

Re: Word count of minimum vocabulary

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- *From:* António Marques <m.ap@xxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Fri, 07 Jul 2006 02:09:12 +0100
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Lee Sau Dan wrote:

António> Lee Sau Dan wrote: '1', '2', '3', '+', are ideographs.
>> >> No, they map to words. :)
>>
António> Call me nuts, but I seldom map them to any words when
António> doing math.
>> Nor do I have to map a Japanese Kanji to a word when I read
>> and understand it.

António> You do, you map it to your HK word.

You can read my mind?

No, but however twisted I usually find it, I don't see you mapping a human language representation into anything other than a human language. When I read english texts I map them into english, not into some system of ideas.

There are many Kanji's which aren't used in Chinese. And I don't know how to pronounce those words at all -- neither in Cantonese nor Mandarin. Yet, I can learn what they mean and memorize the association between that shape and its meaning. There is no need to tie it up with any words -- whether Chinese words or Japanese ones.

Yes you are tying them to words – you're tying each one to a word the sound of which you don't know/care about:

```
struct kanji
{
shape* _shape;
word* _word;
}
```

```
struct word
```

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```
{  
sound* _sound;  
meaning* _meaning;  
}
```

You're just leaving _sound uninitialised.

António> If an ideograph is used inside some text to represent a
António> word, it's being used as a logograph.
>> Since '1', '2', '3', '+' ARE used in some text to represent
>> words, they are logographs? And that makes them ineligible for
>> being ideographs?

António> Since I was precisely referring to them, what do I need
António> to add to 'ideograph (...) being used as a logograph'?

A logograph can be used ideographically, and an ideograph can be used
logographically. How can you then draw a clear-cut line between the
two? Why would you insist that every Chinese character MUST not be
ideographs?

A logograph represents a word. An ideograph represents an idea.

Can you tell between a word and an idea?

In any given chinese text, do not the characters represent chinese
words? This is in fact the only relevant matter in the whole thread.

>> So, please don't rule out that possibility. When some people
>> say "Chinese characters are ideograms", they may be refering to
>> that kind of ideographic usage.

António> They might, but they're not.

Please analyze it into 2 levels: 1) the characters themselves, not in
any sentence (e.g. for labels on a map); 2) a writing system employing
the characters, such as Chinese and Japanese. I'd say that on level
(1), they're used ideographically. For (2), the characters are used
to map to words, and hence are logographs.

(1) isn't rare. In Chinese maps, we often create "symbols" out of
characters — they're precise and concise. A Japanese can read those
symbols too, because they know those characters, just like how we
learnt the symbols for various Olympic games.

Likewise, a [P] may represent parking and a /!\ may represent danger. I
think in your description the use can be seen as ideographical.

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However, when people say the chinese writing system is ideographical, what they're referring to is the usual writing of chinese texts.

In which the characters represent – chinese words!

And if the same text, with the same characters, can be read aloud in more than one chinese – it's because in all of those chineses, there is a string of words that can be represented by the same characters.

If the chinese writing system were ideographical, there would be no need for each chinese to have its own characters and sometimes arrange the same characters in not quite the same way. And the chinese, the koreans and the japanese would all write identical texts when they wanted to express the same ideas.

António> In this case, the student is taking advantage of
António> homography to mask ignorance.
>> True. But is that character here an ideogram?

António> No. The student doesn't mean the idea of 'sun', but a
António> specific (even if unknown) japanese word.

But that word refers to the sun (e.g. "sunshine"), and he may be thinking of the sun when writing it. It seems that you can read his mind?

Whatever is on his mind, he's using it as the representation of a word he doesn't know, not as the representation of the idea of 'sun'.

António> Very good, but the written text will have well-defined
António> set of readings (usually only one, but sometimes more due
António> to no language being phonetically injective). Compare
António> that to $\langle 1 + 2 = 3 \rangle$, which have no reading in particular.
>> It does. "1" is "one", right?

António> 'One' is the particular reading of $\langle 1 \rangle$? Why, pray tell?

And similarly, $\langle \text{nichi} \rangle$ is not the particular reading of the character for "sun".

It is one particular reading of it. The character doesn't stand independently from its readings. $\langle 1 \rangle$ does.

>> If "1" has no reading in particular, neither does the character
>> for "sun". Because it is different in Japanese and in Chinese.

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António> Yes it does. It has a defined number of readings in each
António> language it's used in,

You can use the character in English and pronounce it as "sun".

You could, but you don't.

The
symbol "1" didn't exist in English texts until quite recently, did it?
And when you adopted it, you pronounced it as "1".

You mostly pronounce it as 'one' in english, but that's when it stands
for the english word 'one'. <1>, however, doesn't need to stand for any
word.

Imagine that you
now adopt the character for "sun" to write the English word "sun".
Then, how is that different from "1"?

Just the same it is now, seeing it's already used in other languages
than chinese. If however you say 'imagine that you adopt the character
for the chinese word 'sun' to become a symbol for the idea of 'sun',
you'll be using it in a different fashion than it is now used – do you
have only one word for 'sun'? What's the word for 'star'? 'solar
system'? 'daylight'? 'focal point'?

The fact remains that whatever language you write in whatever writing
system, the system represents the language, not the ideas expressed. If
it represents the ideas, then it's not language that's being written –
if it were, then which language would it be?

(And how about the Thai
numerals? They're not as good as the European (often misnamed
"Arabic") numerals?) The widespreadness affects the status of being
ideographic or logographic?

I don't know the thai numerals, so I can't comment on them, but no.

—
am

laurus : rhodophyta : brezoneg : smalltalk : stargate

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