ABSTRACT

Phonetic Coding of Kanji

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An experiment in the short-term recall of visually presented Japanese Kanji ideograms suggests that Kanji may, like alphabetic words, be encoded phonetically, despite their lack of phonetic structure. The experiment, based on Kintsch and Buschke's (1969) paradigm, assumed that similarity of items in a list increased errors in recall. Four lists were prepared, each containing sixteen different Kanji. The first included phonetically similar pairs of characters; the second, semantically similar pairs; the third, visually similar pairs; the fourth was a control list containing no similar pairs. The subjects, ten native speakers of Japanese, were presented with randomly ordered versions of each list, at one character per second. After a subject had seen an entire list, he was presented with a cue character selected from the list and asked to recall the character which had been presented immediately before the cue. Confusion in primary memory was significantly greater for the phonetic list than for the other lists. These results strengthen the hypothesis that regardless of structure, visually presented linguistic items are, like speech itself, phonetically processed.

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