

Positive and Negative Transfers in the Pronunciation Learning of Japanese *Onyomi Kanji* by Native Cantonese Speakers

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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. Lee (1992) proposed the onset, rhyme and coda corresponding 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 mainly to the Japanese mora /tsu/ (e.g. とつ /to.tsu/) and /ku/ (e.g. とく /to.ku/) respectively. This study investigates whether these Cantonese-Japanese corresponding rules can facilitate the pronunciation learning of new Japanese *onyomi kanji* vocabularies by native Cantonese speakers.

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 characters. 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 corresponding rules implicitly when deducing the pronunciation of unfamiliar Japanese vocabularies. However, we also observed some instances of negative 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 corresponding 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.