

The Difficulties and Teaching Strategies of Japanese and Chinese Homographs in Chinese Language Learning for Japanese Learners

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Abstract: This article explores the difficulties encountered by Japanese learners in learning Chinese with regard to Chinese-Japanese homographs and proposes teaching strategies accordingly. While Chinese-Japanese homographs bring convenience to learners, they also pose challenges in terms of writing, pronunciation, and word meanings. The teaching strategies include fostering correct conceptions, effectively utilizing comparisons and contrasts, and integrating cultural teaching. These strategies are conducive to helping Japanese learners overcome obstacles in learning homographs and promote cultural exchanges between China and Japan.

Keywords: Chinese-Japanese homographs, Chinese language learning, teaching strategies

Introduction

While Japanese-Chinese homographs, or words that share the same or similar characters in both languages, may initially seem to offer Japanese learners of Chinese a head start, they in fact present a unique set of challenges that must be addressed. This article comprehensively explores the impact of these homographs on Japanese learners' Chinese language acquisition, highlighting both the benefits and obstacles they encounter. Furthermore, it proposes effective teaching strategies to help learners.

1. Definition and learning significance of Chinese-Japanese homographs

1.1 Definition of Chinese-Japanese homographs

He Baonian pointed out that the homographs of Chinese and Japanese characters are characters that have exactly the same or almost the same shape in Chinese and Japanese.^[1] The existence of homographs between Japanese and Chinese is due to the long-term cultural exchanges and language contact between the two countries. In ancient times, Chinese characters were introduced from China to Japan and became an important part of Japanese writing. Over time, these characters have acquired unique pronunciations and interpretations in Japan, forming a vocabulary system that is both related to and different from Chinese.

In Japanese-Chinese homographs, there are words with the same shape, such as "勉强, 学校, 意思, 娘", and words with similar shapes, such as "爱情——愛情, 美丽——美麗". However, the subtle differences in writing style are not the biggest difficulty in learning Japanese-Chinese homographs. The biggest difficulty in learning Japanese-Chinese homographs lies in the analysis of word meaning. Although these words share the same or similar Chinese characters in both languages, due to historical, cultural, and linguistic evolution factors, their meanings may vary or even differ greatly.

1.2 The significance of learning Chinese-Japanese homographs

First, learning Chinese-Japanese homographs is conducive to improving Chinese learners' Chinese proficiency. Chinese-Japanese homographs play an important role in Chinese learning. For Japanese learners, they are a challenge that must be faced in mastering Chinese. Learning Chinese-Japanese homographs can help enhance learners' Chinese reading and comprehension abilities, enabling them to express themselves more accurately and fluently in Chinese. Thoroughly mastering Chinese-Japanese homographs not only means improvement and breakthrough in learners' Chinese proficiency, but can even promote the expansion of their native Japanese vocabulary.

Second, learning Chinese-Japanese homographs is beneficial to academic research. For scholars in linguistics, literature, history, and other fields, Chinese-Japanese homographs have important academic value. They help us gain a deeper understanding of the history, culture, and traditions of both countries, revealing the evolution of Chinese and Japanese languages, the borrowing relationship between their vocabularies, and the historical process of cultural exchanges. This kind of research not only contributes to promoting academic development in linguistics, literature, history, and other fields, but also provides strong support for cultural exchanges between China and Japan.

Third, learning Chinese-Japanese homographs is conducive to cultural understanding between the people of China and Japan. Language is the carrier of culture, and Chinese-Japanese homographs are a linguistic phenomenon, a product of cultural exchanges between China and Japan, and a bridge for cultural exchanges between the two countries. By comparing the differences between Chinese-Japanese homographs in the two languages, we can better understand the similarities and differences in society, customs, and ways of thinking between the two countries, promoting friendly exchanges between the people of China and Japan.

3. Difficulties in learning Chinese-Japanese homographs for Japanese learners

3.1 Differences in writing styles and pronunciation

Although both Japanese and Chinese use Chinese characters, there are often subtle differences in the writing of homographs between the two languages.

First, some words have different writing styles in Japanese and Chinese. Japanese often uses traditional characters, while modern Chinese uses simplified characters, such as "发现——发现, 従——従". However, there are also words that are simplified in Japanese but not simplified in Chinese, such as "佛教——仏教, 崇拜——崇拜". Therefore, Japanese learners must pay extra attention to switching between simplified and traditional characters when writing Chinese characters. Second, some words have different morpheme orders in Chinese and Japanese, such as "介绍——紹介, 赞赏——赞赏". This is also a common mistake for Japanese learners when writing Chinese characters.

The differences in consonants, vowels, and tones between Japanese and Chinese lead to different pronunciations of homographs.

Japanese vocabulary can be roughly divided into four categories: Japanese, Chinese, foreign, and hybrid. Most homographs in Japanese and Chinese are Japanese and Chinese. Among them, "Japanese" is an inherent vocabulary in Japanese, and before the introduction of Chinese characters into Japan, it only had a sound. After the introduction of Chinese characters, "Japanese" was associated with Chinese characters with the same or similar meaning. Therefore, the reading method of "Japanese" in Chinese characters is called "训读", which is completely unrelated to the original Chinese reading method. "Chinese" generally refers to the Chinese characters that are pronounced using the pronunciation of Chinese characters when they were introduced into Japan, which are called "音读" words.^[2] Most of them are borrowed words from China. These words are difficult for learners to distinguish and memorize, and they need to be carefully analyzed to prevent mispronunciation.

3.2 Differences in word meanings

Japanese-Chinese homographs can be roughly divided into two categories: homographs and homonyms. Homographs are words that have essentially the same meaning in both Chinese and Japanese, allowing for slight differences in word

form. Homonyms may have identical word forms, but have different or even unrelated meanings in Chinese and Japanese.

"Homographs and synonyms bring convenience to Japanese learners of Chinese in terms of recognition and learning. For example, words such as 'industry, moving, lubricant' that have exactly the same meaning and usage require almost no special memory,"^[3] and learners will not encounter any difficulties when using them. This is also why many Japanese people who have not studied Chinese have much less difficulty reading notices and other texts when traveling to China than people from other countries.

Homographs are the most difficult type of words for Japanese learners to learn when learning Japanese-Chinese homographs. Some of these words have no meaning in either language, and misuse can lead to great jokes. For example, "Da Zhang Fu" in Chinese refers to "a man with ambition, integrity, and achievement", while in Japanese it means "no problem, it's okay"; "Niang" in ancient Chinese refers to "mother", and in modern Chinese it is basically no longer used alone, while in Japanese "Niang" refers to "daughter"; "Mian Qiang" in Chinese mainly emphasizes doing one's best, not being willing or making people do things they don't want to do, while in Japanese it is more related to learning, diligence, testing, and experience.^[4] It is generally believed that these words are too different to be easily remembered, and the words that learners are most likely to misuse are actually homographs in homographs.

Homographs refer to words in Japanese and Chinese that have similar meanings, partially overlap but are not identical. There are differences in part of speech, collocation, and stylistic color between them, and even advanced learners are prone to misusing these words. Such errors are often more difficult to detect and correct.

3.2.1 Differences in word class

Some words have different parts of speech in Chinese and Japanese, so there is some overlap in meaning and each has its own unique characteristics.

The word "反对" exists in both Chinese and Japanese. In Chinese, it is a verb with the meaning of "disagree and disapprove". In Japanese, the word "反对" has three usages: verb, noun, and adjective. The verb usage is the same as in Chinese, meaning "disapprove and disagree"; the noun refers to the opposite or relative position or state; and the adjective means the opposite, contrary, or reversed meaning. For example, when describing a reversal of order, it can be said that "顺序反对" means that the order is reversed.^[5]

3.2.2 Differences in collocation

"Love" is a noun in both Chinese and Japanese, referring to the mutual affection between men and women. However, in Chinese, "love" refers specifically and solely to the emotions between lovers or partners. In contrast, in the Japanese context, the scope of meaning for "love" is broader, extending to non-interpersonal relationships.^[6] For example, it can also express a deep fondness or love for work, nature, one's hometown, and so on. The incorrect sentence "My love for my hometown will never change" written by Japanese learners of Chinese is a result of not understanding the differences in the extended meanings of "love" in Japanese and Chinese, leading to incorrect collocation.

3.2.3 Differences in language color

The word "zhìwèn" (质问) in Chinese has a slightly derogatory connotation, referring to inquiring or accusing based on facts, with tones of "accusation" and "criticism." However, in Japanese, the word "shitsumon" (質問), which translates to "zhìwèn" in Chinese, is a neutral term without any positive or negative emotional color, simply referring to asking questions or inquiries.

When learners merely intend to inquire about something and write a sentence like "I want to zhìwèn (質問) you something," the recipient is likely to misunderstand it as the learner holding a certain degree of hostility against them, leading to misunderstandings. Therefore, understanding the differences in language color of homonyms is also an important topic for Japanese learners of Chinese.

4. Teaching strategies for Chinese-Japanese homographs

The historical origins between Chinese and Japanese characters and the close relationship between the pronunciation,

shape, and meaning of the characters have given Japanese students studying Chinese characters certain advantages. However, due to factors such as the negative transfer of the mother tongue, the differences between the two languages also pose some challenges for them.^[7] This requires teachers to take appropriate measures to help learners make the best use of their strengths and avoid weaknesses, so as to better master Japanese and Chinese homographs.

4.1 Establishing correct concepts

Some Chinese beginners who are native Japanese speakers may have excessive confidence and not study hard. For example, Japanese students studying Chinese characters generally have a lack of attention, believing that Japanese kanji are very similar to Chinese characters and can be recognized even if they are written in Japanese kanji, as long as they can be understood by others. After entering the middle and high stages of Chinese learning, such thoughts will limit the improvement of students' Chinese proficiency. Therefore, in the process of teaching Chinese characters, teachers should pay attention to students' writing of Chinese characters, correct their learning attitudes, and make students realize that Japanese and Chinese are completely different languages. Like learning other foreign languages, learning Chinese also requires hard work and research.

There is another situation where learners have a strong fear of Chinese and develop a fear of difficulty. At this time, teachers should tell learners that the emergence of this fear is a very normal phenomenon and there is no need to worry too much. In teaching, teachers should correctly play the positive transfer effect of Japanese and Chinese homographs and synonyms to help learners establish connections between the two languages and cultivate self-confidence.

In general, teachers should play a role in expanding positive transfer and reducing negative transfer at the beginning of teaching, helping students establish a correct learning perspective and laying a solid foundation for in-depth learning.

4.2 Making good use of comparison and contrast

In the study of Japanese-Chinese homographs, the comparative approach is undoubtedly the most crucial, effective, and intuitive strategy. The importance of this method lies not only in its ability to help students accurately identify and distinguish easily confused Japanese-Chinese homographs, but also in its capacity to deepen students' understanding of the subtle differences between the two languages, thereby significantly enhancing their bilingual proficiency.

During the teaching process, whenever encountering easily confused Japanese-Chinese homographs, teachers should conduct bilingual comparisons from three aspects: form, pronunciation, and meaning.^[8] This avoids incorrect assumptions based solely on visual impressions. Teachers should encourage students to frequently consult dictionaries, especially Chinese-to-Chinese dictionaries. By referring to Chinese-to-Chinese dictionaries, students can not only gain a deeper understanding of the precise meanings of Chinese vocabulary, but also appreciate the unique expressions and cultural nuances of the Chinese language.

4.3 Combining cultural instruction

Ultimately, the differences in form, pronunciation, and meaning of Japanese-Chinese homographs are closely related to the cultural differences between China and Japan. This requires teachers to have a certain understanding of the social culture, customs, and living habits of both China and Japan. By integrating cultural teaching into the classroom, teachers can not only help students understand the cultural differences between China and Japan, but also better assist them in understanding the differences between Japanese-Chinese homographs.

For instance, when explaining words, teachers should avoid focusing solely on the vocabulary itself. Instead, they should seize the opportunity to impart both the words and the associated culture to students, enabling them to learn not only a large number of vocabulary items but also gain a deeper understanding of the cultural differences between China and Japan.^[9]

If students are learning Chinese in Japan, the Chinese classroom is likely the only place where they encounter the language. Teachers should strive to create a Chinese cultural environment and organize various classroom activities, such as screening Chinese movies, to create a good cultural atmosphere and make use of class time to let students learn as much

about Chinese culture as possible, thereby fostering their interest in learning.

If students are learning Chinese in China, teachers should encourage them to communicate more with native Chinese speakers. For example, native Chinese students majoring in international Chinese education can be invited to participate in the classroom with international students and work together on some communicative tasks. This not only increases the opportunities for international students to interact with native Chinese speakers, but also helps Chinese education majors apply their professional knowledge and skills.

5. Conclusion

China and Japan both belong to the Sinographic cultural sphere, and the Japanese language and Chinese have had deep historical ties and mutual influences since ancient times. The phenomenon of Japanese-Chinese homographs exists, giving Japanese learners an initial advantage over learners from other countries when studying Chinese. However, as they delve deeper into the language, these homographs often pose unique challenges that other learners do not encounter.^[10] For Japanese learners to truly master Chinese, overcoming the difficulties of Japanese-Chinese homographs is a crucial hurdle.

Despite the considerable difficulty in learning Japanese-Chinese homographs, teachers can adopt numerous teaching strategies to assist learners in mastering this aspect of the language. By integrating cultural teachings, encouraging active learning, and utilizing various classroom activities, teachers can effectively guide Japanese learners through the complexities of Japanese-Chinese homographs and help them achieve proficiency in Chinese.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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