

Suggested levels for Guided Reading, DRA™, Lexile®, and Reading Recovery™ are provided in the Pearson Scott Foresman Leveling Guide.

Social Studies

Social Studies

# The Japanese Language

by Marilyn Greco

Genre	Comprehension Skills and Strategy	Text Features
Expository nonfiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compare and Contrast</li><li>• Draw Conclusions</li><li>• Predict</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Charts</li><li>• Diagram</li><li>• Map</li><li>• Glossary</li></ul>

Scott Foresman Reading Street 3.5.1



scottforesman.com





# The Japanese Language

by Marilyn Greco



Editorial Offices: Glenview, Illinois • Parsippany, New Jersey • New York, New York  
Sales Offices: Needham, Massachusetts • Duluth, Georgia • Glenview, Illinois  
Coppell, Texas • Ontario, California • Mesa, Arizona





## Language

All over the world, people use language. We use language to talk, to write, to sing, and to communicate through e-mail. Today there are about 6,800 different languages in the world, and each language is important to the people who speak it.

Language helps us share our lives with others. We use language to greet our friends and family and to discuss information and ideas. Language helps us learn from each other.

A language tells us about the people who speak it. A language tells about a culture. How many languages do you speak? How many languages would you like to speak?

Every effort has been made to secure permission and provide appropriate credit for photographic material. The publisher deeply regrets any omission and pledges to correct errors called to its attention in subsequent editions.

Unless otherwise acknowledged, all photographs are the property of Scott Foresman, a division of Pearson Education.

Photo locators denoted as follows: Top (T), Center (C), Bottom (B), Left (L), Right (R), Background (Bkgd)

Opener: Corbis; 4 Corbis; 5 Joseph Sohm/Corbis; 7 ©Royalty-Free/Corbis; 10 Corbis; 12 Paul A. Souders/Corbis; 14 Wolfgang Kaehler/Corbis; 16 Yuriiko Nakao/Corbis; 18 Michael S. Yamashita/Corbis; 20 Corbis

ISBN: 0-328-13384-1

Copyright © Pearson Education, Inc.

All Rights Reserved. Printed in the United States of America. This publication is protected by Copyright, and permission should be obtained from the publisher prior to any prohibited reproduction, storage in a retrieval system, or transmission in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or likewise. For information regarding permission(s), write to: Permissions Department, Scott Foresman, 1900 East Lake Avenue, Glenview, Illinois 60025.

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 V0G1 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05





## What Is Japanese?

Japanese is an ancient and **unique** language. The words are very different from English words, and the sounds and the rhythm of the language are also different. Japanese words do not look like English words.

Look at the Japanese writing on this page. Try to pronounce the Japanese number words, and notice the character for each word.

### How to Count to Ten in Japanese

Number	Japanese Word	Pronunciation Guide	Japanese Character
1	ichi	(ichy)	一
2	ni	(nee)	二
3	san	(sahn)	三
4	shi	(she)	四
5	go	(go)	五
6	roku	(rowkoo)	六
7	shichi	(sheechee)	七
8	hachi	(hah-chee)	八
9	ku	(koo)	九
10	juu	(joo-oo)	十



## Who Speaks Japanese?

More than 127 million people live in Japan, and almost all of them speak Japanese.

There are also large Japanese communities in other countries. Japanese people live in the United States and Canada, and they live in European and South American countries.

Many people who are not Japanese have learned Japanese as a second or third language. Japanese is spoken in many areas of the world.



Japanese people live in communities in many of the world's countries.





## Language Families

Have you ever seen a family tree? Perhaps you have made one about your own family. A family tree is a **diagram** that shows how members of a family are related.

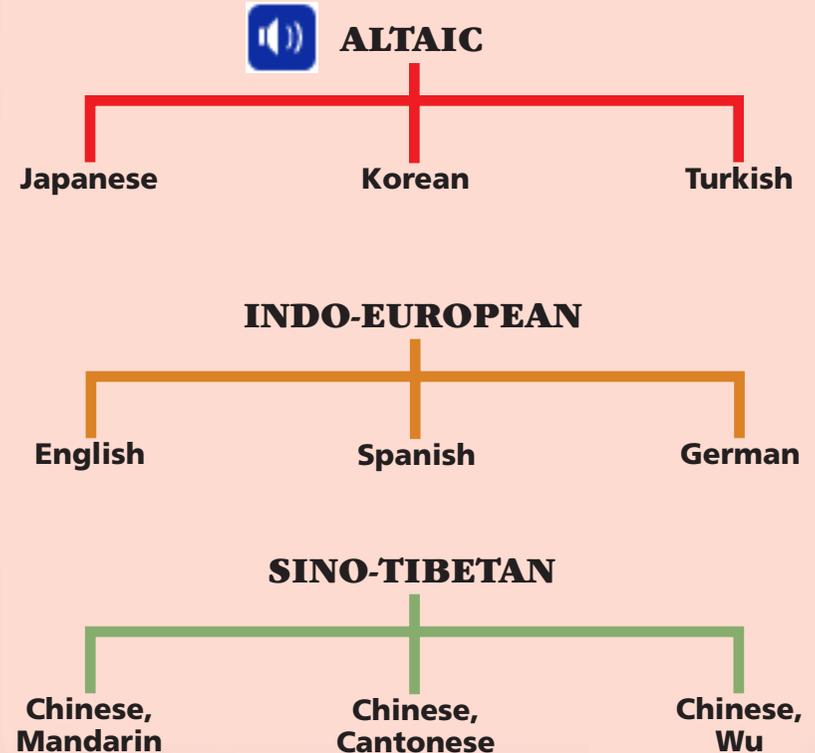
People in a family tree are related, and languages are related too. Languages belong to families. They have a common history and are similar in important ways. How languages are related can be shown in a language family tree.

Japanese and English do not belong to the same language family. Look at the three language family trees on page 7. Does it surprise you to learn that Japanese and Chinese are not related either?

Chinese belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family, and some scholars believe that Japanese and Korean belong to the Altaic family. The Altaic languages began in Central Asia near the Altai Mountains. Some groups that spoke these languages moved west as far as Turkey, and others moved east all the way to Korea and Japan. Japanese and Chinese are not related, but Japanese and Turkish probably are!



A Japanese sign shows that noodles are for sale.



## Where Is Japan?

Japan is a group of islands in the western Pacific Ocean. Japan's southwestern coast is 115 miles from the **mainland** of Asia, and the islands of Japan belong to the continent of Asia.

The first people arrived in Japan thousands of years ago, probably during the last Ice Age. At that time the coasts of the Asian continent and of Japan were closer to each other, so it would have been easier for people to travel from one coast to the other.

Later, after most of the ice melted, Japan was more difficult to reach from the mainland. For thousands of years, Japan was very **isolated**. Not many people came to Japan from other places, and not many Japanese people traveled far away. The Japanese lived mostly by themselves.

Eventually, visitors from China arrived. They taught the Japanese how to write, and the Japanese were excited to learn that words could be represented by marks on paper. Some Japanese traveled to faraway China to learn more. When they returned to Japan, they brought many new skills and ideas. For a long time Japanese scholars wrote only in Chinese, but then people began to change Chinese writing to fit the Japanese language.

Many centuries have passed since those ancient times. Both Japanese and our own language, English, have changed since then. The Chinese language had a great impact on Japanese. This is similar to the way that the Latin language changed English.





## Language and Culture

A people's language and culture are very important to them. Language and culture develop together since they are connected like strands in a rope. Language and culture keep people together and give members of the community an identity.

First, what is culture? Some parts of culture, such as special holidays, games, food, clothes, dances, music, and art, are easy to see. We see signs of our culture all around us. Culture is just about everything a group does together.

Other parts of culture, such as values and beliefs, are not as easy to see. A culture tells people how to behave. It gives them rules to follow and reasons for doing things in certain ways.



A man rakes a Japanese rock garden.



## Now, What Is Language?

People who study languages are called **linguists**. Linguists tell us that a language is a system of sound symbols, or words. People use their mouths to make different sounds. Language sounds that are formed with an open mouth are called vowels, and sounds that are made with the tongue or lips are called consonants.

Japanese has five vowels: *a*, *i*, *u*, *e*, and *o*, and each vowel has only one sound. There are sixteen consonants. Japanese has fewer sounds than English.

The vowel and consonant sounds of a language are put together to form words, and each word has a meaning. The Japanese word *ni* (nee) is the sound symbol in Japanese for the number two.

When we speak a language we put words together to communicate ideas.





## Language Rules

When we play games, we follow rules. Did you know that when you talk, you follow rules too? Every language has rules.

Both Japanese and English have many rules for combining sounds to make syllables. There are also rules for putting words together to make sentences. Here are three rules that are different in Japanese and in English.



Sizes and prices for crates of tuna are shown on this Japanese sign.



### 1. Vowel Sounds

In Japanese each of the five vowels, *a*, *i*, *u*, *e*, and *o*, has one sound.

In English there are also five vowel letters: *a*, *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. But in English these vowels can make about twelve different vowel sounds.

### 2. Combining Vowels and Consonants

In Japanese, all syllables end in a vowel sound. For example, the word for 1 is *ichi*. It has two syllables, *i* and *chi*. The word for 2 is *ni*, which is one syllable. These two words follow the rule that all syllables end in a vowel sound.

In English, syllables can end with a vowel sound or a consonant sound. The English words *two* and *three* end with vowel sounds. Many syllables in English end with consonant sounds. The words for 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 end with consonant sounds.

### 3. Word Order

In English the words of a sentence are in a certain order, but in Japanese the words of a sentence are in a different order. For example, *the child threw the ball* is the order of an English sentence, but in Japanese the word order of the same sentence would be *the child the ball threw*.





## The Japanese Ideal of Harmony

An important **ideal** in Japan is **harmony**, or *wa*. With music we make harmony when low voices and high voices blend together. We enjoy listening to it because music makes us feel good, but what happens when one person sings the wrong notes? The music doesn't sound good, and instead of harmony there is **discord**.

The Japanese value harmony in nature. This can be seen in their gardens. A Japanese garden contains rocks, which represent mountains, a pond, which represents the ocean, trees, which represent the forest, and a fountain or stream, which represents the river. All of the parts of the garden fit together in harmony.



Gardens are very important to the Japanese people.



The Japanese believe that people should be in harmony with each other too. If one person does not follow the rules, there is discord, and harmony has been lost.

In Japan, the group is more important than one person. People try to follow the rules and get along well together, and when they do, there is harmony.

In general, Japanese people do not want to show off or stand out. They do not want to be loud or forceful. In Japan, that is thought of as very rude. To keep harmony, there are many rules for speaking in Japan.





To use the correct words in Japan, you must keep four things in mind:

1. You must know to whom you are speaking. Is the person older than you are? Does this person have a more important position than yours?
2. You must know when to speak. You should be careful not to speak for too long, and you should take turns speaking.
3. You must think about the time and place. Is this the right time and place to say what you have in mind?
4. Men and women use different words for some things.



Japanese children are enjoying a birthday celebration.



## Learning to “Think Japanese”

Learning how the Japanese language communicates ideas of *I* can help us understand how Japanese people think and act.

The Japanese language has many words for *I*, but people do not use these words very often. That seems strange in the American culture since an American usually puts more importance on himself or herself than on a group. It would be hard for an American to speak for a long time without saying *I* or *me*.

In Japanese, to talk about yourself separates you from the group and breaks group harmony. The Japanese like to be known as part of a group, so when they talk, they usually don't talk about themselves. When they do they may use their names instead of the word *I*.





## Japanese Body Language

The movements we make while speaking or listening are called body language.

When Japanese people greet each other, they bow and do not look each other in the eye. English speakers reach out to shake hands, and they make eye contact. Both greetings show respect. The bow and the handshake are different customs of different cultures.



In the United States people shake hands to say *hello*.  
In Japan they bow to greet one another.



## Loan Words in Japanese

Most languages adopt new words from other languages. These are called “loan words.”

The Japanese word *pan* is a loan word. The word *pan*, or *bread*, has an interesting history. More than four hundred years ago, Portuguese traders came to Japan. They brought bread with them. The Japanese people had always eaten rice cakes, and they kept eating rice cakes, but they started baking bread too. They didn't have a word for this new food, so they borrowed the Portuguese word, *pão*, or *pan* in Japanese.

Today, Japan is adopting more and more loan words. Most of these new words come from English. Japanese people enjoy eating *hanbāgu* (hamburger), *sute-ki* (steak), *suupu* (soup), and *sarada* (salad). They watch *terebi* (television) and listen to the *rajio* (radio).

Japanese has loaned words to the English language too. The word *karaoke*, which means “empty orchestra,” is Japanese. Many Americans enjoy singing *karaoke*. The words *kimono*, *karate*, and *typhoon* also came to the English language from Japanese.





## Japanese Writing

Kanji is the oldest form of Japanese writing. The word *Kanji* means “Chinese characters.” Like all early writing, Chinese characters began as pictograms. Pictograms are pictures that are used to represent words. Later the pictograms were made simpler, and some pictograms were combined to make new ones.

An example is the Kanji character for Sun. It began as the pictogram . It was later changed to . Then it was combined with the character , which means “origin,” or “land to the east.” Together these characters mean “land of the rising sun,” or “Japan.”

Japanese is a fun and interesting language to explore. It is one of many things the people of the “land to the east” have shared with us.



A Japanese couple reads a newspaper printed in Japanese. The newspaper looks very different from newspapers printed in English.





# Now Try This

## Learn to Write Kanji

You can write some basic Kanji characters. Make a chart like the one on these pages. Copy the Kanji characters from the boxes on the left into the boxes on the right. Enjoy!

 <i>hito</i> (person)	
 <i>yasu</i> (to rest)	
 <i>karada</i> (body)	
 <i>tsuku</i> (to make)	



 <i>ki</i> (tree)	
 <i>hon</i> (book)	
 <i>hayashi</i> (woods)	
 <i>mura</i> (village)	





# Glossary

**diagram** *n.* a drawing or plan that explains something.

**discord** *n.* disagreement; clashing of sounds.

**harmony** *n.* agreement.

**ideal** *n.* a standard of excellence.

**isolated** *adj.* the state of being separated from others.

**linguists** *n.* people who study languages.

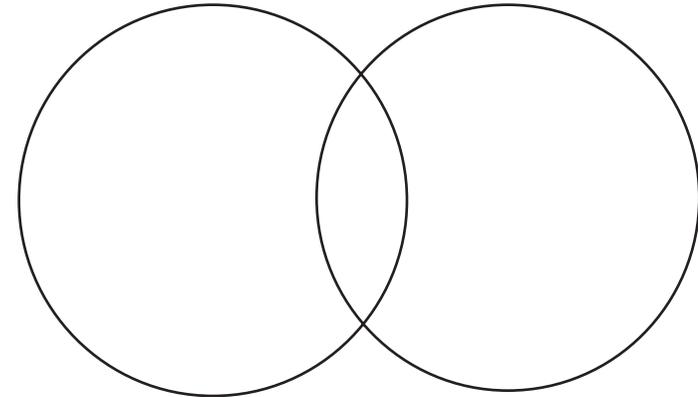
**mainland** *n.* the chief or largest land mass of a country, territory, or continent.

**unique** *adj.* one of a kind.



# Reader Response

1. In what ways is the Japanese language similar to the English language? In what ways is it different? Use a Venn diagram like the one below to explain.



2. Do you think the Japanese language will continue to change? Why or why not?
3. How do the Japanese people try to achieve harmony?
4. What did you learn about the Japanese language that you didn't know before?

