

Preface

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Pages vii–x of

**The Japanese Mental Lexicon: Psycholinguistic Studies of
Kana and Kanji processing**

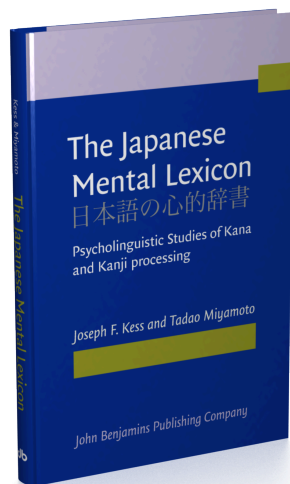
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PREFACE

This text is intended to serve as an introduction to the psycholinguistic dimensions of written word access to the mental lexicon in Japanese. Ten chapters focus on the nature of such psycholinguistic inquiry, its history, lexical access studies in kanji, kana, romaji, and mixed text processing, laterality preferences in kanji/kana processing and their implications for scientific discussions of language and cognition, evidence from eye-movement studies, the acquisition of orthographic skills by Japanese children, and a review of the implications and conclusions that arise from the contributions of such research.

The text is directed at filling the need for an overview of such research not only because of its potential impact on linguistics and psychology, but also on aphasiology, mathematical and statistical linguistics, educational practices and governmental intervention in respect to language policies, and to a lesser degree, linguistic and cultural history. Ours is an unabashedly interdisciplinary view of psycholinguistics, contending that inquiry into such research questions is not the exclusive prerogative of a single field or academic discipline. As the following text will demonstrate, the consolidation of our knowledge about language processing in respect to Japanese orthographic access to the mental lexicon is not the accomplishment of any single scientific paradigm. Rather, an information processing view of such mental events relies on the convergence of a disparate number of research strands which, when taken together, form a cohesive whole. We have, therefore, attempted to present an integrated history of the development of research ideas, and their relative successes, in the psycholinguistic study of orthographic pathways to the mental lexicon. This small area within cognitive science also reflects our interdisciplinary commitments to understanding the structure of human LANGUAGE, together with the structures of specific languages, in their relationship to human cognition.

When we first surveyed the rich field of Japanese psycholinguistics, we quickly realized that the most fertile area for research has been the area of kanji and kana processing. This was true even before the focus on the mental lexicon became fashionable in Western psychology and psycholinguistics, for Japanese scholars have always been keenly interested in possible differences between Japanese orthographic systems and other systems found in the world's languages. As a result, we focussed our attention

on this area, organizing our book into 10 chapters, which, except for the Introduction, represent the diversity of Japanese psycholinguistic research into the nature of written word processing in Japanese. The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the history of Japanese psychology, and the development of the interdisciplinary field of Japanese psycholinguistics within this scholarly tradition. Chapter 2 charts the early emergence and subsequent development of the Japanese orthographic systems in historical terms. It also presents a brief history of more recent developments in governmental policy directed at controlling the number and type of kanji in both the media and the schools, as well as a glance at scholarly attempts to characterize the orthographic symbols which actually do appear in written Japanese. The next four sections are organized around experimental or descriptive treatments of kanji, kana, romaji and mixed-text processing. These chapters survey the theoretical issues in lexical access, word recognition, and the way in which the Japanese mental lexicon reflects processing strategies which are tied to the quadripartite Japanese orthographic system.

Chapter 7 presents a cursory survey of research on the acquisition of Japanese reading and writing skills by young children. Although the field of reading comprehension as a whole is too wide an expanse to cover usefully or profitably here, we feel it is useful to see how the acquisition of these skills in Japanese differs from acquisition of such skills in other orthographic systems. Chapter 8 reviews the recent developments in current research on eye movements in reading different text types in Japanese, and how this reflects universal vs. language-specific issues in orthographic systems and reading. Chapter 9 examines the reported results for studies of lateralization and hemispheric specialization in respect to the special demands made by the Japanese orthography and its dual nature.

Lastly, Chapter 10 offers our summative conclusions about the implications of such research for those universal vs. language-specific issues which arise from processing models of language perception, language production, and language acquisition. Many of the research directions that have informed the last four decades of psycholinguistic research have shared similar intellectual sources with Japanese psycholinguistics. But there are also many instances in which Japanese research is unique in the research questions it has chosen to follow, and the answers to these questions are often enlightening in ways that we have not considered. We offer commentary on these research avenues, and the way that the interplay between universalistic and language-specific issues in Japanese inform theoretical debates about the universalistic nature of language processing in psycholinguistic terms.

Finally, we should acknowledge those colleagues that have been so helpful in supporting the completion of this book. First of all, we must note E. F. Konrad Koerner, whose collegial genius for organization has been recently recognized by the Royal

Society of Canada. It is his editorial tenure at John Benjamins Publishers that has allowed this book, and many another scholarly text, to see the light of day in published format. At the same time, we wish to acknowledge the contribution of our editor at John Benjamins Publishers, Kees Vaes, who encouraged this book and ensured its realization in its final printed form.

We have also been particularly fortunate to have Japanese colleagues who have made this project as much their quest as ours. Their expertise as outstanding scholars in the field, as psychologists and linguists, and their kindness in introducing us to their own work, as well as to that of their colleagues, has been the infrastructure which allowed this work to proceed. The distinguished scholar of whom this is especially true is Dr. Kan Kashu, recently retired as Dean of Humanities and Professor of Psychology at Kwansai Gakuin University in Kobe, Japan. It has been his enthusiastic leadership in our research group that has served as the inspiration for our own commitment to this project. We are also grateful to Dr. Shoichi Yokoyama, of the National Language Research Institute in Tokyo, for his kindness and collegiality in helping us to access the right contacts in the realization of our research goals, particularly in the early stages of our work. We also wish to acknowledge those scholars who took the time to read and comment on various stages of the manuscript, giving freely of their wisdom. Our gratitude goes to Professors Shoichi Yokoyama and Eric Long of the National Language Research Institute, Che Kan Leong of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, Takeshi Hatta and Hirofumi Saito of Nagoya University, Hiroyuki Kaiho and Nobuo Ohta of Tsukuba University, Kan Kashu and Jun Ukita of Kwansai Gakuin University, Michio Inoue of Kobe Yamate University, Katsuo Tamaoka of Hiroshima University, Hironari Nozaki of Nagoya City University, Tomoyoshi Inoue of Doshisha University, Thomas M. Hess of the University of Victoria, and Gary D. Prideaux of the University of Alberta. With their advice and support, the final product is unquestionably a much better portrait of Japanese psycholinguistic research in this area.

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and our collective research efforts have profited in myriad ways from his wise stewardship.

In closing this preface, we want to also acknowledge those special ones who figured in our thoughts during the time of our writing. Joseph F. Kess: I dedicate this book to my son Tony, the last in an unbroken line of 'knezhashki mahacheks', and we hope, the first in a continuing line of many more yet to come. Our times together in Japan gave us the opportunity for a 'walkabout' neither of us will ever forget! Tadao Miyamoto: I dedicate this book to my wife Susan, who allows me to pursue my academic interests.