

Japanese Language and Culture¹

Day Zero

31 December 2015

日本語: Goals and Overview

- Learning Japanese overview:
 - L4 acquisition: For a native speaker of English, one Indian language, and a professionally-fluent speaker of Argentinian-dialect Spanish
 - Approach/structure:
 - Holism vs. reductionism? ⇒ Need both!
 - Self-designed course of study: January 2016 – **May 2020** (??)
 - Long-term: Pass JLPT N1 with advanced proficiency in July or December 2020
 - Maybe live in Japan eventually!
 - At least **one** hour per day of dedicated study
 - Long-term path (not necessarily the only one):

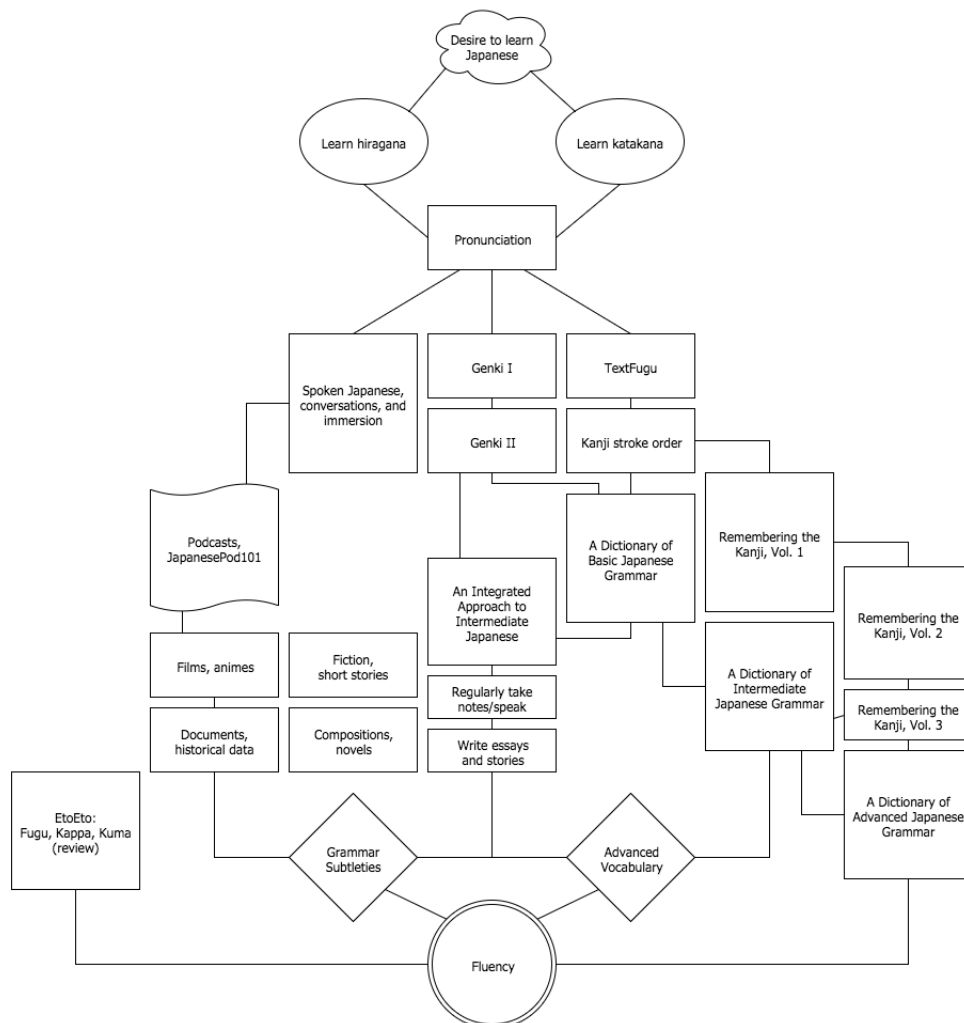


Figure 1: A possible path to take while learning Japanese. We will probably use something that is along these lines.

- Celebrate autodidacticism!
- Measurement of proficiency:
 - Understanding the language at the same level as a native speaker in a top university
 - THINKING in the target language
 - Can **rewrite** this entire collection of notes in the target language

¹Designed and structured by Chirag Bharadwaj, Cornell University, *B.Sc. Computer Science*, 2017.

- Need to cover Japanese language, literature, culture
- Primary emphasis on following skills:
 - Group 1: Reading, Writing
 - Group 2: Speaking, Listening
 - Need BOTH groups!
- Assume no previous knowledge of Japanese
 - Build from the ground-up (*constructive*)
 - Examine parts of existing structure (*deconstructive*)
 - Emergentism \Rightarrow a hybrid approach (age old question, age old answer)
- Learning a language is a **general** skill
 - Can be applied to **any** type of language
 - Natural languages
 - Logical languages
 - Computer languages
 - Metaphysical: Can be extended to learning *anything*
- Toolkit: Learning *how to learn*
 - Need RWLS but also need balanced skillset
 - We need to figure this out for Japanese in particular
- When is learning “complete”, or over?
 - In some sense, never (i.e. a continual process)
 - At full “proficiency” (metric?):
 - How to measure? Two options:
 - (i) Introduce a scoring mechanism:
 - Take JLPT N1, score 150/180+
 - Alternatives: *kanji kentei*, *J-test*, etc.
 - (ii) Self-measurement:
 - Challenge: can you convert all course notes into the target language?
 - Can you do so without **loss in meaning**?
 - i.e. *transliteration* vs. *romanization*
 - or... the *IPA* system
 - These are not the only two, e.g. a third might be: Can you **teach** it?
 - In order to have lossless pronunciation in our self-evaluation, we need to add a *standard* to our system/toolkit
- How can we achieve *lossless pronunciation*?
 - **Objective:** Create a system to pronounce any language’s sounds in a correct, functional manner without any loss in meaning
 - Is there any language for which we can use extended Latin characters to represent all of its sounds?
 - **Sanskrit** (Devanāgarī)
 - IAST: International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration
 - Lossless romanization of Indic scripts using extensions to a Latin script
 - Interesting: Sanskrit is the **ONLY** such language for which this is possible!
 - Rest of languages: Use the IPA system!
 - International Phonetic Alphabet
 - Idea: Cannot represent meaningful units of sound (*morphemes*), so we need to instead break down further into fundamental units of sound (*phonemes*) to characterize
 - Can represent ANY language: just sounds, after all
 - Examples from English to jog memory:

<i>why</i>	wai	<i>flower</i>	'flaʊər
<i>Japanese</i>	ˌçæpɛ'niz	<i>learn</i>	lɜrn

Table 1: Some English words and their equivalent IPA pronunciations.

- May vary with regional accent... use **standard IPA** for language
- Toolkit: **We will assume familiarity with standard IPA**
 - If not familiar with system, read up on it and take notes
 - Useful skillset, allows understanding of pronunciation much more clearly
 - Cleaner system, as sounds are universal in the human vocal system but words are not (exploit this)

- IPA will come in handy as we start examining the **structure** of Japanese pronunciation
- How to learn a language?
 1. **Syntax**: Writing language constructs
 2. **Semantics**: What do phrases actually **mean**?
 3. **Idioms**: Typical patterns for self-expression (“features”)
 4. **Standards**: Grammar, exceptions, standard features
 5. **Resources**: Tools made by others to learn more easily (e.g. texts, podcasts, etc.)
- ALL five steps mentioned above are essential
 - Breaking into pieces makes it easier to learn (i.e. this is **HOLISM**... there’s a theme here!)
 - Can learn a lot of things by breaking it down into manageable pieces
- Rule: Don’t complain about syntax (...or exceptions)!
 - Building blocks, fundamental to language, cannot change
- But before we can talk about syntax of whole phrases, we need to develop fundamental units of sound that can be strung together to make meaningful communication units:
 - “Letters”? “Words”? “Sentences”?
 - In time we will cover all of them... this is **REDUCTIONISM** (i.e. we need both!)
- Japanese has *three* writing systems:
 - *Hiragana*, which is cursive writing used for native Japanese words, particles, etc.
 - *Katakana*, which is so-called “fragmented writing” using for foreign/loaned words, grammatical inflections, etc.
 - *Kanji*, which is used for general vocabulary
 - Borrowed from ancient Chinese characters, but differs in meaning
 - Much harder to learn than hiragana/katakana
 - Takes many years to memorize/understand how to interpret meaning of kanji in context
 - Overloaded characters, overridden meanings
 - We will cover *pronunciation* of these words and other ones like them later on
- More on Japanese writing systems (i.e. specific terminology):
 - *Kana*: hiragana and katakana
 - Kana are *syllabaries* (i.e. spoken **exactly** as written, which is helpful)
 - Therefore, no ambiguity if IPA pronunciation is put into place for standard characters
 - Unlike English or Latin or even *rōmaji*
 - *Rōmaji*: romanization of Japanese script
 - *Kanji*: lexicographic/pictographic representation
 - No choice but to memorize (Anki, Memrise, etc.)
 - Always reduces to kana, so can always write kanji with kana
 - Sometimes authors put kana above hard-to-recognize kanji to help (called *furigana*)
- Japanese **mixes** all three scripts in a single sentence:
 - Therefore, need to learn ALL, especially kanji
 - 皆さん、こんにちは！私はバラドワジ・チラグです。
 - Translation: Hello everybody! My name is Chirag Bharadwaj.
 - We don’t know it yet, but this sentence used kanji and both types of kana
 - Certain simple words, like “everybody”, are written in hiragana
 - More complicated ideas, like “the name that belongs to me is”, are written in kanji
 - Foreign names, like “Chirag Bharadwaj”, are written in katakana
- So... why is Japanese so hard [to learn]?
 - Kana are elementary: Most of Japanese script ($\approx 80\%$) is in kanji
 - Various levels of kanji proficiency:
 - Standard high school education: ≈ 2200 characters
 - University education: ≈ 5000 characters
 - Total: Between 50000 and 80000 characters in existence today
 - Impossible to know them all!
 - Just us a dictionary beyond 10000+ (most authors stop learning extra kanji around 10k)
 - Stroke order matters!
 - Probably the hardest concept to grasp among the aforementioned ones
 - Handwriting must maximize fluidity
 - Retention of knowledge: Follow a set stroke order to avoid memorization for similar-flowing characters
 - cf. English: Not parallelizable
 - Stroke order in English is mostly irrelevant (see example below)
 - Primary exception: cursive/script writing
 - Dying art in the current generation



Figure 2: Two-stroke 'd' in English, with no extra tail.



Figure 3: Alternative two-stroke 'd' in English, with an extra tail and different stroke order.

□ In English, both of these versions of 'd' are considered correct. This type of thing is NOT the case in Japanese! See below:



Figure 4: Two-stroke 're' in hiragana, with the correct stroke order.



Figure 5: Alternative three-stroke 're' in hiragana, with an incorrect stroke order.

- Rule of thumb: *top-to-bottom*, then *left-to-right*, then *clockwise*, then any *ornaments*
- Formal rules: we will cover this later (somewhat irrelevant these days due to computers)
- How will we proceed?
 - All kana at the beginning (\approx first month)
 - Then develop vocabulary/grammar with kanji
 - See plan-of-action above and detailed schedule for full understanding of work/rigor expected daily
 - Journey begins here!