

The Vocabulary of Japanese Language Textbooks for Returning and Foreign Children: Achieving “Symbiotic” Elementary School Japanese Language Education in a Globalized Society

Received: 08 October 2024; Revised: 22 January 2025; Published: 14 April 2025

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Abstract:

In recent years, the number of foreign children residing in Japan has been increasing, leading to a growing need for Japanese language instruction for JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) children who do not speak Japanese as their native language. The role of the Japanese language curriculum in compulsory education is critically important in providing instructions to these children. However, Japanese is considered a particularly challenging subject for JSL children. Additionally, for those involved in teaching and supporting these children, it is often difficult to determine which specific vocabulary should be taught. In response, this study conducted a comprehensive survey of the vocabulary included in first-grade Japanese language textbooks and analyzed their difficulty and characteristics. The survey results reveal that the textbooks contained words that are difficult from the perspective of JSL education, as well as words outside the standard grade-level vocabulary, posing significant challenges to JSL children. Furthermore, the vocabulary survey of Japanese language textbooks for returning and foreign children highlights the need for step-by-step instruction based on a thorough understanding of the vocabulary characteristics in these textbooks when providing learning support to JSL children in their first year of compulsory education. The study concludes that it is essential to build foundational data and that this research contributes to creating and analyzing data related to the Japanese language curriculum. The study also discusses future research challenges and prospects in this field.

Keywords: returning children, foreign children, Japanese language textbooks, vocabulary, quantitative analysis

1. Background of the Study

1.1 Japanese language education in a globalized society

The number of foreign residents in Japan has increased with the advance of globalization and now exceeds 3.41 million (Immigration Bureau of Japan, 2024). Correspondingly, the number of foreign children has increased by more than 10% over the past decade, and the number of Japanese children requiring Japanese language instruction due to years living abroad has more than doubled (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2015). The expansion of Japanese language learning support is essential to ensure equal learning opportunities for all children in Japan (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2014).



The goal of "fostering a love of reading and the ability to correctly understand and use the Japanese language necessary for daily life" (Article 21, Paragraph 5 of the School Education Act) applies equally to returning and foreign children, making the role of Japanese language education for such children crucial. However, the Japanese language as a classroom subject is considered one of the most challenging for returning and foreign children, often leading to difficulties in comprehending works included in Japanese language textbooks (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2010; Furukawa, 2015).

1.2 Ensuring language learning opportunities

In this context, special instruction in JSL is sometimes provided to returning and foreign children (hereafter referred to as JSL children) who require learning support. The textbooks used for such instruction are often geared toward non-native speakers and differ from the standard textbooks used in Japanese schools, however, making it difficult for these children to join regular classes. The Japanese language instruction provided under the "special curriculum" should thus aim to equip JSL children with the foundational Japanese language skills necessary to participate in subject learning (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2015). Additionally, it is important for such instruction to be phased and efficient to enable the smooth integration of JSL children into regular classes (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2017).

Considering the scope of Japanese language instruction as a classroom subject, it is crucial not only to ensure language learning opportunities but also to guarantee access to the rich world of literary works that are included in the Japanese language textbooks certified by the Ministry of Education. This should apply to the "special curriculum" for JSL children, linked with the educational curriculum stipulated by the School Education Act and the Curriculum Guidelines.

1.3 Supporting JSL children using Japanese language textbooks

It is thus desirable that JSL children should also use regular Japanese language textbooks in their "special curriculum," as this would guarantee learning opportunities that align with the content of regular classes. Moreover, creating an environment where both native and non-native speakers learn together using the same textbooks can contribute to achieving "multicultural symbiosis in Japanese language education" (Furukawa, 2014:10).

One of the challenges facing JSL children's education is gaining a detailed understanding of the vocabulary included in these Japanese language textbooks. Effective instruction requires a firm grasp of the number of words included in the relevant curriculum units and grades, their difficulty levels, and the appropriate order and methods for explanation and instruction. It is extremely difficult, however, for individual teachers to gain a full understanding of the vast number of words included in the textbooks. Therefore, there is a need for research that clarifies the actual types and characteristics of the vocabulary included in these textbooks.

Japanese language textbooks reflect the educational content of regular classes, and the vocabulary included in them is essential for learning the Japanese language as a classroom subject. To support JSL children's learning in conjunction with this, it is considered necessary to conduct a survey of the vocabulary included in Japanese language textbooks.



2. Previous Research and Current Issues

2.1 Necessity of surveying textbook vocabulary

Research on Japanese language instruction for JSL children has been conducted since the 1970s, focusing on returning Japanese children, children of refugees, children of returning wartime orphans left in China, and children of Japanese-Brazilian descent. Since the 2000s, studies have focused on JSL instruction in the classroom and the evaluation of Japanese language proficiency.

Regarding previous studies on the vocabulary of JSL children, three main streams can be identified. The first approach is research on basic vocabulary, based on children's actual language use (Otsuka, 1997; Kudo, 1999; Kobayashi, Yokota, & Suzuki, 1999). The second approach examines the vocabulary that children understand and use to explore the language acquisition process (Hitomi, 1996; Nuno, 1997; Matsumoto, 1999; Ikuta, 2001; Higuchi, Kuroda, Shimizu, Goto, & Saito, 2003). The third approach focuses on the methods and materials for teaching vocabulary (Sudo & Hayakawa, 1997; Shiratori, Tamai, Ozawa, & Higuchi, 2000; Kotaka, Shiratori, Sato, Miyagawa, & Endo, 2001). Additionally, these three trends are also connected to studies on heritage language education for children of Japanese descent living abroad (Gordon, Ahmed, & Hosoda, 2021), studies on multilingual education for children in international marriage families (Schwartz & Verschik, 2013; Bailey, & Osipova, 2015), and studies on language support for children who are not native speakers of languages other than Japanese (Unsworth, Brouwer, Bree, & Verhagen, 2019; Buac, & Kaushanskaya, 2023).

While these previous studies have provided many valuable insights, surveys of textbook vocabulary have been limited. Some studies, such as those by Kai (1982), Shimamura (1983), Inoue (2001), Kai & Matsukawa (2005), the National Institute for Japanese Language (2009), Motoki (2013), and Imamiya (2015), have highlighted the important points related to textbook vocabulary and instruction. There are also valuable findings from vocabulary surveys of Japanese language textbooks, such as those by Tanaka (1956), Ikehara (1957), the National Institute for Japanese Language (1989), and Matsuyoshi, Kondo, Hashiguchi, & Sato (2008). However, there has been little research on the vocabulary in current Japanese language textbooks.

Japanese language textbooks often contain what appear to be vocabulary lists, but none has a complete list of all the words used. When words or kanji are explained in footnotes or indexes, these are often limited to new or important words. Explanations in textbooks are usually written with native Japanese-speaking children in mind, moreover, making them insufficient for the education of JSL children. It is therefore difficult to gain a full picture of the vocabulary included in Japanese language textbooks. There are no resources available at the moment that publicly provide information on the vocabulary and difficulty levels of all the vocabulary used in current Japanese language textbooks.

Given this situation, additional research is needed to obtain data elucidating the vocabulary used in Japanese language textbooks to support the learning of JSL children in conjunction with the teaching of the Japanese language as a classroom subject.



2.2 The vocabulary in textbooks for first-graders

The content of Japanese language instruction as a classroom subject varies in difficulty and volume according to grade. Establishing clear benchmarks for the level of Japanese language proficiency required for JSL children in the first-grade of elementary school—the initial year of compulsory education—can pose a challenge, however. It would become possible to assess the Japanese language proficiency of children entering school and develop concrete plans for necessary support if the vocabulary included in Japanese language textbooks can be clarified.

A survey of the vocabulary included in all Japanese language textbooks from the first to the sixth grade would be best, but ascertaining the vast number of words included in textbooks all at once is not realistic. A survey covering such a broad range, moreover, may produce conclusions that are too general. Therefore, this study focuses on surveying the vocabulary included in first-grade Japanese language textbooks to confirm the kind of vocabulary required for JSL children in their initial year of compulsory education.

3. Research Objectives

This study aims to survey the vocabulary included in all first-grade Japanese language textbooks to ascertain the vocabulary encountered by JSL children in their initial year of compulsory education and to explore how their learning can be supported. The goal is to build foundational resources to help ensure that both native Japanese-speaking children and non-native speakers equally benefit from Japanese language education in Japan and have a rich learning experience.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research subjects and analysis methods

The subjects and analysis methods of this study are as follows:

- (1) Extract the words included in all current first-grade Japanese language textbooks, tally the number of words and their parts of speech for each textbook, and conduct a quantitative analysis. The textbooks used are shown in Table 1, numbered KT1 to KT5.



Table 1. The Japanese Language Textbooks Analyzed

No.	Publisher	Title of the textbook
KT1	光村図書	『こくご 一上 かざぐるま』
		『こくご 一下 ともだち』
KT2	三省堂	『しょうがくせいのこくご 一年 上』
		『しょうがくせいのこくご 一年 下』
KT3	東京書籍	『新編 あたらしいこくご 一上』
		『新編 あたらしいこくご 一下』
KT4	学校図書	『みんなとまなぶ しょうがっこうこくご 一ねん上』
		『みんなとまなぶ しょうがっこうこくご 一ねん下』
KT5	教育出版	『ひろがることば しょうがくこくご 1 上』
		『ひろがることば しょうがくこくご 1 下』

(2) Next, determine the vocabulary characteristics of first-grade Japanese language textbooks by analyzing the frequency and overlap of each word across these textbooks.

(3) Finally, measure the difficulty level of the vocabulary in first-grade Japanese language textbooks, compare the vocabulary included in these textbooks with the "Revised JLPT Standards" (hereafter, "Test Standards") and conduct a difficulty level assessment. The Test Standards are one of the representative benchmarks for measuring Japanese language proficiency of JSL learners. They provide specific difficulty level for each word, making them the most suitable benchmark for assessing the difficulty level of the vocabulary included in Japanese language textbooks from the viewpoint of JSL children. In the Test Standards, Level 1 is the most difficult, and Level 4 is the least difficult.

4.2 Scope of extraction and tallying

The scope of extraction and tallying of the vocabulary included in Japanese language textbooks in this study is as follows. Words were extracted not only from the main texts but also from annotations, exercises, instructions, and texts within illustrations and headings. However, information related to the official price of the textbooks, as announced in government gazettes, notes related to copyright and universal design, and other non-educational descriptions, as well as isolated numerical digits such as "①" and "(1)" in the text, parts of characters shown for writing order instruction, page numbers, colophons, and publisher information were excluded. Parts of speech were classified into "nouns," "verbs," "adjectives," "adjectival verbs," "adverbs," "pronouns," "interjections," "conjunctions," and "prefixes/suffixes," with items that did not fit into these categories being classified as "phrases," "neologisms," and "idiomatic expressions" (excluding particles and auxiliary verbs). Titles that appeared as book introductions and sets of words like "あいうえお" and "かきくけこ" that were taught as single units were counted as single nouns.



5. Results and Discussion

5.1 Number of words and breakdown by part of speech in Japanese language textbooks

To gain an overall picture of current first-grade Japanese language textbooks, the words included in five textbooks were extracted, and parts of speech codes were assigned and tallied. The number of distinct words and breakdown by part of speech for each publisher's textbooks are shown in Figure 1.

The graph in the upper part of Figure 1 illustrates the percentage breakdown of parts of speech listed in the table below the figure. Nouns account for the majority of the words (KT1: 66%, KT2: 68%, KT3: 66%, KT4: 67%, KT5: 68%), with very little difference in the percentage across textbooks, all within a margin of 2%. This trend is true for other parts of speech, with the percentage breakdowns being quite similar. The number of distinct words ranges from a maximum of 2,434 (KT5) to a minimum of 1,783 (KT1), a difference of 651 words. However, for KT2 (2,178), KT3 (2,197), and KT4 (2,130), the difference between them is just 3.2% of the total number of distinct words included in each of these textbooks.

From the number of words and breakdown by part of speech, the vocabulary characteristics of first-grade Japanese language textbooks can be summarized as follows: KT1 has a relatively small number of words, KT2, KT3, and KT4 have almost the same number of words, and KT5 has a relatively large number of words. It is also found that the breakdown by part of speech is very similar.

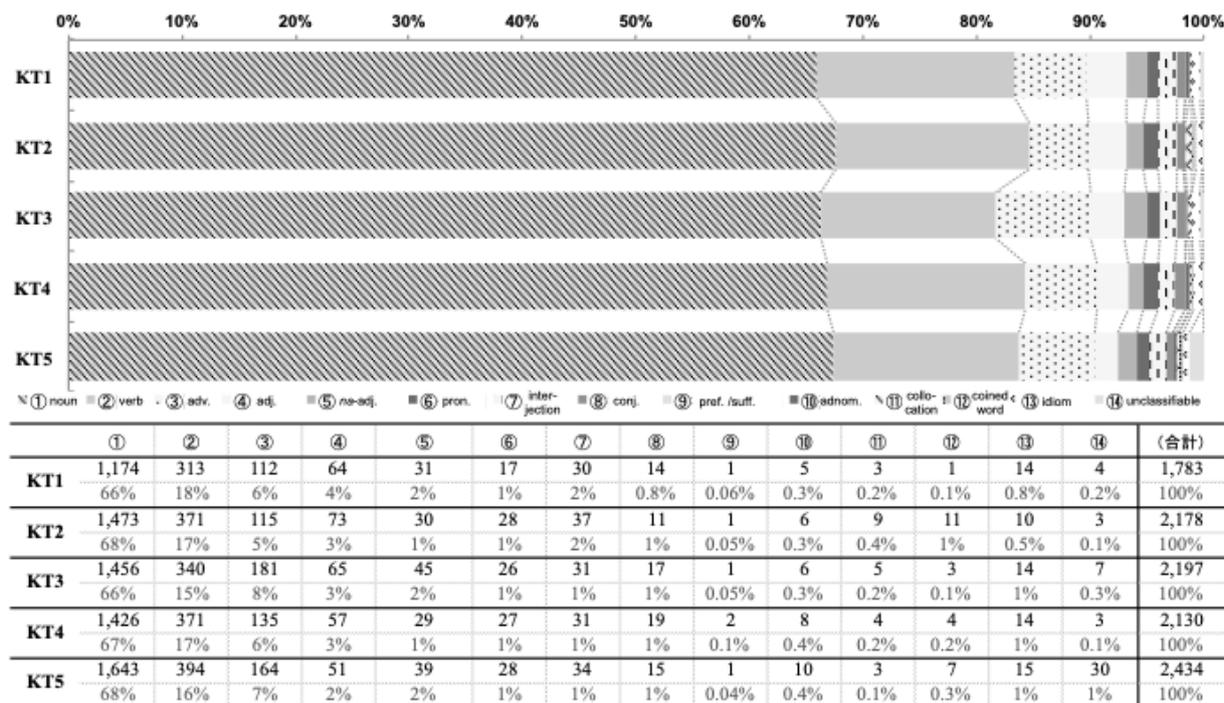


Figure 1. Number of Words in Japanese Language Textbooks and Breakdown by Part of Speech



5.2 Frequency of appearance and overlap of words included in Japanese language textbooks

To clarify the overlap of words included in the five textbooks, the frequency of appearance of each word was calculated, and the number of textbooks in which each word appeared was tallied. The results are shown in Figure 2.

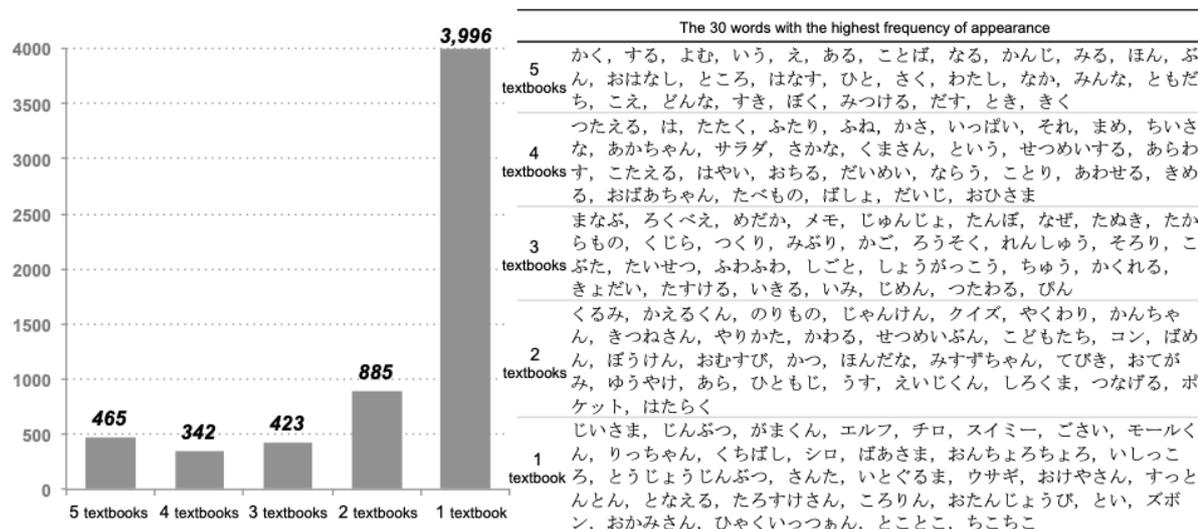


Figure 2. Breakdown by Number of Overlapping Words and Top 30 Words by Frequency

The bar graph on the left side of Figure 2 shows the number of words that appear, from the left, in all five textbooks, four textbooks, three textbooks, two textbooks, and only one textbook. The right side of Figure 2 provides specific examples of the 30 words with the highest frequency of appearance among these. Of the total of 6,111 distinct words included in the five textbooks, 3,996 words appear only in one textbook. This indicates that most words are unique to that textbook. Among the words that appear only in one textbook, those with the highest frequency of appearance include specific words unique to the stories contained in the textbooks, such as "がまくん," "エルフ," "チロ," "スイミー," "モールくん," "りっちゃん," "シロ," "おんちよろちよろ," "いとぐるま," "おげやさん," "たろすけさん," and "ひやくいつつあん." Unlike the results for the number of words and the breakdown by part of speech in the previous section, the words unique to each textbook vary widely.

To examine this in more detail, the extent to which the words in each textbook overlapped was calculated, in addition to the degree of overlap (the sum of the number of overlapping words between two Japanese language textbooks divided by the total number of words included in both textbooks). The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Degree of Overlap between Japanese Language Textbooks based on Vocabulary

	KT1	KT2	KT3	KT4	KT5
KT1	-	-	-	-	-
KT2	38.2%	-	-	-	-
KT3	44.2%	38.2%	-	-	-
KT4	44.1%	42.1%	43.2%	-	-
KT5	40.3%	37.2%	41.5%	45.5%	-

Table 2 shows the degree of vocabulary overlap between Japanese language textbooks. A higher percentage indicates that the same words are being used in both textbooks with greater frequency. The results show that the degree of overlap is the highest between KT4 and KT5 (45.5%), followed by KT1 and KT3 (44.2%) and KT3 and KT4 (43.2%). Whether this degree of overlap is considered high or low depends on one's perspective, but what is clear is that less than half of the words in the five textbooks overlap.

On the other hand, 465 words appear in all five Japanese language textbooks (Figure 2). As for the frequency with which these words appear in the textbooks, some words appear as many as 576 times. Table 3 shows the 465 words that are included in all five textbooks and, among them, 43 words that appear more than 100 times.

Regarding Table 3, the 43 words that appear with extremely high frequency include "こと" (576 times), "かく" (477 times), "する" (473 times), and "よむ" (423 times). The high frequency of these words can be attributed to their appearance multiple times within the same work. Additionally, some of these words, such as "うんとこしょ" (The Gigantic Turnip), "どっこいしょ" (The Gigantic Turnip), "ちようしんた" (author of a picture book), and "せたていじ" (translator of a story), are used in works of all five textbooks. So, while it is not possible to judge the importance of words solely based on their frequency, it can at least be said that 465 words are found in all five Japanese language textbooks, with 43 of them being used more than 100 times.



Table 3. 465 Common Vocabulary Words and 43 Words with a Frequency Over 100

No.	Vocabulary	Frequency									
1	こと	576	12	ほん	212	23	こえ	139	34	はな	112
2	かく	477	13	ぶん	188	24	どんな	134	35	おばあさん	112
3	する	473	14	おはなし	186	25	すき	127	36	き	111
4	よむ	423	15	ところ	166	26	ぼく	125	37	かんがえる	109
5	いう	264	16	はなす	161	27	みつける	125	38	もの	109
6	え	264	17	ひと	160	28	だす	125	39	できる	108
7	ある	256	18	さく	152	29	とき	123	40	やく	106
8	ことば	248	19	わたし	149	30	きく	121	41	いく	106
9	なる	246	20	なか	149	31	ひ	121	42	ひっぱる	106
10	かんじ	223	21	みんな	144	32	つくる	117	43	いぬ	100
11	みる	213	22	ともだち	144	33	でる	115			

[noun (288)] : こくご、いち、じょう、せんせい、こえ、あさ、こと、みんな、なかよし、いちねんせい、おはなし、ぶん、え、さく、やく、ちよう、しんた、えんぴつ、あし、せなか、ひとつ、かみ、いちねん、おおきさ、うた、あいうえお、いろいろ、ことば、あり、うし、おに、あひる、いるか、えほん、いえ、きりん、き、うえ、かき、かぎ、まど、ふた、うみ、かお、はな、ともだち、あな、きつね、まる、ねこ、ねっこ、いっぴき、きつて、しっぽ、せつけん、わけ、おばあさん、おばあさん、そら、おかあさん、おにいさん、おじいさん、ふうせん、おねえさん、おとうさん、いもうと、かたち、なか、むし、たね、み、じてんしゃ、きのう、おにごっこ、はる、ひ、たて、よこ、あかさたな、め、はっぱ、て、いろ、かんじ、あさがお、みどり、はなし、やま、みみ、ねずみ、きん、かいがら、ため、かわ、ほん、かぶ、まご、いぬ、てぶくろ、せた ていじ、いっしょ、おすすめ、しゃしん、ところ、ちから、はじめ、みず、ひらがな、さんぽ、せん、はち、もち、くさ、とけい、ひと、ゆき、こ、まえ、ふたつ、すがた、うさぎ、うち、ほう、さんびき、した、あと、あか、つぎ、じ、とき、かたかな、そこ、からだ、まわり、なかせ、はきみ、に、さん、みつつ、し、まん、よつつ、ご、いつつ、ろく、むつつ、しち、なな、ななつ、やつつ、きゅう、ここのつ、じゅう、とお、のはら、おりがみ、にまい、じどうしゃ、かきかた、まんなか、ページ、よみかた、つかいかた、エプロン、シーソー、セーター、カヌー、ノート、ヘリコプター、ミシン、タイヤ、ユニホーム、ヨット、リボン、しるし、なす、みかん、よる、りんご、れんこん、でんしゃ、がっこう、どんぐり、ほうし、こくご、げ、きもち、むかしはなし、ひつげ、ようび、もの、なまえ、てがみ、どうぶつ、くも、おんなのこ、おとこのこ、てん、こんど、むら、まち、こども、ねん、じかん、しろ、ぶんしょう、くち、ようす、がく、ころ、にちようび、きょう、あめ、た、はやし、つき、もり、いと、たけ、それぞれ、トラック、ほか、しゃ、ニュース、おおかみ、いま、まいにち、ついたち、ふつか、みっか、よっか、いつか、むいか、かようび、ホース、なのか、ようか、ここのか、とおか、はつか、おかね、かね、つち、せかい、ゆめ、へや、あいだ、となり、カード、きみ、おじさん、まどめる、な、ゆう、ひやく、えん、あお、アイロン、おんがく、むかし、ふしぎ、おと、こたえ、おうさま、おう、かい、いし、みぎ、ひだり、いす、おとこ、たま、す、いっばん、だい、むい、なの、よう、おんな、しせい、すい、にち、か、もく、がつ、げつ、くるま、ど、せい、**[verb (99)]** : なる、いう、かく、する、つくる、みる、はなす、いる、あらう、みつける、はいる、さく、いく、あける、できる、はしる、ねる、つける、とぶ、よぶ、たべる、いれる、おもいだす、つかまえる、あそぶ、よむ、のぼす、まく、ひろげる、まつ、のぞく、あげる、もつ、かえる、ふる、おしえる、つかう、すむ、だす、かんがえる、うたう、ぬく、ぬける、ひっぱる、たのむ、ある、のる、ふく、しらせる、あつまる、あつめる、つく、おもう、でかける、くる、ひろがる、でる、にる、のむ、うむ、たしかめる、かぞえる、やる、くらべる、えらぶ、さがす、とまる、かける、およぐ、おろす、みえる、わかる、ひろう、ひく、はえる、のぼる、しる、おこる、たつ、とる、なく、かう、わらう、ひらく、やってくる、おきる、つむ、びっくりする、はなしあう、うまれる、あるく、ちがう、まもる、すわる、たてる、けす、がんばる、よみあう、おきる、**[adv. (20)]** : どう、わいわい、やっぱり、いっばん、とても、とっても、ちよつと、よく、やっつと、もつと、もう、はじめて、これから、いつも、そう、そつと、すぐ、まだ、はっきり、どうして、**[adj. (21)]** : いい、まるい、おいしい、おおきい、あかい、ながい、たのしい、おもしろい、しろい、あまい、ない、あおい、あたらしい、ちいさい、つよい、たかひ、よい、ただしい、ひろい、おもい、うれい、**[no-adj. (10)]** : たくさん、どんな、げんき、おなじ、きれい、すき、こんな、ていねい、どのよう、だいすき、**[pron. (10)]** : ぼく、わたし、なん、なに、どこ、どれ、これ、じぶん、だれ、ここ、**[interjection (6)]** : ありがとう、うんとこしょ、どっこいしょ、あつ、おお、**[conj. (7)]** : そして、すると、それから、それでも、だって、でも、また、**[adnom. (4)]** : その、あの、この、おおきな、**[idiom. (1)]** : きなをつける

5.3 Assessing difficulty level based on test standards

To analyze the characteristics of the vocabulary included in Japanese language textbooks in more detail and clarify the nature of the words included, a difficulty level assessment was conducted for the vocabulary included in first-grade Japanese language textbooks. Specifically, the words included in the five textbooks used in this study were compared with those appearing in the Test Standards, and the percentage breakdown by level was calculated (words not included in any level were classified as "outside the levels"). The results are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 shows the size of the shares, which can be arranged in descending order from Level 2 to Level 4, Level 3, and Level 1, with similar percentages observed across the five textbooks. Although JLPT is not specifically designed for children, the survey results based on previous language proficiency assessments provide important insights. Generally speaking, Japanese language textbooks for JSL beginning learners use words with low difficulty levels, as prescribed by the Test Standards. This analysis shows, however, that first-grade Japanese language textbooks used in compulsory education include relatively difficult Level 2 vocabulary, with the majority being vocabulary outside the levels.



	KT1	KT2	KT3	KT4	KT5
Level 1	6.7%	6.3%	7.1%	7.1%	6.6%
Level 2	27.8%	23.9%	25.3%	27.4%	24.1%
Level 3	11.9%	10.1%	10.5%	12.3%	10.0%
Level 4	26.5%	20.6%	23.4%	23.4%	20.2%
Outside	27.2%	39.2%	33.7%	29.8%	39.2%

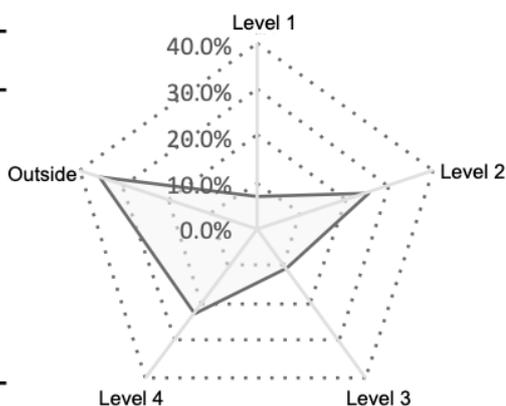


Figure 3. Breakdown of Textbook Vocabulary by JLPT Level

What exactly are these words that are classified as outside the levels? They include names of characters in stories, such as "ろくべえ," "がまくん," "チロ," "かんちゃん," "モールくん," "りっちゃん," "シロ," and expressions like "かえるくん," "くまさん," "おひさま," "きつねさん," and so on that are related to animals, fruits, plants, interjections, and mimetic words used to describe familiar expressions, situations, and states or to express the worldview and theme of the stories.

This indicates that first-grade Japanese language textbooks contain a significant number of words outside the levels that are used to express familiar expressions and describe situations and states. This points to the rich vocabulary of the Japanese language that goes beyond the scope of proficiency tests for non-native speakers.

6. General Discussion

6.1 Characteristics of the vocabulary in first-grade Japanese language textbooks

This study represents the first attempt to make a comprehensive survey of the vocabulary in current first-grade Japanese language textbooks. The analysis of the vocabulary reveals that while there are commonalities across various textbooks, most of the words used are unique to each textbook. This finding suggests that it is essential to have an accurate understanding of the vocabulary used in each textbook when teaching or learning with Japanese language textbooks. At the same time, the identification of 465 common vocabulary items across these textbooks points to the possibility of ascertaining the core vocabulary necessary for understanding first-grade Japanese language textbooks.

A more detailed analysis of the vocabulary in first-grade Japanese language textbooks as measured against the Test Standards reveals that more than half of the words are Level 2, which is relatively difficult, or outside the levels. This finding may help identify one of the factors contributing to the difficulties JSL children face when learning with textbooks designed for native speakers. It can be said that Japanese language textbooks contain many words that are difficult for non-native speakers.

Language education for children should not, of course, be prescribed based solely on linguistic difficulty. Consideration should also be given to fostering linguistic qualities and skills that derive from



interacting with, savoring, and expressing the situations and emotions depicted in the works studied in Japanese language textbooks.

The characteristics of the vocabulary classified as outside the levels, such as familiar, everyday expressions and words used to describe a worldview or various situations, reinforce the notion that Japanese language textbooks use a rich vocabulary that goes beyond the scope of proficiency tests for non-native speakers.

The study also identifies specific words in Japanese language textbooks that may be difficult for JSL children. This can lead to discussions on concrete strategies to teach these words and the methods for doing so. Even if some words are difficult, it is possible to teach them as long as their presence is known. The inclusion of difficult words in instruction will better enable JSL children to engage with the rich world of works included in textbooks for native speakers.

6.2 Supporting vocabulary-based learning

How can the clarification of the overall vocabulary in Japanese language textbooks and their difficulty levels help support learning? First, it would allow for the informed choice of instructional content contained in curriculum units and textbooks so that it aligns with the Japanese language proficiency of JSL children. While this paper does not list all the vocabulary included in the five textbooks due to space constraints, it would be desirable for the detailed vocabulary lists created in this research to be made available in a user-friendly and legally compliant manner. This would clarify the vocabulary handled in each curriculum unit, allowing for support tailored to the learner's proficiency.

Second, knowing the vocabulary included in the textbooks in advance would make it possible to anticipate areas where JSL children may struggle, as opposed to analyzing difficulties through tests or follow-up interviews.

And third, it would enable the development of supplementary materials. Although the vocabulary included in Japanese language textbooks is largely unique to each textbook, vocabulary explanations or annotations tailored to JSL children could be added, or supplementary materials to build vocabulary knowledge could be created. An additional form of vocabulary-based support would be to develop instructional materials that have been rewritten to simplify complex vocabulary.

The above is an outline of the specific methods of supporting vocabulary-based learning for JSL children through an investigation of first-grade Japanese language textbooks.

6.3 The results of this study and future issues

There are still many remaining challenges. This study does not cover the entire scope of language learning for JSL children but merely clarifies the situation from the perspective of vocabulary in first-grade Japanese language textbooks. There is a need in the future for comprehensive research that also considers children's overall living environment and growth process. Once vocabulary trends and characteristics are clarified, the reasons and factors behind them should be pursued, covering not only linguistic but also social, historical, and educational factors. Furthermore, the effectiveness and potential of the learning support methods that are suggested by this study need to be verified through case studies in educational settings. This requires careful and detailed examination over time.



It is important to tailor Japanese language instruction and subject instruction to the Japanese language proficiency of JSL children, as well as to provide lifestyle guidance that takes into account the cultural backgrounds of the children's home countries and family environments. Furthermore, as stated in the literature review, the importance of heritage language education for children of Japanese descent living abroad and the challenges of multilingual education in international marriage families have been highlighted. The acquisition of Japanese by JSL children is becoming an increasingly critical issue. Similarly, shifting the focus to languages other than Japanese, addressing the care and support for children who are not native speakers is an urgent task. The investigation, analyses, and discussions undertaken in this study are believed to provide critical points for the future direction of language support. This also has implications for Japanese language education within Japan. The elucidation of the actual vocabulary used in Japanese language textbooks, as undertaken in this study, is an indispensable first step in enhancing Japanese language instruction for JSL children and could prompt a review of Japanese language education in Japan from multifaceted perspectives.

It is hoped that this study will serve as a foundational resource to help ensure that both native and non-native-speaking children equally benefit from Japanese language education in Japan and have a rich learning experience.

Declarations and Acknowledgment:

The author declares there is no conflict of interest.

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP22K00644 and the Hakuho Research Grant.

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