



Current Issues with *Kanji* Education - a Culturally Integrated Approach

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Overview

- Background
- Current Issues with *Kanji* Education
 - frequency-based approach
 - need, motivation & desire
 - in comparison with Chinese
 - why is writing *kanji* important?
- A New Approach
 - homonyms & associated chunks
 - American-style Japanese calligraphy
 - potential benefits to Japanese program
- Practical Syllabus
- Conclusion

Background

- **Grinnell College** in the middle of nowhere between Iowa City and Des Moines.
- **No language requirement**
- **High attrition rate towards advanced level**
- **Cultural integration**

Current Issues with *Kanji* Education

- ▣ The learning of *kanji* poses a multiple challenges to students of Japanese, especially those from an alphabetic background (Ishida, 1984).
- ▣ *Kanji* has been extensively studied from various perspectives because of its unique characteristics, such as its high visual for *kanji* complexity and logographic nature (Kaiho & Nomura, 1983).
- ▣ Alphabetic-habituated learners do not process *kanji* in the same way as Japanese children (Flasherty, 1991).

Current Issues with *Kanji* Education 2

- Frequency-based Approach

<i>Nakama 1</i> Chapter 12		元気入薬休体病院住所語好每回数	
	# of chapters	Chapter <i>kanji</i> appear	Kind of <i>kanji</i>
<i>Genki 1</i>	12	Chapter 3	一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九 十 百 千 万 円 時
<i>Nakama 1</i>	12	Chapter 7	山 日 田 人 上 下 中 大 小 本 学 生 先 私 川
<i>Yookoso 1</i>	7	Chapter 1*	日 本 学 生 名 何 月 人 一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九 十 百 先 話 語 大 間 半 上 下 分 小 好 町 左 右 中 外 前 後 時 山 口 千 万 方 近 遠 有

Current Issues with *Kanji* Education 3

- Need, Motivation, & Desire
 - ▣ Extinct & intrinsic motivation.
 - ▣ Toyoda (1995) conducted a survey among students of Japanese from an alphabetic background at a Japanese university with a result of the largest number of students of intermediate Japanese feeling learning *kanji* very difficult.

Current Issues with *Kanji* Education 4

- In Comparison with Chinese
 - ▣ 700 Chinese characters vs about 150 Japanese *kanji* a year at Grinnell College
 - ▣ Learning a much larger number of *kanji* is not by no means impossible but perhaps requires more motivation and commitment.

Current Issues with *Kanji* Education 5

- Why Is Writing *Kanji* Important?

Method	Temporal visual memory	Kinetic movement	Confirmation after writing
Viewing	☐		
Writing in space	☐	☐	
Writing on paper	☐	☐	☐

A New Approach

- Element-based Approach
(Heising, 1986)

☐ For example, before 「語」 is learned, the radical, 「言」, 「五」 and 「口」 is introduced so that learners can make a smooth transition.

A New Approach 2

- Homonyms & Associated Chunks

- ▣ Samuels (1973) found pre-training for visual discrimination effective with American children trying to learn English letters, “p”, “d”, “g”, and “q” and concluded that the pre-training facilitated the subsequent learning by sensitizing children to visual features of letters.
- ▣ Sugimura & Kubo (1975) conducted a similar experiment with Japanese children trying to learn the pronunciation of *katakana*, and found that their pre-training for visual discrimination facilitated their subsequent association between *hiragana* and their sounds.
- ▣ Kaiho & Nomura (1983) propose that as learners have to learn a huge number of *kanji*, the pre-training for visual discrimination of *kanji* is necessary before learners recognize useful *kanji* patterns.

A New Approach 3

- Systematic *kanji* learning is needed, for instance, *miru* can be written as 「見る」「看る」「診る」「観る」 or 「視る」.
- For alphabetic-habituated learners, without knowing radicals, some *kanji* are so similar to others that they can't make clear distinctions, especially when writing. Examples are 「四/西」「良/食」「大/天」「小/少」「元/先」「各/名」「字/学」「映/英」「大/本」「理/野」「牧/枚」

A New Approach 4

- American-style Japanese Calligraphy
 - ▣ The ancient traditional art needs to be revised to fit into the American university curriculum.
 - ▣ Critique of each other's calligraphic work can be introduced to quickly develop better appreciation of the art
 - ▣ Two calligraphy projects: 「永」 with all the basics & a word of student's choice to make the activity enjoyable for students.

A New Approach 5



A New Approach 6



A New Approach 7

- Potential Benefits to The Japanese Program
 - ▣ Aims to ease the burden of those learners, who feel *kanji* is very tough to learn and the hope is that more of them go up to advanced level better-prepared.
 - ▣ Extended to the other skills, better *kanji* recognition leads, for example, to better reading comprehension.
 - ▣ Alleviate instructors for the extra headache of trying to read students' illegible handwriting.

Practical Syllabus

- *Kanji* Section

- ▣ “Remembering The *Kanji*” by James Heisig but with an additional reading list and those beyond the official 1,850 official *kanji* excluded.
- ▣ A comprehensive workbook
- ▣ Introduce *rikusho* (六書), compositional units, and radicals at the very beginning of the course so that students understand how *kanji* is basically formed.
- ▣ Teach how to use *kanwajiten* (*kanji* dictionary).

Practical Syllabus 2

☰ Example exercises to develop graphic memory by Tollini (1991).

Exercise 1:

Divide the following *kanji* in two parts.

Example: 細 = 糸 + 田

「鎮」 「習」 「梅」 「語」 「張」 「答」 「悲」 「晴」 「現」 「仕」

Exercise 2:

To which decomposed series do the *kanji* in the list belong?

Example: 田 + 糸 = 累

「土 + 心」 「安 + 木」 「耳 + 口 + 王」 「竹 + 木 + 目」 「言 + 刃 + 心」

Practical Syllabus 3

Exercise 3:

Choose the common components of the following *kanji*.

Example: 奈奧太奄 大

「勉努勤務募」 「謀諮誓」 「念恥愛感」 「岩峠島獄」 「守寺導謝」

Exercise 4:

Which parts are contained in the following *kanji*?

Example: 侍 j+f

1. 明 2. 時 3. 品 4. 加 5. 吉 6. 含 7. 念 8. 志

Parts: a. 月 b. 口 c. 力 d. 心 e. 土 f. 寺 g. 日 h. 今 i. 生 j. 人

Exercise 5:

Choose from each list the *kanji* that does not belong.

Example: 技持功抗 : 功

「梅桜料柏」 「鮎蛤鯛鯨」 「罵雪雲電」 「都影郊郵」 「虫忠念愁」

Conclusion

- ▣ Frequency-based approach might work better for JSL or at the very beginning levels for JFL where the selection of *kanji* is closely related to the theme of each chapter.
- ▣ This study argue that this may be counterproductive in the long term as the current approach often forces learners to depend on ad hoc rote memorization in a one dimensional way.
- ▣ This new approach aims to stimulate learners with Japanese calligraphy and motivate them to tackle *kanji* positively.
- ▣ The task, especially writing *kanji* with native proficiency is not easy. It requires a great deal of stamina, concentration, and commitment. However, I hope this new approach is a way to eliminate a great deal of wasted efforts and can better facilitate learners of Japanese struggling towards success with *kanji*.

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