

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

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Previous research has shown similar orthographic principles in the Chinese and Japanese kanji writing systems (logographic), as well as in the English and Japanese kana writing systems (phonographic). However, little is known whether similarity in orthographic principles lead to transfer of reading skills from one language to the other. The present study aims to understand the relationship of reading competence in Chinese and English on one side, and Japanese kanji and kana reading on the other side, among native Cantonese-speaking university 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. Reading tests in the three languages were administered to 20 university students. Specifically, we show that participants' reading competence in English and Japanese kana were moderately associated. The relationship remained even after accounting for the number of years of Japanese learning. However, the relationship between reading ability in Chinese and that in Japanese kanji was less consistent. Reading competence in Chinese was not a significant predictor of overall reading ability in Japanese kanji. Also, it did not significantly predict any types of Japanese kanji. These findings provide evidence that the writing systems of English and Japanese kana to some extent share similarity and they share similar orthographic principles, whereas the relationship between Chinese and Japanese kanji is more complicated.