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A Contrastive Study of Messaging and Orthography in English, Chinese and Japanese

Abstract

In this study, I will contrast the relative information processing efficiency in proportion with the amount of writing in three languages: English, Chinese and Japanese. In these three languages, one adopts alphabetical orthography(?) – English – and the others the Chinese character system. Of the latter two, Japanese has its own *kana* syllabaries which are based on the Chinese characters.

My concern is which of the three writing systems is the most informative when contrasted with certain amount of a text. First, let us compare Chinese and Japanese. If we count only the letters written in the text that is translated from one language to another, it is obvious that Chinese are more efficient; basically one character expresses one idea in Chinese, but auxiliary verbs and case particles are necessary in Japanese. The syntactic relation is marked with the word order in Chinese, hence case particles are not needed. In addition, auxiliary verbs consist of three or four letters in Japanese to express one meaning of obligation, possibility, respect and so on.

Next step is to contrast English and Chinese. In a very informal and rough way, it can be postulated that Chinese one letter/morpheme corresponds to one word in English. In that sense, the informative efficiency of these two languages will be similar to each other.

Let us look at an example:

English: *What we can do today, most of which was not possible in the past.*

14 words, 17 syllables

Chinese: women jintian neng zuo de shi, you xuduo shi guoqu zuo-bu-dao de.
we today can do 'de' thing there-is a-lot-of COPULA past do-NOT-RESULT 'de'

12 words, 18 syllables

Japanese: ware-ware-ga konnichi dekiru koto wa, ooku wa ima-made deki-nakat-ta
mono de aru.

*we-NOM today can thing TOPIC, much TOPIC now-until do-NEG-PAST thing AUX
COP*

12 words, 31 syllables

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