

Japanese Counter Words

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_counter_word

In Japanese, counter words or counters (*josūshi*) (助数詞) are used along with numbers to count things, actions, and events.

In Japanese, as in Chinese and Korean, numerals cannot quantify nouns by themselves (except, in certain cases, for the numbers from one to ten; see below). For example, to express the idea "two dogs" in Japanese one must say *inu nihiki* (犬二匹), literally "dog two-small-animal". Here *inu* 犬 means "dog", *ni* 二 is the number 2, and *hiki* 匹 is the counter for small animals. The counters are not independent words and always appear with a number before them.

Counter words are similar in function to the word "sheet" in "two sheets of paper" or "cup" in "two cups of coffee", but in Japanese, (almost) all nouns require a counter. In this sense, all Japanese nouns are mass nouns. This grammatical feature can result in situations where one is unable to express the number of a particular object in a grammatically correct way because one does not know, or cannot remember, the appropriate counting word. The problem is partially solved for the numbers from one to ten by using the traditional numbers (see below) which can be used to quantify some nouns by themselves. For example, "four apples" is *ringo yonko* (リンゴ四個) where *ko* (個) is the counter), but can also be expressed using the traditional numeral four as *ringo yottsu* (リンゴ四つ). These traditional numerals cannot be used to count all nouns however; some, including people and animals, require the proper counter.

Counters can also be intentionally misused for humorous, sarcastic, or insulting effects. For example, one might say 男一匹なのに (*Otoko ippiki nano ni*; "I am only one man..."). Using the counter *hiki* (匹), the counter for small animals, humorously suggests that the person is overpowered by massive obstacles.

Some of the more common counters may be used instead of less common ones. For example, 匹 *hiki* (see below) is often used for all animals, regardless of size. However, many speakers will correct themselves and use the traditionally "correct" counter, 頭 *tō*, when speaking of horses, for example.

Just as in English, different counters for the same thing can be used to convey different meanings. In English, one can say one loaf of bread or one slice of bread, and the referent is different. In Japanese, the same effect is made by saying パン一斤 *pan ikkin*, literally "bread one-loaf" versus パン一枚 *pan ichimai*, literally "bread one-flat piece".

Table of traditional numerals

Table of Traditional Numerals			
Numeral	Japanese	Pronunciation (Rōmaji)	Pronunciation (Hiragana)
1	一つ	<i>hitotsu</i>	ひとつ
2	二つ	<i>futatsu</i>	ふたつ
3	三つ	<i>mittsu</i>	みっつ
4	四つ	<i>yottsu</i>	よっつ
5	五つ	<i>itsutsu</i>	いつつ
6	六つ	<i>muttsu</i>	むっつ
7	七つ	<i>nanatsu</i>	ななつ
8	八つ	<i>yattsu</i>	やっつ
9	九つ	<i>kokonotsu</i>	ここのつ
10	十	<i>tō</i>	とお
20	二十	<i>hatachi</i> (used for age)	はたち

List of Japanese Counters

This list also includes some counters and usages that are rarely used or not widely known.

List of Japanese Counters		
Pronunciation	Japanese	Use
<i>ba</i>	場	Scene of a play
<i>ban</i>	晩	Nights (see also: <i>ya</i>)
<i>ban</i>	番	Sports matches
<i>bi</i>	尾	Small fish and shrimps (used in the fish trade; most people say <i>hiki</i> instead)
<i>bu</i>	部	Copies of a magazine or a newspaper
<i>bun</i>	文	Sentences
<i>byō</i>	秒	Seconds
<i>chaku</i>	着	Suits of clothing (see also: <i>mai</i>)
<i>chō</i>	挺	Guns, sticks of ink, palanquins, rickshaws, violins
<i>chō</i>	丁	Tools, scissors, saws, trousers, pistols, cakes of <i>tofu</i> , town blocks
<i>chō</i>	町	Town blocks
<i>dai</i>	代	Generations, periods, reigns
<i>dai</i>	台	Cars, bicycles, machines, mechanical devices, household appliances
<i>danraku</i>	段落	Paragraphs
<i>do/tabi</i>	度	Occurrences, number of times (see also: <i>kai</i>).
<i>fuku, puku</i>	服	Bowls of <i>matcha</i> (powdered green tea); packets or doses of powdered medicine
<i>fuku, puku</i>	幅	Hanging scrolls (<i>kakejiku</i>)
<i>fun, pun</i>	分	Minutes
<i>furi</i>	振	Swords

<i>gatsu/tsuki</i>	月	Months of the year. Month-long periods when read <i>tsuki</i> (see also: <i>kagetsu</i>)
<i>go</i>	語	Words
<i>gon/koto</i>	言	Words
<i>gu</i>	具	Suits of armour, sets of furniture
<i>gyō</i>	行	Lines of text
<i>haku</i>	泊	Nights of a stay
<i>hai</i>	杯	Cups and glasses of drink, spoonfuls, cuttlefish, octopuses, crabs, squid, abalone, boats (slang)
<i>hai</i>	敗	Losses (sports bouts)
<i>hari</i>	張	Umbrellas, parasols, tents
<i>hashira</i>	柱	Gods, memorial tablets
<i>hatsu, patsu</i>	発	Gunshots, bullets, aerial fireworks
<i>heya</i>	部屋	Rooms
<i>hiki, piki</i>	匹	Small animals, insects, fish, reptiles, amphibians
<i>hin, pin</i>	品	Parts of a meal, courses (see also: <i>shina</i>)
<i>ho, po</i>	歩	Number of (foot)steps
<i>hon, pon, bon</i>	本	Long, thin objects: rivers, roads, ties, pencils, bottles, guitars; also, metaphorically, telephone calls, movies (see also: <i>tsūwa</i>).
		Although 本 also means "book", the counter for books is <i>satsu</i> .
<i>ji</i>	字	Letters, <i>Kanji</i> , <i>Kana</i>
<i>ji</i>	児	Children. As in "father of two (children)", etc.
<i>ji</i>	時	Hours of the day
<i>jikan</i>	時間	Hour-long periods
<i>jō</i>	畳	<i>Tatami</i> mats. The <i>Kanji</i> 畳 is also read <i>tatami</i> and is the same one used for the mats.
		The room size of a <i>washitsu</i> in Japan is given as a number of mats, for example 4½ <i>jō</i>
<i>ka</i>	架	Frames

<i>kabu</i>	株	Stocks; nursery trees
<i>kagetsu</i>	ヶ月、箇月	Month-long periods (see also: <i>gatsu</i>). 箇 is normally abbreviated using a small <i>Katakana</i> ケ in modern Japanese.
		Alternatively 個, <i>Hiragana</i> か, small <i>Katakana</i> カ and full-size <i>Katakana</i> カ & ケ can also be seen, but only か is frequent.
<i>kakoku</i>	ヶ国、箇国	Countries
<i>kakokugo</i>	ヶ国語、箇国語	(National) languages
<i>kaku</i>	画	Strokes in <i>Kanji</i>
<i>kai</i>	回	Occurrences, number of times (see also: <i>do</i>)
<i>kai</i>	階	Number of floors, stories
<i>kan</i>	貫	Pieces of <i>nigiri-zushi</i>
<i>kan</i>	艦	Warships
<i>ken</i>	件	Abstract matters and cases
<i>ken</i>	軒	Houses
<i>ki</i>	機	Aircraft, machines
<i>ki</i>	基	Graves, wreaths, CPUs, reactors, elevators, dams
<i>kire</i>	切れ	Slices (of bread, cake, <i>sashimi</i> etc.)
<i>ko</i>	個、箇、个 or ケ	General measure word, used when there is no specific counter. 個 is also used for military units.
<i>ko</i>	戸	Houses (戸 means "door")
<i>kō</i>	校	Schools
<i>kō</i>	稿	Drafts of a manuscript
<i>koma</i>	齧、コマ	Frames, panels. 齧 is virtually not used nowadays.
<i>ku</i>	区	Sections, city districts
<i>ku</i>	句	<i>Haiku</i> , <i>senryū</i>
<i>kuchi</i>	口	(Bank) accounts, donations (口 means "opening" or "entrance")

<i>kumi</i>	組	Groups, a pair of people (twins, a husband and a wife, dancers, etc.)
<i>kurasu</i>	クラス	School classes
<i>kyaku</i>	脚	Desks, chairs, long-stemmed glasses
<i>kyaku</i>	客	Pairs of cup and saucer
<i>kyoku</i>	曲	Pieces of music
<i>kyoku</i>	局	Board game matches (chess, <i>Igo</i> , <i>Shogi</i> , <i>Mahjong</i>); radio stations, television stations
<i>mai</i>	枚	Thin, flat objects, sheets of paper, photographs, plates(dishware), articles of clothing (see also: <i>chaku</i>)
<i>maki</i>	巻	Rolls, scrolls
<i>maku</i>	幕	Theatrical acts
<i>mei</i>	名	People (polite) (名 means "name")
<i>men</i>	面	Mirrors, boards for board games (chess, <i>Igo</i> , <i>Shogi</i>), stages of computer games, walls of a room, tennis courts,
<i>mon</i>	門	Cannons
<i>mon</i>	問	Questions
<i>nen</i>	年	Years, school years (grades); not years of age
<i>nichi</i>	日	Days of the month (but see table of exceptions below)
<i>nin</i>	人	People (but see table of exceptions below)
<i>ninmae</i>	人前	Food portions (without exceptions, unlike <i>nin</i> above)
<i>pēji</i>	ページ、頁	Pages
<i>rin</i>	輪	Wheels, Flowers
<i>ryō</i>	両	Railway cars
<i>sai</i>	才 or 歳	Years of age
<i>sao</i>	棹	Chests of drawers, flags
<i>satsu</i>	冊	Books

<i>seki</i>	席	Seats, <i>Rakugo</i> shows, (drinking) parties
<i>seki</i>	隻	Ships
<i>shina</i>	品	Parts of a meal, courses (see also: <i>hin</i>)
<i>sha</i>	社	used for businesses, i.e. 会社 (<i>gaisha</i>)
<i>shō</i>	勝	Wins (sports bouts)
<i>shu</i>	首	<i>Tankas</i> (small japanese poems)
<i>shū</i>	週	Weeks
<i>shurui/shu</i>	種類 or 種	Various types of things
<i>soku</i>	足	Pairs of footwear, pairs of socks, stockings, and <i>tabis</i> .
<i>tai</i>	体	Images, person's remains
<i>tawara</i>	俵	Bags of rice
<i>teki</i>	滴	Drops of liquid
<i>ten</i>	点	Points, dots
<i>tō</i>	頭	Large animals, cattle, elephants (頭 means "head")
<i>tsū</i>	通	Letters
<i>tsūwa</i>	通話	Telephone calls (see also: <i>hon</i>)
<i>toki</i>	時	Time periods, a sixth of either day or night (in the traditional, obsolete way of telling time). See also: <i>jikan</i>
<i>tsubo</i>	坪	Commonly used unit of area equal to 3.3 square metres.
<i>wa</i>	羽	Birds, rabbits* (because of their ears); 羽 means "feather" or "wing".
<i>wa</i>	把	Bundles
<i>ya</i>	夜	Nights (see also: <i>ban</i>)
<i>zen</i>	膳	Pairs of chopsticks; bowls of rice

Exceptions

*Japanese Buddhist monks weren't allowed to eat any meat other than birds, but they liked rabbit meat so much that they came up with contrived evidence that rabbits are actually birds, their ears being like unusable wings. Nowadays *hiki* is the usual counter.

The traditional numbers are used by and for young children to give their ages, instead of the usual age counter *sai*.

Some counters, notably *nichi* 日 and *nin* 人, use the traditional numerals for some small numbers, usually one through three; exceptional cases for these counters are given in the table below.

Others include 月、言、品 and 度 and are usually restricted to certain phrases.

Futatabi (two times, another time), although normally written 再び instead of 二度, is very common though.

Counters beginning with *h-* (including *fu-*) undergo (almost) regular changes in sound, when preceded by the numerals 1, 3, 6, 8, and 10. The table below illustrates the process for *hon* 本 but the same changes apply to *fun* 分, *hai* 杯, *hiki* 匹 etc.

Exceptions				
Numeral	<i>nichi</i> 日	<i>nin</i> 人	<i>hon</i> 本	<i>kai</i> 階
1	<i>tsuitachi</i> *	<i>hitori</i>	<i>ippon</i>	<i>ikkai</i>
2	<i>futsuka</i>	<i>futari</i>		
3	<i>mikka</i>		<i>sanbon</i>	<i>sangai</i>
4	<i>yokka</i>	<i>yonin</i> ***		
5	<i>itsuka</i>			
6	<i>muika</i>		<i>roppon</i>	
7	<i>nanoka</i>	<i>shichinin</i>		
8	<i>yōka</i>		<i>happon</i>	
9	<i>kokonoka</i>			
10	<i>tōka</i>		<i>juppon/jippon</i> **	<i>jukkai/jikkai</i> **
14	<i>jūyokka</i>			
20	<i>hatsuka</i>			
24	<i>nijūyokka</i>			

*When counting the number of days rather than days of the month, *ichinichi* is used. But *ippi* is also heard.

***Jū* is replaced by either *ju-* or *ji-* (じゅっ/じっ) followed by a doubled consonant before the voiceless consonants (i.e., /t k s/); furthermore, *p* is used instead of *h*, as noted above. *Ji-* is the older form, but it has been replaced by *ju-* in spoken language by young generations.

***In remote rural areas (ie. Northern *Honshu* and Eastern *Hokkaido*) older speakers might use *yottari*.

Note that 三階 ("third floor") can be read either *sankai* or *sangai*, while 三回 ("three times") can only be read *sankai*.

Ordinal numbers

In general, the counter words mentioned above are cardinal numbers and in that sense, they indicate a quantity. To transform a counter word into an ordinal number that

denotes a position in a sequence, *me* (目) is added to the end of the counter. Thus

"one time" would be translated as *ikkai* (一回), whereas "the first time" would be translated as *ikkaime* (一回目).

This rule is inconsistent, however, as counters without the *me* suffix are often used interchangeably with cardinal and ordinal meanings. For example, *sankai* (三階) can mean both "three floors" and "third floor".

Period of time

To express a period of time one may add *kan* (間) to the following words:

byō 秒, *fun* 分, *ji* 時, *nichi* 日 (and its irregular readings aside from *tsuitachi*), *shū* 週, *kagetsu* 箇月 and *nen* 年. Usage varies depending on the word.

For example, omitting *kan* in the case of *jikan* 時間 would be a mistake, whereas *shūkan* and *shū* are both frequently used. What's more, *kagetsukan* is rarely heard due to being essentially superfluous, the *ka* already expressing the length.

Tableau des Hiragana et Katakana

あア <i>a</i>	いイ <i>i</i>	うウ <i>u</i>	えエ <i>e</i>	おオ <i>o</i>	やヤ <i>ya</i>	ゆユ <i>yu</i>	よヨ <i>yo</i>
かカ <i>ka</i>	きキ <i>ki</i>	くク <i>ku</i>	けケ <i>ke</i>	こコ <i>ko</i>	きゃキヤ <i>kya</i>	きゅキユ <i>kyu</i>	きょキョ <i>kyo</i>
さサ <i>sa</i>	しシ <i>shi</i>	すス <i>su</i>	せセ <i>se</i>	そソ <i>so</i>	しゃシャ <i>sha</i>	しゅシュ <i>shu</i>	しょショ <i>sho</i>
たタ <i>ta</i>	ちチ <i>chi</i>	つツ <i>tsu</i>	てテ <i>te</i>	とト <i>to</i>	ちゃチャ <i>cha</i>	ちゅチュ <i>chu</i>	ちょチョ <i>cho</i>
なナ <i>na</i>	にニ <i>ni</i>	ぬヌ <i>nu</i>	ねネ <i>ne</i>	のノ <i>no</i>	にゃニャ <i>nya</i>	にゅニユ <i>nyu</i>	にょニョ <i>nyo</i>
はハ <i>ha</i>	ひヒ <i>hi</i>	ふフ <i>fu</i>	へヘ <i>he</i>	ほホ <i>ho</i>	ひゃヒャ <i>hya</i>	ひゅヒユ <i>hyu</i>	ひょヒョ <i>hyo</i>
まマ <i>ma</i>	みミ <i>mi</i>	むム <i>mu</i>	めメ <i>me</i>	もモ <i>mo</i>	みゃミャ <i>mya</i>	みゅミユ <i>myu</i>	みょミョ <i>myo</i>
やヤ <i>ya</i>		ゆユ <i>yu</i>		よヨ <i>yo</i>			
らラ <i>ra</i>	りリ <i>ri</i>	るル <i>ru</i>	れレ <i>re</i>	ろロ <i>ro</i>	りゃリャ <i>rya</i>	りゅリユ <i>ryu</i>	りょリョ <i>ryo</i>
わワ <i>wa</i>				をヲ <i>o</i>			
んン <i>n</i>							
がガ <i>ga</i>	ぎギ <i>gi</i>	ぐグ <i>gu</i>	げゲ <i>ge</i>	ごゴ <i>go</i>	ぎゃギャ <i>gya</i>	ぎゅギユ <i>gyu</i>	ぎょギョ <i>gyo</i>
ざザ <i>za</i>	じジ <i>ji</i>	ずズ <i>zu</i>	ぜゼ <i>ze</i>	ぞゾ <i>zo</i>	じゃジャ <i>ja</i>	じゅジュ <i>ju</i>	じょジョ <i>jo</i>
だダ <i>da</i>	ぢヂ <i>ji</i>	づヅ <i>zu</i>	でデ <i>de</i>	どド <i>do</i>			
ばバ <i>ba</i>	びビ <i>bi</i>	ぶブ <i>bu</i>	べベ <i>be</i>	ぼボ <i>bo</i>	びゃビャ <i>bya</i>	びゅビユ <i>byu</i>	びょビョ <i>byo</i>
ぱパ <i>pa</i>	ぴピ <i>pi</i>	ぷプ <i>pu</i>	ぺペ <i>pe</i>	ぽポ <i>po</i>	ぴゃピャ <i>pya</i>	ぴゅピユ <i>pyu</i>	ぴょピョ <i>pyo</i>