

L2 Japanese Learners' Response to a *Frog Story* Elicitation Task

**Kiyoko Toratani
York University**

Abstract

Some recent L2 Japanese acquisition research uses the wordless picture book *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer 1969) to elicit stories from learners. While the method is gradually gaining popularity, the task difficulty and task complexity remain uninvestigated. Previous studies focus on the final product, the frog stories, and devote little attention to how participants perceive the task. If Mayer's picture book is adopted, the task complexity (Robinson 2005) will be high given the nature of the resource-directing dimension. But the degree of the task complexity can be lowered by changing how the task is implemented (the resource-dispersing dimension). This study transformed the story elicitation task from the commonly adopted on-site oral task to a take-home one; using this method, frog stories were elicited from eight L2 learners of Japanese, and post-task interviews were conducted. Even with the adjusted task complexity, participants still found the task difficult in certain areas. The paper discusses the impacts of the task transformation.

1. Introduction

Slobin's (1987) theory "Thinking for Speaking" posits that the way speakers of a language verbalize events is partly governed by the availability of the language's codable means. To test the thinking-for-speaking hypothesis, Slobin and his collaborators (e.g., Berman & Slobin 1994) have conducted a number of crosslinguistic studies using the wordless picture book, *Frog, where are you?* (Mayer 1969). The pictures tell a story about a little boy with a pet frog; one day, the boy realizes that the frog is missing; as a result, he and his dog venture into a forest in search of the frog; along the way, they meet different forest animals, including a gopher and a deer. The scenes contain dynamisms, such as chasing

and falling, and they take place on a number of geographical sites. The story ends with the boy holding a frog, but its identity is left to the reader to determine. Participants in the studies using the book are commonly asked to tell their own version of frog story by following the pictures. This elicitation method has been widely adopted in first language acquisition research and more recently, in second language (L2) acquisition research, including Japanese.

In the latter research, the frog story elicitation method has been used to investigate such topics as tense-aspect (Shibata 2000), narrative structure (Inaba 2000, Minami 2004), and referent-marking (Nakahama 2003, 2009a). Since the goal is to explore a particular topic, such works naturally tend to focus on usage of a particular item such as *-ta* ‘past’ or topic marker *wa*. As a result, the participants’ insights into the story elicitation task remain uninvestigated. Moreover, despite the gradual adoption of Mayer’s work (1969) to analyze Japanese L2 performances, task complexity has been little considered. Accordingly, questions on how the task should be administered or for which learner proficiency level the task is appropriate remain unasked.

This paper addresses these issues using two of Robinson’s (2005:5) three components of task classification and design: “task complexity” and “task difficulty.” These consist of the following dimensions (see Robinson, Cardiero & Shirai 2009 for an extended version):⁽¹⁾

- | | |
|---|---|
| (1) Task complexity
(cognitive factors) | Task difficulty
(learner factors) |
| (a) resource-directing
e.g., ±few elements
±Here-and-Now
±no reasoning demands | (c) affective variables
e.g., motivation
anxiety
confidence |
| (b) resource-dispersing
e.g., ±planning
±single task
±prior knowledge | (d) ability variables
e.g., working memory
intelligence
aptitude |

I use these divisions to take a closer look at the task complexities stemming from the use of Mayer’s (1969) picture book. I also report the result of a pilot study

wherein I elicited frog stories from eight L2 learners of Japanese and conducted post-task interviews to gain insights into how the task was perceived.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 examines task complexity in creating a story. Here, I examine the task complexity by considering the factors in the resource-directing dimension (1a). Section 3 considers the task complexity arising from the method of task administration by referring to the factors in the resource-dispersing dimension (1b) and outlines the procedures of the pilot study. Section 4 discusses how the participants perceived the task's difficulty. Section 5 turns to the impact of transforming the task into a take-home task. Section 6 offers concluding remarks.

2. Task complexity: resource-directing

This section discusses the task complexity arising from using Mayer (1969). It considers what renders the task complex, examining the factors in the resource-directing dimension (1a).

The first factor, [\pm few elements], can be considered to refer to the number of items included in the picture book. Since Mayer's picture book consists of 24 pictures with multiple elements within each picture, the book as a whole naturally presents multiple elements (i.e., [-few elements]), thereby setting the task at the more complex end of the spectrum. The number of items contained in each picture differs: Picture 21 has the fewest (seven items: boy, dog, grass, bulrushes, pond, sky and log) and Picture 2 contains the most (19 items: boy, dog, frog, bed, boots, floor, jar, light, moon, pillow, quilt, shirt, night sky, slippers, sock, stool, wall, and window).⁽²⁾ Not only are there multiple items in each picture, but the items themselves involve different degrees of detail. Some are foregrounded entities such as animates, both in motion (e.g., a swarm of bees moving) and motionless (e.g., the frog sitting), whereas others are backgrounded entities such as topographical features (e.g., a sheer cliff) and stationary objects (e.g., a bed). The task of telling a story is necessarily complex, as one must decide which items

should be included in the story and how closely they should be detailed. Further, the portrayal of each picture must be coherent with the rest of the pictures.

Next, [\pm Here-and-Now] refers to a conceptual domain wherein the task requires “reference to events happening now, in a shared context” (Robinson 2011: 16). In such a context, the content of the portrayal is direct, concrete and real, and the speakers are prompted to use present tense. For Nakahama (2009b), telling a frog story while looking at the picture book is a Here-and-Now task, whereas telling a story based on a film which the participant has just finished watching is a There-and-Then task. The rationale seems to be that in the former, the pictures are in front of the speaker, whereas in the latter, there are no visual cues (i.e., the speaker must recall the story from his/her memory). The determination of here-and-now-ness, however, is not as simple as Nakahama (2009b) assumes, as it is not solely governed by the presence or absence of an item in front of the speaker; rather, it depends on how the visual cue is perceived and construed.

Adding words to the pictures can be done in at least two ways. In one, the speaker treats the task as a Here-and-Now activity, talking about what s/he is currently looking at and describing the scene as if it is happening “now”. In other words, the speaker describes each picture as if it is independent, as in: *There is a boy in this picture. This is his room*, etc. In the other, the speaker treats the task as There-and-Then. In this case, s/he narrates a story. That is, the speaker has a storyline in mind and narrates his/her version of the story as s/he flips through the pages. The speaker is likely to include both spatially and temporally distant portrayals. The tense is likely to be past (i.e., temporally distant) as in: *Once upon a time, there lived a small boy named Ken*. The speaker may refer to items not in a particular picture (i.e., spatially distant). For example, the speaker may talk about a *pond* as the place where the boy and the dog have gone during the day to play, even though the pond does not appear until later in the picture book. Thus, telling a story while looking at Mayer’s book does not mean that the task is

simple; even with the visual cues right in front of the speakers, There-and-Then descriptions can be included.

The third factor deals with whether the task involves reasoning. As noted, Mayer's picture book depicts different animates. The dynamic actions among them involve causal relations, which must be rationally portrayed. For instance, Picture 12 contains a scene in which a dog is chased by a swarm of bees, which pass just above a boy who has tumbled down from the tree as an owl suddenly pops out of a hole in the tree, but at the same time, it looks as if the boy falls backwards as he avoids the swarm of bees. As such, the scenes involve multiple causal relations, the descriptions of which require complex syntactic structures. Further, not only must the causal relations be properly portrayed but the story is expected to follow a narrative structure with components such as setting, theme, plot and resolution (Thorndyke 1977), and these components must be coherently expressed.

Given all these factors, story creation using Mayer's picture book makes strong cognitive demands on the participants, rendering the task highly complex.

3. Task complexity: resource-dispersing

3.1. Task complexity arising from the on-site elicitation method

Recall that the cognitive factors in the resource-dispersing dimension include [\pm planning], [\pm single task] and [\pm prior knowledge]. These factors are affected by how the task is administered. Most previous research does not detail how the stories were elicited, but in all cases, the researchers appear to have met with each participant individually, and this individual was asked to narrate a story on-site after receiving an explanation of the task. The allocated task time remains unstated in Inaba (2000), Minami (2004), and Shibata (2000), but Nakahama (2003: 89) articulates that participants were given a maximum three-minute preparation time and were asked to tell their stories within a 15-minute period. This type of on-site elicitation ensures that the task complexity of the resource-dispersing dimension is high. First, the task is almost [-planning] since the participants are given a limited amount of preparation time, for example, three

minutes in Nakahama's (2003) study. Second, the multiplicity of the task is [-single task], since looking at the pictures, narrating the story and thinking about how the story should develop involves multiple tasking, although telling a story as a verbal delivery *per se* may constitute a single task. Third, with respect to the value of [\pm prior knowledge], the content of the pictures can be categorized as [+prior knowledge] since it portrays familiar items and scenes, which average people can relate to without having specialized knowledge. However, having little preparation time blocks the participants from fully activating their prior knowledge, making the task almost equivalent to [-prior knowledge].

As long as Mayer's (1969) book is used, the level of task complexity in the resource-directing dimension cannot be changed. However, the values of the factors in the resource-dispersing dimension are adjustable by changing how the task is administered. To reduce the task complexity in the resource-dispersing dimension, I transformed the story elicitation task from the commonly adopted on-site oral task to a take-home task, and elicited frog stories from eight learners of Japanese. This modification allows the learners to have a reasonable planning time (i.e., [+planning]); they can focus on one task of their choice at a time as they prepare for the story (i.e., [+single task]); and their ability to access their prior knowledge is allowed with the use of relaxed time constraints (i.e., [+prior knowledge]). The modification is also intended to examine whether the task is appropriate for participants with lower proficiency levels, as in the following studies: elementary level (Inaba 2000), learners with one year and five months of learning Japanese (Shibata 2000: 251), and "Intermediate Low" (ACTFL guidelines) learners whose mean length of Japanese study is 8.4 months (Nakahama 2003).⁽³⁾

3.2. Take-home task

3.2.1. Participants

The participants in the pilot study were eight L2 learners of Japanese (three male, five female), who were all speakers of English.⁽⁴⁾ They had been studying

Japanese at a North American university (coded as LNR1 through LNR8) as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants

LNR	Instruction hours at the university	Other experience of Japanese study
1 (F)	150	N/A
2 (F)	150	N/A
3 (M)	150	Self-study for a few years in high school.
4 (F)	150	Studied Japanese in high school for 3 years.
5 (M)	200	Studied Japanese in high school for 3 years.
6 (M)	200	Self-study for a few years in high school.
7 (F)	200	N/A
8 (F)	270	Studied at a Japanese university for one year after the 3 rd year instruction. Passed JLPT 2.

At the time of the story elicitation, the participants were enrolled in or had completed a second- or third-year Japanese course at the university; four had completed approximately 150 instruction hours; the other four had completed more than 200 instruction hours, but their experience of studying Japanese differed as indicated in the rightmost column. The numbering of the learners is arbitrary except that those with fewer instructional hours are given lower numbers (LNRs 1-4) than those with more instructional hours (LNRs 5-8).

3.2.2. Preparation

During the preparation stage, the learners prepared a story at home. This allowed them to familiarize themselves with the task and work at their own pace. To obtain consistent quality and length across stories, the following context used in Seig (2004) was adopted with a slight wording modification:

This is a children's picture story. There are no words written for this story. National Public Radio would like to play stories like this one on Saturday evenings for young children to listen to on the radio right before they go to

bed. The children do not have the pictures to look at, only you, the announcer on the radio program, will have them. (Seig 2004: 230)

In the scenario, a hypothetical radio station in Japan narrates stories for children; each learner is an announcer who tells a story. This was adapted for my study; the final assignment was for each learner to tell a story, as in Sieg's study.

Along with the 24 pictures, the participants in my study were given a vocabulary list of nouns following Inaba (2000) and Cadierno (2004: 22). They could use any resources except human resources and were told they could name the characters and use a quoted speech. They were asked to turn in any notes they made (e.g., translation, vocabulary list). The expected time frame for completing this preparatory stage was two weeks.

3.2.3. Recording

The second stage was recording. When the learners finished preparing the story, the researcher met with each participant individually and audio-recorded his/her story.

At the time of the recording, it was observed to what extent the learners relied on their notes to tell their stories. It was expected that more proficient learners would tell their stories while looking at simple notes containing key phrases, whereas the less proficient learners would rely on written-out sentences. Contrary to this expectation, everyone had prepared a Japanese script; in telling their stories, they basically read their scripts fairly faithfully.⁽⁵⁾ It may be that the context of radio broadcasting was taken literally to mean a formal recording, depriving the learners of a chance to show their ability to spontaneously produce Japanese sentences. Possibly the learners themselves chose to lower the degree of task complexity by reducing the number of tasks to one ([+single task]) and to focus on reading the script well.

Immediately following the recording of the story, the researcher interviewed the participant about the task, concentrating on the questions of (i)

how the task was prepared and (ii) what aspect was perceived difficult. Examples of the questions are given in (2).

- (2) (i) Please explain how you prepared for the task.
- (ii) What part of the task did you find difficult?
- (iii) Which grammar points did you look up?

4. Task difficulty

In Robinson's (2005: 5) classification, task difficulty is associated with learner factors, which are subdivided into affective variables (1c) and ability variables (1d). The present paper cannot discuss the relation between the task difficulty and the aforementioned variables as it did not investigate how each participant could be characterized in terms of these variables. However, the interview results reveal how the participants perceived the task's difficulty.

The responses to the question: *What part of the task did you find difficult?* generally fell into two types: story content (Content), and language usage (Language). As for Content, participants mentioned that they found it difficult to come up with a description that would make the overall story coherent; they said they had to go back and forth to revise their descriptions, deciding what to focus on and which parts to include.

Two aspects of language usage were reported as difficult. One was the use of the passive, a particular type of grammatical construction: e.g., LNR5 said that he needed to review how to make a passive form to accurately describe the relationship between two animates, such as "The boy was chased after by the owl." For this description, he successfully created the phrase: "*Hukuroo-ni oikakerare...*". The other was the phrasing of a particular condition described in the picture. The participants gave two kinds of examples, one of which is the description of simultaneity. LNR1 said she had trouble describing Picture 11, sketched in Figure 1, wherein simultaneous actions take place among animates: the boy is on a tree looking into a hole in the trunk; away from the boy, a dog is

standing, holding onto a tree while surveying what is happening behind him; behind the dog, a beehive from which bees are starting to swarm has fallen from a tree branch; a short distance away, a gopher is looking at the action.

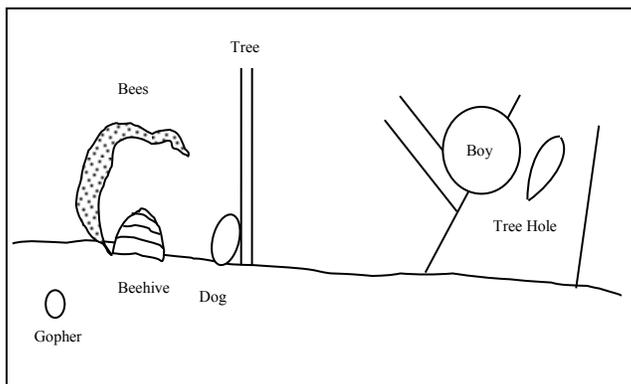


Figure 1: Sketch of Picture 11

To portray this scene, LNR1 wrote:

- (4) *Tomu ga ki no miki o noborimashita. Ana ga arimashita. Tomu ga ana no naka ni mimashita. Sono aida ni, hachi no su ga ochimashita.*

The learner's English script: 'Tom climbed on the trunk of a tree. There is a hole. Tom looks inside the hole. At the same time, the beehive falls.'

This provides a glimpse into LNR1's efforts trying to figure out how to say a complex sentence in Japanese. Here, she has broken down the complex interactions into smaller pieces so that she can focus on the boy (Tom) and the beehive, leaving out the dog, the bees and the gopher. She includes simultaneity ("at the same time" in the learner's English script) by using an adverbial phrase *sono aida ni* "during that time", instead of two clauses.

The other example of difficult phrasing concerns the contact relation of two animates. One scene repeatedly mentioned appears in Pictures 15-16 wherein the boy who remains sandwiched between the deer's antlers is carried to the edge of the cliff.⁽⁶⁾ Examples of the learners' descriptions appear below (English translations are mine.):

- (3) *Otokonoko ga shika no senaka ni notta kara, shika-san ga okotta!
Kawa made hashitte itte...* (LNR6)
'As the boy rode on the deer's back, Mr. Deer got angry! (He) ran
to the river and...'

Shika wa tsuno de Yuuya o mochi-age-nagara arui-ta. (LNR5)
(lit.) 'While the deer carried Yuuya by his horns, he walked.'

Some were implicit about the contact relation. For instance, LNR6 used the verb *noru* 'ride' first. Then, in a separate sentence, he described the deer's running, without referring to the boy's presence. Others used more specific expressions. For example, LNR5 used *nagara* 'while' to refer to two conditions: the deer's carrying the boy and the deer's walking. Her use of *nagara* in this context is inappropriate, as the *nagara*-marked phrase must be an activity, not a state as in 'being carried'. The more accurate alternative would be *mama* 'remaining', as in *mochi-age-ta mama* 'keeping him lifted'. This utterance by LNR5 highlights the challenge encountered by learners when they need to describe a condition not frequently seen in materials specifically designed for language learners.

Table 2 summarizes the area of the task each participant found difficult; seven out of eight found either Language or Content to be a difficult aspect of the task, whereas one (LNR 6) found both difficult.

Table 2: Task difficulty

LNR No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Language	✓	✓			✓	✓			4
Content			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	5

Differently stated, every participant found some aspect of the task difficult regardless of his/her language proficiency level, even when the time-pressure factor was almost removed by transforming it into a take-home task.

This language-content division can account for a seemingly inconsistent comment by LNR7. LNR7 has more proficiency than most other learners. She said, “I could have made it [the task] difficult but I kept it simple”, suggesting that she utilized a metacognitive strategy (cf. Anderson 2005) to create a simple narrative based on what she could “automatically” (Segalowitz 2003) produce, thereby making an ally of her advanced language ability. Yet she identified Content as a difficult aspect of the task (see Table 2), which seems incompatible with her comment that she kept the task “simple”, i.e., “not difficult”. Arguably, because she found creating a sophisticated story line (i.e., Content) “difficult”, she decided to make a very simple story line; thus, she did not experience any language difficulty.

Robinson’s (2005: 5) classification seems to treat “task difficulty” as a single category. But as Table 2 shows, learners are sensitive to two different aspects of the task. Therefore, it seems important to identify the kinds of task difficulty learners may experience before it can be correlated with a particular variable such as language aptitude.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the impact of transforming an on-site task into a take-home task, including both the benefits and the negative aspects.

5.1. Positive aspects

The transformation is considered to have yielded at least a few benefits. First, it made the task more manageable to learners with lower proficiency levels (Intermediate Low), though the cognitive burdens may have still been very heavy. LNR 2 mentioned that she felt very happy because she could now write a story in Japanese. Her comment indicates that the task boosted her confidence in Japanese even though it may have been challenging for her. Second, the transformation helped reduce the anxiety level of participants. When an on-site elicitation method is used, participants are more likely to have a high level of anxiety since they

must observe the time limit and tell a story almost spontaneously. The take-home task reduces the anxiety factor, creating a relatively relaxed environment where the learners can take time to think of what needs to be done and improve certain areas, allowing them to meet their own standards of excellence. Third, the transformation gave the learners “autonomy” (Holec 1981) to adjust the degree of task complexity, determining to what extent they could perfect their stories in terms of both content and language use. When taken together with the relaxed time constraint, this autonomy led to revision of both language and content as elaborated below.

5.1.1. Revision of language

A few learners attempted to improve structural complexity. (5) shows an example of a learner’s attempt to use *rashii*, an evidential marker that indicates that the information is obtained through a secondary source, typically “used when the speaker’s subjective judgment is added to what the speaker has heard from an outside source” (Johnson 2008: 261). This learner said that she wanted to use *rashii* which she had just learned so that the structure of her description could be more complex.

(5) *Demo, bin ni suwatta kaeru wa, kowakatta rashii desu.*

Intended: ‘But the frog sitting inside the jar looked scared.’

In (5), the marker is applied by the narrator who is looking at the frog directly and noting that it appears frightened (as opposed to hearing from someone that the frog is scared). In this case, if an evidential marker is to be employed, another evidential marker *yoo* should be used, as in *kowagatte iru-yoo-desu*. ‘It appears that it is scared.’ Though *rashii* is not applied in an appropriate context, the learner’s eagerness to tackle a new grammar item should be acknowledged; at the same time, the error highlights the importance of providing contexts when a new grammar item is introduced.

Another participant, LNR4, mentioned that her original story was comprised of simple sentences with repeated expressions. To make her story more syntactically sophisticated, she went back to the materials she learned during the academic term and revised accordingly. An example she gave was an abstract noun *uchi*, ‘(lit.) inside’, which she used successfully in her closing sentence (5).

- (6) “...*Kondo, mata aoo!*”
Kuraku nara nai uchi ni, minna ga ie ni kaetta.
“... Let’s meet again!” Before it got dark, everyone went home’.

5.1.2. Revision on Content

Two participants made a special effort to make their stories more attractive to children. LNR8 adopted a rhetorical style that appeals to children, namely, a type of repetition often found in children’s stories: she used the phrase *aruite aruite* ‘walked and walked’ for two pictures, and “*Kaeru, doko ni iru?*” ‘Frog, where are you?’ for six pictures. Instead of sounding redundant, the phrase served as a helpful reminder that the boy was looking for the frog.

Another ambitious endeavor was the use of onomatopoeia. LNRs 2 and 8 specifically mentioned that they decided to include onomatopoeia because their stories were for children. LNR 2 searched for a frog’s croaking and included *kerokero* (*Mori kara “kerokero” kiita. “Jaa mori e ikoo!”* ‘He heard “*kerokero*” from the forest. “Now, let’s go to the forest!”’). LNR8 used five kinds of onomatopoeia: a dog’s barking (*wan wan*), a frog’s croaking (*kerokero, gero gero*), bees’ buzzing (*buun buun*), an owl’s hooting (*hoo hoo*), and the splashing sound of water (*pashaat*). She said that she used an internet search engine to find onomatopoeia, typing in key phrases such as “Japanese onomatopoeia” and “buzz”. (7) is an example of how she used *buun* to create the bees’ buzzing sound.

- (7) *Ippai hachi ga hachi no su kara demashita. “Buun, buun!”*
‘Many bees came out of the beehive. “*Buun, buun!*”’

The inclusion of onomatopoeia indicated LNR8's consideration for the children listeners who would not have pictures (in the radio station setting); she thought onomatopoeia would help her audience vividly imagine the scenes. In (7), the addition of the bees' buzzing sound renders the description more concrete, making the scene more easily imagined by children. It is worth noting that although other participants did not specifically state that they sought onomatopoeia, four used this technique. Like LNR 8, they used onomatopoeia to represent animal voices and/or to create a splashing sound. This point deserves mention since none of their instructional materials included onomatopoeia, suggesting that the participants resorted to their own experiences as story-tellers and listeners and decided to include them. This task provided an opportunity for them to connect their personal experiences to their language learning, going beyond the classroom materials.⁽⁷⁾

Lastly, LNR2 said that she researched information on Japanese names to make her story more culturally acceptable to her imaginary audience. First, she looked for a common dog's name. Then, she came up with *Shiro*, which means 'white'. Taking this a step farther, she decided to name the frog in her story *Midori*, 'green'. She included a description:

- (8) *Kaeru ni hanashita: Korekara, kimi no namae wa Midori-kun desu.*
 'He talked to the frog: "From now on, your name will be Midori."'

Then she looked for a common boy's name because she did not want to use a name no Japanese would recognize. She chose *Keiji*.

In short, the post-task interviews helped us understand how the learners tackled the story elicitation task, a type of information missed in previous studies. We found that some learners used this task to test their hypotheses about their linguistic knowledge, using newly-learned grammatical items (e.g., *rashii*, *uchi*) or vocabulary items (e.g., onomatopoeia) to tell their stories. The penalty-free nature of the task seems to have facilitated such endeavors. The interviews also revealed some personal aspects of the learners. Some made a real effort to

improve the quality of the story. The non-routinized nature of the frog story task encouraged them to go beyond the expected, although they certainly could have done the bare minimum.

5.2. Negative aspects

One major drawback of the transformation into the take-home task is the lack of transparency in the preparatory stage:⁽⁸⁾ simply stated, there is no way for the researcher to know whether participants create a story on their own (though in this case, they were instructed not to consult anyone) or how they come up with the phrases they use unless these issues are addressed during the post-task interviews. This lack of transparency is detrimental to any analysis.

6. Conclusion

To date, L2 Japanese research using frog stories to elicit L2 data has done so by creating an on-site oral task (e.g., Nakahama 2003) in which the degree of the task complexity is “high,” in terms of both resource-direction and resource-dispersion (Robinson 2005). The present study takes a different approach, transforming the telling of a frog story into a take-home task, thereby reducing the learners’ burden in the area of resource-dispersion. Still, the participants found certain aspects of the task difficult (language and/or content), suggesting an intricate relationship between task complexity and task difficulty. Although the results must be carefully interpreted since the present study relied on only eight participants, the findings of this study seem at least useful for discussing future frog story projects.

In light of the issues raised in Section 5, future studies might consider adopting an on-site oral task format but with a relaxed preparatory time to reduce the participants’ anxiety, giving them 2 to 2.5 hours to prepare and allowing them to look at their notes while they tell their stories.⁽⁹⁾ The proficiency level of the participants can be Intermediate Mid or higher as in Cardierno (2004), but the inclusion of participants with a lower level (Intermediate Low) seems possible, although their inclusion may require making more adjustments. Future studies

might also consider developing a questionnaire to identify the relationship between the task complexity and the task difficulty, specifying the area of the task difficulty. A large-scale quantitative study seems essential for examining the existence of such a relationship. Irrespective of the format of the task (oral, on-site etc.), the importance of contextualization cannot be emphasized enough, if researchers are to adopt the picture book. Specifying the potential audience and whether or not the audience is looking at the pictures will allow learners to focus on what the story should sound like for children, and the information will serve as a crucial guide when participants prepare the story, including decisions regarding the plot, word choice, grammar, and style. Future frog story projects will determine which procedures best suit the needs of a specific type of research.

Note

- * I am grateful to the student volunteers who consented to participate, taking on this extra task independently of their course work. Thanks also go to Mitsuaki Shimojo for his support and valuable comments. I am grateful to Elizabeth Thompson for her editorial suggestions. The remaining errors and shortcomings are, of course, solely my responsibility.
- 1. The third parameter, Task Condition, is not considered here; it deals with interactional aspects of the task, which are not relevant to this case as the participants are not asked to interact amongst themselves.
- 2. This excludes items metonymically related to the items such as the boy's hair and the bed's legs.
- 3. Elsewhere, using a modified design, stories were elicited via a written format, as documented in Cardierno (2004): the participants in her study (L1 Danish learners of L2 Spanish) were given 45 minutes to complete the writing task; their levels of competence fall between "Intermediate Mid" and "Advanced" (ACTFL guidelines on writing).
- 4. Of the eight learners, three were monolingual English speakers and five were bilinguals who spoke English and one more language.
- 5. This raises the question of whether the recording component is really necessary. However, it is believed that the recording component makes the goal of the task realistic (i.e., telling a story to children), and it helps the learners focus on creating a story, rather than on accurately writing Japanese characters, especially kanji.
- 6. This can be considered an example of simultaneity whereby the two actions, the deer's running and the boy's remaining on the deer's head, happen concurrently.
- 7. The choices of onomatopoeias used by the participants to denote the sound of splash are not quite felicitous: *Pashaat* (LNR8), *gan-to* (LNR6), *Supurasshu!* (LNR7), and *Chapun!* (LNR3), which should be *Basshaan!*, *Bachaan!* etc. to indicate the heaviness of the objects that fall into the water. These infelicitous forms suggest that

the acquisition of onomatopoeias involves complexity due to the special nature of their semantics as well as their high sensitivity to context (cf. Akita 2012).

8. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for raising this issue.
9. Other points to consider include: (i) whether to specify the beginning of the story in the instructions in order to establish tense so that There-and-Then descriptions can be uniformly elicited (e.g. *Aru tokoro ni chiisana otokonoko ga sundeimashita*. 'There lived a small boy in a certain place.'), and (ii) whether the participants should be allowed to access on-line resources as they prepare their stories.

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