Semantic Understanding of Sound-Symbolic Words by Native Korean and Chinese Speakers Learning Japanese

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Summary

The present study investigated the understanding of Japanese sound-symbolic words by Korean and Chinese speakers learning Japanese. Two questionnaires were conducted; one was a reading proficiency test and the other was a test to measure understanding of the meaning of Japanese-sound symbolic words. From the collected data the Korean and Chinese speaker's samples were matched according to sex, age, years of studying Japanese and Japanese reading ability to produce 30 pairs of data each. The results of decision tree analysis showed that the understanding of 15 Japanese sound-symbolic words was influenced by the level of reading proficiency in both Korean and Chinese speakers. Moreover, Chinese speakers learning Japanese showed better results than Korean speakers with respect to some of the Japanese sound-symbolic words. Although Korean and Japanese sound-symbolic words share linguistically similar characteristics, the results did not show any significant difference compared with Chinese speakers.

Key words : sound-symbolic words, reading proficiency, native Korean speakers learning Japanese, native Chinese speakers learning Japanese, decision tree analysis