widely used in Japan
- Free unlimited emailing during the program (but not calling)

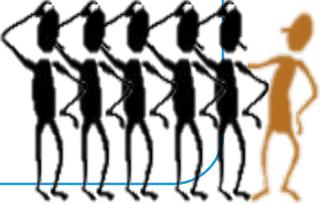
One week later....



During the CLS program, a cellphone was distributed to each student. Cellphone emailing is widely used in Japan, and the CLS students had free unlimited emailing on their phone during the program (but not for calling). It was a good opportunity for them to practice reading and writing through interacting with NSs on the cellphone. However, one week later, it became evident that all but one student in Level 3 high class had not set up their email accounts on their phones, which indicated that they had not taken advantage of having a cellphone in Japan.

## + Scaffolding in Cell Phone Use

- 1 •A student explained how to set up an e-mail account using conjunctions “-te” and “-to” which they had learned in conversation class.
- 2 •Other students set up their email account on their cellphone with helping each other (negotiations of meaning)
- 3 •Practiced emailing on cellphone.
  - To a teachers (Passive honorific forms)
  - To a friend (Direct-style)
  - Marked expression of invitation in Japanese
    - 「カラオケにいかない？」 (Negative form)
    - Direct translation: “Don’t you go *Karaoke*?”



Therefore, in the reading and writing class, I decided to scaffold students’ cellphone use. Because there was one student who had already set up her email account on her phone, the student explained the direction using conjunctions “-te” and “-to” which they had learned in the conversation class. Following her direction, other students set up their email accounts on their cellphone by helping each other. After all students set up their email accounts, I asked them to send emails to me both as a teacher and as a friend to monitor students’ different registers in two different contexts: one in direct style and the other in passive honorific forms that they had just learned in the previous conversation class. The students also practiced sending invitation emails to their Japanese friends, where a commonly used but marked invitation expression to American learners was focused (i.e. negative forms in invitation expression, such as “*karaoke ikanai?*” ‘lit.

Don't you go *movie?*”). Because of their L1 influence, which is English, American students tend to produce sentence like “*karaoke ikitai?*” which is a direct translation of “do you wanna go to *karaoke?*,” which could be misunderstood into a different message by Japanese natives.

Therefore, in the class, students focused in the difference explicitly.

## + Scaffolding in Cell Phone Use



**Practicing marked expression in Japanese**

- Could prepare students to interact with NSs with less pragmatic errors.

**Integrating the skills they have learned in conversation class**

- Could enable students to connect memories of the language skills and apply to other skills.



In this process, students’ used of a commonly used but also marked expression in Japanese were scaffolded along with their cellphone use. By doing so, the formal instruction could prepare students to interact with NSs through the devices with less pragmatic errors. In addition, integrating the skills students have learned in conversation class enabled students to

connect memories of the language skills and apply to other skills, which could reinforce students' memory on the language.

## + Instruction in Application Class

アクション! (“Action!”)

6-6. On your way back from the university, you will take a taxi. Direct the taxi back to where you live. Be sure to think about the best way to explain where you live and remember to use landmarks as part of a guide

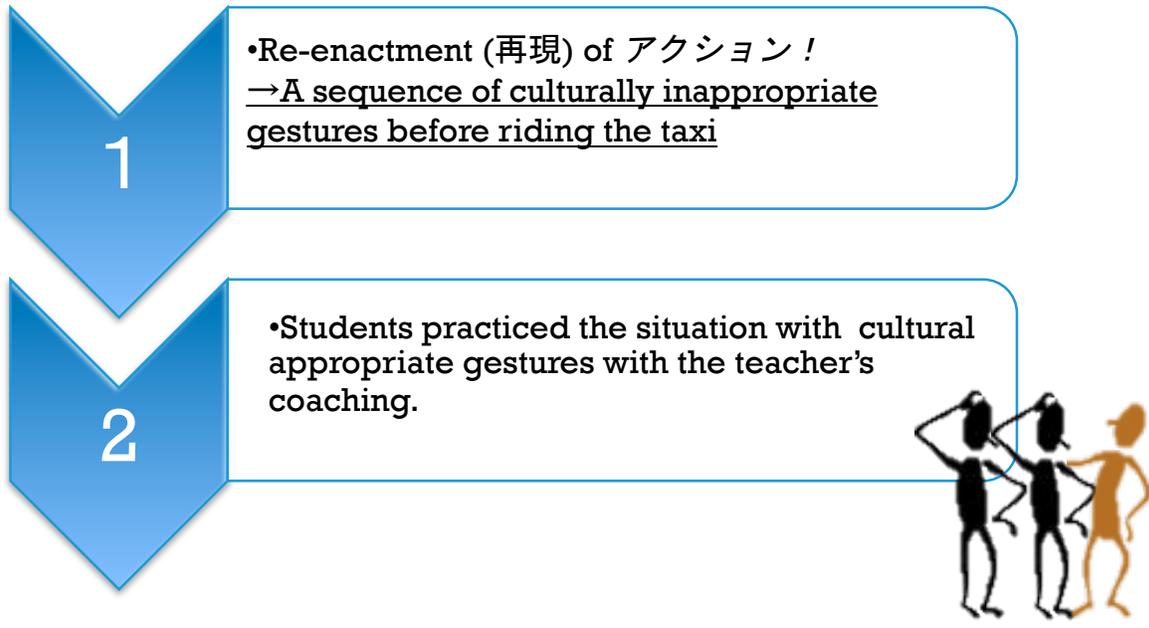
大学から帰ってくる時にもタクシーを使うことにしました。タクシーに乗って、具体的に自分がどこに住んでいるかを説明してください。乗る前に、どのように分かりやすく説明ができるのかを考えてください。ランドマークも使った方が分かりやすいかもしれません。

(Adapted from Noda & Terada, p. 31 2013)



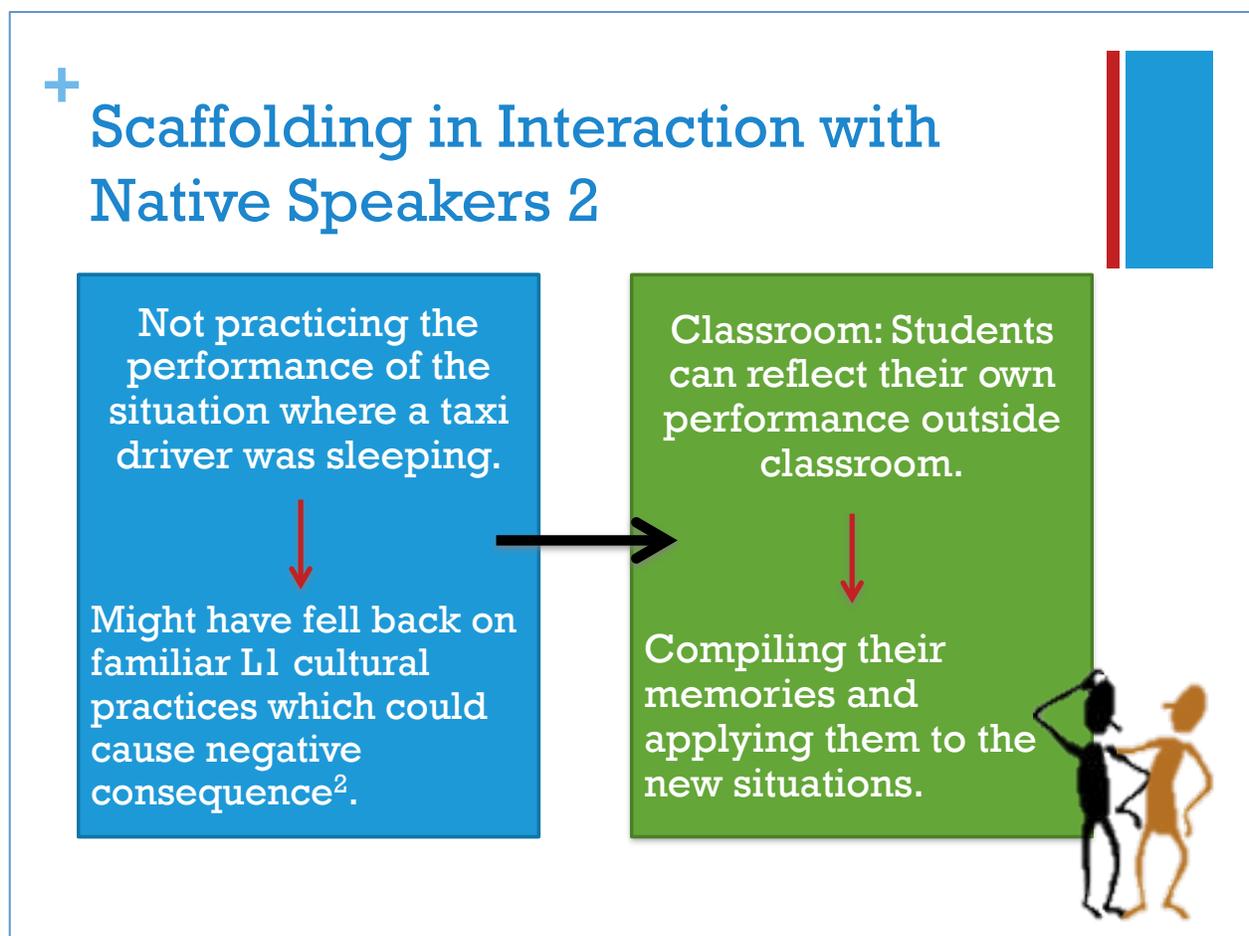
The second example of Level 3 high class was scaffolding in students' interaction with NS. During the CLS program, students were assigned tasks called “Action!” The slide above presents an actual “Action!” that the students in Level 3 high class did. In the “Action!”, students rode a taxi from the university to the hotel they stayed using the language they had learned in the classroom. In the following application class where students presented and discussed their own “Action!” experiences, a group of two students expressed their concern over their taxi driver's uncooperative attitude toward their conversation during their ride.

## + Scaffolding in Interaction with Native Speakers 1



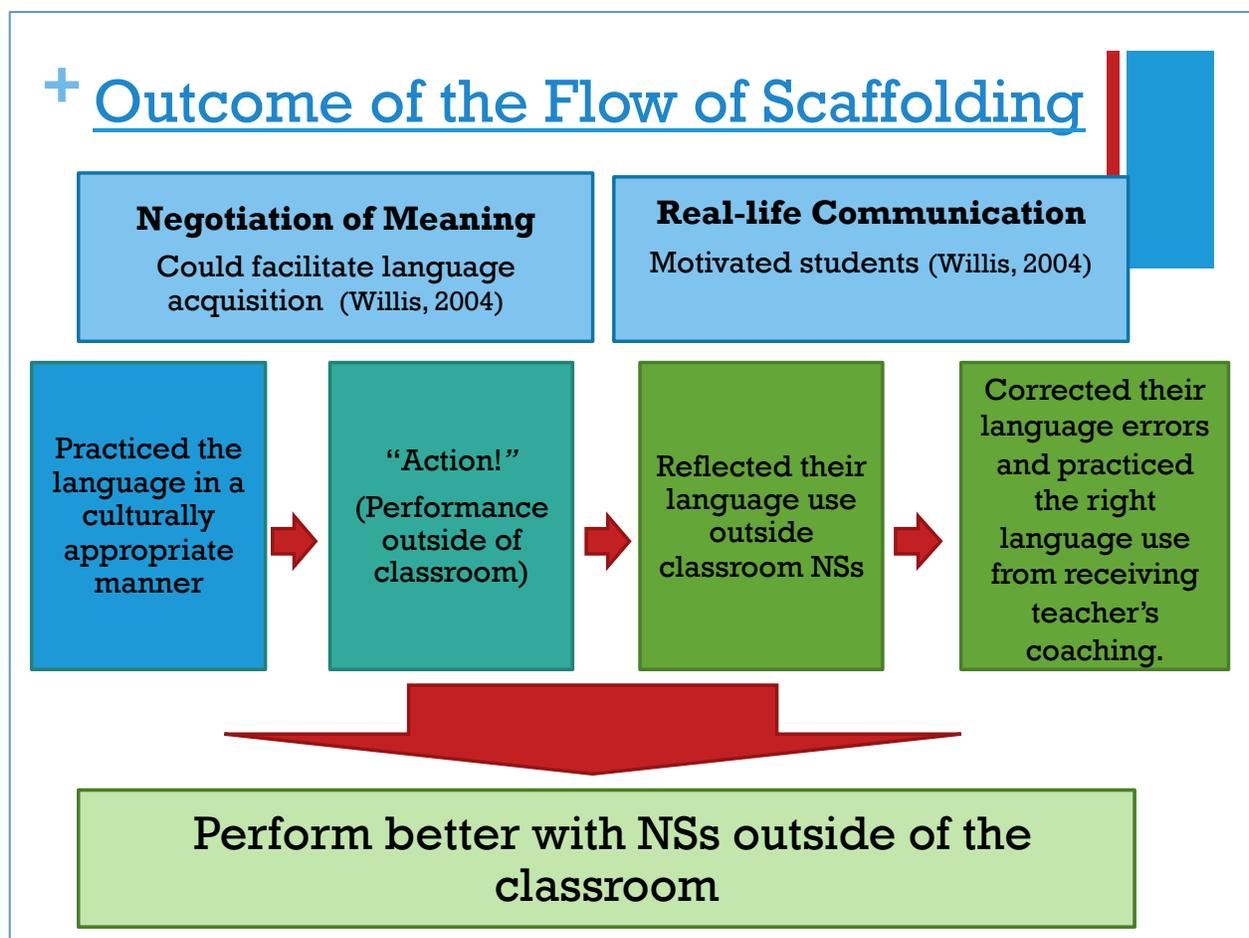
In order to scaffold their interaction with NSs, the students were asked to do re-enactment their experience of the “Action!”, which revealed a sequence of culturally inappropriate gestures. The gestures that one student performed were knocking on the window of the taxi because the driver was lying down and closing his eyes, pointing inside of the taxi, and raising his thumbs up with a big smile on the student’s face, meaning “can we ride in the taxi?” The gestures looked very friendly and could be too friendly to a Japanese stranger like the taxi driver. Although there could have been another reason, such as the taxi driver might had been just frustrated with being woken up from his nap, or he was just shy, these gestures might be one of the reasons why the taxi driver was unwilling to talk with them. According to Brown and Levinson (1978) politeness in the Japanese culture where people highly value maintaining social distance with and avoiding

imposition to others, is referred to as “negative politeness” whereas, American politeness, such as being friendly, is considered to be “positive politeness.” (as cited as Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2006). The students’ negative experience with the taxi driver might stem from the cultural differences in politeness. In order to prepare student not making the same sociocultural errors in the future, in the class, the students practiced the proper language use and gestures in that situation as the follow-up activity along with the explicit instruction on Japanese gestures.



The student’s sociocultural error might have resulted from not knowing how to act in the situation. Although the students practiced their language and gesture use in the scenario of taxi ride in the previous class, they did not practice the performance of a situation where a taxi driver

was sleeping before their ride. Therefore, when the student encountered the situation, he or she might have fallen back on familiar L1 cultural practices while their “Action!” assignment, which could cause negative consequence. By providing a place where students can reflect their own performance outside classroom and practice the right language and gestures, the students can compile their cultural memories and will be able to apply it to similar situations in the near future.



The formal instruction in Level 3 high class incorporated negotiation of meaning, which could facilitate students' language acquisition, (Willis, 2004). It also incorporated real-life communication, which can motivate students (Willis, 2004).

In class, students practiced the language in a culturally appropriate manner, and through “Action!” they applied the language in the interaction with NSs outside of classroom. In the following class, students reflected their language use outside the classroom with NSs. When it was necessary, students corrected their language error and practiced the right language use from receiving teachers’ coaching.

Through the process, scaffolding was provided both at the beginning and at the end. Overall formal instruction in Level 3 high focused on students’ language use in the culturally appropriate manner, and that was also the main purpose of this culture-heavy study abroad program. This process enable student to perform better with native speakers outside of the classroom.

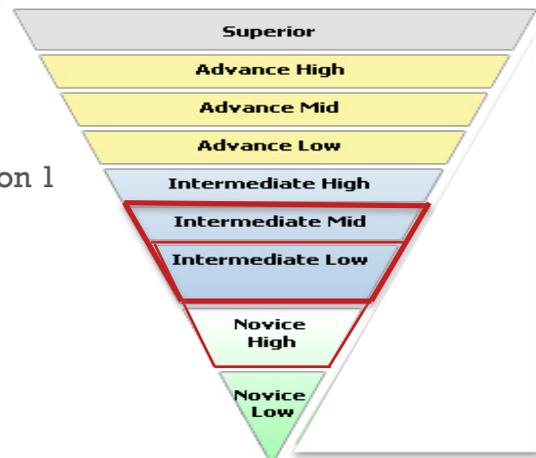
## + By the end of the program...

- Increases on students' amount of time spent on interactional activities



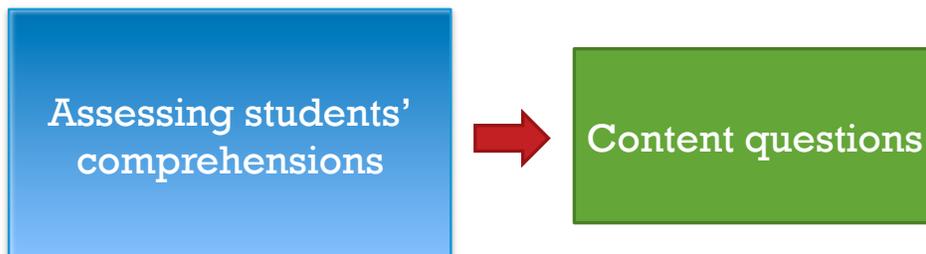
- The post-OPI results:

- 4 out of 5 demonstrated improvement on 1 level or higher.



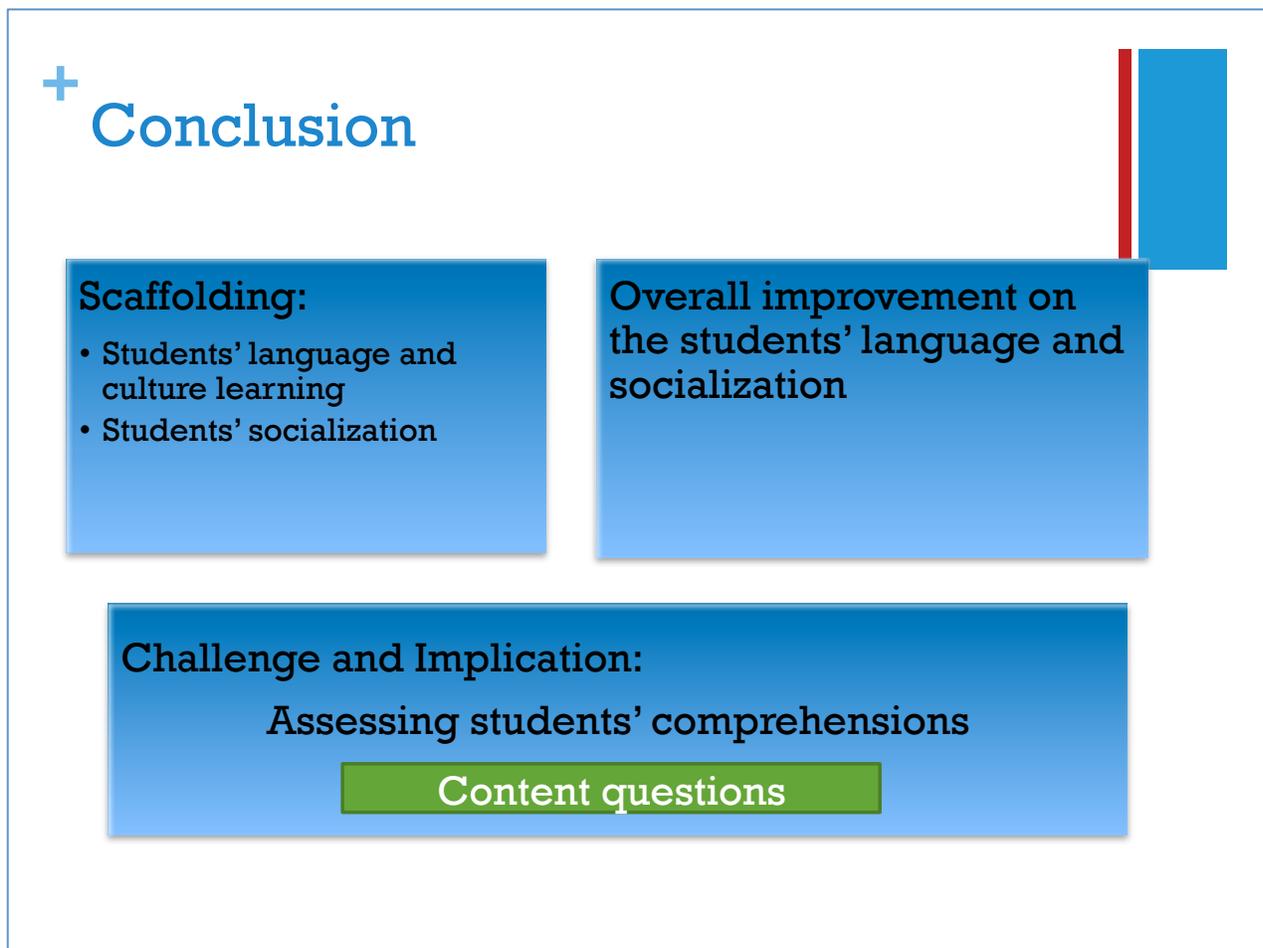
By the end of the program, students in Level 3 high class increased their interaction with NSs according to students' "Action!" reports and the program instructors' informal observation. In addition, four out of five students demonstrated improvement on one level or higher in the post-OPI results.

## + Challenge and Implication



Although there were several challenges I faced while teaching Level 3 high class, the biggest challenge I had in the class was effectively assessing students' comprehension. It was difficult to know what students did not understand and needed help with. There were some occasions that only Level 3 high class students did not understand the situation, but they rarely brought up the questions to seek support. Without knowing their passive attitude, I asked questions like "*wakarimasita ka* (did you understand?)" "*situmon arimasu ka* (do you have any questions?)" to confirm their comprehension. Because of the students' passive attitude, it took some time to find out what they were having difficulties with and what kind of assistance I needed to provide.

In order to confirm students' comprehension and provide imperative support, content questions will be helpful to measure lower level students' comprehension. Asking content questions are valuable not only for teacher to assess student's comprehension, but also for students to realize what students understand and what they don't.



The formal instruction of Level 3 high class focused on scaffolding students' language and culture learning as well as their socialization outside of the classroom. The overall development in the students' post-OPI results and increases of students' interaction with NSs also illustrates students' improvement during the program, especially in their oral ability. Assessing students' comprehension through content questions was the key to maximize Level 3 high students' learning.

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