

Re: Chinese dictation

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>>>> "Richard" == Richard Herring <junk@[127.0.0.1]> writes:

Richard> I don't think so, either, but I'm asking because I
Richard> don't know. What I don't know is how easy it is for you
Richard> to work out what the omitted prepositions and particles
Richard> should have been.

As easy as it is for you with English.

Richard> You've missed the point. I was indicating how **I** resolve
Richard> ambiguities in English. **I* *ask* *you* *to* *spell* *it**
Richard> **out**.

Richard> What's the Chinese for "Please spell it for me." ?

"How to write that character / those characters?"

Richard> I'm trying to write these words, not pronounce them.

>> *We also write our Chinese words in our Chinese script. So,
>> what's the difference?*

Richard> The difference is that each English word is written as a
Richard> sequence of symbols which can be named individually,
Richard> while each Chinese word is written with a single
Richard> character.

Wrong concept.

Chinese characters are not atomic. We learn and memorize them as structured objects, consisting of radicals and strokes organized in a structured way. That you fail to understand this structure doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Think that each Chinese character is an atomic writing unit is like treating each English **word** as an atomic unit.

So, people who know the Chinese script can tell one another how to

write a certain character by giving the component radicals/strokes and their relative positions. You can say this is "spelling out" the characters. Using this method, we can even tell a Japanese (and vice versa) how our names are written in characters, in an English-only conversation. We often do that because we want to know the character (and meaning) of one other's names.

Richard> What I was trying to establish, and Dylan explained, is
Richard> how you identify that single character when there's an
Richard> ambiguity.

Many possibility, which I've already mentioned in this thread:

1) by example, as in "A for apple", "B for boy", etc.

You just upgrade it to the character level. Since a character maps to a word (at least a morpheme) in English, a better analogy would be: "'right' as in 'left and right'"
or "'right as the opposite of 'left'"
vs. "'right' as in 'right and wrong'" or "'right as in 'alright'"
vs. "'write' as in 'read and write'" or "'right as in 'writer'"

2) give the components (radicals/strokes) of the character, and their relative positions in the character.

Richard> My question was about those occasions when the context
Richard> isn't enough. As I said, imagine dictating a very terse
Richard> telegram.

Even a terse telegram has context. The listener is clever enough to know which characters are meant. And the speaker is usually clever enough, too, to predict which characters would need clarification because it is "unusual". Just like a (smart) British telling an American "it's 'program(me)' with em ee" or "'organisation' with 's'".

Again, nothing magical.

Richard> The intended recipient knows the context, but the person
Richard> in the telegraph office doesn't.

They do. They aren't illiterate. (Assuming that the telegraph is not an encrypted message.)

>> *I can't see any _radical_ difference, except the mystery about
>> the Chinese script that you have in mind. Once you learn how
>> it works, it's no longer mysterious.*

Richard> You are imputing something to me that is not there, and
Richard> that seems to be making you respond to some imaginary
Richard> question that's also not there, with more questions
Richard> instead of a straightforward answer.

Richard> I have no "mystery" in my mind. I don't have a mystical
Richard> belief that Chinese characters are arbitrary shapes. I
Richard> understand that they are structured; I just don't know
Richard> the details.

I'm suggesting that you learn the details. Once you've learnt the details, you'll know the answers to your questions much better than anyone can explain to you. If you don't learn the details, you'll never really understand the answers to your questions. Just like asking a chemist to teach you chemistry, without making you learn the concepts of electron shells.

Richard> I know that there are homophones, but I also know that
Richard> all languages are sufficiently expressive to deal with
Richard> that.

Richard> I observe that there are obvious, non-mysterious
Richard> differences between writing a word as one or two
Richard> characters and as a long sequence of letters, and I
Richard> wanted to know what practical effects that has.

But you fail to see that trying to equate a Chinese character to a letter in the English script is no better than comparing oranges to apples.

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