
# L2 Japanese Reading Fluency and Motivation Enhancement: Effects of Speed Reading and Extensive Reading

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The orthographic system of Japanese is unique in using two types of syllabaries and logographs, which renders mastering reading in Japanese difficult, in particular to learners from alphabetical language backgrounds. This difficulty is exacerbated when learners of Japanese proceed to advanced-levels and begin to read demanding expository and academic texts. This study examines fluency development in reading instruction targeting advanced-learners of Japanese who learned to read expository texts in genres such as history and economics. Specifically, it investigates the effects of speed reading and extensive reading as fluency development instructional practices. Quantitative analyses show that the practice of speed reading significantly increased participants' reading rates for both specially prepared and authentic expository texts. Qualitative analyses demonstrate that the practice of extensive reading dramatically revitalized the participants' previously dwindling motivation to read in Japanese.

"Fluency, and especially automaticity," according to Grabe (2009), "allows readers to attend to the meaning of the text, the textual context, and required background knowledge without being slowed down by attentional word-recognition demands" (p. 291). Fluency development is now viewed as one of the most important aspects of second or foreign language (L2) reading instruction (Grabe, 2009; Nation, 2009). There are four components of reading fluency: automaticity, accuracy, reading rate, and prosodic structuring (Grabe, 2009). All of these components are acquired incrementally through practice. Therefore, L2 reading instruction must encompass fluency instruction as a core element to provide learners with enough practice to develop these four components.

In the context of L2 English pedagogy, studies have examined the effects of particular fluency practices—specifically, extensive reading (ER), speed reading (SR) and repeated reading on learners' development of reading fluency. ER in which learners read large quantities of easy texts for meaning plays a pivotal role in fluency instruction. Graded readers (GRs), which are lexically and syntactically graded, are used in ER. Learners can effortlessly read GRs at the appropriate level for meaning, because they will not encounter lexical or syntactic items that they would find difficult and that therefore would demand their conscious attention. Studies of ER have proved that it can increase learners' reading rates, vocabulary knowledge, text comprehension, general L2 skills, and motivation to read in the L2 (e.g. Al-Homoud & Schmitt, 2009; Beglar & Hunt, 2014; Iwahori, 2008;

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Takase & Otsuki, 2012). Research on SR is in its infancy. Yet SR is a core fluency instruction approach that develops automaticity of lower-level processes and text comprehension. A series of studies have looked at SR (e.g. Chang, 2010; Chung & Nation, 2006; Macalister, 2010; Tran, 2012), which uses specially created SR materials to increase learners' reading speed, and have indicated that the effects of SR training transfers to the reading of authentic L2 texts (e.g. Macalister, 2010; Tran, 2012). Repeated reading has also been proved to enhance learners' reading rate and text comprehension (e.g. Han & Chen, 2010; Haupt, 2015; Taguchi, Gorsuch, Takayasu-Maass, & Snipp, 2012).

This active stream of L2 English fluency research contrasts with the limited research on L2 Japanese reading fluency. Although an increasing number of studies have focused on ER in Japanese (e.g. Banno & Kuroe, 2016; Hitosugi & Day, 2004; Nakano, 2016; Tabata-Sandom & Macalister, 2009), very few have explored repeated reading or SR in Japanese. Important exceptions are Fujita's (2012) study on repeated reading, and Nishigoori's (1992) and Tabata-Sandom's (2017) studies on speed reading. More research that examines the effects of fluency practices in L2 Japanese is needed.

Hence, the current study aims to answer the following three questions in order to examine the efficacy of ER and SR for L2 Japanese learners' reading fluency when they read expository texts:

> 1. Do learners' reading rates with specially prepared expository texts increase because of ER and/or SR treatments? If so, do such gains transfer to their reading of authentic expository texts?
>
> 2. Are there differences in gains of reading rates and text comprehension between participants who engage in ER and participants who engage in SR?
>
> 3. Are there changes in the participants' L2 Japanese reading motivation?

Studies that have shown ER's beneficial effects usually employ narrative texts (Savaş, 2009) and examine the impact of the approach on 'reading for pleasure' given by narrative texts. This study is unique in that it specifically examines whether or not ER has beneficial effects on L2 Japanese learners' 'reading for learning' when they read expository texts.

## The Study

### *Participants*

The participants were university-level L2 Japanese learners enrolled in two courses, one using ER and the other using SR. The two courses were 15 weeks long. There were three 50-minute lessons (the ER class) and two 75-minute lessons (the SR class) weekly. The objective of both courses was to practice reading expository texts in genres such as history and economics. The data analyzed for this paper were collected from:

- eleven students from the SR class (i.e., the SR Group)
- six students from the ER class (i.e., the ER Group)
- eighteen students from both classes who completed a questionnaire survey.

There was no significant difference between the SR Group and the ER Group in the participants' initial vocabulary size measured by Matsushita's (2012) Vocabulary Size

Test, U = 30.5, p = .80, which implies that the two groups were equal in terms of vocabulary knowledge.

***Procedures and instruments***

Reflecting the results of the initial Vocabulary Size Test (Matsushita, 2012), all the materials were written using only the first 4000 vocabulary items in the base vocabulary list of the Vocabulary Size Test so that the lexis in the texts would be fairly easy for the participants.

Both groups first participated in two sessions: an initial reading of an authentic text and an initial reading of a specially prepared text (hereafter, the pre-reading). They also participated in two sessions at the end of the courses: a final reading of an authentic text and a final reading of a specially prepared text (hereafter, the post-reading).

Participants' reading rate (words per minute) and scores on 10 multiple-choice comprehension questions were obtained from the readings of the two specially prepared texts.

The two authentic texts were from a book written by a psychiatrist. The vocabulary difficulty of the two authentic texts was the same when assessed by an online reading support system called Reading Tutor's Tutorial Tool Box (Kawamura, Kitamura, & Hobara, 1997). The participants read the text for 150 seconds and then completed a written recall task. The following data was obtained from the readings of the two authentic texts:

- reading rate: words read per minute
- written recall scores: a proportion of correctly recalled items against all items.

Fifteen texts were created for the SR sessions; they had the same format as the specially prepared texts used in the pre- and post-readings. The 15 speed reading texts' coverage by the first 4000 words was more than 95%. Each text had between 445 and 455 words, and it was accompanied by 10 four-option multiple-choice questions. As for grammar control, the Learning Item Analysis System (Student Center at the University of Tsukuba, 2012) was used to ensure that no advanced-level grammar items were used in the texts.

Each SR session was conducted as follows:

- The text was printed on one side of an A4 sheet, and 10 four-option multiple-choice questions were printed on the other side.
- The learners were told that they would not be allowed to refer back to the text when answering the multiple-choice questions.
- They were told to aim to get the gist of the text's meaning.
- When they were done reading, they recorded their reading time. An online stopwatch was projected on the whiteboard to show them the time.
- Then they answered 10 four-option multiple-choice questions.

The whole session was always completed within 10 minutes. The researcher conducted SR sessions at least every second class. Only the data of participants who took part in 11 to 15 SR sessions was used for the analyses.

For the ER Group, numerous graded materials were constructed. The lexical and grammatical control was conducted in the

same manner as that employed when SR materials were constructed. The researcher conducted ER sessions at least twice a week, with one session being around 15 minutes.

At the end of the semester, a questionnaire survey was administered in both courses to obtain the participants' responses to the approaches they experienced. Two questionnaires were prepared, one for each group. Some items appeared on both questionnaires, while other items appeared only on the questionnaire for either the ER or SR group.

## Results

### *Changes of the participants' reading rates (Research question 1) – SR Group*

A Wilcoxon Signed-ranks test indicated that the SR Group (N = 11) showed a statistically significant reading rate increase from the pre-reading to the post-reading of the specially prepared texts, $Z = 2.14$, $p < .033$. This statistically significant gain transferred to their reading of the authentic texts, $Z = 2.60$, $p < .009$. The participants' reading rates for the specially prepared texts ranged from 87 to 193 words per minute (pre-reading) and from 117 to 245 words per minute (post-reading). Those for the authentic texts ranged from 73 to 181 words per minute (pre-reading) and from 100 to 263 words per minute (post-reading).

All the participants of the SR Group scored more than 70% on the 10 four-option multiple-choice questions accompanying the two specially prepared texts. A 70% score is viewed as satisfactory text comprehension by Anderson (2008). The SR Group's written recall from the pre-reading to the post-reading of the authentic texts increased significantly, $Z = 2.8$, $p < .005$ (from 32.13% [the pre-reading average] to 54.24% [the post-reading average]).

### *Changes of the participants' reading rates (Research question 1) – ER Group*

The ER Group's (N = 6) reading rate slightly decreased from the pre-reading to the post-reading of the specially prepared texts. The average of their reading rate of the pre-reading of the specially prepared text was 128.2 words per minute, whereas that of the post-reading was 127.2 words per minute. This group's reading rate gain of the authentic texts did not show a significant increase either, $Z = 1.6$, $p = 1.2$. The participants' reading rates for the authentic texts ranged from 68 to 145 words per minute (pre-reading) and from 96 to 185 words per minute (post-reading).

The ER Group's comprehension scores of the specially prepared texts did not change between the pre-reading (M = 97%) and the post-reading (M = 92%), whereas their written recall of the authentic texts increased significantly, $Z = 2.0$, $p < .04$ (from 40.81% [the pre-reading's average] to 69.23% [the post-reading' average]).

### *Differences between the ER Group and the SR Group (Research question 2)*

Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to compare the following scores of the post-reading between the ER Group and the SR Group:

- reading rate for the specially prepared text
- reading rate for the authentic text
- scores of 10 four-option multiple-choice comprehension questions accompanying the specially prepared text
- written recall scores of the authentic text.

There was only one significant difference between the two groups in their post-reading, which was in scores of the 10 comprehension questions accompanying the specially prepared text. The highest possible score was 10. In this category, the ER Group (M = 9.2) outperformed the SR Group (M = 8.2) significantly, U = 12.5, p = .047. Although the reading rate of the SR Group was faster, there was no statistical significance between the mean reading rates for the post-reading of the specially prepared text between the two groups: U = 17, p = .1.55.

***Qualitative analyses of a questionnaire survey (Research question 3) – the SR Group's responses***

Twelve students of the SR course returned the questionnaire survey. The respondents all welcomed SR. The following are example comments:

> *I've never done SR before, and it forces me to read with a good pace. (Kim)*

> *I needed something to force me to read at a 'normal' pace, and this skill will surely help me in the future. (Cecil)*

The participant who had the largest vocabulary in the SR Group (13,400 words), Taylor, expressed the clearest understanding of the value of SR:

> *I really liked to do 'SR training' because it taught me a new strategy for reading Japanese. In the past, I thought that reading speed does not affect the reading skills, but now I learned that I have to increase my reading speeds.*

All but two respondents answered in the affirmative to a question, "Are you convinced reading instruction such as speed reading is necessary? If so, why?" The following are examples of positive responses:

> *Speed reading builds comprehension. (Wayne)*

> *I would continue to read quite slowly if I was not pushed to do otherwise, and I feel a need to challenge myself. (Cecil)*

Two negative answers are as follows:

> *It encourages some students to avoid reading between the lines. Understanding of the texts sometimes shallow. (Connor)*

> *…not necessarily a requirement but using speed reading can be effective... (Ken)*

***Qualitative analyses of a questionnaire survey (Research question 3) – the ER Group's responses***

All six participants who experienced ER welcomed this novel instructional practice. To a question, "To what degree did you find ER encouraging/facilitative?" four out of six respondents answered "very." The tendency of the participants to welcome ER by comparing its efficacy to that of translation, the only approach to which they had been exposed for long, is clearly represented by the following response:

> *I think ER is the most encouraging method, because it increased my interest in reading Japanese texts. In my previous classes, I often felt frustrated when we were tested on how well we understood the text, and sometimes, I had difficulty in translating the content of texts precisely, and I lost motivation to read Japanese texts. (Lisa)*

While their reading rate for the authentic texts only showed a marginal increase, and their reading rate for the specially prepared texts slightly decreased from the

pre-reading to the post-reading, half of the participants in the ER Group felt that they could read Japanese texts with a better rhythm at the end of the semester. They commented as follows:

> *Before this course I always read texts, stopping at each kanji (Japanese logographs) and word I didn't know. This made my reading very slow and no rhythm. This is the first class that rhythm has been a factor and although I am still slow, I definitely feel like I have improved drastically from before this course. (Amy)*

> *I think the emphasis on a mental map of an article's meaning rather than meticulous translation helped improve my rhythm. (Steve)*

This study demonstrated a strong impact of ER on L2 Japanese learners' motivation to read. Among all the participants, Amy seems to have experienced the strongest positive influence from ER:

> *I think at the beginning of the course my opinion was actually that I 'disagree' that I like reading Japanese. After taking this course though, and realizing that it's okay to read texts that are at my level and about topics that I found interesting, I can 'agree' that I now enjoy reading Japanese.*

Rebecca also lamented,

> *I wish that I could've been exposed to ER earlier on because I feel that it would've helped me a lot.*

### *Qualitative analyses of both questionnaire surveys (Research question 3)*

At the end of both questionnaires, the participants were asked whether or not they would use SR or ER in the future. All but one participant in the SR Group (Connor) answered in the affirmative.

> *I tend to want to read carefully to understand all the content. (Connor)*

The following is an example of the affirmative answers:

> *[I will continue using ER] because I have 'seen the light,' so to speak. It is an incredibly beneficial exercise, so I will continue to use it to improve my Japanese. (Andrew)*

## Discussion

While quantity of text read in this study may have been less than some other ER studies, Waring and McLean (2015) stated "whether the subjects are reading extensively or not, is a matter of how text is processed" (p. 162). I assert that ER practiced in this study created this "indispensable core attribute" (ibid., p. 162): it enabled the participants to fluently comprehend the text for meaning.

Due to the small sample size, the findings obtained from the current study are indicative but not conclusive. Also, the researcher was unable to secure a control group because this study was conducted within the framework of an actual university's curriculum. Without a control group, it cannot be said that positive gains were created solely by either the SR or ER practices in this study. Nevertheless, the findings may shed light on some unexplored areas of L2 reading pedagogy.

First, the current study demonstrated that SR significantly enhanced the participants' reading rates for specially prepared and authentic expository texts. Furthermore, the SR Group's written recall scores showed a statistically significant increase. These findings imply that SR can be an effective

instructional practice for advanced L2 Japanese learners' reading fluency development when they need to read expository texts.

In contrast, the ER Group's reading rates for the authentic texts increased only marginally, and their reading rate slightly decreased from the pre-reading to the post-reading of the specially prepared texts. Tabata-Sandom and Macalister (2009) reported that their participant, an advanced L2 Japanese learner, significantly increased her reading rate when she read narrative texts extensively for three months. L2 readers cannot change their reading processes according to text types as efficiently as native readers can (Horiba 2000). More studies are needed to determine the effects of ER in terms of fluency development for advanced L2 Japanese learners' expository reading.

Next, the participants' motivation was enhanced by these two fluency approaches, especially by ER. This finding is even more significant when we consider that it came from advanced learners who seemed to have started the class feeling disillusioned with their L2 study. Lisa explained that ER revitalized her dwindling L2 motivation, which was caused by too much language-focused study:

> *I loved it [ER] and it was very practical to do. We were reading and learning about Japan, instead of going too deep into the language.*
>
> *Reading pleasure material gives me motivations to read in Japanese. After taking this class I found reading in Japanese can be fun and I enjoy it when I will not be tested about the content.*

All the learners who experienced ER pointed out specific virtues that match well with Day and Bamford's (2002) "Top Ten Principles." The following are example comments:

> *Now I understand what level of texts I can have a good rhythm. (Anne)*
>
> *… it [ER] offered me the most exposure to Japanese language texts that were not too difficult to read. (Andrew)*
>
> *I find it [ER] very enjoyable and I enjoy the huge variety of texts to choose from. It has also gave me hope to improving my Japanese and it is less intimidating than extremely challenging texts. (Amy)*
>
> *It [ER] was fun especially reading stories that are not difficult. (John)*
>
> *[Good things about ER are] 1. it [ER] helps to widen readers' perspectives; 2. various topics, styles, genre." (Zara)*

These participants' comments confirm that ER revitalized the motivation of advanced learners of Japanese, some of whom might have come to a standstill in their L2 learning.

## Conclusion

Savaş (2009) claimed that the tertiary-level English for academic purposes courses he researched, in which IR and translation were the main instructional approaches, failed to nurture students' cognitive academic literacy. His study proved that the task-based ER practice incorporated into an existing curriculum did nurture the participants' cognitive academic literacy. The context of the current study cannot be categorized as Japanese for academic purposes. However, this study's findings, like those of Savaş, prove that SR and ER

can be effective approaches in advanced classes where students need to learn to read expository texts as a prelude to succeeding at academic text reading. The former approach can increase L2 learners' reading fluency, whereas the latter can serve to revitalize learners' stagnant motivation. Finally, the participants' nearly unanimous approval of SR and ER as their future learning approaches endorse that these approaches can be crucial means "to create autonomous learners with intrinsic motivation" (Savaş, 2009, p. 14).

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**Appendix.** *An example of speed reading texts*

## 3.ミスコン

日本人はブランドの物が好きだ。かばん、服、くつ、化粧品と、お金がある人は高いブランドの物を買いたがる。大学を選ぶ時も同じように選ぶ高校生がいる。東京などの有名な大学は「ブランド大学」と言われている。たとえば、慶応大学、青山学院大学などである。

最近、そのようなブランド大学で学園祭（大学のお祭り）の日に盛んに行われているのが、「ミスコン（ミス・コンテスト）」というイベントだ。これは、大学の中で一番ステキな女子学生、一番ステキな男子学生を選ぶイベントだ。もちろん、地方の大学でも今はミスコンをやっている。一番ステキな女子学生は、「ミス・キャンパス」と呼ばれる。一番ステキな男子学生は、「ミスター・キャンパス」と呼ばれる。ミスキャンのコンテストの方が人気があり、オンラインの記事でもブランド大学のミスキャンの話がよく出てくる。また、大学がミスコンのイベントの前にオンラインでイベントに参加する女子学生の紹介をしている。それらの女子学生がスポーツをしたり、授業に出ているところなどを紹介したビデオまで作ってオンラインにのせている。

特に日本中から注目されているのは、慶応大学のミスキャンだ。それはどうしてだろうか。たぶん、今まで慶応大学でミスキャンになった女子学生たちが、とても有名になったり、注目される仕事についているからだろう。たとえば、今まで慶応大学などのブランド大学でミスキャンになった女子学生の多くが、東京の大きなテレビ局のアナウンサーになっている。

日本では、ミス・ユニバースやミス・ワールドよりもミスコンが注目されている。むかしからこういうイベントには反対している人も多かった。きれいで頭もよい女子学生がみんなから好かれて、その大学のイメージ・モデルのようになるのは悪いことではないかもしれない。でも、2006年のミス・慶応大学には外国のとても高い車（BMW）がプレゼントされたそうだ。その次の年にはとても高いアクセサリーがプレゼントされたそうである。

ここまでくると、「ミスコンは学生らしくない」と言われても仕方がないかもしれないなあと思う。(454 words)

Time you needed: _____

**一番いいと思う答えを A-D から選んでください。**

(1) ブランド大学というのは、（　　）のことだ。
- A. 外国にある大学
- B. 学費（fees）が高い大学
- C. 東京などの有名大学
- D. 留学できる大学

(2) ミスコンでは、（　　）を選ぶ。
- A. 一番頭がいい学生
- B. スポーツのできる学生
- C. リーダー（Leader）になれる学生
- D. 一番ステキな学生

(3) ミス・キャンパスにくらべて、ミスター・キャンパスは、（　　）。
- A. あまり人気がない
- B. 少ない
- C. なるのが難しい
- D. いそがしい

(4) ミスコンは（　　）に行われる。
- A. 一年のはじめ
- B. クリスマス
- C. 大学のお祭り
- D. テストの後

(5) 小さな地方の大学では、（　　）。
- A. 有名大学と同じようにミスコンをする
- B. お金がないのでミスコンをできない
- C. ミスコンに反対する学生が多い
- D. 大学がミスコンをしてはいけないという

(6) ミスコンの宣伝のために、大学は（　　）。
- A. テレビでコマーシャルをする
- B. 大きな会社に知らせる
- C. ポスターを町にはる
- D. オンラインで紹介する

(7) ミスコンで一番のミス・キャンパスになった女子大生は、（　　）。
- A. 大学のために働かなければならない
- B. 注目される仕事につくことが多い
- C. 困った学生のカウンセリングをする
- D. 大学院に行かなければならない

(8) ミスコンやミスユニバースは、（　　）。
- A. みんながいいイベントだと思っている
- B. お金がかかるイベントだ
- C. 反対している人も多い
- D. もっとしたらいいと言われている

(9) 慶応大学のミスコンで一番になると、（　　）。
- A. アメリカに旅行できる
- B. たくさんの本をもらえる
- C. 車をもらえることもある
- D. 大学を卒業できる

(10) ミスコンについて反対する人は（　　）。
- A. 学生らしくないイベントだと言う。
- B. お金がかかりすぎるイベントだと言う
- C. 他の学生がいやな思いをすると言う
- D. あんまりおもしろくないと言う