

1. Consider the very natural sentence:

お菓子^{かし}を二個^{にこ}食べた。 [= (lit.) I ate candy to the extent of two units in quantity.]

consider how the phrases fit together:

お菓子を
二個
食べた。

Note that in Japanese, the quantifier attaches most naturally to the verb (or whatever the predicate is: A,N,V).

Note that this also implies that the sentence can be reordered:

二個、お菓子を食べた。 [note the comma just makes the sentence easier on the eye]

This is also not wrong, but it is vaguely unnatural. There is a strong tendency for quantity expressions to adhere closely to the verbs with which they collocate. Think of it this way:

お菓子を
二個
食べた。

2. Now, let's compare the first sentence to normal spoken English: "I ate two pieces of candy."

For English speakers, there is a strong tendency to syntactically attach the quantifier onto the noun that is being quantified, thus "two pieces of candy" or "three gallons of gas." You can do this in Japanese, but it sounds unnatural, like a translation from English (which, in fact, it often is):

二個のお菓子を食べた。

Go ahead and use this if you want to sound like you don't really understand how Japanese syntax works.

3. Now consider the English:

"I need ten yen."

With some words in English, there is also a tendency to conflate the substance with the unit (yen=money). If you need money, what you need is money, not units. If you want to put a liter of gasoline in your tank, what you really want is for your car to run on gas, not on units of volume. Japanese language usually keeps the units of measurement separate from the stuff being measured. Thus:

(お金が) 十円、要る。 [= I need (money) to the extent of ten yen units.]

There are some exceptions. The following would not work for twelve yen (for example):

十円が要る。 [= I need a "ten-yen" (i.e. a single ten-yen coin)].

4. The following are some basic quantifiers that use Sinitic numbering (いち、に、さん、...):

Note: accentuation is a huge headache; utterly predictable except for mountains of exceptions...

Counters for material objects:

- 一個 (いっこ) : オレンジが一個ある。 > 消しゴム (けしゴム)、...
- 一本 (いっぽん) : ビールを一本飲む。 > 鉛筆 (えんぴつ)、映画 (えいが)、...
- 一枚 (いちまい) : 紙 (かみ) が一枚ある。 > シャツ、...
- 一台 (いちだい) : タイプライターが一台ある。 > トラック、...
- 一巻 (いっかん) : 絵巻物 (えまきもの) を一巻見る。 [for scroll-like objects]

Counters for animals:

- 一匹 (いっぴぎ) : ネコが一匹いる。 > 犬 (いぬ)、リス、うさぎ、...
- 一頭 (いっとう) : 牛 (うし) が一頭いる。 > 馬 (うま)、鹿 (しか)、...
- 一羽 (いちわ) : 鶏 (にわとり) が二羽いる。 > 鳥 (とり)、うさぎ (?)、...
- 一本 (いっぽん) : 秋刀魚 (さんま) を三本買う。 [for long skinny fish]

Counters for sets and collections of things:

- 一足 (いっそく) : 靴 (くつ) が一足ある。 [a pair: but ズボンを一枚はく。]
- 一束 (いっそく/ひとたば) : 花を一束買う。 [bundled items]
- 一冊 (いっさつ) : 本が一冊ある。 > 辞書 (じしょ)、... [tightly bound publications]
- 一部 (いちぶ) : 新聞が一部ある。 > 雑誌 (ざっし)、...
[usually used for multi-sectioned, loosely bound publications]
- 一人前 (いちにんまえ) : ラーメンを一人前食べる。 [one regular person's serving.]

Counters for Housing:

- 一軒 (いっけん) : 家が一軒ある。
- 一畳 (いちじょう) : 畳 (たたみ) が一畳ある。八畳の部屋。 [tatami unit = somewhat under 3 x 6 ft]
- 一坪 (いちつぼ/ひとつぼ) : [unit of area = 2-tatami; for real estate = 3.306 m²]
- 一階 (いっかい) : 二階建て (にかいだて) の家 [a "two-story -built" house]
- 一戸 (いっこ) : 戸数百戸 (こすうひゃっこ) [lit: the number of households is one-hundred households]
[literally 'doors', signifying 'households' for population census purposes]
[note 戸籍 (こせき) is the 'household register' kept by cities or towns of each family.]

Counters for repetition:

- 一度 (いちど/ひとたび) : 一度、電話した。 [I called once. (lit: one discreet event)]
- 一回 (いっかい) : 一回行ったことがある。 [I've been there once. (lit: 'one time around')]
- 一回り (ひとまわり) : 地球の一回り [One revolution (=circling around) of the earth.]

Units for distance, volume, weight, computer memory, etc. (for time, see other handout).

- 一メートル、一キロ (メートル/グラム/バイト)、一センチ、一ミリ、一リットル、
- 一メガ (バイト)、一ギガ (バイト)、

Some classical units for money, distance, weight: [often tweaked and redefined over the centuries]

- 1円 = 100銭 (せん) = 1000厘 (りん)
- 1両 (りょう) = weight=41~42grams; currency=50~60匁 (もんめ), in Meiji meant "one yen" colloquially
- 1貫 (かん) = redefined in 1891 as 3.75kg
- 1匁 (もんめ) = 1/1000貫 = 10分 (ぶ)
- 1石 (いっこく) ≈ 180 liters volume (of rice) = 10斗 (と)
[Tokugawa era (1600-1868) territories (han) were measured in 'koku' according to rice crop yields.]
- 1尺 (しゃく) = 1/10丈 (じょう) ; redefined in 1891 as 1/33 of 10meters, or 30.4 cm... (go figure)
- 1寸 (すん) = 1/10尺、1分 (ぶ) = 1/10寸

5. The Japanese-style (訓読み=くんよみ) numberings:

- 一つ (ひとつ)、二つ (ふたつ)、三つ (みっつ)、四つ (よっつ)、五つ (いつつ)
- 六つ (むっつ)、七つ (ななつ)、八つ (やっつ)、九つ (ここのつ)、十 (とお)

Some common counters that take kun-yomi numberings when the numbers are small:

- 一つ (ひとつ) : [one basic small object]
- 一皿 (ひとさら) : [one plate-worth]
- 一山 (ひとやま) : [one pile; e.g., a pile of 4-6 oranges at the grocer's]
- 一袋 (ひとふくろ) : [one bag-worth]
- 一月 (ひとつき) : [one month; e.g., of rent payment]
- 一部屋 (ひとへや) : [one room]
- 一坪 (ひとつぼ) : [one tsubo]
- 一束 (ひとたば) : [one "hand-holdable bundle"; e.g., of roses]
- 一度 (ひとたび) : [once; e.g., I telephoned you one time.]

Counters used with contrastive particles:

- 一本は飲んだが... [I drank (at least) one bottle-worth (but maybe more).]
- 一本も飲んでいない。 [I have not drunk even one bottle-worth.]
- 四本も飲んだ。 [I drank as many as four bottles-worth.]
- 三枚とも大凶という。 [All three sheets-worth (of the mikuji?) read "extreme unluckiness."]

6. Modifiers used after quantity expressions:

分 (ぶん)

一月分 (ひとつきぶん) 払 (はら) った。 [I paid one month's "portion."]

一人分 (ひとりぶん) もらった。 [I received one person's "portion" -worth of it; e.g., ramen.]

目 (め)

右から三人目 [The third person from the right.]

二つ目の信号 (しんごう) [The second traffic signal]

位 (くらい/ぐらい)

8人くらい、いたかな。 [Hmm, I guess there were about eight people there?]

そこそこ

安い方のカーナビは3万円そこそこ... [The cheap car navigation systems are 30ky or so...]

高い方は10万円やそこらで... [The expensive end goes for about 100,000y or around that...]

7. Modifiers used before quantity expressions:

約 (やく)

この宿題は約一時間かかるはずだ。 [This homework should take about an hour.]

昨年の来賓は約一名だった。 [Our invited guests last year numbered approximately one person.]
= note the above is a bit tongue-in-cheek

ほぼ (略、粗)

NASAが受信してからほぼ1時間後にGoogle Earth 上で見ることができる。

[You can see it on Google Earth about an hour after NASA receives the signal.]

8. Arithmetic:

2.5メートル (にい てん ご メートル) [note the double-mora 'ni-i' ... think rhythm]

2 + 3 (にい 足(た)す さん / にい ぶらす さん)

2 - 3 (にい まいなす さん / にい から さんを 引いて...)

2 x 3 (にい かける さん)

2 / 3 (さんぶんの)