

## **Teacher vs. Student: The Perspectives on Cognitive Skills in foreign language learning**

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### **Abstract**

Although there is some disagreement as to whether language forms one's process of thought or thought guides one's linguistic development, all agree that there is an interaction between language and thought (e.g., Bowerman & Levinson 2001; Chomsky 1975; Vygotsky 1978; Whorf 1956). Because language and thought are interrelated, it is inevitable that, while teaching foreign languages, educators must train students to develop their linguistic as well as cognitive skills. In the field of foreign language education, teachers expect students to improve their linguistic skills by using cognitive skills such as comparing and contrasting the target language with their own language, hypothesizing the grammatical rules of the target language, and reflecting on content based on their personal experiences and knowledge from other areas of studies.

However, students often underestimate the importance of cognitive skills in foreign language classrooms, especially in novice and low-intermediate levels. This means that there is a gap between teacher's and student's perspectives on what the important skills are for foreign language learning. This gap was clearly demonstrated when students in the first year Japanese language course at Bennington College discussed what constitutes a good language learner. Although students value critical thinking skills in other areas of study, they did not list critical thinking as a valued skill in foreign language development. Therefore, foreign language teachers must describe what we expect our students to improve while studying foreign languages, and clearly explain the evidence we seek to evaluate their linguistic and cognitive skills.

This action research paper will first discuss the importance of cognitive skills in foreign language learning and explain the different expectations between teacher and student on what the important skills are to acquire foreign language effectively. Next, this paper will explain how to guide students to develop cognitive skills, while studying Japanese by giving sample lesson plans from a Japanese course that I designed at Bennington College.

### **Introduction to Action Research Project**

Assessing the quality of education gained much attention with the 2002 enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act, which required each state to set standards and develop assessments to measure students' achievement and educational growth. Because the outcomes of assessments have a direct impact on whether or not schools receive federal funding, this law pushed not only educators, but also policymakers and professional test developers, to discuss the processes of assessments and the quality of education. In 2006, the movement towards assessing the quality of education was expanded when Margaret Spellings convened a commission to discuss how to evaluate the quality of higher education institutions. The Spellings Commission recommended to assess what students learn and "(o)ur colleges and universities must become more transparent, faster to respond to rapidly changing circumstances and increasingly productive in order to deal effectively with the powerful forces of change they now face" (29). (Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education 2006)

Following this trend of what and how to assess the quality of education, I started to question if teachers' perspectives on what and how to assess students' skills in foreign language classrooms were shared with their students. More specifically, although the Isabelle Kaplan Center for Languages and Cultures at Bennington College strongly believes that students must improve not only their linguistic skills but also their cognitive skills through their foreign language learning experiences, I wondered if students in the first term foreign language courses were aware of teacher's expectations on cognitive development.

Therefore, I conducted an action research to examine students' perspectives on the important skills in foreign language learning and compared it with teachers' perspectives. Then, I implemented the findings to design a Japanese course at Bennington College.

### **Language, Thought, and Culture**

Many researchers examined the relationship between language and thought and discussed whether language forms one's process of thought or thought guides one's linguistic development. Here I will not argue one view or another, but rather I will focus on the fact that there is a connection between language and thought (e.g., Bowerman & Levinson 2001; Chomsky 1975; Vygotsky 1978; Whorf 1956). In addition, based on Wilhelm von Humboldt's study, Slobin (1996) asserts that "(l)anguages differ from one another; thought and language are

inseparable; therefore each speech community embodies a distinct world-view” (p.70). He continues to state that “(t)he language or languages that we learn in childhood are not neutral coding systems of an objective reality. Rather, each one is a subjective orientation to the world of human experience, and this orientation **affects the ways in which we think while we are speaking** (p.91). Benjamin L. Worf (1956) also reported that each language contains a distinctive thinking pattern of the society, so people who speak different languages demonstrate different ways of conceptual constructions. In other words, the way we think is embedded in the language, and it means that language we learn contains subjective views of the people in the society. Therefore, through learning a language, we learn a way of thinking that is accepted in the culture.

Learning a foreign language is not an exception. Through foreign language learning, learners must acquire the linguistic knowledge of the target language as well as how people in the target culture think. Therefore, foreign language teachers are responsible to design lessons that allow students to practice vocabulary and the mechanics of the language and improve their linguistic skills as well as to guide students to analyze how people think and how the language is used in the society. Moreover, effective foreign language teachers are the ones who can guide students to comprehend and apply the linguistic and cultural knowledge and who can analyze students’ cognitive developmental phases and provide the right aides for students to decode the embedded thinking patters in the language.

In terms of one’s cognitive development, Vigotsky (1978) examined how a child develops his/her cognitive ability and drew a clear distinction between the two of cognitive developmental stages. One is called “the *actual developmental level*, that is the level of development of a child’s mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already *completed developmental cycles* (p. 85).” The other developmental stage is called “*the zone of proximal developmental level*,” which “defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state (p. 85). That is, “the actual developmental level” demonstrates what a child is capable of completing independently, while “the zone of proximal developmental level” determines a child’s ability that is currently in a process of development and displays what a child can complete with some assistance from adult or peer, not independently. He emphasized the importance of “the zone of proximal developmental level” in learning because it allows teachers to identify what students have already acquired and what are in a process of acquiring. In order to teach effectively, teachers must design lessons that follow students’ developmental stages, and provide appropriate assistance for students to internalize what they are acquiring. Therefore, it is one of the crucial competences for teachers to be able to define student’s zone of proximal developmental level.

### **Foreign Language Teaching and Critical Thinking**

Benjamin Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy first emphasized critical thinking (Duron, et al., 2006) and brought our attention to the two levels of cognitive development. One of the levels is considered as basic cognitive ability and consists of knowledge, comprehension, and application. The other level consists of the skills to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate and is considered as more complex cognitive ability. Critical thinking belongs to this second level. (Duron, et al., 2006; Savich, 2008). Critical thinking has been valued in various disciplines, and assessments to evaluate critical thinking skills have also developed. For example, the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (Facione, 2000) measures students’ ability to interpret, analyze, infer, explain, self-regulate, and evaluate, and various colleges and universities have used the test to evaluate their students’ critical thinking skills.

However, some researchers reported crucial information to think about the development of critical thinking skills. Children in early adolescence start developing the cognitive ability to think abstract ideas and provide reasons deductively (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). However, Cotter and Tally (2009) indicate that even college-aged students might not completely develop their abstract thinking and deductive reasoning skills, which are the fundamental skills of critical thinking.

As I previously discussed, language contains subjective views of the society and learning a language is learning perspectives of which the language is spoken. Therefore, teaching a foreign language is unique in a sense that teachers are not only teaching the content of subjects, but also teach words and the mechanics of the target language, introduce new concepts, and guide students how to think in a way that is appropriate in the target culture. That means that, in order to examine how people think and how people deliver their thoughts, learners must be able to think critically. Therefore, developing and acquiring critical thinking skills is essential for successful foreign language learning. However, if critical thinking skills have not been completely developed even among college students, foreign language teachers at secondary and post secondary education must help students develop their critical thinking skills as they develop their linguistic skills. In addition, Black (2005) claims that students develop their thinking skills if teachers demonstrate how to think critically. Furthermore, Choy and Cheah (2009) also emphasizes that “although students have a natural ability to think critically, it is important for teachers to guide then

in order to refine their skills” (p. 198). Therefore, it is very important for foreign language teachers to demonstrate how to think critically in their foreign language classrooms.

We, teachers, must carefully investigate how to develop students’ cognitive skills. Cotter & Tally (2009) examined if students improve their critical thinking skills by completing textbook exercises that are developed to improve their critical thinking. After measuring scores using the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCTST, 2000; Facione, 2000), they concluded that the textbook exercises, which are developed to improve students’ critical thinking skills, did not help students improve their critical thinking skills.

Then, are there any effective strategies to improve students’ critical thinking skills? Warren, Memory, & Bolinger (2004) described that students improved their critical thinking skills effectively if critical thinking was not taught in isolation, but rather taught through examining and understanding the content of what students were studying. Savich (2008) also reported the similar result. Students in his high school history class improved their critical thinking skills more as they were challenged to use critical thinking skills in order to understand the issues and problems taught in the history class. That is, students develop their critical thinking skills effectively if the content of the course were more emphasized than just the development of critical thinking skills and if critical thinking skills are embedded in the exercises to comprehend the content. Therefore, we, teachers, must think of providing content that pushes students to practice critical thinking such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation when we design a course.

Another strategy that is suggested to be effective to improve critical thinking is the use of multiple texts. Shanahan (2003) explains that “(m)aking sense of multiple texts ---- requires **critical thinking** (p. 2). He describes that, while reading multiple texts, students must compare, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate sources of information in order to decide whether the information is valid or not. Savich (2008) also claims that the improvement of critical thinking was demonstrated when students dealt with multiple texts because using multiple texts “allowed students to see different view points and perspectives on historical issues and problems” (p. 7).

However, most foreign language textbooks at introductory level provide various authentic texts such as menus, personal ads, weather forecasts, short stories, and short essays, but students at this level hardly ever examine various perspectives on one issue or topic in depth. It is simply because based on an assumption that students at introductory levels cannot make arguments with limited linguistic ability. However, it is needless to say that a student who has limited linguistic skills does not mean he/she is limited in his/her cognitive ability. In other words, it does not mean that a student with limited linguistic skills cannot develop their cognitive skills. Therefore, foreign language teachers must rethink the way we provide reading texts to students at introductory levels. If students at introductory and low-intermediate levels were challenged only to obtain linguistic knowledge and skills, they might think that critical thinking skills are not required in novice and low-intermediate coursework. Additionally, students might not be trained effectively to improve their critical thinking skills.

Many foreign language teachers have experienced a sense of “something is missing” when students who were placed in appropriate level of language courses, but cannot function in class. From my experience, this often happens when students are placed in intermediate courses after studying a foreign language at high school or by tutors. The issue is that their placement tests indicate that they belong to intermediate levels linguistically, but their cognitive ability might have not reached at intermediate levels, in which students are required to express their opinions coherently and cohesively and examine and evaluate texts. If students are not trained to improve their critical thinking in introductory courses, it is expected that students might not perceive critical thinking skills as important factors to learn foreign languages effectively and might not have developed them successfully.

Therefore, I decided to examine if students at introductory level value critical thinking in order to effectively learn foreign languages and if students and teachers share their views on the importance of cognitive skills in foreign language learning/teaching.

## **Method**

### Participants

Participants were 11 undergraduate students who enrolled in the first term Japanese course at Bennington College. In this course, 9 out of 11 students (82%) were freshmen and 2 students (18%) were sophomore. 6 students (55%) were male and 5 students (45%) were female. The majority of the sample was native speakers of English (82%, n=9) and the rest (18%, n=2) were Asian and Asian American background so that they spoke Chinese as well. All 11 students studied a foreign language in high school. Except 1 (9 %) student, who took Japanese for a year at high school, the rest of the sample (91%, n=10) had never formally studied Japanese.

### Measures

Three questions were developed to investigate students' perspectives on cognitive development (Table 1). All three questions were open-ended questions so that students could freely express their thoughts. Open-ended questions were chosen because multiple choice questions sometimes limits student thoughts.

The questionnaire was designed to examine 1) what skills students value for their foreign language learning and 2) if students and teachers share their views on the important skills for effective foreign language learning. The list of teachers' perspectives on what they expect students to develop through foreign language learning was created based on the objectives of my introductory Japanese courses and the goals of introductory level created by the Isabelle Kaplan Center for Languages and Cultures at Bennington College (Table 2).

**Table 1: Questionnaires**

1	What makes a student a good foreign language learner? Please list the skills that you think are important for students to improve and acquire in order to be a good foreign language learner.
2	What makes a student a good learner? Please list the skills that you think are important for students to improve and acquire.
3	What are the difference between a good language learner and a good learner? Are there any differences?

**Table 2: The goals at Introductory Level based on the objectives of an introductory level Japanese course and the goals of cognitive skills at Bennington College**

Linguistic Goals	Students will be able to: develop familiarity with and partial control of the phonetic system develop control of basic structures develop vocabulary in discrete areas/limited topics develop sentence-level discourse (short and simple sentence-level) develop abilities to listen, speak, read, write about limited topics develop familiarity with limited complex structures develop strategies for interpersonal discourse develop strategies to chose appropriate words and sentences in order to communicate effectively
Cognitive Goals	Students will be able to: recognize cultural products and practices. develop awareness of different registers. identify cultural similarities and differences. identify linguistic similarities and differences. identify essential information from texts. compare linguistic and cultural similarities and differences. compare information obtained from texts. use extra-linguistic clues to identify context. analyze and interpret linguistic and cultural imprecation appropriately from the context. infer vocabulary, grammar and content through context. reflect in linguistic and cultural similarities and differences subjectively and objectively. synthesize acquired knowledge. hypothesize about possible linguistic and cultural meanings based on your knowledge. evaluate acquired knowledge. express one's preferences, feelings, and opinions. collect data on familiar and concrete subjects

### Procedures

In the last day of the first term Japanese course, students were asked to reflect and discuss their foreign language learning experiences. All the conversations and discussions were conducted in English.

First, each student was asked to individually write answers to the first question (Table 1). After individually filling the questionnaire out, students were divided into a group of three and shared their answers and thoughts in the groups and explained the reasons of their answers. Once all the students shared their answers in groups, each group was asked to present the list of the answers from its group and discussed them in class. During the in-class discussion, I wrote down students' answers and categorized them. After everyone expressed their

thoughts on the first question, I read the list to them. The same procedure was conducted for the second question. Lastly, students were asked to discuss the third question (Table 1) in groups and in class.

Data Analysis

After collecting data of students’ views on essential skills to improve foreign language learning, I will examine the data by comparing with the teachers’ perspectives of cognitive development, which was developed based on the objectives from my introductory courses and from the Isabelle Kaplan Center for Languages and Cultures at Bennington College. The focus of this analysis is to find out 1) what skills students value for their foreign language learning and 2) if students and teachers share their views on the important skills for effective foreign language learning.

Results

The most significant finding of this project was to find the enormous gap between students’ and teachers’ perspectives on the skills in order to effectively acquire foreign languages. When students were asked to list the skills that are essential to improve and acquire foreign languages, they listed only the linguistic skills (e.g., good pronunciation). Other elements that students listed were not skills, rather one’s talent (e.g., talented in memorization) and personality (e.g., open-minded)(Table 3). In other words, students did not think cognitive skills as important factor in successful foreign language learning. On the other hand, it was clear that teachers expect students not only to improve their linguistic skills, but also to develop their cognitive skills such as critical thinking skills in their foreign language classroom (Table.2).

Another interesting finding was that students differentiate between the skills, which are essential to improve foreign language learning, and the skills to succeed in other disciplines. Students stated that critical thinking is important to succeed in other disciplines, but they did not mention critical thinking skills when they talked about important skills for foreign language learning. For example, students listed that a successful learner “can think critically” and “can apply what they memorized,” although they only indicated that a good foreign language learner is “talented in memorization” (Table 3). Critical thinking is valued across the disciplines, and foreign language teachers do not differentiate foreign language learning from learning other areas of study. Again, teachers believe that students must develop critical thinking in foreign language classrooms (Table 2).

**Table 3: Students’ perspectives**

1. What makes a student a good foreign language learner?	2. What makes a student a good learner?
A good foreign language learner: is talented in memorization has good ears -Pronunciation/Intonation practices vocabulary and grammar points repeatedly is disciplined is willing to make mistakes is open-minded is interested in something from the target culture	A good learner: is disciplined can not only memorize, but also can apply can draw connections from other areas of studies can compare methodologies enforce understanding is motivated and curious about what s/he is studying can think critically

Conclusion

In conclusion, students and teachers do not share their views on the important skills for foreign language learning. Although teachers consider both linguistic and cognitive skills must be developed in order to learn foreign languages effectively, students consider one’s personality, one’s aptitude, and linguistic development, as key factors to be successful language learners.

In addition, students differentiate foreign language learning from learning content of other disciplines. Students value the importance of critical thinking when they study other subject matters, although they did not indicate the importance of critical thinking in foreign language learning.

However, this does not mean all students cannot think critically, but rather they do not expect to develop their cognitive skills through foreign language learning, especially at introductory level. In my opinion, there are two main reasons why students differentiate between a successful language learner and a successful learner in other disciplines. One of the reasons is because, at introductory level, teachers and students strongly focus on linguistic development in order to obtain a basic knowledge of the language and culture and tested only the students’ linguistic skills. Therefore, students might not realize that they are also expected to develop their cognitive skills. I hypothesize that another reason there is a distinction between the important skills for foreign language and for other

areas of study is because linguistic improvement is clear and easier to measure and it can be recognized by students and by teachers.

Therefore, in order for teachers to share their views on successful foreign language learning with students at introductory and low-intermediate levels, teachers must be clearly demonstrate what linguistic and cognitive skills are expected for students to develop in their classrooms. Teachers must also redesign the curriculum, courses, lessons, and assessments to students to develop and self-evaluate both their cognitive skills and linguistic skills.

## **Implementing the Findings in a Japanese Course at Bennington College**

### **Background**

As Warren, Memory, and Bolinger (2004) and Savich (2008) indicated, students improve their critical thinking skills more effectively if critical thinking skills were taught in content, not in isolation. Therefore, I suggest that teachers design an introductory and low-intermediate course, which allow students 1) develop their linguistic skills and 2) develop their cognitive skills though the analysis and evaluation of a concept and content of the course.

Here, I would like to introduce a content-based course I designed for students to raise students' awareness of the importance of critical thinking skills in foreign language classroom as well as to improve their linguistic and cognitive skills.

Through the content-based course I designed, students examined how one culture influences another through the analysis of how Europe and America influenced Japan during Edo and Meiji periods and how Japan influenced European art in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This course was the third term Japanese course, and students in this course studied chapter 13 through chapter 16 of a textbook called Genki II: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese by Banno, et al. (1999). The reasons why I chose to design a content-based course at this level are two-fold:

- 1) My action research indicated that students in my first year Japanese course did not value critical thinking skills, although they consider critical thinking as an important factor to succeed in other disciplines. Therefore, I wanted for those students who continued to study Japanese to become aware of the importance of critical thinking in foreign language learning and develop their critical thinking skills effectively.
- 2) Especially in the third term Japanese course, there is a huge gap between what students are asked to think and express in their textbooks and what they are actually capable of thinking.

In this course, I focused on teaching students how to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they studied. According to Bloom's taxonomy (1956), these skills are more advanced and complex cognitive ability, and I believe that students at introductory and low-intermediate levels underestimate these skills in foreign language learning.

### **Course Organization**

Each class was one hour and fifty minutes long and met three times per week for fifteen weeks. Students studied vocabulary, grammar points, and written characters from Genki II: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese (from Chapter 13 to 16) by Banno, et al. (1999), while learning historical figures and events from 1600's to 1800's in Japan, Europe, and the US (Table 4).

The textbook, Genki II: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese consists of two sections: One is for students to practice listening and speaking and another is to practice reading and writing. First, new vocabulary and grammar points are introduced in the listening and speaking section, so students practice vocabulary and grammar points orally. Then, students move on to the reading and writing section. In this reading and writing section, new written characters - Kanji- are introduced, and students practice the new written characters and learn how to use them. Students also learn how the vocabulary and the grammar points, which they already practiced orally, are used in writing.

Because the focus of this course was for students to practice to apply vocabulary, grammar, and written characters from the textbook in a content of Japanese history and Japonism, I carefully examined which events to introduce and how to explain the historical events within the range of the textbook vocabulary. In addition to the textbook vocabulary, some new words that are related to Japanese history were introduced, but the numbers of new words were limited to minimum - at most 15 words with each chapter.

While students practice vocabulary and grammar orally in the listening and speaking section, they made hypotheses of the historical figures and events by analyzing historical paintings/pictures in class. After making hypotheses in the listening and speaking section, students checked the accuracy of their hypotheses as they read the

texts in the reading and writing section. The texts students read in the reading and writing section were written by me based on the fifth grade history textbook in Japan. In the reading and writing section, students were also required to utilize newly studied written characters as they summarized and reflected in their understanding of the text.

**Table 4: Textbook Chapter and Content**

Textbook Chapter	Content
Chapter 13	1600's
Chapter 14	1700's
Chapter 15	1800's in Japan
Chapter 16	1800's in Europe

### Lesson Organization

Each lesson consisted of five sections. For the listening and speaking section, the five sections were called warm-up, introduction, practice, application, and wrap-up. For the reading and writing section, they were called warm-up, reading, checking on understanding, evaluation and reflection, and wrap-up. Below is a sample lesson plan for each section.

#### A lesson plan for the listening and speaking section

##### Warm-up: small talk (10 minutes)

In this section, I casually asked questions such as their daily life and weekend activities using a grammar point(s) that students studied in last lesson. For example, if students learned to a grammar point, volitional form +と思う, I asked, “週末（夏休みに／サンクスギビングに）何をしようと思いますか。” The purpose of this is to examine if students have internalized their understanding of the previously studied grammar point(s).

##### Introduction (15 minutes)

Students were introduced a new grammar point from the textbook, and I demonstrated how it is used in various context by giving examples. Then, students were asked to write sentences using the grammar point. (Inductive) Or sometimes I gave students sentences in which a new grammar point was used and asked them to find its grammatical rules. (Deductive)

##### Practice (25 minutes)

After a new grammar point was introduced, students practiced the grammar point using textbook exercises. Then, students completed more grammar exercises that I created. The exercises I created focused on developing students' application skills. It means that students practiced to apply the grammar point into various contexts, which are still related to the topic of the textbook chapter and/or which students might face when they attend a university in Japan. Again, the purpose of this section is for students to practice applying what they are studying into various contexts, with which they are already familiar.

##### Application (50 minutes)

Once students practiced applying the newly introduced grammar points within various familiar contexts, the instructor showed a set of paintings and/or pictures that are related to historical figures and events in Japan, Europe, and the US. Then, students were guided to examine and analyze what they saw in the paintings by answering the questions individually, in groups, and in class. The questions were designed for students to utilize the grammar point from the textbook in order to discuss their thought on historical events. They were also asked to hypothesize 1) who the people were in the paintings, 2) what might have happened, and 3) how the paintings were related using the knowledge of what they already know and what they saw in the paintings. When discussing their hypotheses, students were asked to provide logical reasons.

For example, in Lesson 15 students examined the paintings of Commodore Perry, the Black Ship in Yokohama Port, and the Restoration of Imperial Rule, and discussed what they saw in the paintings (e.g., 誰がいますか, 何をしていますか), what they tried to do (この人は、何をしようと思いましたが/Lesson 15 grammar point, volitional +と思う), and what might have happened (将軍は何をしたか/もしませんか).

Examples:

1. ペリーがいるし、たくさんふねも見えるし、将軍は外国と話そうと思った。
2. 港にたくさん船が来たし、300人も侍がいるし、将軍は戦争しようと思ったかもしれない。

In this application section, I designed activities and questionnaires not only for students to apply vocabulary and grammar points from the textbook and obtain the historical information, but also for students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they have studied in the context of Japanese history and Japonism. Again, the purpose of this section is to discuss history in Japanese because critical thinking improves more when students were taught critical thinking skills through content (Warren, Memory, & Bolinger, 2004).

Wrap-up: (10 minutes)

Students were asked to summarize their thoughts based on what they saw and what they discussed in class. Assignments and announcements were made in this section.

#### A lesson plan for the reading and writing section

Warm-up:(15 minutes)

Like the lessons for the listening and speaking section, I casually asked students' daily and weekend activities using grammar points that students still need of practice. Then, I displayed the paintings from the text students read in previous lesson and asked them to arrange the historical paintings in order that historical events happened. Then, I asked students to retell what they read.

Reading: (30 minutes)

As students read the text, they arranged the rest of historical paintings in order that historical events happened. Once they could arrange the painting in historical order, they were also asked to divide the paintings into cause and effect groups. While reading the text, students could ask questions on vocabulary and sentences if they were not clear.

Checking on understanding:(30 minutes)

Students were asked to answer questions that checked their understanding of vocabulary, grammar, written characters, and the texts. Students worked individually, in groups, and as a class. For example, students were asked to highlight a synonym of the new vocabulary that they studied in a text (checking on vocabulary understanding) and to talk about the painting to demonstrate what they just read by using a newly studied grammar point and/or written character (checking on grammar, written characters, and content understanding).

Evaluation and reflection: (40 minutes)

Based on what they read, students were asked to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the content of the texts. For example, students were asked to write causes and effects of arrival of Commodore Perry in Uraga. In order to answer this question, students had to analyze the intentions and reactions of the US and Japan, to synthesize the information that they had studied in this course and in their high school history classes, and evaluate if the information was valid. Then, students shared their writing in groups and in class.

Wrap-up: (10 minutes)

Students were asked to reflect on what they read and discussed. Assignments and announcements were made here.

#### **Implications**

Students' feedback in the end of the term was mostly positive. A notable comment in the feedback was that linguistic knowledge might not stay after graduating from the college, but the content knowledge and the psychological journey in order to understand the concept - how one culture influences another, will stay for life. One also commented that looking at history from Japanese perspective helped her realize the importance of looking at a subject matter from another perspective in learning.

Lastly, I think that teaching a history to someone whose linguistic knowledge is limited was challenging. However, it was a very satisfying experience to see how students grew as a thinker and to witness students'

intellectual satisfaction. Next, I plan to design an introductory content-based course that pushes students to develop both linguistic and cognitive skills through learning content that satisfies both students' and teachers' intellectual curiosity. After developing the content-based Japanese course using Genki II: An Integrated Course in Elementary Japanese by Banno, et al. (1999), I am confident that students can express their sophisticated ideas even with limited linguistic ability.

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