Solution to Question 1: As easy as 2-3-5

(a) *disuku*   sammai   three disks
(b) *endomame*   goko   five peas
(c) *haŋkachi*   nimai   two handkerchiefs
(d) *kaba*   gotō   five rhinos
(e) *kyūri*   sambon   three cucumbers
(f) *morumotto*   nihiki   two guinea pigs
(g) *nezumi*   sambiki   three mice
(h) *riŋgo*   goko   five apples
(i) *tsuna*   nihon   two ropes
(j) *zō*   santō   three elephants

Comments

The counting word came after rather than before the noun, and that it consisted of the words *ni* (2), *sam/san/saŋ* (3) and *go* (5). What of the other part of the word? If you rearrange the list so words with the same second part are together, a pattern should emerge:

> *hon/bon*: legs, bananas, pencils
> *ko*: balls, stones
> *mai*: sheets of paper, plates
> *hiki*: cats, squirrels
> *tō*: horses, cows

The second part of the counter word depends on the type of object being counted: long thin things, round things, flat things, small animals, big animals.

There are two other little tricky things going on: the variation in the word for 3 is because the 'n' of *san* matches ('is assimilated') to the following consonant: n+m/b becomes 'm', n+k/g becomes 'ŋ'. And with the word for 'long thin things' *hon*, 'h' becomes 'b' with *san* (*sam*), so that explains why *san+hiki* becomes *sambiki*.

The basic principle of semantic grouping for the counter words should have been rather easy: it is typical of many East Asian languages, where these words are called 'classifiers'.

Actually, English also has classifiers, though not as systematically used as in Japanese: we say *three slices of bread*, rather than *three breads*, *200 head of cattle*, etc. (And by the way, the counter *tō* for big animals also means 'head', so Japanese is just like English!).
The extra difficulty with the assimilation of the letters made the problem a little bit harder, or should we say, interesting.