

# Basic Kanji Learning Strategy using the Mnemonic and *Happyou* Methods in Japanese Literature Program Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Pakuan University

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**Abstract.** The strategy of learning Kanji with the Mnemonic method is one solution to eliminate this perception. These Kanji lectures were conducted by group presentation in which each group of students presented 8 - 10 Kanji characters in every meeting. The research was conducted for 2 semesters with first and second semester students as subjects. The samples of study were A Class with 34 students. The book used was Minna no Nihongo Shokyuu Kanji I Eigoban with 220 basic kanji. The method author use in this study is a true experimental. These research subjects using two classes: A class consisting of 34 students which is an experimental class and class B are 34 students who are class control. An average pre-test score are 79 for experimental class and 77.5 for control class, while the value of post-test for experimental class is 89 and for the control class is 71.

**Keywords:** mnemonic, happyou, association, loci , word markers

## 1 Introduction

*Kanji* letter expressing the meaning established by mimicking the shape of the object or the signs given in denoting an object or nature or jobs or other signs. *Kanji* is the script with pictographs system as it's base (Iwabuchi, 1989: 63). *Kanji* is formed of lines or stroke that can be counted. The number of lines or strokes of *kanji* called *kakusuu*, which can reach a dozen strokes. In a *kanji* letter, there is a section of character that shows the *kanji* meanings. That *kanji* portion is called *bushu*. Some *kanji* have the same *bushu*, so by classifying them we can identify the meanings of *kanji*. *Kanji* has seven types of *bushu*, namely (1) *hen*, (2) *tsukuri*, (3) *kanmuri*, (4) *ashi*, (5) *tare*, (6) *nyoo*, and (7) *kamae* (Kato, 1991: 222).

Foreign students who learn Japanese generally finds it difficult to mastering *kanji*. Moreover, Japanese writing system using 3 types of letter. There is *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*. *Hiragana* and *katakana* are generally not a problem for foreign learners as it consists of 46 letters and only has one kind of way to read, so easily memorized without using a special method. In contrast to *kanji*, which one *kanji* generally have more than one way of reading, which is Chinese reading (*onyomi*) and Japanese reading (*kunyomi*). For example, this *kanji* {男} read as “*dan*” and “*nan*” for it's *onyomi*, while it's *kunyomi* is “*otoko*”.

Considering there are thousands of *kanji* used in Japan, memorizing every possible way to read *kanji* is not an easy thing. However, memorizing how to write *kanji* is even harder.

This is due to stroke numbers of writing *kanji* is varies, most of it has a lot of strokes. For example, *kanji* like {機} which requires only one *hiragana* {き} both have the same sound “ki”, but to write it into *kanji*, requires 16 strokes. It makes memorizing each *kanji* require special methods in order to strengthen students memory.

*Kanji* I and II is a basic *kanji* course which aims to introduce a Japanese font that has an important role to support two language skills, the ability to write and read. *Kanji* subjects also have a very important role in supporting other subjects, particularly subjects that require writing and reading skills. Those subjects such as *dokkai* (reading comprehension), *bunpou* (grammar), and *sakubun* (writing).

Until now, the method used by the majority of basic *kanji* lecturer (*Kanji* I and *Kanji* II), particularly in Pakuan University Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Japanese Literature program still conventional, like teaching how to write and read each *kanji* based on textbook. The students are required to memorize how to write *kanji* characters without the methods which can simplify the process of memorization. This resulted in a decent memory of the students to write *kanji*, means that the ability of students in mastering *kanji* is not optimal. By not fully mastering *kanji* writing make students less confident in writing *kanji*. In addition, lecturers are still applying teacher center learning that make students feel bored in *kanji* class. It also resulted in the declining interest of students towards *kanji* subjects. The decreasing interest towards *kanji*, leads to a low-grade achievement which makes students fail and have to repeat the course next year.

Based on the results of interviews regarding *kanji* learning for 15 students who repeated *kanji* I and II courses, all answered that they were only able to remember *kanji* for short term, like when the course lasted or just one day, the next day was very difficult to remember even imagine how to write *kanji* that has been learned. In addition, interviews with the same questions were also conducted on 15 students who passed the *kanji* I and *kanji* II examinations, most of them answered that learning *kanji* requires routine writing exercises every day and it's time-consuming because if they lack on their routine training, they will easily forget how to write the *kanji*.

Pursuant to the problems experienced by students in learning *kanji* as authors have described above, the authors conclude the need to use new methods in teaching *kanji*, using the *mnemonic* method by using *happyou* (presentation) is needed. With this method, author will look at how the student's ability to remember *kanji* writing changes and how to increase student confidence in writing *kanji*.

## 2 Literature Review

The word "*Mnemonic*" comes from the Greek, "*Mnemosyne*" (remembrance 'memory'), which means Goddess of Memory. In his blog, Sunarwan says, *mnemonic* is memorize something with help of another object. Such assistance may be acronym, presupposition with objects, or "linking" (remembering something based on a relationship with something else). There are three basic principles when using *mnemonic*, which is imagination, association, and location. Based on these definitions can be said that the *mnemonic* is a technique to make it easier to remember something. More specifically, *mnemonic* means doing something by make a statement or expression, or linking words, ideas, and fantasies.

According to Jensen (2002), a *mnemonic* is a method to help remember the large amount of information that involves three elements: coding, maintenance, and recall. By applying

some mnemonic techniques to remember something of information, recalling memory process will be easier because *mnemonic* always uses the principle of association (link) with something else. Such techniques, as follows:

1. Loci (Loci Method)

Loci is a *mnemonic* tool that serves to associate places or objects at known locations with things that want to be remembered. Usually, the use of these methods involve areas as visual memory then remember everything that was in place to connect each part so that it becomes an integral / combined intact. And everything from the venue contains any decree anything we want to remember or memorize.

2. Word Marker

Word marker system is a mnemonic tool to associate/connect one word with another word through an action or picture it using concrete objects. Word marker system is very helpful in remembering numbers. Said marker can be words we create our own or words that are already known to the public.

3. Link-word

Link-word techniques used to remember foreign words or abstract concepts. Link-word is another linking technique which associate words verbally and visually, the word that is sound similar or a concept that related to the word you want to be remembered.

4. Acronyms (*Mnemonic Acronym System*)

Acronym is how to remember a word by using every first letter of a group of words (sentences) into a new word. Usually, the use of acronyms is helpful when we want to remember words that need to be particularly ordered.

5. Chunking

This technique is commonly used to memorize numbers, although it also can be used to remember everything. Because our memory has such limited capacity, it is difficult for most people to learn a long series of numbers. However, if it can be placed in a number of pieces, the number is easier to remember. The theory is, rather than memorize eight digits simultaneously, it is better to divide the figures into several parts.

### **3 Research Methods**

The method author use in this study is a true experimental. A true experimental is an experiment that tight control of the variables that affect and determine the sample with random system and uses the control class as a comparison, while the experimental class is a class who received treatment (Anwar, 2004). These research subjects using two classes: A class consisting of 34 students which is an experimental class and class B are 34 students who are class control. Experimental class is a class that is getting treatment of learning kanji using the new method, the method of mnemonic presentation using *happyou* (presentation), while Class B is the class that serves as a control, the class does not get treatment study using mnemonic and *happyou*, but use the lecture method that it's idea or notion of learning is determined by the teacher.

## 4 Discussion

Learning strategy by using *mnemonic* methods in kanji I and II courses is the development of basic *kanji* learning strategy in Pakuan University Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities Japanese Literature program. The aim of using this new strategy is to give students an easy and interesting impression towards kanji course that is usually considered as a difficult and tedious subject.

In the first 3 class meeting, the class presented in the form of a lecture by the teacher. At the first class meeting, the teacher tells the origin or history of how *kanji* were formed, along with other things that must be considered when studying the *kanji*. At the second and third meetings, teachers provide an overview of the basic kanji which often comes as a part of another *kanji*, which later will be used as the object of a presentation by students. Those *kanji* introduced in this second meeting are kanji which has a similar shape to the original object, such as (日, 月, 火, 水, 木, 金, 土, 山, 川, 田, 人, 目, 口, 耳,). At the third meeting, teachers introduce *kanji* of numbers from 1 to 10. The aims of this kanji orientation and introduction are to (1) stimulate students to be interested in *kanji*, (2) make students have a clear picture to analyze how to easily memorize *kanji*. At the fourth meeting onwards, students began to make a presentation group in turn.

In this course, students are given an opportunity for creative thinking and imagining on how to write *kanji*, and then the results shall be presented in the classroom. The audience students are given the opportunity to ask questions and express their opinions if the presenter's imagination is quite inappropriate. This presentation format is intended to make students have the confidence to present and defend the results of their creative thinking and imagination in front of other students. This study uses 220 basic kanji contained in the book *Minna no Nihongo Shokyuu Kanji I Eigoban* as the material object.

Based on the results of student presentations during the two semesters, the author can classify an easy way students remember writing *kanji* as follows:

### 1. Associating kanji elements with *katakana*

Some elements of kanji have a shape similar to the *katakana*. Therefore, students are looking for one easy way to remember writing *kanji* by associating kanji elements with *katakana*. *Kanji* element that resembles *katakana* that appear in basic *kanji* are as follows:

イ (i), エ (e), オ (o), カ (ka), ク (ku), ケ (to), シ (shi), セ (se), タ (ta), ト (to), ナ (na), ヌ (nu), ネ (ne), ノ (no), ハ (ha), ヒ (hi), マ (ma), ム (mu), メ (me), ヨ (yo), リ (ri) ロ (ro).

**Table 1.** *Kanji* element with *katakana*

<i>Kanji</i>	<i>Kanji</i> elements associated with <i>katakana</i>	How to read	How to remember	Meaning
右 (U8)	ナ + 口	<i>Migi</i>	<i>Na ro</i>	Right
左 (U8)	ナ + エ	<i>Hidari</i>	<i>Na e</i>	Left
外 (U8)	タ + ト	<i>Soto</i>	<i>Ta to</i>	Out
友 (U9)	ナ + ヌ	<i>Tomo</i>	<i>Na nu</i>	Friend
多 (U13)	タ + タ	<i>Oo (i)</i>	<i>Ta ta</i>	Many
名 (U14)	タ + 口	<i>Na / mei</i>	<i>Ta ro</i>	Name
etc.				

For example, an easy way to remember みぎ (右) *kanji* which means 'right', students associate with ナロ *katakana*, so to write みぎ *kanji*, students just need to remember *katakana naro*. Similarly, ひだり (左) *kanji* which means 'left' is a combination of *katakana ナ* and *エ*, to write it just remember *katakana nae*, そと (外) which means 'outside', a combination of *katakana タ* and *ト*, to write it just remember *katakana tato*.

2. Associate the *kanji* part with surrounding objects

As the author mentions beforehand in the introductory chapter, that *kanji* character has *kanji* elements (*bushu*) which can help identify the meaning of the *kanji*. However, because some of those *kanji* element names are difficult to memorized and understood by freshmen, then the *kanji* elements names are converted by associate it to surrounding objects with similar shape.

**Table 2.** *Kanji* part that associated with surrounding object

<i>Bushu</i> shape	<i>Bushu</i> name	Replacement name
冂	<i>Kamae: dogamae</i>	A cage with its door open
凵	<i>Kamae: kunigamae</i>	A cage with its door closed
門	<i>Kamae: mongamae</i>	Gate
宀	<i>Kanmuri: Ukanmuri</i>	Pot Lid
艹	<i>Kanmuri: Kusa Kanmuri</i>	Grass
广	<i>Tare: Midare</i>	Shop 1
疒	<i>Tare: Yamaidare</i>	Shop 2
冫	<i>Tsukuri: oozatozukuri</i>	Letter B
etc.		

By using the new names as a replacement name that was created by the students as in Table 2, it will be easier for them to memorize how to write *kanji*. For example, to remember the 花 (はな) *kanji* which means 'flower', students will be given the *bushu kusakanmuri* which changed its name to the grass and *katakana イ* (i) and *ヒ* (hi), so it will be pronounced as 'grass *ihi*'. Another example, to remember the writing 漢 (かん) *kanji* consisting of 13 strokes, the students could dissect a *kanji* consists of 'mizu' renamed 'water', *bushu kusakanmuri* which was renamed 'grass', 凵 meaning 'mouth' 二 meaning 'two', and 人 meaning 'person', so it will be pronounced to be 'on the left is water, on the top is grass, below that a mouth and two people'. Examples of how to dissect *kanji* above, more details can be seen on the following table.

**Table 3.** How to dissect *kanji*

<i>Kanji</i>	<i>Kanji</i> Elements	How to Remember
花	艹 (grass) イ (i) ヒ (hi)	Grass <i>ihi</i>
漢	冫 艹 凵 二 人	Water on left, grass on top, underneath a mouth and two people'

3. Associate *kanji* elements with other *kanji*

This technique can make remembering *kanji* easier. By remembering the *kanji* element, students are able to remember some other *kanji*. If the student has been considering how to

write *kanji* element, then they will easily remember how to write some other *kanji* that have the same element, such as the example in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *Kanji* element with other *kanji*

<i>Kanji</i> Elements	<i>Kanji</i> that could be remembered
門	間, 聞, 開, 閉
言	話, 読, 語
車	軽, 転, 運
etc.	

Based on Table 4 it can be concluded that by memorizing one *kanji* element, students are able to remember some other *kanji* at once. For example, when looking at the *kanji* 門 students will be reminded of how to write some other *kanji* that has the same elements, such as あいだ (間) *kanji* which means 'between', 聞く (きく) *kanji* which means 'to hear', 開ける (あける), which means 'to open', 閉める (しめる), which means 'to close'.

Learning activities by *mnemonic* method and presentation using the presentation made by the students in the experimental class (class A) showed very positive results, it proved in the average value of pre-test and post-test. An average pre-test (with the material presented at the first 3 class) are 79 for experimental class and 77.5 for control class, while the value of post-test for experimental class is 89 and for the control class is 71. Based on the average value of pre-test and post-test, the ability of the experimental class student proved to have a lot of enhancement.

Based on the results of questionnaires obtained from research subjects, which is experimental class students, all of them enjoy learning using *mnemonic* method and *happyou* (presentation). Especially when they find an easy way to remember *kanji* and present it in the class, the good response from other students and teachers they received, seemingly to foster students curiosity and make them continue looking for an easy way on how to remembering *kanji* writing that has not been studied.

#### 4 Conclusion

Based on the study above, it can be concluded that the basic *kanji* learning strategy uses *mnemonic* methods and *happyou* (1) are very effective as alternative ways to easily memorize how to write *kanji*, (2) make students think creatively and actively to find an easy way on how to remember *kanji*, (3) help maintain a longer span of memory (long term memory), (4) make students used to express and defend their opinions in front of many people, (5) boost the Japanese language ability, especially the ability to write and read, and (6) eliminates the presumption that *kanji* course is a very difficult and tedious subject, but it is actually an easy and interesting subject.

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