Web-based readings in the JFL classroom: Learning outcomes and best practices

Though the number of studies exploring digital reading in L2 classrooms has soared in the last decade (see Lotherington & Jenson, 2011 for a review), very few have focused on logographic languages like Japanese (e.g., Abe, 2016; Fukai, 2005; Peterson, 2016), which poses specific challenges for readers. A part of being digitally literate, web-based readings present real-life, unfiltered reading challenges that can provide opportunities for students to learn vocabulary, grammar, and culture, but also to develop a wide range of digital reading skills in the L2 (e.g., manage multiple modes of information, find the reading path in a nonlinear environment, use computer-mediated tools like hypertext dictionaries) (Park & Kim, 2011).

Using pre- and post-activity questionnaires, feedback sessions, instructor reflections, and data from a recall task from 13 third-year (5th semester) university learners of Japanese, this paper reports on the creation and immediate learning effects of a web-based reading task using a hypertext pop-up dictionary for intermediate Japanese as a foreign language (JFL) students. The immediate post-recall questionnaire showed that students immediately recalled vocabulary and kanji at the i + 1 level (Krashen, 1985) that were targeted on a task sheet, but that incidental learning of kanji that drew the students' interest also occurred. Moreover, the pre- and post-questionnaires indicated an increase in student motivation and confidence to read online texts. The study also discusses best practices (e.g., activating schema, bridging activities, scaffolding, post-activity discussions) and the pedagogical value of web-based reading activities such as kanji and vocabulary learning as well as increased learner autonomy and independence. Caveats are also revealed, such as student overreliance on pop-up hypertext dictionaries (e.g., *Rikai*) and difficulties in dealing with the flood of vocabulary and kanji beyond the i + 1 level. Ultimately, the study shows how authentic, unfiltered, multimedia (i.e., videos, pictures, links, interactive maps, audio, hypertext etc.) web-based reading activities can be incorporated into JFL classrooms using best practices to provide students not only with opportunities to improve their linguistic competence (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, kanji) and confidence in reading online material, but also to develop important skills in digital literacy.

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