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PBI ni yoru Nihongo kyōiku no jissen [Proficiency-Based Instruction: Practical Applications in Japanese Language Education]. (PBI による日本語教育の実践).

Edited by **Kenichi Miura** and **Suwako Watanabe**. Tokyo: Bonjinsha, 2024. 268 pp. ¥2,800.

Reviewed by

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This volume, *PBI ni yoru Nihongo kyōiku no jissen*, serves as a comprehensive and practical guide for Japanese language educators aiming to align instruction with proficiency targets grounded in the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (hereafter the Guidelines). Edited by Miura and Watanabe, the volume provides a detailed account of how to apply the Guidelines in real-world instructional contexts by adopting Proficiency-Based Instruction (hereafter PBI). PBI emphasizes functional language use and task-based learning situated in meaningful communicative contexts. Its pedagogical objective is to develop learners' ability to do things with the language in real-life situations, rather than focusing solely on what learners know about the language in terms of grammar or vocabulary. Unlike theoretical works that critique or conceptualize instructional paradigms, this volume places a strong emphasis on practice—specifically, on how to teach toward proficiency through goal-oriented, performance-based tasks. In this respect, the review begins with a panoramic overview of the volume's structure and content to highlight its practical scope and instructional utility, followed by a reflection on its pedagogical significance and suggestions for further exploration.

The volume consists of fourteen chapters divided into five parts. Part 1 lays the theoretical foundations by explaining the Guidelines and core principles of PBI. Parts 2 through 4 present classroom-based applications



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organized by proficiency level: Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced. Part 5 provides supplementary discussions, including insights into Distinguished-level proficiency and comparisons between the ACTFL and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, assessment (hereafter CEFR) frameworks. Each chapter includes detailed explanations of learning outcomes, lesson planning, practical teaching strategies, and sample activities.

The volume brings together contributions from six educators—Miura, Watanabe, Ajioka, Kawanishi, Kubo, and Takami—who are all ACTFL-certified Oral Proficiency Interview (hereafter OPI) testers. Drawing on their extensive experience implementing PBI in various Japanese language programs in the United States, the authors present pedagogical practices that are grounded in both theory and classroom experience. Each chapter demonstrates how communicative proficiency—particularly speaking ability—can be cultivated through goal-oriented, performance-based instruction. This book is especially relevant for Japanese language educators interested in shifting from grammar-dominant models to learner-centered, communication-focused instruction. The text is written entirely in Japanese.

In Part 1, “*PBI (Proficiency-Based Instruction) no gaiyō* [Overview of PBI],” Miura and Watanabe outline the Guidelines and explain how they serve as the foundation for PBI. Chapter 1 (Miura) offers a clear and concise overview of the Guidelines 2024 Edition, focusing on the four evaluation criteria—Functions, Context and Content, Accuracy, and Text Type—for each of the four proficiency levels (Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, and Superior; Distinguished is addressed extensively in Part 5). Sample OPI responses are provided to illustrate how the criteria are applied in actual proficiency assessments. Chapter 2 (Watanabe) introduces the instructional framework of PBI and its defining features: use of the Guidelines to set instructional goals, integration of goal-oriented tasks, and performance-based assessment. This chapter also addresses how to shift classroom practices by focusing on discourse-level instruction, enhancing interaction, and fostering communicative accuracy at each proficiency level.

In Part 2, “*Shokyū reberu no shidō* [Novice-level Instruction],” four contributors discuss how to advance Novice-level learners toward Intermediate proficiency. Chapter 1 (Watanabe) defines the characteristics of Intermediate-level proficiency and elucidates instructional strategies for guiding Novice learners toward these benchmarks. The chapter provides

detailed descriptions of instructional methods and practice strategies, including techniques to support learners in using language creatively and managing basic transactional situations. To illustrate these points, the author presents interaction samples from real-life contexts—such as the workplace, hospital, and shopping—each highlighting different aspects of transactional conversation, text types, and accuracy. These examples underscore the author’s view that developing the ability to handle transactional communication is central to fostering intermediate proficiency. Chapter 2 (Kawanishi and Ajioka) introduces three types of classroom activities: (1) fostering students’ ability to initiate, sustain, and conclude conversations effectively in real-world contexts; (2) prompting learners to add an extra utterance to elaborate their speech; and (3) engaging students in transactional activities that encourage them to express themselves in full sentences rather than at the word level. All three activities are designed to facilitate transactional exchanges by having students combine previously acquired vocabulary, grammar, and set expressions. Chapter 3 (Miura) explores how traditional “grammar practice” can be transformed into meaningful, proficiency-oriented communicative activities. Miura proposes three key strategies: embedding grammar instruction in authentic contexts, recycling previously learned grammar and vocabulary, and supplementing instruction with essential elements for successful transactional interaction. The chapter includes lesson plans that illustrate the practical application of these principles. For example, one lesson features a role-play in which exchange students in Japan ask their host families for permission to invite friends to the house, targeting the transactional function of requesting permission.

Part 3, “*Chūkyū reberu no shidō* [*Intermediate-Level Instruction*],” presents structured activities designed to foster narrative and descriptive skills, aiming toward advanced-level benchmarks. Chapter 1 (Watanabe) provides an overview of Advanced-level proficiency and focuses on Advanced-level speaking ability, particularly narrating and describing in paragraph-length discourse and managing complications in conversation. It presents OPI samples to illustrate the quantity and quality of speech expected at this level and outlines key instructional considerations for fostering these abilities, such as incorporating unexpected linguistically challenging situations into transactional practice, guiding students to structure cohesive paragraphs by preparing conclusions in advance, and shifting from familiar personal topics to broader general or social topics. Chapter 2 (Kubo) introduces two projects designed to develop paragraph-

length narration and description: the first, the “Unsung Hero Project,” employs the Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) framework; the second, “My Funny Story,” draws on the kishōtenketsu narrative structure, a mode of discourse organization widely used in Japanese, particularly in storytelling. Chapter 3 (Takami) presents instructional examples from her Business Japanese course designed for Intermediate-High level students. The chapter situates these activities within Nunan’s ‘Process, Production, and Interaction’ framework, (p.153) enabling students to progress naturally through scaffolded stages. A jigsaw reading task and a news presentation are introduced as examples of interactive and communicative tasks. Chapter 4 (Watanabe) introduces a teaching sequence that helps learners integrate descriptive elements into narrative. By gradually expanding minimal narrative units, students are guided to construct well-developed, paragraph-length discourse. The author exemplifies this with a three-stage cooking activity that starts with brief procedural steps, extends the sequence, and finally culminates in addition of descriptive detail.

Part 4, “*Jōkyū reberu no shidō* [*Advanced-Level Instruction*],” addresses Superior-level proficiency and presents lesson plans explicitly designed with this target in mind, incorporating the requisite competencies and instructional components. Chapter 1 (Miura) introduces the characteristics of Superior-level proficiency and examines the curricular components and specific competencies necessary to support learners’ progression toward this level, such as scaffolded opportunities for reflective discussion, debate-based tasks, and the integration of authentic academic or professional texts. These components are designed within learners’ zones of proximal development, providing structured support that gradually enables them to engage in abstract, extended, and culturally situated discourse independently. Chapter 2 (Miura) presents a curriculum designed for an Advanced-level course centered on debate and discussion. The curriculum emphasizes learners’ ability to construct arguments, explain complex issues, and engage in abstract, theoretical, and persuasive discourse. Chapter 3 (Watanabe) presents three types of lesson plans: (1) vocabulary-building activities centered on current social and political issues; (2) opinion-expression tasks, including debates, opinion essays, and rebuttals to online posts; and (3) a hypothetical discussion activity based on “What if...” scenarios. The author illustrates this last type with an example in which students consider, “What if university tuition became free?” Using a scaffolded worksheet, learners are guided to explore the possible consequences of this situation—first at a personal level, then

extending to societal and even international impacts—thus practicing how to develop abstract reasoning and sustain multi-paragraph discourse.

Part 5, “*Hoi [Addendum]*,” focuses on additional themes relevant to PBI. Chapter 1 (Miura) presents a focused explanation of Distinguished-level proficiency, illustrating its developmental path and defining characteristics through an example from the OPI. Chapter 2 (Miura) introduces the CEFR framework, compares it with the Guidelines, and examines comparative studies and their implications for Japanese language education.

This volume offers a coherent integration of theory and practice by adopting the Guidelines as its foundational framework and operationalizing them through PBI. The contributors illustrate how backward design and goal-oriented instruction can be applied across proficiency levels—from Novice to Advanced—using tasks carefully scaffolded to support learners’ progression through functional benchmarks. Classroom activities are grounded in real-world communication and are designed to develop learners’ speaking proficiency in practical and measurable ways.

Although not an empirical research study, the volume draws upon evidence-based practices and reflects the contributors’ deep engagement with OPI-based assessment and instruction. Each chapter is accessible yet pedagogically rigorous, providing detailed rationales and sample lesson plans that can be readily adapted to diverse instructional contexts. Particularly valuable is the consistent advocacy for a shift from grammar-dominant instruction to communication-centered pedagogy, while maintaining attention to the structural demands of proficiency-based assessment.

While the volume presents a clear and practical account of PBI implementation, it does not substantively engage with more recent pedagogical paradigms such as the Multiliteracies approach advocated by the New London Group or models of intercultural communicative competence developed by scholars like Byram and Scarino. These approaches emphasize learners’ critical engagement with language as social practice, multimodal meaning-making, and cultural reflexivity—dimensions that remain underexplored in this proficiency-driven model. For instance, topics such as learner agency, identity formation, and the socio-cultural or political dimensions of language use are not directly addressed. Readers seeking broader theoretical discussion or comparative critique may therefore find the volume somewhat narrowly framed in its

theoretical engagement, with a primarily technical focus on PBI. However, this selective focus reflects the book's clear purpose: to present PBI as a practical framework grounded in the Guidelines and implemented in real classroom settings.

That said, it is important to recognize that no single pedagogy can address all instructional goals. While PBI provides a structured framework aligned with proficiency outcomes, it is not inherently exclusionary. Educators interested in frameworks such as Multiliteracies or intercultural communicative competence are encouraged to incorporate these perspectives into a PBI-oriented curriculum. Depending on the course's learning objectives, these approaches can complement and enrich instruction by addressing dimensions such as learner identity, critical literacy, and cultural understanding, including reflexivity.

In summary, this volume is a valuable resource for Japanese language educators seeking to transition toward proficiency-based, performance-oriented instruction. Its systematic organization, alignment with the Guidelines, and rich collection of classroom-tested examples make it particularly useful for: (1) teachers and curriculum planners developing or revising programs to align with proficiency targets; (2) teacher training and professional development workshops; and (3) institutions shifting from form-focused instruction to communicative, task-based approaches. At the same time, the volume serves as an accessible introduction for educators with little prior experience in PBI, while offering experienced practitioners an opportunity to revisit and refine their instructional practices. By demonstrating how the Guidelines—originally developed with a strong focus on European languages—can be effectively adapted to Japanese, the volume advances Japanese pedagogy and offers insights for other less-commonly taught languages. As Japanese language education continues to evolve to meet the demands of real-world communication, this volume offers a strong model for curriculum design and instructional planning that supports learners' functional language development in meaningful contexts.