

## INTRODUCING KANJI STRATEGIES THROUGH JAPANESE CALLIGRAPHY

書道と組み合わせての漢字ストラタジーの導入の試み

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### Introduction

Every foreign language has some challenging aspects to learn and Japanese language is no exception. Learning *kanji*, the logographic characters shared with Chinese, is surely one of the most complex tasks when it comes to learning Japanese (Gamage, 2003; Mori, 1999; Okita, 1997; Toyoda, 1995). In particular, Toyoda (1995) found through her survey that intermediate level students feel learning *kanji* to be most difficult as the lexical burden increases. The respondents' difficulty includes retention, multiple readings of a single character (unlike Chinese), as well as visual similarity and complexity.

Five major word learning strategies discussed in the literature include rote learning, context-based strategies, morphological analysis, mnemonics or association methods, and metacognitive strategies (Mori & Shimizu, 2007). As for learning *kanji*, strategy instructions, such as raising learners' metacognitive or metalinguistic awareness about the nature of word meanings are suggested by Mori (2002) on the basis that the integrated combination of morphological clues and context clues leads to better understanding of novel *kanji* compounds, i.e., words consisting of two or more Chinese characters. On the other hand, Shimizu & Green (2002) reported through their survey of 251 members of the Association of Teachers of Japanese that although some tended to utilize memory and contextual strategies for teaching *kanji*, the rote learning approach was the most frequently employed among all the respondents.

Indeed, the widely used methodology of *kanji* education at American universities seems to (1) introduce a few *kanji* every day, (2) practice the stroke order with an instructor writing in space while reading aloud or using flashcards, and (3) administer occasional *kanji* quizzes to ensure that all students make steady progress. This whole process is limited generally to the very beginning, most likely 5 to 10 minutes per class (Endo & Kurokawa, 2004; Toyoda, 1995) and at most 30 minutes per week. Moreover, the textbooks widely used at American universities follow a thematic frequency-based approach to the order of teaching *kanji*. This approach supposes JFL learners, without much exposure to *kanji* outside the classroom, will have a better chance to see/read and use/write the same *kanji* more often, thus reinforcing their memory of learned *kanji*.

However, according to Toyoda's survey, the most difficult aspect of *kanji* learning is retention. Learners might not have much difficulty to initially memorize *kanji*, but, soon afterwards their retention rate declines. So, although frequency is no doubt important, the question remains whether rote memorization is sufficient to help learners acquire *kanji*? Most learners, especially intermediate level, seem to have some doubts about it. This discrepancy between the feelings of learners of Japanese towards *kanji* learning and the commonly used methodology for teaching *kanji* suggests a strong risk of de-motivation.

This causes additional problems because, if teachers follow a proficiency-oriented approach, they should aim to improve all the four language skills. As each closely interacts with the other, the lagging of one also adversely affects the rest. Insufficient knowledge of *kanji* leads to deficiency of reading comprehension, especially when learners face authentic materials, such as a Japanese newspaper. Yet priority is often put on spoken language. At some big state universities, for example, due to the emphasis on speaking, “Conversational Japanese” is offered. However, as it is students’ *kanji* acquisition that tends to lag behind, why not provide a specialized *kanji* course?

The present study investigates issues in *kanji* education at American universities and makes a case for a combined Japanese calligraphy and specialized *kanji* course. While the calligraphy course teaches basic techniques of calligraphy to re-motivate learners by lowering learners’ resistance towards *kanji* learning, the *kanji* course introduces learning strategies and through exercises in class, and thus learners build up *kanji* knowledge more systematically. For instance, they learn through an element-base approach, as well as becoming flexible at employing multiple strategies when they face unfamiliar *kanji*. Finally, the study shows how such a combined course may fit into a typical American institution’s curriculum.

### **Motivation**

The first question to consider is motivation, for without this, little progress can be expected. Motivation generally consists of intrinsic and extrinsic components (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Financial gain is the most obvious example of the latter, but coercion and threat of punishment are also common extrinsic motivations (Kohn, 1996). However, both are time and context dependent and the same activity can be intrinsically or extrinsically motivating for different people (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2007). Intrinsic motivation can also change over time (ibid). Many things that children find interesting gradually lose their appeal or vice versa. This can also be applied to *kanji* learning. Students perhaps find *kanji* exotic first but after taking Japanese and experiencing some learning difficulties, their motivation may be affected by changes in their perception towards it.

There is, indeed, evidence for this. As already noted, Toyoda (1995) conducted a survey among students of Japanese from an alphabetic background at a Japanese university. The results revealed that more students of intermediate Japanese, who had already studied 301 to 1,000 *kanji*, thought learning characters is difficult in comparison with students of introductory Japanese (with less than 300 *kanji*). Meanwhile students of advanced Japanese, who had previously studied 1,001 to 2,000 *kanji*, felt the least daunted by the task. But among the three groups, all considered retention of *kanji* as the most challenging aspect. This indicates how some learners of Japanese may go through some motivational changes in their perception towards *kanji* learning as they move up to intermediate level because they struggle with the sheer quantity. My thesis here is that a combination of *kanji* learning strategies and practice in combination with Japanese calligraphy may rekindle learners’ intrinsic motivation and thus help students overcome the difficulties face as they progress.

As Toyoda’s study was undertaken in Japan, in order to verify whether it is also the case with JFL learners, I conducted a similar survey in April 2009 across all students who were currently taking Japanese or had previously taken Japanese at Grinnell

College<sup>1</sup> where I am teaching. The participants were categorized into either beginning (with less than 300 *kanji*) or intermediate (with 300 to 1,000 *kanji*). There were 29 participants in this study: 19 beginning, 10 intermediate learners of Japanese.<sup>2</sup>

With background questions on the frequency and the amount of time spent on their *kanji* studies outside the classroom, the questionnaire asked about their perception towards *kanji* learning. The first three questions about overall *kanji* learning, *kanji* reading, and *kanji* writing respectively asked students to rate these to four different scales from (1) very difficult, (2) manageable, (3) relatively easy, and (4) very easy. The last question

about their attitude to *kanji* learning used a similar format from very interesting to very daunting.<sup>3</sup>

From the results (see appendix), none of the beginning learners felt *kanji* learning to be very difficult including 4 feeling that it was relatively easy whereas all the intermediate learners felt it either very difficult or no more than manageable. As for *kanji* reading and writing, slightly more of the beginning learners felt (multiple) reading is more difficult than writing while all the intermediate learners felt writing is more difficult or similar to reading. The last question about their perception towards *kanji* learning shows a stark contrast between beginning and intermediate learners in that the majority of beginning learners felt it was either very interesting or quite interesting whereas the majority of intermediate learners felt it was both very/quite interesting but at the same time very/quite daunting. Overall, this would seem to support Toyoda's evidence that although initial interest is strong, *kanji* learning can become a burden to students of both JSL and JFL as they get beyond the early stage.

There is one further point worth noting here. Toyoda (1995) commented that one possible reason why most advanced learners do not feel learning *kanji* to be as daunting as intermediate learners is that they may have somehow acquired *kanji* learning strategies, such as identifying *kanji* patterns. If this is the case, explicit instructions of *kanji* learning strategies might help the struggling intermediate learners of Japanese.

### **Memorization**

As we have noted, rote memorization has been used the most for *kanji* learning in the U.S., but first, the definition of “memorization” needs to be clarified here, as this will help us understand both the strengths and the weakness of this approach. Memory is generally processed through three stages: (1) acquisition or encoding to learn the material in the first place, (2) storage to keep it until it is needed, and (3) retrieval to find it and get it back out when it is needed (Higbee, 1996). We also have short-term memory and long-term memory. The former refers to how many items can be perceived at one time – how much a person can consciously pay attention to at one time. The retention for short-term memory is therefore limited, to less than 30 seconds. A good example is when we look up a telephone number and forget it before we actually get to dial it. The retention for long-term memory is considerably longer. Long-term memory is also composed of several

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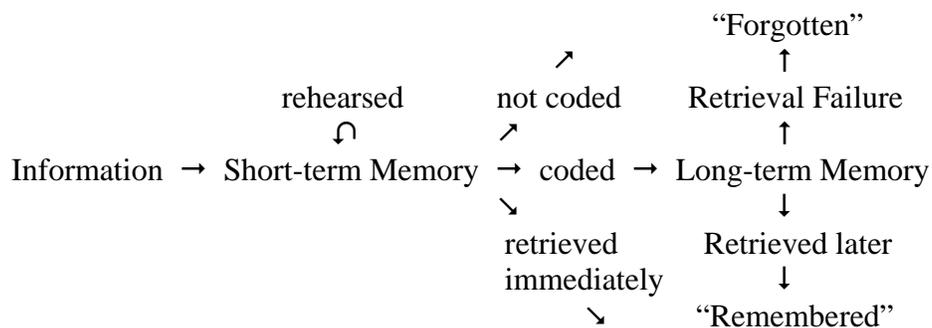
<sup>1</sup> Grinnell College is a highly selective private college with an enrollment of about 1,500, located in Iowa.

<sup>2</sup> Among them, 3 beginning and 3 intermediate *kanji*-background students were excluded to match up with Toyoda's

<sup>3</sup> For this last question, some participants chose more than one answer: for example, “very interesting but quite daunting”.

different types: procedural memory, semantic memory, and episodic memory. Procedural memory involves remembering how to do something, such as riding on a bicycle. Semantic memory involves remembering factual information, such as math equation with no connection to time or place. And episodic memory involves remembering personal events, such as mnemonics.

Higbee (1996, p. 25) summarizes the process of the transition from short-term memory to long-term memory as follows:



All the information goes through short-term memory to reach long-term memory, but the information in short-term memory needs to be coded in some way to be transferred. This transition for *kanji* learning from short to long-term memory can be made in two ways: rote learning or mechanical repetition, and learning through understanding components of meaning, i.e., understanding, for instance, the radicals. However, these two methods are, in fact, placed at each end of a continuum. Coding requires us to make connections between, for example, a word and its meaning, in our brains. Rote learning depends on repetition and neglects the deeper affective side of memory while learning through understanding affects the other end. However, the latter stabilizes, moving from short-term memory to long-term memory only through repetition. Therefore, long-term memory requires both methods. As new information is added to long-term memory, the mental lexicon increases like a web through, not one, but various ways such as co-ordinates and collocational links (Aitchison, 1987). This can also be true with *kanji* building.

Indeed, even native speakers do not learn *kanji* simply through rote-memorization. From elementary school, various methods, such as stroke orders, radicals, *rikusho* (六書), homonyms, and other games-like activities are also used (Suda, 1988), just as native English speakers play “Scrabble”. Moreover, according to its difficulty and complexity, various methods and techniques have been employed among Japanese instructors to introduce each grammar point, for example, *te*-form by singing the *te*-form song, as well as provide various exercises to help learners efficiently acquire the new concept. So although current research has not adequately answered the question why some learners achieve higher *kanji* proficiency while others fail (Mori & Shimizu, 2007), we could at least say that a variety of techniques can help learners “playfully” motivated to acquire *kanji* and stabilize their knowledge.

### Issues with the Thematic-frequency Approach

However, playful the learning process is, words in long-term memory are, nevertheless, just stacked at random but carefully organized (Aitchison, 1987) and closely related. For example, they are stored through superordination (e.g. animal – horse) or synonymy (e.g., hungry – starved). As I already noted, the thematic-frequency approach promotes *kanji* recognition and attempts to make semantic connections but these remain weak. The current curriculum also fails to adequately recycle vocabulary that has already been learnt, but has yet to be stored in long-term memory. Here I will therefore address the current limitations with *kanji* education in the U.S. and propose an alternative specialized *kanji* course where learners with individual differences can learn and build up their *kanji* knowledge through various supplementary methods.

In most of the Japanese textbooks used in the U.S., the order in which *kanji* appears is based on a combination of the easiness of the *kanji* character (generally, those with fewer strokes) and the particular textbook chapter: for example, the theme of *Nakama 2 Chapter 1* is health. Therefore, most of the *kanji* for the chapter is health-related. Below is a chart showing the order that *kanji* appears in three widely used textbooks, *Genki*, *Nakama*, and *Yookoso* as well as *kanji* for Chapter 1 of *Nakama 2*.

	Type of <i>kanji</i>	Chapter	Total Chapters
<i>Genki 1</i>	一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九 十 百 千 万 円 時	Chapter 3	12
<i>Nakama 1</i>	大 学 校 先 生 山 川 田 人 上 下 中 小 日 本	Chapter 4 Chapter 5	12
<i>Yookoso 1</i>	日 本 学 生 名 何 月 人 一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九 十 百 先 話 語 大	Chapter 1*	7

\**Yookoso 1* starts with *Getting Started* section which consists of 5 chapters, so the textbook is almost equivalent to *Genki 1* and *Nakama 1* with 12 chapters each.

<i>Nakama 2 Chapter 1</i>	子 供 元 入 左 右 体 薬 病 院 医 者 住 所 痛 悪 変
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The order of *kanji* is also apparently in accordance with the Educational *Kanji* Grade Breakdown *Kanji* Allotment Chart (教育漢字の学年別漢字配当表) of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in Japan. The Ministry has placed the order of *kanji* in the order of importance according to the age of learners. For example, all the 80 *kanji* assigned for first graders are easily understandable for them, such as 「花」「空」「男」「森」「学」 and 「校」. Likewise, most of the *kanji* in Chapter 3 of *Genki 1* or Chapter 4 and 5 of *Nakama 1* are either from the 80 *kanji* for first-year or from the 160 *kanji* for second-year elementary students in Japan.

However, we might question whether this approach is necessarily the most effective. As Flaherty (1991), for instance, pointed out, alphabetic-habituated learners do not process *kanji* in the same way as Japanese children. While Japanese children acquire speaking and listening at an early age and then acquire reading and writing rather late, adult learners learn the four skills almost simultaneously. Besides, children as well as JSL learners are also exposed to *kanji* outside the classroom.

The order of *kanji* in most Japanese textbooks in the U.S. is strongly influenced by the frequency of the use of particular words in the classroom, such as 「先生」 「学生」 「学校」 「日本語」. Thematic-frequency approach is, therefore, employed for JFL learners apparently with less exposure to *kanji* outside the classroom to reinforce memory through repetition. However, learners of Japanese are often forced to learn 「時」 「語」 「好」 before 「日」 or 「寺」 「言」 「女」 or 「子」 respectively. For instance, 「時」 is introduced in Chapter 3 of *Genki 1* but 「寺」 does not appear until Chapter 15 of *Genki 2*. Because of this semantic priority, learners are forced to learn the more complex 「時」 before 「寺」. This shows how semantic familiarity is prioritized over structural simplicity. Moreover, Ellis (1985) reported that the rate and the degree of success of foreign language learning is largely affected by individual learner differences, such as age, aptitude, attitude, motivation, personality, cognitive style, and preferred learning strategies. My argument is that the thematic-frequency approach may make sense pragmatically in the short term but ultimately such an approach treats *kanji* as an extension of (classroom) speaking rather than a skill in itself.

Of course, the issue mainly depends on each learner's needs, such as how far s/he wants to learn the language. Supposing the learner wants to get to an advanced level, s/he will need to cover a large number of *kanji*, say somewhere around 2,000+. If so, I would argue that as far as writing *kanji* is concerned, it is more efficient and effective to teach smaller components first and then if possible, introduce more complex *kanji* like building blocks. Hatasa (1989) reported that more complex *kanji* are not necessarily more difficult to read but as far as production is concerned, not surprisingly, *kanji* with fewer strokes are more easily produced than those with more. Of course, computer input methods can get around this problem, but I would suggest that as the burden of *kanji* increases, the reliance on whole character memorization for its production which the thematic-frequency approach encourages is in fact its long term weakness. Although such an approach may facilitate *kanji* reading best, in the short term, because the choice of *kanji* is mainly in accordance with the theme of the chapter and its relative 'easiness' (i.e. either fewer strokes or its inclusion in the *Kanji* Grade Chart or both) only the criteria of simplicity makes sense if we wish to introduce *kanji* in a systematic manner.

Of course, opinion is somewhat divided on whether teaching radicals, as part of morphological analysis, should be taught in the Japanese class (Hatasa, 1989). One of the main objections was that it would take a large amount of time out of the current already tight curriculum and also possibly bore students. However, this depends on how they are taught and brings me to the design of the *kanji*/calligraphy course.

### **Calligraphy Course at Grinnell College**

Grinnell College currently offers a 1-credit Chinese/Japanese calligraphy course each semester. This practicum course mainly consists of students of Chinese and Japanese as well as those with an art major. Of course, Chinese or Japanese calligraphy is an ancient traditional art and therefore, it takes a tremendous amount of time to master. In order to successfully fit into the American university curriculum, the way the art is taught needs to be revised for learners, especially from an alphabetic-background. First of all, the basic course objective should be to enjoyably experience the traditional art rather than to make them master calligraphers.

Following adequate practice of basic strokes, two projects can be provided, one in the middle of semester and another at the end. 「永」 can be a good sample for the mid-term project when students acquire all the basics as the character contains all the basic strokes with a dot, a straight line, a hook, and stops while a word of student's choice, for instance, a four-letter Japanese idiom, for the final project can make the activity enjoyable. This slow yet repetitive process enables students to learn and master basic stroke orders – once this foundation is laid, more rapid progress can be achieved.

The art makes learners focus on smaller details through kinetic movements whereas the *kanji* learning section focuses on studying *kanji* systematically through learning radicals, homonyms, and distinctive and assorted chunks. The former aims to arouse intrinsic motivation as learners mainly enjoy the traditional art and become more aware of each *kanji* stroke while the latter facilitates extrinsic motivation as they learn *kanji* in a more systematic manner, building from 'block' to 'block', component to component. However, the two sections of the course are complimentary and mutually reinforcing.

Of course, we cannot deny that in one way or another, *kanji* need to be memorized by learners. But, the question is how the process can be made less painful, for otherwise too many learners will simply give up. I have already been teaching a one-credit once-a-week calligraphy course at Grinnell College. This art-oriented course has been received very well. A student's comment, such as "After taking the course I have realized the importance of the balance of *kanji*" shows, I hope, that learners do not simply improve their penmanship as a result, but become more committed to the overall task of learning Japanese.

### **New Approach: Introducing Flexibility in Kanji Learning**

This specialized *kanji* course allows us reconstruct the order of *kanji* for learners to learn or review them as well as to teach learning strategies. The purpose of the course is to approach both ends of the memory continuum, learning through repetition and through understanding.

Here I will briefly explain what kind of learning strategies can be taught and how each of them should be exercised in class. Heisig (1986) proposed an innovative *kanji* learning approach, called, the element-based approach, which focuses more on each element, such as radicals, and builds these up meaningfully by identifying the parts of *kanji* and assigning their meanings. Learners first learn important radicals and simpler elements. For example, before 「校」 is learned, the radical, 「木」 and 「父」 is introduced so that learners can make a smooth transition. This is an analogy to building blocks of a house: first, put in place the solid foundations - i.e. mainly radicals. The number of *kanji* to introduce during the course is, on an experimental basis, limited up to JPN332 (the highest Japanese language course). So, within the approximately 800 *kanji* syllabus, the order will be rearranged using the element-based approach. For example, 「言」 (Chapter 8 of *Genki 1*) and 「売」 (Chapter 10 of *Genki 1*) and 「日」 (Chapter 4 of *Genki 1*) and 「寺」 (Chapter 15 of *Genki 2*) are introduced first and then, 「読」 (Chapter 8 of *Genki 1*) and 「時」 (Chapter 3 of *Genki 1*) follow respectively for smoother learning sequence.

One of the other difficulties of learning *kanji* is homonyms, which learners of Japanese may find unfamiliar. However, Samuels (1973) found pre-training for visual

discrimination was effective with American children trying to learn English letters, “p”, “d”, “g”, and “q”. He concluded that the pre-training facilitated the subsequent learning by sensitizing children to visual features of letters. Sugimura & Kubo (1975) conducted a similar experiment with Japanese children trying to learn the pronunciation of *katakana*, and found that their pre-training for visual discrimination facilitated subsequent association between *hiragana* and their sounds. Kaiho & Nomura (1983) propose that as learners have to learn a huge number of *kanji*, the pre-training for visual discrimination of *kanji* is necessary before learners recognize useful *kanji* patterns.

For instance, *miru* can be written as 「見る」 「看る」 「診る」 「観る」 or 「視る」. However, each of them is semantically different:

「見る」 - ‘seeing’, ‘looking at’, ‘watching’ (TV)

「看る」 - ‘attending’ (a person)

「診る」 - ‘examining’ (a patient)

「観る」 - ‘appreciating’ (a movie)

「視る」 - ‘setting an eye on’.

In addition, especially for those from alphabetic-background, without knowing radicals, some *kanji* are so similar to others that learners cannot make clear distinctions, particularly when writing. Examples are 「四/西」 「良/食」 「大/天」 「小/少」 「元/先」 「各/名」 「字/学」 「夕/名」 「英/映」 「木/本」 「理/野」 「枚/牧」. Occasionally such exercises can be conducted in class for learners to recall their *kanji* memory and sort them out meaningfully.

I can also cite a number of exercises developed by Tollini (1991). For alphabetic-habituated learners, *kanji* appears to be an arbitrary congregate of dots and lines, therefore, we can use Tollini’s (1991) (slightly revised) introductory exercises as below to develop graphic memory.

#### Exercise 1:

Divide the following *kanji* in two parts.

Example: 細 = 糸 + 田

「鎮」 「習」 「梅」 「語」 「張」 「答」 「悲」 「晴」 「現」 「仕」 「始」 「好」 「時」 「間」 「強」 「学」 「語」 「毎」 「買」 「住」 「何」 「前」 「曜」 「線」

#### Exercise 2:

To which deconstructed *kanji* do the following in the list belong?

Example: 田 + 糸 = 累

「士 + 心」 「安 + 木」 「耳 + 口 + 王」 「竹 + 木 + 目」 「言 + 刃 + 心」 「目 + 民」 「言 + 五 + 口」 「糸 + 刀 + 口」 「走 + 耳 + 又」 「羽 + 白」 「木 + 目」 「車 + 交」 「糸 + 又 + 土」 「言 + 火 + 火」 「貝 + 占」 「立 + 木 + 見」 「立 + 日 + 心」

#### Exercise 3:

Choose the common components of the following *kanji*.

Example: 奈奥太奄 大

「勉努勤務募」 「謀諮誓」 「念恥愛感」 「岩峠島獄」 「守寺導謝」 「妙烈炭焚」

Exercise 4:

Which parts are contained in the following *kanji*?

Example: 侍 j+f

1. 明 2. 時 3. 品 4. 加 5. 吉 6. 含 7. 念 8. 志

Parts: a. 月 b. 口 c. 力 d. 心 e. 土 f. 寺 g. 日 h. 今 i. 生 j. 人

Exercise 5:

Choose from each list the *kanji* that does not belong.

Example: 技持功抗 : 功

「梅桜料柏」 「鮎蛤鯛鯨」 「罵雪雲電」 「都影郊郵」 「虫忠念愁」

The current lack of time in the college curriculum does not allow an instructor to teach learners these distinctions in class systematically without a separate specialized *kanji* course. The categorization of Japanese proficiency levels that Toyoda (1995) employed was in accordance with JSL. However, even for JFL, for instance, in the U.S. the number of *kanji* that learners of introductory Japanese learn is within 100 to 300 manageable range. However, students of intermediate Japanese face a daunting 301 to at least 800 (at the end of one of the most widely used textbooks for the intermediate level, *Integrated Approach to Intermediate Japanese* by McGloin & Miura, 1995) and many of them, as I already suggested, may become de-motivated from tackling *kanji* without such assistance.

This specialized *kanji* course therefore aims to accommodate all learners with their individual differences not only thorough the element-based approach but also through introduction of various learning strategies. So learners can pick up combined methods to facilitate the transfer of their *kanji* knowledge from short-term memory to long-term memory without relying solely on tedious repetition.

### **Potential Benefits to the Japanese Program**

As we have seen, many intermediate learners of Japanese from an alphabetic-background feel *kanji* are very tough to learn. In any language course, the attrition rate gets higher as language learners move up to higher level. This new approach aims to ease the burden for those learners and the hope is that more of them might be able to reach to advanced level better-prepared. In addition, improved *kanji* proficiency has benefits for the other skills: better *kanji* recognition leads to better reading comprehension, especially at intermediate to advanced levels where many more novel *kanji* appear. And lastly, this new course may help alleviate instructors from the extra headache of trying to read learners' illegible handwriting – a small, but worthwhile side-effect of a more general improvement.

### **Further Research**

This study explains the current issues with *kanji* education in the U.S. and proposes, as an alternative, a specialized *kanji* course in combination with Japanese calligraphy course. The basic structure of the *kanji* course is illustrated with some exercise examples, however, the course is still work in progress. Thanks to support from Grinnell College, this brand-new course is scheduled to be offered there from the Fall Semester 2010. Therefore, the actual syllabus and course schedule is also in development. One of the possible textbook to be used for the course is 「漢字はむずか

しくない ; 24の法則ですべての漢字がマスターできる」 (*Kanji Isn't That Hard!*) by Takebe (1994), one of the few textbooks with a focus on morphological analysis available on the market, but along with Heisig “Remembering The *Kanji*” (1977), the effectiveness of its unique methodology has yet to be demonstrated (Okita, 1995). Further research work on this is therefore required.

### Conclusion

There is nothing necessarily wrong with rote memorization. In fact, this strategy has been found to be effective for some purposes (Naka, 1988; Naka & Naoi, 1995), however, a lack of self-monitoring and flexibility in strategy use should be of great concern (Mori & Shimizu, 2007). Learners are taking Japanese classes to learn Japanese systematically, but also imaginatively. So, why not offer a specialized *kanji* course to help them learn other *kanji* learning strategies and monitor their *kanji* acquisition?

One of the main reasons behind why the rote learning strategy has still remained the most frequently used by teachers of Japanese in the U.S. is our own experience of how to learn *kanji* (Shimizu & Green 2002). Most of us have the idea that we learned *kanji* through repetition: writing it many times on paper. This experience may strongly reflect our underlying ideas of how learners should learn. At the same time, several strategies, such as morphological analysis and metacognitive strategies, have been suggested, but the current curriculum tends to focus on speaking, and thus doesn't have much room for more effective *kanji* education.

While Japanese calligraphy should stimulate learners and motivate them to change their perception towards *kanji*, the *kanji* course should allow learners to study *kanji* systematically with an introduction of various learning strategies, and thus more efficiently and effectively for JFL. This combination aims to re-motivate learners of intermediate Japanese swamped with *kanji* by combining it with the experience of traditional Japanese calligraphy which focuses on detail and thereby aims to deepen and diversify learners' memorization techniques.

It may be that a thematic-frequency-based approach might work better for students from *kanji* background or even for JSL or for JFL at the very beginning levels where the selection of *kanji* is closely related to the theme of each chapter. However, as I have argued, this may be counterproductive in the long term as the current approach often forces learners, especially from alphabetic background, to depend on ad hoc rote memorization in a one dimensional way. As we have seen, when learners of Japanese reach a limit where they feel overloaded with *kanji*, they may become overwhelmed. The task, especially writing *kanji* with close to native proficiency is not easy. It requires a great deal of stamina, concentration, and commitment (Heisig, 1977). I hope the new approach outlined in this paper can compensate for the drawbacks of the thematic-frequency-based approach (without necessarily replacing it). If so, it can eliminate a great deal of wasted efforts and thereby better facilitate learners of Japanese struggling towards success with *kanji*.



11. If you feel that *kanji* writing is is very difficult, do you feel it is increasingly difficult? If so, why?

\* Strongly agree

\* Agree

\* Slightly agree

BECAUSE

12. I have found learning *kanji*:

\* Very interesting

\* Quite interesting

\*Neither I like nor dislike

\* Quite daunting

\* Very Daunting

BECAUSE

13. Feel free to write anything to help you learn *kanji* more effectively and efficiently in class

### Questionnaire Results

		Q1 ( <i>k</i> learning)	Q2 ( <i>k</i> reading)	Q3 ( <i>k</i> writing)	Q4 ( <i>k</i> found)
Beginning	(1)	0	3	0	7
	(2)	12	9	11	8
	(3)	4	4	4	0
	(4)	0	0	1	2
	(5)	-	-	-	1
Intermediate	(1)	4	0	5	3
	(2)	3	6	2	2
	(3)	0	1	0	0
	(4)	0	0	0	3
	(5)	-	-	-	1

\* (1) very difficult, (2) manageable, (3) relatively easy, and (4) very easy for Q1 to Q3  
 (1) very interesting, (2) quite interesting, (3) neither I like nor dislike,  
 (4) quite daunting, and (5) very daunting for Q4

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