Japanese Culture Notes

Chapter 2: Language

2004

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2.0. LANGUAGE

Key words: writing system - Kanji and Kana (when do they use them, different readings of Kanji, men's or women's characters) SOV, Case markers and postpositions, scrambling, agglutinative, No agreement, empty pronouns, WH in situ, Topic, politeness, 5 vowels, pitch accent, Calligraphy

vagueness - literary preference
politeness - importance of social and age differences
kotodama - Language = a property for Japanese, not a means of communication

2.1 Japanese language as a "Theory of Japanese Culture"

Very popular in 1960s-80s (supercedes or incorporates "climate" theory) e.g.:
- left vs. right brain theory
- time devoted to acquisition of complex system of writing
- visual and aesthetic effect of language: calligraphy
- eminently prepared for the "information society"
- emphasis on non-verbal communication; cultivation of ambiguity
- importance of context, interpersonal relations: the business card
- a "wet" language: environment or mood is heightened

2.2 Japanese is a member of the Altaic family of languages

(Central Asian origin) as opposed to Indo-European family (largest spread) and Sino-Tibetan family (largest number of speakers)

Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, Turkish, Hungarian, Finnish

Common historical characteristics of Altaic languages
- Strength of oral tradition and literature
- Did not develop own system of writing
- Borrowed a non-Altaic system of writing; but had to modify it

Common grammatical characteristics

S O V
(S) (O) V: high degree of ellipsis; but there is always a verb
verbs are highly inflected, carry more information (tense, aspect, status of speaker)
Japanese - levels of politeness, formality; in-group vs out-group

Kojiki 'Record of Ancient Matters' (712 AD)-written in Chinese
Manyooshuu 'Collection of Myriad Leaves' (759AD) - manyoogana
karina vs. mana
2.3 Writing system – 5 types

Kanji characters: 日 本
Hiragana: に ほん
Katakana: ニ ホン
Romaji: Ni hon
English: Nihon/Japan

- vertical (right to left) or horizontal writing
- stem or content words (more abstract) – kanji

Hiragana: postpositions and inflection

Example 1. オハイオを案内する/案内した。
Ohio-o annai-suru/annai-shita
Ohio-Acc guide/guided 'Show/showed someone Ohio / guide/guided Ohio'

Example 2. うらにはにはにはにはにわにわにわにわとりがいる
裏庭には二羽 庭には二羽 鶏がいる
Uraniwaniwa niwa, niwaniwa niwa, niwatori ga iru.
back yard at-Top two CL front yard at Top two CL chickens be
'There are two chickens in the back yard and two chickens in the front yard.'

Kanji 漢字

Go on (Wu area), Kan on (Tang Dynasty), Toosoo on
行 gyoo koo an

On yomi vs. Kun yomi
行く i (ku)

1850 Kanjis - 1945 Jooyoo kanji

Words
Japanese native word (Yamato Kotoba/Wago)
Chinese word (Kango)
Loan word (Gairaigo)

Western loan words - Katakana (16c - Portuguese and Dutch; 20c - American occupation;
Greek & Latin - science; German - medicine; French - arts; American - pop culture)

Gion-go (phonomimes), Gitai-go (phonomimes), Gijoo-go (psychomimes)
voiced - heavier/louder/stronger/bigger/rougher actions or states...baby talk
グーグー/グウグウ/ぐうぐう
2.4 Morphology
agglutinative - tense, mood, politeness plus passive, causative, desiderative, negative, interrogative, etc.
  mi-ru (present)   mi-ta (past/perfect)   mi-masu (polite)   mi-rareru (passive)
  mi-se-ru (causative)   mi-tai (desiderative)   mi-nai (negative)   mi-ru-ka (interrogative)

No marking of gender, number, and person on nouns and verbs
Hanako/Ken/Hanako-to Ken-ga kuru.
hanako/ken/hanako and ken-Nom come 'Hanako/Ken/Hanako and Ken comes/come.'

2.5 Phonology
- V, CV, or C - karaoke, anime, pokemon
- 5 vowels /a/, /e/, /i/, /u/, /o/
- long vs. short vowels "aa", "ii", "uu", "ee", "oo" (should be pronounced as one continuous sound, e.g., juudoo, Kobe=koobe
- geminate consonants "pp", "tt", "kk", "ss", "ssh", "cch" (long stop/no sound), e.g., Nippon
- /r/ vs. /l/, /b/ vs. /v/, /di/ vs. /zi/, (English - for entrance exams)
- /hu/ as in Fuji - pronounced by blowing air out between the unrounded lips

  Stress vs. pitch accent (mora and syllable are important)
  1) Assign high pitch to all morae
  2) Assign low pitch to all morae following the accent
  3) Assign low pitch to the first mora if the second is high pitched

  Stress vs mora rhythm
  hon 'book' - 1 syllable, but 2 mora
  
- Loan Words: 1) /o/ after /t/&/d/, 2) /i/ after /ch/&/j/, 3) /u/ elsewhere
  e.g., cat -> kyoatto, watch-> uocchi, Smith-> sumisu

2.6 Syntax
SOV word order - related to Korean, Mongolian, Turkish (Ryuukyuan - a dialect)
Hanako-ga hon-o kaimashita
hanako-Nom book-Acc bought 'Hanako bought a book.'

  Scrambling
  hon-o Hanako-ga kaimashita (OSV)
  book-Acc hanako-Nom bought 'Hanako bought a book.'

  No WH-movement
  Hanako-ga nani-o kaimashita-ka
  hanako-Nom what-Acc bought Q 'What did Hanako buy?'

  Empty pronouns
Hanako-ga kaimashita
hanako-Nom bought
hon-o kaimashita
book-Acc bought
kaimashita
bought

'She bought it.'

2.7 Pragmatics/Sociolinguistics

- Politeness (Keigo)
  iku 'come' (plain), ikimasu (polite), irasshaimasu (honorific), mairimasu (humble)
  ikimasen-ka (negative question) 'Do you not go?'; 'Would you like to go?'
- Formal vs. informal
  Hai vs. un for 'yes, ok, etc.'
- Sentence final particles
  ikimasu-ne (confirmation, agreement, polite)
- Men's and Women's languages

2.8 Japanese Names: Pronunciation Rules

There are five phonetic vowel sounds you need to know to pronounce Japanese names. These vowels are always pronounced the same:

- a as in father
- i as in police, machine
- u as in pull, full
- e as in enemy, elf
- o as in original, oh

Here are most of the Japanese letters written in romanized alphabet for easy pronunciation. Modifying the common letters can create the sounds in parentheses.
Japan: Cultural Notes

<table>
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<th>o</th>
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Note: “L” and “R” do not exist in Japanese. “R” when used in London sounds very close to “Rondon”. “N” is the only consonant that can be pronounced alone or with a vowel. If “N” doesn't have a vowel after it, it will be just an “n” sound alone.

There are several other rules that involve the lengthening of a vowel sound, the doubling of a consonant, etc. but the basic sounds above will help you with most of the Japanese names that you will encounter.

When reading Japanese names, first try and break the name up into consonant and vowel pairs and pronounce each separately.

Example:

TANAKA = TA/ NA/ KA
KAWASAKI = KA/ WA/ SA/ KI
TOYOTA = TO/ YO/ TA
HONDA = HO/ N/ DA

Sometimes you will see combination consonants like *chi, tsu, shi* that should be pronounced together. Group two consonants with the next vowel.

Example:

MATSUMOTO = MA/ TSU/ MO/ TO
SHIMADA = SHI/ MA/ DA
KAWAGUCHI = KA/ WA/ GU/ CHI

Sometimes there may be vowels next to each other that should be pronounced individually.

Example:

INOUE = I/ NO/ U/ E
NAGAI = NA/ GA/ I

There are other special rules, but these are the ones that are most commonly used and will get you through most situations.
2.9 Japanese Phrases

ENGLISH
Hello. "I'm ________. How do you do"

JAPANESE
Konnichiwa __(Jim)___ desu. Yoroshiku. (or Hajimemashite)

SAN = Miss, Ms, Mrs & Mr
DOOZO = Lit: Please go ahead/ after you
YOROSHIKU = Lit: Please continue to favor me
HAJIMEMASHITE = Lit: It's the first time to meet you
GOMEN NASAI = I'm sorry I did that to you
SUMIMASEN = Excuse me; sorry to trouble you, I'm sorry
KONNICHIWA = Good day; Lit: this day
KONBANWA = Good evening; Lit: this night
OHAYO GOZAIMASU = Good morning; Lit: it's early
DOMO = Thanks
DOMO ARIGATO GOZAIMASU = Thank you very much
____(tea)____ WO KUDASAI = Please give me tea; Lit: Tea give to me
SAYONARA = Good-bye; Lit: See you again
HAI = Yes
IIE = No

Source: JW Associates, GH
### 2.10 Forms of Address: Business

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>ROMAJI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>KAICHO</td>
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<td>President</td>
<td>SHACHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vice-President</td>
<td>FUKU SHACHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior (Executive) Managing Director</td>
<td>SENMU TORISHIMARIYAKU</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Executive) Managing Director</td>
<td>JOMU TORISHIMARIYAKU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director (Supervisor)</td>
<td>TORISHIMARIYAKU</td>
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<tr>
<td>Department Head (General Manager)</td>
<td>BUCHO</td>
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<tr>
<td>Section Chief</td>
<td>KACHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief</td>
<td>SHUNIN or KAKARICHO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>KA IN</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLES:** LAST NAME + FORM OF ADDRESS

SUZUKI KACHO

TOYOTA SHACHO

MATSUMOTO SAN

A few language-related links

http://www.japanese-online.com


Humorous English-Japanese language related articles