

## Rhythm of Japanese



Pronouncing two morae as one

★ Japanese is a **mora-timed rhythm** language.

♪ Each *kana* is pronounced at about the same length. This unit of length is “**a mora**”.

ex.) 「あさ」 is two morae, 「リズム」 is three morae, and 「あいさつ」 is four morae.

♪ As for contracted sounds, “a *kana* + a contracted sound” (「かな+ や / ゆ / よ」) is one mora.

ex.) 「しゅみ」 is two morae, 「かいしゃ」 is three morae.

But, we don't pronounce them like 「あ、さ」, 「リ、ズ、ム」, 「あ、い、さ、つ」, or 「しゅ、み」!

☛ We pronounce them combining two morae in one, like 「あさ」, 「リズム・ム」, 「あい・さつ」, or 「しゅみ」.

Musical notation showing the rhythm of the words: あさ, リズム, あいさつ, しゅみ. Below the notes are rhythm diagrams consisting of squares. Brackets under the notes indicate the number of morae: あさ (2), リズム (2, 1), あいさつ (2, 2), しゅみ (2). The rhythm diagrams are: [ ] [ ] for あさ; [ ] [ ] [ ] for リズム; [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] for あいさつ; [ ] [ ] for しゅみ.

♪ Special sounds, such as **long vowels** (ー), **choked sounds** (っ), or **nasal euphonies** (ん), take one mora to pronounce.

☛ “A *kana* + a special sound” is also pronounced as one.

Musical notation showing the rhythm of the words: きょう, あさって, こんにちは. Labels above the notes indicate special sounds: long vowel (きょう), choked sound (あさって), and nasal euphony (こんにちは). Brackets under the notes indicate the number of morae: きょう (2), あさって (1, 2, 1), こんにちは (2, 2, 1). The rhythm diagrams are: [ ] [ ] for きょう; [ ] [ ] [ ] for あさって; [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] for こんにちは.

★ The above square-shaped objects are called **Rhythm Diagrams** or **RDs**.



## Rhythm Pattern and Typical Model

★ **Rhythm Pattern** shows the placement of length in the respective word.

ex.) 「あさ」 or 「しゅみ」 belongs to Pattern 2, 「リズム」 belongs to Pattern 2-1, 「あいさつ」 belongs to Pattern 2-2.

☞ Any word can be represented by these patterns.

★ The representative examples of rhythm patterns are called **Typical Models**. See Figure 1.

Rhythm Pattern	Rhythm Diagram	Typical Model	Number of Morae
2		きょう	2
2-1		あ①・た	3
1-2		き・の <u>う</u>	〃
2-2		おは・ <u>よう</u>	4
1-2-1		あ・ <u>さつ</u> ・て	〃
2-2-1		<u>こん</u> ・にち・は	5
2-1-2		あり・が・ <u>とう</u>	〃
1-2-2		さ・ <u>よう</u> ・なら	〃

(The underlined parts indicate "a *kana* + a special sound", and the circled part "devocalized vowel".)

Figure 1 Rhythm Pattern and Typical Models

♪ Let's repeat each typical model above three times. By doing it, you understand the placement of length and how to pronounce in appropriate length. We call this **Continuous Repeating Method**. Please practice by using other words with the same rhythm pattern.

ex.) きょう (Pattern 2) → きょう | きょう | きょう → しゅみ | しゅみ | しゅみ

♪ What's important is to feel the beat and practice at a constant speed.



## Devocalization of vowels

- ★ The vowel [i] of 「し (shi)」 in 「あした」 is not pronounced clearly. You pronounce it as if just breathing out the air like when you say 「静かにしてください。 し〜」. This is the “**devocalization of vowels**”.



♪ Put your finger close to your mouth and say 「し〜、あした」.



## You can distinguish the Rhythm Pattern of the word from *kana*!

ex.) 「ありがとう」, 「あした」

- ① At first, put “a *kana* + a special sound” together if special sounds are contained in the word. (「ありが・とう」)
  - ② Next, combine two morae from the beginning of the word. (「あり・が・とう」)  
Even if no special sounds are contained, combine two morae from the beginning. (「あし・た」)
  - ③ One mora may remain. (「あり・が・とう」 → 2-1-2 「あし・た」 → 2-1)
- ♪ Let's indicate the two morae you put together initially in yellow (or white), and color the others in green (or black), and arrange the two colors alternately.



Accent Pattern	Accent Diagram	Existence and Position of Accent Falls
[a]		The accent-fall exists at the beginning. ex.) 「かゝぞ・く(が)」(family)
[b]		No accent-fall. ex.) 「む(ず)・こ(が)」(son)
[b']		The accent-fall exists at the end. ex.) 「むす・め(が)」(daughter)
[c]		The accent-fall exists in the middle. ex.) 「あな(ら)・た(が)」(you)

( □ shows a particle. )

Figure 2 The accent of the nouns of Rhythm Pattern 2-1

★ The above step-shaped objects are called **Accent Diagrams** or **ADs**, which were created by Tanomu KASHIMA, emeritus professor of Nagoya University, in 2002.

★ The Japanese pitch accents have the following regular patterns.

1. The pitch levels are different between the first mora and the second mora.

☛ Pay attention to the pitch level of dotted lines!

♪ The difference in pitch between the first mora and the second mora is small except the words belonging to Pattern [a], when the second mora is a nasal euphony or a long vowel.

In addition, when the second mora is a vowel, the difference is also sometimes small.

ex.) 作家 : 2-1 【b】      参加 : 2-1 【b】      夢 : 2 【b'】      有名 : 2-2 【b】  
 会社 : 2-1 【b】      かいしゃ      一日 : 2-2 【b'】

	↔		↔		↔	
さっ か		さん か		ゆ め		ゆう めい
(choked sound)		(nasal euphony)				(long vowel)
		かい しゃ				つ いた ち
		(vowel)				(vowel)

2. Each word doesn't have more than two accent-falls.

3. Once the accent-pitch falls down in a word, it doesn't rise again.