Understanding the Difficulties in Building Intercultural Relationships from Perspectives of American Students and Japanese Students during a Short-term Study Abroad in Japan

Hiromi Tobaru
The Ohio State University

Abstract

Research on study abroad (SA) reported American students' struggles of developing personal relationships with local people. Theses studies often focus on American students' perceptions on their SA experiences as well as intercultural interaction. Because personal relationships cannot be built without mutual understanding and acceptance, obtaining the local people's perceptions toward intercultural relationships is essential to addressing American students' struggles. This case study investigates American and Japanese local students' perceptions towards building intercultural relationships in a four-week SA program in Japan. Interviews were conducted with American college students who participated in the SA program, and Japanese students who participated in the program as Japanese language partners. The paper presents the local Japanese students' struggles with the American students' passive attitude and too formal behaviors, and American SA students' struggles with casual speech style usage. Based on the findings, this paper discusses the implications for pre-departure orientations, the limitations of the current and future research implications.

1. **Introduction**

Recent study abroad (SA) quantitative studies show that strong social networks in a target culture (C2) are a strong predictor for oral gain, measured by objective testing (Baker-Smemoe et al., 2014) and self-evaluation of oral gain (Dewey et al., 2012). However, qualitative research that focuses on SA students' perspectives on their SA experiences reported that SA students often struggled with cultural differences in gender roles (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Polanyi, 1995), values of politeness and speech style (Iwasaki, 2011; Siegal, 1995), as well as making friends (Burn, 1986; Iwasaki, 2011; Tobaru, 2014), which resulted in limiting the SA students' interactions with native speakers. These struggles led to unsuccessful experiences of constructing social networks with people in target communities.

To address these issues, the current study investigates the types of cultural and linguistic issues American students and local people encounter in building intercultural relationships during SA in Japan, and to discuss how these difficulties might be addressed in pre-departure orientations.

2. **Literature Review**

Wang's (2010) reviews of SA research literature conclude that SA studies focusing on outcomes show "general inconsistencies and inconclusiveness (p. 51)." Wilkinson (1998) also demands that SA studies shift focus from product or outcome in order to fully process what actually happens during SA. Thus, this section focuses on qualitative studies that examine the process of SA learning, rather than the products by obtaining the perspectives of SA students and local people as supporting evidence.

2.1 **SA students' perspectives on SA learning**

In a follow-up study of by Polanyi (1995), she investigated SA students' learning in Russia. The focus was on the students' perspectives in order to figure out what types of experiences resulted in gender differences in language gain among American students in Russia. To address the issue, Polanyi analyzed journals from 20 male

and 20 female students who participated in SA programs in Russia[1] during 1990-1991. The original quantitative study was conducted by Brecht et al. (1995).

Narrative analysis of the students' journals revealed that American female students often encountered unpleasant interactions derived from cultural differences in gender roles. American female students often felt misunderstood when speaking with male native speakers of Russian, and were pressured to listen to the male speakers rather than fully engage in conversation, which often resulted in ending their friendships. On the other hand, male American students often had positive interactional experiences with female Russian speakers. Female American students also faced unpleasant, and often negative and sexually charged encounters with strangers in public. Many of the American female students had to learn by themselves or were taught by female native speakers to "be frank" with male natives. Such attitudes helped the American female students to be understood without having "a big vocabulary and a lot of expression (p. 286)." However, unfortunately, these abilities were not rated as high level skill on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) scale, which resulted in gender (i.e. being a male learner) as a predictor of oral gain in Brechet et al's study (1995). Polanyi's analysis revealed that both male and female American students learned cultural and linguistic skills during SA in the Soviet Union era, but the types of linguistic and cultural skills that they learned differed and were influenced by their gender. Polanyi claims that gender differences in oral gain was due to the fact that the language proficiency test used in Brecht et al. (1995) did not accurately measure the female SA students' language gain during their stay in Russia.

Other qualitative studies also revealed cultural difficulties that the students faced during SA in Japan. Burn (1993) reported that most of the SA students regretted that they could not build intimate relationships with Japanese people. He found that the SA students had struggles with hierarchy in groups when building interpersonal

---

[1] At the time of the research, it was Soviet Union.

relationships with Japanese people in the friendships category. The SA students tried to fit into the hierarchy of the local community they belonged to during SA, such as athletic clubs at the host institution. However, they were often positioned as "foreigners" in the hierarchy. Japanese people treated them differently from other members of the community. Also, SA students chose not to participate fully in the customs or practices of the community even when having been invited to do so. Instead, SA students chose to be observers rather than members of the community in such situations.

Iwasaki (2011), who investigated American SA students' choice of speech style, also reported similar difficulties that SA students faced during SA in Japan. Her findings revealed that the learners' interactional experiences with local people affected their choices of speech styles. Although some of the students understood the function and importance of polite speech styles (i.e. *desu/masu* forms and honorific/humble forms) in Japanese communication, especially in environments where hierarchical relationships were obvious, the gaps between their social identities in their own culture (C1) and the norms in the target culture (C2) seemed to inhibit the use of polite speech style. In addition, some of the participants were explicitly told that they were not expected to use polite speech style because, according to some participants, they were "Americans (p. 85)," "a foreigner, or a white guy (p. 86)."

Moreover, Iwasaki's findings revealed that the participants' surprises in frequent use of vulgar language used by Japanese young male speakers resulted from their former learning experiences where teachers told them that the use of such vulgar language was rude. During SA in Japan, they learned that use of vulgar or masculine language can express friendliness as well as playfulness. However, Sam, one of the participants in Iwasaki's study, discovered that he was not allowed to use men's language when he tried to use the expression *gommen na* to his host brother, which resulted in him receiving explicit negative feedback from his host brother.

Iino (2006) investigated the norms of interaction in home stay settings in Japan and found that communicative competence required for SA students is not the same as the ones that are considered as

"native" or the norms of the target culture. Some SA students' errors are considered as "*kawaii* 'charming and cute'" in some situations as opposed to negative transfers. Iino also discussed power relationships between SA students and their host families, and proposed two approaches based on his observations. The first approach is the cultural deficiency. This is where SA students play the role of care-receivers and deficient participants of the target community whereas host families act as care-providers and ideal members of the target community. The second is the two-way enrichment approach. This is where the power relationship is considered as not fixed or one-way but dynamic and two-way. For example, in addition to the role of information receiver, SA students also play the role of providers by teaching correct pronunciation of English words (Iino, 2006).

2.2 Third Space for Intercultural Communication

In the aforementioned studies discussed and others (Kramsch, 2009; and Siegal, 1995), there was an indication that L2 learners may not follow the same process of L1 socialization because they often chose not to act the same as members of the community due to various reasons, but primarily due to conflicts between values and norms in C1 and C2. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) differentiate primary habitus acquired through first socialization at home and secondary habitus learned after the first socialization, including cross-cultural contexts. The first habitus is more durable than the second because through first socialization, a person usually conforms to the behaviors, norms, values, and social conventions of the community, which constructs his/her individual histories over times. Such individual histories are often confronted with the second habitus, especially in cross-cultural contexts (Kramsch, 2009).

In addition to SA students' resistance to fully participate in C2 conventions, research reveals that local people seem to hold different expectations and norms when they interact with foreigners (Iwasaki, 2011; Iino, 2006). Jian and Walker (2017) term this unique phenomenon of intercultural communication as "Third Space." Third Space (TS) is defined as an imagined space where different cultures converge, contest or cooperate: Norms or rules of the game will not conform entirely to either C1 or C2, but will be dynamic and conditioned by shared interests and goals (Jian, 2018). As soon as

people recognize the other person is coming from a different cultural background, they change the norms and expectations of their interlocutor. TS is not stable, but constantly changes as L2 learners and people in the community interact with each other on a continuous basis. The effects of Third Space could be positive, such as during productive TS where L2 learners and L1 speakers work together to co-construct an ideal environment that benefits both sides. Or it can be negative, such as in the confrontational Third Space, where a consequence of interaction between L2 learners and L1 speakers leads to the construction of negative views toward each other. Furthermore, as the L2 speaker successfully gains membership in the community, the norms and values of Third Space may become closer to that of C2. However, for an adult learner, Third Space will never be the same as C2 due to their previous L1 socialization (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Kramsch, 2009).

2.3   Research Questions

To understand different types of linguistic and cultural difficulties in building intercultural relationships in an SA context, it is important to investigate what happens in Third Space when American SA students and Japanese local students interact with each other. Generally, relationships cannot be built without mutual understanding and acceptance of both sides, which includes obtaining the local people's perceptions toward intercultural relationships. This is essential to addressing American students' struggles. From this perspective, three research questions guide the current study.

1. What kinds of linguistic and cultural difficulties do American SA students encounter when interacting with local Japanese people?
2. What kinds of difficulties do Japanese local students encounter when interacting with American SA students?
3. What kinds of Third Space emerge when American SA students and Japanese local students interact with each other?

3.   **Methodology**

The current study took place during a four-week SA program at a private university in Eastern Japan, which was sponsored by a Midwest university in the U.S. All of the American SA students were from the same university in the U.S. The language requirement for the SA program was to complete at least the first semester of the level-3 course at the home institution, or have the equivalent level of Japanese language proficiency. The objective of the program, according to the program handbook, is to "deepen [the students'] understanding of the Japanese language, people, society, and culture through conducting a research project, class lectures and discussions, personal observations, and service-learning."

During the program, SA students stayed at a university dorm where two local Japanese resident assistants were assigned to oversee and support them. A typical daily schedule of the program included that the participants attended classes on Japanese culture and society in the morning. All classes are taught by the Japanese program resident director in English, who is a faculty member of the SA students' home university. In the afternoon, the students worked on their own research projects and/or participated in service learning, which included participating in English conversation tables and assisting the teaching of English to Japanese students at the host university. On the weekends, students went on field trips to historical and traditional sites such as shrines. They also stayed with Japanese families.

One of the attractive aspects of the program is that each SA student was assigned a language partner who was a Japanese student at the host university. These Japanese students volunteered to participate in the SA program as language partners. They were required to meet with SA students at least once a week, using the Japanese language as the primary communicative language. The matching of Japanese language partners and SA students was decided based on their personal information provided prior to the program. Such information included personality, hobby, academic major, and availability for meetings during the program.

The participants of the current study included eleven American SA students who participated in the program. Nine of them were female and two of them were male. The ethnic backgrounds of the students were as follows: one African American, one Asian American, one Latino American, and eight Caucasian Americans. One of the SA students studied abroad in Japan for nine months when she was a high school student, and another student stayed in Japan for two weeks for a high school field trip. The rest of the students had never been to Japan.

To gain local people's perspectives on intercultural relationship, I recruited nine local Japanese students who participated in the program as language partners and two resident assistants who were former students of the host university. The two resident assistants were assigned by the host university based on their previous experiences of assisting and tutoring international students. They stayed at the university dorm with the SA students and also accompanied field trips with them. Because of large amounts of shared time with the two resident assistants, most of the SA students mentioned both or either of their names when I asked whom they spoke with most in Japanese during the SA program.

Perspectives of both American SA students and local Japanese students were elicited through individual interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded for later analysis and notes were taken during the interviews. During the interviews, each participant's L1 (i.e. English or Japanese) was used to elicit detailed accounts of his or her experiences and opinions regarding intercultural communication. The length of each interview ranged from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. Semi-structured questions were used and additional questions were also asked to gain a better understanding of their interactional experiences. All of the interviews were transcribed for the data analysis. After the interviews were transcribed, the domain analysis was conducted to search for a larger unit of the informant's cultural knowledge by looking for vocabularies that are similar to each other (Spradly, 1979).

4.   Findings

Data analysis of the interviews revealed two domains that the local Japanese students struggled with, and one domain that SA students struggled with when trying to build intercultural relationships. This section presents three domains, i.e., 1) Japanese people's struggles with American students' passive behaviors; 2) gaps between Japanese students' pre-SA images of American people and the American SA students they interacted with; and 3) the American SA students' struggles with using a casual speech style.

4.1   Local perspective 1: Struggles with American students' passive behaviors

The first finding is a local Japanese students' perspective on their struggles with American students' passive behaviors. The Japanese students described the American SA students as "*ukemi sugiru*" ('too passive') and "*ukemi na tokoro ga aru*" ('they are sometimes passive') in terms of initiating get-togethers or daily communication. The excerpt below is an example of a Japanese student describing her American SA student's passive behavior. The interviewer and the Japanese student discuss her daily communications with her American language partner.

Interviewer	*Renraku ya atta koto mo fukumete dotira kara?* 'Who initiated meeting up and contacting via phone?'
Japanese student	*Watasi kara no hoo ga ookatta desu ne.* 'I did more (than my language partner).'
Interviewer	[Name of her language partner] *no hoo kara susunde renraku totta koto wa?* 'Were there times that [name of her language partner] actively contacted you?'
Japanese student	*Sore wa nakatta…* 'It didn't happen...'

On average, American and Japanese students met three to five times during the four-week program. All the get-togethers were initiated by the Japanese students, except for one initiation by an American student. The Japanese students also mentioned that Americans gave unclear answers when they asked what they wanted to do, or where they wanted to go. When I asked what challenges or difficulties she encountered while communicating with the SA students, one resident assistant said:

> *"Nanka kekoo, kyooto ni iku toka wa, jizen ni sukejuuru wa saretemasita yone. Demo kekkoo minna, iku tte dake ni natte ite* […] *sitasirabe to iu ka, sooyuu no ga sukunakutte,* […] *'doko ka ikitai toka tte aruno?' tte kiite mitemo, nan ka kekkoo 'wakaranai' 'nandemo' tte iu ko ga sugoku ooi n desu yo.* […] *kore wa watasi no katte na imeeji nan n desu kedo, amerika-jin wa yes to no de kotareu toka tte aru ja nai desu ka, to omotte ita node, 'iku, ikanai, dotti' de kiite mitara, 'wakaranai,' 'are, tigau' to omotte, tata nayamu koto ga arimasita ne.* ('Well, pretty much, the plan that they were going to Kyoto was previously scheduled, right? But everyone pretty much, like, 'just going there' […] It seemed that (the EA students who did) research on (where they wanted to go or what they wanted to do in Kyoto) beforehand were very few. […] Even when I asked them, 'Do you have anywhere in mind you wanna go?' they often answered like, 'I don't know' or 'anywhere.' The answers like that I got a lot. […] This might be only me thinking like this, but isn't it American people who usually answer questions with 'yes' or 'no'? Because of that, I asked a question like, 'Are you going or not, which choice?' But, when I got an answer like, 'I don't know,' I thought, 'What, it is different (from what I expected).' There were times that I was confused (because of that).)'

This account shows the resident assistant's struggle with American SA students' passive behaviors and answers when deciding where to go during free time after field trips. In addition, from the account above, it is clear that the resident assistant had a stereotype of

American decisiveness. But the actual American SA students she interacted with were the opposite of what she imagined, which made her confused about their passive behaviors. This kind of image gap is discussed further in the next section (**4.2**).

Because it was clear that Japanese students struggling with American SA students' passive behaviors from the early stage of the interviews, I decided to ask the American students about their perspectives on this issue. When I asked them why they didn't take any initiatives for interaction with the Japanese language partners, one student indicated her fear of being rude by suggesting her ideas. She said "because I don't know the area well enough…so if I suggest something that Japanese people know it's bad, Japanese people don't say 'no' even if they know it's bad." The American students' feeling of being "foreign to the area" and their images of Japanese people, being polite by not expressing their true feelings, resulted in the American students' passive behaviors toward interacting with their language partners.

By applying Iino's two approaches of power relationships, the American students' passive behaviors indicate that they positioned themselves as "care-receivers" and "deficient participants" of the target community. The excerpt below also illustrates that perspective by an SA student when I asked if she considered her language partner as friend.

> "I look at her and think […] maybe she sees me as a younger sister or something like that, she does take care of me which is very nice, she is a very responsible person."

This SA student considered her relationship with the language partner as more of a care-receiver and care-provider rather than the relationship of the two-enrichment approach as described in Iino's study (2006). Most of the SA students seemed to position themselves as care-receivers. Iino argues that both sides (SA students and local people) have to take roles of care-provider and care-receiver for such a relationship to be constructed. However, as most of the Japanese students' accounts indicate, it was rather unexpected for the Japanese

students to be positioned as care-providers by their American partners, or at least to the degree that the SA students expected them to be, which resulted in the Japanese students' struggles. Thus, even though the Japanese students seemed to take the roles of the care-provider when interacting the SA students, they wanted their American partners to be more outgoing and take initiative.

4.2   Local perspective 2: Gaps between prior images of American people and the actual American SA students

The second finding is also from the Japanese students' perspectives, namely, gaps between prior images towards American people and the American SA students they actually interacted with. Local Japanese students had images of Americans as being "*furendorii de sekkyoku-teki*" ('friendly and out-going'), "*kekkoo rafu*" ('pretty casual'), "*akarui hito ga ooi*" ('probably a lot of cheerful people'), and "*jibun no isi ga tsuyosoo*" ('strong willed: different from Japanese people').

When the same Japanese students described the American students they actually interacted with during the program, their descriptions were different from their images of American people. Most of them expressed positive surprises in terms of the American students' language and behaviors, through comments like "*nihon no koto ga suki de, nihon no syuukan ni somatte iru na…*" ('they like Japan and they are accustomed to Japanese customs') and "*sugoi ki ga kiku na to omotta… omotteita ijoo ni nihongo ga syaberetete sugoi na to tomotta*" ('I thought (she) was very considerate. Her Japanese was better than I expected, and it was amazing'). Because of the prior images of American people (e.g. outgoing, strong willed), they had struggles with gaps between the imagined American students and the actual American students who were "passive." Furthermore, many of them also described the American students' language and behavior as "too formal," which made them feel like they could not become friends.

> "*Tomodati ni naritai kanji de kiteiru* […] *onaji nendai no ko ga kuru si, sono toki ni 'X-san wa' to korareru to, ikki ni mazu kabe ga dekityau n desu. 'sooyuu kanji na no ka, paatonaa wa. Jaa, watasi to paato naa wa, keego de hanasanai to ikenai no ka'* … ('I became a language partner

because I wanted to be friends with them […] In addition, the American students are around the same age (as me). <u>But when the American students start addressing me as *'X-san'* that immediately creates a barrier.</u> That makes me think, 'oh, our relationship is like this. So we have to speak in polite language.'

Use of *desu/masu* forms (i.e. more formal forms) in self-introduction seemed to create a psychological distance between the American and Japanese students. In this excerpt, the Japanese student also mentioned that even being addressed with an honorific suffix –*san* is too much for her. The Japanese students indicated that they do not expect the American students to use *desu/masu* forms, especially the humble forms, such as *X to moosimasu* ('my name is X')when they introduced themselves for the first time. My personal discussion with the program coordinator at the host university revealed that some of the SA students were, in fact using the humble form of *X to moosimasu* in the first meeting, which was a surprise for the program coordinator as well. The accounts from the Japanese side indicate that they did not expect the American SA students to use *desu/masu* forms. However, because the SA students used *desu/masu* forms, but also used the humble forms, which are considered much more polite than *desu/masu* forms, in the self-introduction, the Japanese students and the program coordinator were surprised by it. Some Japanese students felt a "distance."

However, interestingly, when I asked the Japanese students which speech style they use when meeting new Japanese students for the first time, they mentioned that they used *desu/masu* forms. For example, on the first day of school or class, they start by using *desu/masu* forms and continue using them until they feel comfortable enough to use casual speech style. This indicates the Japanese students held different expectations when interacting with foreign students. The next account from a Japanese student also indicated that she held different expectations toward American students. She recognized a different cultural background.

"*Syotaimen wa, desu/masu yori mo… nihon-jin doosi nara desu/masu de tte iu katati ga aru to omou n desu kedo,*

yappari tigau tte iu ninsiki wa aru to omou n de, sositara,
patte ittyatta hoo ga ukeire yasui kamo sirenai… paatonaa
toka datta ra, baa tte kita hoo ga yariyasui. 'When meeting
for the first time, rather than *desu/masu….*, if they are
both Japanese, I think 'desu/masu' form is the norm,
but <u>I think there is a recognition of (cultural)</u>
<u>differences, so it is probably easier to accept</u>
<u>Americans right off the bat (indicating informality</u>
<u>rather than formality), so if it is a language partner,</u>
<u>then it's even easier.'"</u>

The local Japanese students mentioned that use of the
desu/masu forms was the norm when they met other Japanese
students for the first time. However, these accounts from the local
Japanese students indicated that their expectations toward the
American SA students were different from the expectations or norms
when they communicate with people from the same cultural
background. This finding aligns with Iwasaki and Iino's studies: The
local people do not necessarily expect foreigners to follow the norms
and conventions of their culture. The findings show that American
SA students and the local Japanese students were interacting in the
Third Space.

4.3   American SA students' perspective: Struggles with using the casual speech style

The last finding is the struggle American students have with
using the casual speech style in Japanese. The quotes below are the
American students' explanations for difficulty.

"I'm almost kind of afraid of the language partners
just because my Japanese is really weak… the direct-
style[2] is really hard for me to do, and I think that
probably ummm, factors into why I have a hard time
speaking to the language partner. Coming to Japan,

---

[2] The Japanese textbook the American SA students used at their home university
uses terms the direct-style/forms as plain forms (or more casual speech style) and
the distal-style as *desu/masu* forms (or more formal/polite speech style).

> that's what I thought, I wanted to do was, I wanted to treat everyone, like with *masu* form. (I: Why is that?) Just because I guess I'm in the country, […] 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'.

This student seemed to think that all Japanese people use *desu/masu* forms, and that was why she wanted to do the same. The following quote is from another American student. This student mentioned that he wanted to use the casual speech style when he was interacting with language partners, but using the casual speech style (the direct style) was more difficult than using distal style (i.e. *desu/masu* forms), so oftentimes he unconsciously ended his sentences with *desu/masu* forms.

> "There are plenty of words that are…just uhh, easier to say, and for a certain that it's gonna sound right in the distal-style […] The direct-style is harder than it should be. I'm getting used to now, because that's what we have been using most exclusively. […] In class (at the home institution), we mostly [inaudible] in the distal-style, so a lot of words that I... words and phrases and stuff almost always in distal-style, so it just come out that way easiest."

Although the quotes express similar struggles, they provide different reasons. In the first quote, there are gaps between the student's expectations and the local Japanese students' expectations. In addition, her misunderstanding of Japanese people and culture is shown when she indicates Japanese people use *desu/masu* forms and are "polite" all of the time. On the other hand, the second quote indicates that gaps between the student's previous learning environment (at the home institution) where *desu/masu* forms were exclusively used and the SA context where the casual speech style was the norm for daily communication. Although the second student understood the importance of using casual speech style, he got used to using *desu/masu* forms much more than casual speech style because of his previous learning experience as he indicated in the above quote.

Uncovering the current SA students' struggles with using casual speech style was also reported in Burn's (1996) study. However, in terms of using humble/honorific forms, other studies reported opposite perspectives. They concluded that SA students struggled with using Japanese polite/female language (Iino, 2006; Iwasaki, 2011; Siegal, 1995). The previous research reported SA students' negative perceptions toward using humble/honorific forms. Therefore, they suggested that the participants in these studies did not want to use such forms. These differences in American SA students may have resulted from previous learning experiences at their home educational institutions.

5.   Discussion

The findings in the current study also suggest, that the Third Space where American SA students and Japanese students interacted is not a productive or positive Third Space where both interlocutors understand each other's cultural differences and co-construct a mutually productive atmosphere. In order for American SA and Japanese students to co-construct a productive Third Space, instead of somewhat a controversial or negative Third Space found in the current study, pre-SA program training for both students will be necessary to addresses this issue. In the following portion of this paper, I will propose three ideas that could be implemented during pre-SA program training.

First, I propose that pre-SA programs provide pedagogical support for American SA students not to be perceived as "passive" or to position themselves as the care-receiver prior to SA in Japan. Such pre-departure training should provide a clear framework that requires SA students to initiate intercultural communication. For example, instead of having "free time" after field trips with the expectation that the SA students will naturally have productive time with their language partners and/or resident assistants which often cases did not happen based on the current study, it is more effective to call such time "community exploration time" and instruct them to find places they might want to visit. They also need to show them how to communicate effectively with their language partners. By practicing appropriate language usage meet up initiation, not only in

person, but also via telephone text or mobile applications, it may encourage American students to be more outgoing and take initiative in building intercultural relationships with local Japanese students. Such program interventions are also reported as effective in Dewey et al.'s (2014) study on L2 language use.

Second, pre-departure training for American SA students should address struggles with using a casual speech style by observing and discussing how Japanese young people communicate for first time meetings. For such activities, use of non-pedagogical videos taken from Japanese TV drama or movies is recommended. The potential discussion topics would include: 1) what types of speech style are used in a given context; 2) what kinds of changes in the context lead to changes in the speech style; and 3) what kinds of changes in the speech style as well as expectations occur when foreign students interact with Japanese students. After the discussion, an activity involving the creation of a script of meeting a Japanese student for the first time would be effective for the students to apply what they have observed and discussed, and can help them practice effective communication strategies with Japanese local students. Because SA students often have to figure out and resolve the communication problems by themselves, pre-departure training should prepare SA students for such situations.

Finally, training for local Japanese students must focus on adjusting their prior images of American people when they do realize gaps between their prior images and the reality of their interactions with actual American SA students. This can be done by holding discussions with former language partners and sharing prior experiences and struggles with SA students. The discussion should also inform American students' struggles with using a casual speech style due to the complexity of conjugation as well as their previous learning environment. Such insights would help the Japanese language students to adjust their images of American students more easily during the SA program, instead of feeling a "psychological distance."

6.   Conclusion and Limitations

The findings in the current study indicate that American students and Japanese college students struggled with building personal relationships during the four-week SA program. One reason is that the American SA students were afraid of being rude by explicitly expressing their desires (e.g. where they want to go) and positioned themselves as care-receivers. Another reason is the gaps between the Japanese students' prior images of American people and the actual American SA students that they met. In addition, because of such images, the Japanese college students did not expect the American students to follow the norms of Japanese culture. The last finding was that the American students struggle with using a casual speech style due to, first, a misunderstanding that Japanese people are always polite, or, second, different expectations in speech styles in the American SA students' previous learning environment and the SA context. Regarding the latter issue, in addition to easier conjugations of *desu/masu* forms compared to plain forms (i.e. the more casual speech style), the SA students' home institutions focused on the Japanese language that is used in formal situations, such as business settings, to train students to sounds like educated speakers of Japanese for future careers. These students may not have similar difficulties if they were participating in internships at a Japanese company instead of study abroad.

Although the current study provides new insights to pre-departure training for American SA students in Japan, there are some limitations. First, there were only a few observation opportunities (one and a half weeks) where the Japanese local students and American SA students interacted. It might provide more detailed aspects of intercultural communication among the Japanese students and the American students if I could have observed the participants' actual interactions throughout the program.

Second, findings in the current research could have limited applicability to pre-departure training for a year-long SA program. As mentioned before, in a long-term SA program, SA students and local Japanese students may have more time to fill in such gaps. In addition, difficulties that the current American participants

experienced during the short-term SA program might be different from that of those who study abroad for an academic year.

Lastly, the current findings also have limited applicability to other SA populations, i.e. all American students were from the same educational institution, therefore, the previous learning environment might have resulted in the SA students' overly polite/formal attitude when interacting with local Japanese students. In addition, the same students might not have experienced the same struggles (i.e. being friendly) if they had had internship experience at a Japanese company where the norms of language use might have been closer to what these SA students learned in their previous formal instruction.

Regarding implications for future research, we need more qualitative research that investigates the Third Space by obtaining both SA students and local people's perspectives in order to provide pedagogical supports that facilitate SA students' productive Third Space construction. In addition, future research should include conversation data between SA students' and local people collected multiple times to investigate the processes of socialization during SA. Such research will provide better guidance on what kinds of pedagogical supports SA students really need to maximize their linguistic and cultural learning during SA.

References

Baker-Smemoe, W., Dewey, D. P., Bown, J., & Martinsen, R. A. (2014). Variables Affecting L2 Gains During Study Abroad. *Foreign Language Annals, 47*, 3, 464-486.

Berg, V. M., Connor-Linton, J. & Paige, M. R. (2009). The Georgetown Consortium Project: Interventions for Student Learning Abroad. *Frontiers: The interdisciplinary journal of study abroad, 3*, 1-48.

Burn, P. (1996). *Foreign student in Japan: A qualitative study of interpersonal relations between North American university exchange student and their Japanese host.* Ph.D. Diss., University of Massachusetts.

Dewey, D., Bown J., & Eggett, D. (2012a). Japanese Language Proficiency, Social Networking, and Language Use during Study Abroad: Learners' Perspectives. *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, *68*, 2, 111–137.

Iino, M (2006). Norms of interaction in a Japanese homestay setting: Toward a Two-Way flow of linguistic and cultural resources. In DuFon, A.M., & Churchill, E. (Ed.) *Language learners in study abroad contexts.* (p151-172) NY: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Isabelli-Garcia, C. (2006). Study Abroad Social Networks, Motivation and Attitudes: Implications for Second Language Acquisition. Language learners in study abroad contexts,. In DuFon, A.M., & Churchill, E. (Ed.) *Language learners in study abroad contexts.* (pp.231-258) NY: Multilingual Matters Ltd.

Iwasaki, N. (2011). Learning L2 Japanese "Politeness" and "Impoliteness": Young American Men's Dilemmas during Studying Abroad. *Japanese language and literature*, 45, 1, 67-106.

Iwasaki, N. (2008). Style Shifts among Japanese Learners before and after Study Abroad in Japan: Becoming Active Social Agents in Japanese. *Applied Linguistics, 31*, 1, 45-71.

Polanyi, L. (1995). Language learning and living abroad: Stories from the field. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context.* (pp.271-291) Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company

Siegal, M. (1995). Individual differences and study abroad: Women learning Japanese in Japan. In B. F. Freed (Ed.), *Second language acquisition in a study abroad context.* (pp.225-244). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Tobaru, H. (2014). *Study abroad in Japan: A case study of three American undergraduates individual and cultural experiences.* Unpublished master's thesis, University of Findlay, Findlay, Ohio.

Jian, X., and Walker, G. (2017). *Seminar in the Learning of East Asian Language and Culture* [PowerPoint presentation].

Wang, C. (2010). Toward a Second Language Socialization Perspective: Issues in Study Abroad Research. *Foreign Language Annals*, 43, 1, 50-63.

Appendix A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH AMERICAN STUDENTS

1. What was your primary reason for participating in this program?
2. Have you spent any time in Japan prior to this program? (If so, please consider the rest of the questions specifically about your experience during this Kobe program.)
3. During your stay in Kobe so far, who have you spent time with most? (Please describe your relationship to that person.)
4. During your stay in Kobe so far, who have you communicated with in Japanese the most?
5. Do you consider your language partner as your friend? Please explain.
6. Have you made Japanese friends outside of your language partner?
7. What aspects of your language partner's behavior confused or surprised you?
8. What aspect of Japanese students' language use confused or surprised you?
9. What challenges or difficulties do you feel you have had while communicating with your language partner?
10. What communication strategies do you use when communicating with American students?
11. How do you think a pre-education abroad training can better prepare American students' social network construction during SA?

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH JAPANESE STUDENTS

1. What was your primary reason for participating in this program as a language partner?
2. Among the American students, who have you spent time with most?
3. Among the American students, who have you communicated in Japanese most?
4. Do you consider your language partner as a friend? Please explain.

5. What aspects of the American students' behavior confused or surprised you?
6. What aspects of the American students' language use confused or surprised you?
7. What challenges or difficulties have you had while communicating with American students?
8. What communication strategies do you use when communicating with American students?
9. Did you make any new foreign friends recently? How did you become friend with them?
10. How can pre-SA training support American students' social network construction?