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The **Sounds** of Japanese

This introduction to the sounds of Japanese is designed for English-speaking students with some prior knowledge of the language, and includes an audio CD which demonstrates the sounds and pronunciation described. It will be an invaluable resource for students of Japanese wishing to improve their pronunciation, as well as those studying Japanese linguistics.

- Explains how speech sounds are produced in Japanese (articulatory phonetics), and the system of sounds in Japanese (phonology).
- Covers a range of topics including vowels, consonants, syllables, accents, intonations, and phonemics.
- Gives clear comparisons with English, and provides practical advice on pronunciation.
- Provides a wealth of authentic Japanese examples.
- Each chapter contains exercises to help students put their knowledge into practice.

TIMOTHY J. VANCE is a Professor in the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona. He completed his PhD in 1979 at the University of Chicago and has lived in Japan for extended periods on three occasions. He is currently co-ordinating editor of *Japanese Language and Literature.*

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To Mom and Dad

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Preface

The original motivation for this book was dissatisfaction with *An Introduction to Japanese Phonology* (Vance 1987) as a textbook for a kind of course that I and many of my colleagues are often asked to teach. Faculty members who are interested in Japanese phonetics and phonology and who have appointments in departments that include East Asian languages are usually expected to provide an introductory course for beginning graduate students and advanced undergraduates. I myself have taught courses that fit this description for the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, for the University of Arizona, and for the Summer MA Program in Japanese Pedagogy at Columbia University. Most of the students who enroll are interested primarily in becoming teachers of the Japanese language, and they typically have little or no background in linguistics. The great majority of them will never take another course that deals with phonetics or phonology. Not surprisingly, this clientele hasn't been well served by *An Introduction to Japanese Phonology*, which targeted graduate students specializing in linguistics.

When Cambridge University Press approached me about contributing to the *Sounds of* series, I welcomed the opportunity to develop a manuscript that I'd been working on little by little into something that would fit the series parameters. Compared to *An Introduction to Japanese Phonology*, *The Sounds of Japanese* covers much less material, but it covers that material much more thoroughly and in a way that I hope will meet the needs of its intended audience – students, teachers, and aspiring teachers of Japanese as a foreign language. The only background it presupposes is a fairly high level of Japanese language proficiency. The discussion is confined almost entirely to phonetics and what might be called "phonology proper." Morphophonemic alternations are mentioned only in passing.

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The Sounds of Japanese focuses almost exclusively on the "standard" dialect of Japanese, that is, the pronunciation of well-educated, upper-middle-class native speakers who grew up in the Tokyo metropolitan area (Shibatani 1990:186). This narrow focus is simply a matter of practicality; providing something close to an adequate description of this single, idealized variety is as much as I could realistically hope to accomplish, and this is the variety that is normally taught to students of Japanese as a foreign language. It's also the variety (more accurately, narrow range of varieties) most extensively studied in linguistic research. I certainly don't endorse the hegemonic notion that this particular variety of Japanese is somehow intrinsically superior to all the other varieties that the dialect diversity of modern Japan still has to offer. I'm also skeptical of the widespread belief that there are no significant pronunciation differences correlating with socio-economic background in the Tokyo metropolis (Akamatsu 2000:211), but I don't know of any relevant research

Needless to say, there's also a great deal of dialect diversity in the English-speaking world, and when I compare Japanese to English, I need to identify a particular variety as the standard of comparison. There's no variety of English pronunciation in the United States that has quite the same status as **received pronunciation** (**RP**) in Great Britain (Bloomfield 1933:49, Bronstein 1960:6, House 1998:210–4), but I'm going to refer to the variety I use in examples as **United States newscaster English**. This is just a makeshift label for a variety that most English speakers in the United States would be willing to acknowledge as standard. It's close but not identical to the variety that I speak myself, and it's more specific than so-called **General American** (Baugh and Cable 1978:374–5).

As I mentioned above, this book presupposes a fairly high degree of Japanese language proficiency. In particular, I assume that readers are familiar with Japanese grammar and vocabulary, although I provide enough glossing to make the discussion intelligible even to someone whose knowledge of the Japanese lexicon is quite limited. I also assume that readers are familiar with the present-day Japanese writing system, and I'll use the words *hiragana*, *katakana*, *kana*, and *kanji* without explanation and, hereafter, without italicization. I'll occasionally use *dakuten* 濁点, also without italics, to refer to the "voicing diacritic" of kana spelling, that is, the two "dots" that distinguish letters such as ぐ (*gu*) and く (*ku*). It's sometimes convenient to label vocabulary items by etymological source, and I'll use the labels **native** (corresponding to *wago* 和語) for elements that predate that massive influx of borrowings from Chinese that began about 400 CE, **Sino-Japanese** (corresponding to *kango* 漢語) for elements that date back to that influx, and **recent borrowing** or **recent loanword** (corresponding to *gairaigo* 外来語) for elements that

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came from other languages in the not-so-distant past, mostly from English. Following Martin (1975:151), I'll use **Sino-Japanese binom** (corresponding to *niji-jukugo* 二字熟語) to refer to the prototypical Sino-Japanese vocabulary items that are written with two kanji. When I use romanization, I use the modern, modified version of the Hepburn (*Hebon-shiki* ヘボン式) system, although I occasionally refer to the Kunrei (*Kunrei-shiki* 訓令式) system. Appendix C treats the romanization systems in detail.

In connection with choice of topics and depth of coverage, I accept the idea that rhythm and intonation are more important than segmental accuracy in contributing to native listeners' impressions of "accentedness" and "intelligibility" (Anderson-Hsieh, Johnson, and Koehler 1992, Boula de Mareüil and Vieru-Dimulescu 2006). But these prosodic aspects of pronunciation are much more challenging to describe and to teach, and the relevant sections of this book only scratch the surface. It's hard to avoid the uneasy feeling that we teach what we teach because we can, not because it's especially helpful. Incidentally, whenever I cite a pair of words to illustrate a segmental contrast, my intention is for the two words to have the same pitch-accent pattern, which makes them a true minimal pair (§2.2). In fact, though, the accentuation of lexical items varies enough among "standard" Tokyo speakers that at least some of the cited pairs will not match for many individual native speakers. Fortunately, it turns out that accent makes no difference as far as the analysis of the segmental system is concerned (Akamatsu 2000:51–2).

The list of references that I provide isn't even close to a comprehensive bibliography of relevant sources, but there's at least one citation whenever documentation seems called for. I try to cite one Japanese-language source and one English-language source when I can, but in almost every case there are many other sources that I could've chosen instead. Even so, a reader who wants to learn more about any particular topic will usually be able to get a good start by consulting the items I do cite and their bibliographies.

Much of the final manuscript for *The Sounds of Japanese* was written in Honolulu in the fall of 2006. I'm grateful to the College of Humanities and the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona for letting me negotiate a semester on "alternative assignment" – a sabbatical in all but name. I'd also like to thank the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa for granting me visiting scholar status, and my colleague Dave Ashworth for letting me borrow his office in Moore Hall. I benefited enormously from easy access to the resources of Sinclair Library and especially Hamilton Library, which has made a remarkable comeback from a nearly catastrophic flood in October of 2004.

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My comrades Mie Hiramoto, Terry Klafehn, Haruo Kubozono, and Leon Serafim provided help and encouragement along the way. For photos and acoustic displays in the text and for voice recordings on the accompanying CD, thanks are due to Dalila Ayoun, Haruko Cook, Peter Ecke, Samira Farwaneh, Hiromi Uchida Kelley, Alexis Manaster-Ramer, Yumi Matsumoto, Nobuko Ochner, Miki Ogasawara, Naomi Ogasawara, Katsuhiro "Justin" Ōta, Mee-Jeong Park, Lolín Cervantes-Kelly, Kiwako Satō, Yasumasa Shigenaga, Karen Vance, Seiji Watanabe, Naoko Witzel, and Yiran Zheng. Nancy Arakawa handled the technical aspects of the recording process in the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's Language Learning Center. All the acoustic displays were produced using version 4.5.01 of the software package Praat, which is distributed free by its creators, Paul Boersma and David Weenink. I'd also like to thank Helen Barton, my editor at Cambridge University Press, for her patience with an author who didn't seem to understand the concept of a deadline. Sarah Green, Elizabeth Davey, and Anna Oxbury all helped to get the manuscript into production.

I used portions of early drafts of this book in classes at Columbia and at Arizona, and I'm indebted to several cohorts of bright, hardworking students at those two schools and at Hawai'i for their acumen and their tolerance. Itsumi Ishikawa-Peck, Mieko Kawai, Yuka Matsugu, Naomi Ogasawara, Yumiko Satō, and Ikuko Yuasa provided particular examples or observations that I've incorporated into the text, and I'm especially grateful to Seiji Watanabe for his keen insight into the phonology of his native dialect.

This book is dedicated to my parents, as a small token of gratitude for their unwavering support over the years. Sadly, my dad died just before I finished the manuscript. During the long process of writing and revising, I found myself wondering more than once whether I'd made a terrible mistake by taking this project on, but looking back on it now, my one and only regret is that my dad won't get to see the final product.

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