Paper Title: How can we help L2 Japanese learners to become fluent readers?

Name of Author 1  Mitsue Tabata-Sandom  
Institutional Affiliation  Victoria University of Wellington  
Contact details of a presenter  email: mitsue.sandom@vuw.ac.nz  
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Abstract  
Reading in Japanese as a second/foreign language is often thought to be more difficult to master than reading in other second languages. Many teachers of Japanese are familiar with the image of reading passages in language textbooks being filled with learners’ countless notes. This image is a symbol of an intensive reading approach. Whereas such an image may make some teachers of Japanese feel satisfied and comment that ‘it’s good to see my students try so hard,’ it may worry other teachers. Their reaction might be ‘are my students getting better at L2 Japanese reading in this way?’

The current paper addresses the question, ‘how can we help L2 Japanese learners to become fluent readers?’ Specifically, the paper investigates whether or not fourteen L2 Japanese learners obtained benefits from reading graded reader (GR) texts in their reading development.

GRs play a pivotal role under an extensive reading approach in the contexts of English as a second/foreign language. In the contexts of Japanese as a second/foreign language, an extensive reading approach has begun drawing attention from researchers and practitioners. However, it is not yet widely practised. Learners still tend to be given intensive reading instruction in secondary and tertiary L2 Japanese classrooms. Furthermore, there have not been sufficient empirical findings in relation to extensive reading in this younger field.
The current paper, therefore, examines whether or not GRs could be efficacious for L2 Japanese learners. Fourteen learners carried out a think-aloud task, reading excerpts from two GRs and equivalent excerpts from their original for comparison. They then compared the GR versions with the original. Unstructured exit interviews were also conducted so that learners’ perceptions toward extensive reading and reading GRs could be deduced.

The findings show that the participants experienced a fluent reading process with the GR excerpts, while their reading of the original was a laborious decoding exercise rather than reading. This implies that GRs have the potential to be material for L2 Japanese reading fluency development.

The paper concludes that if modified texts such as GRs are given a duly role in a reading programme which is well-balanced in terms of accuracy instruction and fluency training, learners’ reading competency will be efficiently developed.