日本語能力試験勉強本
基本な事

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目次

第 1 章

仮名
かな

Japanese uses three sets of glyphs to write in, two are syllabaries and the other one is logographic. Those syllabaries are called kana. This chapter will cover the ins and outs of kana, how they are used, and how to read them.

1.1　五十音図
ごじゅうおんず

Much like how English has an alphabetical ordering of their letters, Japanese has it too. We call this ordering system the gojyuuon, "fifty sounds" in English. For it to be easier to read and use, we arrange it into a gojyuuonzu – "fifty sound map." This map is arranged into rows and columns. Rows are called 'dan' (段) and
だん
columns are called 'kou' (行). Both of those names will come back
こう
later in this book, so it is good to bring them up now rather than later.

With all this talk about the gojyuuonzu, let's show you one. Below is the hiragana gojyuuonzu, it should be read top to bottom and right to left. A kana is read by combining its column and row together and then pronouncing them. You would read 「いろはにほへと」as "irohanihoheto." 「は」is at the intersection of H and A so it would be read as 'ha.' This is true for *almost* all of the kana, the exceptions are as follows: Ｓ Ｉ is read as 'shi', Ｔ Ｉ is read as 'chi', Ｔ Ｕ is read as 'tsu', Ｈ Ｕ is read as a rather breathy 'fu'.

Then you have the single N, pronouncing that depends on context but it mostly sounds like a normal 'n' if you pull your tongue away from that ridge in your mouth and let it sit on the bottom of your mouth.

N	W	R	Y	M	H	N	T	S	K	−	
	わ	ら	や	ま	は	な	た	さ	か	あ	A
		り		み	ひ	に	ち	し	き	い	I
ん		る	ゆ	む	ふ	ぬ	つ	す	く	う	U
		れ		め	へ	ね	て	せ	け	え	E
	を	ろ	よ	も	ほ	の	と	そ	こ	お	O

Now let's talk about what hiragana is actually used for. Anything and everything you could want to write in Japanese can be written in hiragana. 「すしや は ここ に なります か?」 read as "sushiya wa[い]koko ni narimasu ka?" Katakana on the other hand, has a lot more specific use cases. It is the script that you will be using to write loanwords. Think about all those English words that Japan just took and imported directly into Japanese. 'One-oh-eight' is nothing more than 「ワンオウエイト」. It is also used to write down the sounds things make, the 「ワクワク」of getting excited, the 「ワンワン」that the dogs say, and so on. Below is the gojyuuonzu for katakana, reference it to read the katakana above.

N	W	R	Y	M	H	N	T	S	K	−	
	ワ	ラ	ヤ	マ	ハ	ナ	タ	サ	カ	ア	A
		リ		ミ	ヒ	ニ	チ	シ	キ	イ	I
ン		ル	ユ	ム	フ	ヌ	ツ	ス	ク	ウ	U
		レ		メ	ヘ	ネ	テ	セ	ケ	エ	E
	ヲ	ロ	ヨ	モ	ホ	ノ	ト	ソ	コ	オ	O

1.2　濁点<ruby>(だくてん)</ruby>と半濁点<ruby>(はんだくてん)</ruby>

There is more to the story of kana than just the gojyuuonzu. Firstly, how do you even *write* the 'jyuu' and 'zu' that are in that word? Those consonants don't appear anywhere in the gojyuuonzu.

[い]Yes that kana 「は」 is read as 'wa' here, its a grammatical thing covered on page **??**

Both of those questions will be answered in the following sections, starting with "how do you even write 'zu?"'

Dakuten modify the sound of the kana they are placed on, literally meaning "muddying mark." The dakuten is written with a 「゛」 and makes the sound voiced. That is if you were to say 「かかかか」and 「ががががが」you would feel your vocal cords vibrating a lot more for the second one. Four kana take dakuten to become voiced, however one kana is special and can also take a handakuten. The handakuten – literally "half muddied mark" – only dilutes the sound somewhat. It looks like this: 「゜」. Below is the table of both hiragana and katakana with the dakuten and handakuten added on.

P	B	D	Z	G	N	W	R	Y	M	H	N	T	S	K	−	
ぱ	ば	だ	ざ	が		わ	ら	や	ま	は	な	た	さ	か	あ	A
ぴ	び	ぢ	じ	ぎ			り		み	ひ	に	ち	し	き	い	I
ぷ	ぶ	づ	ず	ぐ	ん		る	ゆ	む	ふ	ぬ	つ	す	く	う	U
ぺ	べ	で	ぜ	げ			れ		め	へ	ね	て	せ	け	え	E
ぽ	ぼ	ど	ぞ	ご		を	ろ	よ	も	ほ	の	と	そ	こ	お	O

P	B	D	Z	G	N	W	R	Y	M	H	N	T	S	K	−	
パ	バ	ダ	ザ	ガ		ワ	ラ	ヤ	マ	ハ	ナ	タ	サ	カ	ア	A
ピ	ビ	ヂ	ジ	ギ			リ		ミ	ヒ	ニ	チ	シ	キ	イ	I
プ	ブ	ヅ	ズ	グ	ン		ル	ユ	ム	フ	ヌ	ツ	ス	ク	ウ	U
ペ	ベ	デ	ゼ	ゲ			レ		メ	ヘ	ネ	テ	セ	ケ	エ	E
ポ	ボ	ド	ゾ	ゴ		ヲ	ロ	ヨ	モ	ホ	ノ	ト	ソ	コ	オ	O

Just like with the original goyjuuon, there are some exceptions to how to pronounce these kana. These are mostly sound mergers, where two sounds became pronounced the same but still need to be written differently. They are: Z I and D I are both read as "ji", and Z U and D U are both read as "dzu." For the Z U, D U merger, you typically see it written as 'zu' but I need to stress that it is the 'tsu' that is getting voiced not the 'su.'

1.3 拗音

Now to answer the second question: "How do you write 'jyuu?"' This is done through youon, translating to 'crooked sound.' You

twist and fuse two sounds together to come out with a fusion of both.

How this actually works in practice, you take any of the I-row kana and add a small Y-column kana to the end of it. The effect of this is to delete that I and replace it with the appended kana. To use another animal example, cats go 「ニャンニャン」, read as "nyan nyan." Below is the chart for the youon combinations, the base character chart has been ommitted, remember the sound mergers and sound shifts of the base kana while reading this.

P	B	D	Z	G	R	M	H	N	T	S	K	
ぴゃ	びゃ	ぢゃ	じゃ	ぎゃ	りゃ	みゃ	ひゃ	にゃ	ちゃ	しゃ	きゃ	Y A
ぴゅ	びゅ	ぢゅ	じゅ	ぎゅ	りゅ	みゅ	ひゅ	にゅ	ちゅ	しゅ	きゅ	Y U
ぴょ	びょ	ぢょ	じょ	ぎょ	りょ	みょ	ひょ	にょ	ちょ	しょ	きょ	Y O

P	B	D	Z	G	R	M	H	N	T	S	K	
ピャ	ビャ	ヂャ	ジャ	ギャ	リャ	ミャ	ヒャ	ニャ	チャ	シャ	キャ	Y A
ピュ	ビュ	ヂュ	ジュ	ギュ	リュ	ミュ	ヒュ	ニュ	チュ	シュ	キュ	Y U
ピョ	ビョ	ヂョ	ジョ	ギョ	リョ	ミョ	ヒョ	ニョ	チョ	ショ	キョ	Y O

There is however another kind of youon. Let's take a look at the name of the famous game series Final Fantasy. It's written in Japanese as 「ファイナルファンタジー」 and is read as "fainaru fantajii". Taking that 'fu' kana and adding a small 'a' kana to it allows us to delete and replace the vowel there too! This technique can apply to all vowels, and is typically used for making sounds that don't appear in the charts above. Take for example, the word "discord." If you try to create a 'di' kana it would be a 'dzi/ji' kana, so you have to improvise and create 「ディ」 instead. Those are the most common kinds of additional youon replacements, using 'fu' to generate a new F-column of the gojyuuon, and building your own actual 'di' sound.

1.4   促音

While we are on the topic of small kana, let's bring up the final small kana that you will encounter. The sokuon, or as it is sometimes referred to, the small tsu.

This kana is pronounced in a very special way, it is a sort of pause between the sounds that you are saying. To use an example, 「ちょっとまって」 is pronounced as "chotto matte." Note those duplicated 't's. You're saying that 't' twice in a sense, but it's much more silent. You are effectively saying a single syllable of *nothing* before continuing with your word with a little bit more force. The precise mechanics and timing will be touched on in section 1.6, but for now just get used to it as a small delay or a duplication of the previous sound.

1.5 長音符

You now know everything about the typical uses of kana, small kana, and how to construct sounds that you need. However there is one kana-related tool that serves to help the kana work. The chouonpu, literally "long sound mark." It extends the duration of the vowel before it by one syllable. It's why 「ファイナルファンタジー」 was romanized as 'fantajii' not just 'fantaji.' This is most commonly seen in katakana loan words, like 「コンピューター」 *('konpyuutaa')* or 「エスカレーター」 *('esukareetaa').* The precise mechanics will be touched on in section 1.6, but it is important to bring it up now.

1.6 伯

Now that you have a vague understanding of how the kana form sounds, let's touch more precisely on how those sounds form words.

Each kana, sokuon, or youon-ed kana, will be pronounced for one mora. Japanese would refer to it as a 'haku,' which would mean a musical beat. 「ひらがな」 has four kana so it will take four mora to pronounce, 「まって」 has three kana – yes that sokuon counts as a kana for this counting – so it will take three mora to pronounce, 「しょうしんしゃ」 has three kana and two youon pairs so it would take five mora to pronounce. By this rigid structure, Japanese has meaningful distinction between long and short vowels, as well as meaningful distinction between stopping for that sokuon or not. 「かれ」 is just some person, but 「かれー」 is a healthy meal.

You know how the chouonpu works, however that's just one way

to write the long vowels. To extend the length of a vowel without
using a chouonpu, you just need to write the vowel kana you want
to extend. 「ああ」, 「いい」, 「うう」, 「えい」, 「おう」are
how you extend all of the vowels. Now, 'ei' and 'ou' are the outliers
here. You use a different sound to extend them, however they are
pronounced identically to a long 'e' or a long 'o'. Reading them as
is and gliding the vowel to the other one, or leaving it the same
vowel are both valid readings.