

# Initial Introduction to the World of Japanese Language

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**ANNOTATION:** In this article we will analyze the most significant basic information about Japanese language, including the main aspects of Japanese language, about the language itself and the main points of grammatical structures.

Additionally, not only modern construction of language, but also, it's historical background and hierarchical characteristics will be explored in this paper.

**KEYWORD:** Japanese language, Uzbek, Nippon, language learners, hiragana, katakana, kanji, manga, Chinese, kana, features, mastering, politeness, pronunciation, tenses.

## Introduction

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, 2021, the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev chaired a meeting on measures to improve the system of teaching foreign languages, as a result, several improvements have been made in this sector. It should be noted, that learning foreign languages can benefit both at the individual and governmental levels. Therefore, foreign languages have been prioritized at a governmental scale for the last decade in our country. On this basis, the issue of attitudes to foreign language teaching is addressed in the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated May 19, 2021 No PP-5117 "On measures to bring the promotion of foreign languages in the Republic of Uzbekistan to a qualitatively new level" is dedicated to importance of foreign languages.

Learning foreign languages helps us to better understand their language and culture. Plus, with learning a brand-new foreign language we can involve us in reverse psychology, as it allows to understand the language and culture by comparison. This is one of the most unexpected benefits of learning a language.

Japanese, with over 127 million speakers in Japan, with rapidly growing body of fluent non-native speakers, is one of the world's major languages. Japan is known as *Nihon* or *Nippon* in Japanese; its people are *Nihonjin* and the language is called *Nihongo*. "Jin" is a suffix meaning "person" or "people" and "go" of course means "language". Outside the languages of Europe and some Western countries, it is probably the most studied foreign language, with about a million learners in China, a similar number in Korea and around 3,500 learners in Uzbekistan. According to the statistics, it is the most studied foreign language in Australian secondary schools and is now also becoming very popular in Britain and America. Japan is the world's second-largest economy, a major provider of foreign aid and a significant force in world affairs, particularly in Central Asia. It has a rich, distinctive culture combining native elements with influences from the Asian mainland and, more

recently, from Europe and America. A fascinating blend of tradition and modernity, Japan has a literary tradition extending back 1,200 years, yet is one of the most modern, some would say postmodern, high-tech, post-industrial societies in the world. The Japanese language is the key to understanding Japanese culture and society. Studying Japanese can be a very rewarding experience in its own right, but, more important, it has great practical value for anyone wishing to do business with the Japanese or planning to visit Japan.

## The main findings and results

The Japanese language is absolutely different from most languages in the world, as Russian, Uzbek and etc. Therefore, learning English and other languages will not help us anymore in learning Japanese. The other side of the coin can be Chinese and Korean languages, as they have slight connection with Japanese. As it mentioned before, it should be no surprise that as a non-western language (and a language isolate), Japanese is entirely dissimilar from Uzbek. Fortunately though, despite the common myth of Japanese being "the world's most difficult language" there isn't much about the language itself that is inherently difficult.

When it comes to the history of Japanese language, we should notice that written records of Japanese date to the 8th century, the oldest among them being the Kojiki (712; "Records of Ancient Matters"). If the history of the language were to be split in two, the division would fall somewhere between the 12th and 16th centuries, when the language shed most of its Old Japanese characteristics and acquired those of the modern language. It is common, however, to divide the 1,200-year history into four or five periods; Old Japanese (up to the 8th century), Late Old Japanese (9th–11th century), Middle Japanese (12th–16th century), Early Modern Japanese (17th–18th century), and Modern Japanese (19th century to the present).

The main feature of Japanese is the fact that in Japanese there are only two tenses: past and present-future. Moreover, it is possible to understand what kind of time is meant in the second case (present or future) by the context and the meaning of the sentence itself. Let's imagine, if it is written as "tomorrow", then we are talking about the future. It sounds a little strange, but you will not encounter with difficulties with it. There is no plural in Japanese. That is, in Japanese, "book" and "books" are the same word "hon". How to understand what is being said? It's all the same in context. Plus, sometimes you can name the number specifically, with words as "one", "two" or "three" or instead of numbers, we can say "a lot". In addition to this, there are particles that are placed at the end of the word, and indicate exactly a large amount, or a group of something.

The second feature of the Japanese language is that Japanese nouns do not change in gender, number, and case. For example, the word 日本人 (nihonjin) can mean Japanese, as well as Japanese or Japanese. Accordingly, the word itself does not change in any way. There are special suffixes that make the singular plural, there is also a way to say "two Japanese", "three Japanese", etc., but the word itself (if you do not add any suffixes) does not change. The word can be used in various situations and you can only understand if this is Japanese, Japanese or Japanese from the context. The next word is 先生 (sensei). It can be a male teacher, a female teacher or teachers. This, on the one hand, is very convenient, but, on the other hand, sometimes people get confused, especially at the first stages. The Japanese language relies heavily on context.

Japanese has a relatively simple sound system. It does not have a strong stress accent as we have in Uzbek language, mainly, it consists with preferring instead of use high and low pitch contrasts to mark the boundaries between phrases. For practical purposes, we will find that you can produce natural sounding Japanese by giving each syllable equal stress and prominence or in other words, loudness.

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In addition, Japanese is very easy to pronounce. It is made up of strings of syllables (a, ka, ta, etc.) which just join together following very simple rules of pronunciation (e.g. anata is a-na-ta). Unlike Uzbek language, each syllable has mostly even stress and combinations of vowels (e-i, a-i, etc.) do not represent completely new sounds.

Japanese writing, on the other hand, can be confusing because Japanese scripts don't look at all like Western alphabets. The Japanese scripts consist of two sets of kana (kah-nah) — phonetic symbols for Japanese syllables — and about 2,000 kanji (kahn-jee) characters, which are Chinese characters adapted for Japanese. It is difficult to estimate the exact total number of kanji characters, but Dai Kanwa Jiten (大漢和辞典, “The Great Kanji-Japanese Dictionary”), for example, contains about 50,000 characters. Fortunately, not all of these need to be memorised. Learning the most common kanji characters as defined by the Japanese Ministry of Education (常用漢字; jōyō kanji) is a prerequisite for basic literacy. However, the more you know, the better. The jōyō kanji list has 2,136 characters, which sounds like a lot. Japanese children learn these most common characters at school gradually.

Several thousand years ago, the Japanese did not have any written language. They decided to borrow writing from the Chinese, as at that time the Chinese nation was skilled, with their developed writing system. But the Japanese found it difficult to read such characters, and they began to invent various signs to sign the reading of kanji. So there were two alphabets - hiragana and katakana. If you just want to learn how to speak Japanese, you may want to skip focusing on these Japanese scripts and use rōmaji (roh-mah-jee), the Romanized spellings of Japanese words. However, getting used to the Japanese scripts is a good idea, especially if you plan to use your Japanese skills to travel. If you can recognize some of the Japanese scripts, you can get around in a Japanese town more easily because all street signs are written in only the Japanese scripts.

Nowadays, everything has changed and borrowed words are written in katakana. For example, you will arrive in Japan and want to write your name. Your name will be written in katakana. Accordingly, such words as computer, internet, skirt, bus, etc. are written in katakana. Original Japanese words are written in hiragana, and you can also write a word in hiragana, even if it has a hieroglyphic spelling, but you do not know how this hieroglyph is written. Mostly Japanese students do this. When they come to study, of course, they do not know this huge number of hieroglyphs - they write everything in hiragana. Later they learn hieroglyphs and write the word in hieroglyphs. Also, hiragana is used to write variable endings of words in Japanese and various cases.

Mastering the language of Japanese means mastering the many unique nuances and social conventions of Japanese culture, so that you not only use the language fluently, but in a culturally and socially appropriate manner as well, for when it comes to Japanese, the language and the cultural context in which it is used are intimately intertwined.

The next feature is the existence of levels related to politeness. There are different levels of politeness in Japanese. Depending on who you are talking to, it will be expressed differently. According to the situation, the endings will be changed, or more polite word is chosen instead of simple term. This is due to the fact that Japanese society is highly hierarchical. Accordingly, there are three styles of politeness in Japanese speech:

- Spoken language - used when you are talking to loved ones, family or friends. Also, conversational speech can be allowed by elders in relation to younger ones.
- Neutral-polite style is the most common. Used when meeting strangers. Also used at work with colleagues of equal status or in educational institutions.

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- Polite speech - used in the service industry, and younger people use it in relation to elders. (At work or school).

## Conclusion

In the latest decades, most fresh Japanese language learners we may encounter with initially become acquainted with the language through Japanese pop culture, such as manga, anime and JPOP. However, back when I first began learning Japanese, Japanese pop culture had not yet entered the mainstream. Instead, Japan was still viewed as an emerging global economic powerhouse, and many aspiring learners saw gaining competency in Japanese as a means of advancing one's business or career.

Most beginning learners of Japanese language embark on their journey toward mastery of the language with excitement, optimism, and perhaps a bit of trepidation at the unknown path ahead. They envision the day when they will soon be conversing fluently with friends in Japanese, reading manga and novels, watching movies and anime and consuming other media in the original language, and even living in Japan and working in a career in which they use Japanese on an everyday basis in the workplace.

In fact, it should be said that there are international students from more than 170 countries and regions across the world in Japan. About 220,000 international students from more than 170 countries and regions of the world are studying at higher educational institutions in Japan. These students can broaden their horizons through exposure to Japanese as well as the diverse cultures of the world. Japan is a tolerant country where freedom of religion and thought is guaranteed by the constitution.

Finally, I would like to notice that once again that while it certainly is possible to “master” Japanese so that you acquire the “knowledge and skill that allows you to do, use, or understand something very well,” when it comes to learning languages in general and Japanese in particular, the journey is as perpetually endless as it is infinitely rewarding.

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