

Orthographic principles' effect in learning to read Japanese as a foreign language in
Chinese-English biliterates

Rachel Hoi Yan Au, Urs Maurer

Previous research has shown similar orthographic principles in Chinese and Japanese kanji, as well as in English and Japanese kana. Chinese and Japanese kanji are both logographic systems, in which symbols are mapped onto morphemes; whereas English and Japanese kana are both phonographic systems, in which orthographic elements are mapped onto sound units (Koyama, Hansen & Stein, 2008; Hino, Miyamura & Lupker, 2011). However, little is known whether similarity in orthographic principles lead to transfer of reading skills from one language to the other. The present study explores the relationship of reading competence in Chinese and English on one side, and Japanese kanji and kana reading on the other side, among 20 native Cantonese-speaking university undergraduate students. Moreover, the present study also examines the relationship of reading in Chinese and various types of Japanese kanji which show different levels of similarity to Chinese characters. Specifically, as Chinese and Japanese are similar in various aspects, including phonology, semantics, and visual inputs, which aspect are similar and to what extent they are similar exert stronger effect on the relationship of reading in the two languages is investigated. Results of the relationship among reading ability in the above scripts are discussed.