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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2d93q9j5>

Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 33(33)

ISSN

1069-7977

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Publication Date

2011

Peer reviewed

Introducing Chinese Characters to Beginners Through the Use of Embodied Animations

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Abstract: Chinese has become one of the most popular foreign languages in K-12 classrooms and colleges in the US. However, it is considered hard-to-learn due to its difficult characters. We created the computer-based Chinese character learning (CCL) program using the embodied animations (EA), which are the animations that contain bodily movements or gestures in videos. The empirical study investigated whether EA facilitates CCL for beginning learners by comparing three learning conditions: traditional learning (TL), etymological animation learning (AL), and embodied animation learning (EAL).

The study adopted an experimental between-subject design. The learning materials were 18 characters. Thirty-six adult participants who did not speak any Chinese were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. The results show that the EAL group yielded better CCL outcome than the AL group, and both groups outperformed the TL group. The findings suggest that learners best learn characters through the use of embodied animations.