

Correlations Between Proposed Orthoepic Competence Descriptors and Japanese Language Ability

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Abstract

In this paper, three types of Japanese online tests, and self-assessment questionnaires comprised of 13 descriptor categories, including one category on Japanese orthoepic competence, were issued to 15 Japanese language learners attending language schools in Japan. As a result, we confirmed a more than moderate positive correlation between the orthoepic competence descriptors and test scores, both concerning the individual scores on the three tests and the aggregate total of those scores. Based on these test results, learners were categorized into different skill levels, such as novice, intermediate, and advanced. Learners who scored at the intermediate level with their grammar test or scored over 170 total points across all tests tended to evaluate themselves at a B-level or higher competency level.

Keywords: Japanese language education; orthoepic competence; CEFR; descriptors; self-assessment

Povzetek

V tem prispevku so bili 15 učencem japonskega jezika, ki obiskujejo jezikovne šole na Japonskem, izdani tri vrste japonskih spletnih testov in vprašalniki za samoocenjevanje, sestavljeni iz 13 kategorij deskriptorjev, vključno z eno kategorijo o japonski ortoepski kompetenci. Rezultati testov so potrdili več kot zmerno pozitivno korelacijo med deskriptorji ortoepske kompetence tako posamično kot tudi v skupnem seštevku vseh točk. Na podlagi teh rezultatov so bili učenci razvrščeni v različne ravni spretnosti, kot so začetniki, srednji in napredni. Učenci, ki so pri svojem slovničnem testu dosegli vmesno stopnjo ali dosegli več kot 170 skupnih točk na vseh testih, so bili ocenjeni na ravni B ali višji ravni kompetenc.

Ključne besede: poučevanje japonskega jezika; ortoepska kompetenca; CEFR; deskriptorji; samoocenjevanje



1 Introduction

In 2001, the Council of Europe introduced the “Common European Framework of Reference for Languages” (hereinafter referred to as CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). This new framework rapidly spread throughout the world’s language education circles. In Asia, including Japan, its acceptance is growing as the language education standard for various foreign languages (Chéng, 2017). In the case of Japanese language education, the Japan Foundation created its standard, named the JF Standard for Japanese-Language Education (JFS) taking into consideration the CEFR. Programs using this standard expanded in recent years, deploying class level descriptions, learning material, and other components based on common reference levels that are further divided into six stages (Ito, 2019, Majima, 2018). However, North (2014) noted problems applying CEFR to languages such as Japanese, which use large numbers of characters.

North writes:

In the context of current pedagogy for Japanese and Chinese it is not possible for a learner at A2 or B1 or B2 to read the types of text that appear in CEFR descriptors for the levels concerned, simply because they do not know enough signs. (p. 45)

North continues:

...[u]sing the CEFR for such languages implies either *profiling* proficiency, admitting that such learners are a higher level for listening and speaking than they are for reading and writing – which the CEFR scales will facilitate describing – or alternatively, developing completely new descriptors for reading and writing. (p. 45)

There have also been reports on problems conducting task-based tests in Japanese language education, where a lack of sign ability may impede carrying out tasks, or make a performance evaluation difficult (Kumano et al., 2013). Therefore, in recent years discussions have advocated the need to resolve orthoepic competence to adopt the CEFR in Japanese language education. Engaging with this issue, we have already noted (see Ito 2017, 2019, 2020) that although orthoepic competence is acknowledged in the CEFR, the framework does not outline any descriptors for this competency. From 2017 to the present year, we proposed several draft descriptors for orthoepic competence, arranged according to different proficiency levels. It should be noted, however, that these drafted descriptors for orthoepic competence were created by using text mining analysis to extract characteristic words from communication ability descriptors as given within the CEFR. For this reason, the relationship between these descriptors and actual Japanese language learners’ abilities has not been clarified. The present research, therefore, aims to clarify the relationship between Japanese language learners’ abilities,

and descriptors of Japanese language orthoepic competence, as proposed in our previous study (Ito, 2020).

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 outlines the preceding research related to Japanese language orthoepic competence and clarifies the research project's goal. Section 3 explains the examination methods used, and reports on the results attained. Section 4 contains an analysis and observation of the results. Finally, Section 5 provides a summary of the details included in this paper and raises several future research directions.

2 Prior research

2.1 The definition of orthoepic competence

In the CEFR, orthoepic competence is defined in the following manner: “[U]sers required to read aloud a prepared text, or to use in speech words first encountered in their written form, need to be able to produce a correct pronunciation from the written form, need to be able to produce a correct pronunciation from the written form.” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 117) Meanwhile, Bellassen and Zhang (2008) define orthoepic competence as: “The ability of the language user to accurately read aloud and pronounce a text or speech in a loud voice” (p. 68). We (Ito, 2019), however, take a somewhat different approach. After examining orthoepic competence entries in the CEFR as well as Bellassen and Zhang (2008), we suggest that, when a person reads, an ambiguous continuity exists between pronunciation and the understanding of a word's meaning: “The individual can pronounce characters or vocabulary, and is at least partially capable of understanding the meaning of characters or words within context, as well as the function of how they are written.” (p. 76) In this paper, orthoepic competence is understood by the definition provided in Ito (2019).

2.2 Orthoepic competence descriptors

A large volume of research relating to the CEFR has been conducted in numerous languages, often focusing on a characteristic aptitude outlined in the CEFR, known as “competence in accomplishing tasks” (Ito, 2019). However, very little research has specifically investigated the connection between the CEFR's orthoepic competence and languages that use non-alphabetic scripts. It would seem that the only examples are Bellassen and Zhang (2008), and Ito (2017, 2019, 2020).

Bellassen and Zhang (2008) experimented with the introduction of the CEFR to Chinese language education in France. They noted that the characters used in the Chinese language pose a challenge for the implementation of the CEFR. This is because there is almost no relationship between the pronunciation of Chinese characters and

how they are written. It is almost impossible for learners to read characters they are unfamiliar with. Furthermore, understanding the meaning of characters can be impeded by misreading, which stems from the fact that different characters look similar to each other. Therefore, Bellassen and Zhang (2008) proposed an evaluative standard known as a “literacy threshold.” First, Chinese characters can be grouped into different tiers of language proficiency, based on the frequency with which they are used, their frequency in everyday conversation, and the extent to which they can be combined with other characters to create new ones. Then, the language proficiency of a learner can be determined based on how many characters they can recognize and write (Table 1). According to our study (Ito, 2019, 2020), the research behind the ‘literacy threshold’ proposed by Bellassen and Zhang (2008) is valuable because of the way it links together Chinese characters and the CEFR. However, we note the proposed “literacy threshold” does not include any concrete methods for selecting Chinese characters, except based on frequency. Furthermore, it only indicates tiers of the characters, with no specific descriptors for each tier. We, therefore, doubt the applicability of this approach, given that it runs counter to how the CEFR understands language users; i.e., as ‘social agents’ who strengthen and revise their language capabilities while carrying out tasks under particular environmental conditions.

Table 1: Literacy threshold (Bellassen & Zhang, 2008, p. 69).

Levels	Number of Chinese characters (approximately)
C2	Over 3,000
C1	2,200
B2	1,500
B1	800
A2	500
A1	250

In the previous studies (Ito, 2017, 2019, 2020), we researched the formulation of Japanese language orthoepic competence descriptors, making progressive advancements. We noted that, although the CEFR lacks concrete descriptors for orthoepic competence, the framework itself is not complete, but is characterized by an orientation towards continual expansion and refinement (Ito, 2017). As the Council of Europe (2001) states: “The framework should be open and flexible, so that it can be applied, with such adaptations as prove necessary, to particular situations” (p. 7). We further assert that the description of the Japanese language orthoepic competence is a pressing task. In our view, it is necessary to establish some concrete descriptors as soon as possible, even if they are initially in a rough form that leaves room for further discussion and refinement. We therefore developed some draft descriptors for Japanese language orthoepic competence. However, to produce these drafts, we

turned to the six linguistic competences where the CEFR does provide descriptors (general linguistic range, vocabulary range, vocabulary control, grammatical competence, phonological competence, orthographic competence), and arbitrarily extracted characteristic words from each language proficiency level (Ito, 2017). Therefore, the resulting descriptors cannot be said to have a high degree of objectivity. Following this initial attempt, we asserted, “It is necessary to research [orthoepic competence] further so that it becomes a more objective measure” (Ito, 2019, p. 78). This time, a text mining method was used to extract characteristic words, and re-consider the orthoepic competence descriptors for levels A1 and A2. Finally, with Ito (2020), the work conducted in Ito (2019) is extended from levels B1 through to C2, with a more objective method deployed to create competence descriptors for Japanese language education (Table 2).

Table 2: Orthoepic competences (Ito, 2020)

C2	The learner can consistently read accurately, and can even read difficult kanji such as those found in literature.
C1	While [a learner] may make slight mistakes at the vocabulary level, they can accurately read linguistic expressions and vocabulary, such as [those] used in their field of expertise.
B2	[The individual] has a high level of orthoepic competence, and can accurately read words if they are common.
B1	While there are cases where [a learner] may make obvious mistakes, they are relatively able to accurately read characters related to a broad range of material, including everyday topics.
A2	There are many cases where a learner may need to re-read a section of text or reads incorrectly; however, if they have the necessary basic vocabulary, then they are able to read material encountered in daily situations.
A1	The learner is able to read a section of text if they have studied the material and has a basic, concrete, and limited repertoire (words and expressions, etc.) that relates to his/her personal information.

3 Examination

3.1 Examination participants

In February 2020, data were collected from a total of 15 students attending Japanese language school E in Japan. The breakdown of the 15 students’ nationalities was as follows: 11 from China, 1 from Taiwan, 1 from South Korea, 1 from Vietnam, and 1 from Indonesia. As the aim was to collect data from learners with a diverse range of skill levels, no particular restrictions were given with regards to Japanese language ability. As a result, data was collected from 3 individuals with less than a year of experience, 9

individuals with one to three years of experience, 1 individual with three to five years of experience, and 2 individuals with more than five years of experience.

3.2 Examination Methods

For the examination, participants were gathered into a single classroom, and the following two steps were carried out.

1. Data were collected on the Japanese language ability of examination participants by having them sit three online Japanese language tests, the SPOT90, Grammar90, and Kanji SPOT50. This set was provided by the Tsukuba University Center for Distance Learning of Japanese and Japanese Issues, and is known as the “Tsukuba Test-Battery of Japanese” (TTBJ).
2. Data were collected on how students evaluated their Japanese language ability. For this purpose, students were asked to complete a self-assessment questionnaire, after being shown descriptors from A1 to C2 as a random for 13 categories. These included six communicative language activities designated in the CEFR: “overall oral production” (oral production), “overall written production” (written production), “overall listening comprehension” (aural reception), “overall reading comprehension” (visual reception), “overall spoken interaction” (spoken interaction), and “overall written interaction” (written interaction); the six communicative language competences designated in the CEFR, of “general linguistic range,” “vocabulary range,” “vocabulary control,” “grammatical competence,” “phonological competence,” and “orthographic competence;” and the focus of the present research, “orthoepic competence.”

The respective aims of the three TTBJ tests used in step 1 are as follows: the SPOT90 test measures total Japanese language ability, including practical know-how, the Grammar90 test measures grammatical knowledge, and the Kanji SPOT50 test measures capability in using kanji-based vocabulary (Kobayashi, 2015; Sakai et al., 2015). The test time was between 30 to 60 minutes in total.

CEFR自己評価_eng

[OVERALL ORAL PRODUCTION]
Please choose the one closest to your Japanese language ability.

<input type="checkbox"/> Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on complex subjects, integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	<input type="checkbox"/> Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail. Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples.
<input type="checkbox"/> Can produce clear, smoothly flowing well-structured speech with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.	<input type="checkbox"/> Can give a simple description or presentation of people, living or working conditions, daily routines, likes/dislikes, etc. as a short series of simple phrases and sentences linked into a list.
<input type="checkbox"/> Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.	<input type="checkbox"/> Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points.

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◀ Back

▶ Next

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Question

List

Figure 1: An example of the English version of the display used in the self-assessment questionnaire

3.3 Examination Results

From the TTBJ tests and self-assessment questionnaires, data were collected from each of the 15 individuals. This data included the results of individual tests, the total score for all three tests combined, and the 13 category self-assessment results. All 15 individuals sat the TTBJ tests until the end, and also selected answers for all 13 categories of the self-evaluation questionnaire. Therefore, the data from all 15 individuals were used in the analysis. An overview of the examination results is provided in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3: Overview of TTBJ results

Test Name	Full Marks	Average Value	Minimum Value	Maximum Value
SPOT90	90	66.2	41	79
Grammar90	90	62.5	43	82
Kanji SPOT50	50	38.9	15	47
Total	230	167.7	108	208

Table 4: Overview of self-assessment results

Self-Assessment Categories	Most Commonly Selected Proficiency	Least Commonly Selected Proficiency	Highest Selected Proficiency
Overall Oral Production	A2	A1	C1
Overall Written Ability	B1	A2	C2
Overall Listening Comprehension	B1	A2	C1
Overall Reading Comprehension	A2/B1/B2	A1	C1
Overall Spoken Interaction	A1	A1	C1
Overall Written Interaction	B2	A1	C1
General Linguistic Range	A1/A2/B1	A1	C1
Vocabulary Range	A1	A1	C2
Vocabulary Control	A2	A1	C2
Grammatical Competence	A2/B1	A1	C2
Phonological Competence	A2	A1	C1
Orthographic Competence	A1/A2	A1	C2
Orthoepic Competence	B1	A1	C2

4 Results

4.1 Method of analysis

With the data gained through the TTBJ, along with the self-assessment questionnaire, correlation analysis was conducted between the total test score and individual test results, and the descriptor self-assessment. This examination used an ordinal scale for descriptor self-assessment. Therefore, correlation analysis of the TTBJ results and the descriptor self-assessment was conducted by applying Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, which is nonparametric. The significance of the correlation coefficient was also examined by testing for non-correlations. Section 4-2 shows the correlation between the descriptor self-assessment and the test total score. Sections 4-3 to 4-5 show correlations between the respective test results and the descriptor self-assessment. In Section 4-6, some observations are made about the analysis results.

4.2 Method of analysis correlation between total test score and self-assessment

The correlation results between the total test score and the descriptor self-assessment are shown in Table 5. If we examine the correlation coefficients and *p*-values, for the 3 categories: “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” and “general

linguistic range,” a statistically significant moderate positive correlation at 5% was observed (overall oral production $\rho = 0.64$, $P = 0.010$, overall listening comprehension $\rho = 0.68$, $P = 0.006$, general linguistic range $\rho = 0.65$, $P = 0.009$). Furthermore, for “orthoepic competence” as well, a statistically significant strong positive correlation at 5% was observed ($\rho = 0.72$, $P = 0.003$).

Table 5: Correlation between total test score and self-assessment

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficients (ρ)	P-Value	Frequency
Test Total	Overall Oral Production	0.639	0.010	15
	Overall Written Production	0.192	0.493	15
	Overall Listening Comprehension	0.676	0.006	15
	Overall Reading Comprehension	0.463	0.082	15
	Overall Spoken Interaction	0.144	0.610	15
	Overall Written Interaction	0.261	0.348	15
	General Linguistic Range	0.648	0.009	15
	Vocabulary Range	0.160	0.569	15
	Vocabulary Control	0.495	0.060	15
	Grammatical Competence	0.076	0.787	15
	Phonological Competence	0.298	0.280	15
	Orthographic Competence	0.091	0.748	15
	Orthoepic Competence	0.715	0.003	15

4.3 Correlation between the SPOT90 and self-assessment

The correlation results between the SPOT90 and the descriptor self-assessment are presented in Table 6. The correlation coefficient for “orthoepic competence” was somewhat lower than for the correlation with the total test score, with a moderate correlation. However, as with the correlation with the total test score, a statistically significant moderate positive correlation at 5% was observed for four categories: “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” “general linguistic range,” and “orthoepic competence” (overall oral production $\rho = 0.65$, $P = 0.009$, overall listening comprehension $\rho = 0.64$, $P = 0.010$, general linguistic range $\rho = 0.68$, $P = 0.006$, orthoepic competence $\rho = 0.51$, $P = 0.050$).

Table 6: Correlation between the SPOT90 and self-assessment

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficients (ρ)	P-Value	Frequency
SPOT90	Overall Oral Production	0.649	0.009	15
	Overall Written Production	0.223	0.424	15
	Overall Listening Comprehension	0.640	0.010	15
	Overall Reading Comprehension	0.339	0.216	15
	Overall Spoken Interaction	0.232	0.405	15
	Overall Written Interaction	0.192	0.494	15
	General Linguistic Range	0.676	0.006	15
	Vocabulary Range	0.110	0.695	15
	Vocabulary Control	0.376	0.167	15
	Grammatical Competence	0.083	0.769	15
	Phonological Competence	0.186	0.507	15
	Orthographic Competence	0.068	0.810	15
	Orthoepic Competence	0.515	0.050	15

4.4 Correlation between the Grammar90 and Self-Assessment

The correlation results between the Grammar90 and the descriptor self-assessment are presented in Table 7. A statistically significant moderate positive correlation at 5% was observed for the four categories “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” “overall written interaction,” and “orthoepic competence” (overall oral production $\rho = 0.58$, $P = 0.023$, overall listening comprehension $\rho = 0.54$, $P = 0.040$, overall written interaction $\rho = 0.53$, $P = 0.044$, orthoepic competence $\rho = 0.60$, $P = 0.019$). A statistically significant strong positive correlation at 5% was also observed for ‘general linguistic range’ ($\rho = 0.79$, $P = 0.001$).

Table 7: Correlation between the Grammar90 and self-assessment

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficients (ρ)	P-Value	Frequency
Grammar90	Overall Oral Production	0.583	0.023	15
	Overall Written Production	0.183	0.513	15
	Overall Listening Comprehension	0.535	0.040	15
	Overall Reading Comprehension	0.414	0.125	15
	Overall Spoken Interaction	0.345	0.208	15
	Overall Written Interaction	0.525	0.044	15
	General Linguistic Range	0.786	0.001	15
	Vocabulary Range	0.338	0.218	15
	Vocabulary Control	0.434	0.106	15
	Grammatical Competence	0.136	0.630	15
	Phonological Competence	0.289	0.296	15
	Orthographic Competence	0.358	0.190	15
	Orthoepic Competence	0.595	0.019	15

4.5 Correlation between the Kanji SPOT50 and Self-Assessment

The correlation results between the Kanji SPOT50 and the descriptor self-assessment are presented in Table 8. A statistically significant moderate positive correlation at 5% was observed for the three categories “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” and “orthoepic competence” (overall oral production $\rho = 0.60$, $P = 0.018$, overall listening comprehension $\rho = 0.53$, $P = 0.044$, orthoepic competence $\rho = 0.63$, $P = 0.012$).

Table 8: Correlation between the Kanji SPOT50 and self-assessment

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficients (ρ)	P-Value	Frequency
Kanji SPOT50	Overall Oral Production	0.601	0.018	15
	Overall Written Production	0.295	0.286	15
	Overall Listening Comprehension	0.527	0.044	15
	Overall Reading Comprehension	0.303	0.272	15
	Overall Spoken Interaction	-0.061	0.828	15
	Overall Written Interaction	-0.092	0.743	15
	General Linguistic Range	0.332	0.226	15

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficients (ρ)	P-Value	Frequency
	Vocabulary Range	0.026	0.927	15
	Vocabulary Control	0.437	0.103	15
	Grammatical Competence	0.082	0.772	15
	Phonological Competence	0.148	0.597	15
	Orthographic Competence	-0.142	0.613	15
	Orthoepic Competence	0.631	0.012	15

5 Discussion

Table 9 summarizes the correlation results for the total test scores as well as the results of each test, and the descriptor self-assessment.

Table 9: Categories where a statistically significant correlation was observed in the examination

Test Name	Categories with a Moderate Correlation Observed	Categories with a Strong Correlation Observed
Total Test Score	Overall Oral Production, Overall Listening Comprehension, General Linguistic range	Orthoepic Competence
SPOT90	Overall Oral Production, Overall Listening Comprehension, General Linguistic Range, Orthoepic Competence	
Grammar90	Overall Oral Production, Overall Listening Comprehension, Overall Written Interaction, Orthoepic Competence	General Linguistic Range
Kanji SPOT50	Overall Oral Production, Overall Listening Comprehension, Orthoepic Competence	

As we can see from the results shown in Table 9, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the Japanese orthoepic competence descriptors proposed by Ito (2020) and the total test score, as well as with the scores for the individual tests themselves; SPOT90, Grammar90, and Kanji SPOT50. Furthermore, if we examine the correlation coefficient for orthoepic competence, and each score, the total test score was the highest at $\rho = 0.72$. Then, we have Kanji SPOT50 at $\rho = 0.63$, Grammar90 at $\rho = 0.60$, and SPOT90 at $\rho = 0.51$. The total test score displayed the highest degree of correlation. The next highest score was obtained by the test that measures kanji ability, the Kanji SPOT50, which is directly related to orthoepic

competence. Follow is the Grammar90, which measures grammatical knowledge. At the end is the SPOT90, which primarily measures practical conversational ability. If we consider the definition of orthoepic competence as “the capacity to read text or characters aloud,” the necessary abilities for this skill in order are overall ability, kanji knowledge, grammatical knowledge, and conversational ability. Therefore, the above ordering of correlation coefficients suggests a general correlation between Japanese language ability and the Japanese orthoepic competence descriptors proposed by Ito (2020). Moreover, for this examination, the descriptor “overall reading comprehension,” was prepared for the self-assessment categories. However, “overall reading comprehension,” had only a weak or moderate non-significant correlation with any of the test scores. This also indicated that orthoepic competence descriptors are assessed separately from reading comprehension descriptors.

Furthermore, if we change our focus and consider the abilities the TTBJ test sets measure within the CEFR descriptors, we found that for each test, a statistically significant positive correlation was confirmed for “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” and “orthoepic competence.” In other words, the TTBJ test set used for this examination has the potential to function as a test to measure the CEFR criteria of “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” and “orthoepic competence.”

Here, as can be seen in Table 10, scores received for the TTBJ tests SPOT90, Grammar90, and Kanji SPOT50 have equivalent Japanese-Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) standards for comparison. Following these standards, an examination was conducted into the relationship between self-assessment and proficiency levels such as novice, intermediate, and advanced.

Table 10: Standards for interpreting results of individual test scores (from the TTBJ website)

Test Name	Total Score	Proficiency	JLPT Equivalent (Rough Equivalent)
SPOT90	0 - 30	Beginner	None
	31 - 55	Novice	N4, N5
	56 - 80	Intermediate	N3, N2
	81 - 90	Advanced	N1
Grammar90	0 - 20	Complete Beginner	None
	21 - 50	Novice	N4, N5
	51 - 80	Intermediate	N3, N2
	81 - 90	Advanced	N1
Kanji SPOT50	0 - 15	Beginner	None or N5
	16 - 30	Novice	N4
	31 - 40	Intermediate	N3, N2
	41 - 50	Advanced	N1

As a result, we have found correspondences presented in Table 11. As correspondence only concerns test scores, it is difficult to reach any categorical conclusions. However, a certain tendency was observed and that is if Grammar90 was at the intermediate level then self-assessment would be level B or higher. Furthermore, when the total score for SPOT90, Grammar90, and Kanji SPOT50 reached 170 marks, there was a tendency for self-assessment at the B-level or higher. Japan Foundation (2017) has also investigated the relationship between the JLPT results and JFS assessment conducted by teachers. According to their findings, many individuals who passed the N3 level or higher were assessed as a B1 level or higher. This result matches with the standard used for the intermediate level in Grammar90, which is JLPT N3 or N2.

Moving forward, we can anticipate further investigations into the relationship between various test results and self-assessment questionnaires, like those conducted in this examination. These will shed more light on the connections between the CEFR and various resources that are already happening within Japanese language education.

Table 11: Interpreted Level of Tests Taken by Participants, and Self-Assessment Equivalence

Number	SPOT90	Grammar90	Kanji SPOT50	Total Score	Most Commonly Selected Proficiency
1	Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced	208	B2
2	Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced	207	C1
3	Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced	199	B2
4	Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced	189	B1
5	Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced	188	B1/B2
6	Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced	180	A2
7	Intermediate	Intermediate	Novice	169	B1
8	Intermediate	Novice	Advanced	166	A2
9	Intermediate	Intermediate	Novice	166	A2/B1
10	Intermediate	Intermediate	Advanced	157	A2/B1
11	Intermediate	Novice	Advanced	156	A1
12	Intermediate	Novice	Advanced	148	A2/B2
13	Novice	Novice	Intermediate	137	A1/A2
14	Novice	Novice	Intermediate	137	A2
15	Novice	Intermediate	Beginner	108	B2/C2

6 Conclusion and Future Tasks

The goal of this research project was to clarify the correlation between the abilities of Japanese language learners and the orthoepic competence descriptors that we provided for different proficiency levels in our previous studies (Ito, 2017, 2019, 2020). For this purpose, Japanese language learners were requested to sit the three TTBJ tests: the SPOT90, Grammar90, and Kanji SPOT50. Subsequently, they were shown 13 category descriptors before completing a self-assessment questionnaire. These descriptors included the following: the six communicative language activities designated in the CEFR, of “overall oral production” (oral production), “overall written production” (written production), “overall listening comprehension” (aural reception), “overall reading comprehension” (visual reception), “overall spoken interaction” (spoken interaction), and “overall written interaction” (written interaction); the six communicative language competences designated in the CEFR, of “general linguistic range,” “vocabulary range,” “vocabulary control,” “grammatical competence,” “phonological competence,” “orthographic competence,” and finally, “orthoepic competence.” After conducting correlation analysis using the data from the tests and self-assessment, a statistically significant positive correlation was confirmed for the orthoepic competence descriptors and test scores. This included both the total score for all three tests, as well as individual test scores. Furthermore, when examining the examination results according to the TTBJ test classification, for each of the three tests a statistically significant positive correlation was confirmed for “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” and “orthoepic competence.” The TTBJ test set used for this examination displayed potential for functioning as a test measuring “overall oral production,” “overall listening comprehension,” and “orthoepic competence,” from the CEFR standard. Here, further examination was conducted into the relationship between Japanese learners’ self-assessment, and the proficiency levels associated with the scores for the TTBJ’s SPOT90, Grammar90, and Kanji SPOT50 tests (novice, intermediate, advanced, etc.) A tendency was observed among students at the intermediate level in the Grammar90 to self-assess their skill at a B-level or higher. Students who had reached the total score of 170 or higher for all three tests also tended self-assess their skill at a B-level or higher.

Although the present examination was conducted with a limited number of participants, it provided some indications to prove the relationship between orthoepic competence descriptors and Japanese language ability. Japanese language education requires the use of three types of characters: hiragana, katakana, and kanji. Studying these characters poses a significant burden for learners. For this reason, going forward, a future task will examine the relationship between self-assessment questionnaires for the CEFR descriptors, and tests offered by external organizations. I hope to thereby clarify the utility of the orthoepic competence descriptors presented by Ito (2020).

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