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# REVIEWS

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## An Approach for Supporting Thesis Writing in the Language Curriculum

Uchikawa Kazumi 内川かずみ: Sotsugyōronbun to nihongokyōiku: TBLL (Thesis Based Language Learning) no rinen to jissen 卒業論文と日本語教育: TBLL (Thesis Based Language Learning) の理念と実践. Thesis Writing and Japanese Language Teaching: Philosophy and Practice of TBLL (Thesis Based Language Learning). Tokyo: Coco Shuppan, 2024. 352 pp.

According to current guidelines, students enrolled in the Japanese Studies BA specialization of the Institute of East Asian Studies at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) are required to write their thesis primarily in Hungarian. However, they must also include a summary in Japanese, spanning a few pages. They are also expected to engage with Japanese-language academic sources during the writing process. Of course, thesis supervision is carried out by faculty members who teach historical, linguistic, and other thematic courses, rather than by language instructors, and it is not necessarily the primary aim of the language curriculum to help students engage with these sources. Nevertheless, students rely heavily on the Japanese language skills they have acquired in language classes, and the classes may explicitly or implicitly contribute to the development of the competencies required for thesis writing. Moreover, language learning tends to be more effective when students engage with topics that genuinely interest them. This compelling synergistic potential, which has so far received little academic attention, is the topic of Uchikawa Kazumi's monograph, published in the series *New Currents in Japanese Language Education Studies* (*Nihongo Kyōikugaku no Shinchōryū* 日本語教育学の新潮流) by Coco Shuppan ココ出版 in 2024.

Kazumi Uchikawa is currently an assistant professor at the Department of Japanese Studies at ELTE, where she previously served for many years as a native-language instructor. She defended her doctoral dissertation within the Doctoral Program in Japanese Studies at the same university in 2022. This dissertation formed the basis of the book under review, in which the author

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introduces the term TBLL, or Thesis-Based Language Learning, to describe the type of interaction outlined above.

The book consists of eleven chapters. The first is an introduction, in which the author emphasizes that the book is not a methodological guide for supervising theses. Rather, it has two main objectives: first, to examine whether and how language instruction and thesis writing are connected in Japanese Studies programs across European universities; and second, to provide a theoretical framework for the author's argument that it is important for Japanese language instructors to be involved in supporting the thesis-writing process.

In the remaining chapters, the book addresses both of its stated objectives. Chapter 2 provides a historical overview of thesis writing, which has existed in Europe since the Middle Ages and has also been an important part of academic study in Japan since the establishment of universities. Drawing on existing literature, the author outlines the wide range of expectations and attitudes toward thesis writing in various institutions. She also presents findings from her own qualitative study conducted among her students, which shows that while students view the thesis as a significant component of their university education, they do not generally feel that language classes provide meaningful support for thesis writing.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Japanese Studies programs, including the results of a survey conducted among Japanese language instructors in Europe. The findings reveal, for instance, that students are often required or strongly encouraged to use Japanese-language academic sources for their thesis in over half of the programs surveyed. The Hungarian model, i.e., writing the thesis in Hungarian but including a Japanese-language summary, was reported by approximately one-quarter of respondents, a detail that further underscores the absence of a unified or standardized approach across these programs.

Chapters 5 and 6 provide a literature review of best practices in language classes that support thesis writing at universities outside of Japan and continue the discussion of the survey results from the previous chapter. According to the data, 58.1% of the European Japanese language instructors surveyed report offering some form of support for thesis writing, such as assisting students in locating appropriate sources. However, 71.4% reported that Japanese language classes do not currently provide support for the thesis-writing process.

In Chapter 7, the author identifies five key problem areas that contribute to the situation described above. The first is the issue of separate domains and separate instructors: that is, the (usually informal) division between Japanese language and Japanese Studies courses. The second is the issue of expertise, as language instructors do not necessarily have specialized knowledge of the Japanological topics addressed in students' theses. The third concerns challenges

related to scheduling and course design. The fourth issue is students' insufficient proficiency in Japanese. Finally, the fifth issue relates to practical applicability, specifically, the perception that the linguistic competencies required for thesis writing may not be directly useful in the labor market.

Chapters 8 and 9 elaborate on the social and pedagogical background of TBLL. The author argues that in our changing world, both the purpose and perceived value of language proficiency are undergoing transformation, along with the role of teachers and institutional education. She emphasizes that the goals of TBLL align with the principles of constructivist pedagogy and learner-centered education. Among the models more closely related to second language education, she highlights the potential for integration with approaches such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and PBL (Project-Based and Problem-Based Learning). These chapters also introduce possible assessment methods that can be implemented within the TBLL framework. The symmetrical structure of these chapters, beginning with the presentation of a particular issue or theoretical methodology, followed by a discussion of how TBLL fits into that context, greatly enhances the value of the book, particularly for readers seeking insights into contemporary educational approaches or the discourse regarding the role of education in the 21st century.

In Chapter 10, the author presents her detailed practical experiences with the implementation of TBLL in her courses at ELTE, offering concrete guidance for Japanese language teachers who wish to apply this method in their own classrooms. Finally, Chapter 11 provides a comprehensive summary of the main findings and arguments presented throughout the book.

The author presents a multifaceted argument in support of the usefulness of TBLL, grounded in an extensive body of academic literature and several original, self-conducted empirical studies. It is not easy to define precisely what falls within the scope of TBLL, apart from the general idea that it includes any classroom activity related in some way to thesis writing. However, if we adopt the pedagogical mindset outlined in the second half of the book, it becomes clear that TBLL is not merely concerned with supporting students in the writing process. Rather, it offers a broader pedagogical framework that considers learner motivation, opportunities for collaboration, and the comprehensive development of both linguistic and Japanological academic competencies.

I recommend this book to anyone interested in the state of Japanese language education in higher education, the history and current practices of thesis writing, or holistic approaches to language teaching. It will also be of value to readers seeking a deeper understanding of the evolving role of language instruction and lexical knowledge, as well as recent trends in pedagogy more broadly.