

Extensive Reading and Language Learning: A Diary Study of a Beginning Learner of Japanese

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Abstract

Motivated by the continued growth of research on extensive reading as well as the positive results from a variety of studies (e.g., Bell, 2001; Camiciottoli, 2001; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Nash & Yuan, 1992; Renandya, Rajan, & Jacobs, 1999; Tse, 1996; Walker, 1997), an investigation was conducted on the impact of extensive reading on an adult's self-study of Japanese over a 20-week period. Data were collected from multiple sources, including a learner diary, audio-recordings from several private tutorial sessions, and vocabulary tests. The results of this study show that extensive reading can enhance vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, and promote a positive attitude toward reading. The challenges that the learner encountered during the extensive reading process and how they were dealt with are also addressed.

Keywords: extensive reading, Japanese as a foreign language, self-instruction, vocabulary acquisition, vocabulary, affect

Introduction

Extensive Reading

Over the past decade or so, there have been numerous studies reporting that extensive reading not only benefits learners of different ages, but also in different contexts. In addition to the gains in reading proficiency, positive affect, and reading habits (Camiciottoli, 2001; Nash & Yuan, 1992; Renandya, et al., 1999; Tse, 1996), other benefits of extensive reading also include gains in listening proficiency (Elley & Mangubhai, 1983), writing ability (Mason & Krashen, 1997; Tsang, 1996), reading speed (Bell, 2001; Walker, 1997), and even spelling (Day & Swan, 1998; Krashen, 1989). These studies provide valuable insights and pedagogic implications for educators who want to implement extensive reading in their classrooms.

However, the majority of these studies are quantitative with a focus on whether a particular extensive reading program is beneficial to learners; very few of them provide a clear picture of what learners experience during the extensive reading process, including the challenges they face

or the turning point at which learners gain a more positive attitude toward reading. In addition, researchers who have conducted studies on extensive reading are mostly researchers or language teachers who lack the time or the opportunity to experience what it is like to engage in extensive reading from the learner's perspective. The purpose of this paper is to explore both the benefits and challenges that one may encounter when engaging in extensive reading as revealed through a learner's diary study.

Diary Studies

According to Bailey (1990), a diary study "is a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analyzed for recurring patterns or salient events" (p. 215). In fact, diary studies have been an important introspective tool in language research because they can provide an emic perspective of learners' learning experiences and processes which may be "hidden" or "inaccessible" through observation from investigators (Bailey & Ochsner, 1983, p. 189). While some diarists are commissioned to keep a journal recording their language learning experience as a participant in someone else's study, others diarists are the investigators themselves (e.g., Bailey & Ochsner, 1983; Cohen, 1997; Jones, 1994; Schmidt & Frota, 1986). Although diary studies, like any other case studies, cannot make claims for generalizations, they have provided valuable insights regarding various aspects of language learning which include learners' anxiety, learning strategies, impact of classroom interaction, conversational interaction, proficiency thresholds, self-study, vocabulary development, and pragmatics, to name a few.

A major limitation of a diary study is its subjectivity, as has been well recognized by researchers in general (e.g., Schmidt & Frota, 1986). Jones (1994) observed that when a researcher is the observer as well as the subject under study, it creates a "triple subjectivity" which may "increase the danger of finding what one sets out to find rather than what is objectively there" (p. 444). However, Jones also argued that if the goal of a study is to find out what is involved in the learning process, then that subjectivity -- "how one perceives the processes, what one chooses to record" -- should be an important part of the study.

Purposes of the Study

Due to my own interest, I decided to learn to read Japanese on my own for four months and to record my journey of extensive reading in a diary. The goals of this study were to discover the effectiveness of extensive reading and to better understand the extensive reading process from the perspective of a foreign language learner. The research questions in this study are

1. Does extensive reading lead to vocabulary acquisition?
2. Does extensive reading promote reading comprehension?
3. Does extensive reading promote positive attitudes toward reading?
4. What challenges does a beginning foreign language learner face in the extensive reading process and how did the learner deal with these challenges?

Method

Subject

The subject of this case study is also the researcher and the author of the paper, referred to as Wendy. Wendy lived in Hong Kong for 20 years where she learned Chinese as her first language and English as a second language. She has resided and studied English in the US and Canada since 1992. At the time of the study, she was attending the University of Hawai'i for her master's degree in ESL.

About 10 years ago, Wendy took a few Japanese lessons at the YMCA in Hong Kong. In those few lessons, she learned how to write and pronounce Japanese orthographies, *hiragana* and *katakana*, and learned some phrases for self-introduction, greetings, and so on. Although she still remembered some of the expressions when she began this study, the limited training did not help her with her reading. She had to relearn hiragana as a beginning learner of Japanese at the time she began this study.

The Study

The study was divided into two stages, covering 9 and 11 weeks respectively. During the first stage of the study, Wendy was taking a graduate course about teaching ESL reading. It was then she gained a better understanding about what extensive reading was and how it could benefit language learners. Since Wendy could not find any Japanese courses featuring extensive reading for beginning learners, an ideal way to carry out her study was to set her own course. To prepare for the study, Wendy talked to her professor in the Teaching ESL Reading class and two students who had learned Japanese as a foreign language. Some of their suggestions included: a) start reading something simple and interesting; b) learn some basic vocabulary; c) try to read hiragana out loud to get a feel for the language; d) learn the conjunctions because they delineate word/vocabulary endings; and e) study with a Japanese student.

Wendy tried to follow their suggestions as she began the study. She also borrowed books from her friends and the library to learn to read and write the hiragana. Occasionally, she asked her Japanese friends to clarify some of the grammar points and explain the Japanese sentence structures to her. She also got help from a book called *Japanese for Busy People* (AJLT, 1995). It contains basic grammar and dialogs focusing on learning Japanese for communication. In an effort to learn Japanese through extensive reading, Wendy tried to apply the characteristics of the extensive reading approach established by various studies (Bell, 1998; Day & Bamford, 1998; Renandya, et al., 1999; Walker, 1997):

1. *Students read as much as possible.* By the end of the study, Wendy had read 32 books which covered about 1,260 pages of simple Japanese text, of which 483 pages came from comic books and 170 pages from children's textbooks. The rest of the pages were from simple children storybooks with an average of about 10 sentences per page.
2. *Students read a variety of materials of their interest.* Due to Wendy's limited Japanese proficiency, she was not able to read a variety of materials in terms of genre. However,

she was able to read a variety of children's stories of interest to her which included some traditional Japanese stories such as *Issunboshi* and *Momotarou* as well as translated stories such as *The Sleeping Beauty*.

3. *Reading materials are well within students' linguistic competence.* Most of the books that Wendy read were children's books with pictures. She read books with which she felt comfortable and ones that were interesting to read. However, there were children's books that she found difficult. When that happened, Wendy stopped reading and chose other books to read.
4. *Students choose what they want to read and the purposes of reading are usually related to pleasure, information, and general understanding.* Wendy enjoyed reading the children's books with her 2-year-old daughter and was entreated by the different cultural values that were portrayed in the children's literature.
5. *Follow-up tasks should be simple, encouraging, relate to students' readings, and be done in a low anxiety environment.* Since Wendy did not study Japanese in a classroom setting, there were no follow up tasks in the study. However, keeping a journal regarding her own progress and experience about her study could be considered as a task related to Wendy's reading which was done in a low anxiety environment.

Wendy spent an average of one hour studying and reading Japanese each day. Every day after her study, Wendy reflected on what she learned that day and wrote in her journal issues that concerned her. Then she gathered her notes and made one to two diary entries recording her experience and progress for the week. The diary was written in English, which is the language she had been using to write her personal journal for more than 8 years. Periodically, she talked to her professor about her progress and concerns about her learning Japanese through e-mail or after-class discussions.

After 9 weeks of studying and recording, Wendy reviewed her journal and identified interesting trends. Then, she resumed her study after two and a half months. During the second stage, Wendy continued to follow the same study pattern and journal recording procedure that she did in stage 1. In the second stage, Wendy found a Japanese friend who was willing to help her with her study for about half an hour to 1 hour each week. In order to triangulate the subjective data from journal entries and provide a more objective view, other sources of data were used to evaluate Wendy's progress in her learning as part of the study during the second stage.

Evaluative Methodology Used in the Study During the Second Stage

First, the tutoring sessions were tape-recorded. They contained discussions of various reading passages from a first-grade Japanese textbook, Wendy's questions about Japanese, her tutor's comments, and oral reading. Salient trends were identified and transcribed. A second source of evaluation was a vocabulary test.

Testing Procedures

Vocabulary test. The vocabulary test was created by a Japanese graduate student who randomly selected a sub-sample of 150 words from a word list of 689 words in *Japanese for Busy People* (AJLT, 1995). These 689 words are considered to be essential for the most common situations in which non-native speakers need to communicate in Japanese. Then, 50 words were randomly selected for the first test (version A) and 50 words for the second test (version B). Because one word mistakenly appeared twice in the second test, only 49 words were actually counted in the second test. The answers were marked by the test constructor and scored by the researcher. In grading the tests, each item was evaluated on a 0-4 scale (adopted from Paribakht & Wesche, 1997):

- 0 = I don't remember having seen this word before.
- 1 = I have seen this word before, but can't remember the meaning/give an incorrect meaning.
- 2 = I know the meaning and provide the correction translation of the word.
- 3 = I provide the correct translation of the word and am able to use it with semantic appropriateness in a sentence.
- 4 = I provide the correct translation of the word and am able to use it with semantic appropriateness and grammatical accuracy in a sentence.

Results and Discussion

Does Extensive Reading Lead to Vocabulary Acquisition?

Vocabulary test. Results of the vocabulary test show that Wendy's vocabulary knowledge, as measured by the modified Paribakht & Wesche's scale, improved by 23.5% in one month (see Table 1).

Table 1: *Vocabulary Test Results*

Item	Score	0	1	2	3	4	Test
		Unknown	Unknown/Seen	Known/Translate	Known/Semantic	Known/Accurate	Score
Test 1	N	20	18	2	5	5	57/200
	%	40.0	36.0	4.0	10.0	10.0	28.5%
Test 2	N	18	16	0	7	8	69/196
	%	36.7	32.7	0.0	14.3	16.3	35.2%

Note: The pre-test had 50 items; the post-test had 49. The best score possible on the pre-test was 200; the best possible for the post-test was 196.

The first test was administered in Week 16; the second test in Week 20. The largest improvement was manifested in her ability to identify words and use them to construct more semantically and grammatically correct sentences in the second test (from 10% on the first test to 16% on the second test). In addition, her responses in the "don't know the word" answers (categories 0 and 1) decreased slightly in the second test. The gain in vocabulary knowledge as assessed by Wendy's ability to use words in

sentences resulted from the large linguistic input she received through extensive reading and her increased knowledge in Japanese grammar and sentence structure through self-study.

Data from journal entries and tutoring sessions. Wendy's journal entries indicate that extensive reading helped her acquire vocabulary in various ways. First, a large amount of input increased her opportunities to be exposed to words previously learned. As a result, it reinforced her existing knowledge of certain vocabulary items and allowed her to apply her vocabulary knowledge in a meaningful way. At weeks 10, 13, and 18, Wendy made these journal entries:

Journal entry, Week 10

The cool thing about reading so far or perhaps I should say the rewarding part is when I am able to recognize words that I have read from other books before. Last night I took a Japanese children's book from the bookshelf and was going to show the pictures to my baby. As I scanned through the book, I realized that I could read some of the words. As I tried to read along, words that I recognized include: everyone, delicious, father, mother, child, boy, girl, woods, school, etc.

Journal entry, Week 13

I really feel that it is through reading I get to reinforce the vocabulary that I learned. It is very difficult to retain my vocabulary just by memorization since there are so many words to be learned.

Journal entry, Week 18

I was a little bit confused about the words *ikimasu* (go) and *imasu* (come) a while ago. I got mixed up with these two words easily, just like some people who had a hard time figuring out which way is left and right, but they [*ikimasu* & *imasu*] sink in a bit more after I read a book in which *ikimasu* and *imasu* showed up quite often in the story.

Second, reading different genres allowed Wendy to learn words or phrases that would not normally be found in textbooks. For example in week 14, she learned expressions such as "it's time to get up." In week 16, she learned *oshikkoshinakatta* (children's expression for "I didn't wet my pants"). Third, the children's literature that Wendy read not only provided favorable repetitions for vocabulary learning, but also allowed her to discover the meanings of certain words through pictures and contextual cues:

Journal entry, Week 18

I read *Kumasan aisu* yesterday with Menorah. Although I knew *Kumasan* meant Mr. Bear, I didn't know what *aisu* meant. Then as I read along, I realized that *aisu* meant ice-cream because I could see the little pig holding some bear-shaped ice-cream bar in various pages ... When I read page 1, I felt great that I knew many words, then as I proceeded, I only knew a few words on each page, but the pictures helped me a lot and made reading more enjoyable.

Fourth, reading extensively increased Wendy's opportunities to discover new and alternative meanings for certain words that she knew, but in a limited sense:

Journal entry, Week 14

I used to think that *kirei* only mean "pretty" or "beautiful", but today I read something from a children's story book which used *kirei* to describe drinking water. I then realized that *kirei* could also mean "clean" or "pure."

Journal entry, Week 16

I learned that *osoi* means slow from reading other books. Then I see this word in an expression like this "*otoosan osoine*" (father is late). I then realized *osoi* can mean late as well.

Fifth, reading extensively also helped Wendy learn vocabulary incidentally. Being able to correctly guess some unfamiliar terms at the time of vocabulary testing really surprised Wendy; her only explanation for that was "I must have read it somewhere" (journal entry, week 20).

Although extensive reading has helped Wendy acquire vocabulary in various ways, the data recorded in the tutoring sessions as well as the journal also revealed that multiple exposures to particular vocabulary items do not necessarily ensure vocabulary learning:

Transcription from tutoring session, Week 10

Learner: *molino naka*...

Tutor: Do you have any guess?

Learner: It sounds familiar, but I don't remember. I must have read it somewhere.

Tutor: Ok. *naka* means in or inside

Learner: oh yes, that's right. I remember inside...

Journal entry, Week 12

There are vocabulary items that I can spot right away before, but today I forget until I look it up. For example, *ookii* means big, and I knew that word pretty well last semester, but I lost it today.

Journal entry, Week 14

I spent a few hours studying and reading Japanese today ... I found that there were words I once knew, but I forgot. Also, there were words I guessed wrong, such as *ahiru* and *ohirune*. I got mixed up because they look quite similar in hiragana. While the first word means duck, the second word means something else.

The phenomenon of forgetting the meaning of certain vocabulary could be caused by insufficient exposure or reinforcement of words. As Nation (1997) pointed out, "vocabulary learning from extensive reading is very fragile. If the small amount of learning of a word is not soon reinforced by another meeting, then that learning will be lost." In other words, though we cannot guarantee all the vocabulary items that learners encounter with multiple exposures will be acquired, extensive reading does lead to vocabulary acquisition if materials with suitable vocabulary levels are available to learners for "repeated opportunities to meet wanted vocabulary" (Nation, 1997).

Does Extensive Reading Promote Reading Comprehension?

Data from journal entries. Data from the journal entries show that Wendy's reading comprehension gradually improved throughout the course of the study. Basically, she improved from having a hard time decoding the hiragana orthography to understanding some simple children's stories. This gradual improvement can be seen from the following journal entries:

Journal entry, Week 3

Using the way I learn to read and decode the meanings of Chinese characters just doesn't help me learn Japanese because I can't attach meaning to each [Japanese] syllable that I see. I'm confused.

Journal entry, Week 6

Although I don't know exactly what I am reading at times, I feel that it helps just by looking at the hiragana and familiarizing myself with the Japanese text ... To me at this stage, reading books without pictures is like trying to read without my glasses; everything is a blur.

Journal entry, Week 15

I read the book that I checked out from Claire *sensai* today. I am so glad that I can find something interesting and in the right level to read. Yes, pictures in the book really help, but I also know that I am understanding the text rather than just merely guessing the meaning of the story by looking at the pictures.

Journal entry, Week 16

I am beginning to feel where a word ends. At the beginning of the study I would think that some object markers/particles are actually part of the word. The more I read now, the more I understand. Like *kodori*, it means a small bird and I wasn't aware that *ko* means little or small. I just thought that *kodori* means a bird. Until I was reading something else today and it mentioned about birds, but instead of using *kodori*, the book just uses *dori*. Then all of a sudden I realize that *dori* means "bird" in general.

Journal entry, Week 19

At this point, I think I do enjoy reading ... Yesterday I read three books in a row ... I think through these past months I have somehow conquer my apprehension of not knowing how to read and doubting my reading ability, but now I feel that I have really gained something. I also have more confidence in myself. I am glad that I am progressing, though slowly ... While I was reading the textbook a while ago, I have flashes of memories about things that I have learned before; somehow more understanding comes in and I am more capable to see how things are put together.

Improvement in reading comprehension is a gradual process; it does not happen overnight. While the instructions Wendy received from the textbooks and her tutor gave her the basic foundation to improve her comprehension, reading extensively gave her the opportunity to practice and expand her reading comprehension skills.

Does Extensive Reading Promote Positive Attitudes Toward Reading?

An analysis of Wendy's diary entries indicates that her attitude toward reading Japanese generally became more positive throughout the course of her study. This change of attitude has also been reported in various extensive reading studies (e.g., Camiciottoli, 2001; Mason & Krashen, 1997; Renandya, et al., 1999; Tse, 1996). When Wendy began her study, she was very excited about her reading project, but then her excitement was quickly replaced by confusion and frustration, mainly because she had a hard time finding the appropriate materials for her study. She reported her concerns through an e-mail to her professor:

E-mail message, Week 1

I went to the local library and checked out Alice in Wonderland (Japanese version) hoping that my background knowledge could help me understand the story in Japanese. But to my surprise, I could not understand any of it because most of the children's books are written in Hiragana. [Therefore, I can't use my knowledge in Kanji to comprehend the story] ... I also checked out a Japanese magazine from the library and a Japanese book called Principles of Japanese discourse.

I was able to read those materials and guess the meaning of the context because it has a lot of Kanji in the text. In fact, I could read quite fast although I am not sure if the meaning that I got out from the reading is correct. So, I found myself in a very funny situation. While I manage to read some magazines, I cannot read a simple Japanese children's story. One major concern that I have is that when I read the Japanese magazine, I feel like my eyes only focus on the Kanji and skip all the Hiragana that I don't understand, so I really don't know if I was really reading Japanese, or just reading Chinese.

After consulting with her professor, Wendy decided that trying to "crack the code" by relearning hiragana would be beneficial to her. She would not only learn to read hiragana, but also have the opportunity to truly experience the learning process as a beginning foreign language learner. At the same time, she pursued reading children's books that would help her Japanese learning.

After Wendy was able to find a substantial volume of materials that matched her language competency, she felt more comfortable trying to read Japanese. Her confidence as well as her excitement toward reading grew gradually as she was able to identify different vocabulary appearing in various texts and figure out meanings of words or sentences that she had never learned before. This attitude change can be seen in her diary entries:

Journal entry, Week 4

I spent a long time reading today. I feel a lot more comfortable to read Japanese than ever before. Although the children's textbooks that I borrowed from my friends are a little bit old, I was glad that there are lots of pictures to help me make intelligible guesses. Yes, I think I am slowly progressing. I feel very proud of myself as I discovered that I could recognize some vocabulary I learned while reading different materials.

Journal entry, Week 6

I have been reading a lot of Japanese books during these past couple of days. Although I don't know exactly what I am reading at times, I feel that it helps just by looking at the Hiragana and familiarize myself with the text. When familiar words or phrases come up from the text, I feel so good that I can identify them right away I enjoy reading traditional Japanese story. I feel like I can relate some of the Chinese stories that I read to the Japanese ones. Somehow, a lot of the oriental stories share similar plots and moral and it helps a lot in terms of interpreting stories.

Journal entry, Week 9

I re-read the sleeping beauty today and to my surprise I got a lot more out of it than last time. This time I feel like I really can understand the text if I just try a little bit harder. Then all of a sudden, as I read along, I found myself understanding the text and especially the dialogs between the mirror and the witch. When the witch says "*kagamiya kagami konokunide ichiban kireinanowa dare?*" I was able to figure out *kagami* means mirror and as I read *ichiban* aloud, I realized that it means number one because I hear people use this word quite often. Then *dare* was one of those terms that I learned at the beginning of my study, which means who. And when I put everything together, the written text became alive to me and I told my friends about my experience the next day.... This time when I re-read sleeping beauty, I am able to recognize more functional words and thus I am able to focus more on the content rather than stumbling through the text. It is amazing to see how much more I can understand by re-reading the text. It is very exciting.

Journal entry, Week 11

I just love the Japanese children's book. The picture is so cute and attractive. It makes learning a lot of fun ... It is nice to read something fun rather than reading academic writing or journal articles [for my graduate courses] all the time.

As Wendy's confidence in reading grew, she found herself having more tolerance of the different features and complexity of Japanese. In other words, when things got complicated, instead of thinking that Japanese was too difficult to learn, she tried to acknowledge the complexity and patiently learned to resolve one thing at a time. When she came across books that she really wanted to read, it motivated her to improve her reading proficiency so she could truly comprehend the essence of the story:

Journal entry, Week 11

Tonight I tried to read the story about a rabbit which tries to run away. I love the pictures of the book because it is so beautiful. The little rabbit is trying to get away so she can see the world. However, when she left her cage, there were dangers everywhere. Besides, she had to find food and water for herself. Yet, I guess it is better for her to live in the nature because it is where she longs to be and belongs. Too bad I didn't quite understand the end of the story. I wasn't sure whether the rabbit died in her sleep so she could see the beautiful scene of heaven or she actually woke up with renewed strength to move on in her journey. I really want to improve my reading proficiency so perhaps one day I can just pick up this book again and know exactly what happened at the end.

Whenever Wendy was able to read something interesting and within her level of proficiency, it motivated her to read more. But if she tried to read something that she could not understand, it negatively impacted her confidence in reading:

Journal entry, week 19

Generally, when I can find books at my level of proficiency, it sure makes me feel good and increases my desire to read more. Just like the other day, I kept flipping the pages and didn't even realize an hour had gone by when I closed the book. However, as an adult reader, it can be frustrating if I open a children's book and find that it is too difficult for me to read. It reminds me of how little I actually know. Yet, when I get to read books that I can understand, it gives me reassurance to go on.

In short, extensive reading did promote a positive attitude toward reading when appropriate reading materials were accessible to Wendy. Also, in her case, reading extensively helped her develop a habit of reading Japanese. From her journal entries, she recorded that she has tried to read Japanese advertisements on campus, directions on the package of children's toys, Japanese instructions on a phone card, Japanese signs everywhere, and items on the menus of a Japanese curry house near a bus stop. This reading habit increased her linguistic input whenever and wherever possible.

What Challenges Does a Beginning Foreign Language Learner Face in the Extensive Reading Process?

Through an analysis of journal entries, some of the challenges Wendy faced at the beginning of her study included the difficulty of finding the appropriate reading materials, discipline, and time to read:

Journal entry, Week 2

The big book that I got from my friend focuses too much on speaking. Besides, the book has more English words in it rather than Japanese. So, I feel like I am reading English instead of Japanese ... I guess the main challenge for me right now is to have the discipline to study Japanese regularly ... I try to study Japanese at least one hour every day, but sometimes it is hard to do. Self-study is not an easy task. Perhaps I need to set some goals so I can feel like I am working toward something.

Journal entry, Week 3

This week has gone by quickly. I spent most of my time working on my research proposal for my Sociolinguistic class. I think I only spent a few hours on my Japanese study this week.

Another challenge, as mentioned in the earlier section regarding attitudes toward reading, is that Wendy got discouraged if she did not choose the appropriate reading materials to read. Also, sometimes Wendy's L1 negatively impacted her learning of Japanese. For example, she wrote

Journal entry, Week 3

Japanese looks a lot like Chinese, so I subconsciously use my L1 experience in learning Japanese. However, Chinese is an ideographic language; each Chinese character looks different and contains different meanings. Using the way I learn to read and decode the meanings of Chinese characters just doesn't work because I can't attach meaning to each syllable that I see. I am confused.

Journal entry, Week 11

I discover that some of the sounds are more difficult than others for me. The first one is *ka*. I sometimes caught myself pronounce *ga* instead of *ka*. I think it is mainly due to the fact that *ka* in Hiragana looks a lot like the word *ga* in Chinese, so I tend to pronounce *ka* as *ga*.

Dealing with the Challenges

Since Wendy was studying Japanese on her own with very limited help from her Japanese friends at the beginning of her study, it seemed that some of her challenges were related to the self-study itself. To overcome this problem, she studied with her tutor for about half an hour to an hour each week during the second stage of her study. As a result, she was more motivated and disciplined with her study because she felt that there was a good language model she could follow and rely on.

Journal entry, Week 10

I asked my tutor to read the text in Japanese so I could hear what it sounds like. Then I tried to read it myself. And sure enough, I still have trouble pronouncing *ka*, *ne*, *re*, *no*, etc. I will work on these and hopefully I can have some improvement. Studying with my tutor is fun. It is great that she can help me figure out what the text means. I learned many things today.

Journal entry, Week 13

Today, my tutor was testing my vocabulary by reading the words out loud. Somehow I still have a hard time getting the meaning just by listening. I feel like I need to see the word in order to figure out what is going on, but it is good that my tutor followed up with me so I will push myself a little harder to remember what I have learned.

Tutoring session, Week 16

After listening to her tutor read a passage during the tutoring session, Wendy was very impressed and wanted to read as smoothly as her tutor did, so she said, "You know, I am going to go home to practice and next time when I [read] it, I will try to [read] it a little bit more fluently."

Although Wendy's tutor provided her a lot of help, finding the appropriate reading materials to read still seemed to be a major concern for Wendy throughout the study. In order to read extensively, Wendy had to look constantly for materials to read. Besides checking out books from the local library, a good source of materials she found was her Japanese friends, especially those who have young children in the family. During the second stage of the study, Wendy was referred to a Japanese teacher who was implementing an extensive reading program in one of her classes. Wendy was allowed to borrow Japanese books from the teacher and felt relieved, as she knew that there were a lot of books available for her study:

Journal entry, Week 14

I am glad that Claire sensei allows me to borrow Japanese books from her class. I was so happy to see she has different kinds of books. Some of them are children's books with a lot of pictures; others are simple short stories. I think I will be able to read more when books become more accessible to me. Thanks to the extensive reading program.

When learners try to learn a new language, it is possible that they apply some of their previous language learning experiences or strategies to tackle their foreign language learning problems. While sometimes this helps, other times it does not. It may be frustrating when beginning learners feel that what they are learning is very different from the language they already know. As Wendy mentioned in her journal, she had a hard time understanding Japanese when she tried to apply the way she had learned Chinese. Also, Wendy reported that the Chinese orthography had somewhat impacted her pronunciation in Japanese. Nevertheless, as Wendy continued to learn and read Japanese, her tolerance of the difference between her first language and Japanese also grew. This change can be seen in her journal in Week 11:

Journal entry, Week 11

I think I am aware that there are few words in Japanese which mean totally different things in different context. At first I felt a little bit frustrated about this discovery and as I realize that the vocabulary that I learned may look quite differently when it appears in the text. I feel a little bit scared and afraid that I may get very confused as I continue to learn more about Japanese. Nevertheless, as my confidence grew or I should say as I continue to read more and see how different vocabulary may be changed into different faces, I think I am more tolerant about the changes. When I think about the irregular verbs in English such as "go," "went," "gone." They spell and look quite differently too. So, if I can tolerate English, I should be able to tolerate Japanese as well. Actually, I think Chinese is even more complicated to learn. We have a lot words with very similar pronunciation or even the same pronunciation, yet they look very different in the written forms. So, I guess there are always challenges when learning a new language.

Conclusion

The present diary study, motivated by extensive reading studies from various learning contexts, examined the impact of extensive reading on vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and attitude toward reading through the eyes of a beginning learner of Japanese. It also documented the challenges encountered during the extensive reading process and how the learner dealt with these challenges.

Through this study, we can see that the key element in the success of extensive reading is having access to a large quantity of reading materials geared to an individual's level of proficiency and interest. While some people believe that there can't be any pleasure in reading if learners haven't mastered the language (Nell, 1988, cited in Susser & Robb, 1990), the author would agree with those who argue that postponing reading until students have at least reached a certain level of proficiency may ignore "the role that reading can play in foreign language acquisition, particularly in the all-important learning of new words" (Bamford & Day, 1997). If appropriate reading materials are available, it is possible that a beginning foreign language learner can reap the benefits that extensive reading can offer.

Although the instructions Wendy received from her textbooks through self-study and her tutor contributed to the improvement of her vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, reading extensively also played an important role in her learning process. As Wendy reflected on her learning experience at the end of her study, she wrote

Journal entry, Week 20

I feel that learning about different rules and sentences structures have helped me build a foundation to read Japanese and reading extensively has reinforced things I learned previously, provided me the opportunity to learn new things as well as given me a sense of accomplishment when I realize that I can manage to read in the real world ... I think if reading teachers can somehow help students find what they are interested to read and encourage them to read extensively, students will want to learn not just to pass the class, but also to use the language as a vehicle to learn/read whatever interests them.

Language learners, especially those who have never experienced the benefits of extensive reading, may find it challenging to find the time, discipline, and commitment to read extensively at the beginning. The problem will probably be resolved as they begin to experience the impact of extensive reading during the reading process. Once a routine is established, with constant encouragement from friends and teachers, reading can become a part of learners' daily activities and provide a nice break from other intensive studies.

In short, learning to read a new language is not an easy task, but it does not necessarily mean that one cannot find enjoyment in the process. If learners are given the opportunity to read extensively for pleasure and develop a passion for reading, they can become more eager to learn the necessary reading skills and vocabulary they need in order to enjoy what they read. In addition, extensive reading also gives learners more control over and confidence in their own learning. In light of research that shows the benefits of extensive reading, it is worth incorporating extensive reading into the reading curriculum.

Since this study only investigated the impact of extensive reading on a single subject, the findings in the study are limited to the perspective of this single learner. Future research involving beginning foreign language learners in different learning environments along with more subjects will shed more light for those who are interested in implementing extensive reading into their reading curriculum. In addition, keeping a record of reading to keep track of learners' progress or reading speed may provide greater insights regarding the effectiveness of extensive reading.

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