A Behaviorist Kanji Lesson

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A BEHAVIORIST KANJI LESSON

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Learning to read Kanji ideograms challenges students of Japanese as the characters can have multiple pronunciations depending on their context. This lesson uses behaviorist learning theory with computer technology to teach Kanji characters. An analytic rubric provides a way of indicating expected learning outcomes and measuring student achievement.

Teaching Kanji Characters

In order to be literate in Japanese, one must be able to navigate an orthographic system that uses a combination of Roman alphabet characters, two syllabaries, and a set of pictograms known as Kanji characters. Each Kanji character represents a discrete morpheme. An individual Kanji character may stand alone as a word; Kanji characters used in combinations become other words. Depending on the context in which it is used, a character has multiple pronunciations.

This lesson, designed for students of Japanese at any level, uses computer technology to drill associations with Kanji pronunciations. By the end of the lesson, the student should be able to:

- Hear a pronunciation and choose the single character word pronounced that way;
- See a single character and give the possible pronunciations of that character;
- Hear a word and identify which combination of Kanji characters represents that word;
- See Kanji characters used in combination as a word and give the pronunciation of that word.
- Demonstrate mastery by correctly performing all tests three times.
The Lesson

The lesson comprises of teaching slides and testing slides. It also features a progress monitor. Typical lesson units would consist of 20 Kanji characters and 60 additional words comprised of multiple characters.

Figure 1. Kanji teaching slide. Corresponding audio is initially “hana” for the character meaning “flower.” It then gives the other pronunciations for the character ("hana" and "ka"), then the pronunciations for the vocabulary words ("hanabi," "kaga," and "kadan") (Hana, n.d.).

Teaching slides (Figure 1) introduce characters by giving the pronunciation for the character as a stand-alone word, both orally and onscreen in the hiragana syllabary characters. The lesson then displays the Kanji character followed by all the possible pronunciations of the character, both orally and in hiragana characters under the Kanji character. It then displays three vocabulary words that use the character in combination and gives the oral pronunciation of each and the hiragana equivalents while highlighting the word in question. A rollover feature allows students to see a translation of the term in their native language.
Figure 2. Kanji identification testing slide. Upon hearing “hana” and “ka,” the student is expected to select “花” (Hana, n.d.).

Figure 3. Kanji pronunciation testing slide. Upon seeing this, the student is expected to enter “hana” and “ka” (Hana, n.d.).

Figure 4. Word identification testing slide. Upon hearing “hanabi,” the student is expected to select “花火” (Hana, n.d.).
Figure 5. Word pronunciation testing slide. Upon seeing this, the student is expected to enter “hanabi” (Hana, n.d.).

Testing slides (Figures 2–5) test either recognizing or generating the pronunciation of a word or character. In slides testing generating the sound of the character or word, the character or word appears on screen and the learner types in the pronunciation(s) on the keyboard. For the ones testing recognizing the sound of a word or character, the hiragana equivalents to the sound of the word or character appear on the screen as the program generates the pronunciation; the learner would then need to identify the correct character or word from a list of choices appearing on screen.

In the testing slides, a reward chime follows each correct answer and a buzzer follows each incorrect answer. Teaching slides (Figure 1) reappear after incorrect choices. Progress bars corresponding to each category of testing provide students with a monitor of their progress.

Benefits of Technology

This lesson uses technology in a number of ways. The ability to simultaneously generate sound and image links Kanji characters and their pronunciation in various contexts. The program identifies student errors and provides a tool for instant review. It provides a tool for students to assess their own progress and for instructors to see that students have completed the
work. Although students can use a cheat sheet to game the system or have someone else do the lesson in their place, the module assumes students’ goodwill and desire to learn.

**Behaviorist Theory**

Behaviorist theory informs the techniques in this lesson. The lesson employs a stimulus/response model that goes back to Pavlov (Harasim, 2012, p. 32). Harasim defines three primary aspects of behaviorist learning pedagogy reflected in this lesson: behavioral instructional design; taxonomies of learning; and reward and punishment (p. 37). The instructional design of this lesson emphasizes practice and reinforcement (p. 39). For taxonomies of learning, this lesson breaks down the learning process into discrete steps and specifies behavioral objectives (p.39). The system provides the learner immediate consequences with positive reinforcement (the chime) for correct answers, punishment (the buzzer, review slides) for incorrect answers, and the score bar for assessing progress (p. 37).

**Rubric**

As this lesson concerns the learning of specific information and fulfilling specific tasks, Mertler’s (2001) template for analytic rubrics (para. 7) is far more useful than his template for holistic rubrics (para. 5) or Pierce’s (2006) Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric (p. 2). The following rubric reflects expectations that students correctly complete each test three times.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Unsatisfactory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Give correct pronunciations of a Kanji character – 25%</strong></td>
<td>Correctly identify pronunciation of all characters three times</td>
<td>Correctly identify pronunciation of all characters at least once</td>
<td>Does not correctly identify pronunciation of all characters at least once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Give correct pronunciation of vocabulary words – 25%</strong></td>
<td>Correctly identify pronunciation of all words three times</td>
<td>Correctly identify pronunciation of all words at least once</td>
<td>Does not correctly identify pronunciation of all words at least once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify Kanji characters by pronunciation – 25%</strong></td>
<td>Correctly identify all characters three times</td>
<td>Correctly identify all characters at least once</td>
<td>Does not correctly identify all characters at least once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identify words by pronunciation – 25%</strong></td>
<td>Correctly identify all words three times</td>
<td>Correctly identify all words at least once</td>
<td>Does not correctly identify all words at least once</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 6. Lesson rubric.*
References

http://jisho.org/words?jap=%E8%A%B1&eng=&dict=edict&tag=&sortorder=relevance


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