Why Does Japanese Use Three Writing Systems?

日文為什麼同時用漢字、平假名和片假名？



Three scripts at breakfast

早餐桌上的三種文字



Illustrative scene · 情境示意

The sentence
例句

パンを食べます reads pan o tabemasu. In a breakfast conversation it can mean “I eat bread.” Japanese often leaves the subject understood.
「パンを食べます」讀作 pan o tabemasu，早餐對話中可理解為「我吃麵包」，主詞可依語境省略。

Three chunks
拆成三段

Follow the sentence from left to right here. **パン** names the food, **を** marks it as the object and **食べます** describes the action.
這裡橫寫，從左往右。パン 是食物，を 標出動作的對象，食べます 表示動作。

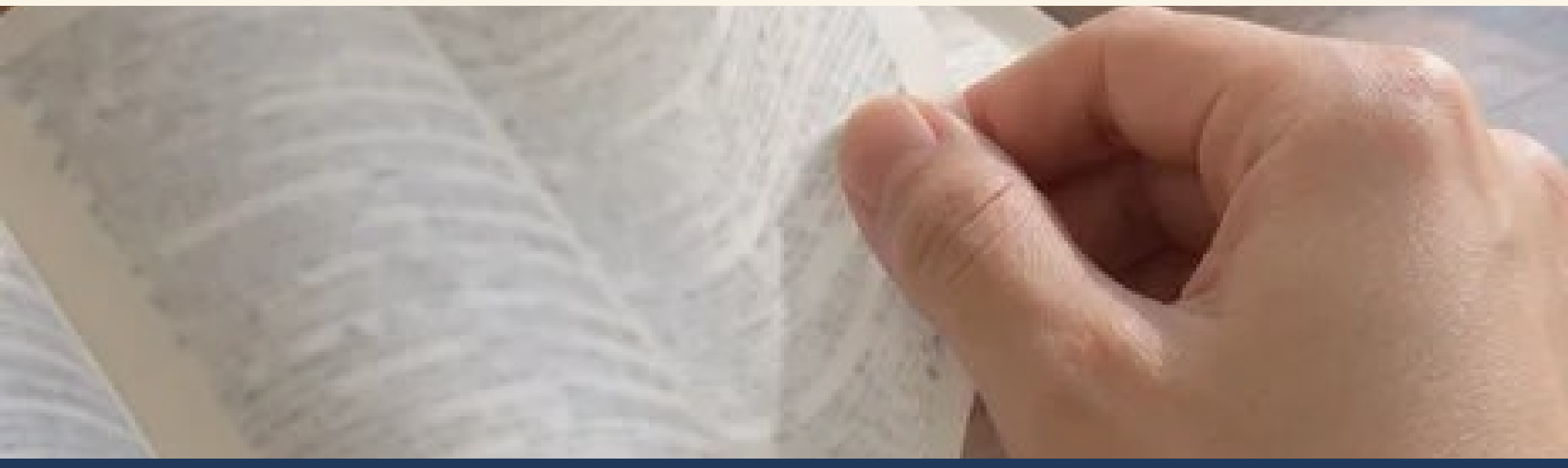
What to notice
看哪裡

The same short sentence changes script several times. Identifying the script is a first clue, even before you know every word.
短短一句話裡就會切換好幾次文字，初學者即使有生字，也可先找出文字怎麼切換。

[1] [2]

Kanji carries meaning

漢字提示意思



Illustrative scene · 情境示意

Find 食

從「食」開始

The character **食** appears at the start of **食べます**, “eat.” It carries a clue to the meaning of the verb.

「食べます」開頭的「食」提示吃的意思，看到漢字就能先猜動作大意。

Read the word

整詞讀音

In **食べる** the whole word is taberu. In **食事**, meaning a meal, the reading is shokuji. Learn the reading with the word.

「食べる」讀 taberu，「食事」（一餐、用餐）讀 shokuji。同一漢字要連同整個詞學讀音。

Look above

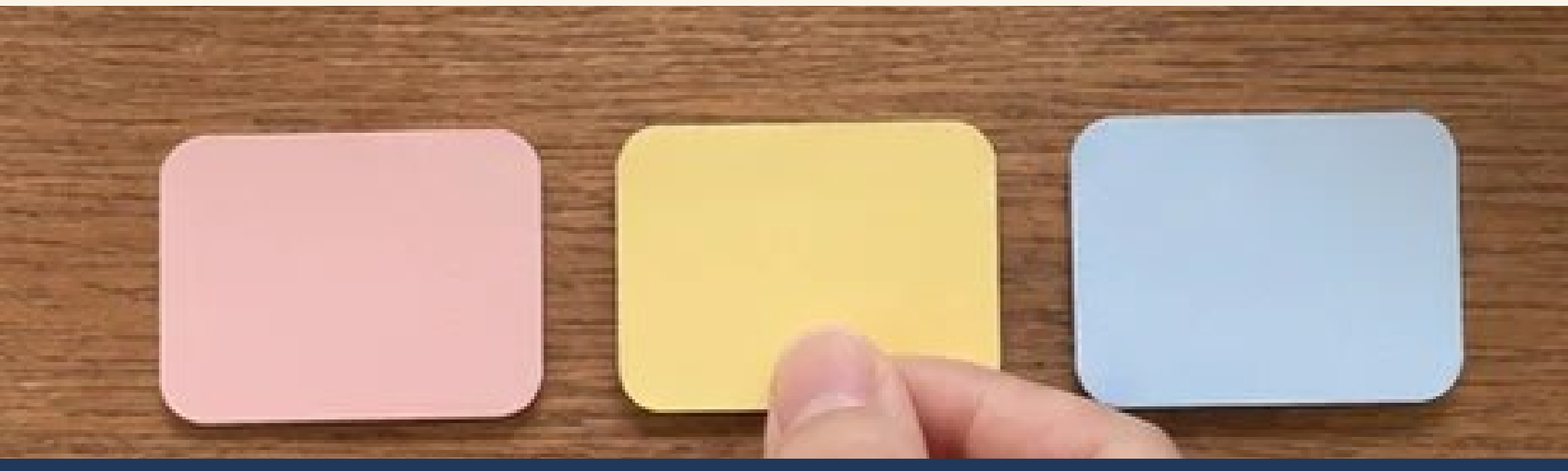
找注音

Small kana printed above or beside kanji are called furigana. When present, they show you how the characters are read in that word.

漢字上方或旁邊的小假名稱為振假名（ふりがな）。有標示時，可用來確認該詞讀音。

Hiragana links the sentence

平假名連接整句



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Object marker

助詞

In **パンを食べます**, **を** marks bread as what is eaten. The particle is written **を** and usually pronounced o in modern Japanese.

在「パンを食べます」裡，助詞「を」表示被吃的是麵包，現代日語通常讀作 o。

Verb ending

動詞尾

The **べます** in **食べます** is written in hiragana. Compare **食べる**, the dictionary form, with **食べます**, the polite form.

「食べます」裡的「べます」是平假名。字典形為「食べる」，禮貌形為「食べます」。

Words in kana

假名成詞

Hiragana can also write a whole word. The greeting **ありがとう**, “thank you,” is one familiar example you may see on a note.

平假名也可以寫完整的詞，例如紙條上常見的「ありがとう」，就是「謝謝」。

[1] [2]

Katakana spells out sounds

片假名怎麼表音



Illustrative scene · 情境示意

Bread

麵包

パン is pan, “bread.” Notice the small circle on **パ**. Without it, **ハ** is ha, so the tiny mark changes the sound.

「パン」讀 pan，意為麵包。注意「パ」右上有小圈；拿掉小圈的「ハ」讀 ha。

A long vowel

長音

コーヒー is kōhī, “coffee.” Each long dash lengthens the preceding vowel, so keep the sound going when you read it aloud.

「コーヒー」是咖啡，讀 **kōhī**。「ー」表示前一個母音拉長，朗讀時要把聲音延續下去。

More than loans

多種用途

Katakana often appears in borrowed words and foreign names. Writers also use it for emphasis or sound effects, depending on context.

外來詞、外國人名常用片假名，也可用來強調或表示聲音，需配合語境判讀。

[1] [2]

Rebuild your breakfast sentence

自己重組早餐例句

Food

パン (麵包) 或 すし (壽司)

Start with **パン**, “bread.” To say “I eat sushi,” replace the food with **すし** and keep the rest of the sentence.

先用「パン」表示麵包。換成「すし」並保留其他部分，就能表達「我吃壽司」。

Object marker

を (通常讀 o)

Place **を** directly after the food to mark the object in this example. Read it aloud as o, then pause briefly for practice.

在這個例句裡，將「を」接在食物後面，標示動作對象。練習時讀作 o。

Action

食べます (吃)

Add **食べます** after the particle. In ordinary Japanese print, you will generally see the parts together as **すしを食べます**.

最後加上「食べます」。一般日文會把各部分連在一起寫，成為「すしを食べます」。

[1] [2]

A menu reading exercise

用菜單練習辨識

Bread

パンを食べます。

Find **コーヒー** and trace both long-vowel marks with your finger. Read the entire word before comparing it with the menu translation.

找出「コーヒー」，用手指指出兩個長音符號；先唸完整詞，再對照翻譯。

Coffee

コーヒーを飲みます。

For coffee, use **飲みます**, nomimasu, “drink.” The new sentence is **コーヒーを飲みます**, with the same object marker **を**.

咖啡搭配「飲みます」nomimasu（喝）。「コーヒーを飲みます」同樣用「を」標示對象。

Pattern

名詞 → を → 動詞

Line up **パンを食べます** and **コーヒーを飲みます**. The foods and verbs change, but both sentences follow the same simple pattern.

把兩句並排：食物、飲料和動詞跟著情境改變，句型都是「名詞 + を + 動詞」。

[1] [2]

Recognise the scripts on a menu

用菜單辨認三種文字

Kanji: 定食

漢字：定食

In 定食, both characters are kanji. On a menu the word refers to a set meal.

「定食」兩個字都是漢字，在菜單上指套餐。

Hiragana: ごはん

平假名：ごはん

ごはん is written here in hiragana. In the context of a set meal it can mean cooked rice.

「ごはん」此處用平假名書寫，在定食的語境裡可指白飯。

Katakana: コーヒー

片假名：コーヒー

The borrowed word coffee is written in katakana. Try finding it in the drink list before checking the pictures.

外來語 coffee 可用片假名寫成「コーヒー」。試著先從飲料清單找，再對照圖片。

[3]

REFERENCES

Sources & links

資料來源與原文連結

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Diagrams redrawn for this edition. Scene images are illustrative.
圖解依資料重新編排。內頁影像用於說明情境。