

A corpus analysis of the *on-kun* reading ratio in junior high school English textbooks

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The Japanese writing system is based on the use of characters adapted from the Chinese language, called *kanji*. *Kanji* learning is a bottleneck in acquiring Japanese for JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) children whose background is from a country that does not use *kanji*. Literacy in *kanji* is made difficult by the fact that each character contains two readings: an *on* reading based on the original Chinese pronunciation, and a *kun* reading based on Japanese. Additionally, some characters may possess more than one *on* or *kun* reading.

Researchers and educators must investigate authentic and current teaching materials in order to reform *kanji* education for children not used to *kanji*. In 2017, Iori & Hayakawa conducted a corpus analysis to calculate the *on-kun* reading ratio for the *kanji* used in junior high school science textbooks. In the present study, we conducted a similar corpus analysis for the *kanji* used in English textbooks.

The results indicated that: 1) *kanji* using several readings in the textbooks accounted for more than 30% of the total; 2) *kanji* using an *on* reading only accounted for approximately 50%, *kanji* using a *kun* reading only accounted for 15%, and *kanji* using both *on* and *kun* readings accounted for approximately 20% of the total; 3) the most frequently occurring characters were substantially different from the most frequently occurring characters in the science textbooks; 4) *kun*-reading characters that appeared frequently in the English textbooks also appeared frequently in the science textbooks, however, frequently appearing *on*-reading characters differed between the two subjects; 5) there was no significant correlation between *on-kun* reading frequency rank and the government-mandated list of *kanji* to be learned for each school year.

The final finding in particular suggests that the current system of *kanji* education is inadequate for the needs of JSL students, and that researchers and educators should be working towards a reform of this system.