



READING COMPREHENSION AND READING CORPUS

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1 Introduction

"Reading comprehension is difficult." Japanese learners who have taken the Japanese proficiency test unanimously say this. In contrast, do Japanese teachers provide sufficient guidance? Noda (2019), in "Clarifying the Process of Reading and Comprehension," points out the delays in reading comprehension research in Japanese education, emphasized the importance of clarifying the reading comprehension process for Japanese learners, and further emphasized the need to create a "reading comprehension corpus." (p. 23-41) The author unravels previous research on reading comprehension, Record and reflect on your own research on reading comprehension.

2 What is "Reading"?

According to the Japanese Language Subcommittee of the Council for Cultural Affairs, the 'Report on the Reference Frame for Japanese Education,' 'reading' is described as follows. (Table 1)

Table 1: "Proficiency by Language Activity" and "Reading"

	A1	A2	B1
reading	For example, posters and catalogs can help you understand familiar names, words, and simple sentences.	You can understand very short and simple text. You can extract simple, concrete, predictable information from advertisements, brochures introducing content, menus, and	I can understand texts written in very commonly used everyday language or words related to my work. You can understand private letters that express what



		schedules. A simple and short personal letter is understandable.	happened, emotions, and hopes.
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	B2	C1	C2
reading	You can read articles and reports on contemporary issues that reflect the author's attitude and perspective. He can read prose from contemporary literature.	Texts based on long and complex facts: Able to understand literary texts while recognizing differences in writing style. You can understand specialized articles in fields outside your field as well as lengthy technical manuals.	It is easy to read abstract, structurally and linguistically complex words written in virtually any form, such as manuals, professional articles, or literary texts.

"Reference Frame for Japanese Language Education Report"

What specific skills are necessary for Japanese learners to acquire such abilities?

3 Required Abilities for Reading Comprehension and Difficulties in Instruction

Reading comprehension requires various abilities depending on its purpose, and it demands not only the ability to read texts but also a comprehensive range of abilities. Examples include vocabulary and grammar comprehension, contextual awareness, reasoning skills, sense of purpose, and critical thinking and evaluation skills. These abilities are utilized to comprehend reading, but various difficulties exist. Noda (2024) classifies and explains the difficulties in reading comprehension into five levels: (1) pronunciation and characters, (2) vocabulary, (3) grammar, (4) discourse and writing, and (5) pragmatics.

In (1), there was an example where a blogger was misread as 'professional' and the incorrect inference was made; in (2), the meaning of 'shoulders was narrow'



was inappropriately understood as 'the body was small'; and as a case of difficulties in dictionary use, there was a case where '2 bunban steam' was mistakenly looked up as '2 bu' or 'han steamed'. In (3), the "ka" in "whether research cases need to be verified and accumulated" expresses doubt, but there is an example where it was mistakenly understood as parallel; in (4), the subject of "subject to management" was inappropriately understood as "these companies"; (5) Then, the Japanese phrase "not possessing something to have" was inappropriately understood as "not possessed." This learner is native Chinese and has made an inappropriate understanding based on their background knowledge, believing that "no country has a system to recognize any country as a 'citizen.'" With these difficulties in mind, Japanese teachers need to provide guidance. However, these are just examples, and it is expected that teaching reading comprehension to address many learners' mistakes will be challenging.

4 Successful Examples of Learners' Guessing Techniques in Reading Comprehension

In the same book, Noda also cites successful examples of deduction techniques in reading comprehension by Japanese learners.

- (1) Audio: Based on the sound of "bi," you can appropriately infer the meaning of "hairstylist" as "esthetician or hairstylist," or infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from parts of the pronunciation.
- (2) Vocabulary: From the word "san," the meaning of "station staff" is appropriately deduced to be "staff," and the semantic relationship with postwar terms is used to infer the meaning of words.
- (3) Grammar: From the grammatical form "shikunai," one can infer the meaning of "not familiar" to "I don't know," or by the grammatical form of a phrase, inferring the meaning of a word from the grammatical form of a phrase.
- (4) Discourse: Infer the meaning of words from the content of the previous sentence, such as 'passed by,' and infer the meaning of words from the content of the previous sentence.



(5) Pragmatics: Reasonably infer the meaning of "exchange study" by referencing knowledge about the study abroad period, and infer the meaning of words by referencing one's own background knowledge.

Considering such examples, while inference is an important factor in reading comprehension, it is also thought that there may not be a reliable method.

5 Further Challenges in Reading Comprehension for Learners

While we have seen the difficulties and success stories in reading comprehension instruction, Noda points out even greater problems in reading comprehension. The content taught in Japanese language education and the skills required for learners to actually perform reading comprehension differ (p. 34). Examples include: (1) the difference between the vocabulary and spelling learned and the vocabulary and notation needed for actual reading, and (2) the difference between the grammar learned and the grammar needed for actual reading. For example in (1), "not very tasty" is written as "not very tasty," and "a lot" as "manayama" (a lot of it), and (2) As an example, the question "How about almond tofu for dessert?" is a negative evaluation that "almond tofu is not suitable for an Italian restaurant dessert." However, learners often struggle with the question, "Why do I have doubts?" How can we bridge the gap between the content we study and the skills needed for actual reading comprehension?

Khmelyaku Samukawa (2019) also stated that while searching for unreadable or unknown kanji in a dictionary may seem like a simple task, obtaining the necessary information and using it to aid understanding of the text requires going through several steps, and he describes the "flow of dictionary usage." The process consists of five stages: setting up the reading environment, identifying the search target, deciding on the search method, executing the search, and applying the search results. Learners are told that each time they encounter a word they do not understand, they go through these stages in order and repeat this process. How can we overcome this enormous amount of time-consuming work? I believe the reading corpus is a major clue for this.



6 Reading Comprehension Survey of Graduate Students in Uzbekistan

I asked students at the university where I work to investigate how reading comprehension is conducted and obtained their cooperation. The basic information of the requested collaborators is as follows.

Graduate Student A Current Occupation: Student

Studying Place: Uzbekistan

Current school and grade: First-year graduate student

Specialization: Education and Linguistics

Year of Birth: 2004

Native languages: Uzbek and Russian

Languages I'm most skilled at speaking: Uzbek and Russian (Russian is used for expressing feelings)

Best language for reading: Russian

Things I read Japanese often outside of studying Japanese: YouTube, blogs

Language used in textbooks (elementary, junior high, high school): Russian

Languages used in textbooks (university): Uzbek, Japanese

Stay in Japan: Yes

Duration and purpose of stay in Japan: March 2024 ~ February 2025
[Study Abroad]

Experience learning Japanese reading comprehension: Yes

Japanese Reading Comprehension Learning Location, Method, and Period: University [September 2020 ~ February 2025]

Exams and levels obtained: Japanese Language Proficiency Test [N2], CEFR-C1

Hiragana and Katakana Discrimination: Yes

Number of kanji whose meaning is understandable: about 1,500

Experience learning Chinese or Korean: None



The book I read was 'Chikyū no Arukikata: Central Asia—Countries of the Silk Road 2025~26,' which I specified. His speech was in Russian, but it will be omitted. I have included a Japanese translation of that Russian pronunciation by graduate student B. (Table 2)

Table 2: Reading Comprehension Records of Uzbekistan Graduate Student

A

line number	Selected Materials		Content of the collaborator's statement		What data collectors say
	Page	Article	utterance	Japanese Translations	
	1	Known as Uzbekistan's premier pottery town, Rishitan is also well known as the "Japanese Town." This town has the Rishitan Japan Center, commonly known as the 'Noriko Class,' where you can learn Japanese for free.		In Uzbekistan's city of art, well, you hear a lot of Japanese. There is a free Rishitan Japan Center School where you can study Japanese. It's called a noriko school.	Please read as usual.
		The late Mr. Shigekatsu Osaki, who was once an engineer stationed in Uzbekistan, is the creator of this facility. Based on the philosophy that "even children without money need a place where they can read, study, and feel at		It was built by Osaki-san, and apparently, students who don't have money at that school but want to study from the bottom of their hearts can enroll. In	



		ease," he opened the school in 1999 with his own retirement allowance together with the current principal, Mr. Ganishel, whom he met through pottery. He opened the first classroom in the workshop of Mr. Alisière Nazirov, known as the master ceramic artist and brother of Mr. Ganishel.		1999, the principal of Noriko School met Ganishell-san, and together they opened the school. His younger brother, Alisière Nazirov, is an artist, so together with Mr. Ganishel, he established a school for study.	
		Mr. Osaki passed away in 2005, but Mr. Ganishell inherited his wishes and became principal, running the facility with the help of volunteers. The current classroom is located a little away from the center of Rishitan but has become a fine two-story facility called the Rishitan Japan Center. It has also leased 3 hectares of farmland from the government and has begun experimenting with vegetable cultivation incorporating Japanese		After Osaki passed away in 2005, Ganishell continued with the school. Now, the school is a beautiful two-story building not far from the center of Rishitan. Hmm, hmm, the Rishitan Japan Center received 3 hectares of land from the government. We are planting Japanese	



		agricultural techniques. Incidentally, the name of the Noriko class is derived from Mr. Osaki's beloved wife.		vegetables. The name Noriko School was given to me by Osaki's aunt.	
		In Uzbekistan, school classes are divided into two parts: morning and afternoon. Before going to school, after school, or during long vacations, they come to the center to study Japanese. Many have studied there, placed highly in the Uzbekistan Japanese Speech Contest, and successfully studied abroad in Japan.		Schools in Uzbekistan start in the morning and at noon. Ah, students studying at school have achieved high scores in speech contests. You can also study abroad in Japan.	
		The school classes are basically conducted by Japanese volunteers. Not only travelers who stay a few nights here, but also many who come for extended periods to become volunteer teachers after learning about the facility. This place serves as a bridge between Japan and		The teachers teaching at the school are Japanese volunteers. Hmm, people who come to Rishitan learn that Japanese is taught and come to see the school. The school conducts classes together	



		Uzbekistan, where you can have the rare experience of teaching Japanese while interacting with children.		with children and serves as a bridge between Japan and Uzbekistan.	
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Graduate student A, who was a collaborator, checked vocabulary twice on a mobile phone. "Assignment" and "Osaki-san." Because the meaning of 'appointed' is unclear, the pronunciation of 'Osaki-san' is unclear. After reading comprehension, I was asked how I interpreted the following vocabulary, and received the following answers. "陶藝" was interpreted as "art" based on the kanji for "藝" (art). He thought that 'zuiichi' was similar to 'Ichiban' (number one). I thought 'common name' was similar to 'name' and considered it a word related to the name. "Comfort," "realized," and "precious" were familiar vocabulary. I understood that 'bridge' means 'bridge to connect.' Because the student has extensive knowledge of kanji, there are many situations where students can infer their meanings and connect them to understanding. He brushes off minor or unclear points within the scope of not affecting most people, but overall, it is clear that he understands the content. In Section 4, we describe examples of successful guessing skills by learners in reading comprehension, and it was confirmed from this collaborator that kanji greatly contributes to the success of guessing skills. At the same time, the need for understanding meaning in kanji learning was also confirmed, indicating directions for future kanji instruction. On the other hand, the analysis from the perspectives of grammar, discourse and writing, and pragmatics—which are difficulties in reading comprehension—is insufficient, so I plan to examine this in the future.

According to graduate student B, Russian has the word "bridge" but not "bridge." Therefore, graduate student A used the term "tsunagu hashi" (bridge to connect), but graduate student B also translated it into Japanese as "kakehashi" (bridge bridge).



7 The Importance of the Reading Corpus

The reading corpus plays an important role in analyzing how learners understand texts, and is expected to have educational significance from various perspectives, such as supporting efficient and useful vocabulary and grammar acquisition, and identifying misuse and comprehension difficulties. Sunakawa (2011) states, "The advantage of corpora is that it allows us to notice ways of using words that even native speakers intuitively do not notice. This not only expands the possibilities for research and education, but also serves as a powerful tool for non-native speaker teachers and learners who may not have the intuition of native speakers. Furthermore, traditional Japanese education has relied on teachers' linguistic intuition to edit teaching materials and devise teaching methods based on a syllabus, and corpora play a significant role in verifying whether this syllabus is appropriate. (p. 8) and the importance of corpus are explained.

Noda stated that if the data on learners' reading comprehension processes obtained through surveys using the "Reading Comprehension Survey Method" becomes widely available to anyone and made available to many researchers, reading comprehension research is expected to advance. To achieve this, developing a "reading corpus" is essential. Sunagawa points out the difficulty of constructing corpus itself, stating that it requires tremendous effort. However, even more than that, I have high hopes for the creation of a reading corpus, which will serve as a powerful weapon for many Japanese learners and Japanese teachers.

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