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Recently, Yasashii Nihongo (Easy Japanese: EJ) has emerged as a new focus area in the field of language policy studies in contemporary Japan, where the number of expatriates is steadily increasing. EJ was introduced after the Hanshin-Awaji earthquake and was considered a potential solution to the problems concerning language services in the multilingual context that characterizes Japanese society.

EJ aims to assist expatriates in Japan with limited Japanese language proficiency, by using basic level of grammar, fewer kanjis (Chinese characters), etc. However, the question remains whether EJ actually aids native Chinese speakers living in Japan, taking the reduced number of kanjis into consideration. The Chinese form the largest group of expatriates in Japan, constituting approximately 30% of the total expatriate population of approximately 2 million.

In order to address the above issue, this article analyses the similarities and differences of meanings in kanjis used in both Japanese and Chinese. The data comprise a vocabulary of 1,343 words that can be written in kanjis, sourced from the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) Level 3, upper basic level. JLPT Level 3 is a rough standard of easiness for EJ. The data are classified into nine groups according to their form, origin, part of speech, and meaning. Several Japanese-Chinese and Chinese-Japanese dictionaries are referred to.

The key finding of this study is that a significant number of kanjis from JLPT Level 3 are shown to differ in meaning in Japanese and Chinese. For example, the percentages of the differences in meaning according to the parts of speech were as follows: noun, 34%; adjective, 27%; and verb, 26%. The above finding indicates that the percentages of differences in usage of kanjis in Japanese and Chinese are considered relatively high. In the other words, using many kanjis randomly might create confusion instead of aiding comprehension.

In conclusion, employing the vocabulary from JLPT Level 3 as data, this article suggests that using many kanjis in Japanese for the benefit of native Chinese speakers does not necessarily improve comprehension. Therefore, the use of kanjis in EJ should be selective. The following tasks are left for future research: studying a larger quantity of data and collecting opinions from native Chinese speakers.

* An Alternative Perspective of Yasashii Nihongo as a Language Service for Native Chinese Speakers: Focusing on Vocabulary Written in Kanjis (WOO Wai Sheng)

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