

Speak Japanese — the fun and easy way!



# Japanese

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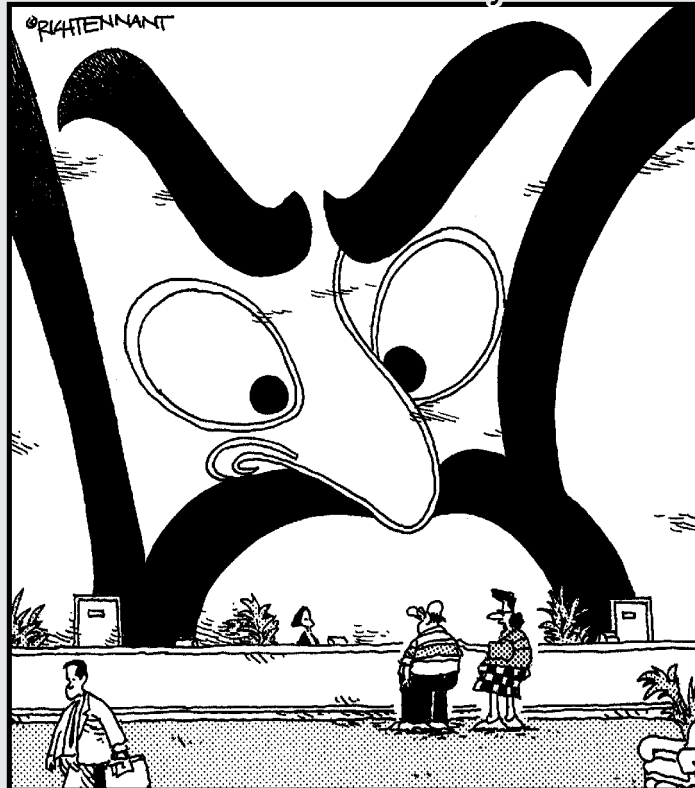


# Part I

# Getting Started

The 5<sup>th</sup> Wave

By Rich Tennant



"I don't know what you're so nervous about. Just use the phrase book and demand they upgrade us to a better room."

## *In this part . . .*

**P**art I welcomes you to the Japanese language. Here, I give you the basic facts on Japanese — how to produce Japanese sounds like a native speaker, how to put Japanese words together appropriately, how to count in Japanese, and how to communicate in Japanese with a Japanese attitude. **Jā, hajimemashō** (jahh, hah-jee-meh-mah-shohh; Let's start!).

## Chapter 1

# You Already Know a Little Japanese

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Getting the basic sounds down
  - ▶ Sounding fluent
  - ▶ Recognizing the Japanese you already know
  - ▶ Perfecting some phrases
  - ▶ Using gestures
- 

**W**elcome to Japanese! This chapter lets you open your mouth and sound like a totally different person — a Japanese person! Isn't it exciting? In this chapter, I show you how to start saying familiar Japanese words like **sushi** with an authentic Japanese accent. Next time you go to a Japanese restaurant, you can amaze your server by pronouncing **sushi** properly. This chapter also provides you with some convenient Japanese phrases and interesting tips on Japanese body language.

Use your eyes, ears, mouth, and intuition a lot as you go over this chapter and apply what you see, hear, pronounce, and feel to your daily life. To practice the language, work with your family, your close friends, or even your pets until you get the chance to talk with a Japanese person. The more you apply a language in your daily life, the better you grasp its essence.



When you speak a foreign language, don't be afraid of making mistakes and be sure to keep smiling. If you speak even a little bit of their language, Japanese people will open their hearts to you right away and appreciate your effort. Simply making the effort to communicate in another person's language is one of the best ways to act as an ambassador and contribute to international friendship.

Learning to speak a foreign language perfectly should take a back seat to this cultural exchange. Foreign language education is the greatest way to explore a different culture and the related values and ways of living. Encountering

another culture helps you know your own culture and values better. Opening your eyes to Japan is actually opening your eyes to yourself and to your roots.

## Basic Japanese Sounds

Japanese sounds are very easy to hear and pronounce. Each syllable is simple, short, and usually pronounced very clearly. With a little practice, you'll get use to them quickly. This section gets you off on the right foot (or should I say the right sound) by looking at vowels, consonants, and a couple of combinations of each. All vowels and consonants are specified by **rōmaji** (roh-mah-jee; Roman letters) in this book, so you see the familiar English alphabet. Japanese use their own system called **kana** (kah-nah) and about 2,000 Chinese characters in their daily life, but they also use **rōmaji** for the convenience of foreigners. In this book, you won't see any **kana** letters or Chinese characters, just **rōmaji**.

## Vowel Sounds

The Japanese language only has five basic vowels — **a**, **e**, **i**, **o**, and **u** — all of which sound short and crispy — plus their longer counterparts, represented by **ā**, **ē**, **ī**, **ō**, and **ū** in this book.

The difference between short and long vowel sounds in Japanese is quite a bit different than in English. In Japanese, long vowels have the same sound as short vowels — you just draw out the sound for a moment longer. To an English-speaking ear, a long vowel sounds as if it's being stressed — as if it has an accent mark.



The difference between a long vowel and a short vowel can make all the difference in the meaning of a Japanese word. For example, **obasan** (oh-bah-sahn) with the short vowel **a** means *aunt*, but **obāsan** (oh-bahh-sahn) with the long vowel **ā** means *grandmother*. If you don't differentiate the vowel length properly, no one will understand who you're talking about when all of your relatives get together.



Not getting the vowels right is a very common mistake new Japanese speakers make and one that can cause a lot of confusion, so concentrate on getting the vowel sounds right as you go through this book.

Listen for the difference between short and long vowel sounds on the CD to get the idea about vowel length. Table 1-1 lists all the Japanese vowels. Listen to their pronunciation using the CD and imitate them a few times, pretending to be a parrot. Now you know what a day in a parrot's life is like. In this book, a straight bar ( ¯ ) over a vowel indicates that it's a long vowel.



Table 1-1		Japanese Vowel Sounds	
<i>Letter</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>English Word with the Sound</i>	<i>Example</i>
a	ah	a <u>h</u> a	obasan (oh-bah-sahn; aunt)
ā	ahh		obāsan (oh-bahh-sahn; grandmother)
e	eh	b <u>e</u> d	Seto (seh-toh; a city in Japan)
ē	ehh		sēto (sehh-toh; pupil)
i	ee	f <u>e</u> t	ojisan (oh-jee-sahn; uncle)
ī or ii	eee		ojīsan (oh-jeee-sahn; grandfather)
o	oh	d <u>o</u> me	tori (toh-ree; bird)
ō	ohh		tōri (tohh-ree; street)
u	oo	f <u>o</u> ot	yuki (yoo-kee; snow)
ū	ooo		yūki (yooo-kee; courage)

## Vowel combinations

In Japanese, any two vowels can be next to each other in a word, but you might hear them as one vowel sound. For example, the combination **ai** (ah-ee; love) sounds like one vowel sound, the English *i* (as in *eye*), but to Japanese, this is actually two vowels, not one. The Japanese word **koi** (koh-ee; carp) sounds like the English one-syllable word *coy*, but to Japanese, **koi** is a two-syllable word. Other common vowel combinations are in Table 1-2. To you, some of them may sound similar to each other, but Japanese speakers hear them differently. Try hearing and saying the difference.



Table 1-2		Vowel Combinations
<i>Japanese</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
ai	ah-ee	love
mae	mah-eh	front
ao	ah-oh	blue

(continued)

**Table 1-2 (continued)**

<i>Japanese</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
au	ah-oo	meet
ue	oo-eh	up
koi	koh-ee	carp
koe	koh-eh	voice

## Whispered vowels

The vowels **i** (ee) and **u** (oo) come out as a downright whisper whenever they fall between the consonant sounds **ch**, **h**, **k**, **p**, **s**, **sh**, **t**, or **ts** or whenever a word ends in this consonant-vowel combination. What do all those consonants have in common? They're what linguists call "voiceless," meaning that they don't make your vocal cords vibrate. Don't believe me? Put your hand over your vocal cords and say a voiceless consonant like the *k* sound. Then say a "voiced" consonant like the *g* sound. Feel the difference? Whispering **i** (ee) and **u** (oo) with these voiceless consonants almost makes it sound as though these vowels disappear. Listen to the examples from Tables 1-3 and 1-4 with and without the whispered vowels.

**Table 1-3 Words with Whispered Vowels**

<i>Japanese</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
sukēto	skehh-to	skating
kusai	ksah-ee	stinky
ashita	ah-shtah	tomorrow
sō desu	sohh dehs	that's right

**Table 1-4 Words without Whispered Vowels**

<i>Japanese</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Translation</i>
sugoi	soo-goh-ee	amazing; wow
kuni	koo-nee	country
kagu	kah-goo	furniture

## Consonant Sounds

Good news. Most Japanese consonants are pronounced like they are in English. Check out the descriptions of the sounds you need to pay attention to in Table 1-5.



**Table 1-5 Japanese Consonants Different from English**

<i>Consonant</i>	<i>Description of the Sound</i>	<i>Examples</i>
r	Almost like a Spanish <b>r</b> , where you tap your tongue on the roof of your mouth just once — almost like an English <b>d</b> or <b>l</b> , but not quite.	rakuda (rah-koo-dah; camel); tora (toh-rah; tiger); tori (toh-ree; bird)
f	A much softer sound than the English <b>f</b> — somewhere between an <b>f</b> and an <b>h</b> sound. Make it by bringing your lips close to each other and gently blowing air through them.	Fujisan (foo-jee-sahn; Mt. Fuji); tōfu (tohh-foo; bean curd); fūfu (fooo-foo; married couple)
ts	The combination of <b>t</b> and <b>s</b> is hard to pronounce at the beginning of a word, as in <b>tsunami</b> , although it's easy anywhere else. My advice is to say the word <b>cats</b> in your head and then say <b>tsunami</b> .	tsunami (tsoo-nah-mee; tidal wave); tsuki (tsoo-kee; the moon)
ry	The combination of <b>r</b> and <b>y</b> is difficult to pronounce when it occurs before the vowel <b>o</b> . If so, try saying <b>ri</b> (ree) and then <b>yo</b> (yoh). Repeat many times and gradually increase the speed until you can pronounce these two sounds simultaneously. Remember that the <b>r</b> sounds almost like a <b>d</b> in English	ryō (ryohh; dormitory); ryokan (ryoh-kahn; Japanese-style inn)



Like most other languages, Japanese has double consonants too. To say these double consonants — **pp**, **tt**, **kk**, and **ss** — you pronounce them as single consonants preceded by a brief pause. Check out the following examples and listen to the pronunciation on the CD.



- ✓ **kippu** (keep-poo; tickets)
- ✓ **kitte** (keet-teh; stamps)
- ✓ **kekkon** (kehk-kohn; marriage)
- ✓ **massugu** (mahs-soo-goo; straight)

## *Sounding Fluent*

If you want to sound like a native Japanese speaker, you need to imitate the overall intonation, rhythm, and accent of native Japanese. These almost musical aspects of the language make a big difference, and they're not that difficult to achieve. In the following sections, I show you some tricks to make you sound like a Japanese.

### *Don't stress*

English sentences sound like they're full of punches, one after another, because they contain English words that have stressed syllables followed by unstressed syllables. But Japanese sentences sound very flat because Japanese words and phrases don't have any stressed syllables. So unless you are very angry or excited, suppress your desire to stress syllables when you speak Japanese.

### *Get in rhythm*

English sentences sound very smooth and connected, but Japanese sentences sound chopped up because each syllable is pronounced more clearly and separately in Japanese than in English. You can sound like a native speaker by pronouncing each syllable separately, not connecting them as you do in English.

### *Pitch perfectly*

Although Japanese speakers don't punch their syllables, they may raise or lower their *pitch* on a specific syllable in certain words. A raised pitch may sound like a stress, but if you think in terms of music, the high notes aren't necessarily stressed more than the low notes. But pitch differences in Japanese are a lot more subtle than differences between musical notes. Sometimes this slight difference can change the meaning of a word. That, however, also depends on what part of Japan you're in. For example, in eastern Japan, the

word **hashi** (hah-shee), said with high-to-low pitch means *chopsticks*, but with low-to-high pitch, it means *a bridge*. In western Japan, it's exactly the opposite: High-to-low pitch means *a bridge*, and low-to-high pitch means *chopsticks*. How can you tell what anyone means? For one thing, the eastern dialect is standard because that's where Tokyo, the capital of Japan, is located. In any event, the context usually makes it clear. If you're in a restaurant and you ask for **hashi**, you can safely assume that, no matter how you pitch this word, no one will bring you a bridge. Listen to this word said both ways on the CD and try to hear what I mean by pitch.



✓ **hashi** (hah-shee; chopsticks): The pitch goes from high to low.

✓ **hashi** (hah-shee; bridge): The pitch goes from low to high.

Okay, so they don't sound terribly different. Rather than getting all bothered about pitch, just know that it exists and try as best you can to mimic the pronunciations on the CD.



Another interesting fact about pitch: The Japanese raise their overall pitch range when they speak to their superiors. So, to a boss, client, customer or teacher, people speak as if they are chirping birds, and to their friends, assistants, and family members, they speak using their normal pitch range. This is most noticeable among women. Female workers raise their pitch greatly when they deal with business customers. They don't mean to scare their customers; they're just trying to be super polite. Women also raise their pitch when they speak to young children, just to indicate a friendly attitude toward the little ones. A Japanese woman's flattering high pitch in these contexts has a totally different tone of voice from the high pitch that she uses when she raises her pitch out of anger.

## *You Already Know a Little Japanese*

Believe or not, you already know many Japanese words: Some are Japanese words that English borrowed and incorporated; others are English words used in Japan.

### *Japanese words in English*

Do you love eating **sushi**? Do you practice **karate**? Do you hang out at **karaoke** bars? Even if you answered no to every question, you probably know what these words mean and that they come from Japanese, so you already know some Japanese.



One tip about pronunciation: Remember that there are no accented syllables in Japanese. So when you say **sushi**, don't stress the first syllable. I know the English-speaker in you wants to do it, but don't. Check out these words that traveled from Japan to become part of the English language:

- ✔ **hibachi** (hee-bah-chee): portable charcoal stove
- ✔ **jūdō** (jooo-dohh): Japanese martial art that redirects an attack back onto the attacker
- ✔ **karaoke** (kah-rah-oh-keh): form of entertainment that involves singing to prerecorded music
- ✔ **karate** (kah-rah-teh): Japanese form of self defense that relies on delivering quick, sharp blows with hands or feet
- ✔ **kimono** (kee-moh-noh): robe with wide sleeves and a sash; traditional Japanese clothing for women
- ✔ **origami** (oh-ree-gah-mee): the art of paper folding
- ✔ **sake** (sah-keh): Japanese rice wine
- ✔ **samurai** (sah-moo-rah-ee): professional warriors
- ✔ **sashimi** (sah-shee-mee): sliced raw fish
- ✔ **sukiyaki** (soo-kee-yah-kee): Japanese-style beef stew
- ✔ **sushi** (soo-shee): rice ball with sliced raw fish on top
- ✔ **tsunami** (tsoo-nah-mee): tidal wave

## *English words used in Japanese*

A ton of English words have crossed the oceans to Japan, and the number is increasing quickly. You can use many English words in Japan, if you pronounce them with a heavy Japanese accent.

- ✔ **bāsudē kēki** (bahh-soo-dehh keh-kee): birthday cake
- ✔ **jūsu** (jooo-soo): juice
- ✔ **kamera** (kah-meh-rah): camera
- ✔ **kōhī** (kohh-heee): coffee
- ✔ **nektai** (neh-koo-tah-ee): necktie
- ✔ **pātī** (pahh-tee): party
- ✔ **rajio** (rah-jee-oh): radio
- ✔ **resutoran** (reh-soo-toh-rah-n): restaurant
- ✔ **sutēki** (soo-tehh-kee): steak
- ✔ **sutoraiku** (soo-toh-rah-ee-koo): strike



## Puzzling English words in Japan

Some English words changed their meanings after they were assimilated into the Japanese language. Don't be puzzled when you hear these words:

✓ Smart: **Sumāto** (soo-mahh-toh) does not mean *bright*. It means *skinny* or *thin* in Japan.

✓ Training pants: **Torēningu pantsu** (toh-rehh-nee-n-goo pahh-tsoo) are not for toddlers who are about to give up their diapers. They're gym pants, and adults also wear them.

✓ Mansion: **Manshon** (mahn-shohn) is not a huge, gorgeous house. It's just a small, neat-looking condominium in Japan.

How many English words can you find in the following dialogue?

## Talkin' the Talk

Ken and Yōko are making plans for Michiko's birthday. They use a number of English-influenced words during their conversation.

Ken: **Michiko no tanjōbi wa pātī o shiyō.**  
mee-chee-koh noh tahn-johh-bee wa pahh-tee  
oh shee-yohh.  
For Michiko's birthday, let's throw a party.

Yōko: **Ōkē. Jā, watashi wa, bāsudē kēki o tsukuru ne.**  
ohh-keh. jahh, wah-tah-shee wah, bahh-soo-  
dehh keh-kee oh tsoo-koo-roo neh.  
Okay. Then I will make a birthday cake.

Ken: **Jā, boku wa kōhī to, jūsu o yōisuru.**  
jahh, boh-koo wah kohh-hee toh, jooo-soo  
oh yohh-ee-soo-roo.  
Then I will prepare coffee and juice.

Yōko: **Sorekara, kamera mo wasurenaide ne.**  
soh-reh-kah-rah, kah-meh-rah moh  
wa-soo-reh-nah-ee-deh neh.  
And don't forget to bring the camera.

## Keeping English company names in Japan

If you walk down the street in Japan, looking at the signs of companies, restaurants, stores, hotels, and galleries, you may be amazed that many of the names are completely English or a combination of Japanese and English.

The Japanese also use English when naming products like cars, electronics, appliances, cosmetics, and even children's snacks! They think that things sound cool if their names are English or spelled with the English alphabet. Seeing English in Japan can certainly make you feel cool and comfortable!

- ✔ **Cars:** Corolla, Crown, Sprint, Civic
- ✔ **Companies:** Recruit, Sony, National, NEC, Sharp
- ✔ **Computers:** Valuestar
- ✔ **Galleries:** Gallery Ginza
- ✔ **Hotels:** Shinagawa Prince, Palace Tokyo
- ✔ **Restaurants:** Skylark, Oasis
- ✔ **Snacks:** Pocky, Milky, Chelsea
- ✔ **Stores:** Lawson, High Ace, Happy Mart

## Basic Phrases

Start using the following short Japanese phrases at home. Make it a habit. You may need your family's cooperation with this, but if you get used to seizing the moment and saying the right phrase, you can seem like a Japanese even if you don't have black eyes. And the next time you associate with Japanese people, you can smoothly say these Japanese phrases:

- ✔ **Dōmo.** (dohh-moh): Thank you *or* Hi!  
Used for thanking, and also for brief greetings.
- ✔ **Īe.** (eee-eh): No *or* Don't mention it.
- ✔ **Sō, sō.** (sohh, sohh): You're right, you are right!  
Used when you agree with someone's statement. It's almost like what you mean when you say *yeah* in the middle of conversations just to let the other person know that you're listening and agreeing.
- ✔ **Dame.** (dah-meh): You are not allowed to do that *or* That's bad!  
Used when you want to stop someone doing something or when you want to say that something is bad or impermissible. You'd probably never say it to a superior or to someone older than you. You can say it to your children, your siblings, or your very close friends.
- ✔ **Zenzen.** (zehn-zehn): Not at all *or* It was nothing.
- ✔ **Ii desu ne.** (ee-ee deh-soo neh): That's a great idea!
- ✔ **Yatta.** (yaht-tah): Yahoo! I did it.

- ✔ **Gambatte.** (gahm-baht-teh): Go for it *or* Try your best!
- ✔ **Omedetō.** (oh-meh-deh-tohh): Congratulations!
- ✔ **Yōkoso.** (yohh-koh-soh): Welcome!
- ✔ **Shinpai shinaide.** (sheen-pah-ee shee-nah-ee-deh): Don't worry!
- ✔ **Makasete.** (mah-kah-seh-teh): Count on me!
- ✔ **Sono tōri.** (soh-noh tohh-ree): You're absolutely right!

## Body Language



Gestures are very important for communication. Japanese probably use fewer gestures than Westerners. For example, they don't hug or kiss people in public. But they do have some unique gestures. If you know their meanings and functions, and if you can use them as you interact with Japanese people, you'll seem like part of the crowd. Try some of the following gestures yourself. And if you see native Japanese people in a Japanese grocery store, at the mall, at a party, or anywhere else, observe them carefully. You will definitely see some of these gestures used.

- ✔ **Banzai** (bahn-zah-ee): When a bunch of people gather to celebrate something, they often stand up at the same time, raise both arms over their heads simultaneously, and shout **banzai** (hurrah) together three times.
- ✔ **Bowing:** For Japanese, bowing is an absolutely important and necessary everyday communication tool. You bow to thank someone, to apologize, to greet, and even to say goodbye. By bowing, you express your politeness and respect for others. But you don't have to bow very deeply. In most cases, you can just tilt your head for a second or two. Save the deep bow, using the upper half of the body, for those times when you make a horrible mistake, receive overwhelming kindness, or associate with extremely formal people.
- ✔ **Nodding:** Whenever someone says something to you, nod immediately. Otherwise, the speaker will think that you're not paying attention or that you're upset.
- ✔ **Waving:** To have your waves understood, you must know that it's all in the wrist. If you greet your neighbor by moving your hand up and down from your wrist, like a toddler waving bye-bye, your American neighbor will understand that you mean to say *hi*. However, your Japanese neighbors will think that you're beckoning them to come to you. The Japanese use a sort of palm-down scooping motion to say *come here* — just a 180-degree turn from the palm-up scooping motion Americans use to say the same thing.



## Fun & Games

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Japanese has short and long vowels, and they make a difference in meaning. Think about how you say the following words in Japanese, and circle the correct word in the parentheses. The solution is in Appendix C.

1. grandmother (**obasan**, obāsan)
  2. grandfather (ojisan, **ojīsan**)
  3. Thank you. (domo, **dōmo**)
  4. karaoke (**karaoke**, karaōke)
  5. judo (**jūdō**, judo)
- .....