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80/20 JAPANESE

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RICHARD WEBB

Hi there!

Thank you for downloading this sample from my book, *80/20 Japanese*.

This sample from the *Kana + Kanji Edition* includes the complete table of contents, followed by *Chapter 2: Introduction to Japanese Grammar*.

As you read through the chapter, please do not worry if you are not sure how to say the Japanese words that appear. If you decide to purchase the book, you will learn about pronunciation in *Chapter 1: The Sounds of Japanese*.

I hope you enjoy the chapter! If you decide that you would like to purchase the complete book, you can do so at <https://8020japanese.com>.

Thank you,

Richard Webb

Author of *80/20 Japanese*

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Chapter 2

Introduction to Japanese Grammar

The purpose of this chapter is to help you understand how the Japanese language is structured. Sentence structure in any language determines how words are used together to form meaning. The content in this chapter is quite heavy, but once you overcome the extreme differences between English and Japanese sentence structure, the language becomes much easier.

2.1 Basic Japanese sentence structure

New vocabulary

to be (am/are/is)	です*
this	これ
that	それ
car	くるま 車
red	あか 赤い
I/me	わたし 私
person	ひと 人

* In the word 「です」, the “u” sound is usually not voiced, hence this should be pronounced “dess”.

Let's start with some basic sentences.

1. I am a person. わたし ^{ひと} 私 は 人 です。
2. This is a car. これは ^{くるま} 車 です。
3. My car is red. わたし ^{くるま} 私 の 車 は ^{あか} 赤い です。
4. That is Taro's car. それは ^{た ろ う} 太 郎 の ^{くるま} 車 です。

Looking at these sentences, you may notice that:

- Every sentence ends in 「です」 (pronounced “dess”)
- Every sentence contains a 「は」 (pronounced “wa”)

「です」 is effectively the verb “to be”, which in the above cases takes the form “is” or “am”. In Japanese, **the verb always comes at the end of the sentence.**

「は」 is what is known as a particle (particles will be explained in greater detail later). Its purpose is to identify the topic of the sentence. In English, the topic (or subject) of a sentence is whatever comes before the main verb, which in the above cases is either “is” or “am”. In Japanese, the topic of a sentence is whatever comes before 「は」. Note that although 「は」 is usually pronounced “ha”, it is always pronounced “wa” when used as a particle.

Now that we know this, let's take another look at sentences one and two. Text with the same formatting has the same meaning.

1. I am a person. わたし ^{ひと} 私 は 人 です。
2. This is a car. これは ^{くるま} 車 です。

First of all, we can see that 「は」 has no English equivalent. This is because its entire purpose is to show that 「^{わたし}私」 or 「これ」 is the topic of these sentences. There is no English equivalent because in English, word order alone is enough to determine the subject of a sentence.

Secondly, since 「^{ひと}人」 means person and 「^{くるま}車」 means car, we can see that there is no Japanese equivalent of “a”. The articles “a”, “an” and “the” simply do not exist in Japanese. This makes things simpler in some ways, but can be hard to get used to for someone used to English or similar languages, as not having these words can sometimes make a sentence feel as though it is lacking somehow.

Now let's look at sentences 3 and 4.

3. My car is red. わたし くるま あか
 私 の 車 は 赤 い です 。
4. That is Taro's car. た ろう くるま
 それは 太 郎 の 車 です 。

Here we can see that:

- わたし くるま
私 の 車 = my car, and
- た ろう くるま
太 郎 の 車 = Taro's car

Adding 「の」, another particle, indicates possession. It converts “I”, “you”, “he”, “she” and “they” into “my”, “your”, “his”, “her” and “their”, respectively. For other things like people's names, animals, places and objects, it has the same effect as adding “s” (apostrophe s).

The one-size-fits-all way of defining 「の」 would be to say it is equal to English “of”. For example, instead of “Taro's car”, 「た ろう くるま太 郎 の 車」 could be thought of as “the car of Taro”. This is more versatile as there are plenty of situations in English where “s” is not normally appropriate. 「の」 can be used to connect just about any two things, where one of the two things belongs to the other in some way, such as “the back of the door”, “the color of your eyes” or even “the rain of yesterday”.

To summarize what we have learned about Japanese sentence structure so far:

- The verb comes at the end of the sentence
- The particle 「は」 defines the topic of the sentence, and has no English equivalent
- There is no “a”, “an” or “the”
- The particle 「の」 indicates possession

2.2 Introduction to particles

Now that you have a basic understanding of some simple sentences, we will look at the most important concept relating to Japanese sentence structure - particles. Particles are like small words that go in between other words to help a sentence make sense. They are somewhat like prepositions in English (in, at, on, from, to etc.), but only in some cases, and thinking of them as the equivalent of prepositions will likely cause you unnecessary confusion.

Put simply, **particles determine the role of each word relative to the verb.**

Understanding what this really means will make learning Japanese grammar much, much easier.

To illustrate what is meant by “the role of each word”, let’s first consider how the English language works. In English, the role of words in a sentence is determined primarily by word order. Take the following example:

John saw Jane.

From the word order, we know:

- a) John was the person who did the seeing
- b) Jane was the person who was seen

If we change the word order, it changes the meaning of the sentence. We can say “Jane saw John”, and it makes grammatical sense, but it does not mean the same thing. This is because English sentences always follow the pattern [subject] + [verb] + [object].

The *subject* of a sentence is the person/animal/thing that is performing the action described by the verb. In this case, “John” is the subject because John is the one performing the act of seeing. We know this because “John” comes before the verb “saw”.

The *object* of a sentence is the person/animal/thing that the action is performed on. In this case, “Jane” is the object because she is the one who was seen by John, and we know this because “Jane” comes after the verb “saw”.

As you can see, in English, *word order* determines the role of each word in the sentence and, in particular, how each word relates to the *verb*.

In Japanese, instead of word order, particles determine the role of each word and how they relate to the verb. Word order is important too, but not to the same extent. Word order in Japanese mainly influences the natural flow, and has more of an effect on where the emphasis lies within a sentence than on its literal meaning. Don’t worry about this too much for now - the important thing to know is that particles, not word order, determine how all the words in a sentence relate to each other.

The simple sentence “John saw Jane” could be written in Japanese as follows:

ジョンはジェーンを見ました。

Firstly, as you may have guessed, 「見ました」 is the verb “to see” in the past tense. Note that for verbs in the past tense, the “i” sound from the 「し」 is usually silent, hence this would be read as “mimashta”.

Also in this sentence are the two particles, 「は」 and 「を」. Like all particles, these ones define the role of the words that come *before* them.

In general terms:

- 「は」 defines the topic of the sentence, as we discussed earlier.
- 「を」 defines the object of the verb. Recall from chapter one that the “w” in “wo” is silent, and is therefore simply pronounced “o”.

So in the above sentence:

- 「は」 defines 「ジョン」^{J o h n} as the topic of the sentence, meaning John is the person who performed the act of seeing
- 「を」 defines 「ジェーン」^{J a n e} as the object of the verb “saw”, meaning Jane is the person who was seen

By putting this together, we can see that:

ジョン^{J o h n}はジェーン^{J a n e}を^み見ました = John saw Jane

Exercise

So far, we have seen the particles 「は」, 「の」 and 「を」. Recall that:

- 「は」 defines the topic of a sentence or clause
 - 「を」 defines the object of the verb
 - 「の」 indicates possession
1. Identify the topic of each of the following sentences. Keep in mind that the topic is one ‘thing’ and can be more than one word.
 - a) I watched the baseball game.
 - b) This apple is green.
 - c) My sister is listening to music.
 - d) The red bike is faster than the blue one.
 - e) The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.
 2. Identify the object of the verb in each of the following sentences. Like the topic, the object can also be more than one word.
 - a) He ate a hamburger.
 - b) Alan watched TV.
 - c) I read a fascinating book.
 - d) Her older brother bought a mobile phone.
 - e) My grandfather drank a big glass of water.

3. Using the vocabulary provided, translate these phrases into Japanese.

- a) My friend
- b) His mother
- c) Her bicycle
- d) Jiro's book
- e) My friend's dog

Vocabulary

I	わたし 私
he	かれ 彼
she	かのじょ 彼女
friend	とも だち 友達

mother	かあ お母さん
bicycle	じ てんしゃ 自転車
book	ほん 本
dog	いぬ 犬

Answers

- 1. a. I; b. this apple; c. my sister; d. the red bike; e. the quick brown fox
- 2. a. a hamburger; b. TV; c. a fascinating book; d. a mobile phone; e. a big glass of water
- 3. a. わたし ともだち かれ かあ
私の友達; b. 彼のお母さん; c. かのじょ じ てんしゃ
彼女の自転車; d. じ ろう ほん
次郎の本; e. わたし ともだち いぬ
私の友達の犬

2.3 Particles in more depth

To further your understanding of particles, we will now look at 「は」, 「を」 and 「の」 in action, while also introducing a couple more common particles.

Here is the vocabulary for this section:

Verbs* (past tense)	
went	い 行きました
watched	み 見ました
came	き 来ました

Nouns	
school	がっ こう 学校
movie	えい が 画映
house	いえ 家

* For all of the verbs above, the “i” sound in 「し」 is usually silent.

We will now break down the following sentences. Particles are bolded.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| 1. I watched a movie. | ^{わたし} 私 ^{えい} は ^が 映画 ^み を見ました。 |
| 2. Taro went to school. | ^た 太郎 ^{ろう} は ^{がっこう} 学校 ^い に行きました。 |
| 3. Taro came to my house. | ^た 太郎 ^{ろう} は ^{わたし} 私 ^{いえ} の家 ^き に来ました。 |
| 4. I went to school with Taro. | ^{わたし} 私 ^た は ^{ろう} 太郎 ^{がっこう} と学校 ^い に行きました。 |
| 5. I watched a movie with Taro. | ^{わたし} 私 ^た は ^{ろう} 太郎 ^{えい} と映画 ^み を見ました。 |

Notice that every noun in each sentence is followed by a particle. This is almost always true because nouns represent things, and how these things are affected by actions always needs to be defined, which is what particles are for.

Let's start by deconstructing sentence one:

1. ^{わたし}私 ^{えい}は ^が映画 ^みを見ました。

Here you can see that:

- 「は」 comes after 「^{わたし}私」. This means that 「^{わたし}私」 is the topic.
- 「を」 comes after 「^{えい}映画」. This means that 「^{えい}映画」 is the object of the verb 「^み見ました」.

This sentence says that I am the person who performed the act of watching, and it is a movie that I watched. In other words, “I watched a movie”.

Make sense?

Now let's compare this to sentence two.

1. ^{わたし}私 ^{えい}は ^が映画 ^みを見ました。
 2. ^た太郎 ^{ろう}は ^{がっこう}学校 ^いに行きました。

In sentence two, we can see that Taro is the topic, and he performed the act of going. There is, however, no 「を」. Instead 「^{がっこう}学校」, meaning “school”, is followed by the particle 「^いに」.

The particle 「に」 defines the destination related to an action that involves movement.

This includes actions described by verbs like go, come, move, give, send, return, etc. It is very similar to the English preposition “to”, although they are not perfectly

equivalent. Note that 「に」 also has a number of other meanings, which will be covered later.

In sentence two, we can see that 「に」 comes after 「学校」^{がっこう}, indicating that school is the destination. Putting this together, we know that Taro is the person who went somewhere, and his destination was school, hence sentence two means, “Taro went to school”.

3. 太郎^{たろう}は私^{わたし}の家^{いえ}に^き来ました。

The particles we see here are 「は」, 「の」 and 「に」, so we know that:

- Taro performed the action, which in this case is “came”
- The place that he came to is 「私^{わたし}の家^{いえ}」

Remembering that 「の」 indicates possession, 「私^{わたし}の家^{いえ}」 means “my house”. This comes before 「に」, so Taro’s destination must be my house, and the full sentence therefore means, “Taro came to my house”.

Now let’s take a look at sentence four.

4. 私^{わたし}は太郎^{たろう}と^{がっこう}学校^いに行きました。

We can see that I (私^{わたし}) performed the action, the action is went (行きました^い), and the destination is school (学校^{がっこう}), but we also have 「太郎と」 in there as well.

The particle 「と」 indicates who or what else is involved in the action in the same way.

Basically, 「太郎と」^{たろう} means “with Taro”, making the whole sentence equivalent to, “I went to school with Taro”.

The particle 「と」 is often compared to “and” in English, but “and” is much more versatile than 「と」. 「と」 can only be used to join nouns together, whereas “and” can be used to join virtually any two phrases together that are grammatically equal. For example, you cannot use the particle 「と」 to say something like, “I went to school and watched a movie,” because the “and” in this sentence doesn’t join two nouns. For this reason, it is more appropriate to think of 「と」 as meaning “with”, even if “and” is the more natural choice when speaking English.

One alternative way to express the same meaning as sentence four, although with a slightly different emphasis, is to say, 「私^{わたし}と太郎^{たろう}は学校^{がっこう}に行きました^い」. Let’s compare these directly:

- a) 私^{わたし}は^は太郎^{たろう}と^と学校^{がっこう}に^に行^いきました。 I went to school with Taro.
- b) 私^{わたし}と^と太郎^{たろう}は^は学校^{がっこう}に^に行^いきました。 Taro and I went to school.

In option (a), 「私^{わたし}」 is the only thing before 「は^は」, so 「私^{わたし}」 is the topic. This means the focus of the sentence is me, and Taro's presence is additional information. This is more likely to be the answer to the question, “What did you do?”

In option (b), 「私^{わたし}と太郎^{たろう}」 comes before 「は^は」, so 「私^{わたし}と太郎^{たろう}」 is the topic. This means both Taro and I are the focus of the sentence equally. This is more likely to be the answer to the question, “What did you and Taro do?”

In the end, they both have essentially the same meaning. The difference in emphasis is small enough that it really doesn't make much difference, so just use whichever one makes the most sense to you.

Sentence five is similar to sentence four.

5. 私^{わたし}は^は太郎^{たろう}と^と映画^{えいが}を^を見^みました。

We can break this down as follows:

- I (私^{わたし}) am the person who performed the action
- Taro is also involved in the action in the same way as me
- The object of the action was a movie (映画^{えいが})
- The action was “watched” (見^みました)

The sentence must therefore mean, “I watched a movie with Taro”, and just like sentence four, this could also be rearranged to 「私^{わたし}と太郎^{たろう}は^は映画^{えいが}を^を見^みました」.

If we ignore the particles, we can see that the important elements of the sentence are: I, Taro, movie, watched. The particles are there to define the role of each of these words, thus defining their relationship with one another. Without them, we can't be sure what actually happened. We can probably guess what happened, but what if Taro is a film director? Instead of watching a movie with Taro, maybe I actually want to say “I watched Taro's movie” (私^{わたし}は^は太郎^{たろう}の^の映画^{えいが}を^を見^みました). This uses the same key words, but the relationship between these words is different. This is why particles are so important.

Indirect objects

In the previous section, we discussed how the object of a verb in Japanese is marked by the particle 「を」. The particle 「を」 is actually used to mark the *direct* object. In English, we also have *indirect* objects. These, however, do not exist in Japanese, so a brief explanation might be helpful.

Consider the sentence, “I sent you a letter”. In this sentence, the direct object is “a letter”, because that is what is being sent. The indirect object is “you”, because that is who the letter is being sent to. In English, the indirect object (you) is placed in between the verb (sent) and the direct object (a letter). It defines the *recipient of the action*. However, there is always another way of phrasing a sentence that uses an indirect object. In this case, that would be, “I sent a letter *to you*”. This is closer to how it would be phrased in Japanese. Here are some more examples:

I gave you a gift.	=	I gave a gift to you .
I showed him a picture.	=	I showed a picture to him .
I bought her a present.	=	I bought a present for her .
I baked Emma a cake.	=	I baked a cake for Emma .

Notice that the alternative phrases always use “to” or “for”.

In Japanese, like everything else, particles are used to define the recipient of the action. **Think of the recipient as the destination.** For “I sent you a letter”, the destination of the letter is “you”, so “you” should be marked with the particle 「に」. The sentence would therefore be:

わたし 私 は **あなたに** て がみ おく 手紙を送りました。
 I you letter sent

The same applies when the English phrase uses “for”. In the example above, Emma is the recipient of the cake, and this would be expressed by saying 「^{Emma}エマに」. There is, however, more to it than that, as will be covered in Chapter 12.3.3. For now, focus on the examples that more clearly involve movement to a destination.

Exercise

In this exercise, you will build simple sentences using the particles covered so far.

Complete tasks 1 - 6 for each of the sentences a - m below. Vocabulary is provided for each sentence so you can focus on the grammatical aspects of each sentence.

1. Identify the topic of each sentence and say it in Japanese followed by 「は」. Be aware that the subject can be more than one word.
2. Identify any extra people involved in the action of each sentence. Say them in Japanese followed by 「と」.
3. Identify the destination, if there is one, of the person or object in each sentence. Say it in Japanese followed by 「に」.
4. Identify the object of each sentence and say it in Japanese followed by 「を」. Keep in mind that some sentences do not have an object (including a and b).
5. Translate each of the phrases into Japanese and write them down. Check your answers on the following page.
6. Without looking at your answers from the previous questions, say each of the sentences aloud in Japanese. Check your answers as you go and if you make any mistakes, say the sentence again correctly before moving on. Once you have finished all of the sentences, go back and repeat any that you said incorrectly the first time.

a) This is a pen.

this	これ
pen	ペン
is	です

b) My name is [your name].

I / me	わたし
name	なまえ
is	です

c) I ate an apple.

I / me	わたし
ate	たべました
apple	りんご

d) You drank water.

you	あなた
drank	のみました
water	みず

e) He bought a mobile phone.

he	かれ
bought	かいました
mobile phone	ケータイ

f) She read the newspaper.

she	かのじょ
read (past tense)	よみました
newspaper	しんぶん

g) Your mother wrote a book.

you	あなた
mother	おかあさん
wrote	かきました
book	ほん

h) His father studied Japanese.

he / him	かれ
father	おとうさん
studied	べんきょう しました
Japanese (language)	にほんご

- i) My friend made sushi with Aiko.

I / me	わたし
friend	ともだち
made	つくりました
sushi	すし

- j) Her older sister listened to music with him.

she / her	かのじょ
he / him	かれ
older sister	おねえさん
listen	ききました
music	おんがく

- k) Her older brother went to my school.

she / her	かのじょ
I / me	わたし
older brother	おにいさん
went	いきました
school	がっこう

- l) He came to my house with Taro.

he / him	かれ
I / me	わたし
came	きました
house	いえ

- m) She sent a letter to her grandmother.

she / her	かのじょ
sent	おくりました
letter	てがみ
grandmother	おばあさん

- n) Our grandfather taught English to Mai and Kazutaka.

we / us	わたしたち
grandfather	おじいさん
taught	おしえました
English (language)	えいご

- o) They gave Mako's mother a souvenir.

they	かれら
gave	あげました
mother	おかあさん
souvenir	おみやげ

- p) Yutaka and I gave Kenta a jacket.

I / me	わたし
gave	あげました
jacket	うわぎ

Answers

	Task 1	Task 2
a)	これ は	-
b)	わたし の なまえ は	-
c)	わたし は	-
d)	あなた は	-
e)	かれ は	-
f)	かのじょ は	-
g)	あなた の おかあさん は	-
h)	かれ の おとうさん は	-
i)	わたし の ともだち は	あいこ と
j)	かのじょ の おねえさん は	かれ と
k)	かのじょ の おにいさん は	-

l)	かれ は	たろう と
m)	かのじょ は	-
n)	わたしたち の おじいさん は	まい と or かずたか と
o)	かれら は	-
p)	わたし と ゆたか は or ゆたか と わたし は	わたし と or ゆたか と

	Task 3	Task 4
a)	-	-
b)	-	-
c)	-	りんご を
d)	-	みず を
e)	-	ケータイ を
f)	-	しんぶん を
g)	-	ほん を
h)	-	にほんご を
i)	-	すし を
j)	-	おんがく を
k)	わたし の がっこう に	-
l)	わたし の いえ に	-
m)	かのじょ の おばあさん に	てがみ を
n)	まい と かずたか に	えいご を
o)	まこ の おかあさん に	おみやげ を
p)	けんた に	うわぎ を

Tasks 5 and 6

- a) これはペンです。
- b) わたしの なまえ は [your name] です。
- c) わたし は りんご を たべました。
- d) あなた は みず を のみました。
- e) かれ は ケータイ を かいました。

- f) かのじょ は しんぶん を よみました。
- g) あなた の おかあさんは ほん を かきました。
- h) かれ の おとうさんは にほんご を べんきょう しました。
- i) わたし の ともだち は あいこ と すし を つくりました。
- j) かのじょ の おねえさんは かれ と おんがく を ききました。
- k) かのじょ の おにいさんは わたし の がっこう に いきました。
- l) かれ は たろう と わたし の いえ に きました。
- m) かのじょ は かのじょ の おばあさんに てがみ を おくりました。
- n) わたしたち の おじいさんは まい と かずたか に えいご を おしえました。
- o) かれらは まこ の おかあさん に おみやげ を あげました。
- p) わたし と ゆたか は けんた に うわぎ を あげました。 OR
ゆたか と わたし は けんた に うわぎ を あげました。