

JAPANESE

WORDS THAT FEEL JAPANESE.

A visual travel guide to 30 expressive -ri words.



See it. Hear it. Feel it.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This is not a complete dictionary. It is a visual guide to the feel of 30 expressive Japanese words.



SAY

Worth trying yourself.



COMEBACK

A short response you can use.



KNOW

Recognition is enough.



FEEL

Understand the scene and nuance.

MEET SANTARO



The dictionary gives you the basic meaning. Santaro's Take handles the messier part: what the word feels like, when it sounds natural, and the cultural details a short translation leaves behind.

Start with the illustration. Then read the examples. Use MEANING to confirm the basics.

THE -RI SOUND

Every word in this book ends in -ri.

DON'T USE AN ENGLISH "R"

Do not curl your tongue back. Make a very quick, light tongue contact near the ridge just behind your upper front teeth. Keep -ri short and light. It is not a rolled Spanish-style r, either.

Think: a quick tap, not a long R sound. Listen first; imitate second.

HIRAGANA AT A GLANCE



Hiragana Chart

Japanese Sounds for a Wider World

A new language,
a wider world.

	a	i	u	e	o
—	あ a /a/	い i /i/	う u /u/	え e /e/	お o /o/
k	か ka /ka/	き ki /ki/	く ku /ku/	け ke /ke/	こ ko /ko/
s	さ sa /sa/	し shi /çi/	す su /su/	せ se /se/	そ so /so/
t	た ta /ta/	ち chi /tçi/	つ tsu /tsu/	て te /te/	と to /to/
n	な na /na/	に ni /ni/	ぬ nu /nu/	ね ne /ne/	の no /no/
h	は ha /ha/	ひ hi /hi/	ふ fu /fu/	へ he /he/	ほ ho /ho/
m	ま ma /ma/	み mi /mi/	む mu /mu/	め me /me/	も mo /mo/
y	や ya /ja/	—	ゆ yu /ju/	—	よ yo /jo/
r	ら ra /ra/	り ri /ri/	る ru /ru/	れ re /re/	ろ ro /ro/
w	わ wa /wa/	—	—	—	を wo /wo/

Notes

- Hiragana represents Japanese sounds. Each character usually has one simple sound.
- Pronunciations are approximate IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet).
- Japanese has no "l" sound. The ら り る ろ (r) sounds are closer to a light "l" (like "r" in Spanish "pero").
- つ is pronounced "tsu" (like "ts" in "cats"). り is "ri".



Small Letters,
Big Connections.

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29	UTTO-RI	SAY / FEEL
30	KUKKI-RI	SAY



MEANING

- 1 A very small amount or degree; just a little.

EXAMPLES

- 1 "Do you speak Japanese?" — "CHOPPI-RI."
- 2 "Can you eat uni?" — "CHOPPI-RI."

SANTARO'S TAKE



CHOPPI-RI is a colloquial, slightly childlike way of saying "a little" or "a bit," but it does not sound strange when adults use it. To me, it feels even smaller than sukoshi or chotto — as if you are trying to convey something like "one drop from an eyedropper." With steak, "Can I have a little?" might mean as much as 25%, chotto perhaps 10%, while CHOPPI-RI feels more like 1–9%: so little that the other person does not really feel that anything was "taken." You may often be asked, "Do you speak Japanese?" Compared with answering "A little" or sukoshi, saying CHOPPI-RI can give the impression that you like Japan and are studying Japanese, while also preparing the Japanese speaker not to expect too much. Likewise, if someone asks whether you like uni and you answer CHOPPI-RI, it can sound like, "I do not really love it, but I am trying to say that politely." It is a useful word that softens negativity.

WHEN TO USE IT

It works well as a one-word answer to "Do you speak Japanese?" It is also useful for gently expressing how much you can eat or how much you like something.

HEAR CHOPPI-RI
& EXAMPLES

Tap or scan



びっくり ①

BIKKURI

pleasant surprise / to be surprised (in a good way)



びっくり ②

BIKKURI

unexpected surprise / to be startled



MEANING

- ① Describes being surprised, startled, or amazed by something unexpected, sudden, or unforeseen.

EXAMPLES

- ① "This building is 300 years old." —
"Wow, BIKKU-RI!"

SANTARO'S TAKE



The exclamation mark "!" is called a bikkuri mark in Japanese. BIKKU-RI can be replaced quite directly with "surprised." It is an extremely everyday word used for both good and bad surprises. On a trip, it is an all-purpose emotion word for history, scenery, prices, and more. You can be BIKKU-RI because something is delicious or because it tastes terrible. But if you smile and say BIKKU-RI in a restaurant, I think your positive surprise will probably come across.

WHEN TO USE IT

You can use it as-is to react to surprising history, scenery, unusually large food, prices, and other unexpected moments while traveling.

HEAR BIKKU-RI
& EXAMPLES

Tap or scan





MEANING

- 1 Light and not overly rich, heavy, intense, or lingering in taste, color, and similar qualities.
- 2 Describes something proceeding unexpectedly easily or simply.
- 3 Describes a personality or attitude as straightforward, detached, and not lingering on things.

EXAMPLES

- 1 “ASSA-RI or KOTTE-RI — which would you like?”

SANTARO'S TAKE



Sense 1 is used mostly for taste. Seasoning and oil are restrained, the flavor is not strong, and I imagine lower density or viscosity that does not linger afterward. A person with an ASSA-RI personality does not hold grudges or dwell on things. Sense 2 contains an “unexpectedly” feeling: contrary to what you predicted, something ends easily and without difficulty.

WHEN TO USE IT

Very practical when choosing a food style such as ramen. You can also order by saying, “ASSA-RI, please.”

HEAR ASSA-RI
& EXAMPLES

Tap or scan



しっくり ①

SHIKKU-RI

feels right; comfortable; just right



しっくり ②

SHIKKU-RI

feels right; natural; fits well (with one's taste)



MEANING

- 1 Describes something feeling naturally right, comfortable, and free of awkwardness or mismatch.

EXAMPLES

- 1 This one feels more SHIKKU-RI.

SANTARO'S TAKE



There is some ideal sense of “rightness” that is hard to put into words. When reality does not quite fit that ideal — as life often does — things feel shikkuri shinai or shikkuri konai: not quite right.

Because this is an extremely personal feeling, other people may not understand what feels SHIKKU-RI to you. It is the person's own sensation, not an objective match. Compare it with PITTA-RI.

WHEN TO USE IT

When shopping, you can compare two options and say, “This one feels more SHIKKU-RI,” when size alone cannot explain your preference.

HEAR SHIKKU-RI
& EXAMPLES

Tap or scan



ASSA-RI vs KOTTE-RI



ASSA-RI

light / clean / not heavy



KOTTE-RI

rich / oily / thick

THE KEY DISTINCTION

ASSA-RI and KOTTE-RI are often presented as two styles, especially with ramen. One feels lighter and cleaner; the other feels richer, oilier, or thicker.

SANTARO'S TAKE



I do not hear these as “good” and “bad.” They are useful because they describe what kind of richness you want. With soup, I especially notice how much oiliness or thickness remains on the tongue.

YAPPA-RI vs TEKKI-RI



YAPPA-RI

expectation confirmed



TEKKI-RI

a confident assumption was wrong

THE KEY DISTINCTION

YAPPA-RI confirms a thought or expectation you already had. TEKKI-RI appears when an assumption you felt sure about turns out to have been mistaken.

SANTARO'S TAKE



These make a neat pair in memory: YAPPA-RI is "I knew it / as I thought." TEKKI-RI is "I was sure it was A, but it was actually B." The direction of the surprise is opposite.

Thank you



Take it YUKKU-RI.

And enjoy the words you meet along the way.

About this book

Created for learners and travelers who want to understand Japanese beyond direct translation.
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