The Analysis of Student’s Writing Abilities of Kanji at Japanese Education Study Program of UNP

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Abstract—The background of this research is the importance of mastering Kanji in learning Japanese since most Japanese transcriptions use it. However, the large number of Kanji characters makes it difficult for the students to understand it. This research is done due to the importance of mastering Kanji for Japanese language learners since almost all writings in Japanese use it. Kanji is one of the most difficult aspects for Japanese language learners especially for those who do not have a cultural background about it. This happens since they are targeted to be able to master 1945 Kanji characters. In addition, one Kanji character has more than one pronunciation. Thus, they find it difficult to memorize and use those characters. A big number of characters and the various ways of writing as well as pronouncing them make the students difficult in mastering Kanji. The objective of this research is to find out the Kanji mastery level of the 5th semester students who are majoring in the Japanese Education in the academic year of 2015/2016. This quantitative research applied the descriptive method. The subject was 19 students of the study program. To select this sample, the purposive sampling technique was used. Data were taken from the scores of the students’ Kanji test. The instrument of the research was an essay test which measures the students’ abilities in writing the Kanji characters. Based on the research results, it is found that the students’ mastery was in the “satisfactory” classification with score of 63.33.

Keywords—Kanji, students’ writing abilities

I. INTRODUCTION

Characters in Japanese are called moji (文字). There are two types of moji (文字): Hyouyi Moji (表意文字) and Hyouon Moji (表表表音). Hyouyi Moji expresses content and meanings as well as states pronunciation. One type of Hyouyi Moji is Kanji (漢字). Meanwhile, Hyouon Moji states forms of pronunciation which are meaningless (Zalman, 2014: 1). Hiragana (平仮名), Katakana (片仮名) and Romaji (ローマ字) or Latin characters are included in Hyouon Moji. It is inferred that Japanese characters consist of Kanji, Hiragana, Katakana, and Romaji which are later divided into two groups based on their use.

Sudjianto (2009: 71) states that Kana characters (Hiragana and Katakana) are included in Honsetsu Moji (本節文字) since the characters denote a meaningless syllable. However, there are several Japanese words consisting of only one syllable like particles and nouns such as え (e: picture), き (ki: tree), け (to: feather), and て (te: hand). Those nouns also have their own Kanji like え (絵), き (木), け (毛), and て (手). It is said that Kana states a syllable which forms the pronunciation in Japanese.

Kanji contains meanings and forms of pronunciation. It derives from Chinese characters which are adapted into Japanese. Sudana (Zalman, 2014: 14) explains that from its first entry into Japan (5th century) to the 9th century, Kanji is used in various ways such as translating and writing even though there are still problems in terms of sentence patterns as well as its pronunciation. The pronunciation of Kanji in Japanese Kokkun (国訓) and Chinese Kashia (仮借) or using only Kanji produces the same sound (Kasha).

In 1981, a list of TouyouKanjiHyo (当用漢字表) was published and it contained 1945 Kanji consisting of 1850 characters in TouyouKanji and 95 Kanji related to legislation, documents, newspapers, magazines, and everyday life. The list contains Chinese or on yomi (音読み) and Japanese or kunyomi (訓読み) fonts and pronunciation forms. Since the number of Kanji is various and one character has more than one pronunciation, there have been some difficulties in memorizing and using it.

Japanese students are targeted to be able to master the 1945 Kanji listed in the TouyouKanji based on their conditions and needs (Zalman; 2014: 15). In addition, foreign students are also expected to master 14 Kanji characters related to names of places, 17 Kanji characters used for writing names, and 24 other Kanji characters. Thus, there are 2000 Kanji characters that have to be mastered by them. Akihiko (Sudjianto, 2009: 58) divides several levels and time allocations in teaching Kanji. The first is the basic level in which 400-500 Kanji characters are learned within 13 weeks. The second is the intermediate level in which 700–
800 Kanji characters are learned within 18 weeks. The last is the advanced level in which 300-400 Kanji characters are learned within 9 weeks. To sum up, according to Akihiko, the total number of Kanji characters that has to be mastered by foreign students is 1400 to 1700.

Kanji is assumed to be one of the most difficult aspects for Japanese learners especially for those who have no cultural background related to the characters themselves. Surprisingly, Sudjianto (2009: 56) mentions that it is not only those who do not have the cultural background that find it difficult to learn Kanji. Even, students who possess such background such as Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese, still find it difficult to comprehend the Kanji characters. Although the Kanji characters that they use have the same forms and meanings, the way of pronouncing them is different. Therefore, pronunciation is one of the difficulties for the two types of students who learn about the Kanji characters.

Another difficulty faced by the students in the mastery of Kanji is the forms and manners of writing in Kanji. The result of a preliminary interview done by the researcher to the students of Japanese Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Padang shows that it is difficult for them to memorize the forms and write the Kanji characters themselves. The large number of characters as well as the rules in writing Kanji are two factors which cause the difficulties.

The elements of forming Kanji are as follows.

a) Bushu

Kanji is written out of several lines or streaks. The lines or streaks form parts of Kanji and later form a complete one (Sudjianto, 2009: 59). Those lines or streaks are called Bushu. Sudana (Zalman, 2014: 15) states that Kanji contains Bushu which forms the Kanji itself. Thus, Kanji consists of characters that form a letter out of lines. There are seven types of Bushu Kanji. They are:

(a) Hen 偏, which is a Bushu located on the left side of a Kanji.
(b) Tsukuri 旁, which is a Bushu that is on the right side of a Kanji.
(c) Kanmuri 冠, which is the Bushu located at the top of a Kanji.
(d) Ashi 脚, which is the Bushu located at the bottom of a Kanji.
(e) Tare 垂, which is a Bushu shaped like a 90-degree angle from the top right to the top left.
(f) Nyoo 饒, which is a Bushu shaped like a 90-degree angle from the left to the right.
(g) Kamae 構, which is a Bushu that looks as if it surrounds other parts of Kanji.

Kanjis grouped based on Bushu in order to find out the meaning of it. However, there are some of them that cannot be classified into those Bushus since the forms are intact and they already have certain meanings. The examples are 心, 手, 生, 長, 飛, and so on. Therefore, not all Kanji can be put into the seven Bushu.

b) Kakusuu

The lines or streaks that make up Kanji are usually counted. That number is called the Kakusuu (Sudjianto, 2009: 63). The number of lines varies. Some Kanji are formed from small lines while others are formed out of many complicated lines or streaks. Similar to Bushu, Kakusuu is also used to search for a Kanji in a dictionary, Kokugo Jiten, and so on. Therefore, each Kanji dictionary will be equipped with Bushu and Kakusuu to help the students. There are various numbers of Kakusuu Kanji. At least, one Kanji has one streak. Meanwhile, the complicated one may have a large number of streaks.

The followings are the examples of Kakusuu on a Kanji:

一 (1 streak)
二, 人 (2 streaks)
土, 夕 (3 streaks)
今, 五 (4 streaks)
兄, 北 (5 streaks)
交, 合 (6 streaks)
位, 体 (7 streaks)
京, 参 (8 streaks)
乗, 前 (9 streaks)
俺, 座 (10 streaks)
動, 間 (11 streaks)
奪, 喜 (12 streaks)
塩, 夢 (13 streaks)
聞, 語 (14 streaks)
篠, 駒 (15 streaks)
頭, 親 (16 streaks)
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Not only Bushu, Kanji also has Kakusuu. Each Kanji has a various number of streaks. To find out the number of streaks on a Kanji, the first step is to figure out the basics or steps in writing Kanji. If someone does not know the basic steps of writing Kanji, it will be difficult for him/her to calculate the number of streaks in it. Errors in calculating the Kakusuu will cause problems in determining a Kanji. As an example, Kanji 月 (tsuki) has four streaks. However, without knowing the steps of writing, it seems like it has five streaks or more.

c) Hitsujun

The step or sequence in writing Kanjis called Hitsujun. The writing of Kanji has to be in order according to the correct writing step. Writing in Kanji cannot be done arbitrarily. It has its own writing procedure. As an example, in writing 三 “san”, it starts from the top part and is continued to the middle part then the bottom part. Thus, Writing Kanji cannot be done randomly. It has to be in order based on the example above. In addition, Hitsujun is not only applied in writing Kanji but also in Hiragana and Katakana.

Iwabuchi (Sudjianto, 2009: 66) explains that to unify the Hitsujun on Kanji especially in the field of education, Mambushoproposed the Hitsujun Shidou no Tebiki in 1985. It is the sequence principles of writing in Kanji. The principles are as follows.

a) Kanji is written from the top to the bottom, e.g 三, 喜.
b) Kanji is written from the left to the right, e.g 川, 例.
c) Yokokaku (horizontal straight lines) on Kanji that has the cross-like form is written first, e.g 々, 大. However, Yokokaku on Kanji 川, 王 is written later.
d) Lines or streaks which are the center of the Kanji, e.g 水, 小 are written first, except for streaks in Kanji 火 and 了.
e) The outer line of Kanji is written first, e.g 国, 同じ, 司.
f) The streak of Hidariharai (the left streak) is written first, e.g 人, 文.
g) The streak of Tatekaku (the perpendicular line) which divides the other part of Kanji is written in the final sequence e.g た, 中. Letters such as 里, 重, and those which divide the top part or the bottom part of the Kanji are written from the top part of the Kanji then Tatekaku and finally the bottom part of the Kanji.
h) The streak of Yookaku which splits the rest of the Kanji is written in the last sequence, eg 女, 子, 母.

Based on the previous explanation, it is analyzed that Kanji has certain rules in its writing. The rules are written in the Hitsujun Shidou no Tebiki as a reference in learning Kanji as well as a unification of the Kanji writing steps. Hitsujun is not only used in writing Kanji but also Hiragana and Katakana.

II. Method

This quantitative research used numbers as its data. This is in line with the explanation proposed by Sugiyono (2013: 7) who states that a quantitative research is a research that uses numbers as data and analyzes them by using statistics. The numbers in this study were scores of the 5th semester Japanese Education Study Program students’ mastery.

This descriptive research applied the survey and case study design. The population was the students of Japanese Education Study Program of UNP. 25 of them were chosen as the sample of the research. They were divided into instrument test samples and 19 research samples. The sampling technique used was the purposive sampling in which “the samples are determined” (Sutedi; 2009: 181). This is in accordance with the opinion of Sugiyono (2013: 81) who states that when the population is large and it is impossible for the researcher to do research to all of them due to limited fund, energy and time, then she/he is allowed to take samples from the total number of the population. What is learned from the sample will be generalized to the population. Thus, the samples taken have to be representative.

Data analysis was aimed at determining the mastery level of students’ Kanji writing based on the research questions in the formulation of the problem in this study. The obtained data were analyzed in these following steps.

First, students’ Kanji writing mastery was assessed by using a test. Their scores were analyzed by using indicators seen in the table below.

Table 1. Students’ Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Total score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 ...</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 ...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
The range of scores are from 0 to 2.
Score 2: both writing steps and forms are correct.
Score 1: the writing steps are incorrect while the forms are correct.
Second, the students’ final scores were calculated using the following formula:

\[ n = \frac{\sum_{\text{correct score}}}{\sum_{\text{score}}} \times 100 \] (Suhestiyarno, 2009: 64)

Third, their mean score were calculated using the following formula:

\[ M = \frac{\sum F_X}{N} \] (Abdurahman and Ratna (2003: 270))

Notes:
- M: mean
- F_X: the total number of students’ scores
- N: the total number of samples

Fourth, the students’ mastery was classified based on the table 2 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Mastery Level</th>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Conversion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>96% - 100%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>86% - 95%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>76% - 85%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>66% - 75%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fairly Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>56% - 65%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>46% - 55%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Quite Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>36% - 45%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>26% - 35%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Very Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>16% - 25%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Extremely Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0% - 15%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Abdurahman and Ratna, 2003:265)

Fifth, a histogram of the students’ Kanji writing mastery was made. Finally, the results of data analysis were discussed and conclusions were drawn.

III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The following table described the scores of the 5th semester students’ Kanji writing mastery at Japanese Education Study Program of UNP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Score (X)</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Frequency (F)</th>
<th>FX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Fairly Good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Fairly Good</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Quite Satisfactory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Quite Satisfactory</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Quite Satisfactory</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students’ Kanji writing mastery was described as follows. First, there was only one student who got a “good”grade. Second, there were two of them who got the “fairly good” grade. Third, 8 of them were classified into the “satisfactory” classification. Fourth, 5 students got the “quite satisfactory” grade. Finally, 3 of them were categorized as “poor”.

The students’ mean score was analyzed by using the formula of \( M = \sum F_X \), in which \( M = \frac{\sum \text{FX}}{\sum \text{F_X}} \) = 63.3.
To sum up, from the mean score, it is found that the students’ Kanji writing mastery was classified into the “satisfactory” classification.

Table IV. The Histogram of Students’ Kanji Writing Mastery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brs</th>
<th>Br</th>
<th>KS</th>
<th>K</th>
<th>HC</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>LC</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>BS</th>
<th>S</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

Brs: Fail  C: Satisfactory
Br: Extremely Poor LC: Fairly Good
KS: Very Poor  B: Good
K: Poor  BS: Very Good
HC: Quite Satisfactory  S: Excellent

From the histogram, it is analyzed that the students’ Kanji mastery was divided into 5 classifications. First, the “good” classification was 5.56%. Second, the “fairly good” classification was 11.11%. Third, the “satisfactory” classification was 38.89%. Fourth, the “quite satisfactory” was 27.78%. Finally, the “poor” classification was 16.66%. The “satisfactory” classification was at the highest frequency with the percentage of 38.89% while the “good” classification was at the lowest frequency with the percentage of 5.56%.

Based on the results of the test and data analysis of the students’ Kanji writing mastery, it is found that the mean score of the students’ mastery was 63.33 which was in the “satisfactory” classification. Errors made by the students need to be observed carefully. Most of them made errors in determining the Hitsujun, Bushu and KakusuuKanji based on the rules set in the TouyouKanji. Since the errors are not complied with the Hitsujun and KakusuuKanji, it will be difficult for the students to find out the use of Kanji in the Kanji dictionary. When the Kanji forms are correct and the Hitsujun and Kakusuu of the Kanji writing are incorrect, then the Kanji characters that want to be written will not be found since they are not in accordance with the rules set on the TouyouKanji.

Unfortunately, those errors were not only made by the 5th semester students of Japanese Education Study Program of UNP but also by other Japanese learners. It happens since there are many characters in Kanji and each of them has distinctive Bushu, Hitsujun and Kakusuu which make it difficult for the Japanese learners to memorize them. Sudjianto (2009: 57) mentions that one problem faced by the Japanese learners in learning Kanji is the numbers of Kanji that have to be mastered. Thus, it is difficult for them to memorize the forms and their pronunciation.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Some conclusions can be drawn based on the research results. The students’ Kanji writing mastery was in the “satisfactory” classification with the mean score of 63.33. The problems faced by them in the mastery of Kanji writing are related to the determination of Bushu, Hitsujun and Kakusuu which make it difficult for the Japanese learners to memorize them. Those difficulties do not only occur for learners who do not have a cultural background about Kanji. They also happen for those who have the cultural background about Kanji such as China, Korea, and Taiwan. Although they use the same characters and meanings, the way of pronouncing them is different. Therefore, pronunciation is one of the difficulties for the learners who have the background as well as those who do not have it.

Based on the conclusions, it is expected that there will be a good learning method that can help the students in improving their writing mastery especially the writing of Bushu, Hitsujun, and KakusuuKanji.
References


