

Towards a framework for Japanese Graded

Readers:

Initial research findings

Brett REYNOLDS*¹ Teruko HARADA*²
Mihoko YAMAGATA*³ Taeko MIYAZAKI*⁴

Keywords: Extensive reading Japanese graded readers (JGRs)
Graded readers (GRs) Vocabulary list Level

Graded readers (GRs) are widely used in ESL/EFL classes but there are currently no well-defined series of GRs available for learners of Japanese as a second/foreign language. To fill this gap, a few teachers and learners of Japanese began an independent, ongoing effort to develop a framework for producing such materials. In the process, we have researched English GRs, and the theory and realities behind them.

In this paper we begin with a brief discussion of the teaching of reading in Japanese as a second/foreign language. We suggest that, especially at the lower levels the concentration has been on intensive reading. This is contrasted with the use of extensive reading (ER) in ESL/EFL education. In particular we discuss how ER should resemble the type of pleasure reading people do in their first language. While some teachers do incorporate *tadoku* (read a lot) in Japanese reading instruction, we argue that there are significant differences between the Japanese idea of *tadoku* and ER. In doing so, we outline the fundamental properties of ER.

We then discuss the role of GRs in ER and describe our vision for Japanese GRs in terms of their design. Our focus is on constructing a clear framework for levelling GRs. This is done mainly through vocabulary control with the goal of ensuring that the reader knows over 95% of the running words in any given text. We also consider how many levels a series should include, how to control grammar and *kanji*, how long to make the books, and

the inclusion of glosses and illustrations.

Next, we lay out the options for the content of the GRs, touching on genre and the choice of simplified novels versus simple original stories. To date, we have produced 3 samples. We include some feedback from learners who have read these.

Since much of our effort so far has been in creating word lists, we describe in some detail the lists we have developed for the first five (of eight) levels. The choice of the vocabulary we have included takes into consideration the Japanese Language Proficiency Test levels, frequency (from a large but dated corpus), genre, and inevitably the intuition and experience of the team members. We anticipate that the remaining levels will be guided more by up-to-date word-frequency information from a corpus of post-war Japanese literature.

Finally, we conclude with an overview of what remains to be accomplished and how we plan to move forward. We hope that this paper will raise awareness of the need for graded readers and extensive reading in the teaching of reading in Japanese as a second/foreign language and that it may spur progress on these fronts.

(*1 Sakuragaoka Girls' Jr. & Sr. High School *2Tamagawa University
*3Asahi Culture Center *4Nihon University)