

Re: Beginner Question about Kana/Kanji/Romaji

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- *From:* Ben Finney <bignose+hates-spam@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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Walker Moore <walker.moore@xxxxxxxx> writes:

Anyway, a few episodes in...I appeared to be doing quite well, when people began telling me what a mistake it was to "start out with" Romaji. That I should study Kana & Kanji first.

I agree that learning Japanese via romaji is counterproductive in the long run.

I do think you should be learning to read kana from the first stages. I don't think the introduction of kanji needs to be simultaneous; that is, I think not learning kanji is merely a delay, rather than the absolute setback that comes from not learning kana from the earliest stages.

In addition to the many reasons people have given **for** learning kana, I think there's a good reason **against** learning romaji in the early stages. The reason is that your brain, through your childhood language learning, already "knows" how to pronounce those symbols, and this will warp your pronunciation of Japanese if you read it using romaji.

The kana, on the other hand, have no pre-existing sound association in your mind, so you can learn the sounds without so much influence from the sounds you learned for the latin alphabet. This benefit only accrues if you actually do dissociate the kana from the romaji in the early stages: by listening to a native speaker pronounce them (and, ideally, correct your speech), **not** by looking at a romaji equivalent in a table.

Note that this argument could be made for just about any language (especially English!) that uses our alphabet to represent its sounds: if you learn it after childhood, the existing sound associations you have to the latin alphabet will strongly guide your pronunciation of those characters, even when the language you're trying to learn has quite different sounds.

The difference here is that Japanese comes to you with the benefit of

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a totally discrete set of sound symbols: if you use them *instead* of romaji to learn the sounds, you avoid the romaji trap and you at least have a good shot at pronouncing the language correctly.

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\ "As we enjoy great advantages from the inventions of others, we |

\ should be glad to serve others by any invention of ours." -- |

o) Benjamin Franklin |

Ben Finney

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