



# RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

## **M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports**

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program  
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

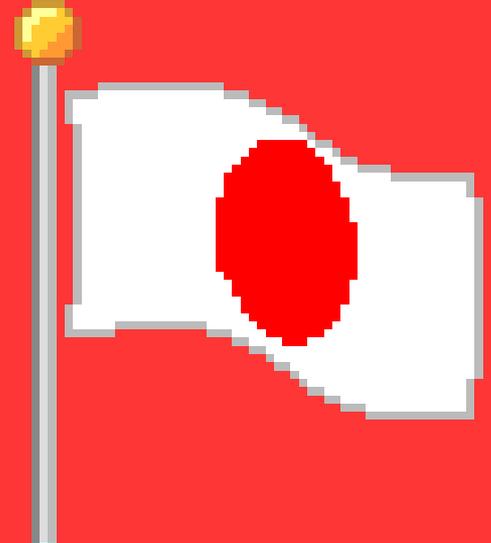
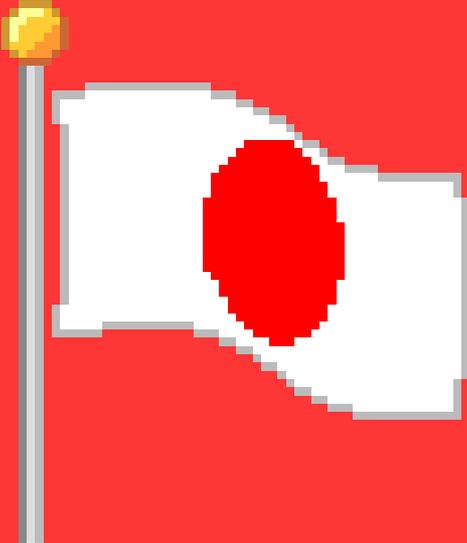
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# Language Group Specific Report:

# *Japanese*

Nikhol E. Bentley  
TESL 539  
Spring 2010



# History of the Language

- Japanese, a Japonic language, is the official language of Japan, but it is spoken in other parts of the world as well, such as Taiwan, Guam, the US and Brazil .
- Over 130 million people speak Japanese, making it the 9<sup>th</sup> most widely spread language in the world.
- Due to the mountainous island terrain, there are numerous dialects of the Japanese language used throughout the country. These dialects can be divided into Eastern and Western dialects.



(<http://hhh.gavilan.edu/>)



# Major Dialects

## Eastern Japanese VS.

- More emphasis on the consonants
- Dialects
  - Hokkaido
  - Tohoku
  - Kanto
  - Eastern part of Chuba

## Western Japanese

- More emphasis on the vowels
- Dialects
  - Kansai
  - Chugoku
  - Shikoku
  - Kyushu
  - Okinawa
  - Western part of Chuba

*\*Despite the complexity of the language, Japan has a 99% literacy rate*



# Writing System

- Japan has 4 distinct systems of writing
  - Hiragana
    - Syllabic and the most original writing system in Japan
  - Katakana
    - Used to write foreign words
  - Kanji
    - Based on Chinese writing system, consists of about 2000 signs
  - Romanji
    - A Romanization of Japanese words which has been recently developed

Hiragana

あ a	い i	う u	え e	お o
か ka	き ki	く ku	け ke	こ ko
さ sa	し shi	す su	せ se	そ so
た ta	ち chi	つ tsu	て te	と to
な na	に ni	ぬ nu	ね ne	の no
は ha	ひ hi	ふ fu	へ he	ほ ho
ま ma	み mi	む mu	め me	も mo
や ya		ゆ yu		よ yo
ら ra	り ri	る ru	れ re	ろ ro
わ wa				を wo
ん n				

Katakana

ア a	イ i	ウ u	エ e	オ o
カ ka	キ ki	ク ku	ケ ke	コ ko
サ sa	シ shi	ス su	セ se	ソ so
タ ta	チ chi	ツ tsu	テ te	ト to
ナ na	ニ ni	ヌ nu	ネ ne	ノ no
ハ ha	ヒ hi	フ fu	ヘ he	ホ ho
マ ma	ミ mi	ム mu	メ me	モ mo
ヤ ya		ユ yu		ヨ yo
ラ ra	リ ri	ル ru	レ re	ロ ro
ワ wa				ヲ wo
ン n				

(<http://blog.asiahotels.com> , 2010)

**Link to Japanese Alphabet song:**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrMkJAzBWQc>

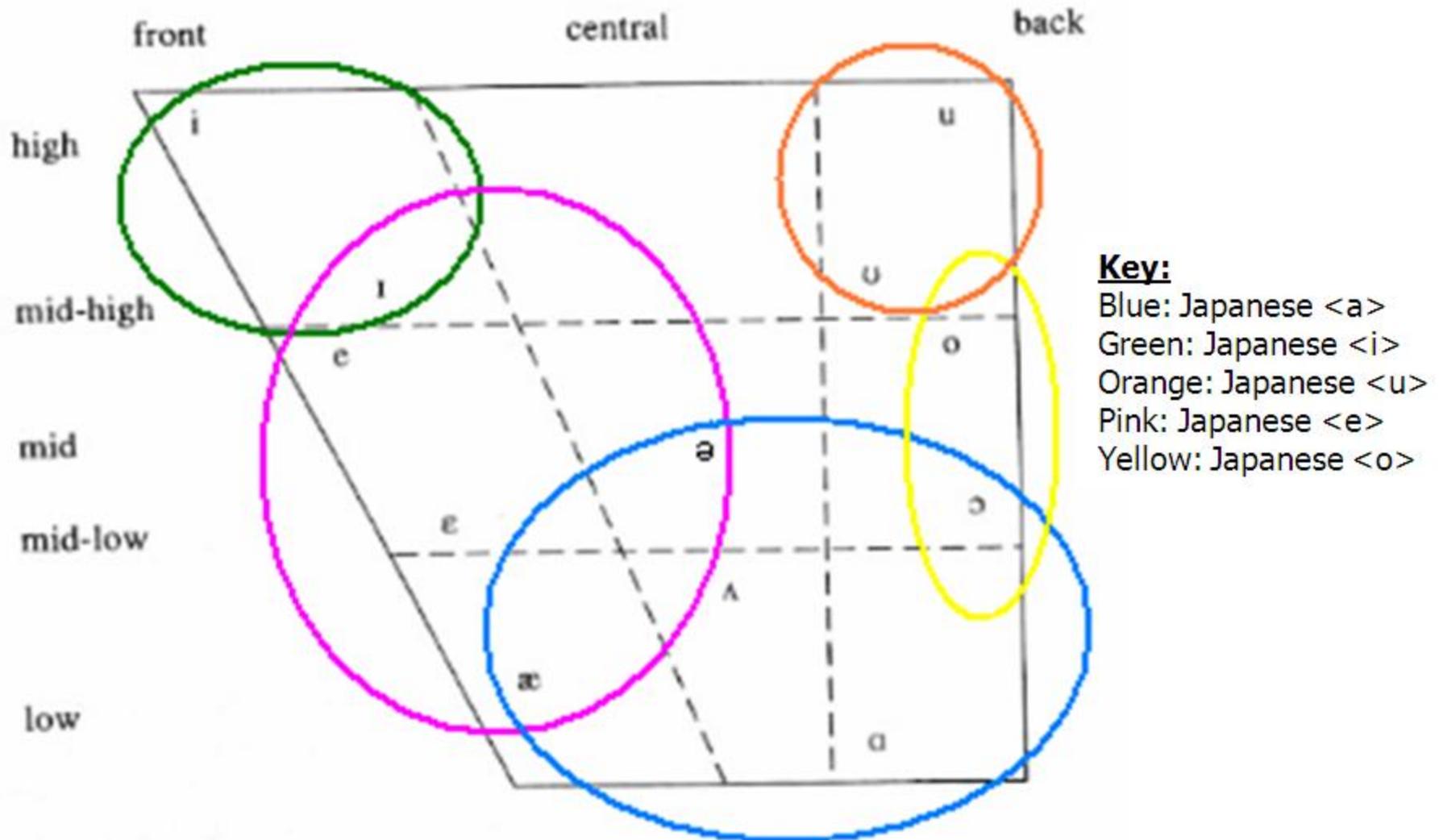


# Common Difficulties

- With over 6,800 spoken languages in the world, it is easy to understand how mistakes can be made when trying to learn a new language; especially one from another family in the case of Japanese, which comes from the Japonic family, and English, which comes from the Germanic family.
- It is very important to know and be able to identify the common errors made by English Language Learners (ELL) as early as possible.
- By doing so, teachers will be able to correct these mistakes immediately to ensure their students' overall success in learning English.
- Japanese students encounter many common difficulties when trying to learn English.



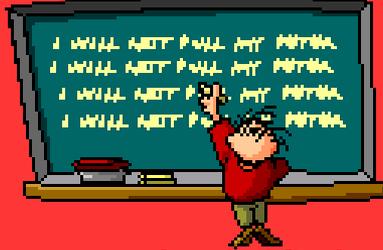
# Phonology



In Japanese there are no consonant clusters, therefore the English word by adding in an unnecessary vowel. For example, strawberry is pronounced sutoroberi.



# Morphology



- Due to the fact that Japanese and English come from different types of polysynthetic languages, it is easy to understand the common errors that are made by Japanese students when learning English morphology.
  - English is a fusional or inflected language, in which morphemes are squeezed together and often the meaning of the word is changed.
  - Japanese is an agglutinative language, in which morphemes are connected but does not change the meaning of the word.
- Common mistakes Japanese students make
  - Japanese people value silence and with that silence often comes deep listening for understanding. The problem that Japanese listeners encounter most is that native English speakers talk very quickly and usually drop letters from words. Even though a Japanese student might have a brain full of knowledge, they cannot always understand English because of this issue. To make matters worse, Japanese people are too proud to ask for clarification. Therefore, they tend to just sit there and nod even though they have no clue what is going on.





# Syntax

- Common errors Japanese students make in English grammar

- Articles, such as “a” and “the”, do not exist in Japanese. Also, articles are functional words, which means that they have no contextual meaning. So, when a Japanese student is trying to listen to an English speaker they might not hear the articles and therefore they will not use them when speaking themselves. As if that did not make it difficult enough for them to learn the English articles, the rules themselves are so complex, most native speakers cannot explain them exactly.
- Relative pronouns, such as “which”, are also a new concept they have to acquire, which can cause some of the same issues as stated above.
- Japanese students struggle with verb agreement when learning English because in Japanese the final verb in the sentence signals the tense in which the sentence takes place. For example, a Japanese student would say this without a second thought; “John closed the book he is reading.”
- Due to the fact that the subject is often implied in the Japanese language, Japanese English Learners often omit the subject when speaking/writing in English. For example, a Japanese student might write, “Since Richard did not come, got angry.” Notice “I”, the subject, is not stated in the sentence.





# Semantics



- While Japanese English Learners often have difficulties learning the English language, they actually have a head start with their vocabulary skills.
- Although the Japanese and English languages have no relationship between them, the Japanese use many English words in their daily life. This gives Japanese students the opportunity to use English terms more often.
  - Examples
    - mania for maniac
    - terebi for television
    - koohil for coffee
- However, if not corrected, this head start could actually be a drawback. This is because Japanese speakers often pronounce English words a Japanese accent, which can lead to major errors.



# Pragmatics

- In Japan, there are 4 different ways to address people
  - Kun, somewhat condescending; used when talking with boys or young men
  - Chan, used with children and close friends
  - San, universal mode; most respectful; used as a default
  - Sama, deferential; used in a formal situation
  - The only other way to address someone would be by their title, for example a teacher would be addressed “Cloud sensei”
- Common difficulties Japanese students have with English pragmatics
  - English speakers are often very casual, whereas the Japanese are more professional. Due to this difference, Japanese English Learners often will not speak if they do not know how to address someone or do not understand because they do not want to be wrong or be considered rude.
  - To be polite, Japanese often use the same professional talk in all settings. This is awkward and can seem pretentious to English speakers, therefore Japanese English Learners tend to have trouble making English speaking friends. Both of these factors can often lead to a common communication break down that Japanese English Learners go through.



# Communication Styles

- The Japanese tend to be suspicious of words; they are more concerned with actions.
  - They often use silence to communicate, as they believe it is better to talk too little than too much.
- They value harmony over truth.
  - Japanese people would rather give you an answer that pleases you than tell the truth.
- Criticism is considered personal and therefore disrespectful.
  - Japanese value their reputation highly, so to admit fault or inaccuracy would be very serious.



# Communication Styles Cont.

- Japanese feel that making direct eye contact is rude or aggressive.
  - They often look at a person neck or tie knot to show engagement in a conversation.
- The Japanese value their personal space.
  - They often keep a great distance between themselves. They rarely touch each other and never point or make gestures when speaking.

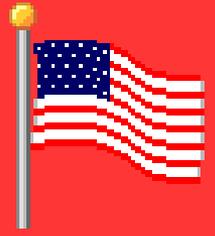


(<http://en.wikipedia.org>, 2011)





# Cultural Differences



## • Japanese Values

- Traditional
- Group orientation
- Indirectness/Harmony
- Academic success
- Politeness
- Modest
- Silence
- Non-verbal communication
- Little or no movement when speaking
- No eye contact
- Old age, sign of wisdom

vs.

## • American Values

- Non-traditional
- Individual achievement
- Directness
- Material success
- Equality for all
- Arrogant
- Conversation
- Verbal communication
- Lots of movement and gestures when speaking
- Direct eye contact
- Youth, sign of beauty





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