

L2 Reading Perceptions of Learners of Japanese: The Influence of the Reading Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The nature of learning to read in a second and foreign language (L2) can be more challenging when compared to learning other subjects. Therefore, the influence of instruction given in L2 classrooms cannot be underestimated. A balanced instruction needs to be taken in order to develop learners' reading proficiency and their motivation to read. This paper reports the findings of a cross-sectional survey which investigated what factors of L2 reading learners of Japanese found motivating and demotivating. It investigates whether or not students were familiar with strategies, whether or not they believed they would be fluent L2 Japanese readers, whether or not their perceptions toward L2 reading changed according to developmental stages, and so on. One of the noteworthy findings is that regardless of their levels, the respondents (132 university level learners of Japanese as a foreign language) sought language-learning opportunities from L2 reading rather than seeking engagement from the content of what they read. The findings also imply that whereas the intensive-reading-oriented instruction the respondents received may have been compatible with their initial language-learning oriented approach toward L2 reading, it seemed to have failed to show these learners an accessible path to master reading in their target language.

INTRODUCTION

Learning to read in an L2 is unique and probably more challenging, compared with learning subjects of other disciplines. That is because learners have to acquire proficiency not only in understanding writers' messages but also in understanding the language used to convey such messages. Moreover, the cross-linguistic nature of L2 reading, i.e., involving not only an L2 but also an L1, probably makes its learning process more complicated and demanding (Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2007). Therefore, the roles of teachers and classroom instructions in terms of enhancing learners' understanding about how to tackle L2 reading are significant. For example, Kitao and Kitao (1997) claim that materials chosen by teachers often control the instruction and consequently learners' learning processes. Day and Bamford (1998) also suggest that L2 classroom environments are one of the four sources which form L2 reading attitudes.

Nation (2007) mentions that a good language curriculum should have four even strands. The four strands are meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning and fluency development. He claims that when these four strands are placed evenly, learners' L2 language competency can be nurtured in a well-rounded manner, i.e., in both fluency and accuracy aspects.

To create a good language curriculum as proposed by Nation in terms of L2 reading instruction, intensive reading and extensive reading can be employed equally (Yamashita 2013). Metacognitive training such as strategy guidance also needs to be given a place in a curriculum. However, in reality, many L2 courses lack such factors and some teachers possess biased

perceptions about how to guide L2 readers and employ intensive reading and extensive reading dichotomously, as suggested by Claridge (2011, also, the Japanese Extensive Reading Research Group, 2012 in the field of L2 Japanese pedagogy).

This state-of-affairs affects inexperienced L2 readers, in particular, those of less commonly taught languages such as L2 Japanese. Learners of Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) often lack direct exposure to their target language, and they do not have enough access to reading materials and information regarding how to develop their reading ability. Nevertheless, Saito, Horwitz and Garza (1999) report that learners of JFL have higher motivation to master their target language despite its orthographic difficulty, compared to learners of French and Russian. Other researchers also report the high motivation held by learners of Japanese (Sandom 2013; Yu, Takata & Dryland, 2012).

It is, therefore, necessary to explore how teachers of JFL can maintain the high motivation initially held by their students, and give their students a balanced L2 reading curriculum. Research in the L2 Japanese context is still in its infancy. Furthermore, research related to L2 Japanese reading is one of the least researched areas. This paper is an attempt to fill such a void. Specifically, the paper tries to shed light on how learners of JFL perceive reading in their target language, and how instruction possibly influences learners' perceptions. By using a cross-sectional survey, this study is able to demonstrate the change of learners' perceptions which is an implication of the influence coming from the instruction they received.

BACKGROUND

Situational Characteristics

The current survey was conducted in Japanese language courses offered at a university in New Zealand. There were four courses from a beginner level to an advanced level. The approach taken throughout the four courses was the 'fragmental intensive reading approach'. This means, all the courses used commercial structural textbooks, and teachers taught mainly grammar and sentence structures. Reading instruction was given in a fragmental manner, using a small number of reading passages contained in textbooks, and the grammar translation method was employed. Therefore, students did not have the opportunities to receive fluency development, and strategy training.

Table 1 below demonstrates the difficulty of randomly-chosen reading passages taught in the current context. In Table 1, Levels 1, 6 and 10 indicate the first 1000 words, 6000 words and 10,000 words respectively according to their frequency in Vocabulary Database for Reading Japanese, i.e., VDRJ (Matsushita, 2010). Komori, Mikuni and Kondoh (2004) claim that L2 Japanese readers need to know approximately 96% of the running words to comprehend a Japanese text satisfactorily. From this table, it can be understood that students need to know more than 6000 words to understand these reading passages satisfactorily. However, such a vocabulary level is almost equal to the former Level 2 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT).¹ To the best knowledge of this author who taught in the current context for over a decade, only a minority of students reached such a level at the end of their studies. That means that reading passages taught were beyond the proficiency level of students enrolled in these four courses. Table 1 renders the difficulty of these reading passages more obvious by comparing them to one Japanese graded

reader (GR) called *Chūmon no ōi ryōriten* (the Japanese Extensive Reading Research Group, 2006).

Table 1. Linguistic analysis of reading passages in four textbooks and a GR text*

Names of textbooks and a GR	Average character no. per sentence	<i>Kanji</i> ** proportion	Coverage by Level 1 vocabulary	Coverage by vocabulary up to Level 6	Coverage by vocabulary up to Level 10
<i>Genki 2</i> ***	22.73	26.5	84.91	95.12	96.05
<i>An Integrated Approach</i>	39.68	30.5	80.66	91.14	92.64
<i>Tobira</i>	44.16	34.4	84.11	96.52	97.66
<i>Chūmon no ōi ryōriten</i>	24.2	18	94.81	97.77	98.15

* Only the prelude of the GR (*Chūmon no ōi ryōriten*) used was analyzed. Twelve reading passages were randomly taken from three textbooks (four from each textbook). They were morphologically analyzed to gain vocabulary frequency patterns.

***Kanji* are logographs that are used in the Japanese orthographic system.

*** *Genki 2* (Banno, Ikeda, Ōno, Shinagawa & Tokashiki, 2011), *An Integrated Approach* ([the original title is *An Integrated Approach to Intermediate Japanese*], Miura & McGloin, 2008), *Tobira* ([the original title is *Jōkyū e no Tobira*], Oka, Tsutsui & Kondō, 2009)

Previous Study Conducted in the Same Context

Prior to the current survey, the author conducted a study which investigated learners' reactions toward extensive reading and Japanese graded readers (GRs) in this context. In the study, fourteen learners from the same context compared an original Japanese literary text with its GR version. Their perceptions toward extensive reading and L2 Japanese reading in general were also elicited from unstructured exit interviews. The study (Tabata-Sandom, 2013) reported that advanced participants accepted the myth of 'no pain, no gain', and believed the "cult of authenticity" (Day and Bamford, 1998, p. 53). That means that they believed that they had to suffer difficulties to master L2 Japanese reading, and that only by reading difficult authentic texts could they improve their ability. The study also reported that some advanced participants denounced extensive reading as it gave them stigma: they felt that their reading level was low, and that they could hence only read simplified GRs.

METHOD

Current Study

The precedent study (Tabata-Sandom, 2013) described above motivated the current study, inviting a question: why are some learners willing to take such a laborious path to learn L2 Japanese reading? The precedent study implied influences coming from instructions on such a phenomenon. However, the subject sample of the precedent study was limited in terms of its size (N=14) and its proficiency level (mainly upper-intermediate and advanced). Therefore, the current questionnaire survey investigated L2 reading perceptions of a larger number of learners who studied in the same context, using a cross-sectional approach. By employing a cross-sectional

approach, the current survey was expected to portray the changes in learners' perceptions, i.e., an indication of the effects of instructions, according to their developmental stages.

Procedures – The Respondents

The respondents of the current survey were 132 learners of JFL. They were from the aforementioned four Japanese language courses: beginner (N=40), elementary (N=30), intermediate (N=32), and advanced (N=30). Table 2 presents the details of the respondents according to four courses (Japa112, Japa116, Japa203 and Japa302).

Table 2. Respondents' Backgrounds

Course	Number of respondents	Target level	Average study length (years)	Self-assessed proficiency level
Japa112 (first year)	40	Beginner	Less than 1*	74% → beginner
Japa116 (second year)	30	Elementary	5 to 6	83.3% → elementary to lower intermediate
Japa203 (third year)	32	Intermediate	6 to 7	78.3% → lower to upper intermediate
Japa302 (fourth year)	30	Advanced	7 to 8	93.3% → upper intermediate

More than 90% of the respondents were L1 English speakers.

60.3% of the respondents said that they were very keen readers in their L1.

*There was a big gap in average study length between Japa112 and the three other courses because while students of Japa112 only started learning Japanese on entering university, those of the other three courses had studied Japanese at high schools.

Procedures – The Instrument

Participation by students in the current questionnaire survey was anonymous and voluntary. The questionnaire used in the current survey consisted of 14 statements which were to be answered on a five-scale. The 14 statements are as follows:

- I am an avid reader (a very keen reader) in my first language.
- I read for pleasure in my first language.
- I usually read only for practical reasons in my first language.
- I don't like reading in my first language.
- I want to read in Japanese as well as I can in my first language.
- I like reading in Japanese.
- I think that I am a competent reader in Japanese.
- I believe in the future that I will be a native-level reader in Japanese.
- I read for pleasure in Japanese.
- I read to improve my language ability in Japanese.
- Reading in Japanese is fun.
- Reading in Japanese is difficult.
- I don't know how to improve my reading skills in Japanese.

- Speaking and listening abilities in Japanese are more important than writing and reading abilities in Japanese for me.

The questionnaire also had two open-ended questions (see section 7 of Results and Discussion). Each coordinator of the four courses handed out the questionnaire during class time and gave the respondents approximately a quarter of an hour to complete it. This questionnaire survey was conducted in the last quarter of a 24-week long academic year.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The five scales for 14 statements in the questionnaire were ‘1. Strongly agree’, ‘2. Agree’, ‘3. Neither agree nor disagree’, ‘4. Disagree’, and ‘5. Strongly disagree’. In general, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of the respondents’ developmental stages on their responses toward the 14 statements in the first year (Japa112), the second year (Japa116), the third year (Japa203), and the fourth year (Japa302) levels. Using a one-way between subjects ANOVA for ordinal scale data such as the current Likert-scale data is supported by some scholars (e.g., Oshio & Nishiguchi, 2007). In the following, some noteworthy results are reported.

1. The respondents’ confidence to be able to become native-level readers in Japanese did not statistically significantly increase according to the advance of their developmental stage.

Answers to the statement of ‘I believe in the future that I will be a native-level reader in Japanese’ indicate the respondents’ confidence of obtaining native-level fluency in their target language reading. There was not a statistically significant effect of the respondents’ developmental stages on their responses toward this statement in the four year levels [$F(3, 128) = .629, p = .600$]. It is noteworthy, however, that while 10% of Japa112 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, this number increased to 40% for Japa302 respondents.

2. Regardless of their developmental stages, the respondents found reading in Japanese difficult.

The respondents’ answers to the statement of ‘reading in Japanese is difficult’ did not statistically significantly differ by their year level, i.e., their developmental stages [$F(3, 128) = 1.675, p = .176$]. Overall, the respondents found Japanese reading difficult regardless of their developmental stages. The proportion of the respondents in each course who agreed or strongly agreed that Japanese reading was difficult increased slightly as they advanced their study, however:

Japa112 (75%) → Japa116 (80%) → Japa203 (81%) → Japa302 (93%).

At the same time, more than a half of the respondents of all the classes strongly agreed or agreed that reading in Japanese was fun (Japa112 [73%], Japa116 [63%], Japa203 [54.1%], and Japa302 [60%]).

3. The respondents' awareness of strategies to improve their reading skills in Japanese was uncertain.

More than 40% of all the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement of 'I don't know how to improve my reading skills in Japanese' (Japa112[40.5%], Japa116[43%], Japa203[40.54%], and Japa302[40%]). At the same time, more than 30% of all the respondents from each course neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Less than 30% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they did not know strategies to improve their L2 reading skills. This means that the respondents were divided relatively equally into the three groups in terms of their strategy knowledge to improve their L2 reading skills. A remarkable result is that Japa302 had by far the biggest proportion of students who chose a mid-scale answer to this statement, i.e., 'neither agree nor disagree' (66.3% compared to Japa112 [32.7%], Japa116 [40%] and Japa203 [35.1%]). The respondents of Japa302, students whose study was the most advanced, gave answers with a clear weight toward either agree or disagree to all the other statements. Only this statement gathered such a high proportion of a mid-scale answer from this final year class.

4. The respondents' high desire to master L2 Japanese reading despite its difficulty.

Answers to the statement of 'I want to read in Japanese as well as I can in my first language' demonstrate the respondents' strong desire to master L2 reading to a high level. There was not a significant effect of the respondents' developmental stages on their responses toward this statement for the four year levels [$F(3, 128) = .485, p = .693$]. Understandably, the respondents of all the four courses wished to acquire a high L2 reading competency equal to that of their L1. It is remarkable to see this high desire when the majority of the respondents perceived reading in Japanese as a difficult task.

Table 3. The respondents' strong desire to master L2 Japanese reading

Statements	Japa112	Japa116	Japa203	Japa302
I want to read in Japanese as well as I can in my first language (strongly agree and agree).	87.5(%)	93	83.8	87
Reading in Japanese is difficult (strongly agree and agree).	75(%)	80	81	93

5. The respondents in general were not confident readers in Japanese.

Surprisingly, none of 132 respondents *strongly agreed* with the statement of 'I think that I am a competent reader in Japanese', even though some of the respondents who had studied Japanese for more than 10 years. However, there was a significant effect of the respondents' developmental stages on their responses toward this statement at the $p < .001$ level for the four year levels [$F(3, 128) = 8.561, p = .000$]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the fourth year, Japa302, ($M=2.53, SD=0.73$) was significantly different than Japa112 ($M=3.40, SD=0.91$), Japa116 ($M=3.31, SD=.97$) and Japa203 ($M=3.31, SD=0.73$). This means that significantly more students from Japa302 were confident L2 Japanese readers, compared to those from the other three classes. Specifically, they were the majority of

20.3% of the total of 132 respondents who *agreed* (none of them *strongly agreed*) that they were competent readers in Japanese.

6. Improving linguistic abilities was a bigger purpose to read in Japanese than enjoying reading.

Table 4 indicates that the current respondents read in Japanese predominantly to improve their language ability than to gain pleasure. Whereas the respondents of Japa302 read for pleasure more than those of the other lower level classes, all of them used reading in Japanese as a means of improving their linguistic competency at the same time.

Table 4. The respondents' purpose of L2 Japanese reading

Statements	Japa112	Japa116	Japa203	Japa302
I read to improve my language ability in Japanese (strongly agree and agree).	72.5 (%)	63	86.5	100
I read for pleasure in Japanese (strongly agree and agree).	40	33.3	32.4	67

7. The respondents' multi-componential perceptions toward L2 Japanese reading.

The following two open-ended questions were given at the end of the questionnaire:

1. What factors make reading in Japanese fun?
2. What factors make reading in Japanese difficult to get into?

The given answers were categorized into several factors with two raters. The seven factors for question 1 above are:

Language-related factor, Cultural factor, Instrument-motivational factor, A sense of achievement, Challenge to a difficult task, Not yet found, and Others.

The answers for question 2 above were categorized into the following six factors:

Kanji, Other linguistic factors, Inherent difficulty in L2 Japanese reading, A lack of and problems in typographical/visual reading support in texts, Unavailability of Japanese reading materials, and Others.

When there was a discrepancy, the two raters discussed it until they came to an agreement. Table 5 demonstrates example answers for each factor and the proportion of each factor toward the whole pool of answers. In Table 5, the top half corresponds to question 1 and the bottom half to question 2.

Table 5. What factors make reading in Japanese fun and difficult to get into?

1. What factors make reading in Japanese fun?

Category	Example answer	Proportion to the whole answers*			
		112	116	203	302
<i>Language-related</i>	Japanese as a whole is a fun language...and I especially like the look of the <i>kana</i> and <i>kanji</i> (Japa112).	24.4	17.5	21.1	19
<i>Cultural</i>	An opportunity to learn things from another (Japanese) perspective (Japa203) <i>Manga</i> and novels are interesting (Japa112).	26.7	22.5	15.8	28.6
<i>Instrument-motivational</i>	Knowing that it will improve my vocabulary for later use (Japa203)	4.5	12.5	7.9	4.8
<i>A sense of achievement</i>	Feeling of accomplishment when I can read something (Japa302)	22.2	30	42.1	42.8
<i>Challenge to a difficult task</i>	Challenging my abilities, fun trying to translate (Japa116)	13.3	17.5	0	4.8
<i>Not yet found</i>	Haven't discovered any (factor which makes L2 Japanese fun) so far (Japa112).	6.7	0	0	0
<i>Others</i>	Moment when I understand the story rather than focusing on translating (Japa203)	2.2	0	13.1	0

2. What factors make reading in Japanese difficult to get into?

Category	Example answer	Proportion to the whole answers*			
		112	116	203	302
<i>Language-related – kanji</i>	Lots of <i>kanji</i> that I don't know can make it quite daunting (Japa112) Not knowing enough <i>kanji</i> (Japa116) Sheer amount of <i>kanji</i> needed to understand (Japa203) <i>Kanji!!!!</i> (Japa302)	56	55.81	53.34	50
<i>Language-related – others</i>	Sometimes meaning is clouded by difficult grammar (Japa302).	24	27.91	24	29.17
<i>Difficulty inherent in reading</i>	It takes more concentration than reading in English (Japa203).	4	9.3	45	4.17
<i>Problematic typographical and visual support</i>	Lack of <i>furigana</i> on new <i>kanji</i> (Japa203) The context is written from up to down... so it's quite difficult to follow (Japa112).	6	4.65	13.33	0
<i>Unavailability of materials</i>	No easy access to beginners texts (Japa112) Unavailability of suitable material for my level (Japa302)	8	0	4.44	8.33
<i>Others</i>	Lack of free time (Japa116) Serious, boring content (Japa203)	2	2.33	4.44	8.33

*The proportion of each factor against the whole answers (%).

In order to indicate the difference among the four courses, Figures 1 and 2 present line graphs which show the proportion of each factor against the whole answers according to each course. (The numbers along the vertical line indicate percentage [%].)

Figure 1. What factors make reading in Japanese fun?

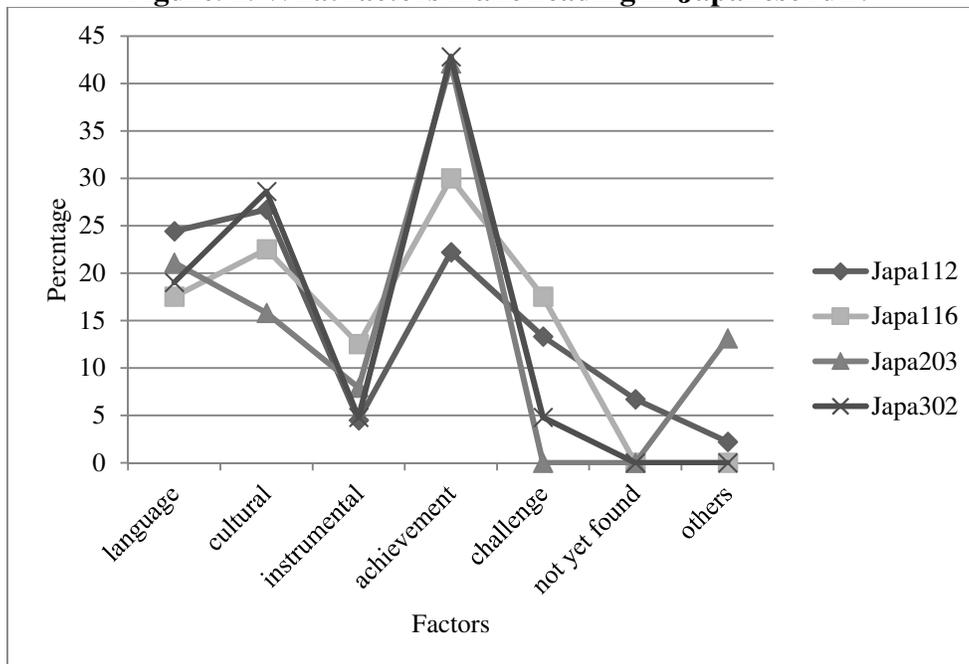
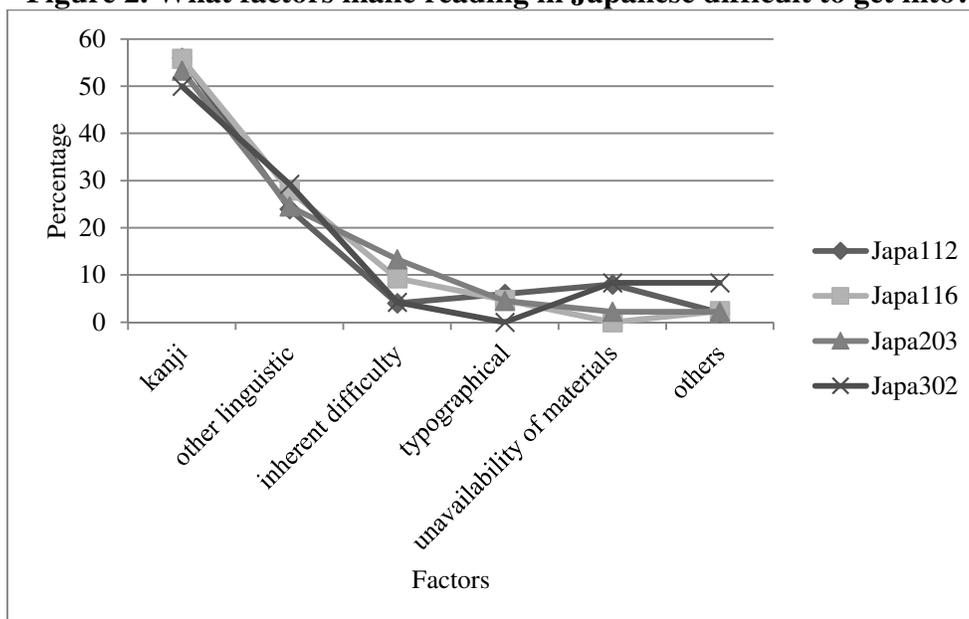


Figure 2. What factors make reading in Japanese difficult to get into?



In order to analyze the respondents' answers toward the two open-ended questions quantitatively, the Pearson Chi-Square analysis was computed to assess relations among

variables, reflecting the nature of the obtained data, i.e., the nominal scale. A Pearson Chi-Square analysis indicates that the proportion of each factor which makes L2 Japanese fun can be seen to differ significantly by the developmental stages ($\chi^2=30.060$, $df=18$, $p<.05$). As seen from Table 4 and Figure 1, ‘a sense of achievement’ is the overall biggest determiner that makes L2 Japanese reading fun for the respondents of the three upper courses who have studied Japanese for more than five years at least. The respondents of Japa112 seemed to enjoy language characteristics per se slightly more than a sense of achievement. This is understandable because the students of this class had studied Japanese for less than one year and thus the novelty of Japanese language was probably still fresh. The noteworthy finding here is that the cultural factor, which is thought to be a dominating source of motivation in some contexts, is not a sole winner in the current context.

Unlike the proportion of factors which make L2 Japanese reading fun, the proportion of factors which make L2 Japanese reading difficult to get into does not seem to differ significantly by the respondents’ developmental stages ($\chi^2=12.203$, $df=15$, n.s.). Table 4 and Figure 2 demonstrate that the respondents of all the courses viewed *kanji* as one prominent determiner in making L2 Japanese reading difficult to get into. This factor is followed by other linguistic features (i.e., sentence structures, vocabulary and the complex writing system). All the other factors had equally small proportions of the total.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The current survey demonstrates that the respondents’ confidence to master L2 Japanese reading did not increase according to their developmental stages. Similarly, the number of the respondents who found L2 Japanese reading difficult remained high regardless of their year levels. This implies that the instruction given to these respondents may have failed to present accessibility for seemingly unconquerable L2 Japanese reading. Table 1 demonstrates that the textbooks used in this context were far beyond the proficiency level of enrolled students. The sheer difficulty of textbooks, and the intensive reading, grammar-translation approach may have clouded these learners’ outlooks toward reading in their target language in some aspects. One student vividly expressed such a feeling: “lots of *kanji* that I don’t know can make it (L2 Japanese reading) quite daunting” (Japa112).² Another student expressed “not recognizing *kanji* and having to stop all the time to look them up” (Japa116) as a factor which makes L2 Japanese reading difficult to get into.

It is surprising to see that more than one-third of all the respondents claimed to have knowledge about strategies to improve their reading abilities despite a lack of strategy training in this context. However, this number must be viewed with caution because two thirds of the most advanced respondents from Japa302 presented an uncertain attitude regarding their strategy knowledge. The lower level respondents’ awareness of strategies may not be as clear as they believe because they virtually have no guidance about reading strategies. The current survey was unable to pinpoint what type of strategies they use. Nevertheless, the obtained findings imply a possible reading approach taken by the current respondents. The survey demonstrates that the respondents treated L2 Japanese reading as a means to improve their language ability: 80.5% of the respondents read to improve their language ability in Japanese whereas only 43.1% of them read for pleasure in Japanese.

The respondents' answers to the first open ended question also indicate that language learning factors have a relatively large influence in making L2 Japanese reading fun. One respondent stated:

The characters [*kanji*] not only put across what the meaning is, but they also tell a story themselves. Chinese characters (*kanji*) have abstract meanings (compared to English), so it is also like solving a puzzle, which I love!! (Japa112, parentheses included in the original)

“Picking up nuances in grammar structure” (Japa203) was also raised as a motivating factor by another respondent. These answers endorse that some of the respondents find learning discrete linguistic features an enjoyable part of L2 Japanese reading. The intensive reading, grammar-translation approach these learners received may have been compatible with their perceptions in part because it is language-focused.

This enjoyment of a discrete language learning approach in their L2 reading is confirmed by their comments which describe “a sense of achievement”, i.e., the largest determiner in making L2 Japanese reading fun. That is, when these learners say that they feel “a sense of achievement”, it has strong language learning characteristics. The respondents find “a sense of achievement”:

- when I work out what the sentence means (Japa112)
- when I read something correctly (Japa112)
- (when) being able to read a foreign text, (it) feels like a secret code (Japa116)
- (when) being able to understand foreign squiggles, seeing new uses of *kanji* & its radicals (Japa116)
- (when) being able to recognize some grammar + *kanji* (Japa203)
- (when) I understand the *kanji* (Japa302)

These comments indicate that many of the respondents do not necessarily need ‘pleasure of reading’ envisaged by some extensive reading specialists (e.g., Day & Bamford, 1998; the Japanese Extensive Reading Research Group, 2012) in order to enjoy reading in their target language. Rather, a sense of learning something, and a sense of competency in “unpacking a sentence and trying to translate it” (Japa116) brings different types of ‘pleasure of reading’ to them. Their pleasure of reading is language learning oriented, and this interpretation is endorsed by their reading habit.

As mentioned above, the current respondents read to improve their language ability in Japanese more than read for pleasure. The trend was opposite in their first language: 29.7% of the respondents read for practical reasons whereas 68.5% of them read for pleasure. In short, these findings demonstrate that the respondents did not conduct L2 reading in the way that extensive reading specialists envisage, i.e., read for general meaning, engage with the content, and experience pleasure in reading itself just as in the first language reading. Rather, some given comments prove that some of the respondents read Japanese texts in a similar way to solving puzzles:

- Chinese characters (*kanji*) have abstract meanings (compared to English), so it is also like solving a puzzle, which I love!! (Japa112, parentheses included in the original)

- It (the Japanese text) feels like a secret code (Japa116).
- As Japanese is so different to English, it's like a puzzle (Japa302).

Surprisingly, these comments are given as factors which make L2 Japanese reading fun, not as factors which make L2 Japanese reading difficult.

Yamashita (2013) reports that reading attitudes are generally thought to be multi-componential. The current survey reveals that the respondents' reading perceptions which closely relate to their reading attitudes were similarly multi-componential. Here, two of such components are noteworthy. First, these learners found reading in their target language difficult mainly due to its *kanji* difficulty. This corresponds with what other scholars claim (Gamage, 2003; Okita, 1997; Toyoda, 1995). The fragmental intensive reading approach and the difficult textbooks seem to strengthen this perception, and lead to the fact that more advanced students start losing confidence in mastery of L2 reading. One student who had been studying Japanese for more than eight years explained the disheartening L2 reading process, saying that "looking up words, when *furigana* (phonological support for *kanji*)³ is not provided, can make it (L2 Japanese reading) tedious, and translating is generally slow, and can be exhausting after extended periods" (Japa302). In short, we can see the limitations of an intensive reading approach in the current context. It fails to make these learners envisage that L2 Japanese reading should not be laborious but can be effortless.

So, should we turn to extensive reading blindly? The second facet of the respondents' reading perceptions is that these learners found pleasure in language learning from L2 Japanese reading. This aligns with an attitude held by the advanced participants of the aforementioned previous study conducted in the same context by the current author (Tabata-Sandom, 2013). The study reported that some advanced students who had studied in the same courses eagerly sought improvement of linguistic ability from L2 Japanese reading rather than better engagement with the content of what they read. Consequently, those advanced learners presented anti-extensive-reading attitudes, and denounced simplified graded readers (GRs) since such easy texts failed to provide them with learning opportunities of discrete linguistic items. While the current survey cannot determine whether or not the respondents have reached an anti-extensive-reading attitude similarly, the survey at least demonstrates that the respondents equally treated L2 Japanese reading as a means to improve their language knowledge. Furthermore, a sense of achievement that they gained when they managed to successfully understand Japanese texts in an intensive reading manner is a stronger motivating factor than other factors. This teaches us that learners' desire to learn linguistic items and a sense of achievement produced from learning new linguistic items during L2 reading should not be underestimated in L2 reading instruction. Day and Bamford (1998) claim that L2 reading is a real-world reading with a pedagogical purpose. Learners' desire to feel a sense of achievement created from learning novel linguistic items during L2 reading can be a pedagogical purpose. Furthermore, Campbell and Storch (2011) emphasize "the importance of Language related enjoyment for sustaining language study" (p. 176). Thus, it must really be contemplated whether or not extensive reading satisfies such language related enjoyment.

There are numerous studies that demonstrate positive effects of extensive reading (e.g., Bell, 2001; Beglar, Hunt & Kite, 2012; Hitosugi & Day, 2004; Yamashita, 2008). These studies indicate that the strength of extensive reading is that it nurtures learners' positive reading attitude/motivation, and increases general comprehension/fluency. At the same time, some studies report that extensive reading also facilitates development of discrete language skills (Horst, 2005; Lao & Krashen, 2000; Pigata & Schmitt, 2006 for vocabulary gain, Elley & Magubhai, 1983; Yang, 2001 for grammar competency). Furthermore, Tabata-Sandom and Macalister (2009) report

that extensive reading can also satisfy learners' language related enjoyment to some degree. In their study, an advanced learner of Japanese felt such enjoyment when reading very easy texts because such texts enabled her to understand usages of previously-learned grammar and vocabulary effortlessly. She coined such a feeling as the "eureka feeling" (ibid, p. 41). Nevertheless, how much extensive reading satisfies learners' language learning oriented perceptions is still uncertain. Nation (1997, p. 15) claims that "vocabulary learning from extensive reading is fragile." Learning possibilities of other linguistic items from extensive reading needs to be further examined.

In sum, the findings of the current survey present that the fragmental intensive reading approach in this context have both positive and negative impacts: it is compatible with learners' language learning oriented reading perceptions whereas it is incompetent in nurturing perceptions of mastering fluent, engaging reading in Japanese. With these findings and the aforementioned relevant empirical findings, the paper supports Yamashita's (2013) eclectic stance and furthers her appeal: "an appeal to teachers' sense of balance when implementing ER [extensive reading]" (p. 259) as well as intensive reading. That is, teachers have to know that mere extensive reading may not pose enough challenges to satisfy learners' language learning desire but also that mere intensive reading may not free learners from laborious L2 reading process which is similar to secret-code unpacking.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The current survey has a relatively small sample size. This is often inevitable in JFL contexts since the population of JFL learners is small in some countries (the Japan Foundation, 2010). Thus, accumulation of similar survey results is awaited. Also, surveys which delve into learners' strategy orientation and reading approach with more questions will be welcomed.

Nevertheless, the current survey presents important directions for future studies: a need to research the difference of factors in L2 reading which language learners find motivating as well as factors in L2 reading which language learners find difficult to get into, depending on different L1-L2 pairings. Yu, Takata and Dryland (2012) report that cultural interests are a dominating factor which motivates learners of Japanese in Hong Kong. Unlike the current situation, L1 Chinese learners of Japanese do not face a great difficulty in reading Japanese texts because their L1 and L2 equally use logographs. In such a case, a sense of achievement coming from learning linguistic features may not be enormous. Therefore, investigating what type of learners find what factor of L2 reading motivating is of benefit for second language teachers. Equally, it is pedagogically feasible to investigate whether or not there is a big determiner such as *kanji* difficulty in the current context which decreases L2 learners' motivation to read in their target languages in other contexts.

Similarly, how the difference of L1-L2 pairings affects learners' response toward extensive reading can be examined. Much research claims that extensive reading enhances L2 learners' reading abilities and affective factors. For example, Hedstrom (2005) demonstrates the power of extensive reading, reporting that an L1 Spanish boy was engrossed in the Harry Potter series without a solid linguistic proficiency in English. However, Spanish and English are cognate languages which share the orthographic system. The current study endorses the accumulated research findings that *kanji* decoding is by far the biggest obstacle for learners of Japanese from alphabetical native language backgrounds. Many L2 Japanese learners claim that rote learning is the best method to learn *kanji* (Mori & Shimizu, 2007). Whether or not such learners similarly are convinced of the benefits of extensive reading as a means to overcome

kanji difficulty and show positive response toward extensive reading needs to be carefully investigated.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT).

² The respondents' comments given to the two open questions are presented either with speech marks plus their class numbers or with just class numbers.

³ The Japanese orthographic system employs logographs (*kanji*) and two types of syllabaries (*hiragana* and *katakana*). *Furigana* (phonetic supports), i.e., smaller syllabaries, usually *hiragana*, which indicate readings, is sometimes attached to *kanji*.

Example: 東京は、20年ぶりの大雪になるという警報けいほうが気象庁きしょうちょうから発表はっぴょうされた。
(The last three *kanji* compound words have *furigana* in this sentence.)

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