

The Role of Lexical and Grammatical Analysis in Adapting Extensive Reading to Low-Level EFL Learners

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Abstract

The effectiveness of the language acquisition methodology known as *extensive reading* has been confirmed through both research results and practical experience, but the vast majority of graded readers currently available for use in extensive reading programs are simply too challenging for the lowest level students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in some Japanese universities. Carefully selected starter-level graded readers can be used effectively, in order to fuel language acquisition and enhance student motivation, but lower level students require much more support than higher level students, who can work more independently. The creation of support materials (pre-quizzes, vocabulary handouts, pre-reading activities, etc.) is greatly facilitated by first performing a thorough analysis of the lexicon and grammatical structures found in the graded readers chosen for use. This can also reveal obstacles to students' comprehension that might never be suspected otherwise. The author has successfully implemented an extensive reading program for his university students, which is currently in its 3rd year. The purpose of this paper is to provide a detailed report of the information gained through a methodical lexical and grammatical analysis of the graded readers used in the program, including important issues which are often overlooked, such as verb valency.

Introduction

Research results and the practical experience of a growing number of teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have confirmed the efficacy of the approach to second language acquisition known as *extensive reading*, also known in Japanese

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as *tadoku*. In spite of this, the curriculum of most EFL reading courses in Japanese universities (and high schools) still revolves around the methodology known as “grammar translation,” focusing primarily (often exclusively) on “intensive reading,” which is based on a bottom-up approach to reading. As Nunan (1989) explains, the bottom-up approach treats reading as “a process of decoding written symbols, working from smaller units (individual letters) to larger ones (words, clauses and sentences). In other words, we use strategies to decode written forms in order to arrive at meaning” (p.33). The word “decode” is particularly apropos here, as such an approach to reading often resembles cryptography more than what we normally think of as “reading” (i.e. what most of us engage in on a daily basis in our own first language), especially when students are required to attempt to “read” materials far above their natural level of ability, as is all too often the case. Newmark (1971), in fact, even refers to this process of deciphering difficult paragraphs as “cryptoanalytic decoding.”

Smith (1978) argues, in contrast to what conventional wisdom might lead us to believe, that reading works in the opposite order from what the bottom-up approach implies, claiming that words are identified by first understanding meaning, and that in turn, even letters are generally identified by first identifying words. This is in accord with Krashen’s “input hypothesis” (1987), which argues that what is needed for language acquisition is large amounts of “comprehensible input.” It cannot be overemphasized that Part 2 of the hypothesis as articulated by Krashen clearly states that it “relates to acquisition, not learning” (p.21). There is a clear distinction between the two, and the goal of extensive reading is true language *acquisition*, not merely the memorization of vocabulary or grammar rules. Regarding the extensive-intensive reading debate, Krashen sides with Newmark (1971) in proposing that students gain more by reading for meaning (and of course ideally reading large amounts of material) than from the type of “cryptoanalytic decoding” described above.

The debate continues to the present day, as exemplified by Craven (2009), who defends intensive reading while fully acknowledging the value of extensive reading, and who advocates focusing on the complementary strengths of the two approaches. He emphasizes the role of active reading strategies employed in intensive reading (and

the overt teaching of those skills): predicting, guessing, inferring, checking, identifying text organization, and of course decoding meaning. At the same time, he concedes that “to some advocates of extensive reading, intensive reading is not really reading at all. They argue that analysing texts in this unnatural way is simply a language exercise... What’s more, some say that the reading skills and strategies so clearly identified in the intensive approach don’t in fact exist; these so-called skills...are simply elements of the natural process of comprehension...[and] that separating these skills out artificially can impede students’ progress” (p.24). Craven ultimately argues for a “unified approach” that incorporates both intensive and extensive reading.

This is supported by the findings of Stanovich (1980), who has shown that learning to read involves both bottom-up and top-down strategies, and that integrating the two strategies may be a requirement for efficient reading. Rubin (2002), professor of Japanese literature at Harvard University, sheds further light on the issue, stating that students are at a disadvantage if they do not “learn to check the accuracy of their understanding in terms of their own language.” He also advocates a middle ground: “Just as it is a mistake to expect students to master a language by translating it into their own, it is also a mistake to exclude translation from the classroom entirely.” It appears, therefore, that *some* type of intensive reading, if properly implemented, may have a legitimate place in the classroom. Craven stresses, however, that “content is key” and that if students are required to spend a class “in close scrutiny of a text they can’t relate to...the result will be a tiresome exercise in futility” (p.24). Mikulecky (2004) also acknowledges the potential value of intensive reading, but emphasizes the necessity of extensive reading: “While intensive reading can play an important role in developing an appreciation of the English language and selected English literature, it is only by reading extensively that students can develop their ability to read with fluency and understanding. Furthermore, extensive reading is essential for practicing and applying reading skills and for developing all areas of language skills,” and she agrees with other researchers that “vocabulary acquisition and writing ability...are directly related to the quantity of reading that students engage in” (p.257).

Regardless of the differing opinions on intensive reading, most EFL researchers

acknowledge the value of at least including some form of extensive reading in the curriculum. Mason's studies have demonstrated that for university students in Japan, in courses lasting for an entire academic year, extensive reading can be superior to traditional instruction, and that students' writing skills improve as well (Mason and Krashen, 1997). In Mason's first study, students in "extensive reading" classes read graded readers in class (and as homework), with accountability (albeit minimal) in the form of writing short synopses and keeping a diary, as opposed to the "traditional" students in classes taught using the typical grammar translation method. Regarding this study, Krashen (2002) points out that the extensive reading students in *sairishû* (retakers) classes "made larger gains than the traditional students, and in fact nearly caught up to them, even though the traditional students began the semester far ahead." Equally important, however, was "the clear improvement in attitude shown by the students who did extensive reading. Many of the once reluctant students of EFL became eager readers. Several wrote in their diaries that they were amazed at their improvement" (p.30). This brings up an equally important benefit of extensive reading, if properly implemented: the potential positive effect on students' attitudes toward not just reading, but toward English in general. One of our challenges as educators, particularly in classes with lower level learners is how to successfully motivate them. There is obviously an upper limit to how many pages of text even a motivated student can read in one academic year of extensive reading. Perhaps more important than how much English they learn (or rather, *acquire*), during the short time they are in our care, is whether they develop the desire and motivation to continue on their own (and acquire the tools for doing so) when they are no longer in our care.

Implementation of Extensive Reading Program

My attempts to establish an extensive reading program for my students at Osaka Sangyo University began in 2004, but I was initially disappointed when I investigated the lowest level graded readers available and discovered that even they were too challenging for many of my students. This is not to say that they would have been unable to decipher them through intensive reading, but that was not the point. The goal was to provide them with the pleasurable and motivating experience of true extensive

reading, and the lowest level graded readers would not have fulfilled the necessary criteria. Many of my students simply did not have the vocabulary and basic knowledge of grammar necessary to read and understand the stories without a dictionary. It would not have been comprehensible input for them, nor would it have been enjoyable or provided them with the feelings of success that lead to increased motivation. However, in 2006 a new series of graded readers was published, which I became aware of the following year, and I began planning the implementation of an extensive reading program to be launched in the 2008-2009 academic year using the new *Foundations Reading Library* (published by Thomson ELT). The series consists of seven levels, each of which has six titles, for a total of 42 graded readers. The highest two levels are as difficult as the other low-level readers I had previously considered but had decided against, but the lowest three levels are much easier and I felt confident that they would allow all my *Reading & Writing* students, with a few rare exceptions, to experience true extensive reading.

One thing that sets the series apart from other graded readers is the extremely skillful use of illustrations. In other series, the pictures are merely a pleasant accompaniment, but in any of the *Foundations* books, much of the story can be understood from the illustrations alone, and in this respect they share the same strength as comics: they provide invaluable context that in turn enables comprehensibility, the key to acquisition. Another positive feature of the *Foundations* books, also shared by comics, is a preponderance of dialogue, which provides valuable input for indirectly developing students' listening and speaking skills. The series also builds in considerable redundancy, repetition, and recycling of vocabulary, not just within individual books but throughout the series (see Appendix D), and this serves a dual purpose: it makes the books easier and faster to read, and it provides the repeated exposure necessary for true acquisition to take place. In contrast to the text-only glossaries found in some graded readers (usually at the end of the book), each of the *Foundations* books has a one-page "picture dictionary" at the *beginning*, called "Before You Read," where 12 to 15 main words or phrases are presented with small illustrations. The names of the main characters are also introduced on this page. Unlike the disconnected, individual stories of other graded readers, the same characters reappear throughout all seven levels of the

series and they all live in the same town of *Bayview*, providing a sense of continuity and familiarity. Finally, the levels progress very gradually in difficulty, resulting in a much smoother transition, and meaning that most students are able to reach at least Level 4 and enjoy the concomitant sense of accomplishment and progress.

The few rare exceptions I mentioned above are those students who, for whatever reason, somehow managed to complete six years of junior and senior high school without acquiring more than 10 or 20 words of English. For those few students (rarely more than one per class), true extensive reading is simply not an option, for they lack the proper foundation. However, they are still able to participate by using the illustrations to practice their skills in guessing and inference. They do their best to understand the story using the few words they recognize, in conjunction with the pictures, and then fill in the gaps with their imagination. Since they are behind in comparison with the other students, they are made aware that they will have to make a greater effort to catch up. After reading the story, they use their dictionaries to engage in intensive vocabulary study, in order to improve future comprehension. As mentioned above, there is considerable repetition and recycling throughout the entire series, so they experience the benefits of this vocabulary study very directly and immediately.

The extensive reading program is now in its third year of implementation, and student feedback and reactions have been extremely positive. All students progress through at least the first three levels (a total of 18 books) and usually through most or all of Level 4, thereby completing a maximum total of 24 books in one academic year. Of course, higher level students are placed at an appropriate level early in the program and therefore progress even further, into Level 5 or 6. One unfortunate drawback to the series is the two large jumps in length as one progresses upward in level. The books in the first three levels are all 16 pages long, but this suddenly increases to 24 pages as of Level 4, and then to 32 pages as of Level 6. These are considerable jumps in length, considering the otherwise very gradual increase in difficulty from level to level.

Critique of Publisher's Wordlist

Before implementing the extensive reading program, the first step was to thoroughly examine the content of the first level, the initial starting point for all of the students. Among other uses, this lexical and grammatical information would then be used to create a pre-quiz, administered to every student at the start of the program. The purpose of the pre-quiz was twofold: to assess each student's reading level and degree of preparedness, and to give them the opportunity to expand their vocabulary in order to experience greater success in their reading, by allowing them to see which words they needed to learn. Basic vocabulary common to all six books in Level 1 was then covered in class.

With a username and password, instructors can download the following documents from the publisher's website: a grammar syllabus (covering all seven levels) and a separate "wordlist" for each of the seven levels. Unfortunately, these materials are woefully inadequate, and the wordlists are particularly problematic, as explained in greater detail below, so it was necessary to perform a thorough linguistic analysis of my own, which I will elaborate on later. The following excerpt from the Level 1 wordlist will serve to illustrate the format employed in each of the seven wordlists provided by the publisher:

A	an
About	
And	
Angry	angrier angrily anger
Ask	asks asking asked
At	
Away	
Be	am are is s being was were
Big	bigger biggest
Boy	boyfriends boyfriend boys
But	

As can be seen above, headwords are listed on the left, and in many cases related words or forms are listed on the right (with no commas separating them). The unfortunate decision to capitalize the headwords is difficult to understand, especially since headwords are not capitalized in dictionaries. The Level 1 list contains a total of 73 headwords, and there are an additional 134 words (or forms) listed to the right of the headwords, as well as the following section included at the end of the list:

Plus

Colors black green red blue blues reds white gray orange
 Days day [sic] Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday today
 tomorrow yesterday day days
 Pronouns I me my you your yours he him his she her hers we us our they their theirs

In most cases, the words listed to the right of a headword are merely morphologically different forms of the word. Three forms are included for most verbs: 3rd-person singular (-s), present participle (-ing), and simple past tense. Only five adjectives (*angry*, *big*, *good*, *happy*, *okay*) are included as headwords in the list, and morphological variants to the right of those include: comparative, superlative, and adverbial (when applicable). In the case of the headword *angry*, the superlative form *angriest* is inexplicably omitted, but the noun form *anger* is included, even though it is not used in the Level 1 books. The irregular forms *better* and *best* are listed to the right of the headword *good*. Only five nouns are included as headwords in the list (*man*, *boy*, *girl*, *friend*, *name*), and in each case the plural form is provided to the right, although the irregular plural form *men* does not appear anywhere in Level 1.

In a number of cases, however, the lexical items included to the right are different (albeit similar and/or related) words, as illustrated in the following examples:

Boy boyfriends boyfriend boys
 Every everybody everything everywhere
 Nobody nothing

Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, there are numerous problems with the wordlists provided by the publisher, and Level 1 is no exception. One of the most glaring errors is the inclusion of past tense forms for all verbs, in spite of the fact that not a *single* past tense form is used in any of the six books comprising Level 1. Even the grammar syllabus provided on the publisher's website corroborates this, listing only present continuous and present simple verb tenses for Level 1. In fact, past tense is not listed on the grammar syllabus until Level 4. Similarly, although comparative, superlative, and adverbial forms are listed for adjectives, not a single one of these forms is used in the Level 1 books. The publisher's grammar syllabus is lamentably lacking in detail, making it sometimes difficult to know exactly what is being referred to, but in any case the topics of "comparative" and "superlative" do not appear in the syllabus until Levels 3, 4 and 5:

- Level 3: comparatives (regular)
- Level 4: comparative... *more ...than*
 comparatives (irregular)
- Level 5: superlatives with *most* and *best worse* [sic]

In addition to the forms mentioned above, there are also other words included in the wordlist which are not actually used anywhere in the Level 1 books: *everywhere*, *friendly*, *goodnight*, *nobody*, *these*, etc.

Beyond this fundamental problem, there are also various idiosyncrasies in the list. First, the verb forms listed to the right of each verb in the list are not placed consistently in the same order. Sometimes the *-ing* form appears first and other times the 3rd-person singular form appears first. The noun forms *player* and *players* are included to the right of the verb *play* (along with the expected verb forms *plays*, *playing*, *played*), which differs from the format used for other verbs in the list. This in and of itself is not necessarily overly problematic, but it would perhaps be preferable to include *player* as a separate headword, since it is a noun, rather than a form of the verb *play*. More problematic is the fact that the nouns *runner* and *runners* are similarly listed to the right of the verb *run* (along with the three expected verb forms), but are not used

anywhere in the Level 1 books. Here as well there is a lack of consistency in the order of the words, with the nouns *runner* and *runners* sandwiched between the verb forms, in contrast to the leftmost position of *player* and *players* in the list (italics added for emphasis):

Play *player players* playing plays played

Run running runs *runner runners* ran

Other problems with the verb forms listed include the fact that the past participle of *show* (i.e. *shown*) is inexplicably included, but not the past participle of *know* (i.e. *known*), or for that matter any other verb in similar cases where the past participle differs from the simple past form (i.e. *did* vs *done*, *gave* vs *given*, etc.). Of course, as mentioned earlier, the past tense is not used at all in Level 1, let alone the past participle, so none of these forms should have been included in the list.

Adding to the confusion is the fact, as mentioned earlier, that some of the words included to the right of the headwords are not merely morphological variations (i.e. different forms of verbs, adjectives, nouns, etc.). The following examples from the wordlist will serve to illustrate words that fall into this category. Parentheses have been added to indicate lexical items not actually used anywhere in the Level 1 books. Eliminating these 14 words (along with the erroneous “t” that presumably should be *-n't*, as mentioned below) leaves only 16, meaning that almost half of the words below are actually unnecessary.

Boy (boyfriends) boyfriend boys

Every everybody everything (everywhere)

Friend (friends friendly)

Girl (girls girlfriend girlfriends)

Goodbye bye (goodnight)

No not t [sic]

(Nobody) nothing

Some (somebody somehow) something (somewhere)

This (these those)

With the exception of *boys*, *friends*, *girls*, *bye*, and *these*, all of the words listed to the right are separate (albeit related) lexical items, not merely different forms of their respective headwords. (The adverb *friendly* is best treated as a separate word, since it is formed from a noun, rather than an adjective, as would usually be the rule. In any case, this word is not even used in the Level 1 books.) The word *boyfriend* is used in Level 1, but not *girlfriend*, which is presumably included in the list only because of its symmetrical relationship to *boyfriend*.

Several other problems are immediately apparent here. First, the order of lexical items to the right is inconsistent, as already mentioned earlier. Note the difference between the two analogous entries for *boy* and *girl*, where the order of items to the right is reversed. Second, in the case of *nobody*, the actual headword itself is not even included in the Level 1 books. Third, *those* is inappropriately included to the right of *this*, along with the expected plural form *these*. The word *that* is listed elsewhere as a separate headword, and it is there that the plural form *those* should appear, but it does not.

There are also errors in some of the entries in the Level 1 wordlist:

Be	am are is s (being was were)
Have	has haven (having had) haven [sic]
Let	lets
Name	(names named)
No	not t [sic]

(Again, parentheses have been added to indicate lexical items not actually used anywhere in the Level 1 books.) The apostrophe is missing from *let's* and *'s* (contraction of *is*). The lexical item *haven* is presumably meant to be *haven't* and the single letter "t" after *not* was probably meant to be the contraction *-n't*. Worse still, the erroneous *haven* is included twice. The form *named* is also likely an error. It does not appear in the Level 1 books, whereas the word *name* does appear but is used only as a noun. Finally,

let is included as a headword, but the only form of this word that actually appears in the Level 1 books is *let's*, which should ideally be treated as a separate item, since the uncontracted expression “*let us*” is not normally found in the same contexts in modern English usage. The suggestion “*Let's go*” means something entirely different from “*Let us go*” (i.e. “*Release us*”).

As mentioned earlier, the following additional section appears at the end of the Level 1 wordlist:

Colors	black green red blue blues reds white gray orange
Days day [sic]	Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday today tomorrow yesterday day days
Pronouns	I me my you your yours he him his she her hers we us our they their theirs

All of the “pronouns” listed here are used in the Level 1 books, with the exception of the pronominal possessive forms *yours*, *hers*, and *theirs*. (The remaining pronominal possessive forms *mine* and *ours* are not even included in the wordlist.) Strictly speaking, the forms *my*, *your*, *our*, *their*, and depending on context, *his* and *her*, are actually possessive adjectives or determiners, not pronouns, although they are similar (or identical) in form to their corresponding pronouns. Conspicuously missing from this otherwise almost complete paradigm is the object form *them*, but it does not appear in Level 1.

Of the remaining words, however, in contrast to the “pronouns,” only the following are actually used in the Level 1 books:

Colors	red blue blues reds white
Days	Monday Thursday Saturday today day

(The word *colors* and the plural form *days* are not used in Level 1, but they are clearly intended here as labels for their respective categories, rather than actual headwords.) The plural forms of *red* and *blue* are used in only one Level 1 book (*Get the Ball!*), which

involves a soccer game between the red team and blue team, referred to respectively as *the Reds* and *the Blues*.

Omitting all the words not actually used in the Level 1 books, as well as morphological variants of the headwords, results in the following extremely condensed version of the original Level 1 wordlist, with a total of only 87 words, organized here by lexical category:

Articles	a, an, the
Conjunctions	and, but
Demonstratives	this, that
Interrogatives	what, where, why
Prepositions	about, at, for, from, in, of, on, to, onto, with
Adverbs	here, there, away, down, out, now, very, really, not, today
Nouns	boy, friend, girl, man, name, day
Adjectives	angry, big, good, happy, okay, red, blue, white
Verbs	ask, be, come, do, get, give, go, have, know, like, listen, look, play, run, say, see, show, start, take, talk, tell, think, wait, walk, want, watch
Interjections	yes, yeah, no, please, sorry, thank(s), goodbye, bye, hello, hi
Indefinites	every, some, something, nothing
Days of week	Monday, Thursday, Saturday

Of course, these could be organized differently. The articles and demonstratives could be combined with the words *every* and *some* into one category of determiners, for example. However, the demonstratives *this* and *that* can both be pronouns as well as determiners. The interjections category includes a subcategory of greetings, and the “indefinites” category includes both determiners (*every*, *some*) and pronouns (*something*, *nothing*). The word *okay* is used as both an adjective and as an interjection in the Level 1 books, but is here listed only as an adjective, since each word appears only once in the list.

A cursory glance at the list immediately reveals that there are far more verbs than any other part of speech. In fact, the 26 verbs account for almost one third of the 87 total words in the list. In contrast to this, there are only 6 nouns, which is very difficult to understand, since these are not by any means the only nouns used in the Level 1 books. Even if it is assumed that the publisher made a decision to include only the most basic vocabulary items, this does not provide an adequate explanation, as there is no conceivable rationale for including these 6 nouns and no others. In fact, this brings us to the biggest criticism of all regarding the publisher's wordlists. As already mentioned, a number of words are included in the Level 1 wordlist that are not actually used in the Level 1 books, but ironically the bigger issue is conversely the number of words that *are* used in the books, but *not* included in the wordlist, as discussed in detail below.

Lexical Analysis

Performing a thorough analysis of the six books in Level 1 revealed that, in contrast to the 87 words above, provided on the publisher's website, the actual total of distinct words used is at least 240, over two and a half times as many! Not included in this are proper nouns: names of the characters in the stories, *The Lagoon* (the name of a café), *The Bandits* (the name of a band), and *Bayview* (the name of the town where all the characters live). The three categories with the largest number of words were, not surprisingly, verbs, nouns, and adjectives. Of these, verbs were the most plentiful (26) in the publisher's list, but the actual number is 45, not even counting the three key verbs *be*, *do*, and *have* (and their other forms), which are omitted from the list below. At least 17 of these 45 verbs appear in more than one of the six books of Level 1. Instead of only 8 adjectives, there are actually 18, of which 9 appear in more than one book, but nouns outnumber both verbs and adjectives combined. A total of 75 nouns are used in the Level 1 books, in stark contrast to the paltry 6 provided in the publisher's wordlist. Of these, 21 nouns are used in more than one book. (Words that appear in more than one of the six books of Level 1 are emphasized on the pre-quiz administered in my class.) Here is a complete list of these three main categories:

Nouns: apple, bag, ball, bike, birthday, boy, boyfriend, brother, bus, café, car,

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(shopping) cart, CD, class, classroom, clock, coffee, concert, cookie, day, dog, drink, egg, father, food, friend, fruit, game, gate, goal, girl, holiday, house, husband, ice cream, lunch, lunchroom, lunchtime, maker (coffee maker, ice-cream maker), man, meat, milk, Mom, money, mother, name, (police) officer, pants, paper, player, police, puppy/puppies, purse, (bike) rack, rain, referee, sandwich, score, shirt, sister, snowboard, soccer, (train) station, school, store, street, student, team, thing, ticket, time, train, tree, watch, woman

Verbs (included in publisher's wordlist): ask, come, get, give, go, know, like, listen, look, play, run, say, see, show, start, take, talk, tell, think, wait, walk, want, watch

Verbs (not included in publisher's wordlist): call, eat, fall, help, hit, jump, kick, leave, love, meet, open, push, put, remember, ride, score, shop(ping), smile, stop, understand, win, work

Adjectives: angry, bad, beautiful, big, cold, good, happy, hungry, late, little, lucky, new, next, nice, okay, sad, surprised, wet

Note that there are two words (*score* and *watch*) that are used in the series as both verb and noun, and therefore appear separately in the list and are each counted as two words. Although *surprised* is the past participle of a verb, it is used adjectivally in the series and has therefore been placed in that category. The noun form *surprise* is used in the title of one of the books (*Sarah's Surprise*), but has not been included in the list as a separate word, since *surprised* is already included. (For more detailed indexes of the nouns, verbs, and adjectives used in Level 1, and in which books they appear, see Appendices A, B and C.)

I divided the remaining 102 words into two groups: a miscellaneous category and a list of 72 "basic vocabulary" words that all students should already know. These "basic" words are briefly reviewed in class (if necessary), and any students who do not know all of them are required to learn them before we begin extensive reading. The "basic vocabulary" list is subdivided into the following smaller categories:

Articles	the, a/an
Pronouns	I, you, he, she, it, we, they, me, him, them, my, your, her, his, our
Conjunctions	and, but
Prepositions	at, to, for, out, of, on, onto, in, into, by, with, from, off
Interrogatives	what, where, why, how
Demonstratives	this, that, here, there
Days of week	Monday, Thursday, Saturday
Numbers	one, two
Colors	red, blue, white
Key verb forms	am, are, is, do, does, don't, have, has
Miscellaneous	oh, yes, no, not, very, o'clock, too, Mr., Mrs., please, thank(s), sorry, morning, bye, goodbye, hello

The verb *be* appears in Level 1 only in its conjugated forms, not as the actual word *be*. I have grouped *here* and *there* together with the related words *this* and *that*, even though the former are actually adverbs, rather than demonstratives. Ideally, students should know the names of all seven days of the week, but even if they do not know them all or which is which, at the very minimum they should recognize them as days of the week. Obviously, there are other words that could easily be included as “basic vocabulary,” but I tried to assume a bare minimum of knowledge. I also avoided including any nouns, verbs, or adjectives, other than the three colors and the forms of the key verbs *be*, *do*, and *have*.

This leaves the remaining 30 miscellaneous words:

after, about, away, back, down, (get) dressed, front, near, over, up, everybody, everything, some, something, nothing, every (day), excuse, hey, let's, more, now, ouch, really, today, ummm, well, wow, yeah, years old

Grammatical Analysis

In addition to the vocabulary used in Level 1, students must also be familiar with

the grammar patterns used. As mentioned previously, the grammar syllabus provided on the publisher's website, as with the wordlists, is quite inadequate, as will be explained below. Except for the fact that the original syllabus is in chart form, the content has been left unaltered here. I have included both Level 1 and Level 2 because there are items listed for Level 2 that should have been included in Level 1. (Items in bold in Level 2 belong in Level 1, and items in bold in Level 1 do not actually appear in the Level 1 books.)

LEVEL 1:

Sentence structure

simple SVO / SVC

simple copula questions

there is / are

Verbs / tenses

be as main verb

questions and negatives

present continuous (present meaning)

present simple (future reference)

present simple (habit and state)

Other

adjectives (simple attributive and predicative)

determiner *this that*

plurals (regular / **common irregular**)

possessive 's

possessives *my your her his our*

pronouns as subject or direct object

time prepositions *at, on, in*

verb and verb

which?

LEVEL 2:

Sentence structure

joining sentences with *and but, because*

Verbs / tenses

can ('t) (ability)

positive imperatives

negative imperatives

want X vs want to do

Other

cardinal numbers 1-20

demonstratives *this that these those*

distributives, *every* + np *another, other, the other*

gerunds acting as noun for activities and pastimes

possessives *mine hers its ours*

some and *any*

too + adjective

indefinite *some- no- any- every body / thing*

Aside from other problems, the syllabus is organized in rather sloppy fashion. Italics are not used consistently: in Level 2, *these those* are in italics, but not *this that*, and the ('t) of *can* ('t) is not italicized. (There is also an unnecessary space after *can*.) Rendering *every body / thing* as *everybody, everything* would make more sense. There are commas separating words in some lists, but not in others. Presumably, “verb and verb” refers to patterns such as “She waits and waits,” used in *Rain, Rain, Rain!* (p.13), indicating repeated or continuous action. If so, then “and” should be in italics. Here then is a revised Level 1 syllabus with errors corrected and items where they should be:

Sentence Structure

simple SVO / SVC

simple copula questions

there is / are

joining clauses with *and, but*

Verbs / Tenses

be as main verb

questions and negatives

present continuous (*be V-ing*) (present meaning)

present simple (future reference, habit/state)

affirmative and negative imperatives, *Let's...*

want X vs *want to do*

Other

adjectives (simple attributive and predicative)

determiner *this, that*

plurals (regular)

possessive 's

possessives *my, your, her, his, our*

pronouns as subject or direct object

time prepositions *at, on, in*

verb *and* verb (e.g. *waits and waits, runs and runs*)

indefinite *some, no, nothing, everybody, everything*

For the lowest level students, however, we cannot afford to make any assumptions about what they already know. Therefore, there are a number of other minor points not included in this syllabus that could be added for the sake of completeness:

1. 3rd person singular -s (-es: *pushes, watches, goes*)

2. spelling variations of V-ing:

coming, leaving, smiling, taking, getting, running, shopping

3. *and* as connector for nouns, adjectives, verbs

4. plural pronoun *they/them* referring to inanimate nouns:

they = “tickets” *them* = “the sandwiches”

5. present tense (narrative: used in place of past tense in stories):

She looks at the clock.

6. start V-ing (e.g. *start running*)

7. imperative with subject: *You and Dingo wait here.*

Now you go and get the milk. “No, you get it.”

8. position of quote both before and after main verb:

“...,” *thinks/says Faye.* *She thinks/says, “...”*

9. appositive, both with and without comma:

her friend Kerry *this is my husband, Chris*

Jenny's friend Kerry *their friend, Farina*

my dog Misha

There are three additional grammar points that require further elaboration. The first of these is not included in the publisher’s syllabus until Level 3, but appears in at least four places in the Level 1 books:

1. present continuous used with future meaning:

We are coming now. (*Sarah's Surprise*)

She’s coming, Kerry. (*The Tickets*)

We are meeting at lunchtime. (*The Tickets*)

I’m going into the store. (*Good Dog? Bad Dog!*)

2. valency of the verb *want*:

want [noun]

want to [verb]

want [noun] *to* [verb] e.g. *I want the Blues to win.*

3. valency of the verbs *give* and *show* (direct and indirect object):

a. *give/show* [d.o] *to* [i.o]

give the money to Sarah

Jenny shows the tickets to Alex.

b. *give/show* [i.o.] [d.o.]

give me a ticket

Sarah shows them the man.

Anthony shows Alex the bags.

I want to show you something.

Points 2 and 3 have particular relevance for Japanese learners of English, due to the grammatical difference between the two languages. Regarding the three uses of the verb *want* shown above, each of them corresponds to a different form in Japanese:

want [noun]

[noun] *ga hoshii*

want to [verb]

V-*tai*

want [noun] *to* [verb]

[noun] *ni V-te hoshii*

Point 3 provides examples of verbs that require two objects, which can be more difficult for students, especially since there are two possible word orders. Point 3b above can pose particular difficulty for lower level students, since the indirect object is not overtly marked with the preposition *to*. In Japanese, regardless of the order of the direct and indirect objects, they are overtly marked with *o* and *ni*, respectively.

Performing a linguistic analysis of this kind reveals more than just an inventory of vocabulary and grammar; as with Points 2 and 3 above, it also helps to pinpoint areas that are likely to cause difficulty for students. There are at least seven that are noteworthy:

1. various uses of prepositions (e.g. *with*)
2. pivotal constructions (more grammatically complex)
3. less common meanings/uses of words (e.g. verbs like *have*)
4. idioms (meaning differs from literal meaning of individual words)
5. potentially confusing expressions (meaning is unexpected or counterintuitive)
6. vague expressions (meaning is unclear)
7. differences between English and Japanese

Beginning with Point 1, the following five uses of *with*, for example, all have different equivalents in Japanese. Often, students are not familiar with the full range of meanings of prepositions, which can lead to confusion. In example 1, *at* could be substituted for *with*.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. is angry <u>with</u> Alex | <i>ni (okotte iru)</i> |
| 2. is happy <u>with</u> Anthony | <i>no koto o yoku omou; (ni manzoku shite iru)</i> |
| 3. walks out of the café <u>with</u> the food | <i>o motte (kafe o deru)</i> |
| 4. girl is coming <u>with</u> a shopping cart | <i>o oshite (kite iru)</i> |
| 5. The girl hits Alex <u>with</u> the shopping cart | <i>de (butsukeru)</i> |

Pivotal constructions (Point 2) can be found in the following four examples:

1. I want the Blues to win.
(*the Blues* is both object of *want* and subject of *win*)
2. Anthony watches Alex get the ball.
(*Alex* is both object of *watch* and subject of *get*)
3. Jimmy gives Jenny some tickets for her birthday.
(*tickets* is both object of *give* and
semantic subject of prepositional phrase *for her birthday*)
4. Ji-Sung sees Dingo with the meat.
(*Dingo* is both object of *Ji-Sung* and
semantic subject of prepositional phrase *with the meat*)

Of course, there is considerable variation here. Example 1 involves an infinitive (*to win*), and examples 3 and 4 involve prepositional phrases. In order to clarify the role of semantic subject in these prepositional phrases, the two phrases could be written as independent sentences thus: (*The*) *tickets are for her birthday. Dingo has the meat.*

The following five examples from Level 1 each demonstrate a different meaning of *have*, aside from its primary meaning of *motsu* (or more commonly *motte iru*) in

Japanese, thus illustrating Point 3:

1. have lunch (= *taberu*)
2. have school (= *aru*)
3. are having a good game (= *shite iru*)
4. He has a blue shirt and white pants. (= *kite iru, haite iru*)
5. We have a new student today. (= *iru*)

Regarding example 2, *aru* often corresponds to *have*, but it frequently refers to something actually in the subject's possession, whereas in this case, it is equivalent to *there is/are* (another common translation equivalent of *aru*).

The following three idioms (Point 4) from Level 1 are difficult for lower level students because the meaning cannot be deduced from the individual words:

1. Look out! (means "Be careful," not "Look outside.")
2. Come on. (used to urge someone; does not literally mean to "come")
3. Oh, I know! (used when realizing something; *wakatta!* not *shitte iru*)

The following expressions are potentially confusing, since the meaning is not what one might expect (Point 5):

1. is walking a dog
2. The Reds are playing the Blues.
3. I love *The Bandits*.
4. The tickets are for *The Bandits*.

Examples 1 and 2 involve syntactic direct objects that are not the typical semantic objects of their respective verbs, at least in the way these verbs are most commonly used (e.g. *walking the floor / a mile*, *playing a game/song*). In fact, *walk* is more often used as an intransitive verb, so some students may even be confused by the presence of a direct object. The actual meanings of the above examples are equivalent to:

1. is taking a dog for a walk
2. ...playing against the Blues

In examples 3 and 4, *The Bandits* are a rock band, so example 3 does not refer to “love” in a romantic sense. It means, of course, that the speaker likes their music very much. The final example is not analogous to a sentence like “The tickets are for my friends.” It indicates the *purpose* of the tickets, not their intended recipient. The fact that the word *concert* is not included in the sentence makes it more difficult to understand.

Point 6 involves expressions in which the meaning is vague or potentially unclear:

1. I have something for her.
2. Morning, Mom.
3. the girl in red

The first of these is a very common expression in English, but may be too vague for some students. Either of these sentences would be clearer and more concrete:

I have a present/gift for her. I want to give her something.

The second example is also extremely common colloquial English, but many students do not know the word *mom*, even if they know *mother*. Students are also unlikely to know that the greeting “*Good morning*” can be shortened to just “*Morning*.” There are therefore two reasons for the difficulty of this very short sentence. Finally, “in red” may not be clear to some students, as it means “wearing red clothes,” not *aka no naka*.

The following three examples of one notable difference between English and Japanese will serve to illustrate Point 7:

1. comes over to them
2. over there
3. runs down the street

The words *over* and *down* do not contribute significantly to these sentences in terms of meaning, and they are likely to be confusing to students, especially if interpreted literally (as *above* and *downward*, respectively).

Conclusion

There is clearly a wealth of valuable information that can be gleaned from conducting a thorough lexical and grammatical analysis of the graded readers that students will be using in an extensive reading program. Vocabulary, grammar, and confusing or difficult points, like the ones explained above, can be covered in class before and during the reading program. There may not be enough level-appropriate graded materials available for the lowest level students to engage in truly “extensive” reading in terms of quantity, but *graded* reading is a start and is certainly better than nothing. Moreover, with such a limited selection of truly low-level graded readers, the lowest level students may not be able to engage in the self-selection that makes extensive reading ideally synonymous with pleasure reading, but again this is certainly no reason to abandon this type of reading entirely. Part of creating an extensive reading program for low-level learners involves finding appropriate graded readers, like the *Foundations* series. However, this is often not enough. Students must receive sufficient classroom support to render the material comprehensible enough for them to derive the benefits of extensive reading and absorb enough input for true language acquisition to take place. With the proper support, based on a thorough lexical and grammatical analysis of the reading material selected for use, even very low-level learners with a minimum foundation in English vocabulary and grammar can benefit from some form of extensive reading.

Appendix A

NOUN INDEX

B = *Get the Ball!*
 D = *Bad Dog? Good Dog!*
 G = *Goodbye, Hello!*

R = *Rain, Rain Rain!*
 S = *Sarah's Surprise*
 T = *The Tickets*

bold indicates that word is
 included in picture glossary
 at beginning of book

Nouns that appear in more than one book:

People:

boy	R, G
girl	R, G
mother	R, G
Mom	R, D
father	D
man	R, S, G, D
woman	S, D
friend	B, T, D
boyfriend	B, T
husband	S
brother	G, D
sister	G, D

Other:

bag	B, S, G, T
car	G, D
class	G, T
dog	R, D
game	B, D
gate	R, D
house	R, D
money	S, T, D
name	S, G, D
store	G, D
coffee	D
coffee maker	S

Nouns that appear in only one book:

- R: **bus, clock, holiday, rain,**
 bike, (bike) rack, school, (train) station, train, tree, watch
- B: **goal, referee, score, soccer, team,** ball, player, (the Reds, the Blues)
- S: **café, cookies, food, ice cream, pants, (police) officer, shirt,**
 apple, drinks, ice-cream maker, police, sandwiches, things,
 surprise (*in title*)
- G: **birthday, (shopping) cart, snowboard,** CDs, student
- T: **lunch, lunchroom, purse, tickets,**
 classroom, concert, lunchtime, time
- D: **meat, puppy/puppies, shopping, street,** eggs, fruit, milk, paper

Appendix B

VERB INDEX

B = *Get the Ball!*
 D = *Bad Dog? Good Dog!*
 G = *Goodbye, Hello!*

R = *Rain, Rain Rain!*
 S = *Sarah's Surprise*
 T = *The Tickets*

bold indicates that word is
 included in picture glossary
 at beginning of book

call	S		
go out	S	go for a walk	D
have [lunch]	T		
hit	R, G, T, D		
jump [over]	D		
kick [at / away]	B		
know	S, G		
leave	R		
listen [to]	G, D		
look [at]	R, B, S, G, T, D		
meet	S, T		
push	R, B		
put [in]	R, S, T		
ride	R		
run	R, B, T, D	run after	D
score [a goal]	B		
shop(ping)	S, G	do the shopping	D
smile [at]	G, D		
tell [<i>s.o.</i> about]	S, T		
think [about]	G		
wait [for]	R, T, D		
win	B		
work [at]	S		
fall [off a bike]	R	start [at 9:00]	R
fall [down]	B	start [running]	B
fall [from]	T	start [work at/in]	S
fall [on/onto/into]	B, G, D		
talk [about]	T	walk [away]	G
talk [to]	B, G	walk [a dog]	R
talk [with]	S	walk [out of]	S

walk [to]

D

get [the ball]	B	(= gain possession)
get [to school]	R	(= arrive)
get [wet]	R	(= become)
get [on a bike]	R	(= mount vehicle)
get [into the car]	G	(= board/enter vehicle)
get [sandwiches / the milk]	S, T, D	(= buy)
get up	R	
get dressed	R	

take [sandwiches]	S, D
take [the ball from]	B
take [out some money]	T
take [the train]	R
take [a dog for a walk]	D

Appendix C

B = *Get the Ball!*
 D = *Bad Dog? Good Dog!*
 G = *Goodbye, Hello!*

R = *Rain, Rain Rain!*
 S = *Sarah's Surprise*
 T = *The Tickets*

bold indicates that word is
 included in picture glossary
 at beginning of book

ADJECTIVE INDEX

angry [with]	B, G, T , D
bad	T, D
beautiful	G
big	B, S, G , D
cold	R
good	B, T, D
happy [with]	B, G, T
hungry	T
late [for]	R, T
little [girl]	G
lucky	T
new	G
[the] next [bus]	R
nice	S, T
okay	B, S
sad	G
surprised	B, S, T
wet	R

EXPRESSION INDEX

Excuse me?	T		
Good.	R	Good play!	B
I'm sorry.	R, G, T		
Look out!	R, G, D		
Lucky you!	T		
Oh no!	R, S, T		
Really?	G		
See you!	R		
Stop that!	B		
Wait for me!	R		
What do I do?	R	How do I...?	R
How do you do?	S		

It's nice to meet you. **S**
Come here! S, D
Come on. D (1. urging, 2. "come along")

Appendix D

REPETITION & RECYCLING INDEX

goes out of the store (Goodbye, Hello!)
go out of the house (Bad Dog? Good Dog!)
comes out of the store (Bad Dog? Good Dog!)
runs out of the house (Rain, Rain, Rain!)
walks out of the café (Sarah's Surprise)

Bad Dog? Good Dog!

But Ji-Sung says, "I don't want to do the shopping." p.4
 "I don't want to do the shopping," says Ji-Sung. p.5
 "I don't want to do the shopping." p.8
Dingo is happy. p.6 Ji-Sung is not happy. p.7
He is playing with his game. p.7, 9 Ji-Sung is playing with his game. p.8
Yoon-Hee is angry with her brother. p.7 Yoon-Hee is angry with Ji-Sung. p.8
Yoon-Hee says, "Okay. You and Dingo wait here." p.7
 "Okay. You and Dingo wait here," she says. p.8
But Yoon-Hee is not listening. p.4 Ji-Sung is not listening. p.7
 He is not listening to Yoon-Hee. p.8
She is looking at her paper. p.4 Ji-Sung is not looking at Dingo. p.9
 He is not looking at the cars. p.13
"You bad dog!" p.10 "Bad dog", "Bad dog!" p.13
Yoon-Hee comes back. p.8 "Come back!" p.13 "He's going back to..." p.15
"Dingo, look out!" p.12 "Look out, Dingo!" p.13
Dingo runs away with the meat. p.10 Dingo runs away. p.14
Yoon-Hee and her brother run after Dingo and the meat. p.11
 Yoon-Hee and Ji-Sung run after Dingo. p.14
"Over there." p.11 "He's over there." p.14
Dingo sees the meat. ... Dingo wants the meat. He takes the meat. p.9

Get the Ball!

"Good goal/play!" p.6,7,8
"Come on, [Anthony/Alex/ the Blues/Reds]" p.4,9,10
Alex is a good player. p.5
 Anthony is a good player, (but he is not playing well now). p.10
I want the Blues to win. p.3 She wants the Blues to win. p.4
 He wants the Blues to win. Anthony wants the Reds to win. p.9
Alex scores a goal for the Blues! p.6 Anthony scores a goal for the Reds! p.8

...but Alex pushes him. p.7 Alex pushes Anthony. p.10 Anthony pushes Alex. p.14
He takes the ball from Anthony. p.5, 10 Alex takes the ball. p.7
Alex [kicks Anthony and] takes the ball. p.11
Alex has the ball. p.6 Anthony has the ball. p.8, 10
Anthony gets the ball... p.7 He gets the ball... p.12 “Get the ball” p.12
Anthony watches Alex get the ball. p.13
He runs to the Blue’s goal. p.8 He is running to the Blues [sic] goal. p.10
Anthony is angry with Alex. p.10, 12
Anthony is very angry with Alex now. p.11
He is very angry with Alex. p.12
“Get the ball, Anthony.” p.12 (x2)
He runs at Alex. p.13 Anthony runs at Alex. p.14
“Why is Anthony running at me?” p.13, 14
“Don’t do that!” p.11, 14
It is a good game. p.5 The two teams are having a good game. p.9

Goodbye, Hello!

he is not looking. p.4, The little girl is not looking. p.6
He thinks, “What’s her name?” p.10 “What’s her name?” he thinks. p.12
“what’s that girl’s name?” p.11
Jessica gets into the car. The girl in red gets into the car. p.13

Rain, Rain, Rain!

“Oh no.” p.3,4,7,8,11,14,16
“It’s/ It is now (8:45).” p.4,7,10,11,14,15
“I don’t like the rain. And it’s raining today.” p.3
“And it’s raining. I don’t like the rain.” p.7
She looks at her watch. p.7, 11, 15
She looks at the clock. p.4, 10
“There are no trains today.” “No trains today!” p.11
School starts at 9 o’clock. p.4, 12

Sarah’s Surprise

He says nothing. ...but she says nothing. p.10
“What do I do?” p.10 “What do we do?” p.11
Sarah tells Ji-Sung about the man. p.11
She tells the police officer about the man. p.12
Sarah tells the police officer about the man. p.13
She tells Mrs. Hayes about the man. p.14
“Is everything okay?” p.14, 16

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“Why are the police here?” p.14, 16

She is very surprised... p.10 Sarah is very surprised. p.16

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