

LESSON NOTES

Introduction to Japanese #2

Introduction to Japanese Pronunciation

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#2

VOCABULARY

Kanji	Kana	Romaji	English
ありがとう	ありがとう	arigatō	thank you
わさび	わさび	wasabi	wasabi (Japanese horseradish)

SAMPLE SENTENCES

わさびが嫌いです。

Wasabi ga kirai desu.

I don't like wasabi.

GRAMMAR

The Focus of This Lesson is: Introduction to Japanese Pronunciation

The Basics of Timing

Japanese is what is called a "mora-timed" language. What this simply means is that every character in Japanese - which you can think of as a syllable, occupies the same length of time.

No character takes up more *or* less time than the other characters. Every character is valued equally and is pronounced evenly throughout.

English, on the other hand, is a "stress-timed" language. Syllables that are stressed, are valued greater than syllables that are unstressed.

This gives English a "machine-gun" like rhythm, where the pace is sometimes fast, and at other times, slow.

Because equal value is given to each character, there is no word-stress in Japanese.

Pronouncing Japanese Characters

There are five characters in Japanese that signify a vowel sound...

あ、い、う、え、お (*a, i, u, e, o*)

Apart from these five characters, all other characters - except for one that we will cover shortly - is made up of a consonant sound and one of these vowel sounds.

か、き、く、け、こ (*ka, ki, ku, ke, ko*)

さ、し、す、せ、そ (*sa, shi, su, se, so*)

た、ち、つ、て、と (*ta, chi, tsu, te, to*)

... and so on.

Only ん (*n*) is kind of special. It's a consonant sound, without a vowel sound.

So to recap, a Japanese character could be:

- a vowel, e.g. あ (*a*)
- made up of one consonant and one vowel, e.g. か (*ka*)
- ん (*n*), which is a consonant sound on its own.

Now you know the possible sounds that make up a Japanese *character*, but let's look at ALL the sounds in Japanese collectively.

You already know roughly 80% of ALL sounds in Japanese. That means that if you were to simply imitate a Japanese speaker, your pronunciation would be correct roughly 80% of the time!

Let's consider the word わさび (*wasabi*).

"W", "S", and "B" sounds in this Japanese word are identical to English.

The Unique Sounds of Japanese

ありがとう

This word is often romanized like *arigatou*.

Focus on the second character, it's often written as an "R" and an "l," but don't be fooled! This character isn't pronounced using an English "R" sound at all! It's like a mixture between an "R" and an "L" sound.

There's no such sound in English, but most people would transcribe this using the letter "R", because that's the closest equivalent there is in English. Pronouncing it like an *English* "R", however, would be a huge mistake.

To pronounce this sound, lightly tap the gum ridge behind your upper teeth with the tip of your tongue. It should be a quick, striking motion, similar to the sensation you get when pronouncing the "T" in words like "butter", "cutter" and so on. Don't roll your tongue like an English R. Most of the air should go around the sides of your tongue, the same way it

would when pronouncing an "L" sound. This is why many people describe this sound as in-between an "R" and an "L" sound.