

■ Intransitive Verbs and Transitive Verbs

In Japanese there are intransitive verbs and transitive verbs that form morphological pairs (e.g., *mawaru* ‘something turns’ and *mawasu* ‘one turns something’). There are quite a lot of such pairs among basic verbs, and learners commonly have difficulty acquiring them. The intransitive-transitive correspondence can be sorted out morphologically into several patterns. At some point the instructor may want to give instruction on this matter to help learners.

In sorting the paired patterns, it is effective to transcribe the verbs in rōmaji. The common morphological traits in the following intransitive-transitive pairs may not be obvious if transcribed in kana. (In describing the corresponding pairs, I shall list the intransitive verb on the left and the transitive verb on the right hereafter.)

Examples:

kakaru-kakeru (‘it takes/I spend’), *agaru-ageru* (‘go up/raise’), *kabuseru-kabuseru* (‘cover/cover’), *mazaru-mazeru* (‘mix/mix’), *ataru-ateru* (‘hit/hit’), *kasanaru-kasaneru* (‘overlie/overlay’), *tomaru-tomeru* (‘stop/stop’), *kuwawaru-kuwa(w)eru* (‘join/add’).

Here, I will modify the straightforward Rōmaji transcription a little. I will mark the initial part that is common in both the intransitive and transitive verbs with “~”, and mark the boundary between the stem and conjugating ending with “-“. This way, all the examples above can be written out as the “~ar-u/~e-ru” type. (The last example is considered “kuwaweru.”)

Paired intransitive and transitive verbs are sorted out in this manner and the patterns of pairs are shown on Chart 2-8 with examples. The patterns are divided into four major types. To establish these four types, first we took out the shared part (signified by “—“) and the conjugatable ending, and checked whether there was *-r-* or *-s-* in the remaining part.

We have found that if there is either *-r-* or *-s-* in the stem minus the “—“, the intransitive verb always has *-r-* and the transitive counterpart always has *-s-*.

Chart 2-8: Paired Verbs with or without *-r-* and *-s-*

«A» Intransitive Verb Contains ~r- and Transitive Verb Contains ~s-

(A-1) [~r̄-u -- ~s̄-u]

utsuru – utsusu	‘to transfer’	kaeru – kaesu	‘to go home – to give back’
kudaru – kudasu	‘to go down – to lower’	tōru – tōsu	‘to go through – to let through’
naoru – naosu	‘to heal – to rectify’	nokoru – nokosu	‘to stay behind – to leave behind’
mawaru – mawasu	‘to turn’	wataru – watasu	‘to cross – to hand over’

(A-2) [~r̄e-ru -- ~s̄u-ru]

kakureru – kakusu	‘to hide’	kegareru – kegasu	‘to become filthy – to soil’
koboreru – kobosu	‘to spill’	kowareru – kowasu	‘to break’
nagareru – nagasu	‘(liquid) to run/flow’	taoreru – taosu	‘to topple over – to topple’
hazureru – hazusu	‘to come off – to unlatch’	hanareru – hanasu	‘to separate’

(A-3) [~r̄-u -- ~s̄e-ru]

noru – noseru	‘to get onboard – to load’	niru – niseru	‘to resemble – to imitate’
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«B» Intransitive Verb Contains –r-

(B-1) [~aru -- ~e-ru]

agaru – ageru ‘to rise – to hoist’
atsumaru – atsumeru ‘to gather’

usumaru – usumeru ‘to become diluted –
to dilute’

osamaru – osameru ‘to fall into place – to store’

kabusaru – kabuseru ‘to cover’

sagaru – sageru ‘to lower’

takamaru – takameru ‘to heighten’

tamaru – tameru ‘to accumulate’

mazaru – mazeru ‘to mix’

mitsukaru – mitsukeru ‘to be found – to find’

ataru – ateru ‘to hit’

ukaru – ukeru ‘to pass (an exam) – to take (an
exam)’

umaru – umeru ‘to be filled – to fill’

kakaru – kakeru ‘to cost – to spend’

kimaru – kimeru ‘to be settled – to decide’

somaru – someru ‘to be dyed – to dye’

tasukaru – tasukeru ‘to be saved – to save’

magaru – mageru ‘to bend’

marumaru – marumeru ‘to roll’

mōkaru – mōkeru ‘to be lucrative – to make a
profit’

(B-2) [~aru -- ~u]

kurumaru – kurumu ‘to wrap oneself – to wrap’

fusagaru – fusagu ‘to be plugged – to plug’

tsunagaru – tsunagu ‘to be connected – to
connect’

matagaru – matagu ‘to mount – to straddle’

«C» Transitive Verb Contains –s-

(C-1) [~u -- ~asu]

ugoku – ugokasu ‘to move’

doku – dokasu ‘to get out of the
way – to remove’

naru – narasu ‘to ring’

kawaku – kawakasu ‘to dry’

tobu – tobasu ‘to fly’

heru – herasu ‘to decrease’

(C-2) [~e-ru -- ~asu]

areru – arasu ‘to go to ruin – to devastate’

kogeru – kogasu ‘to scorch’

tokeru – tokasu ‘to melt’

nigeru – nigasu ‘to run away – to release’

makeru – makasu ‘to be defeated – to defeat’

*taeru – tayasu (tayeru – tayasu) ‘to become
extinct – to exterminate’

haeru – hayasu ‘to grow’

fueru – fuyasu ‘to increase’

kareru – karasu ‘to dry up’

sameru – samasu ‘to cool down – to cool’

nareru – narasu ‘to get used to – to break in’

nureru – nurasu ‘to get wet – to moisten’

moreru – morasu ‘to leak’

hieru – hiyasu ‘to become cold – to cool’

moeru – moyasu ‘to burn’

(C-3) [~i-ru -- ~osu]

okiru – okosu ‘to wake up – to wake someone up’

oriru – orosu ‘to get off – to unload’

horobiru – horobosu ‘to become extinct – to destroy’

ochiru – otosu ‘to fall – to drop’

sugiru – sugosu ‘time passes – spend
time’

(C-4) [~i-ru -- ~asu]

ikiru – ikasu ‘to live – to make the most of’ tojiru – tozasu ‘to close – to block’

nobiru – nobasu ‘to stretch’ michiru – mitasu ‘to fill up’

«D» Neither –r- nor –s- Is Included

(D-1) [~e-ru -- ~-u]

oreru – oru ‘to break’	kireru – kiru ‘to snap’
kudakeru – kudaku ‘to shatter’	sakeru– saku ‘to tear’
toreru – toru ‘to yield’	nukeru – nuku ‘to fall out – to pull out’
yabureru – yaburu ‘to tear’	wareru – waru ‘to crack’

(D-2) [~-u -- ~e-ru]

aku – akeru ‘to open’	ukabu – ukaberu ‘to float’
susumu – susumeru ‘to proceed’	sodatsu – sodateru ‘to grow’
tatsu – tateru ‘to stand up’	chijimu – chijimeru ‘to shrink’
tsuku – tsukeru ‘to attach’	tsuzuku – tsuzukeru ‘to continue’
todoku – todokeru ‘to reach – to deliver’	narabu – naraberu ‘to line up’
*sorou – soroeru (sorrow <u>u</u> -u – sorow <u>e</u> -ru) ‘to match’	
kanau- kanaeru ‘to be fulfilled – to fulfill’	totonou – totonoeru ‘to be prepared – to prepare’

(D-3) [~e-ru -- ~-ru]

mieru – miru ‘is visible – to look’	nieru – niru ‘to boil’
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The majority of Japanese verbs fall into one of the 4 major types shown above. A few comments are added below.

(1) Paired intransitive and transitive verbs tend to have the structural correspondence seen in *koma ga mawaru* ‘the top spins’ vs. *koma o mawasu* ‘one spins the top.’ However, a few pairs that have other correspondences are included in the above types. Examples: *senpai ni makeru* ‘be outdone by one’s senior’—*senpai o makasu* ‘outdo one’s senior member’; *shiken ni ukaru* ‘pass the exam’—*shiken o ukeru* ‘take the exam’.

(2) Some basic verbs do not fit into any of the above types, but this is explained from etymology and historical changes.

kieru ‘the light goes out’ – *kesu* ‘one extinguishes the light’

deru ‘go out’ – *dasu* ‘one takes out something’

neru ‘sleep’ – *nekasu* ‘one puts someone to bed’

hairu ‘go in’ – *ireru* ‘one puts something inaspect’

(3) There are transitive-transitive verb pairs that show a similar correspondence found in intransitive and transitive pairs.

[~aru -- ~e-ru] Type:

azukaru ‘keep, take care of’ – *azukeru* ‘entrust’

sazukaru ‘be endowed with’ – *sazukeru* ‘award’

[~-ru -- ~se-ru] Type:

miru ‘see’ – *miseru* ‘show’

kiru ‘put on clothes’ – *kiseru* ‘dress someone’

abiru ‘pour, bathe’ – *abiseru* ‘pour’

(4) One intransitive verb has two corresponding transitive verbs; one transitive verb has two corresponding intransitive verbs. (There are just a few cases where two intransitive verbs having

two corresponding transitive verbs.)

- *tsunagaru* – *tsunageru* & *tsunagu* ‘join, link’
tokeru – *tokasu* & *toku* ‘melt, untie’
nukeru ‘come off, drop out’ – *nukasu* & *nuku* ‘skip, uncork, etc.’
kireru ‘be cut off, run out’ – *kirasu* & *kiru* ‘exhaust, cut’
mureru ‘get musty’ – *murasu* & *musu* ‘steam’
doku ‘get out of the way’ – *dokasu* & *dokeru* ‘remove’
- *okoru* & *okiru* ‘happen’ – *okosu* ‘happen, cause’
chijimaru & *chijimu* ‘shrink’ – *chijimeru* ‘shrink’
yasumaru & *yasumu* ‘calm down, rest’ – *yasumeru* ‘rest, halt’
kamaru & *kamu* ‘get tangled’ – *kameru* ‘entwine’
yowamaru & *yowaru* ‘weaken’ – *yowameru* ‘weaken’
- *hagareru* & *hageru* ‘come off, peel off’ – *hagu* & *hagasu* ‘peel’

Each of the above group may be re-organized into one of the following types:

tsunagaru – *tsunageru* belongs to (B-1) type,

tsunagaru – *tsunagu* belongs to (B-2) type,

okoru – *okosu* belong to (A-1) type,

okiru – *okosu* belong to (C-3) type, and so on.

(5) There are some verbs that have the same form for both intransitive and transitive counterparts. Some have very similar meaning in both forms, such as in *mon ga tojiru* ‘the gate closes’ – *mon o tojiru* ‘one closes the gate’. Other verbs do not share the same meaning. Example: *akanbō ga warau* ‘the baby laughs’ – *hito no shippai o warau* ‘laugh at someone’s failure.’ There are a few cases in which the same verb may be used both intransitively and transitively.

- *Kawa no suiryō ga masu* ‘the water volume in the river increases’ – *Kawa ga suiryō o masu* ‘the river increases its water volume’
Seki ga kawaru ‘the seating is changed’ – *Seki o kawaru* ‘move out of one’s seat to another’
- *Kaisha ni tsutomeru* ‘work for a company’ – *Shikai o tsutomeru* ‘serve as an MC’
Shio ga hiku ‘the tide ebbs’ – *Sara o temae ni hiku* ‘pull the plate toward oneself’

(6) Whether the verb pair is in effect or not depends on the region, time period, and individual. Some may find one verb in the pair to be unnatural. In the following examples the uses of the intransitive verbs will seem odd to many speakers, depending on their region:

Sentakumono ga hiru ‘the laundry gets dry’ – *Sentakumono o hosu* ‘hang out the laundry’

Imo ga fukeru ‘the potato gets steamed’ – *Imo o fukasu* ‘steam potatoes’

Tamago ga yudaru ‘the egg gets boiled’ – *Tamago o yuderu* ‘boil eggs’

Hana ga ikaru ‘the flower gets arranged’ – *Hana o ikeru* ‘arrange flowers’

Kaki ga tsurusaru ‘the persimmon fruit gets hung out’ – *Kaki o tsurusu* ‘hang persimmons’

Yasai ga itamaru ‘the vegetables get stir-fried’ – *Yasai o itameru* ‘stir-fry vegetables’

(7) Some types have more pairs than others. Dominant types seem to keep expanding their inventory. When a new word is temporarily created, these dominant types may work as templates. Examples: *nagusameru* (tr.) ‘console someone’ → *nagusamaru* (intr.) ‘feel consoled’ (B-1) type; *nagomu* (intr.) ‘feel at ease’ → *nagomeru* (tr.) ‘put someone at ease’ (D-1) type.

→ 動詞 Verbs (2-B), 自動詞と他動詞の特徴 Characteristics of Intransitive and Transitive Verbs (2-M)

● References

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