

Individual Paper Session 25
Processing and Syntax
Thursday, July 6
2:15-2:45pm

L2 orthographic processing skills at different levels of L2 exposure

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Orthographic processing skills of English-speaking learners of Japanese at different stages of exposure to kanji characters were examined using two orthographic processing tasks, character-ness judgement and radical-identification tasks. The two tasks were administered first to a control group of L1 readers of Japanese and then to an experimental group of L2 readers. Prior to the tasks, the participant L2 readers were categorised into three levels of kanji knowledge, beginner, intermediate and advanced groups, according to their scores on a simple kanji knowledge test.

In the character-ness judgement task where the participants were required to judge whether the presented stimuli were real kanji characters, consistent to well-established word frequency effects, character frequency effects were observed in the readers of all kanji knowledge levels. On the other hand, radical frequency affected only the L2 readers with little kanji knowledge. In the radical-identification task where the participants were required to find a common radical in two characters, intermediate and advanced L2 readers were adversely affected by character frequency. For radical frequency, while the frequency of main radicals marginally impacted on the performance of the L2 readers with beginner or intermediate levels of kanji knowledge, it significantly affected the advanced readers who had been exposed to a number of main radicals.

These findings suggest that L2 readers start to identify a few familiar recurring shapes in kanji characters, and as their kanji knowledge increases, they become able to identify and process the radicals of kanji. The L2 readers progressively move to the stage where they process kanji at the character-level, which has been seen in the L1 readers.