

A Contrastive Study of Four- Character Idioms in Japanese Language and Some Myanmar Proverbs and Sayings

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Abstract

Kanji denotes meaning and those which are composed of two or more characters are called compound Kanji. Four-character idioms which were made up of two-character idioms and simple four-character Kanji are used to express daily life. This paper studies and presents the common idioms which Japanese language learners should know and their similar proverbs in Myanmar language. The contrastive approach is used in this research to find similarities and differences between some four-character kanjis in Japanese language and the similar Myanmar proverbs and sayings. Findings show that Japanese language and Myanmar language have similarities in the use of some kanji but some don't have exact equivalents in Myanmar language.

Introduction

Japanese Language had no written form till 4th century A.D when Chinese Kanji characters were first introduced to Japan. At first, only Kanji characters were used to write in Japanese Language. At the beginning of Heian Era (794-1192) Manyoogana characters were used to write Japanese phonetically. At about 10th century, Japanese women developed Manyoogana characters and used as Hiragana. They used Katakana which was developed from a part of Kanji in Writing.

Kanji represents meaning and Hiragana and Katakana express sounds. They don't have any meaning. Kanji created by two or more kanji are called compound kanji(idioms). There are many four-character kanji which are made up of two compound kanjis and those which are made up of four separate kanji. This paper studies the different categories of compound kanji which can be seen in everyday expressions of Japanese people.

Literature Review

Richard Medhurst (2016) wrote the article "Yojjukugo". The compressed Poetry of four character idioms. In his paper, he said that like english proverbs, many are obscure or literary, but some are extremely well-known. They are first studied in elementary school, and the most common phrases are referenced regularly in popular culture.

One particularly well-known phrase borrows from English. "To kill two birds with one stone" has entered Japanese as (issekinicho). As its component kanji meaning "one", "stone", "two", and "bird" are included in the 240 characters learned in the first two grades of elementary school, this is among the easiest yojjukugo to remember, especially for English-speaking learners.

In [www.tofugu.com\(2012\)](http://www.tofugu.com(2012)) an article entitled "The Four Kanji that make one idiom is described. In this comparative study with Chinese Language, the researcher said that the yojjukugo have Chinese roots and origins. Many of the yojjukugo idioms just copypaste.Straight from the Chinese version. There are some slight modifications in the readings to make them more Japanese.

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Now the Japanese yojijukugo idioms aren't all copy cats. While many of them do come from a Chinese original, there are many Japanese-only yojijukugo as well. There would be things that come from buddhist scripture, Japanese proverbs, and old Japanese stories. Just like the Chengyu, though, you still need the stories to understand the yojijukugo meaning.

According to wikipedia (2018) " The definition of yojijukugo is somewhat murky since the Japanese word jukugo(literally "ripe/mature/popular word") can linguistically mean "compound", "idiom", or "phrase".It can be classified into two types:Non-idiomaticyojijukugo and idiomatic yojijukugo.

Objectives

Kanji are the indispensable parts of Japanese Language. Studying sounds and meanings of each kanji will help a learner of a Japanese Language in learning compound kanji(idoms). This paper aims to give the knowledge of kanji to language learners to be able to effectively communicate with Japanese people. It also aims for the learners to understand the intended meaning by using four-character idioms.

Research methodology

Contrastive Research Method is used to present the four-character kanji collected from dictionary.

Scope of the Research

Four-character kanji in Japanese Language are studied and analysed into different categories as follow:

- I. Compound kanji used to express actions and manners
- II. Compound kanji created by numerals
- III. Compound kanji used to indicate emotions and ideas
- I. Compound kanjis used to express actions and manners
1. Four-character Kanji:暗中摸索¹

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: A situation in which someone is exploring something without having a clue like searching lost thing in the dark.</p> <p>Eg: starting a new business.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: ခြံစမ်းခရမ်းပျိုး vegetable in order to test the soil.</p>	<p>Imi: kuraitokoro de sagashi mono o suruyooni,tegakarimotsukamenai mono o sagashimotomerujookyoo. Mata, meikakudenaikoto o atetesuirisuruimimoaru.</p> <p>Eg. Shinkijigyoowahajimattabakari de, ima no tokoro an- chuu-mo-sakumojootaidesu.</p>

¹An-chuu-mo-sa-ku

2. Four character kanji:異口同音¹

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: All say in unison. They all have the same opinion.</p> <p>Example: All say in unison that she is a beautiful lady.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: ပုလင်းတူဘူးဆို့ Same bottles, same corks</p>	<p>Imi:oozei no hitogaonajikoto o kuchi o soroeteiukoto.Hitobito no ikengaittisuru to iuyoooomoaru.</p> <p>Eg.yakyuu no kaisetsushawa, karega20nennihitoriderukadenaika no tensaitekinabatta da to 1- ku-doo- on nitteiru.</p> <p>Hitabitowa I- ku- doo-on ni(kanojowabijinda)to itteiru.</p>

3. Four-character Kanji:牛飲馬食²

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Drinking like a cow and eating like a horse. It is used to say eating too much Example: Although he is popular among friends for his habit of drinking like a cow and eating like a horse, everyday is worried for his obesity.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: (နွားလိုသောက်မြင်းလိုစား) Drink like a cow and eat like a horse</p>	<p>Imi: ushi no yooninomi,uma no yoonitaberukoto.</p> <p>Takusan no ryoo o nondaritabetarisurukoto.</p> <p>Eg-kare no Gyuu-in-ba-shokuburiwa, tomodachi no aida de hyoobanninaruhodosugoiga,saikinwa doo mite mohutorisugite, minnagashinpai shite iru.</p>

4. Four-character Kanji:自画自賛³

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Praising and showing off oneself Example: Taking pride of Grandpa’s native is good but everybody is fed up with his frequent braggart .</p> <p>Similar Proverb:(ကိုယ်ဂုဏ်ကိုဖော်မသူတော်) Praising oneself is an art of the unwise.</p>	<p>Imi: jibun de jibun no koto o home soyasukoto.(or)jibun de jibun no koto o home, jimansurukoto.</p> <p>Eg-sohu no kokyoojimanwa, jiga-ji-san mo ii tokoro de, moo kikiakitaga, minnagagamanzuyokuaizuchinadootte iru.</p>

¹I-ku-doo-on

²Gyuu-in-ba-sho-ku

³Ji-ga-ji-san

5. Four-character Kanji: 東奔西走¹

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Running to and fro</p> <p>Example: Running to and fro preparing to open a new change store.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Saying: (ပျားပန်းခတ်မျှအလုပ်ရှုပ်) As busy as a bee, Busy like a bee</p>	<p>Imi: higashi e hashittarinishi e ittari, achikochikakemawarukoto.</p> <p>Eg-shitenkaisetsujunbi no tame, konotokoro, too-hon-sei-soo shite imasu.</p>

6. Four-character Kanji: 粉骨碎身²

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Work with tremendous effort, with utmost effort</p> <p>Example: I can't imagine how he sacrificed his life and work for this company under hardship</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: (အရိုးကြေကြေအရေခမ်းခမ်း) Try hard with utmost endeavour</p>	<p>Imi :hone o konanishitemi o kudakukotokara) chikara no kagiridoryokusurukoto.Matahijoonikuroo shite hatarukukoto.</p> <p>Eg-Fun-kotsu-sai-shin,mi o nageutte, annakaisha no tame nitsukusumante, kangaerarenaikotoda, Itchoo-</p>

II. Compound Kanji of numbers

1. Four -character kanji: 一朝一夕³

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Every achievement can be attained by working steadily through time. Example: On the surface, it seems to be easy; however, literature cannot be created in a short time.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: စုဖန်များပျားလ ဘို့ဖြစ်သယ်ပါများခြံပင်တောင်ပို့ဖြစ်) Slow and steady, win the race.</p>	<p>Imi :monogotowanagaisaigetsu o kaketejidainidekiagarukoto.Hijooni mijikainichjinidekiagarukoto.</p> <p>Eg- tyottomiru to kantansoonimierukeredo, koredake no sakuhinwa, itchoo-isseki no tsukureru mono dewanai.</p>

2. Four –character kanji: 一石二鳥⁴

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Getting two venefits from one.</p> <p>It is not easy to kill two birds with one stone.</p> <p>Example: Running with my pet dog every day, I won the school marathon race and also got a prize from my father. Mother said I killed three birds</p>	<p>Imi :hitotsu no koto o shite hutatsu no rieki o erukoto. Hitotsu no ishi de niwano tori o otosunado to iukotowa, sookantannidekirukotodewanai.</p> <p>Eg- mainichi, aiinu to hashitteiruokage de, Utimarason de yuushoo,titikaramohoobigade,hahaha</p>

¹Too-hon-sei-soo²fun-kotsu-sai-shin³Itchoo-isseki⁴Isseki-ni-choo

Myanmar	Japanese
with one stone. Similar Myanmar Proverb: (ခဲတစ်လုံးနှင့်ငှက်နှစ်ကောင်ပစ်၊တစ်ချက်ခုတ်နှစ်ချက်ပြတ်) Killing two birds with one stone.	ra(isseki- ni-choo)tokorokasanwa ne to iwareta.

3. Four-character kanji:一刻千金¹

Myanmar	Japanese
Meaning: Not Wanting enjoyable moment to pass quickly . Similar Myanmar Proverb: တစ်မိနစ်၊တစ်စက္ကန့်၊ထောင်တန် Time is precious Time and Tide waits for no man.	Imi: hon no wazukana jikan ga hijoonikichoonakoto. Jikangamatataka ma nisugisatteshimaukoto o oshimukimochi no kotoba. (shun shoo ikkokutyokusenkin(de haru no yoru no kimochi, jooshuwaomomukihukaku, wazukaikkoku de senkin no neuchigaaru, to iuyuumeinakotoba Eg- Ikkoku-sen kin no haruni shoo, kukai o tanoshinda.

4. Four-character kanji:十人十色²

Myanmar	Japanese
Meaning: People’s likes thinking and characters are different depending on individual. Example: It was astonishing that no two trainees chose the same flower when they were asked to choose their favourite flowers. Similar Myanmar Proverb: လူအမျိုးမျိုးစိတ်အထွေထွေ၊ လူတစ်ကိုယ်အကြိုက်တစ်မျိုး Likes differ as people differ	Imi: hito no konomiyakangaekata, seikakunadogahitoniyottezuibun to chigaigaarukoto. Juuninirebajuu no konomigaaru to iukoto.Takusan no mono gasorezoresamazamanikotonarukoto. Eg- juunin – to-iro de ironnakangaeyaseikaku no hitogaimasu ne.

5. Four-character kanji:四苦八苦³

Myanmar	Japanese
Meaning: Facing hardships/ Having stressful situation Example: I like cartoons but I always have trouble in writing essays. I would rather write cartoons than essays. Similar Myanmar Proverb: တံဆိုးမိုးမှောင် Misfortune never comes alone	Imi :arayurukurushimi. konoyo no nakanisonzaisuruari to arayurukurushimi no koto. Eg-bokuwa manga watokui da ga, sakubundewaitsumoshiku-hakku shite iru.sakubun no kawarini manga o mitometekurenai mono ka to omotteiru.

¹Ikkoku-sen-kin

²Juu-nin-to-iro

³Shi-ku-hakku

6. Four-character kanji: 七転八起¹

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Try hard and achieve success in spite of seven-time failures.</p> <p>Example: The owner of the shop didn't give up in spite of many failures and reached this present situation.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: အနိုင်မခံအရှုံးမပေး: Never Give Up</p>	<p>Imi: shichi do shippai shite tentoo shite mo, mata, kujigezuokiagattecharenjisurukoto.</p> <p>Eg. Tenchoowa, shichi-ten-hakki no jinsei o ayunde, kyooniitatteirusoo da.</p>

7. Four-character kanji: 九牛一毛²

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Just a small portion out of large amount</p> <p>Example: Don't worry about that. Your loss is just a strand of the hair of nine cows. Similar Myanmar Proverb: ဆင်ပိန်ကျဲလောက် A skinny elephant is bigger than a buffalo.</p>	<p>Imi: kyuu too no ushi no mono no ke no naka no ippon to iukoto de, dairyoona mono no naka no gokuichibu no koto. Kiwametewazukanato no tatoe. Mata, torunitarinai.</p> <p>Eg- sore gurai no shippaiwa, kyuu-gyuu-ichi-moo nisuginai no da kara, Amarikinisurukotowanai.</p>

8. Four-character kanji: 百聞一見³

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Seeing once is surer than hearing 100 times.</p> <p>Example: Seeing once is surer than hearing 100 times.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: ကြားမယုံကြံဖူးမှသိ - Seeing is believing</p>	<p>Imi: Hyakkaikikuyoriikkaimiruhogotashika de arukoto. Hito no iukotoyorijibun no me de tashikamerukotogadaiji.</p> <p>Eg- hyakubunwaikkennishikazu.</p>

9. Four-character kanji: 一期一会⁴

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Friendship should be valued as we encounter once in a life time.</p> <p>Similar Myanmar Proverb: ရေစက်ဆုံလိုကြုံတွေ့ Every encounter in life is due to past life's</p>	<p>Imi: isshooniichidoshika au kikaiganaiyoona en de arukoto. Ichigowa, bukkyoo de issho no koto.</p> <p>Eg- jinsei, ichigo-ichiedesukara, hito to no deaiwataisetsunishinakerebanarimasen.</p>

¹Shichi-ten-hakki²Kyuu-gyuu-ichi-moo³Hyaku-bun-ikken⁴ichigo-ichie

10. Four-character kanji: 一汁一菜¹

Myanmar	Japanese
Meaning: Simple Food Similar Myanmar Proverb: မြန်ရာဟင်းကောင်း Even Simple food can give you an appetite.	Imi :ichishurui no shiru to ichishurui no okazu,shissonashokuji no tatoe. Eg- sohuwabyooki o shite kara, ichijuu- issaishugidesu.

11. Four-character kanji: 二者択一²

Myanmar	Japanese
Meaning: Choose any one from two Similar Myanmar Proverb: ရွေးချယ်စရာ Choice	Imi: hutatsu no kotogara no dochirakaippoo o sentakushinakerebanaranaikoto. Eg- imootowakotoshi, shuushokukashingakuka Ni-sha-taku- itsushinakerebanaranai.

12. Four-character kanji: 二人三脚³

Myanmar	Japanese
Meaning: Work in co-operation Similar Myanmar Proverb: တလှေထဲစီး Rowing the same boat. Travelling in the same boat	Imi: hutarigahitokumininatteyokoninarabi, tagainitonariattaashikubi o musunde san kyakuninattehashirukyooji no koto. Koronjitehutarigakyooryoku shite hitotsu no monogoto o isshoniokonaukoto. Eg. Ozi to chichi wa, ni-nin-san-kyaku de ima no kaisha o tsukuriageta.

III. Compoundkanji used to express emotions and ideas

1. Four-character kanji: 喜怒哀楽⁴

Myanmar	Japanese
Meaning: happiness, anger, sadness, enjoyment common emotions of human beings <i>Example: Children stay away from the new class teacher because she is moody though good-natured.</i> Similar Myanmar Proverb: လူအမျိုးမျိုးစိတ်အထွေထွေ Characters differ as people differ.	Imi: yorokobi to ikari to kurushimi to tanoshimi. Ningendaremoga matte irusamazamanakanjoo no koto o iu. Eg. Shinnin no sensei watotemoyoi sensei nanodaga, ki-do-ai-raku o sugukaonidasu node, jidookarawakeiensareteiru.

¹ichijuu-issai

²nisha-takuitsu

³ni-nin-sankyaku

⁴Ki-do-ai-raku

2. Four-character kanji: 一日千秋¹

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: While waiting, a day seems to me ten thousand years.</p> <p>Example: J. League which we have been waiting for is coming tomorrow.</p> <p><i>Similar Myanmar Proverb:</i> လည်ပင်းညောင်ရေအိုးဖြစ် <i>Waiting makes my length a long-necked vase.</i></p>	<p>Imi: ichinichigasennennimoomoeruh odonagakukanjirarerukoto. Sugokumachitooshikiomoukoto.</p> <p>Eg- ashitawaichinichi-senshuu no omoidematta j riigu no shiai.</p>

3. Four-character kanji: 心機一轉²

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Something changed your bad mood to a good one.</p> <p>Example: My straying mind has become stable because of the new golf stick that my father bought for me.</p> <p><i>Similar Myanmar Proverb:</i> အဆိုးထဲက အကောင်း <i>The good out of the bad</i></p>	<p>Imi: arukoto o kikkakenikimochigayoihooni, sukkarikawarukoto.</p> <p>Eg – konotokorodagekihushin de nayandeitaboku da ga, chichi nikatteromorattaatarashiipatto de, shinki-ittenganbarutsumorida.</p>

4. Four-character kanji: 半信半疑³

Myanmar	Japanese
<p>Meaning: Truth or lie Can't believe what other people say.</p> <p>Example: Although I couldn't believe Grandpa's words to buy baseball gloves for me, now it's in my hands.</p> <p><i>Similar Myanmar Proverb:</i> ယုံတဝက်မယုံတဝက် <i>Half believe, half don't.</i></p>	<p>Imi: han bun washinji, hanbunwautagaukoto. Hontookausoka, handanimayoukoto.</p> <p>Hito no hanashi o nakanakashinjisarenaikoto.</p> <p>Eg. Tanjoobiniguroobu o kattedkureru to iusohu no hanashi o bokuwahanshin-hangi de kiiteitaga, imakokonisono ma atarashiiguroobugaaru.</p>

Findings and Discussion

There are many four-character kanji which are made up of two compound kanji and those which are made up of four separate kanji. In this paper, the three different categories of compound kanji which can be seen in everyday expressions of Japanese people are studied. The study found out that some compound kanji used to express actions and manners in Japanese language have similar proverbs and saying in Myanmar language. For example, four-character Kanji : An-chuu-mo-sa-ku is similar to Myanmar saying “မြေစမ်းခရမ်းပျိုး” which means “growing vegetable in order to try the soil”.

¹Ichi-nichi-sen-shuu

²Shin-ki-itten

³Han-shin-han-gi

Similarly, some compound kanji created by numerals can be compared with some Myanmar proverbs and sayings. For example, four –character kanji: Isseki-ni-choo which means getting two benefits from one has Myanmar equivalent “ခဲတစ်လုံးနှင့်ငှက်နှစ်ကောင်ပစ်၊ တစ်ချက်ခုတ်နှစ်ချက်ပြတ်” . In both languages, numbers ‘one’, ‘two’ etc. are used .

The last category is compound kanji used to indicate emotions and ideas. When they are compared with Myanmar language, some of them have similar Myanmar equivalents. For example, four-character kanji: Ichi-nichi-sen-shuu means “While waiting, a day seems to me ten thousand years” has similar Myanmar proverb ‘လည်ပင်းညောင်ရေအိုးဖြစ်’ which means *Waiting makes my neck a long-necked vase*.

From these findings, it can be concluded that all three *four-character kanji under study in this paper have Myanmar equivalents in sayings or proverbs*. It is hoped that the knowledge of four character idioms can help the learners of Japanese language to be able to use them appropriately and convey the intended meaning to the listener in everyday social communication.

Conclusion

This paper presents the contrastive study of four character kanjis in Japanese language which are common in their daily life and similar Myanmar proverbs and sayings. Every language has its own special characteristics and learners should be aware of them in learning that language. The use of kanjis is very significant in Japanese language. Studying kanjis will be very beneficial for the Myanmar learners of Japanese language. This study will be a great help for the Myanmar learners of Japanese language to be able to communicate effectively with Japanese people.

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