

Introduction

1 The language

1.1 *Genetic affiliation*

It might seem to the casual observer that Japanese is closely related to Chinese, but nothing could be further from the truth. Admittedly Japanese 'looks' similar to Chinese and has absorbed a large number of Chinese words over the centuries, but these loanwords are merely a sign of cultural contact, not of genetic affiliation. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of two languages more dissimilar: Chinese being originally monosyllabic (now largely disyllabic), tonal, and isolating, with a subject-verb-object (SVO) order; Japanese being poly_syllabic, atonal, and agglutinative, with a subject-object-verb (SOV) order. It was precisely this vast gulf between the two languages that caused so many problems when the Japanese tried to adapt the Chinese script to their own ends in the eighth and ninth centuries.

The whole question of where the language comes from is a highly charged subject in Japan, for the idea that Japanese is in some way unique, *sui generis* and without parallel, is a potent and indeed comfortable myth in times of self-doubt. A great many books and articles dealing with the origins and peculiarities of the language are produced for the general reading public, and they sell extremely well. The roots of the language are indeed uncertain. Some scholars, perhaps the majority, argue that it is related to Korean and to the Altaic group of languages that is found throughout central Asia as far west as Turkey. Similarities in the way verbs are formed point to a common origin. Certainly, if one were to restrict oneself to syntax alone, Japanese and Korean are so similar as to appear obvious sister languages. The problem lies with the vocabulary, where it has proved extremely difficult to identify words with a common root that could not at the same time simply be loanwords from Korean into Japanese.

The relative scarcity of sets of words that are clearly connected with each other is something that plagues Altaic linguistics in general and renders the kind of safe comparative work common within the Indo-European group highly problematic. Neither does it help that the phonological characteristics of Japanese and Korean are quite distinct: Korean allows consonant clusters and

has a distinction between aspirates and non-aspirates that never seems to have existed in Japanese. And if it remains difficult to clarify this relationship, any hope of being able to reach further back is a forlorn one indeed. The major obstacle is the so-called time-depth: if Japanese and Korean in fact diverged from one another in the past, it may well have occurred as long as 5,000 years ago. This in itself makes reconstruction of a possible language tree extremely difficult, although it remains tempting. It should be mentioned here, perhaps, that Ainu, which is restricted to the northern islands of Japan and which is now almost extinct, has no obvious relationship to Japanese and is treated as yet another isolate.

If the syntax still makes one look north or north-west to the Asian continent, certain aspects of the vocabulary and the phonology (in particular the fact that Japanese has open syllables and allows simple word reduplication for plurals and other uses, such as onomatopoeia) draw one south, either to the Austronesian group, or even as far afield as south India. Fairly good sound correspondences have in fact been identified here, particularly in the area of agricultural vocabulary. All that can be said at present, however, is that there is a growing consensus that Japanese may well be a hybrid, a mixture between Altaic in the grammar and syntax and perhaps Austronesian in the lexicon. It is probable that the mixture is complex: verbs from the south, for instance, adopting inflections from the north. Whatever the truth of the matter, we know that even today the language is unusually hospitable to foreign loanwords, which can be absorbed into the structure of the language with surprising ease.

1.2 General comments

Japanese is an SOV language, and the rule that the verb must appear in sentence-final position is strictly observed, except for occasional inversion for purposes of emphasis. The modifier always precedes what is being modified. A general and quite useful distinction can be made between *variable* words, which inflect in one form or another, and *invariable* words, which never change their shape (table 1).

As one might expect, much of the grammar is concerned with the variable forms, in particular the verbal inflections, which are rich in aspectual and modal distinctions and which can reach a considerable length, especially in the older forms of the language.

Table 1 Basic distinctions

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Invariable</i>
true verbs, in form root + stem + suffix(es)	nouns, including interrogatives etc.
descriptive verbs, equivalent to English 'adjectives'	particles, interjections, conjunctives
the copula, marking the 'is' of equivalence: a = b	adverbs etc.

Verbs change by adding a series of suffixes and endings for tense, aspect and mood, but they are not marked for either person or number. It is all the more surprising then that the subject of a Japanese sentence, particularly in the spoken language, is omitted whenever possible. The reasons for this relative uninterest in marking person lies not so much with the grammar as with a cultural preference for oblique statements. Context is usually enough to tell listeners what they need to know, and a major role is played by the highly developed system of respect language. It is perhaps this aspect of the language that causes the learner so many problems, because, although clues are always present, it sometimes demands a detailed knowledge of Japanese society and custom to interpret them correctly. The respect language marks nouns where necessary, but the system is most highly developed in the verbs, every one of which is, or can be, marked either 'humble' or 'respectful' depending on the status of the subject. In the commoner verbs, this can involve not just a special inflection but a completely different form altogether.

Sentences are also marked either 'plain' or 'polite' with reference to one's interlocutor. Indeed it is true to say that no spoken Japanese sentence is without a marker or series of markers relating the speaker of the sentence to the addressee. The constant presence of this so-called pragmatic aspect of language in the lexicon and grammar is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the language. Ways have been found to circumvent this in written styles, where it can be an unnecessary intrusion, although it is still the case that the narrative voice in Japanese fiction is usually more insistent than it is, say, in English; and the suppression or neutralisation of this element was one of the major concerns of modern writers when they tried to create a new literary language out of the colloquial in the early years of the twentieth century.

What this means, of course, is that speakers of Japanese, be they native or foreign, must be constantly aware of social distinctions and appropriate ways of saying things. Not that this makes it unique, but in Japanese such concerns are overtly expressed in the choice of words and verb endings. To this extent Japanese is highly formalistic and ritualised, with such phrases as ‘would you deign to?’ and ‘could I not perhaps have the favour of your doing?’ being common and indeed *de rigueur* in the most ordinary of situations.

The Japanese lexicon is large, not only because of its antiquity but also because of its propensity for borrowing, first from Chinese, later from Portuguese and Dutch, and more recently from English. The majority of these loanwords have been nouns, mainly because Japanese nouns are invariable, remaining unchanged for case, gender and even number: this makes their absorption a relatively simple matter in terms of structure. Words of Chinese origin account for over 50 per cent of modern Japanese vocabulary, although words of English origin are now extremely common in all walks of life, especially advertising. Whenever a word is borrowed it is of course altered so that it will fit the fairly inflexible phonemic structure of Japanese. This has been true throughout history. The complex consonantal clusters and tonal variations that are typical of Chinese have all been ironed out, so contributing to an embarrassing increase in the number of homophones; and the ‘difficult’ sounds of western European languages have likewise been naturalised to the extent that they are not readily intelligible to the foreigner who might speak the language in question. So one comes across words such as:

volume	⇒	<i>boryūmu</i>	milk	⇒	<i>miruku</i>
Arbeit	⇒	<i>arubaito</i>	Cambridge	⇒	<i>Kenburijji</i>
restaurant	⇒	<i>resutoran</i>	coffee	⇒	<i>kōhī</i>

What is perhaps a little more disconcerting is the habit of extreme abbreviation:

word processor	⇒	<i>wado purosesa</i>	⇒	<i>wāpuro</i>
supermarket	⇒	<i>sūpā māketto</i>	⇒	<i>sūpā</i>
strike	⇒	<i>sutoraiki</i>	⇒	<i>suto</i>
basic salary raise (‘base up’)	⇒	<i>bēsu appu</i>	⇒	<i>bea</i>

2 The writing system

2.1 A mixed system

In many ways it was by an unfortunate quirk of history that Chinese was the first written language the Japanese were to encounter; an already difficult script had to be transformed and adapted into something even more complicated. It is no exaggeration to say that the Japanese use the most complex writing system in the world today. One might assume that this represented an intolerable burden, but such is not the case. It has led to a stylistic richness hardly dreamt of in the West and has certainly not held back the cultural or scientific development of the nation.

Modern Japanese is written with a combination of four different systems: romanisation, the two syllabaries, known as *hiragana* and *katakana*, and Chinese characters, known as *kanji*. All four can sometimes be found together in the same sentence, although the frequency of use of any particular system will depend on the subject and the style. A rough distribution of these systems is as follows:

<i>Romanisation</i>	Trade marks, acronyms, page numbers (Arabic and Roman), advertisements
<i>Hiragana</i>	Grammatical elements: particles, inflections, suffixes etc.
<i>Katakana</i>	Loanwords, other than of Chinese origin, 'italics'
<i>Kanji</i>	Chinese loanwords, Japanese nouns and verbal roots

2.2 Romanisation

Unlike the situation in Chinese, where different systems of romanisation abound, there are only two systems of romanising Japanese in common use today. The differences are quickly learned. Table 2 shows the traditional arrangement of syllables for basic, voiced and palatalised sets. In the table a few cases have alternates listed in brackets. The main system shown here is the so-called Hepburn system, after the American missionary James Curtis Hepburn (1815-1911), who devised it for his *Japanese-English Glossary*, first published in 1867. This is in common use mainly because it allows speakers of English to produce a reasonable approximation to the Japanese sound with very little effort. The alternative system is known as the 'kunreishiki' or 'cabinet instruction

system', devised, as the name suggests, by the Japanese government. Both systems have their defenders, and it is fortunate that the differences are in fact slight and hardly create an impediment to study or recognition.

Table 2 Traditional arrangement of syllables

<i>Basic</i>										
a	ka	sa	ta	na	ha	ma	ya	ra	wa	n
i	ki	shi (si)	chi (ti)	ni	hi	mi		ri		
u	ku	su	tsu (tu)		nu	fu (hu)	mu	yu	ru_	
e	ke	se	te	ne	he	me	re			
o	ko	so	to	no	ho	mo	yo	ro	[wo]	
<i>Voiced</i>										
	ga	za	da_	ba, pa						
	gi	ji (zi)	ji (zi)	bi, pi						
	gu	zu	zu	bu, pu						
	ge	ze	de	be, pe						
	go	zo	do	bo, po						
<i>Palatalised</i>										
	kya	sha (sya)	cha (tya)	bya, pya						
	kyu	shu (syu)	chu (tyu)	byu, pyu						
	kyo	sho (syo)	cho (tyo)	byo, pyo						
	gya	ja (zya)	nya	hya	mya	rya_				
	gyu	ju (zyu)	nyu	hyu	myu	ryu				
	gyo	jo (zyo)	nyo	hyo	myo	ryo				

NB: The syllable *wo* in this table is distinguished from *o* in *hiragana* and *katakana* but not normally in romanised form. There are also double consonants, *kk*, *ss*, *tt*, *pp*, for instance, and long vowels (written in this textbook a, i, u, e, o) which are roughly twice the length of the normal short vowels.

2.3 The syllabaries

These syllabaries are known by the generic term *kana*. They were developed in the eighth and ninth centuries by simplifying those Chinese characters that were being used purely for their sound value rather than for their meaning.

Table 3 *Hiragana*

Basic											
あ	か	さ	た	な	は		ま	や	ら	わ	ん
い	き	し	ち	に	ひ		み		り		
う	く	す	つ	ぬ	ふ		む	ゆ	る		
え	け	せ	て	ね	へ		め		れ		
お	こ	そ	と	の	ほ		も	よ	ろ	を	
Voiced											
	が	ざ	だ		ば、ぱ						
	ぎ	じ	ぢ		び、ぴ						
	ぐ	ず	づ		ぶ、ぷ						
	げ	ぜ	で		べ、ぺ						
	ご	ぞ	ど		ぼ、ぽ						
Palatalised											
	きゃ	しゃ	ちゃ		びゃ、ぴゃ						
	きゅ	きゅ	ちゅ		びゅ、ぴゅ						
	きょ	しよ	ちよ		びょ、ぴょ						
	ぎゃ	じゃ		にゃ	ひゃ		みゃ		りゃ		
	ぎゅ	じゅ		にゅ	ひゅ		みゅ		りゅ		
	ぎょ	じょ		にょ	ひょ		みょ		りょ		

Voicing is produced by adding a diacritical mark to the top right hand corner of the *kana*: *ka* か ⇒ *ga* が for example. Palatalisation is shown by adding a small *ya* や, *yu* ゆ, or *yo* よ to the *kana*: *ki* き ⇒ *kya* きゃ. Double consonants are shown by a small *tsu* つ, which precedes the sign in question: *tte* って. For the correct stroke order see the end of this introduction.

Table 4 *Katakana*

Basic											
ア	カ	サ	タ	ナ	ハ		マ	ヤ	ラ	ワ	ン
イ	キ	シ	チ	ニ	ヒ		ミ		リ		
ウ	ク	ス	ツ	ヌ	フ		ム	ユ	ル		
エ	ケ	セ	テ	ネ	ヘ		メ		レ		
オ	コ	ソ	ト	ノ	ホ		モ	ヨ	ロ	ヲ	
Voiced											
	ガ	ザ	ダ		バ、パ						
	ギ	ジ	ヂ		ビ、ピ						
	グ	ズ	ヅ		ブ、プ						
	ゲ	ゼ	デ		ベ、ペ						
	ゴ	ゾ	ド		ボ、ポ						
Palatalised											
	キャ	シャ	チャ		ヒヤ、ピャ						
	キュ	シュ	チュ		ヒユ、ピュ						
	キョ	ショ	チョ		ビョ、ピョ						
	ギャ	ジャ	ニャ		ヒヤ	ミヤ			リヤ		
	ギュ	ジュ	ニユ		ヒユ	ミユ			リュ		
	ギョ	ジョ	ニョ		ヒョ	ミョ			リョ		

As with *hiragana*, voicing is produced by adding a diacritical mark to the top right hand corner of the *kana*: *ka* カ ⇒ *ga* ガ for example. Palatalisation is shown by adding a small *ya* ヤ, *yu* ユ, or *yo* ヨ to the *kana*: *ki* キ ⇒ *kyu* キュ. Double consonants are shown by a small ツ, which precedes the sign in question: *tte* ッテ.

The simplification took two forms. *Hiragana* (table 3) emerged from the cursive form of the character taken to an extreme: 安⇒あ, 宇⇒う; it was used for the writing of personal communications, poetry, and was the main medium for the court women who dominated the writing of fiction in the late tenth and eleventh centuries. *Katakana* (table 4), on the other hand, developed from the habit of

taking part for whole: 阿⇒ア, 呂⇒ロ, and first emerged in official documents and in the writing of Buddhist priests. The psychological effect of choosing to write in one rather than the other syllabary differs, of course, through history; today *katakana* is largely reserved for loanwords or to make a word stand out, much as we use italics. Any deviation from the norm can in fact be quite disturbing to read. A whole passage where the grammatical elements are expressed in *katakana* is likely to be of pre-Pacific War provenance and will now have a somewhat martial flavour.

Note that the *kana* syllabaries, although phonographic, are not alphabets, which represent an analysis of syllables in terms of their constituent consonants and vowels. Syllabaries are not designed to represent single consonants. There is a *kana* sign for *ka*, for instance, but it is simply not possible to write down the consonant *k* in isolation. Since Japanese syllables are by and large 'open', being either single vowels or consonant plus vowel, this does not cause any practical problems, but it has had considerable impact on the traditional analysis of the language. It should also be remembered that although either *hiragana* or *katakana* on its own would theoretically be adequate for transcribing the language, certain cultural and linguistic factors, such as the very high incidence of homophones, have conspired to make Chinese characters indispensable.

2.4 Kanji

One of the commoner misconceptions is that Chinese characters are in fact ideographs: signs that represent ideas. This is somewhat misleading, as it can give the impression that thought can be directly written down without the medium of language and that Chinese writing is somehow more 'direct' than a phonetic system. In fact characters are more accurately described as constituting a morphemic script, in that each character represents a morpheme, namely the minimal meaningful unit in a language. In Chinese this may mean a whole word or just part of a word. The important thing is that the character represents a linguistic unit rather than a disembodied idea.

Chinese characters are used to write the large number of Chinese words that have been borrowed over the centuries; the vast majority of such words have been nouns. As we have seen, nouns in Japanese are uninflected and never alter their shape and so the process of borrowing on this particular level has been fairly straightforward (table 5).

Table 5 Words borrowed from Chinese

Character	Reading	Constituent parts	Meaning
大学	<i>dai-gaku</i>	great-learning	university
電話	<i>den-wa</i>	lightning (hence electricity)-speak	telephone
人口	<i>jin-kō</i>	people-mouth(s)	population
東京	<i>Tō-kyō</i>	east-capital	Tōkyō

Note how these words, which mean the same thing in both Chinese and Japanese, are made up of two characters, hence each character here can be said to be standing for a morpheme: part of a word rather than a whole word. The Japanese did not stop here, however; they took the further step of using Chinese characters to write native Japanese nouns, reading them as Japanese (table 6):

Table 6 Using *kanji* to write Japanese words

Character	Japanese word	Meaning
人	<i>hito</i>	person, man
口	<i>kuchi</i>	mouth

So far, so good. Now it will be seen that the characters 人 and 口 can be read in two different ways: *hito* and *kuchi* when they occur on their own and are representing a native Japanese word, and *jin* and *kō* when they are representing a Chinese loanword. *Hito* is what the character ‘means’ in Japanese, just as we would say that 人 means ‘person’ or ‘man’ in English. But the character 人 already had a Chinese pronunciation, the modern Japanese equivalent of which is *jin*. (It is because the sound *jin* is only a Japanese approximation rather than the original Chinese sound that this is called the Sino-Japanese reading of the character). We have, therefore, the interesting situation, where one character has two or more readings (table 7):

Table 7 Different readings for one *kanji*

人	<i>JIN</i> (Sino-Japanese reading or <i>on-yomi</i>)
	<i>hito</i> (Japanese reading / meaning or <i>kun-yomi</i>)

As a very general rule, if the character is part of a compound then it should be pronounced with the *on-yomi*; if it appears in isolation it is pronounced in its *kun-yomi*. Beware, however, because exceptions to this rule are frequent, especially where names are concerned.

So much for nouns, which are simple in that they do not inflect. The real problem occurs when we encounter verbs in Japanese, which are highly inflected. The Chinese script is not able to deal with inflections of this or any other sort and so the *hiragana* syllabary must be brought into play to write down those parts of the verb that change. Happily, Japanese verbs inflect at the end rather than in the middle or at the beginning. The various forms of the verb 'speak', for example, will be represented as in table 8, with the Chinese character standing for the uninflected root of the verb and *hiragana* being used to write down the different inflected endings:

Table 8 Inflections of the verb 'speak'

話す	<i>hana-su</i>	speaks
話した	<i>hana-shita</i>	spoke
話したい	<i>hana-shitai</i>	wants to speak
話さなかった	<i>hana-sanakatta</i>	did not speak

Table 9 shows a typical dictionary entry for the character 話, which is used for both a noun and the root of a verb.

Table 9 Sample dictionary entry

話	WA (as in 電話 <i>denwa</i> 'telephone')
	<i>hana-su</i> , speak
	<i>hanashi</i> , a talk, a speech

The difficulties, as well as the fascinations, of the script should now be apparent. There are some 2,000 *kanji* in common use today: this is the minimum number required in order to be able to read a newspaper, and the minimum that all students in compulsory education must be taught. Novels, journals and specialist magazines are not restricted in this way, however, so it is probably fair

to say that the average educated Japanese can in fact passively recognise some 3,000–4,000 characters. There may, of course, be times when a character or set of characters is recognised and understood but the reading either not known or forgotten. If the publishing house considers a word to be particularly obscure, they can insert the reading (usually in the *hiragana* syllabary) alongside the characters in small type to indicate the correct pronunciation: it is then termed *furigana*. It is this phenomenon that prompted the scholar and diplomat Sir George Sansom to write: ‘One hesitates for an epithet to describe a system of writing which is so complex that it needs the aid of another system to explain it.’ Remembering how unfamiliar *kanji* are written can also be a problem. The unusually high rate of literacy in Japan is partly attributable to the fact that basic literacy is defined as the ability to read the syllabaries and a limited number of characters only.

The burden that retention of Chinese characters represents can, however, be overemphasised. Most children manage to learn them and it has been discovered, for example, that dyslexia of the type that is triggered by the vagaries of English spelling is not prevalent in Japan. In any case, such is the powerful cultural significance of characters in Japan, and such is the vital role that they play in the task of discriminating between the many homophones in the modern language, that it now seems highly unlikely that they can ever be discarded.

2.5 Construction of characters

Characters are either single entities or made up of two or more elements: the most important of these elements are the radical and the determinant. Conventionally, for the purpose of classification, all characters are assigned to one of 214 radicals and one locates them in the dictionary by identifying the radical and then counting the extra strokes. 話, for instance, would be located under the left-hand element 言 (‘word’) + six extra strokes. You will soon find yourself learning the main radicals and being able to find a character in a dictionary as fast as you can locate an English word in an English dictionary. Some radicals are a rough guide to general meaning:

言 word/speech

木 tree/wood

手 hand/doing

The character 話 is clearly divisible left/right with 言 as the radical, whereas 電 'lightning' is clearly divisible top/bottom and the radical is on the top: 雨, meaning 'rain'. It is important to observe the correct stroke order because this will help you recognise characters written by hand. General rules are:

- 1 Left before right

丿 丨 丨丨

- 2 Top before bottom

一 二 三

- 3 Horizontal before vertical 一 十 except inside characters

丨 冂 𠔼 𠔼 田

- 4 With a clearly symmetrical shape, centre first, then left, then right

丨 小 小

- 5 Vertical line protruding beyond horizontals written last

丨 冂 口 中

- 6 Horizontal line protruding beyond verticals written last

丨 冂 𠔼 冊

- 7 Right-to-left diagonal before left-to-right diagonal

ノ 人

- 8 Note the hooks ㄣ and ㄣ

丨 冂 口 丨 冂 同

- 9 Three sided top enclosure written first

丨 冂 月 用

- 10 Top-left enclosure written first

一 厂 厶 厚 原

- 11 Bottom-left enclosure usually written first

一 土 走 起、 〃 五 免 勉

but if enclosed part seems to be larger, then enclosure is written last

ノ イ 什 佳 進

- 12 Full enclosure finished bottom last

丨 冂 冂 国 国

3 PRONUNCIATION

3.1 Introduction

Refer again to the table of romanised syllables (table 2). The best way to learn pronunciation is of course to copy a native speaker. You will not be given a full phonetic description at this point. Japanese is not that difficult to pronounce for native speakers of English, but there are a few sounds that need special care and attention.

(a) There are only five vowels, which are pronounced shorter and sharper than English vowels and with minimal lip activity. Long vowels must be given double time with no break. This is very important; a failure to distinguish clearly between long and short vowels is a typical mistake that could even get you into trouble. Note that a *u* in final position may be so short that it disappears: as in the very common *desu* and *masu*.

(b) The consonants are by and large as in English except that *k, g, t, d, b, p*, are all *unaspirated*. Note this because the English equivalents are quite strongly aspirated, especially at the beginning of words. You may find this difficult to achieve at first. One way to practice this is to expel most of your breath and then try to pronounce the words.

(c) Double consonants are produced by tensing the consonant, 'catching it' and holding on to it for an instant.

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(c) Double consonants are produced by tensing the consonant, 'catching it' and holding on to it for an instant.

(d) *g* may become nasalised when it occurs inside a word or phrase. This nasalisation is a marked feature of Tokyo speech and is often a matter of individual preference.

(e) *h* becomes *f* before the vowel *u*: *fu* is technically known as a labial fricative, a puff through half-closed lips. The teeth are only marginally involved and you must take care *not* to let the top teeth touch the inside of the lower lip.

(f) *r* is neither English *r* nor *l*. It is produced by resting the tongue very lightly on the alveolar ridge (just behind the upper teeth) and then rapidly releasing this

contact. With slightly more tension, setting the tip of the tongue against the upper teeth, this sound actually approaches an English *d*.

(g) the syllabic *n*, such as occurs at the end of the word *Nihon*, is a long nasal sound which usually remains unreleased. The sound comes not directly through the nose but from the back of the mouth, and it is ‘unreleased’ in the sense that the tongue should not touch the roof of the mouth. Before *p*, *b*, or *m*, as in the word *shinbun*, it takes on the colour of an *m*. Failure to give it full weight is another typical mistake.

3.2 The concept of ‘beats’

[While reading this section refer back to table 3.]

For the purposes of pronunciation, it is useful to think of each word being made up of one or more ‘beats’. Generally every *kana* or graph is given the same amount of time; thus a four-*kana* word such as だいがく *da-i-ga-ku* is pronounced with four beats. The following points should be given particular attention:

(a) Syllabic *n* ん counts for a full beat, so the word ほん *hon* consists of two beats and the word ほんもの *honmono* consists of four.

(b) Note that palatalisations such as きゃ *kya*, しゃ *sha*, and ぎゃ *gya*, are treated as full *single* beats, not double. It is therefore important to distinguish as soon as possible between palatalisation and a true や *ya* sound. See table 10.

Table 10 Distinguishing palatalisation

Palatalised	True
きゃ・く <i>kyaku</i> ‘guest’	き・や・く <i>kiyaku</i> ‘agreement’
しょ・く <i>shoku</i> ‘job’	し・よ・く <i>shiyoku</i> ‘selfish desire’

(c) Double consonants, marked with a small つ preceding the consonant in question, are worth two full beats. See table 11.

Table 11 Distinguishing single and double consonants

<i>Single</i>	<i>Double</i>
さ・か <i>saka</i> 'slope'	さ・っ・か <i>sakka</i> 'writer'
も・と <i>moto</i> 'origin'	も・っ・と <i>motto</i> 'more'

(d) You should also take particular care to distinguish between short and long vowels. The distinction is absolutely crucial and yet rather difficult for English speakers to grasp. The general rules of orthography are in table 12.

Table 12 Distinguishing between long and short vowels

<i>Short</i>	<i>Long</i>
お・ば・さ・ん <i>oba-san</i> 'aunt'	お・ば・あ・さ・ん <i>obā-san</i> 'grandmother'
お・じ・さ・ん <i>oji-san</i> 'uncle'	お・じ・い・さん <i>ojī-san</i> 'grandfather'

(e) Note that there are irregularities between sound and spelling in the two cases of long \bar{e} and long \bar{o} . Except for the word for 'yes' ええ \bar{e} , the long vowel \bar{e} is written with the *kana* for *ei*, and for this reason you will often find it romanised as such. By and large the long vowel \bar{o} is written *ou*, although you will not find this normally mirrored in romanisation (table 13).

Table 13 Long and short vowels: writing

<i>Short</i>	<i>Long</i>
て・き <i>teki</i> 'enemy'	て・い・き <i>tēki</i> 'fixed period'
せ・か・い <i>sekai</i> 'world'	せ・い・か・い <i>sēkai</i> 'correct answer'
く・ろ <i>kuro</i> 'black'	く・ろ・う <i>kurō</i> 'hardship'
こ・り <i>kori</i> 'stiffness'	こ・う・り <i>kōri</i> 'wicker basket'

3.3 *The pitch accent*

Accent in Japanese is based on entirely different principles to accent in English. English uses stress with a combination of light-medium-heavy. A 'pitch accent' on the other hand requires a high-low pitch inside each word. As an English speaker you will consciously have to avoid putting stress on any one syllable at the expense of the other. You will also, unless you have an extremely sharp ear for this kind of thing, find it difficult at first to pick up these changes in pitch. On occasion they may seem so slight as to be non-existent, but they are always present and are important. There are times when it will actually make a difference in meaning. It is also one of the ways in which dialectal differences are manifest, and no matter how fluent you eventually become, lazy pitch awareness will betray you on the phone. You should make an effort from the very beginning to listen to how Japanese is pronounced by your native language teacher: the first step is to recognise pitch changes and to know what to listen for.

Unfortunately there are no simple rules by which accent can be predicted. Rules do exist but they are fairly complicated. The best policy for the beginner is to try and learn the basic accent of each word as it comes along. Most of the larger Japanese-English dictionaries do mark accent and it is worth paying attention to this at an early stage. One rule which may help, and which is certainly worth remembering, is that the first beat of a word is always on a

different pitch from the second one, at least as far as the standard Tōkyō accent is concerned. Study table 14 to get a general idea of how pitch accent operates:

Table 14 Pitch accent (1)

は・な・や	さ・く・ら	あ・お・い
<i>hanaya</i>	<i>sakura</i>	<i>aoi</i>
‘flower shop’	‘cherry’	‘blue’
と・う・きょ・う	な・が・さ・き	う・み
<i>Tōkyō</i>	<i>Nagasaki</i>	<i>umi</i>
‘Tokyo’	‘Nagasaki’	‘sea’
きょ・う・と	ま・く・ら	が・っ・こ・う
<i>Kyōto</i>	<i>makura</i>	<i>gakkō</i>
‘Kyōto’	‘pillow’	‘school’

When single words are combined into longer phrases adjustments must sometimes be made to the basic pattern. Again, there are no simple rules but you should be aware that this will happen and be on the look-out for it. By and large the effect of spoken Japanese is one of constant undulation as each pitch accent on the word level flows into the next.

Occasionally, as we noted above, pitch can actually make a difference to the meaning of the word. Table 15 has some examples. Not too much should be made of this phenomenon, however. Although a wrong pitch may occasion the odd stare and even produce momentary incomprehension, Japanese is not a tonal language like Chinese, where pitch is always vital. If you still find the concept of pitch difficult to grasp, remember there are twenty ways of saying ‘yes’ in English, some of which mean ‘no’.

Table 15 Pitch accent (2)

さ・け	さ・け
<i>sake</i>	<i>sake</i>
‘salmon’	‘sake’
に・ほ・ん	に・ほ・ん
<i>Nihon</i>	<i>nihon</i>
‘Japan’	‘two bottles’
じゅ・う・びょ・う	じゅ・う・びょ・う
<i>jūbyō</i>	<i>jūbyō</i>
‘serious illness’	‘ten seconds’

3.4 The phonetics of loanwords

Loanwords, other than from Chinese, are all expressed in *katakana*. Refer back to table 4. The rules for writing are the same as for *hiragana* except for long vowels, where all that is needed is a dash after the relevant graph. See the example in table 16.

Table 16 Long vowels written in *katakana*

ア・ー・ト	ク・イ・ー・ン	ジュース
<i>āto</i>	<i>kuīn</i>	<i>jyūsū</i>
‘art’	‘queen’	‘juice’

Loanwords are fully naturalised into the Japanese sound system and as a result you will find that they are unusually difficult to recognise. This may at times be awkward because Japanese are often puzzled when you do not recognise a word that is ‘obviously’ foreign. These words are used quite widely in modern Japanese and you will have to become adept at picking them out. Because of the need to accommodate certain sounds not normally found in the native sound system, some unusual *katakana* combinations are used. These are listed in table 17. Notice that, as with palatalisation, the second element is reduced in size in order to show that the combination is to be seen as worth only one beat.

Table 17 *Katakana* employed for loanwords

	ツァ (tsa)		ファ (fa)		ヴァ (va)
	ティ (ti)	ディ (di)	フィ (fi)	ウィ (wi)	ヴィ (vi)
	トゥ (tu)	ドゥ (du)			ヴ (vu)
	テュ (tyu)	デュ (dyu)			
シェ (she)	ツェ (tse)		フェ (fe)	ウェ (we)	ヴェ (ve)
ジェ (je)	チェ (che)				
	ツォ (tso)		フォ (fo)	ウォ (wo)	ヴォ (vo)

Because Japanese syllables are open, foreign words that contain the consonant + vowel pattern are easily naturalised. Table 18 shows a few common examples that will cause you no problems.

Table 18 Consonant + vowel loanwords

ピ・ア・ノ	カ・メ・ラ	パ・ノ・ラ・マ
<i>piano</i>	<i>kamera</i>	<i>panorama</i>
‘piano’	‘camera’	‘panorama’

The majority of foreign words do not fit into this simple pattern, however, and you will encounter what may appear to you to be some fairly strange concoctions. Table 19 contains a representative sample. Many foreign words were and still are being adopted into Japanese. Most of them are from English, but this often gives you only the smallest of advantages. Not only is the pronunciation altered out of all recognition, but the meaning may be either more or less specific. We end this section with an example of four words, all of foreign origin, that have unusually specific meanings.

- (a) カード *kado* is from the English and is used for an index or catalogue card.
- (b) カルテ *karute* is from the German ‘Karte’ and is only used for a patient’s record in hospital.
- (c) カルタ *karuta* is from the Portuguese ‘carta’ and refers to Japanese playing cards. This word has become so domesticated that it is often written in *kanji*: 歌留多.
- (d) トランプ *toranpu* is from the English ‘trumps’ and is used to refer to modern Western playing cards.

Table 19 Further loanword examples

ポテ	ゲーム	ナイフ
<i>poteto</i>	<i>gēmu</i>	<i>naifu</i>
‘potato’	‘game’	‘knife’
ミルク	サラダ	テント
<i>miruku</i>	<i>sarada</i>	<i>tento</i>
‘milk’	‘salad’	‘tent’
ルイス	ルノワール	ロンドン
<i>Ruisu</i>	<i>Runowāru</i>	<i>Rondon</i>
Lewis	Renoir	London
ベニス	ベトナム	ベルギー
<i>Benisu</i>	<i>Betonamu</i>	<i>Berugī</i>
Venice	Vietnam	Belgium
スミス	サッチャー	チケット
<i>Sumisu</i>	<i>Satchā</i>	<i>chiketto</i>
Smith	Thatcher	‘ticket’
チップ	ラジオ	ディスコ
<i>chippu</i>	<i>rajio</i>	<i>disuko</i>
‘tip’	‘radio’	‘disco’
ロケット	バケツ	ポケット
<i>roketto</i>	<i>baketsu</i>	<i>poketto</i>
‘rocket’	‘bucket’	‘pocket’

4 Dialects

Dialect variation within Japan is as rich as in most European countries, many dialects being almost mutually unintelligible. As elsewhere, the standard speech adopted for official, nationwide communication has always emanated from the centre of political and cultural power. From earliest times to the eighteenth century, this has been Kyōto, but from around the end of the eighteenth century the centre finally shifted to Edo (Tōkyō), where it has remained ever since.

Educated Tōkyō speech is now the standard for television and radio, although regional accents often show through. Considerable social stigma is attached to those local accents from the north and the far south, the degree of opprobrium being in direct relation to the degree of comprehensibility by outsiders.

Dialect groups can be analysed along two rather different lines, depending on whether one is searching for differences in vocabulary and inflection on the one hand or pitch accent on the other. Differences in vocabulary and verb inflections show a clear East-West split running north from just west of Nagoya. Differences in pitch accent show a somewhat more complicated doughnut situation with the accents in the Kyōto and Ōsaka area differing from the group of accents in both eastern and far western Japan, which have clear similarities.

5 Writing styles

Partly because there are many levels at which classical Chinese can be absorbed into the system, and partly because of the continued divergence between the spoken and written language, Japanese has a very rich stylistic history. The use of Chinese can range from writing in classical Chinese proper, through a heavily sinified version of Japanese, down to today's styles. 'Sino-Japanese 1' in table 20 refers to those styles that make an attempt to 'look' Chinese although the underlying structure and method of reading reveal their Japanese origins. 'Sino-Japanese 2' refers to those styles that are essentially Japanese but contain a large number of loanwords and a few constructions influenced by Chinese, so making them distinct from the 'purer' forms used in Japanese poetry, for example.

Major breaks in style occur, of course, in the Heian period, with the invention of the *kana* syllabaries, and at the beginning of the Meiji period, when the modern styles began to emerge. All writings listed in table 20 both under Sino-Japanese 2 and 'Pure' Japanese that pre-date c. 1908 are now known as 'classical Japanese', a language distinct enough to have to be learned at school. Note how recently this shift has occurred. Even so, a considerable gap remains between spoken and written varieties of the language. A recent survey showed that, on average, words of Chinese origin comprised only 24 per cent of a typical conversation; for the written newspaper language the figure jumped to a remarkable 77 per cent.

Table 20 Differences in written styles

<i>Period</i>	<i>Classical Chinese</i>	<i>Sino-Japanese 1</i>	<i>Sino-Japanese 2</i>	<i>'Pure' Japanese</i>
Nara 710–794	Official documents, Chinese poetry, Buddhist writings	Male diaries and letters		Japanese poetry
Heian 794–1185	Official histories, Chinese poetry (declining)	Official documents, male diaries	Tale collections	Emergence of <i>kana</i> , female writings, Japanese poetry
Medieval 1185–c.1600	Chinese poetry, documents in foreign relations	Male letters, official documents, historical narratives	Military romances, tales, popular religious writings, Nō texts	Japanese poetry
Tokugawa c.1600–1868	Chinese poetry (revival), philosophical and historical prose	Male letters, official documents	Samurai romances, other 'serious fiction'	Fiction, <i>haikai</i> poetry, playscripts
Post-Restoration 1868–c.1908	Male diaries, some prose	Official documents, some prose	Modern newspapers styles, fiction, poetry and playscripts	
c.1908–1945		Male diaries	Modern newspapers styles, fiction, poetry and playscripts	
Post-War			All modern written styles	

6 Further reading

The compilation and marketing of dictionaries is, like much else in Japan, a growth industry. As you proceed, you will find yourself having recourse to a veritable army of them: the following is just an introductory discussion.

At the outset all you will need is either F. Sakade, ed., *A Guide to Reading and Writing Japanese* (Tokyo: Tuttle, rev. edn, 1961) or W. Hadamitzky and M. Spahn, *A Guide to Writing Kanji and Kana*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1991), both workbooks. P. G. O'Neill, *Essential Kanji* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1973) or W. Hadamitzky, *Kanji and Kana* (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1981) are also useful: although they are not really dictionaries, they tell you how to write the characters and give the main readings and meanings. A. N. Nelson's *Japanese-English Character Dictionary* (Tokyo: Tuttle,

2nd rev. edn, 1974) will soon become an indispensable companion, allowing you to move from character to reading to English equivalent with relative ease. Another more recent dictionary is M. Spahn and W. Hadamitzky, *Japanese Character Dictionary* (Tokyo: Nichigai Associates, 1989), which has the added advantage that one can look up words on the basis of the second character in a compound, not just the first. From either of these dictionaries, it is not difficult to wean yourself on to a Japanese-Japanese character dictionary, the best one-volume one being Ogawa Tamaki's *Shinjigen* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1968). Always remember, however, that as you proceed it is wise to learn compounds rather than single characters. Avoid dictionaries that advertise a 'new approach' to character analysis, because you will end up having to learn two systems instead of one. You can, of course, also look up words on their phonetic basis. There are many small dictionaries of this type, but you should get into the habit of referring to Masuda Ko's *Kenkyusha's New Japanese-English Dictionary* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 4th rev. edn, 1974) wherever possible. The most important one-volume Japanese-Japanese dictionary of this type is Shinmura Izuru's *Kojien* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 4th rev. edn, 1991), which takes you from *kana* to *kanji* to meaning.

A general discussion of the language and its cultural setting can be found in R. A. Miller, *The Japanese Language* (Chicago University Press, 1967), and the more recent M. Shibatani, *The Languages of Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 1990). If you have any further questions about grammar go to S. Makino and M. Tsutsui, *A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar* (Tokyo: The Japan Times, 1986) or the highly technical 1198-page S. Martin, *A Reference Grammar of Japanese* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). The honorific system is well described in P. G. O'Neill's programmed course *Respect Language in Modern Japanese* (London: Luzacs, 1966); details of how the modern writing system evolved can be found in G. B. Sansom, *An Historical Grammar of Japanese* (Oxford University Press, 1928, repr. 1968), pp.1-68, and the best way to compare Chinese, Japanese and Korean writing is to read the relevant lucid chapters in G. Sampson, *Writing Systems* (London: Hutchinson, 1985). For more information on matters of pronunciation the best reference is T. J. Vance, *An Introduction to Japanese Phonology* (Albany: State University of New York, 1987). When the going gets really rough turn to Jack Seward, *Japanese in Action* (Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1968) for some light relief. There is a good chapter on 'How to sound better in Japanese than you really are.'