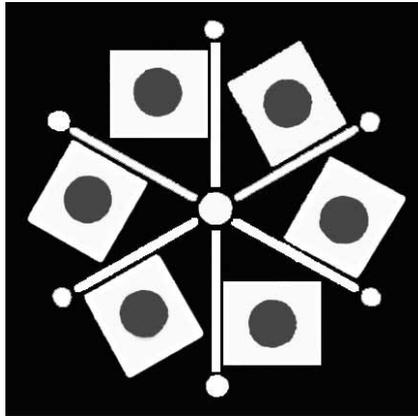


Four Hours to Basic Japanese

Kiso Nihongo Yo Jikan



George Ohsawa

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Editing by Kathy Keller
Text layout and design by Carl Ferré
Keyboarding by Alice Salinero

First Edition	1971
Second Printing	1974
Third Printing	1976
Current Edition, edited and reformatted	2012 Aug 15

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Published with the help of East West Center for Macrobiotics
www.eastwestmacrobiotics.com

ISBN 978-0-918860-06-4

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Introduction

by Herman Aihara

Japanese may be one of the most peculiar languages existing in the world today. The Japanese language is not a member of the Indo-European family, and is neither related to English nor French languages. It is not related to Chinese, even though it has borrowed a large vocabulary from Chinese ideograms. Some Japanese scholars think that Chinese is influenced by Japanese.

George Ohsawa used to say that Japanese is the language of the infinite world. In other words, Japanese has relatively no regulations. It is detached from this world and therefore it can freely express the infinite world. Since it is detached from this world, it often lacks indications of time and space. You can express in any tense simply by using the present tense. However, in the beginning, this lack of time regulation may cause confusion when studying Japanese. This is caused by the fact that you are speaking or writing while thinking in terms of English grammar. In learning Japanese, the most important thing is that you change your concept of the world and its way of expression. To learn Japanese is to learn another way of thinking. Since Japanese was developed by the Japanese mentality, the learning of Japanese entails the assimilation of Japanese thought. From this perspective, studying Japanese is studying Macrobiotics, because the Macrobiotic mentality and principles are the foundation of the Japanese mentality.

The basic differences between Japanese and English are as follows:

1. There are no words corresponding to the articles.

2. There are no plural forms. Therefore, the Japanese word 'tsuma' can mean a wife, wives, the wife, the wives.
3. Japanese rarely use pronouns. They understand the person or thing being talked about through intonations of voice.
4. There is no person or number in verbs.
5. There are no cases for nouns or pronouns. Relations between the words of a sentence are indicated by little words called particles or postpositions (*GA, WA, O, NO, KA, etc.*)
6. There is no infinitive form of verbs.

Contrary to its lack of regulation, Japanese is very particular when indicating courtesy, respect and formality that are often impossible to express in English. These expressions of courtesy, respect, and formality come from the mentality of Japanese who wish to express their deep gratitude, appreciation, and wonder of the orderliness that exists in man as well as in nature.

And finally, the learning of Japanese is the learning of a different art. The Japanese language has created arts called Haiku and Waka, which are simple forms of art. Haiku especially aims at the expression of the order of nature by using only seventeen letters. It seems to me that it is impossible to convey this art in English. It is an art of yin and yang, heaven and earth, flower and bird, mountain and valley. Haiku leads you through ever-changing nature and teaches you an emotionless world. Haiku opens up your mind so that you can see and feel the great nature of the tiny morning dew in the backyard. Japanese expands your mind to infinity.

Of course, it is not an easy job to master such Japanese. This small publication aims at giving you the key to enter the gate leading toward further study of the Japanese language. It is with the utmost pleasure that I am able to serve you with this guide as you once served me with a guide to English or American language.

Recommended Books for the Study of Japanese:

For those who wish to study Japanese beyond the scope of this introduction, there is a way to continue your study indefinitely beyond the first four hours, even though they are all that is necessary. Those who study Japanese are fortunate to have an excellent series of books known as Naganuma's *Complete Japanese Course*.

1. *Basic Japanese Course*. This is a series of fifty lessons, very short and interesting ones, which take a reader, in the fashion of a children's book, straight through all of the Japanese grammar you will ever need to use—and you will never need to study it again. Japanese grammar is very simple, so simple that Japanese themselves never need to study it in school. It is a clever puzzle—a beautiful mosaic of planned harmony. You will be finished with this course in a few weeks, together with the Grammar and Glossary volume.
2. *Grammar and Glossary*. This volume accompanies the basic course, providing every thing you need to understand it, with all explanations in English.
3. *Standard Japanese Reader, Vol. 1*.
4. *Word Book, Vol. 1*.
5. *Kanji Book, Vol. 1*.

Until this point, all of the writing has been in “Romaji,” that is to say, Roman letters, but now you go back over the same lessons quickly in the easy Japanese alphabet, a beautiful one, kana. As you read, the “Chinese characters” are added one by one, in a special order, so that you learn them naturally. The vocabulary is explained in the Word Book, and the characters are completely explained in the Kanji Book.

When you are finished with the lessons you have already learned, you turn the page to begin reading thirty stories, ancient and modern, in many different types and styles of speech, some funny, some beautiful, some practical. All of them explore different aspects of an unknown culture.

There are eight textbooks in all, each with word and kanji books, and additional study materials that are available; only five of them are considered necessary to know almost everything necessary for modern Japanese, while the remaining three lead the student into more ancient forms.

The *Basic Japanese Course* may be obtained from:

The Naganuma Tokyo School of the Japanese Language
38, Nampeidai-Machi
Shibuya-ku, Tokyo Tel.: (463) 7261, 7262

Kyoto Japanese Language School
Ichijo-Dori, Muromachi, Nishi Kamikyo-ku 602
Kyoto Tel.: 431-6737

(The Kyoto School specializes in the “Jordan” modernized text published by Yale University Press.)

Four Hours to Basic Japanese

with the Unique Principle

For English-speaking people, Japanese is probably the easiest major language to learn in spoken form. Four major factors make for this:

1. There is no verb conjugation in basic Japanese, the verb being identical for any person, singular or plural.
2. Simple Japanese can be spoken effectively using the present tense only.
3. Used in this way all verbs are regular and have the same ending: “*masu*.”
4. Japanese is the easiest major language to reproduce; all Japanese sounds are easily adapted from English phonetics.

There being no verb conjugation, lengthy memorization of infinitives, multiple endings, etc. is not needed; only one word need be learned for each verb:

I go = *Yukimasu*
You go = *Yukimasu*
He goes = *Yukimasu*
She goes = *Yukimasu*
It goes = *Yukimasu*

We go = *Yukimasu*
You go = *Yukimasu*
They go = *Yukimasu*

Pronouns

Singular
I = *watakushi*
You = *anata*

Plural
We = *watakusitai*
You = *anatatai*

He, she = <i>ano kata</i>	They = <i>ano katata</i>
It = <i>sore</i>	These = <i>korera</i>
This = <i>kore</i>	Those = <i>arera</i>
That = <i>are</i>	

Possessive pronouns are formed by adding the suffix “no.”

My = *watakusino*
 Our = *watakusitatino*

In conversation, however, a person’s name is generally used, rather than the corresponding pronoun.

Several other structural simplifications can streamline learning Japanese:

1. Plural and singular forms of a noun are always identical:

horse = *uma*
 horses = *uma*

2. The articles (a, an, and the) do not exist in Japanese.

student = *seito*
 a student = *seito*
 the student = *seito*
 students = *seito*
 the students = *seito*

3. Japanese vowels always have the same sound. This pronunciation is roughly the same as Spanish or Italian:

A = the “a” in father (ah)
 I = the “i” in machine (ee)
 U = the “u” in peruse (oo)
 E = the “e” in day (eh)
 O = the “o” in go (oh)

The vowels are all spoken very sharply. The most important thing in Japanese pronunciation is to cut the vowel sounds short, never lazily extending them as in English. Once these five vowel sounds

are learned, any Japanese word can be spoken with ease.

In the following list, the Japanese phonetic system (the “syllabary edifice”) consists of 64 basic syllables, which can be romanized by using the five vowels and fourteen consonants: (parentheses indicate pronunciation)

	A	I	U	E	O
B	ba	bi	bu	be	bo
D	da	di	du	de	do
G	ga	gi	gu	ge	go
H	ha	hi	hu	he	ho
K	ka	ki	ku	ke	ko
M	ma	mi	mu	me	mo
N	na	ni	nu	ne	no
P	pa	pi	pu	pe	po
R	ra	ri	ru	re	ro
S	sa	si (shi)	su	se	so
T	ta	ti (chi)	tu (tsu)	te	to
W	wa	—	—	—	—
Y	ya	—	yu	—	yo
Z	za	zi	zu	ze	zo

The following sounds, introduced from China in the 11th Century, are also used, but much less often:

bya	byu	byo
gya	gyu	gyo
hya	hyu	hyo
kya	kyu	kyo
mya	myu	myo
nya	nyu	nyo
pya	pyu	pyo
rya	ryu	ryo
sya (sha)	syu (su)	syo (sho)
tya (cha)	tyu (chu)	tyo (cho)
zya (ja)	zyu (ju)	zyo (jo)

In various combinations, these 97 sounds form all Japanese words.

Because Japanese is almost wholly unaccented, all syllables receive about the same stress. A particular syllable will thus have the same sound in any word where it occurs. In the examples below, the syllable “*ma*” is pronounced the same in each case. The same holds for any other syllable.

straight = *massugu*

stop = *tomaru*

head = *atama*

There are three syllables that must be given special attention: the *ti*, *si*, and *tu*. The *ti* and *si* incorporate the English “chi” and “shi” sounds. The syllable *ti* = “chi” when spoken; *si* = “shi” when spoken.

hati (pronounced *ha-chi*)

watakusi (pronounced *wa-ta-ku-shi*)

Tu has the sound of “tsu,” as in cuts.

hitotu (pronounced *hi-to-tsu*)

This is all the information needed to reproduce Japanese phonetically. Again, the two important things to remember in pronunciation:

1. Any vowel or syllable will always have the same sound whenever used.
2. Vowels are always enunciated very clearly and sharply in contrast to usual spoken English.

Sentence Structure

Japanese syntax is slightly different from that of English. Although adjectives precede nouns in both languages, the Japanese verb is placed at the end of the sentence; the subject is identified by addition of the suffix “*wa*” or “*ga*,” and the object is identified by the suffix “*o*.”

English: He eats rice.

Japanese: Anokatawa gohano tabemasu. (He rice eats.)

To ask a question in Japanese, add the word “*ka*” after the verb. To make a negative statement, change the final “*su*” of the verb to “*sen.*” To ask a negative question, change the final “*su*” of the verb to “*sen,*” and then add the word “*ka*”:

English: He dances.

Japanese: Anokatawa odorimasu.

English: Does he dance?

Japanese: Anokatawa odorimasu ka? (He dances?)

English: He doesn’t dance.

Japanese: Anokatawa odorimasen. (He dances not.)

English: Doesn’t he dance?

Japanese: Anokatawa odorimasen ka? (He dances not?)

Numbers

Japanese uses two sets of cardinal numbers from one to ten. One set, mainly used by children, is Japanese; the other set is Chinese:

<i>Japanese</i>	<i>Chinese</i>
1 = <i>hitotu</i>	1 = <i>iti</i>
2 = <i>futatu</i>	2 = <i>ni</i>
3 = <i>mittu</i>	3 = <i>san</i>
4 = <i>yottu</i>	4 = <i>si</i>
5 = <i>itutu</i>	5 = <i>go</i>
6 = <i>muttu</i>	6 = <i>roku</i>
7 = <i>nanatu</i>	7 = <i>nana</i>
8 = <i>yattu</i>	8 = <i>hati</i>
9 = <i>kokonotu</i>	9 = <i>ku</i>
10 = <i>to</i>	10 = <i>ju</i>

The numbers after 10 are formed by combining the Chinese numbers with each other and with the Chinese numbers for 100, 1,000, etc. (600 and 800 are the only exceptions):