Introduction for the Learner

OBJECTIVES

The aim of *Japanese: The Written Language* (hereafter JWL) is to enable the learner of Japanese to establish a solid foundation for communicating with Japanese people through the medium of their written language. We assume that you are an adult learner of Japanese and that you have at least begun the study of the spoken language. For those using *Japanese: The Spoken Language* (JSL), with which this text is closely coordinated, the introductory material and all of Lesson 1 in JSL should, at the very least, have been thoroughly mastered. Why is this important? Current research in reading suggests that the ability to speak a language directly benefits one's ability to read.

When *we* use the word *read*, it refers to reading with meaningful processing. Although English speakers distinguish between *listening* 'paying attention to sounds' and *hearing* 'paying attention to sounds and processing them', we have only one verb *read*. Whether someone looks at New Year's greetings written in fifty different languages and assigns appropriate noises without any understanding or whether the same person looks at a manuscript and understands it perfectly, the activity is called reading. English enables us to say "I listened but I couldn't hear," but when we say "I read it," only context can determine whether we understood what we looked at. Sometimes the meaning remains ambiguous.

BACKGROUND

When Americans study western European languages, like Spanish and French, their familiarity with the symbols used in writing these languages is a tremendous advantage. After only a brief period of study, they can associate spellings with sounds. This facility enables them to add new vocabulary and new patterns to their repertoire as they encounter them in their reading. But what of Americans who are learning to read Japanese? They must learn three new sets of symbols, all of which are used in highly conventionalized ways. Familiarity with the spoken language helps in mastering the symbols, but the task is nonetheless formidable, for both native Japanese and foreigners.

The Japanese actually use four sets of symbols, one of which is already familiar to speakers of English: the Roman alphabet. The others are *hiragana* and *katakana*—both identified by the cover term *kana*—and *kanji*, most of which are characters originally borrowed from Chinese. JWL introduces the two kana sets, each consisting of approximately 50 symbols, and about 550 frequently used kanji, all in context. The symbols are introduced gradually and systematically, in an order appropriate for adult foreign learners. Their learning task is very different from that of Japanese children in kindergarten and first grade, already fluent in their native language, who are beginning to learn to read it.

The goal of JWL is not simply the introduction of Japanese symbols and spelling rules; it is also to provide abundant experience in reading and writing in context. In JWL, you will read texts that provide examples of the symbols used in a variety of authentic contexts and will write texts to communicate intentions accurately and appropriately for personal and professional purposes.

For the fluent reader, identifying each symbol does not enter into the complex activity we call reading. For the beginning learner of Japanese as a foreign language, however, the orthographic symbols and the conventions for their use are just as new as the language itself: reading must involve learning and consciously processing the orthographic symbols. The large number of kanji that must be memorized often leads learners to equate reading Japanese with the processing of symbols, that is, to consider it the written parallel to *listen*. A great deal more is involved in the complex act of reading if we are to *hear* the written message.

JWL strikes a balance between the careful introduction of symbols used in Japanese orthography and purposeful and socially meaningful reading activities. Symbols are introduced one by one, accompanied by numerous exercises designed to develop automatic processing and comprehension.

STRUCTURE OF JWL

JWL, like JSL, is divided into three parts, and each lesson of JWL is coordinated with the corresponding lesson of JSL. Thus you can assume that the structural patterns and vocabulary used in any lesson of JWL will have already been introduced and explained by the end of the JSL lesson that has the same number. When from time to time JWL intro-

duces vocabulary or patterns not already introduced in JSL, this is noted and the items are analyzed as needed.

Each part of JWL is further divided into three volumes, each of which is accompanied by a workbook and audio material on the JWL Web site. Part 1, Volume 1, is also accompanied by flash cards. The flash cards and additional materials related to JWL are carried on the Web site. JWL, Part 1, consists of the following:

Volumes 1, 2, and 3—Textbooks

Volumes 1, 2, and 3—Workbooks

Volume 1—Flash cards (downloadable from the Web site)

Additional materials on the Web site: www.yalebooks.com/JWL

The textbooks introduce new symbols, offer explanations of the Japanese writing system and various text genres, and provide many examples for reading practice. The workbooks focus on practical exercises in both reading and writing; pages can be removed and used for homework assignments. The flash cards offer another medium for practicing the reading and writing of personal and place names. The Web site not only furnishes general on-line assistance for learners and teachers but also provides links to other relevant sites. The audio program provides an excellent learning aid for promoting fluent reading ability.

JWL, Part 1, is summarized as follows:

Volume 1	Lessons 1–4	Katakana
Volume 2	Lessons 5–8	Hiragana
Volume 3	Lessons 9–12	Introduction to one hundred kanji

Completion of JWL, Part 1, Volumes 1–3, which is coordinated with JSL, Part 1, enables you to read texts that contain a few elementary kanji in combination with katakana and hiragana, including simple messages—both handwritten and e-mailed—and shopping lists and menus. You will also be able to write similar short messages in a number of personal and professional contexts.

ABOUT *JWL, PART 1, VOLUME 1: KATAKANA*

This volume is a comprehensive treatment of katakana as it represents loanwords, borrowed principally from English, which exist in vast numbers in current Japanese. It aims at developing in learners of Japanese

at all levels an ability to read items written in this script fluently, accurately, and with understanding. Even beginning learners, whose Japanese vocabulary is limited, can handle a number of texts in Japanese, based only on their knowledge of English and the way katakana works. It is surprising how many advanced learners of Japanese, even those who can handle difficult material, still hesitate whenever they encounter a stretch of katakana. These learners will find the detailed, systematic explanations and ample practice provided in JWL helpful for gaining competence in dealing with this increasingly important part of Japanese texts.

Katakana is used primarily to represent Japanese vocabulary that has been borrowed from foreign languages, mainly English. Knowledge of katakana enables learners to read a menu from a Western-style restaurant, a travel itinerary to places outside Japan, China, and Korea, or a list of hotel accommodations. Learners can also scan texts that include numerous words written in katakana, such as articles on Western fashion or food or sports. They will also learn to use katakana to write their names in Japanese, to identify the names of foreigners mentioned in the Japanese press, and to read a Japanese map of the Western world.

Japanese is currently experiencing a period of free borrowing from English. This means that a speaker of Japanese may borrow a word or phrase for use on a single occasion. More important are the countless loanwords that through repeated use have become part of standard Japanese. This vocabulary is in a constant state of flux: while some items may disappear through disuse, innumerable others are being added with such speed that dictionaries of Japanese loanwords tend to be out of date by the time they reach the marketplace.

The borrowed words deal with every imaginable subject, from *basukettobooru* 'basketball' to *huroppii* 'floppy [disk]',[1] from *sutoroberii-aisukuriimu* 'strawberry ice cream' to *haihiiru* 'high heel[s]', from *guroobaru* 'global' to *sukyañdarasu* 'scandalous', from *deribarii-saabisu* 'delivery service' to *riigaru-maiñdo* 'legal mind'. JWL, Part 1, Volume 1, first concentrates on personal names and place-names, which are more stable than some of the more recent borrowings. As we build a firm foundation in the patterns of conversion from Japanese to English, we gradually introduce sets of items grouped together by genre—food, fashion, music, automobiles, and so on.

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[1] In an English equivalent to a Japanese sequence, brackets enclose material required by the English that has no counterpart in the Japanese; parentheses enclose material that has a counterpart in the Japanese but is regularly omitted in the English.

The fluent reader of modern Japanese must be able to handle kata-kana with ease. This entails much more than simply learning to recognize the symbols. The learner who has followed instructions to "memorize the katakana by Monday" still has a long way to go; in fact, learning the isolated symbols is probably the least challenging part of learning to read. Since the sound system of English is considerably more complex than that of Japanese, one mora of Japanese may represent several, quite different sound sequences in English. For example, Japanese *rabu* may represent English 'rub' or 'rob' or 'love'! In addition, syllabification is very different in the two languages. The loanword corresponding to 'ice cream', which has only two syllables in English, has seven mora when pronounced according to the sound patterns of Japanese. It is written with seven katakana symbols: アイスクリーム, corresponding to *a-i-su-ku-ri-i-mu*. While most English words are borrowed into Japanese on the basis of their English pronunciation, the Japanese pronunciation of the borrowed words—and the katakana representation of it—follows the Japanese pronunciation system. To help you identify the English origin of borrowed words, JWL, Part 1, Volume 1, provides a set of regular conversion tips that clarify the overall system and remove the necessity of guessing.

Research indicates that native speakers of Japanese, like those of other languages, recognize words rather than individual symbols when they read. For learners of Japanese to become fluent readers, it is important that they, too, be able to associate sequences of symbols with the words they represent. JWL presents ample reading exercises to develop this important skill. The forty-five commonly used katakana symbols are introduced in four lessons, each of which is divided into three sections. Sections A and B introduce katakana symbols for recognition and reading in context; Section C provides a more comprehensive reading review and guides the learner through the production of katakana symbols and the writing of words and phrases.

In each lesson there are several conversion tips. They help the learner recognize, step by step, the patterns according to which katakana sequences can be associated with their English origins. Gradually, after seeing numerous examples of loanwords and noting the relation between the English words and their transformed shape in Japanese, the learner becomes able to make predictions as to how any given English word might be converted into the Japanese language. In Lesson 1, examples are drawn largely from personal names of Western origin. In Lessons 2 and 3, place-names are added to the examples. In Lesson 4, there are examples from many subject areas, ranging from sports to chemical elements, from historical figures to computers.

The Workbook provides appropriate exercises, including many that require the learner to write katakana. The pages of the Workbook can be removed and handed in as homework assignments. Audio material on the JWL Web site provides the aural representations of the items in both the textbook and the Workbook. Recordings for the dictation exercises can also be found on the JWL Web site, along with additional and updated exercises.

HOW TO USE *JWL, PART 1, VOLUME 1*

Lesson 1, Section A, includes a description of the Japanese writing system in general and of katakana in particular. Read it carefully and study the examples. A knowledge of the fundamental differences between the way the Roman alphabet is used to represent English and the way katakana is used to represent Japanese will help you as you read items written in katakana and as you continue your study of written Japanese.

Now you are ready to proceed through the four lessons of Volume 1:

1. Study the shape of each new katakana symbol, repeating aloud the pronunciation it represents. You may trace the handwritten version provided for each new symbol, but at this point do not spend much time on symbol production. That will come later, in Section C. First develop the ability to *read* the symbol.

2. Read each conversion tip and the examples that follow it. Use the audio program on the JWL Web site as a model for your pronunciation, paying strict attention to vowel and consonant length, whispered mora, the various pronunciations of the syllabic n̄ and pitch accent. Practice until you can read the examples in random order, rapidly, without hesitation and with accurate Japanese pronunciation. Be sure you know what each item represents. As you become able to handle a string of symbols as a unit, you are developing an ability to *read*. You may find that the conversion tips make more sense after you have gone through a number of examples. Do not hesitate to go back to the conversion tips *after* you have gone over the examples given. Do the exercises in the Workbook as directed. Proceed in this manner, new symbol by new symbol, until the end of Section B. There you will find a chart that summarizes all the katakana symbols you have studied so far. Check the chart

for any symbols that continue to cause difficulty, and review them before proceeding.

3. Read the additional material at the beginning of Section C and do the exercises as indicated. Remember to utilize the audio program as a model for your pronunciation.

4. Learn how to write the symbols introduced in the lesson by following the steps at the end of Section C. Proceed exactly as instructed. When you have gained confidence, do the exercises in the Workbook as directed.

5. Visit the JWL Web site (www.yalebooks.com/JWL) for new helpful hints and exercises.

After you go on to the next lesson, feel free to revisit the completed lesson. Reviewing is a good way to solidify your foundation. Repeated practice of katakana with reliance on the audio material provided as your model will undoubtedly improve your pronunciation of Japanese in general.

You are now ready to begin!