Japanese extensive reading: Aesthetic and efferent engagement of learners with texts

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Conventionally, reading in the L2 Japanese classroom focusses on intensive reading of texts (Tabata-Sandom, 2015; 2017). Texts are treated simply as language data, and reading is equated with correctly translating the literal propositional content from the text (Kumagai, 2007; Warnick, 2001). Conversely, L1 Japanese speakers focus on their personal experiences or relate content to their previous knowledge when reading (Warnick, 2001), which evokes Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading. While evidence suggests that extensive reading improves L2 Japanese learners' attitudes and motivation towards reading in Japanese, the extent to which it encourages the development of more natural reading stances along Rosenblatt's aesthetic-efferent continuum has not been established. Data collected over one to two semesters as upper-beginner L2 Japanese learners began to read extensively showed participants demonstrating a variety of reading practices and stances related to the experience of reading for their own purposes. Although participants displayed efferent stances, such stances were not limited to Japanese language study. Participants also adopted aesthetic stances, both exclusively and in conjunction with efferent stances, suggesting that L2 Japanese learners can engage both aesthetically and efferently when reading extensively.

Japanese is reputed to be one of the more difficult languages for L1 English speaking students to learn to read, with large numbers of kanji characters needing to be learned in order to read a text written for L1 speakers (Brockett, 2003). Learning these kanji characters involves not just memorising their forms, but also their many pronunciations, or readings. Without the knowledge of more than 2000 characters' meanings and multiple pronunciations, designated as kanji essential for daily life (Tamaoka, 2014), learners cannot read texts written for L1 learners. To aid L1 and L2 learners in the task of reading, pronunciation guides (known as yomigana or furigana) may be written above kanji, but it is not commonly used for text written for L1 Japanese adults. Thus, the kind of written material able to be read by L2 Japanese learners tends to be restricted to text specially modified by their language instructor or texts written for children. That is, L2 Japanese learners are very constrained in their reading material due to the orthography of Japanese. Because of this situation, many students only encounter reading in their formal Japanese courses, which means the reading instruction method used in class strongly influences their understanding of what it means to read in Japanese (Tabata-Sandom, 2015; 2017). L2 learners are reported to absorb the message given by their teachers: reading in Japanese

means to demonstrate their language knowledge through translating the text (Austin & Blum, 2009; Öjbro, 2016; Warnick, 2001).

This is quite different to how any L1 speakers read in their L1 in general, and how L1 Japanese speakers read (Warnick, 2001). L1 readers tend to engage in reading in a variety of ways to suit the variety of purposes for which they read (Day & Bamford, 2002; Rosenblatt, 2018; Warnick, 2001). These different ways, or stances, were described and defined in Rosenblatt's seminal 1978 work (Rosenblatt, 2018). According to Rosenblatt, a reader adopts different stances along the aesthetic-efferent continuum according to whether their purpose for reading is primarily sensory for enjoyment (an aesthetic stance) or primarily for the purpose of retaining information after the reading act (an efferent stance).

Research in L2 Japanese extensive reading does not currently appear to address whether L2 Japanese learners engage with and respond to texts in different ways according to their varied purposes for reading when they read extensively. Whilst there is evidence that extensive reading improves Japanese learners' attitudes and motivation towards reading in Japanese (Banno & Kuroe, 2016; Tabata-Sandom & Macalister, 2009; Tabata-Sandom, 2016; 2017), the extent to which extensive reading assists learner development of more natural reading responses and stances has yet to be established. The lack of evidence in this regard has motivated the writing of this paper. The data reported here are taken from a larger research project that explored the impact of ER on L2 Japanese learners as they read over one to two university semesters. To the researcher's knowledge, at the time the project was conducted, it was the first longitudinal, mixed-methods project involving multiple upper-beginner learners learning JFL. The project's approach, therefore, was to let participants have the freedom to read as they pleased, without many rules or instructions. This enabled one of the main aims of the project to be achieved: to observe what learners would truly do when given the opportunity to experience extensive reading in Japanese for the first time. Taking such a hands-off approach has enabled the collection of a unique dataset, in that, to the researcher's knowledge, this is the only JFL ER study to collect data that can demonstrate learners' varied reading stances, akin to L1 readers, on the aesthetic-efferent continuum.

Literature review

L2 Japanese reading

Japanese orthography has a strong impact on both the way reading is taught in the Japanese classroom and what L2 Japanese learners come to conceive of as a reading act in Japanese. Similar to Chinese languages, the time it takes to become proficient in reading Japanese is longer than for many other popular modern languages due to the large number of kanji characters that learners must memorise (Brockett, 2003). More than 2,000 kanji are designated as essential for daily life in Japan, the Jouyou character set, and must be learnt by both L1 and L2 learners in order to be considered literate (Tamaoka, 2014). The burden of memorisation for Japanese learners is made more difficult due to the variety of ways to pronounce (or "read") each character, with a high proportion of those characters having four or more ways to pronounce them, depending on the context and other characters they are combined with. Additionally, much of the time, nothing about a character's form suggests anything about how to pronounce it. For these reasons, L1 texts written for L1 learners of Japanese (children) usually include pronunciation guides (furigana or yomigana) above any kanji in the text.

Only advanced learners who have memorised most if not all the jouyou kanji are able to read Japanese texts freely, without support, due to the required kanji knowledge needed to assign a phonetic value to each character in order to read it. As Nara (2001) argues, L1 Japanese speakers' "reading of a kanji is consistently mediated by its phonological form before its meaning is retrieved" (p.264), that is, "the grapheme-sound connection is a prerequisite for comprehension" (p.264). Because of the need to know how to pronounce kanji in order to read Japanese texts, reading becomes perceived to be a function of how

many kanji a learner "knows", rather than their ability to integrate information in Japanese across sentences and paragraphs to derive meaning from the text (Austin & Blum, 2009; Everson & Kuriya, 1998; Kondo-Brown, 2006; Noda, 2003; Öjbro, 2016).

Additional to the burden of memorisation of the written forms of Japanese words, L2 Japanese language classrooms have a noted tendency to use grammar-translation teaching methods (Tabata-Sandom, 2015; 2020), as well as intensive reading of texts which are too difficult for learners to read without assistance from their instructor (Austin & Blum, 2009; Fukumoto, 2004; Tabata-Sandom, 2015; 2020). Because translation is "a primary teaching mode" in the L2 Japanese language classroom (Tabata-Sandom, 2020, p.48), learners come to conceive of "reading" as being a demonstration of their ability to decode texts word-by-word, line-by-line and correctly translate the literal propositional content of the text (Austin & Blum, 2009; Kumagai, 2007; Öjbro, 2016; Warnick, 2001). In the classroom, texts are treated uncritically "as sources of language data" (Kumagai, 2007, p.89), and the concept of reading for enjoyment is neglected in the Japanese curriculum (Tabata-Sandom, 2015). This leads to a tendency of students to believe that reading "should be for study and self-improvement only" (Abe, 2016, p.88).

Warnick (2001) compared the responses of L1 Japanese speakers and L2 Japanese learners when reading two newspaper articles written in Japanese. Warnick's study found that L1 Japanese adults make connections between what they read and their background knowledge and personal experiences, in marked contrast to his L2 Japanese reader participants. Warnick (2001) observed that "the JFL [Japanese as a foreign language] readers seemed to conceive of the task as simply an academic exercise to determine content. The JNS [Japanese native speaker] readers… respond personally to the content of the articles" (p. 159). Further, "if learners [sic] exposure to reading L2 texts is primarily a read-and-translate experience, it is no wonder they demonstrate the same behavior in other contexts" (2001, p.159). The reliance on translation in reading

activities in the Japanese classroom is still the norm in L2 Japanese teaching (Tabata-Sandom, 2020). This means that because translation is what learners are trained to do when engaging in a reading activity in Japanese, they learn that that is what it means to read in Japanese. Therefore, the style of instruction in Japanese language classrooms and the way texts are "read" has a significant impact on students' development of reading proficiency and their conception of the role of written texts in Japanese (Kumagai, 2007; Tabata-Sandom, 2015). If learners only experience "reading" in this way, they are unlikely to develop into fluent and independent readers who read and relate to texts as L1 Japanese readers do (Warnick, 2001). Overall, research suggests that L2 Japanese learners treat reading acts and Japanese texts as a kind of test of their kanji and language knowledge, rather than as an enjoyable experience they choose to do according to their own purposes.

A small amount of previous research has explored L2 Japanese reader reactions to experiencing extensive reading or graded reading materials, reporting mixed results. In one context, the experience of ER activities was reported to be motivating for learners, so much so that Richard Day observed that a number of students requested to change into the ER stream which was part of the project reported in Hitosugi and Day, 2004 (Tabata-Sandom, 2016). Banno and Kuroe (2016) also reported that participants felt more motivated, had better attitudes, and had less anxiety after reading extensively in Japanese for 15 weeks. Conversely, Tabata-Sandom and Macalister (2009) found that although their participant experienced a "eureka" moment and was able to read in Japanese for extended periods, kanji still provoked anxiety in her, despite her advanced language level. In a different study, Tabata-Sandom (2013) presented learners with simplified and unsimplified versions of two Japanese stories. She found that simplified materials caused negative responses in some learners, with one student in particular responding that "my Japanese is only good enough to read children's level" (p.273). Tabata-Sandom noted a differential response from learners whereby learners acknowledged the value of simplified texts

when the original was far above their reading level, but that graded readers were less valued when learners believed that they were able to understand enough of the unsimplified story. More recently, Peterson (2022) reported that learners overall enjoyed ER in Japanese and felt that they gained confidence as readers of Japanese, yet they still appeared to treat the reading event as a language study activity, rather than an activity in which they might do for non-language study-related purposes.

Very few studies report participant comments that directly respond to the texts the participant has read. Warnick (2001) reported responses made during a think-aloud procedure as L2 Japanese learners read two Japanese newspaper articles. He found that the 1658 comments L2 learners made when reading the articles fell into four categories: bottom-up, top-down, metacognitive, and socio-affective, the latter of which he defined as a "category [that] includes strategies that reflect a social response to the text and involve other people in the reading process or in the process of achieving comprehension" (p.142). That is, strategies L2 learners employ to demonstrate or ensure that they have successfully comprehended the text. Despite the focus on comprehension in this category, two comments that suggest a non-language study-related stance were reported, "[a] little bit heartwarming" (pp.154-155) and "I probably wouldn't be too interested in the titles of the songs, but because one of them, is, is Hiroshima Sky, it might just catch my interest as being some kind of, something about Japan" (p.155). Two more, non-language study-related samples were given in the appendix as examples of socio-affective strategies: "…because I'm a, a literature major…" and "when I walk around Japan, you see things that say… that kind of thing" (p.174). Overall, Warnick found that L2 Japanese learners focussed on demonstrating their comprehension of the text, rather than the feelings, memories, or connections to general knowledge that the L1 Japanese participants noted when reading.

Leung (2002), collected detailed diary reports of the researcher-participant's response to attempting ER in Japanese over 20 weeks. Given that Leung's stated goal was to learn Japanese through reading, it is unsurprising that her reported comments were concerned solely with language study and language learning outcomes. It is possible that she did make comments indicating non-language study-related focus when reading, but that those comments were not reported because they were beyond the scope of the paper. Tabata-Sandom and Macalister (2009) also shared some of the comments their participant made in reading logs which responded to the texts she read in Japanese over three months. A small number of comments were reported, but only one suggested a non-language study-related engagement from the participant: "Interesting! Even if it's a kid story, it tells me the difference between Western and Eastern cultures" (Tabata-Sandom & Macalister, 2009, p.49). As with Leung, it is possible there were more, but the ways in which the participant engaged with the texts were out of scope of the research. Hitosugi and Day (2004) observed that one participant was able to establish a better relationship by discussing children's books with her Japanese grandmother. However, it is not clear if this discussion was language-study related, or if it covered different things. Therefore, there appears to be a significant gap in the literature in terms of understanding the various ways in which L2 Japanese learners might engage with texts and the stances they adopt while reading extensively.

Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading

Rosenblatt's influential Transactional Theory of Reading, first detailed in 1978, acknowledges first that each reader brings with them a different "linguistic-experiential reservoir" to a reading event that helps them to interpret the text on the page (2018, p.456). This "linguistic-experiential reservoir reflects the reader's cultural, social, and personal history" (p.456). Different aspects of this reservoir of thoughts, feelings, and emotions evoked by reading a text may come to the reader's attention, or be given selective attention, according to the stance the reader has adopted in choosing to read that particular text. There are two stances existing on a continuum: at one end, the efferent

stance (so named because it involves the carrying away of something from the text, usually specific information), and at the other, the aesthetic one (so named because it primarily involves the senses).

The concept of reading as just being for language-related study purposes is related to Rosenblatt's efferent stance: L2 Japanese learners hope to take away with them a greater understanding of how language elements function in Japanese texts as a result of their reading activity. This is only one of many possible efferent stances, and Rosenblatt refers to several others: someone reading instructions about an antidote to a poison they have swallowed accidentally, or reading a legal brief or newspaper. Above all, the efferent stance is concerned with "the ideas, information, directions, or conclusions to be retained, used, or acted on after the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 2018, p.458).

At the other end of the continuum is the aesthetic stance. Here, a reader's attention is focussed "on what is being lived through during the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 2018, p.458). Readers experience "the sensations, images, feelings, and ideas that are the residue of past psychological events involving those words and their referents [used in the text]" (p.458). In this way, the "reader pays attention to—savors—the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth and participates in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions of the images, ideas, and scenes as they unfold" (p.458). In other words, an aesthetic stance involves feelings and senses evoked as a response both to the words on the page and to the reader's personal experience, both of their past and of the meaning of the words.

Rosenblatt further asserts that a reading event is never solely either aesthetic or efferent, rather that it may be "predominately aesthetic" or "predominately efferent" (2018, p.458). The reader's stance, therefore, may fall predominantly towards the aesthetic end or the efferent end of the continuum, or in the decidedly mixed middle reaches. That is, even when reading the newspaper for current events, a reader may savour a particularly well-written section, or perhaps be reminded of a treasured childhood memory. Similarly, a work of fiction may evoke a particular outlook on life that a reader may take with them and apply to their own life. Thus, a reader may move from one end of the continuum to the other and back again throughout the reading event: a reader is flexible according to their needs and experiences in the moment.

It may be unexpected to connect a theory more commonly associated with literature and L1 reading to the practice of extensive reading (ER) in a foreign language. Although foreign language reading research has tended to focus on whether learners comprehend what they read or whether they were interested in it, it is also important for research to address the extent to which learners are able to adopt different stances flexibly according to their purpose for reading. Part of the reason ER is gaining popularity is that it enables learners to experience reading as something other than just an activity for language-related study. Learners may then be able to engage with texts for a variety of different purposes unrelated to language study, such as reading for enjoyment or general information. Because they read a large number of texts, learners may begin to read texts written in the target language the way they would those in their L1. That is, instead of reading to study the L2, learners adopt different stances according to their different purposes for reading. Thus, the transaction between the reader and the text, and whether the reading event is for enjoyment (an aesthetic stance), for information (an efferent stance), or for another purpose altogether, is relevant to extensive reading.

Aesthetic and efferent stances and the principles of extensive reading

Rosenblatt's aesthetic-efferent continuum has clear parallels in several of Day and Bamford's (2002) top ten ER principles. In principle two, Day and Bamford state

> …the texts made available should ideally be as varied as the learners who read them and the purposes for which they want to read… Learners are led to read for different reasons (e.g., entertainment; information; passing the time) and, consequently, in different ways (e.g., skimming;

scanning; more careful reading). (p.137)

This clearly speaks to Rosenblatt's notion of readers adopting different stances along the continuum according to their purpose for reading. In principle three, Day and Bamford (2002) note that reading should be personal: "For students used to working with textbooks and teacher-selected texts, the freedom to choose reading material (and freedom to stop reading) may be a crucial step in experiencing foreign language reading as something personal" (p.137). That is, rather than reading a text set by an instructor, and being instructed in the meaning of the text, a learner's response to the text would be mediated by their specific purpose of reading and their personal linguistic-experiential reservoir. In principle five, Day and Bamford (2002) write: "in terms of reading outcomes, the focus shifts away from comprehension achieved or knowledge gained and towards the reader's personal experience" (p.138), which speaks to the development of aesthetic stances in readers, where the reader experiences "the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth" when engaged in a reading event (Rosenblatt, 2018, p.458). Rosenblatt's theory thus provides a frame for exploring the variety of ways that L2 Japanese learners might engage with texts while reading extensively.

In view of this, this paper seeks to answer the following research question: do L2 Japanese learners demonstrate non-language study-related stances along Rosenblatt's aesthetic-efferent continuum when reading extensively?

Methodology

Participants and context of learning

In order to explore the impact of ER on JFL learners, twelve students were recruited from a large New Zealand university, nine of whom chose to join the project as readers, who were asked to read for 10 minutes every day, including weekends. The other three participants joined as a semi-control, non-reading group. Of the nine readers, six participants gave sufficient detail in their reading logs to demonstrate different stances they engaged in as part of their extensive reading, and those stances are reported in this paper. Participants could choose to participate for one or two semesters (see Table 1 below). All participants were recruited from the second semester, second year Japanese courses. This meant that participants had either been studying Japanese for three semesters prior to volunteering for this project, or they had studied Japanese for three or more years at high school and matriculated directly into the first semester, second year Japanese course, which they had taken before enrolling in the second semester course. Although they had varied backgrounds, the level of the course is pitched at upper-beginners, and this is the level the participants were assessed as being at by their instructors.

Table 1 *Overview of participants*

	David	Harriet	Ann	Claire	Gareth	Emily
Reported L1	Korean	Chinese*	English/ Chinese	English	Chinese	English/ Chinese
Age at start of project	21	26	22	18	21	18
No. of years studying Japanese at start of project**	4.5	2	8	5	2	7
Length of participation in project (weeks)	13	12	27	13	13	27

*"Chinese" denotes both/either Cantonese and Mandarin
**Language classes are available to students in intermediate and secondary schools in New Zealand, which is why some participants reported long periods of formal study

The first two years (four semesters) of Japanese courses use the Genki textbook series: Genki: An integrated course in elementary Japanese, 2nd ed. (Banno, Ikeda, Ohno, Shinagawa, & Tokashiki, 2011). One chapter is covered every fortnight, and there is very little supplementary material used in courses. Genki has a small section with reading texts and comprehension questions at the back of the textbook, but the amount of material is less than two A4 pages in length per chapter. Thus, it can be said that participants did not do much reading as part of their language course.

Data collection and project procedure

Participants were recruited in the first week of the semester, and attended an information session where they were given a detailed explanation of the purpose and benefit of extensive reading. Extensive reading and Day and Bamford's Top Ten Principles (2002) were explained to participants in the reading group, and they also received an information sheet to remind them should they need it. The main instructions given to the readers were that they should read every day, and they should read books at their comprehension level which they did not need to translate into English or their L1 in order to understand as they read. It was explained to participants that if they felt the need to use a dictionary when reading, they were probably reading at too high a level, and should read at a lower level instead. In order to roughly estimate an appropriate starting level for reading, participants were asked to read two pages from a Level 2 graded reader and circle any words they did not know. The researcher would then suggest an appropriate starting level (either Level 0, 1, or 2) based on the number of unknown words. Because this was just an estimate, participants were told they could move up or down the reading levels as they felt necessary. Participants began reading extensively from the second week of the semester, and if they continued for the second semester of the project, they began reading from the first week of that semester.

A wide variety of data types were collected for the overarching project, including vocabulary and reading tests, questionnaires and reading logs. In-person interviews were not utilised due to time constraints on both the participants and the researcher. The data reported here are taken from the participants' reading logs, email exchanges, and an open-ended questionnaire completed at the end of the project's first semester to collect additional data on the library materials and participants' opinions of them. This data provided enough information to identify a variety of non-language study-related reading stances adopted by six of the participants.

In the reading logs, participants were asked to record the date, the title of the book, the number of pages they read, how many minutes they read for, and the level of the book they read for each reading session on a reading log template provided to them (see Appendix 1 for the template). Reading logs were emailed to the researcher at the end of each week. Participants' reading sessions were not observed by the researcher, in order to explore what students might do if given complete autonomy over their ER activities. Instead, the amount of time participants spent reading in each session and the number of pages or texts they read during that time was used as a rough proxy to determine whether they were reading in a manner that was in line with the aims of extensive reading, or whether they had reverted to a much slower, more time-consuming manner of reading more akin to intensive reading. Because the lower level graded readers and children's books usually do not have much text, participants tended to read more than one book during each ten-minute session, until they got to higher book levels. Some use of email was made to clarify anything interesting observed in the reading logs, or to ensure that participants were able to find enough interesting material at their comprehension level. Participants were told that if they had any particular comment to make about their reading experience, they could note it in the comment box on their reading log, but they were told they did not have to. There were no prompts given for comments, so as not to prejudice what participants might decide was important enough (if anything) about their reading experience to record. In the main, the project was focussed on ensuring that participants would experience, and make meaning of the

experience, of extensive reading for themselves, without being influenced by the researcher's expectations based on the current literature for L2 reading, extensive reading, and reading in Japanese.

Reading materials

Although the situation has improved in the last few years, when this project was conducted there was far less graded reading material available for Japanese learners. At that time, the researcher was aware of three sets of graded readers produced for L2 learners of Japanese: NPO Tadoku [extensive reading] Supporters (hereafter, NPOTS), Let's Read Japanese (LRJ), and the Sendai International Japanese School (SIJS). The NPOTS group have been the most prolific publishers of graded material, and had published about 130 readers by the start of the project, with more having been released since then. The LRJ series had published only three books at the time of the project, and the SIJS group had published just nine graded readers over three levels. That means participants had about 140 graded readers for L2 learners to choose from, plus a supplement of about 230 children's books and 117 graded books for L1 Japanese children. These supplementary materials were not finely graded, but an adapted version of Hitosugi and Day (2004)'s rubric was used to integrate them into the reading system, as shown in Table 2 below.

In the adapted rubric, the NPOTS vocabulary and Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) level notation was taken as the baseline. For children's books

Table 2*: Overview of reading materials available to participants*

Reading Level:	Target vocabulary level	Approximate JLPT level	L2 GRs			L1 GRs	Children's books
			NPOTS	LRJ	SIJS		
Level 0	350 words		Level 0 'Starter' (n=27)				(n=21)
Level 1	350	JLPT N5	Level 1 'Beginner' (n=25)				(n=50)
Level 2	500	JLPT N4	Level 2 'Upper Beginner' (n=28)	Novice (n=1)	Beginner (n=3)		(n=56)
Level 3	800	JLPT N3	Level 3 'Lower Intermediate' (n=24)	Intermediate (n=2)	Beginner-Intermediate (n=3)		(n=62)
Level 4	1300/ND*	JLPT N3/N2	Level 4 'Intermediate' (n=25)		Intermediate (n=3)	Elementary school year 1 (n=15)	(n=49)
Level 5	2000/ND	JLPT N2	Level 5 'Upper Intermediate' (n=2)			Elementary school year 2 (n=37)	(n=23)
Level 6	ND					Elementary school year 3 (n=25)	(n=0)
Level 7	ND					Elementary school year 4 (n=19)	(n=6)
Level 8	ND					Elementary school year 5 (n=12)	(n=6)
Level 9	ND					Elementary school year 6 (n=9)	(n=8)
Total			131	3	9	117	232

and other materials where the vocabulary or intended JLPT level was not stated, in line with Hitosugi and Day, a book's length and kanji would be taken into account. If a book was long, or had many kanji without furigana, it would be entered into a higher level, even if its vocabulary or grammar were relatively simple. For the L1 graded readers, the difficulty of the grammar was the primary concern as the books are generally controlled for kanji and age-appropriate vocabulary, even though this is not without issue for JFL learners (Rothville, 2022). A comparison of grammar structures appearing in the lowest level of the L1 graded readers and those listed at each level of the NPOTS books was made, and it was determined that grammar in the L1 books was similar to Level 4 of the NPOTS scheme. As well as the physical books, participants were shown two websites publishing articles in simplified Japanese that they might find interesting and potentially within their comprehension level: NHK News Easy and Matcha Japanese Tourism Magazine (easy Japanese version). These two websites were estimated to be around Level 3 of the graded reading system.

Findings

Amount of reading

The amount of material read and the difficulty level of the materials read varied widely across the six participants, but some of the variation in reading amounts can be explained by the participants' length of participation (see Table 3). David read for the least amount of time overall, yet on a per-week basis, he was not dissimilar to Ann or Emily, who read for more than double the number of minutes and hours as him over the course of their participation in the project. Harriet stood out from the rest of the group, as she read for more than two hours a week on average and continued to read into the summer holiday, despite joining the project about three weeks later than the rest of the participants.

In terms of the number of books or articles read, Claire and Ann were outliers in this respect, but the high number can be explained by the material type. Claire read low level children's books and NHK news articles, the latter of which are extremely short, often only two or three hundred characters (120-180 standard Japanese words) per article, enabling her to read three or four per 10-minute session. The length of Japanese text is measured by the number of 文字 [moji] or characters in it. A moji can be a hiragana or katakana syllabic 'letter' or a kanji ideograph, and Japanese words are on average 1.66 characters in length (Peterson, 2022). Ann read a high number of children's books, which tend to have a low character count. The two participants who read the lowest number of books or articles did so because they were reading at a higher level, where the texts are longer. Although Emily also read digital articles, she read from Matcha Japanese Tourism Magazine (easy Japanese version), whose articles are usually three or four times the length of NHK's.

Table 3 Overview of participants' reading amount and level

	David	Harriet	Ann	Claire	Gareth	Emily
Reported L1	Korean	Chinese*	English/ Chinese	English	Chinese	English/ Chinese
Project participation (weeks)	13	12	27	13	13	27
Cumulative reading time	14 hours (830 minutes)	26 hours (1580 minutes)	37 hours (2205 minutes)	17 hours (1015 minutes)	21 hours (1240 minutes)	30 hours (1805 minutes)
Average per week (hours)	1.1	2.2	1.4	1.3	1.6	1.1
No. of books read	53	65	148	65	35	22
No. of digital articles read	-	-	-	93	-	31
Level of materials read	0-3	0-4	0-4	2-3	3-5	2-7

"Chinese" denotes both/either Cantonese and Mandarin

Aesthetic and non-language study-related efferent stances

Rosenblatt identified a range of types of aesthetic and efferent engagement with texts, and some of these are demonstrated in the comments participants made in their reading logs or other collected data. Previous research exploring learner responses to reading in Japanese indicated that learners struggled to engage with texts outside of a language study-related stance, so participants' reading logs and email comments submitted for this project were analysed with regard to whether different reading stances appeared to be present.

Aesthetic engagement of learners with texts

When adopting an aesthetic reading stance, the reader is primarily engaged in paying attention to the feelings and emotions evoked from the words in the text (Rosenblatt, 2018). This aspect of L2 Japanese learner response to reading appears to have been neglected in the literature so far. However, here, a variety of aesthetic responses from learners to the texts they read were found to be present in the comments made by participants.

One aesthetic stance that often appeared was an emotional engagement with stories. Usually, positive emotional comments were reported, such as "I just can't help smiling when reading it" (Harriet, reading log, 1st September), or "somehow I was laughing a lot in this story" (Ann, reading log, 12th August). At the same time, there were also more complex responses from participants, for example, "Oh, I mean it's sad, but the ending was so beautiful" (Gareth, email, 5th August). Participants also made comments suggesting they experienced empathy for the characters in the stories: "The grandfather was really kind and he deserves it" (David, reading log, 29th August), "I was moved when I saw ソーピー wants to start over and be a good man" (Harriet, reading log, 13th September), or "I felt like the treatment of the Grim Reaper was unfair" (Emily, reading log, 31st July).

Rosenblatt (2018) also notes that readers "[participate] in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions" (p.458) of the texts as they read,

and this can be seen as participants reported on whether stories turned out as they expected. Although this kind of engagement with the content of the story has an efferent element, the combination with participants reporting their emotions about what happened leads them to be included in this section detailing aesthetic stances. For example, Ann wrote, "I thought everything was going to be fine with [sic] after the 42 days, but it turns out not to be the case!" (reading log, 21st March), "I thought the story was going to be a romance at first. It was scary" (David, reading log, 8th August), or "I can feel the tense [sic] in this story now! Unsure what will happen next, but I'm looking forward to continuing reading on!!" (Ann, reading log, 11th May).

The events and scenes the participants experienced in the texts also called forth memories from their own lives, particularly their childhoods, given the volume of children's stories participants read. For example, Claire recalled reading the same book as a child: "I'm pretty sure I read Titch when I was a kid, kinda exciting…" (reading log, 15th August), while Ann was put in mind of her experiences watching her favourite movie growing up:

> I think because I grew up watching this over and over again, it was and still is one of my favourite movies (despite the sad parts that do happen!); I am enjoying this read even though I don't understand all the small details of what's happening!! (reading log, 17th May)

David movingly described re-experiencing enjoying reading again, having not done so since he was a child: "I felt like I went back to a kid. I used to like reading books when I was young and it gave me the feeling back that I forgot ages ago" (reading log, 20th October).

Rosenblatt explains that when adopting the aesthetic stance, the reader "savors" the text, and such engagement was clearly seen from one participant: "I so love this one and took more time to feel the things hidden behind words" (Harriet, reading log, 2nd October). It could also be said that being so engrossed in a text as to forget about time is an aesthetic stance, even though such a state

is not specifically referred to by Rosenblatt, as the reader fully immerses themselves in experiencing what is being "lived through during the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 2018, p.458). After slightly over one semester of reading, Ann reported experiencing this, noting, "Really enjoying it so far (that's why I went over time without realizing!)" (reading log, 14th March) and "Also got carried away reading for a little too long today haha!" (reading log, 8th April).

Efferent engagement of learners with texts

An efferent reading stance is characterised by the reader's focus on "what is to be… retained after the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 2018, p.458). Previous research has demonstrated that for Japanese learners, reading is primarily an efferent activity in which readers are concerned with using the text as a language study exercise. That is, what is to be retained primarily concerns language data or information about how language is used. Although language-related study was a stance that commonly appeared in the reading logs and emails of certain learners (Emily, Gareth, Harriet, and Ann), it was not the only efferent stance they adopted. Even when reading logs showed them engaging efferently for language-related study, Ann and Harriet also displayed aesthetic engagement; that is, they engaged efferently and aesthetically within the same reading act.

A common efferent stance that was noted in participants' reading logs was participants gaining new knowledge about some aspect of the world through their reading. Some of the graded readers contained recipes or details about how Japanese products are made. David noted that he had learnt "how to make tofu and soy sauce" (reading log, 28th August), while Ann appreciated learning how to make sushi, stating, "I learnt a lot from this one, particularly the instructions on how to make sushi" (reading log, 2nd August). Other comments also reflected participants learning about things for the first time, or realising what they did not know they did not know. Claire reported, "Woah, this book is interesting. It's so satisfying learning about things for the first time in Japanese. New fav" on reading a book about

Japanese sweets (reading log, 2nd September). David found out about the diets of monkeys: "I didn't know monkeys could eat fish. I always thought they just eat fruits like banana" (reading log, 19th August). As well as this, participants sometimes noted learning vital information, such as how to survive an earthquake: "I learned many ways to describe how strong the earthquake is, and how to improve survival chance" (Harriet, reading log, 4th January).

There was also an efferent stance adopted when participants noted learning about Japanese culture. There were many comments about this kind of experience, which is likely to be the result of many of the graded readers and 'easy' reading materials produced that focus on Japanese culture, cuisine, history, and myths and folktales. For example, David wrote that "It was good to know some festivals and traditions of Japan" (reading log, 21st August), Harriet observed that "It's interesting to know how to take bath in Japan" (reading log, 8th September), and Emily noted it was "Interesting reading about all the desserts with Sakura in them" (7th August). David also explained that he was able to find the answer to a previous question he had about the beckoning cats: "I was wondering what's the meaning behind the neko when I was in Japan but forgot to search it. Now I know" (reading log, 7th October). As well as connecting information to past experiences, participants also reported choosing reading materials based on their future needs. For example, Ann wrote: "Didn't know what this book was going to be about, but thought it would help me understand Tokyo a bit since I'll be going there for the first time soon!" (reading log, 27th May).

Another important moment in which a participant was able to connect what they read to questions or gaps in their real-life knowledge was demonstrated when Ann was able to understand more about her mother's religious beliefs, which she explained she had not been able to really grasp before. This illustrative episode shows how the mismatch between her initial assumptions about what she was reading and her background knowledge led her to research the topic a bit more, and then to connect the story, her research, and her mother's beliefs together:

観音様（かんおんさま）＝ Buddhist Deity of Compassion/Mercy. Knew this, as I've come across it before from my mum... I think I would have just referred to it as some Buddhist figure, but I also remember coming across Buddha as 仏像（ぶつぞう）in a previous book I read recently, so I thought I'd dig into it a little more, and found that it's really 'Buddhist Deity of Compassion/Mercy'. Both isn't too new to me I guess, since I've heard of these from my mum (although I never really understood what they meant or were haha!) and a friend, but what really got me into searching deeper what 観音様 was when I first Google searched it, and it came up with ''Mr. Kan'on'' or "Avalokiteśvara", which got me really curious, as I was pretty confident with what I know this is of, and the Google images (as well as the illustration from the book) returned back what I knew it is... but searching up the meaning didn't! ~ it's really interesting haha! But I finally found out it was Buddhist Deity of Compassion/Mercy though! :) Hopefully now I'll also understand a bit more about Japanese culture/beliefs, as well as my mum! :P (Ann, reading log, 29th September)

Claire's efferent stance stood out from the other participants. She had a regular habit of reading an international English-language newspaper, and transferred this to reading the news articles published on the easy Japanese version of the NHK news website. A comment from the post-project questionnaire summed up her method:

"NHK [easy] was the website I used most, I think I want to make it a habit now until I can read the actual news! This was probably my favourite reading material as (perhaps due to the association of news with adults and sophisticated language) I felt rather accomplished after finishing a news article. I also liked being able to go to my regular news site, the Guardian, afterwards and feel nifty about already knowing what was happening in the world, then being able to expand on it with a more sophisticated English text. The context and real life knowledge I already have on the news also helped make it easier to guess some of the words I didn't fully understand the meaning of. Also I keep hitting the paywall on Japantimes.com, so this is a nice way to keep up with stuff in Japan." (Claire, questionnaire, 18th October).

This demonstrates that she would connect the content of the news stories she read on NHK News Easy to the ones she would read more in depth in her usual newspaper, as well as bringing knowledge from her regular reading to her Japanese reading act. This two-way transfer of knowledge also enabled her to navigate any unfamiliar words or phrases in Japanese. Furthermore, she saw it as a means to follow current events in Japan, enabling her to develop her connection to the country on a regular basis. A mix of aesthetic and efferent stances can also be seen as it also shows how Claire's sense of accomplishment at having read a text type she associated with adults led her to feel a sense of sophistication, that is, an aesthetic response, despite the efferent context of her engagement in the main, that speaks to a sense of enjoyment of the material, and an enjoyment of her experience of her reading events.

Previous research (Kumagai, 2007; Öjbro, 2016; Warnick, 2001) indicated that when L2 Japanese learners are asked to read, they focus on their comprehension of the propositional content of the text, with little to no reference to any connections to themselves as readers, their memories and inner lives, or their knowledge of the world around them. In a typical Japanese classroom reading activity, texts are used as "language data… and to practice oral decoding" (Kumagai, 2007, p.89), and "students' comprehension is considered to be achieved when their answers match the instructor's

understanding of the text" (Kumagai, 2007, p.89). Other research has also suggested that L2 Japanese readers feel the need to translate in order to demonstrate their complete comprehension of the text: that is, an ability to translate the text fully is a sufficient proxy for 'reading' (Austin and Blum, 2009; Tabata-Sandom, 2017; Öjbro, 2016). These ways of "reading" are very different to how L1 Japanese speakers read a text (Warnick, 2001). However, in contrast to the findings of previous research, this small cohort of readers did display a variety of aesthetic-related stances, as can be seen from the comments made. This was mirrored, too, in the range of efferent stances participants adopted, which were unrelated to language study.

Pedagogical implications

This small study demonstrates that L2 Japanese readers can adopt different stances other than reading solely for language-related study. This suggests that ER may have an essential role to play in Japanese language study as an activity that allows learners to experience reading for their own purposes and for a variety of reasons. In doing so, learners are able to engage with texts in the same ways they do with texts written in their L1.

For teachers looking to implement ER or autonomous reading activities in their courses in some way, it would appear that it is important to have a wide variety of books and other materials available that can meet learners' individual interests and needs. This may contribute to learners developing different stances. This may be because having different kinds of material available in and of itself contributes to learners reading for a variety of purposes since a text about the history of Tokyo naturally lends itself to being read in a different way, for a different purpose, compared to a text which is a fictional story of a mouse.

Additionally, the development of learner reading autonomy may contribute to the development of various non-language study-related stances. Each reading event occurred because of a participant's self-defined purpose and choices, and participants had full control over when, where, what, why,

and how to engage in reading in Japanese in this project. Japanese teachers should consider including autonomous and independent reading activities in some way in their courses for this reason.

Limitations and conclusion

As a small, exploratory project, there are limitations to the research findings. Firstly, these participants were volunteers and thus may not be representative of the general learner population. Other L2 Japanese learners may be more or less fixed in the idea that reading in Japanese is for language study only and not for their own enjoyment or other purposes. Secondly, the small sample size means the findings may not be generalisable to other contexts.

Despite these limitations, this study makes a unique and novel contribution to this field, which nevertheless suggests some particularly interesting directions for future research. This study only reported participants' non-language study-related comments, however there were many cases where participants' comments indicated language study-related stances. Because this was introduced alongside their Japanese course, and recruitment occurred from the course, it is highly probable that learners were influenced by these factors to be cognisant throughout the project of the language learning impact of ER. The interaction between these stances (language study and non-language study) was out of scope for the present study, which sought instead to confirm that L2 Japanese learners engaging in ER can experience reading for enjoyment and non-language study purposes in the manner of L1 readers, as this appears to be a significant finding for the field of L2 Japanese ER. However, future research should seek to understand the interplay of language study-related stances and non-language study-related stances so that learners' experiences of reading in Japanese may be enhanced.

It must be noted that the research context and methodology employed here was significantly different to previous studies, and this may have influenced the appearance of this wide variety of demonstrated reading stances. Participants were given a high level

of freedom and, in essence, the only monitoring of their reading was when the researcher briefly looked at their reading logs which were emailed at the end of each week. Participants did not receive instruction on what to write in the comment section of the reading log, only that they could fill it in if there was anything they thought was important. Thus, the participants operated with a high degree of autonomy over how they would read and why, and what they might report about that reading experience. To the researcher's knowledge, this is the only JFL ER study to collect data that has demonstrated learners' reading stances, and further research examining these phenomena is necessary. Future research that seeks to ascertain whether non-language study-related stances are adopted by learners in different contexts of learning and reading in Japanese would thus be very beneficial. Additionally, research is needed to understand if such stances only occur when the learner operates under a significant degree of autonomy in their reading choices, or if such stances occur in more controlled reading settings.

It is clear from the comments made that participants did indeed engage with the texts they read in non-language study-related ways. Yet, whether this was because the research was conducted in a hands-off manner which allowed participants to explore reading in Japanese on their own terms, in their own way, or whether this is truly a feature of ER is yet to be established. Ideally, future studies would be able to confirm which interpretation is correct. Even so, this small project suggests that it is possible for learners who read extensively alongside their formal language study to engage with texts in meaningful ways, similar to reading in the L1, rather than seeing texts simply as objects for language study. In that regard, this study is relevant more broadly to the field of L2 extensive reading as a whole, as it suggests the possibility that one of the aims of ER may be met: that learners "read for the same kinds of reasons and in the same ways as the general population of first-language readers" (Day and Bamford, 2002, p.138), as described by Rosenblatt so many years ago.

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Appendix: Reading log template

Reading Log   Name: _____

Date	Title	Level	Pages Read	Minutes Read	Comment