

Hello and welcome to Naruhodo Japan, the podcast for learning about the language and culture of Japan from a Nikkei perspective. I am your host, Mariko.

ようこそ。 「なるほど JAPAN」が<sup>はじ</sup>始まります。日系人の<sup>につけいじん</sup>観点<sup>かんてん</sup>から日本語と日本の<sup>にほんご</sup>文化<sup>にほん</sup>を<sup>ぶんか</sup>学<sup>まなぶ</sup>ぶためのポッドキャストです。ホストのマリコです。

In the previous episode, I went over the Japanese writing systems and introduced dakuten <sup>だくてん</sup>濁点 and handakuten <sup>はんだくてん</sup>半濁点. Adding these markers to certain letters changes their pronunciation.

Dakuten or ten-ten <sup>てんてん</sup>点々 may be added to Ka-Ki-Ku-Ke-Ko, Sa-Shi-Su-Se-So, Ta-Chi-Tsu-Te-To, and Ha-Hi-Fu-He-Ho. This alters them to become respectfully Ga-Gi-Gu-Ge-Go, Za-Ji-Zu-Ze-Zo, Da-Ji-Zu-De-Do, and Ba-Bi-Bu-Be-Bo. Handakuten or maru <sup>まる</sup>丸 may be added only to Ha-Hi-Fu-He-Ho. This alters them to become Pa-Pi-Pu-Pe-Po.

ka ki ku ke ko	ga gi gu ge go	かきくけこ	がぎぐげご
sa shi su se so	za ji zu ze zo	さしすせそ	ざじずぜぞ
ta chi tsu te to	da ji zu de do	たちつてと	だぢづでど
ha hi fu he ho	ba bi bu be bo	ぱぴぷぺぽ	はひふへほ

You may have noticed that some letters with ten-ten sound the same, such as Shi and Chi both become Ji and Su and Tsu both become Zu. Historically it seems that there were distinct sounds for all of these but through the transformation of language we have gotten to the point where we are at now.

In writing foreign words with katakana, traditionally the V (as in violin) has been written in Japanese using B (as in boy). For roughly 20 years now, a new method of indicating the V is to write ウ with ten-ten ヴ, however since Japanese cannot pronounce V, they still say it as B.

In the first episode I mentioned that R and L are very close in the Japanese language, that the two do not exist as separate letters, and that the Japanese L is like a very soft R. When saying the alphabet, Ra-Ri-Ru-Re-Ro らりるれろ might be much closer in pronunciation to the letter L but it is written in romaji as the letter R. This is why Japanese often have issues with distinguishing the two letters when they learn foreign languages.

You might have also noticed irregularities with some other letters such as Chi and Fu. In the Ta sequence, one might expect it to be Ta-Ti-Tu-Te-To, but it is Ta-Chi-Tsu-Te-To. The Ti and Tu sounds are possible in Japanese but we will get to that in a moment. In the Ha sequence, one might expect it to be Ha-Hi-Hu-He-Ho, but it is Ha-Hi-Fu-He-Ho. The F in Fu is a soft F, very much like the L vs. R issue.

Some letters may be combined to form what I refer to as compound sounds. As I mentioned in the previous episode, technically this is called Youon <sup>ようおん</sup>拗音 in Japanese and contracted word or diphthong in English. However, I have issues with these terms and that is why I call them

compound sounds.

Ya, Yu, and Yo may be added to various letters to make new sounds. They may be added to Ki, Shi, Chi, Ni, Hi, Mi, Ri as well as those letters to which ten-ten or maru may be added. When Ya, Yu, and Yo are added in this manner, they are written as small letters. These combinations create:

kya kyu kyo	gya gyu gyo	きやきゅきょ	ぎやぎゅぎょ	
sha shu sho	jya jyu jyo	しやしゅしよ	じやじゅじよ	
cha chu cho	jya jyu jyo	ちやちゅちよ	ぢやぢゅぢよ	
nya nyu nyo		にやにゅによ		
hya hyu hyo	bya byu byo	ひやひゅひよ	びやびゅびよ	ぴやぴゅぴよ
mya myu myo			みやみゅみよ	
rya ryu ryo			りやりゅりよ	

There are other combinations possible for local dialects, foreign words, and mimicking sounds. To make the Ti and Tu sounds, one would write Te with a little I or U respectively テイテウ. Since ten-ten can be added to Te, it is also possible to make the Di and Du sounds デイデウ. Another possibility are F sounds by adding small vowels to Fu フ to make Fa-Fi-Fu-Fe-Fo ファフィフフェフォ. For mimicking sounds, one thing that is very common is to exaggerate speech. If someone says Ne and holds it for awhile, such as Ne~, then it might be written as Ne with a little E ねえ.

This leads me to vowel length. There are regular vowels and long vowels. As mentioned in the last episode, this is the difference between how the capital city of Tokyo is written in the Western world and in Japanese. As written the Western way of t-o-k-y-o, it would be pronounced ときよ but it is actually とうきょう in Japanese. The vowels are held longer.

One way I like to explain the difference in vowel length is to explain it in musical terms. Japanese is spoken at a steady beat. Each syllable is held for the count of only one beat. When a vowel is long, the syllable is held for the count of two beats.

To write long vowels, the vowel that is held longer is written after the letter. The exception to this is O, for which usually U is written to indicate a long vowel. In katakana, long vowels are usually written with a line that looks like a hyphen—this is known as chouon <sup>ちょうおん</sup> 長音, which appropriately means long sound. This line may sometimes be used in hiragana, such as for らーめん but this is rare and unusual. In casual writing, some may also use a tilde ~ to indicate a long vowel.

Here are some examples of regular versus long vowels:

- Obasan おばさん is an aunt or older woman
- Obaasan おばあさん is a much elderly woman or a grandmother
- Ojisan おじさん is an uncle or older man
- Ojiisan おじいさん is a much elderly man or a grandfather

- Fukaku <sup>ふか</sup>深く means deeper but fuukaku <sup>ふうかく</sup>風格 means character or personality
- Okami could mean the government <sup>おかみ</sup>御上 or a landlady <sup>おかみ</sup>女将 but ookami <sup>おおかみ</sup>狼 means a wolf

These examples cover long A, I, U, and O. The only long E sound I could think of is during speech as when one ends a sentence with Ne and might hold the vowel for awhile. This sort of casual speaking will be covered in a future episode.

As for romanizing long vowels, there are multiple methods. One way is to write it exactly the same as in Japanese. I prefer this method so as to be sure of the original spelling of the word in Japanese. I think this is especially useful when the word might be confused for another similar word and for beginners whose knowledge of vocabulary might be limited. Another way is to place a macron, which is a line over the top of the vowel, i.e. ō, or a circumflex, which looks like the letter is wearing a hat, i.e. ô. For long O, another option is to write “Oh” and some Japanese prefer this for their surnames. The third and final way to romanize long vowels is to ignore them altogether. I feel that this may look cleaner, but it is not helpful at all. This is the issue with writing the capital city of Tokyo. Both vowels in Tokyo are long vowels in Japanese but a non-Japanese would not know this due to the standard way of writing it in romaji.

One could say that the opposite of the long vowel is the short vowel or stop. This is written as a double consonant in romaji. The double consonant occurs when a word has a small Tsu, which is formally called sokuon <sup>そくおん</sup>促音 but everyone just calls it chiisai tsu <sup>ちい</sup>小さいつ, meaning little Tsu. I believe that this aspect of pronouncing Japanese is hardest to explain in books and which is why I’m glad that this is a podcast so you can hear it. When there is a little Tsu, you do not pronounce the Tsu. Rather, you pause for a moment and then continue the word. You might also notice that there is a slight accent or emphasis of the syllable before the pause. I sometimes jokingly refer to this as the punched in the gut effect as you would probably say the word in the same way if you were punched in the gut.

Here are some examples of words with chiisai tsu:

- The word for Japanese living abroad or those of Japanese descent is Nikkei <sup>につけい</sup>日系, which is spelled: Ni, chiisai tsu, ke, i
- Tsukuru <sup>つく</sup>作る means to make something and the casual past tense is tsukutta <sup>つく</sup>作った
- Nihon <sup>にほん</sup>日本 is one way to say Japan but another way is Nippon <sup>にっぽん</sup>日本
- Kako <sup>かこ</sup>過去 means the past day but kakko <sup>かっこ</sup>括弧 means parenthesis ( ) or bracket [ ] and then kakou <sup>かこう</sup>かこう with a long O can mean several things such as the mouth of a river <sup>かこう</sup>河口 or a crater <sup>かこう</sup>火口

Next let’s cover 3 tricky letters when it comes to reading them as particles. Particles are an issue we will deal with later but it’s important to note now that these letters are read differently when they function as particles.

### First, He vs. E

The letter He へ may be read as E when it is a particle.

Example: Where are you going? どこへ行きますか。 I am going to work. 仕事へ行きます。

### Second, Ha vs. Wa

The letter Ha は may be read as Wa when it is a particle.

Example: Japan is a country. 日本は国です。 This is a pencil. これはえんぴつです。

### Third, Wo vs. O

The letter Wo is only used as a particle and may be read as O. The W is a soft W or may not be voiced at all. For romaji, some write Wo as “O” but I prefer to write it as “Wo” so as not to cause confusion between the particle を and the letter お。

Example: I ate a banana. バナナを食べました。 I read a book. 本を読みました。

Then there is a consonant that changes. ん is sometimes pronounced as M in certain words such as 新聞 which means “newspaper”.

Finally, I want to talk about disappearing vowels. The U sounds can be omitted when saying certain words. This is very common in speech. For example, the formal sentence endings of desu です and masu ます often omit the U in spoken Japanese. This becomes “des” and “mas”. Some other common words where the U is omitted in spoken Japanese include suki 好き (which means to like something) and the female name Asuka あすか. When the U is omitted, these words are pronounced as “ski” and “aska”. It is entirely up to the speaker if they which to pronounce the U or omit the U.

Example sentence with omitted U: Asuka likes to eat curry. あすかはカレーを食べるのが好きです。

Well, I think that’s enough on pronunciation for this episode. Let’s move on to the next segment.

Today’s topic on Kaa-chan Corner is: Japan’s image. Non-Japanese may think of anime, manga, sushi, and karate but what image do Japanese have of Japan?

[Kaa-chan Corner]

Thank you for listening to Naruhodo Japan and if you liked this episode or have any questions, please leave feedback on the website [naruhodojapan.com](http://naruhodojapan.com). This podcast was created by your host Mariko. Please tune in again for the next episode. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!