

Understanding The Basic of Kanji's Meaning through Mnemonic Method Learning

Linna Meilia Rasiban
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
linnameilia@upi.edu

Abstract - It is commonly assumed and claimed that learners with no prior knowledge of Chinese characters often find it more difficult to learn kanji than learners from character backgrounds (Ishida, 1986; Machida, 2000; Toyoda, 1995). It makes kanji being a burden or something dreaded by Indonesian JFL. According to Hayashi & Yano (1994), Kanji has a lot of characters and the foreigners who do not use to handling such large sets of character in everyday life is not used to it, so it's hard to remember. This research is to answer the question about the difficulty of Indonesian JFL to memorize the meaning of events in Japanese kanji. This study uses mix method design with 30 Indonesian JFL the second semester students of Japanese education department Indonesia University of Education. The results of the analysis revealed that leaning *Kanji* through mnemonic method seemed to help students to understand kanji's meaning and the way to read it. The statement was also supported by the students' response saying that the learning process with *Mnemonic* method was interesting and enjoyable.

Keywords: *mnemonic*, association technique, *Shokyuu Hyouki* (Basic Kanji Writing)

1. INTRODUCTION

The learning of kanji or Chinese characters is considered to be one of the most challenging problems faced by learners of Japanese as a second/foreign language (hereafter JFL/JSL learners) (Gamage, 2003). According to Gamage (2003), the typological differences between kanji and alphabets are assumed to be responsible for this difficulty (Bourke, 1996; Flaherty, 1993; Toyoda, 1998; Watanabe & Toyoda, 1994 in Gamage, 2003). *Kanji* is one of the most difficult parts in learning Japanese especially for students who do not use *kanji* in their language (Grainger, 2005). This is because to read and write in *kanji* they have to know *kun-yomi*, to read *Kanji* in Japanese, whereas *on-yomi* is a system to read *kanji* in Chinese (Heisig & Sienko, 2008, p. 11)

Although, there is a plenty of books published to help memorizing *Kanji*, but most students only memorize successfully the words, but in a short time they forget it easily because *kanji* is not used in their daily life (Rasiban, 2012). This is because there are approximately 2,000 characters of Kanji used in daily life in Japan and the foreigners are not used to handling such large sets of character (Hayashi & Yano, 1994 in Jin, 2012, p. 181). Based on the previous study (2013) through observation and interview with students who have got *Shokyuu Hyouki 2*, the result showed similar outcome that most of students could only remember *Kanji* in the short time. Nevertheless, students hardly remember kanji after the learning process in the next meeting, due to various ways to

read each of *Kanji* word. Such situation was supported by the data from questionnaires given to third semester students of Japanese Language Education Department, Faculty of language and Literature, UPI (Indonesia University of Education). It was found that 80% of the students who took *Shokyuu hyouki 2* courses met some difficulties to remember *kanji's* meaning and memorize the way of how to read it.

At present, the method used in the Japanese learning still use handout and workbook/worksheet. Though the result of weekly quiz is good, the students still found it hard to remember *kanji's* meaning and the way of writing it both in the mid-term exam and final exam. It can be seen from the results of mid-term and final-exam of the third semester students in academic year of 2011/2012.

This research was a follow up of the previous research (Rasiban, 2012) concerning an attempt to remember *kanji's* meaning through association in basic *Kanji* learning. The findings revealed that learning *kanji* by associating it with pictures made it easily remembered and seemed to help the students in memorizing *kanji's* meaning. Therefore, this study followed up the previous research by using a similar technique applied in different level of students. In addition, *kanji* materials were improved from the basic level of *kanji* to the medium one (*Shokyuu Zenhan*). However, some weaknesses found in the previous study were due to multi interpreted pictures displayed as learning media. Consequently, this underlined the improvement of teaching media focusing on pictures association and *kanji* analogue which were understandable by the majority of students.

Learning Model by Using Mnemonic Method with Association Technique

In general, *Mnemonic* is a technique that facilitates students remember something, particularly the method which needs a formula or statement used to help others remember something (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia). Wang and Thomas (1996, p.104) defined mnemonics as ". . . learning strategies that make elements of abstract information more familiar and encourage students to form meaningful association to these familiar elements." More generally, mnemonics can be defined as learning strategies, comprising either visual images or words, that can enhance memorization and recall of information. According to Stine, *Mnemonic* is a brain's ability to connect words, idea and imagination (Rasiban, 2012). Based on the definitions above, *mnemonic* is defined as a technique used to help the other people remember something through creating formula or statement or

connecting words, ideas and imaginations. In other words, *mnemonic* means a technique which optimally uses memory in particular ways. Widiatmoko (2008, p. 51) claimed that *Mnemonic* method may seem to be playable, but it is useful to remember new information unfamiliar to our brain, for example to remember vocabulary of all foreign languages including *Latin*.

The use of *Mnemonic* give benefits to the learning process since the barrier disappeared. The method will encourage students' motivation because it can make the students participate in their learning process more actively, so that the optimal result can be achieved by the students. Therefore, the goal of using *Mnemonic* with association technique was proposed to achieve the optimal result of learning.

Researchers have questioned whether pictures provide more information than words during the memory coding processes, or vice versa (Mayer & Anderson, 1992; Mayer & Sims, 1994; Rieber, 1991; Towers & Anglin, 1994). Rose study (2013) found that while mnemonics are useful to memorize kanji and kanji components when applied in a meaningful way, an overreliance on this strategy can have negative effects for the learner. The study highlighted numerous accounts of the meaning of a kanji being lost in overly complex mnemonic strategies.

There are some techniques used in applying *mnemonic* method for memorizing (Bobby, 2003) that is *Cantol technique/Rhyme, Location technique, Acronym technique* and *Association technique*. Since remembering *kanji* for early Japanese language learners is inappropriate and difficult, the study focused on learning *kanji* through picture association technique which was necessary to be implemented.

In this picture association technique, the following is how *kanji* is formed:

1. *Shiji moji*, *kanji* formation by asserting a particular abstract.

This *kanji* is read 'ue' which means 'above'.

2. *Shouki moji*, *kanji* formation by imitating picture of particular thing or nature.

This *kanji* was read 'ki' which means 'tree'.

3. *Kaii moji*, *kanji* formation by combining two or more things of basic kanji.

Based on the previous research (Rasiban, 2010), it was found that leaning through association technique was adequately effective, since the learners were easy to memorize kanji. However, the lack of pictures as media used in adopting picture association and *Story Manabu Kanji 300* (Beuckmann, 2008) and *Kanji Look and Learn* (Banno, 2011) was insufficiently understood by the students because of the meaning which were adopted was Japanese philosophy.

On the other side, the second research (Rasiban, 2012) showed that the use of associated media and analogue were independently made by Indonesian people without adopting the book *Story Manabu Kanji 300* (Beuckmann, 2008) that can be seen in the following points,

- (1) *Kanji* was associated from the meaning adapted from its *kanji*'s form, for example, *Kanji* 'yuki' which means 'snow'.

- (2) There was some *kanji* which was described from its form related to the Indonesian's meaning. For example, *kanji* 'gou' which means 'number', since *kanji* writing of 'gou' if the letter was reversed, it is similar to 'NO' which means number.

- (3) There was *kanji* that couldn't be connected either to its meaning (as explained in no (1)) or from its letter writing (as explained in no (2)). So it was made from the description of story and the displayed picture that described its story. For example *kanji* 'oriru' which means 'down', it was explained and described at the same time in the form of story.

Besides explaining *kanji* through *Mnemonic* method above, learning to write *kanji* is was also important. The sequence of writing *kanji* (*kakijun*) was adopted from website www.yamasa.org by using flash as the media in power point. I can be put in this example,

2. Method

This research was a mix method research as a combination between qualitative and quantitative one (Ivankova and Cresswell, 2009, p. 137). The method was chosen to answer the research questions of the study. The first question was

related to the students' ability in remembering *kanji's* meaning which was obtained through qualitative method. While the second question was dealing with students' response toward learning model and the effectiveness of teaching media gained

from the qualitative method. The research design was adopted from the action research method proposed by Susanto (2010) as can be seen below:

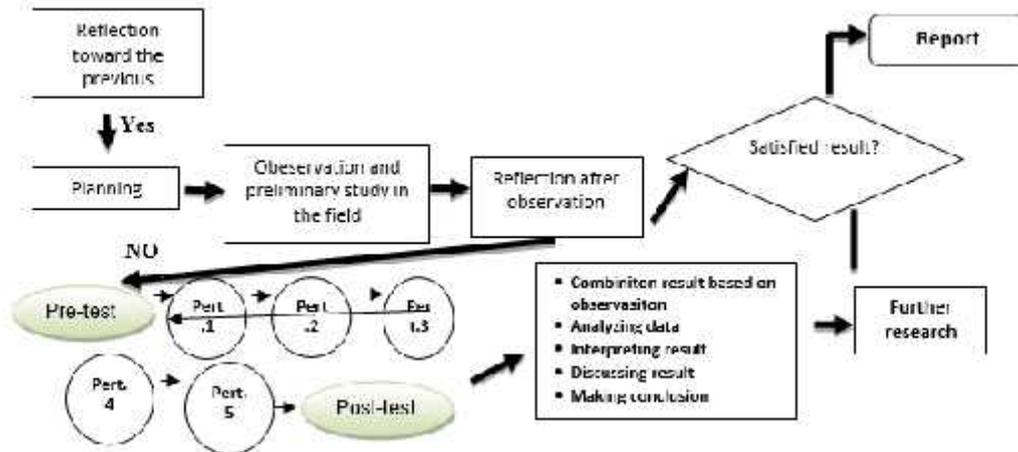


Figure 1. Research Design

The subjects of the research were the second semester students of Japanese education department who were taking *shokyuu hyouki 2*. The samples of the study were 2B class with 30 students. The study was conducted from February to May 2013 with 7 times of meeting which were divided into 2 meetings for pre-experiment, and pre test, post test and filling questionnaire. Five meetings were allocated for giving treatments to the basic *kanji* by using *Mnemonic* method. Data were collected through pre-test and post-test, questionnaire, and interview with students regarding their responses to using power point as media in *Shokyuu learning 3* through *mnemonic* method joined with association technique.

3. Findings and Discussion

The respondent's ability to remember *kanji's* meaning was measured by the pre-test and post-test. The average score of pre-test was 70 while the average score of post-test was 86. The graphic can be seen as below.

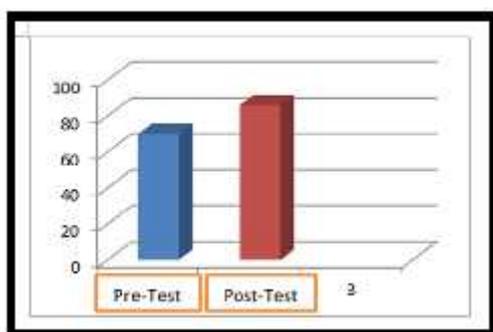


Figure 2. Average score of pre test and post test

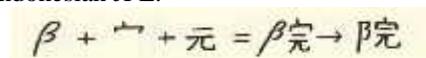
It could be concluded that in general the results of class average score improved 16 points and also the individual's score. The result was supported by the questionnaire and interview stating that the respondents admitted *kanji* tended to

be easier to be memorized since the students were helped by *Mnemonic* method. Besides, this technique seemed to be effective for memorizing and writing *kanji* during exam or test. The respondent's comprehension toward *kanji's* meaning displayed in power point could be seen from game or exercise given after introducing *kanji*. Almost 90 % students could understand and remember easily the meaning of *kanji* through pictures association displayed in power point as its media.

The finding from the interview with respondents was implemented to support the result from the test. Most of them said that using power point as media in *Shokyuu Hyouki 2* learning combining with the *Mnemonic* method and association technique helped respondents remember *kanji's* meaning easily in a short time which was similar to the findings gained in the previous research. According to Bellezza (1981), mnemonics act as mediators between the learning stimuli and the information to be remembered, and are used later by the learner to recall information through a self-cueing process. It was supported by the respondents' statement in the interview that this learning technique helped them to write *kanji* during post-test easily, especially the ones found in the instructions asking them to write *kanji* from *kanji's* part (*bushu*) and write *kanji* into Indonesian language.

In a previous study (Rasiban, 2010) regarding the recall effort *kanji* meaning through association techniques in learning basic *kanji*. The results showed that learning *kanji* to associate into a memorable image and facilitate their memory in remembering the *kanji* meaning. One of the advantages is to assist and facilitate students in answering questions in final test.

But previous research had found that the media image that is displayed is the notion of the philosophy of the Japanese people, which mostly has less comprehensible meaning for Indonesian JFL.



For example, kanji "in" that has meaning institutions, associated by Beuckmann (2008: 154) that 'if you want a healthy body condition (better) need to go to a hospital or health institution'. Associated like this (Beuckmann, 2008: 154).

Association of images and analogies story is poorly understood by most Indonesian JFL in Japanese Language Education Department, Indonesia University of Education (Rasiban, 2010). Because the function of mnemonic techniques is to facilitate remembering associate quickly, then the research this time is to revise the existing image associated with the image created in accordance with the philosophy of the Indonesian people.

4. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that learning *kanji* through a combined technique between mnemonic and power point seemed to be effective to improve the students' comprehension, in remembering the basic *kanji*'s meaning. The success of using this media depended on explanation of *kanji*'s meaning constructed through story so that the students were able to understand and remember *kanji* easily. The respondents' understanding toward *kanji* associated to its meaning was found to be high since they were easier to remember rather than the one which didn't use power point as its media. It influenced the students in completing the test because they could write *kanji* easier. Although the strategies they use mostly are the most helpful strategies, in contrary to the widespread belief that repeated writing is a time consuming and tedious task, JFL learners seemed to believe that strategies associated with repeated writing are the most helpful in learning *kanji* (Gamage, 2003).

Based on the interview result, it referred that most of the respondents said that the learning media helped students in remembering the *kanji*'s meaning. Besides, it may create a new learning atmosphere for the students since most of *kanji* learning was boring and difficult. However the method changed the class to be enjoyable and interesting one. This learning model also eases the students to complete questions in the test. Overall by using this method, this study contributed a new alternative teaching method in basic *kanji* learning. Meanwhile, the weakness of this *mnemonic* method with association techniques was due to unsolved problem regarding the students' difficulties in remembering the way of reading *kanji* either *kun-yomi* or *on-yomi*. Therefore the further research is expected to find the effective method for remembering the way of reading *kanji* for both *kun-yomi* and *on-yomi*.

5. Acknowledgement

Researcher gratitude goes to students of Japanese language education department FPBS UPI academic year of 2010/2011 who participated in the early research and students of Japanese language education department FPBS UPI academic year of 2011/2012. A big thanks also for seniors

who have given suggestion, critics, and guidance until this research can be done successfully. And to all parties who have contributed to this research.

REFERENCES

- Banno, E. et.al., (2011). *Kanji look and learn (512 kanji with illustrations and mnemonic hints)*. Japan: The Japan Times.
- Bellezza, A. S., (1981). Mnemonic devices: Classification, characteristics, and criteria. *Review of Educational Research*, 51(2), 247–275.
- Beuckmann, Fusako et. al., (2008). *Story Manabu kanji 300*. Japan : Kurosio Shuppan.
- Bobby, D., Mike, H., (2003). *Quantum learning*. Bandung : Kaifa.
- Gamage, G. H. (2003). *Perceptions of kanji learning strategies: Do they differ among Chinese character and alphabetic background learners?* Research Online: University of Wollongong Australia.
- Grainger, P. (2005). *Second language learning strategies and Japanese: Does orthography make a difference?* System 33, 327-339. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2005.01.003>.
- Heisig, J. W., & Sienko, T. (2008). *Remembering the kanji 3: Writing and reading Japanese characters for upper-level proficiency*. University of Hawaii Press: Foreign Language Study.
- Ivankova, N. V., & Creswell, J. W. (2009). Mix Methods. In J. Heigham, & R. A. Croker (Eds.), *Qualitative research in applied linguistics: A practical introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, NY.
- Jin, Q. (2012). *Intelligent learning systems and advancements in computer-aided instruction*. Waseda University, Japan: Information Science Reference.
- Mayer, R. E., & Anderson, R. B. (1992). The instructional animation: helping students build connections between words and pictures in multimedia learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 84(4), 444–452.
- Mayer, R. E., & Sims, V. K. (1994). For whom is a picture worth a thousand words? Extensions of a dual-coding theory of multimedia learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 86(3), 389–401.
- Rasiban, L. M. (2010). *Model pembelajaran mnemonic sebagai salah satu upaya untuk mengingat makna pada pembelajaran shokyu hyouki*. Penelitian tindakan kelas di jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Jepang FPBS UPI: tidak diterbitkan.
- Rasiban, L. M. (2012). Mengingat kanji melalui teknik asosiasi dalam metode mnemonic. *Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Jepang ASPBJI Korwil Jabar "Wa"*, 5(1), 1979-7982,
- Rieber, L. P. (1991). Animation, incidental learning, and continuing motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 83(3), 318–28.
- Rose, H. (2013). L2 learners' attitudes toward, and use of, mnemonic strategies when learning Japanese kanji. *The Modern Language Journal*, 97, 4, (2013).

- Susanto. (2010). *Konsep penelitian tindakan kelas dan penerapannya*. Surabaya: Unesa.
- Towers, R. L., & Anglin, G. J. (1994). *The instructional effectiveness of computer-animated and static visuals*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Nashville, TN.
- Wang, A. Y., & Thomas, M. H. (1996). Mnemonic instruction and gifted child. *Roeper Review*, 19(2), 104–05.
- Widiatmoko, I. (2008). *Super great memori*. Jakarta: Gramedia.