

Japanese/English Martial Arts Dictionary

Our style of karate is called Shukokai. This is Japanese for the study of change. It is sometimes translated as “the way for all”.

This style was founded in 1949 by Chojiro Tani (1920-1998) and was developed from another style of karate called Shito-ryu which was founded by Chojiro Tani’s teacher Kenwa Mabuni (1889-1952). It was originally called Tani-ha Shito-ryu.

Our Association is called the Seiken Ryu Karate Association. Seiken Ryu is Japanese for the school of the two-knuckle fist. It was founded in 1975 in Tottington, Greater Manchester by Steve Yates, the father of our present chief instructor, Chris Yates.

Japanese vocabulary and pronunciation

Japanese is very easy to pronounce. The consonants and their combinations all sound more or less as they do in English (but remember the *g* is hard as in Graham rather than soft as in George). There are only five vowels, which are pronounced like this.

a sounds like the a in father

i sounds like the e in be

u sound like the oo in zoo

e sounds like the e in pet

o sounds like the o in god

The vowels can combine however, and the ones you will need for the vocabulary below are as follows.

ai sounds like the ie in lie, for example *Hai* (yes)

ae sounds like the y in my, for example *Mae geri* (front kick)

ui sounds like the ooey in gooey, for example *Tetsui* (hammer fist)

ea sounds like the ear in fear, for example *Keage* (snap)

ei sounds like the ay in bay, for example *Sensei* (teacher)

oi sounds like the oy in boy, for example *Oizuki* (step punch)

When you see two of the same vowels together it just means that you need to lengthen the sound slightly, for example *Juu* (ten).

It is also worth knowing that when some Japanese words are shouted or spoken forcefully they lose the final vowel. This is why *ichi* sounds like the English word “each” rather than something like “eachy” (which is how it would sound in ordinary conversation). If you want to know more, there is some extra information in the notes below the vocabulary list.

Numbers

ichi	=	one	roku	=	six
ni	=	two	shichi	=	seven
san	=	three	hachi	=	eight
shi	=	four	ku (kyuu)	=	nine
go	=	five	juu	=	ten

English

Japanese

General Words

Teacher	Sensei
Senior student (assistant teacher)	Senpai (sounds like <i>sempai</i> as an <i>n</i> before a <i>p</i> sounds more like an <i>m</i>)
Begin	Hajime
Bow	Rei
Formal kneeling	Seiza
Sparring	Kumite
Right	Migi
Left	Hidari
Mat	Tatami
Stop	Yame
Ready/ focus	Kime (both physical and mental)
Yes	Hai
Turn	Mawate
Response (not literally)	Oos
Project	Ski
Thrust	Kekomi
Snap	Keage
Two knuckle/front/fore- fist	Seiken
School	Ryu
Open or empty	Kara ⁱ
Hand	Te
Forearm	Ude
Way	Do
Techniques	Jitsu
Lower part of body	Gedan
Chest/stomach area	Chudan
Head area	Jodan
Training area	Dojo

Punches

Punch	Tsuki (becomes <i>zuki</i> when combined with some other words)
Strike	Uchi
Reverse punch	Gyaku zuki
Step-punch	Oi zuki
Leading hand punch	Maeken zuki
Spear-hand	Nukite
Back-fist	Uraken
Elbow (strike)	Enpi uchi (sounds like <i>empi</i> as an <i>n</i> before a <i>p</i> sounds more like an <i>m</i>)
Ridge-hand	Haito
Hammer-fist	Tetsui
Palm-heel	Teisho
Single knuckle strike	Ippon ken ⁱⁱ
Lunge punch	Junzuki
Short/close punch	Ura zuki
Double U-punch	Yama zuki

Blocks

Block (to receive)	Uke
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Sweep	Harai (becomes <i>barai</i> when combined with some other words)
Downward sweep/down block	Gedan barai
Inside block	Chudan uke / Uchi uke / Uchi ude uke
Rising block	Jodan uke / Age uke
Inside knife-hand block	Shuto uchi uke
Outside block	Soto uke / Soto ude uke
Outside knife hand block	Soto shuto uke
Supported block	Morote uke
Cross block	Juji uke
Lapel-break double block	Kakiwake uke

Kicks

Kick	Geri
Front kick	Mae geri
Roundhouse	Mawashi geri ⁱⁱⁱ
Side kick	Yoko geri
Back kick	Ushiro geri
Back roundhouse kick	Ushiro mawashi geri
Crescent kick	Mikazuki geri
Foot sweep	Ashi barai
Knee-kick	Hiza geri
Blade/edge of foot	Sokuto

Stances

Stance	Dachi
Front fighting stance	Zenkutsu dachi
Cat stance	Nekoashi dachi
Straddle (horse) stance	Shiko dachi
Tension stance	Sanchin dachi
Ready stance	Yoi
T/Crossed-feet stance	Kosa dachi
Crane stance	Tsuri ashi dachi
Heel step	Tsuri komi
Step through	Suri ashi

Once you have learned the vocabulary and the pronunciation, another thing you can do to sound more Japanese is to try and give each syllable the same stress and duration. A syllable in Japanese is made up of a vowel on its own or a vowel with a consonant (or consonant cluster) in front of it. In English we always stress one of the syllables in a word, but in Japanese all syllables are treated equally and take the same amount of time to say.

So to say a word such as back roundhouse kick in Japanese, you need to give each of its syllables more or less the same amount of importance: *u shi ro ma wa shi ge ri*.

Perhaps the hardest thing you could do is try to learn to pronounce the Japanese *r* sound. It isn't really the equivalent of an English *r* sound at all. In fact it is exactly half way between an English *r* sound and an English *l* sound. When you say these sounds in English, you should be able to feel your tongue touching the front of the top of your mouth for the *r* and then feel it move more towards the middle for the *l*. If you can get your tongue to make the same sound while putting itself midway between the *r* position and the *l* position, you will be saying a perfect Japanese *r*. Because it's half way between the two, this is why we hear Japanese (and Chinese) speakers saying *l* when they mean *r* and the other way round.

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- i The *kara* in *karate* is the same word as the *kara* in *karaoke*. It means empty: empty hand, empty orchestra (i.e. without a voice).
 - ii When you see two consonants together you don't repeat them, you just pause very slightly before saying the (single) consonant, like a tiny stutter: so *ippon* is pronounced *i-pon*.
 - iii The *mawashi* in *mawashi geri* is derived from the same word as *mawate* (turn). They both mean “to revolve”.