

Student D

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About the presentation

In our presentation about language, our main purpose is to examine the differences and similarities among languages by presenting specific examples and historical facts. I mainly focus on languages in East Asia: Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. I choose these three languages because they share many similarities in writing. My idea is to present some historical events among these three countries in order to argue my statement that the communication and trading among regions stimulated the interaction and transform of different languages.

As I am from China, I have much background knowledge about East Asia history. But through preparing the presentation, I still found something new. Beforehand, I always thought Japanese is just a language that derived from Chinese, and it was the arrival of Chinese that taught Japanese how to read and write. But I found myself wrong. Although there was many communications between these two countries in ancient times (many during Han and Tang Dynasty), and Japanese's writing system was highly influenced by Chinese, yet Japanese is a totally different system of language. To illustrate how it is different, we may first look at the difference between Eastern and Western languages.

Western languages (here I mainly mean European languages), are "speaking based". Words are composed of letters and when encountering a new word, we normally can correctly pronounce it without knowing its meaning. However, Eastern languages, like Chinese, are "comprehension based". We use thousands of characters to express our ideas. In fact, we regard characters as the "words" in English, but we do not have certain components in composing the

characters. The modern characters derive from an ancient writing system, *pictograms*, which derived from pictures. As a result, we normally can know the meaning of a character even if we have never seen it before.

Now back to Japanese. I find Japanese a language between these two language systems, such that while it uses characters like Chinese, Japanese vocabulary is composed of not only Kanji characters, but also other two systems, Katakana and Hiragana. Hiragana is used for words that do not have a corresponding Kanji character, and Katakana is normally used for translation of foreign languages. Both Katakana and Hiragana are composed of basic sets of symbols, which are much like the letters in English. As a result, I believe Japanese combines both the Eastern and Western language system. It is fair to say that Japanese is a language that highly influenced by Chinese at an early stage, but has transformed dramatically afterwards. It is a pity that I do not show this finding in the presentation because of time limiting, but I have totally change my impression on Japanese through research, and find it really a magic language.

I would like to investigate more on traditional and simplified Chinese characters' influence on Japanese. As recorded in history, the time when Chinese characters introduced to Japan was the period when we used the traditional Chinese. However, I find many simplified Chinese characters in Japanese characters. I am curious on whether they simplified themselves separately or one simplified first and influenced the other. Therefore, I would like to further research on how they transform to what they look like today.

In addition, I want to do some deeper investigate on Hanja, the Korean characters, which is nearly the same as simplified Chinese. As I mentioned in the presentation, while the majority of Korean literature and documents were written in Hanja in ancient times, it has been totally

abandoned since the 19th century. I wonder how a dominant writing system can be and should be totally substituted by another system.

I believe the transform of language is an epitome of globalization. In fact, as I mentioned in the presentation, it is the need of communication with people in different regions that promotes the interaction and evolution of languages. And on the other side, it is the languages that help people communicate with each other and drive the world closer together. And this is globalization.

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