

## 論文

# An Approach to Teaching a University Level Reading Course

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## 要 旨

大学でのリーディング授業（英語）の流れの説明です。

リーディングについて研究している学者が多いですが、一番良いリーディング理論(セオリー)は未だ書かれていません。しかし、効果的なリーディング方法は様々あります。人が書物を読もうとする時のプロセシング方法は大きくわけて2つあり、そのプロセシング方法についてここでは詳しく説明しています。また効果的なアクティビティ（授業活動）とその例も多数挙げています。学生のモチベーションを上げるために、出来るだけネイティブスピーカーが日常的に読んでおり、なおかつ学生が読みたい書物を教材として使うことも説明しています。

キーワード：reading（読書／リーディング）、activities（アクティビティ／授業活動）、motivation（モチベーション）、reading strategies（リーディング 作戦）  
top-down processing（トップダウンプロセシング／事前にもっている知識と文脈からわかろうとする）  
bottom-up processing（ボトムアップ・プロセシング／知識がなく文脈もわからないので字、文法、文などからわかろうとする）authentic material（学習者のために分かりやすく作られている物ではなくネイティブスピーカーが普段使っている物）

In many ways teaching a reading course at the university level in Japan can seem less daunting than teaching a conversation course because most students will have had some experience with reading in English. Their previous English instruction will likely have taken the form of many detailed grammar explanations and sentence translations among other activities. However, on the other hand, teaching reading, especially intensive reading, is also a challenge because it will probably involve re-training students to break bad habits and teach them new techniques for reading in English. In this paper I will outline the elements I feel are necessary to design a successful intensive English reading course. I will describe how I develop the outline of a unit based largely on student self-selected themes and how to design activities around the respective themes while teaching a number of important reading techniques. I will also include a number of sample activities.

## **Background**

In my current teaching context I am responsible for teaching an English elective course in intensive reading. As I alluded to above, virtually all of my students will have had some experience of reading and doing sentence translations in English. Most of them will not, however, have had experience reading in English for pleasure. In fact, one of my goals in teaching a reading course is to impart an enjoyment of reading. Many students will likely have a negative view of English reading as boring drudgery as a result of past unpleasant classroom experiences.

## **Motivation**

A seemingly self-evident and important way to promote motivation and enjoyment of reading in English is to use materials that reflect student interests. Teaching reading to promote enjoyment and to encourage a lifelong interest in reading can be facilitated by using reading materials that students have an interest in. If a teacher can successfully engender a lifelong interest in reading he or she will have provided a benefit to students far beyond the discrete material they have imparted in a semester long course. Research has shown that two of the most demotivating factors for second or foreign language students are use of the grammar translation method in instruction (Brown, 2001) and textbook related issues (Lynch, 1996). Therefore, I choose to minimize grammar explanations and do not use a course textbook at all. Ultimately, people learn to read by reading and they are unlikely to read if they are force-fed material that has no relevance

to their lives and that they have no interest in. A self-evident and critical part of a reading teacher's job is to present appropriate materials to their students.

### **Authentic material**

Using student-selected authentic material should ensure a relatively high level of motivation, as students will feel invested in the course and at least partially responsible for lesson materials. Each student will be responsible for bringing in one piece of text (no length, difficulty nor topics are specified; students are given complete freedom) every other week for the first six weeks of the course. Students will be largely reading things they want to. I say largely because the course material will primarily be drawn from what they bring in for homework. This means that in addition to reading what they themselves have brought in they will be required to read what their classmates have brought in as well. For example, if a student is a movie fan and brings in movie reviews they will read those articles but their classmates will also be forced to. Procedures for this will become clear later in this paper.

An important benefit to using authentic material whenever possible is that students will not have the luxury of graded material outside of the controlled, inauthentic environment of the language learning classroom. Further, they outside of the classroom they will be reading what they want to read and not what a teacher chooses for them. I can say from personal experience that I have often found myself brimming with confidence in my reading ability after comfortably reading something in a Japanese class that my teacher has selected and modified for me. Inevitably I am quickly brought back down to earth, however, when trying to read something ungraded outside of class. Even so, an obvious concern related to the use of authentic material is that ungraded material may be too far above the current level of student comprehension. In addition to selectively grading material for students allowing students to self-select material that they are interested in reading is another way in which to deal with this problem. If the students are reading what they are interested in and have chosen it themselves they might reasonably be expected to have significant background knowledge on the topic and schemata to draw upon to assist in comprehension. Another factor the reading teacher would do well to consider is how much culturally specific material to present. In other words, how much of the course reading material should be concerned with Japanese culture? A benefit to using Japan-specific reading material is that students will often have relevant background knowledge and schemata to draw

upon when processing material. If too much material is concerned with things “non-Japanese” or topics the students have no knowledge of they will be forced into an over-reliance on the text for comprehension. This, in turn, is likely to push them into the unproductive method of trying to fully understand every single word in the text; something that research shows good readers simply do not do. While students will certainly have formal schemata, background knowledge of the organizational structure of text types, they will often lack content schemata, background knowledge of the content area of the text. Content schemata are the type that can be activated and utilized by using material the students have some background knowledge about.

### **Good Reading Instruction**

There has been extensive research about the reading process over the years yet despite this no theory of reading has won general acceptance. Despite the lack of consensus on reading theory, research has shown that good reading instruction often involves the following:

Giving students a variety of reading assignments in which no more than approximately ten percent of the words are new to the students; Providing a variety of activities related to those reading assignments; Familiarizing students with appropriate reading strategies and when to use them; Ensuring that the material is interesting and relevant to the students; Providing plenty of interesting material for the students to read for pleasure at their own pace with no assessment.

### **Types of Processing**

The reading literature often refers to “top-down processing” or “bottom-up processing.” Essentially top-down processing refers to using our background knowledge or schemata to interpret a text while bottom-up processing refers to using the text on the page at the sound, word, sentence etc. level and interpreting textual clues to understand the material. These terms provide useful categories and a broad overall way to conceptualize how people actually use both types of processing when reading. Research suggests that class time should be spent teaching both top-down and bottom-up processing skills. For example, students may have strong top-down processing skills in their native language but often cannot transfer those skills to reading in another language and need at least some practice working on basic lexical and grammatical identification skills. On the other hand, students also need practice reading for global meaning, making educated guesses and developing appropriate schemata to interpret different types of text.

## An Approach to Teaching a University Level Reading Course

Good readers read fast and poor readers often focus excessively on reading word for word which severely limits their chances of understanding much of the text. This would seem to suggest that after having built up sufficient bottom-up processing skills good readers rely more on top-down processing skills. My experience has been that Japanese readers of English tend to excessive bottom-up processing so my courses place more emphasis on practicing top-down processing skills. A discussion of how readers process text leads into the important matter of deciding what strategies to teach in a reading course.

### **Reading Strategies**

There are a number of useful and valid reading strategies we all make use of unconsciously when reading in our first language. A real practical challenge for a reading teacher of students in a second or foreign language is to determine which strategies to focus on. An extension of that question is whether to teach reading strategies explicitly or implicitly. Explicit teaching would involve announcing the name of the strategy, writing its name on the board, making a detailed explanation of how the strategy works and how it can help the students and finally doing activities making use of that strategy. Implicit teaching is more subtle and forgoes detailed explanations. The name of the strategy may not even be mentioned and any explanations (if given at all) might wait until after the strategy has already been attempted in an activity. The teacher would guide students to the use of the strategy without making any type of explicit explanation.

Currently I choose to teach the strategies of predicting, scanning, skimming and utilizing schemata. Predicting involves using clues such as headlines, pictures, captions, subheadings etc. to make educated guesses about the text. To teach predicting, texts could be revealed sentence by sentence (or a picture or headline) while students are asked to predict what they think will come next. Scanning involves looking for very specific information and is a skill we all use when looking at a train schedule for a specific train departure or arrival or a movie listing for the start times of a movie we want to see at our local cinema. Skimming is something we do when we are looking for the main ideas or general meaning of a text and are not so concerned with all the details. Utilizing schemata refers to our use of our background knowledge about the world and/or particular subjects when reading a text.

## **Building up a Library of Material**

One quick and easy way to build up a library of authentic material is to give students a homework assignment to bring to class something they want to read in English. Over the years I have taught this reading course that simple assignment has resulted in students bringing in everything from music and fashion magazines, travel guides, motorcycle accessories catalogs and articles on everything from baseball to costume play to global warming. I repeat this homework assignment every two weeks throughout the semester to build up the supply of reading material. As the semester wears on I am able to develop quite an extensive inventory of authentic student-selected material to draw on.

## **Activities**

To briefly illustrate some of the activities I might use to teach reading strategies I will make use of an actual article about “cos-play” (Appendix 1) that was previously submitted as a homework assignment for my intensive reading course. The article is about costume play and has the benefit of being a topic all of my students will have some background knowledge about. On the other hand, one drawback of the article is the relative complexity, length and likely number of new words. The two most important reasons people read are to find out factual information and for pleasure. Because this article has been brought in by a student who is interested in cos-play they will be presumably be reading for pleasure. Their classmates will be reading to find out factual information about cos-play. To begin with I will show the students a picture (Appendix 1), tell them we are going to read a newspaper article and that this picture is connected to the article and elicit from them what they think the article is about. The next step is to give them a copy of the article (Appendix 2) and a handout (Appendix 3). These activities are concerned with utilizing the skill of predicting and activating schemata. The next handout (Appendix 4) is a gap-fill exercise to deepen comprehension of the first paragraph of the text. The next activity (Appendix 5) asks students to punctuate a paragraph (this can also be done at the sentence or whole text level) from which all punctuation has been removed. This activity would be regarded as working on bottom-up processing skills, requiring students to work with the physical text on the page to decode meaning. The last activity (Appendix 6) is concerned with using both scanning (question 1) and skimming.

## An Approach to Teaching a University Level Reading Course

Each reading passage may have activities similar to the above modified appropriately for the various texts students have submitted for their homework. All assignments can be used to work on the targeted skills of predicting, skimming, scanning and building up and/or activating schemata. Different length passages and different text types (newspaper articles, advertisements, train/bus schedules, cinema listings, emails etc.) and material from different cultural contexts will also be utilized.

### **Other Activity Types**

There are many additional activity types that may be productively utilized depending on the text type, length and difficulty. It can also be useful to have students determine the boundaries between words in a passage from which word boundaries have been removed (again this can also be extended from sentence to paragraph and text length). Cloze exercises focusing on specific lexical forms or key words are also useful in raising the consciousness of second language readers. Having students summarize what they have read in one or more sentences is a good way to check comprehension and can be modified to be an especially useful way to test scanning ability. Students can be asked to add a sentence or paragraph to a text. Afterwards, it can be instructive to compare what the students have produced to the actual text for cohesion and coherence. It is also often useful to have students produce a headline for a text, rearrange jumbled text into correct order in a jigsaw activity, answer reading comprehension questions and fill in gaps in the text among other activities.

Most if not all of these activities can be undertaken individually or in pairs or even groups. To keep lessons moving smoothly I might frequently alternate among all these configurations and use various of the above mentioned activity types in a single lesson with all the tasks supporting the main course goals of improving the reading skills of building up and activating schemata, predicting, skimming and scanning.

While every reading teacher always has the obligation to provide quality instruction ultimately, as mentioned above, people become good readers by reading. By preparing and presenting the appropriate materials during the limited classroom hours the teacher can impart useful strategies and guide students along the path to becoming more fluent readers. Allowing students to proactively participate in materials selection by choosing what they want to read is a useful way to

promote motivation. Motivation as a key factor to encourage students to become good readers can scarcely be overemphasized. Once our students finish a course and leave the classroom it will be down to them to read enough to become fluent readers. Having a say in selecting their own materials and being taught efficient strategies with which to approach different types of texts can increase student motivation and increase the likelihood that they will continue their English reading on their own long after they have moved on from our classrooms.

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## Appendix 1



## Appendix 2

### COSTUME PLAY

#### From Underground Trend to Mainstay of Subculture

1 More and more young Japanese fans these days are dressing up like their favorite characters from anime (Japanese cartoons) and video games. Costume parties are held regularly, and have even begun to be featured on television, as well as in major newspapers and magazines. The practice known as “costume play” has gone from being looked at as just another fan-inspired craze to an established trend in today’s Japanese youth culture.

#### 2 Costume Players Themselves Become Stars

Costume play’s popularity began growing rapidly among young Japanese some years ago at manga (comic book) sales conventions sponsored by underground manga artists. Not just limited to clothing, costume players apply makeup, dye their hair, and even wear colored contact lenses in an effort to take on the likeness of their favorite characters. Every summer, Japan’s largest manga convention is held for three days in Tokyo where anime and manga fans and costume players gather from all over the country.

3 Costume play is no longer limited to manga conventions. Costume parties have started cropping up all over Japan. The largest parties attract thousands of participants, who dance to their favorite anime theme songs and pose in their costumes for photographs. Popular costume players become stars in their own right, receiving letters from their fans. Some even put out their own videos and photo collections.

4 Stores that supply character costumes have also begun to increase. An entire outfit can cost anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 yen. There is one reported case of a female office worker who placed a costume order for more than 1 million yen to ensure that she wouldn’t tarnish her favorite character’s image with inferior apparel. There are even some specialty stores that design costumes to order. Customers bring in a photo of their favorite rock artist, have the store tailor a copy of the artist’s costume, and then wear it out to their idol’s concert.

## An Approach to Teaching a University Level Reading Course

5 Costume play has gone international, with costume contests featuring Japanese anime characters being held in places as far away as France. With this kind of national and even international appeal, costume play can no longer be looked at as just a fad, but a true fixture of Japanese subculture.

### Appendix 3

1. Write the headline of this article here: \_\_\_\_\_

2. In two words, what is this article about? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Write the sub-headline here:

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### Appendix 4

Fill in the gaps in the paragraphs with the proper word. Choose from the words below. Each word is used only once.

Costume                      television                      culture                      dressing  
anime                              More                              magazines

1 \_\_\_\_\_ and more young Japanese fans these days are \_\_\_\_\_ up like their favorite characters from \_\_\_\_\_ (Japanese cartoons) and video games. \_\_\_\_\_ parties are held regularly, and have even begun to be featured on \_\_\_\_\_, as well as in major newspapers and \_\_\_\_\_. The practice known as “costume play” has gone from being looked at as just another fan-inspired craze to an established trend in today’s Japanese youth \_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix 5

Punctuate the following paragraph. You must add capitalize the first word in each sentence, capitalize proper nouns, add comma's and apostrophe's where necessary and add periods at the end of sentences.

### 2 Costume Players Themselves Become Stars

costume plays popularity began growing rapidly among young japanese some years ago at manga (comic book) sales conventions sponsored by underground manga artistsnot just limited to clothingcostume players apply makeupdye their hairand even wear colored contact lenses in an effort to take on the likeness of their favorite charactersevery summer japan's largest manga convention is held for three days in Tokyo where anime and manga fans and costume players gather from all over the country

## Appendix 6

1. How many paragraphs are there in this article?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What are more and more young Japanese fans doing these days (paragraph 1)?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Where is Japan's largest manga convention held (paragraph 2)?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What have started cropping up all over Japan (paragraph 3)?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How much can an entire outfit cost (paragraph 4)?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. In what foreign country are costume play contests held (paragraph 5)?

\_\_\_\_\_