

Re: intrinsic advantage of Latin alphabet over bopomofo (for Chinese)??

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Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.lang/2007-03/msg01758.html>

- *From:* Oliver Cromm <lispamateur@xxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Thu, 22 Mar 2007 13:20:47 -0400
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* Joachim Pense wrote:

Am Tue, 20 Mar 2007 18:16:35 -0400 schrieb Oliver Cromm:

* Peter T. Daniels wrote:

On Mar 15, 7:01 pm, Oliver Cromm
<lispamat...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

* Peter T. Daniels wrote:

On Mar 14, 8:01 pm, LEE
Sau Dan
<dan...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
wrote:

"Oliver"
==
Oliver
Cromm
<lispamat...@xxxxxxxxxxxxx
writes:

Oliver>
Now I
learned
Chinese
characters
within
Japanese,
and the
Oliver>

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Japanese
use of them
is a bit more
stretched: a
character
Oliver>
represents a
family of
morphemes
with similar
meanings,
Oliver> and
can
represent
any other
morpheme
of similar
meaning
Oliver>
exceptionally.

So, the use
of these
characters
in Japanese
writing is
very
ideographic.

No, it is logographic. Any
kanji in any particular
context stands for
one and only one word.
(Any deliberate ambiguity
would be called
"poetry.")

Now that is a hardline approach: As long as
it's representing language
at all, it isn't ideographic. That leaves
nothing to discuss.

[...]

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But in the exceptional cases in Japanese I mentioned, the word it represents is actually noted in Kana. So the Kana represent the word, and the fact that the Chinese character is supposed to represent that word this time is explicitly. That's about as ideographic as it can get. A whole sentence can of course never be written ideographically, because it represents the grammar of Japanese (or the language at hand).

I guess you're using "ideographic" in some private, unexplained sense.

I try to exemplify, as a first step towards explaining:

If any word in the Japanese language that has approximately the meaning of "one*" can be represented by the same Kanji (and I believe this is close to the facts), and any word that will be created tomorrow with the same meaning also will be allowed to be written with the same Kanji, then the function of that Kanji is to represent the idea of "one*", rather than the word "one" ("ichi", "hitotsu" "i" ...).

But the Kanji denotes a word or morpheme, not the concept when it is used. Of course the notation may be defective (so you in some situations cannot derive which word meaning "one*" is supposed to be written in that instance), but I don't think that a Kanji will just denote the concept without a particular word meaning "one" in mind.

Ok, I understand, and I think we get the picture now. We are actually arguing on a different level of abstraction. I already conceded that a whole sentence will never be written ideographically, because it will be a sentence in a specific language, represent its grammar etc. There is some flexibility in the exceptions I mentioned, for example in song lyrics you will find it often that the Kanji for "girl" is written with an annotation that the intended Japanese word is "ko", "child", or you may write "sky" and declare it stands for the word "heaven". But this has limits.

I never claimed that Chinese or even Japanese *is* actually written ideographically, only that Chinese characters as such (and not there instantiations in a specific text) have ideographic character. This is, among others, illustrated by the fact that they have been successfully employed to denote Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese words, besides Chinese.

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Take as an example from Western culture the sentence "I e NY". In this concrete sentence, the "heart shape" stands for the English word "love". Is this because of a convention that e generally denotes the word "love", or is it rather because of a cultural convention that e represents the idea of love? I think the latter.

Another case to ponder: If I write the Chinese character for "one" on a piece of paper and hang it on the wall (as I started this sentence with "I", I will avoid the expression "calligraphy"), what does it represent? A Chinese word, a Japanese word? A number?

If you'd show me such a picture and ask me what this is supposed to mean, I would say that it means "one" (and I would say that in the language of our conversation – I wouldn't know immediately which Japanese pronunciation to attach to it), but could be intended to stand for "beginning". Or "unity". Or something else. So, how strong is the link between that Kanji and some word?

The exceptions we mentioned are situations like kyoo where a sequence of Kanji is used to denote a single morpheme or word in Japanese,

These examples are less interesting for my line of argument.

We left out one other case that is more supporting to my view: the case where one Japanese word is regularly written differently in different contexts.

My standard example for that is "katai" (hard). There are three different Kanji in ordinary writing for this word. Ask a Japanese who is well educated, but not a linguist, and you will likely get the explanation that there are three different Japanese words that happen to be pronounced the same and have similar, but slightly different meanings. In my view, those are three nuances, three ideas of "hardness" that aren't differentiated in the Japanese language, but only in Japanese writing (as a Chinese heritage)?

If you think the Kanji represents the respective word that is spoken when those sentences are read, then you should also claim that the vowels are (implicitly) indicated in ordinary Arabic writing.

Why should he?

Because in a given Arabic text, the sequence <ktb> is not meant to represent any arbitrary word that could be written this way, but only one specific one, so the intended vowels are as fixed as the reading of

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a Kanji in a given Japanese text is (in 99% of cases). This instantiation of <ktb> stands for "kitab", even though in general, out of context, <ktb> can represent a lot of other words as well.

Another hint: There is a book "Chinese for Mathematicians" (or similar) that doesn't bother mentioning Chinese pronunciation. It teaches only the Kanji and their meaning. Those who learn Chinese following that book will pronounce the Chinese text in English, if at all.

That is possible with every language.

But with alphabetical languages, that can't be efficient, with Chinese, it might just be the most efficient way of reading it for limited purposes (and more efficient than the Chinese Room).

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Multitasking /v./ Screwing up several things at once

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