

LESSON TRANSCRIPT

Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide #10

Perfecting Pitch Accent in Japanese

10

Hi everyone! I'm Michelle Yamamoto.

Welcome back to The Ultimate Japanese Pronunciation Guide at JapanesePod101.com.

In this lesson, you're going to learn the basics of pitch accent in Japanese.

Let's listen to these words.

たまご egg、た・ま・ご、たまご

さかな fish、さ・か・な、さかな

Each syllable is pronounced with either a high or low pitch.

た・ま・ご

さ・か・な

The pitch accent for each word is determined when said in isolation. So, if you pronounce it in a different pitch, such as たまご (high, low low), it sounds strange.

Do you know why we need pitch accent in Japanese?

Japanese has many words with the same sounds but different meanings.

雨 (あhigh - めlow) and 飴 (あlow - めhigh)

雨 means "rain". It goes from high to low.

飴 means "candy". It goes from low to high.

Also, we have 橋 and 箸

箸 means "chopsticks." It goes from high to low.

橋 means "bridge." It goes from low to high.

To differentiate between these words with the same sounds, we need pitch accent.

This is a key characteristic of Japanese.

There are two rules you need to know.

The first one is...

Pitch does not change in the middle of a syllable.

- てんき (high-low-low)、weather、て・ん・き、てんき

て is high.

Each ん and き is low.

So, each syllable is pronounced with either a high or low pitch. And pitch doesn't change in the middle of a syllable.

The second rule is...

First and second syllables of a word don't have the same pitch as each other.

あか red、あ・か、あか、high and low

いぬ dog い・ぬ、いぬ、low and high

げんき fine、げ・ん・き、げんき、high, low, low

ひらがな hiragana、ひ・ら・が・な、ひらがな、low, high, high, low

In all words, the pair of the first two syllables should be "high-low" or "low-high".

We're going to give you examples of some words with their pitch accent pattern. Try saying these words. You'll also review the sounds you learned so far.

あさ、"morning"、あ・さ、あさ
あさ

とり、bird、と・り、とり
とり

さくら、"cherry blossom"、さ・く・ら、さくら
さくら

おとうと、younger brother、お・と・う・と、おとうと
Be careful with the long vowel おー.
Repeat after me.
おとうと (with claps)
おとうと

きょうだい、siblings、きょ・う・だ・い、きょうだい
きょうだい

Here, you have a long vowel おー again. You need to change the tone from high to low in the middle of the long vowel.

Repeat after me.
きょうだい (with claps)
きょうだい

Congratulations! You've learned all the essential parts of Japanese pronunciation. You can listen to plenty of dialogs and vocabulary recorded by native Japanese speakers at JapanesePod101.com. Model your pronunciation on these and keep practicing!
How do you practice pitch accent? Share in the comment section!