

HIRA & KATAKANA TRUETYPE OR POSTSCRIPT TYPE 1 FONT WITH SPECIAL BILINGUAL KEYBOARD

Ever since I started to devise fonts, that is, back in 1985, I always had Japanese Kana fonts. At the time, though, it was not as easy as nowadays to get fonts to be printed. Our hottest product, at the time, was called MatchFont. It acted as a printer driver, sending graphics to it instead of characters. The result was great for the 8-pin and then 24 pin printers, although the graphic printing made it quite slow. I doubt anyone ever used intensively MatchFont to generate letters in Japanese, although I know quite a few users who appreciated very much MatchFont for Spanish, French, and other languages.

My first attempt at vector based Japanese Kanas was under the newly acquired Fontographer 3.5, on the Macintosh. Quite a little exercise, in order to get the feeling of the editor. Needless to say, the result was, well, not perfect.

Later on, I used the Autotrace feature of Fontographer to get some characters from paper to the screen in a more proper manner. The result was aesthetically much better.

The biggest problem was to get to sort of a standard keyboard usage. My first attempt was to order the characters so, by typing from left to right, and from top to bottom, the user would access A I U E O, then under that KA KI KU KE KO, and so on. The resulting ASCII code had nothing to do with anything. It was neither sequentially logical, nor phonetically logical.

Users complained, too, that it was kind of unpractical to have to change fonts constantly, for Hiragana to Katakana, and back to some Roman font, in order to mix Japanese and foreign names, as well as English.

Although this is true, the Katakana and Hiragana fonts have an advantage : the Japanese symbols are placed under the same keys as the regular fonts, which means it is possible to enter Japanese with no special keyboard. After all, if your goal is simply to add your name in Katakana on a business card along with the address in Hiragana, why bother changing the keyboard driver ?

On the other hand, I had quite a few users mentioning they were living in Japan, or planning to do business there, or doing some regular Japanese studies. It meant they would probably have quite often to write in Kanas. It would be wise to devise for them a system that could handle with a

minimum amount of manipulations the Hiragana, Katakana, and English (or another Roman-characters-based language). Well, the result is here : a font which contains the regular ASCII character set, complete with possibilities of entering accented characters (see below "Accents characters"), plus the complete Hiragana and Katakana set of symbols.

The Hira & Katakana font, without it's special keyboard handler, resembles Times, or Garamond. Apart from a few differences, it could be used readily for any kind of layout. Used in conjunction with it's special keyboard, though, it gives easy access to Hiragana and Katakana.

This version of the font is a special shareware version, intended for shareware distribution. It is identical to the regular registered version, but the only available style is "outline". It works exactly as the registered version, including accents and keyboard driver. It may be quite fine for an artistic layout, but may be a little limited for everyday use. If you wish to obtain the more usual solid characters set, please register.

How to install the Roman/Japanese keyboard driver

Simply drag the Japanese keyboard driver over the System folder. From that point, the system should take over, and place it in the proper place (the System suitcase).

Then, when you want to access the Japanese Keyboard, go into the Apple menu, select Control Panels, and in there, double click on Keyboard. You will be able to select the appropriate keyboard.

How to use the Japanese Keyboard

First, you want to install the Hira & Katakana font in your system. The most usual way is to simply drag the font files over the System folder, and release them. The system will place them in the proper place. You may also use a font manager like Suitcase, and therefore follow the installation procedure of this particular utility.

The Roman/Japanese keyboard is basically a regular U.S. Qwerty keyboard, and it should behave on regular basis as well as the default keyboard. The Hira & Katakana font is meant to offer the same characters as for instance the Times fonts, and apart from a few letters used for Japanese (accolades, or brackets, for instance), it should be usable for writing in English (as well as other languages, see "Accents" below).

The Japanese characters are accessed when the SHIFT LOCK key is depressed. In other words, as long as that key is not depressed, you deal with a Qwerty keyboard. When Shift Lock is active, the keyboard is dedicated to the Japanese Kanas.

The vowels are directly accessible through the keyboard, as they would on the regular layout : A I U E O. The default characters are HIRAGANA, as I suppose they will be the most common. If one of the SHIFT (left or right) key is depressed, you will get the KATAKANA set of characters.

The other letters are accessible through a phonetic 2-keys combination, as follow :

KA KI KU KE KO
SA SI SU SE SO
TA TI TU TE TO, or TA CI TO TE TO
NA NI NU NE NO
HA HI HU HE HO, or HA HI FU HE HO
MA MI MU ME MO
YA YU YO
RA RI RU RE RO, or LA LI LU LE LO
WA WO
NN (or N followed by space)

The "small" letters, necessary to obtain Iya, etc., are accessible through the lower left keys ` Z X V B

Putting all the symbols in a font required all the slots of the font. It was not possible, therefore, to add the PA, BA, ZA, GA, and so on, directly in the font. I therefore added the necessary changing symbols (look a little like " and °) under the lower right keys. Period is replaced by the proper punctuation mark.

It is also necessary to generate the "long" character (looks a little bit like —), like in TOKYô, for instance. Two different bars replace the and symbols.

If you have to switch often from language to language, you may want to place an alias of the Keyboard control panel in the Apple menu folder. That way, you will be able to change keyboard very quickly, much faster than going through all the windows.

Here is an example of the keyboard layout, using both Hira & Katakana font, and the Japanese keyboard :

ere are most of the characters obtained through keys combinations :

ccents with Hira & Katakana font

Being French, I cannot very easily resort to create a font that does not generate the necessary characters. I know it could seem strange to insist on writing été rather than ete, or français rather than francais. The point is, you may, if you want, enter accented characters. I made sure most of the French accented characters remain in the font, although I had to replace ì by ù, and create a "dotless i" in place of í, in order to be able to generate some accented characters. In other words, it means if you are using an Azerty or Franco-Canadian keyboard, it should generate the most usual accented letters (not all the uppercase, though, I did not have the room).

If you want to create accented characters that are not readily available, here is how : the > and < symbols have been replace by acute and grave (´). The % character has been replaced by the umlaut (¨). the ^ and ~ are there too, under the usual keys. The vertical bar (|) bears the cedilla, necessary to enter ç.

Let us say you want to enter an acute e, for instance. You will enter first the accent (<), and then the character (e). The accent will not push the cursor, and the letter will take place under it, like this : é. The same principle works for all the accents and cedillas. It should allow you to enter whatever combination you may wish to write in French, but also in many other languages. For instance, the cedilla could be placed under the S, like in some Slovak and Polish writing, as well as the ^ could be placed over the consonants, like it is useful in Esperanto.

The only limitation is, I did not create accents for Uppercase characters. There was simply not enough room there. As a matter of fact, if you want to enter other languages, the Japanese font is not the most appropriate. Match Software currently offers many other fonts, including Slovak, Polish, Turkish, Vietnamese (quite an achievement, considering the combinations involved) and so on.

I hope you find this font useful, and look forward for any hints that may help me improve on it (rather than snap some unproductive remark, please be civilized and courteous). Japanese native and scholars, please forgive any error, as my little 3 years of Japanese at the Tenri Institute in Paris, back 15 years ago, may be a little rusty, now. I just hope my small merit in creating that set will be to help other students progress, or businessmen communicate.

What's next ? Lots of users have been asking for a Kanji font. More recently, someone asked for a Chinese Pinyin font. I do have knowledge of some of the basic Kanjis, and dictionaries full of them. I do see how technically put them into a TrueType or PostScript font, or if necessary several sets of them. However, I have no idea how to use them easily. For each pronunciation there may be several Kanji. What kind of application program could I find that uses it ? Is there any sort of standard ? Another user mentions the existence of a "screen" Kanji font available in Japan. Well, at the moment, folks, I need quite a lot of advice before even considering creating a Kanji font. I will appreciate any lead into any kind of standard which to start from. Any limited printed chart of the "elementary" Kanji, together with their pronunciation, could be of help as well. In other words, if you feel the need for a Kanji font, don't simply ask for it, make it happen. I can help greatly in creating the font, and will do it gladly, if some knowledgeable (and helpful) one gives me a hand.

That's exactly how, to-day several foreign language fonts have been created. An when big companies sell each font for \$200, you can get them from Match Software for a very affordable price. That's the reward for sharing knowledge.

Michel Bujardet

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