

Title Inferring Japanese unknown Kanji-words by Chinese learners of Japanese

— From the viewpoint of Japanese and Chinese correspondence relationship and Japanese proficiency —

Name CUI, Ping

Vocabulary learning occurs incidentally while the learner is engaged in reading activities. Kanji-words appear frequently in Japanese texts. Many studies have investigated how the Japanese learners who do not have Kanji-words in their first language (L1) infer the meaning of unknown Kanji-words. This study investigated how Chinese learners of Japanese (CJL), who have a similar orthographic background to Japanese, infer the meaning of Japanese unknown Kanji-words. Japanese Kanji-words can be divided into four vocabulary categories based on Japanese and Chinese correspondence relationship: (1) “S word” refers to the synonym which has the same orthography in Japanese and Chinese, (2) “D word” refers to the word which has the same orthography in Japanese and Chinese but differs in meaning, (3) “O word” refers to the word which has the same orthography in Japanese and Chinese but differs in the range of the meaning, (4) “N word” refers to the word which doesn’t exist in Chinese (Bunkacho, 1978). This study investigated how Japanese and Chinese correspondence relationship, and Japanese proficiency affect the CJL’s inferring.

The thesis consists of two studies. In the first study, in order to compare with the results from English learners of Japanese (EJL), an experiment which follows the design of the previous research (Mori & Nagy, 1999) was carried out, and a inferring test with four choices was used. The results showed that, when both word clues and context clues were available, CJL tended to integrate clues. It was also found that, similarly to the EJL, the CJL of high Japanese proficiency could integrate clues better. A tendency to infer without using word clues has been observed in some S words and in CJL of low Japanese proficiency.

In the first study, the relationship between different clue usages, the relationship between clue usages and Japanese proficiency was also discussed. The results indicated that, similarly to the EJL, CJL’s usage of contextual clues and CJL’s usage of word-clues were not related, but the usage of contextual clues and the usage of word-clues were both associated with integrating clues. Unlike EJL, CJL’s usage of word-clues was associated with integrating clues. As indicated in the previous study, EJL’s usage of contextual clues was associated with Japanese proficiency. However, in this study, CJL’s usage of contextual clues and the usage of word-clues were not associated with Japanese proficiency respectively.

In the second study, two authentic reading materials were used and the data was collected using the think aloud method. The results indicated that, the factor which affects CJL’s inferring was Japanese and Chinese correspondence relationship only. Regardless of the degree of difficulty of the reading materials, the inferring of S words was easier than D words, O words, and N words. Furthermore, a qualitative analysis showed that if the sentence surrounding the unknown word can provide useful information which help to understand the meaning of

the target word, CJL could infer easily. Otherwise, if the sentence surrounding the unknown word did not provide helpful information, as the clue “sentence meaning” only was not enough, other inferring clues were necessary, and thus the inferring did not always succeed.

The number of clues that CJL used to infer the meaning of unknown Kanji-words was also affected by Japanese and Chinese correspondence relationship only. Regardless of the degree of difficulty of the reading materials, the number of clues used to infer the meaning of S words was smaller than N words’ one. When reading a difficult text, the number of the clues used to infer the meaning of O words was bigger than S words’ one. A qualitative analysis showed that, regardless of the degree of difficulty of the reading materials and Japanese and Chinese correspondence relationship, the clue “sentence meaning” was used most. The clue commonly used after the clue “sentence meaning” was “discourse meaning” (S words), “word form” (O words). About D words and O words, the clue commonly used after the clue “sentence meaning” was not constant, and an individual difference was suggested.

As a result of analyzing the relationship between the accuracy of inference and the number of clues, it was found that, when inferring the meaning of O words appearing in the difficult text, using a lot of clues tended to lead to a more successful inference.

In this study, inferring Japanese unknown Kanji-words by CJL was verified using two different methods. As a result, both the features common to and different from Japanese learners who do not have Kanji in their L1 were revealed. Furthermore, the way how Japanese and Chinese correspondence relationship affects the CJL’s inferring was also revealed. As there is still insufficient research about the inferring of Japanese unknown Kanji-words, this research is meaningful as a fundamental research. In addition, educational suggestions for vocabulary instruction were obtained, and contribution to the classroom instruction can be expected as well.