

The Pronunciation Learning Strategy of Japanese *Onyomi Kanji* by Native Cantonese Speakers: a Look from the Cantonese coda

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Lee (1992) proposed the onset, rhyme and coda transformation rules that map the pronunciation of Cantonese characters and Japanese *onyomi kanji* characters. For example, Cantonese characters with a coda /t/ (e.g. 突 /tsu/) or /k/ (e.g. 特 /ku/) correspond to the Japanese mora /tsu/ (e.g. とつ /to.tsu/) and /ku/ (e.g. とく /to.ku/) respectively. Most of the L2 learners realize that the pronunciations of Japanese *onyomi kanji* are similar to the Cantonese pronunciation but they do not know the rules explicitly. This study investigates whether native Cantonese speakers use the Cantonese-Japanese *onyomi kanji* pronunciation transformation rules implicitly when they are learning the pronunciations of new Japanese vocabularies.

A questionnaire with multiple choice questions was distributed to 76 participants to test their knowledge on the pronunciation of some Japanese vocabularies and their corresponding Cantonese character. The participants were divided into four groups according to their proficiency in Japanese. They were encouraged to guess and choose the most appropriate pronunciation if they had not learnt the Japanese vocabularies before. Accuracy rates and error distributions for each item were computed and an error analysis was conducted to identify L1 transfer effects.

We observed that the learners use the transformational rules implicitly when deducing the pronunciation of unfamiliar Japanese vocabularies. However, we also observed some instances of transfer from Cantonese. Some Cantonese speakers had difficulties in distinguishing Chinese characters with /n/-/ŋ/ pairs and /t/-/k/ pairs in the coda position. These problems were also reflected in their Japanese errors. For example, learners who erroneously classified a Cantonese character with a coda /t/ as /k/ (e.g. 突) would pronounce the Japanese character as とく /to.ku/. Pedagogical issues related to the use of the transformation rules as a pronunciation learning strategy will be discussed.

Reference:

Lee, W. H. (1992). *A Guide to Japanese Pronunciation for Cantonese Speakers*.
Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press.