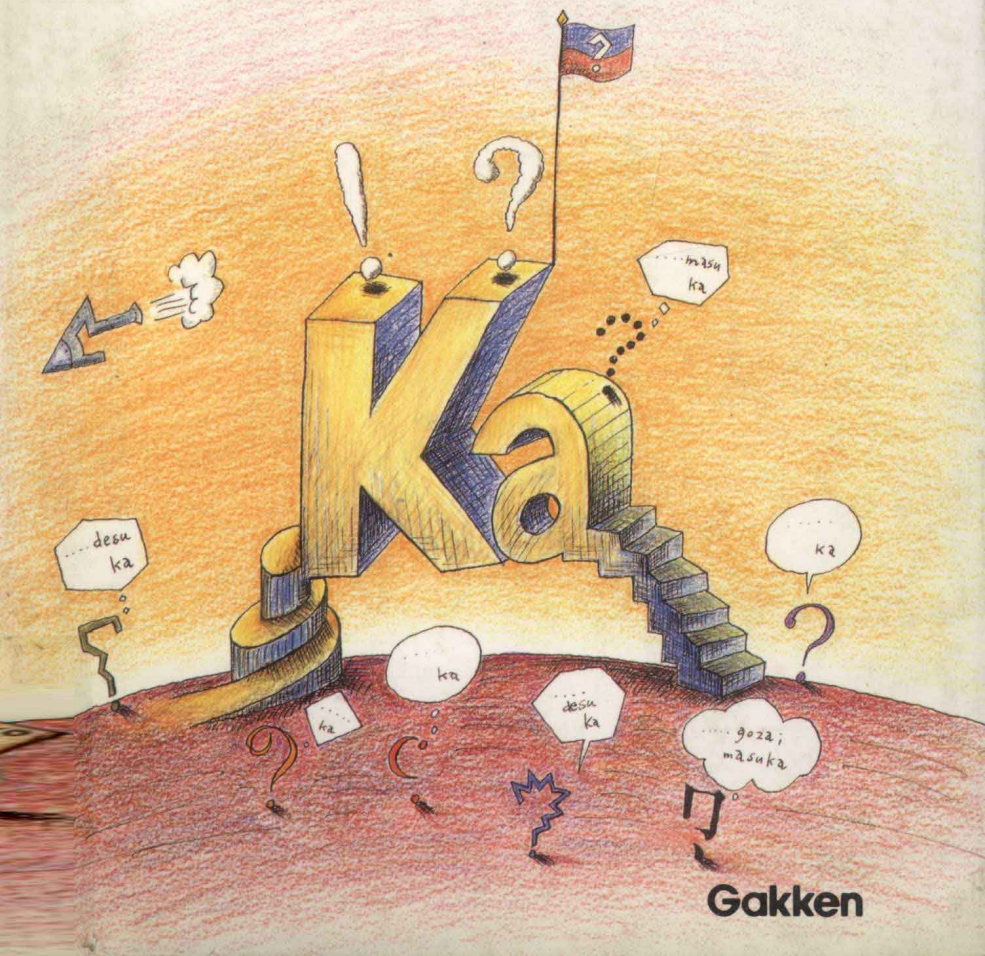


First Steps to Colloquial Japanese

ACTION JAPANESE

アクション日本語

Naomi KURATANI



Gakken

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ACTION JAPANESE

アクション日本語

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藏书章

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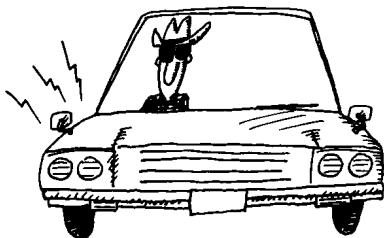
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Introduction

Hello! **Konnichiwa!**

So you want to learn Japanese? Perhaps you have heard native Japanese talk to each other, and you may have thought their words were nothing but gibberish. Their customs may have seemed strange also. Well, in fact, the Japanese are not as different as they may seem, and understanding the Japanese way of life is not that difficult either. After all, Japanese are not Martians. They are people with emotions and experiences very similar to your own.

Learning Japanese is a lot like buying a new car (but not necessarily a Japanese car!) Your new car will probably look very different from your old one. Before you are used to its looks, you may even have a difficult time finding it in parking lots. When you get behind its steering wheel, you may find that the speedometer is in a completely different place, and the stereo may be very different (perhaps it will have a tape-deck!) Even the feel of the steering wheel may



be unusual. While your new car may seem strange in many ways, you will be happy to find that the gas and brake pedals are in the same places as they were before.

Cars can be different in many ways, but they all have things in common that make them cars. They are all made for the same purpose—to carry their drivers from place to place. This book will show you how you can carry your thoughts to others by means of the Japanese language, just as your brand-new car carries you to your destination. So don't be alarmed if while you are learning Japanese you find that the steering wheel feels a little strange in your hands. We will give you the basic skills to converse in Japanese, and also tell you about the behavior, customs, and mannerisms of the Japanese, and even their 'silent language.'

This understanding of Japanese culture will act as a sort of Rules of the Road that you will keep in mind when you are cruising down the highways of Japanese life.

So, ladies and gentlemen, start your engines!

January 20, 1987, Osaka
Naoomi Kuratani

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How to Use This Book

- There are thirty lessons in this book. They cover most basic words and phrases and their usage in modern Japanese. You will also find most basic sentence patterns that you will encounter in colloquial situations. 'Most basic' here reflects the author's elaborate computer research of Japanese words and phrases, especially in the light of their frequency of appearance.
- Lessons are presented systematically. You must start with Lesson 1 and advance through Lesson 30. Randomly starting with some lesson to 'pick up' some useful expressions may not take you anywhere.

Read each lesson carefully, and try to memorize the expressions printed in **boldface** with English translations.

- The section of each lesson called **A Bit of Grammar** will help you understand usages more clearly. Pictures and illustrations have been carefully selected to give you visual explanations.
- If you want to know some Japanese word or phrase that is related to the one in question, see **Index A** (Japanese to English) which lists all Japanese words and phrases used in this book, and where they first appear, together with many more useful words that do not appear in the text. If you want to find some Japanese word or phrase which should mean something you have in mind, use **Index B** (English to Japanese).

Actually, you can use these indices as a handy **Word Finder** dictionary.

- You need to realize that Japanese writing is very complicated. It has three sets of characters: **katakana** mainly for words borrowed from Western languages, **hiragana** for ordinary text including grammatical function words and some words that are purely Japanese, and **kanji** mainly for words taken from Chinese, and some original Japanese words. When to use **katakana**, **hiragana** or **kanji** is really a very confusing decision even to native Japanese. Combinations of **katakana**, **hiragana**, and **kanji** in a given sentence can differ widely from person to person.

• Since different Japanese may use different **kana (katakana/hiragana)** and/or **kanji** in different situations (and there are more than 2,000 letters and characters!) it is almost impossible to show all valid combinations for any given word or phrase. It is far from the author's intention to involve novices in this chaos, so English notations are used in this book for your convenience. When you learn any foreign language, you will usually learn its writing system first, but this is simply *not* the case with Japanese. The purpose of this book is not to teach written Japanese, but to introduce conversational Japanese to English speakers.

In order to fully understand the Japanese writing system, you need to use another book like *A New Dictionary of Kanji Usage* (GAKKEN, by the same author as this book).

Abbreviations and Symbols

• Although most abbreviations and punctuation in this book are self-explanatory, the following list will be helpful:

<i>Marks</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Example</i>
< >	grammar	love <noun>
[]	usage	father [humble]
(())	explanation, clarification	make up ((cosmetics))
[[]]	element/part of a structure	together with [[object]]
()	1: 'can be omitted' 2: translation	[[A] wa [B] desu. Wakarimasu (ka)? aku (open <vi>)
◆	basic verb form	◆ ageru
◇	basic i-adjective form	◇ atsui
/	and/or	go/come back

As a principle, double quotation marks (“...”) are used to show complete sentences, and single quotation marks (‘...’) are used for incomplete phrases and/or intensification.

- The following abbreviations are used:

a	adjectives, adjectival words/phrases
ad	adverbs, adverbial words/phrases
c	counters, numbers
cg	conjugational suffixes
con	conjunctions
cph	colloquial/conversational phrases
gr	grammatically functional words/phrases which do not have English equivalents
ia	‘-i’ ending adjectives and their conjugated forms
int	interjections, exclamations
n	nouns
na	nouns which can become adjectives with ‘-na’ endings
nv	nouns which can take ‘-suru’ conjugational suffixes to make verbs
pf	postfixes
pre	prefixes
sf	suffixes
v	verbs in their conjugated forms
vc	verbs with consonant ending stems in their basic forms
vv	verbs with vowel ending stems in their basic forms
vx	verbs with irregular conjugations in their basic forms

Many of these definitions may be unfamiliar to you. It is not necessary for you to understand them right now because they will be explained in the lessons as needed. Some grammatical terms will be shown in capital letters for emphasis. An English grammar book may help you with basic grammatical terms such as suffix, conjugation, etc.

Pronunciation Guide

Strictly speaking, the following pronunciation guide is not precise since Japanese has its own system of pronunciation, but it will help you to figure out good approximations.

a	<i>cut, flood</i> (shorter than 'ahh...')
i	<i>inch, hit</i> (shorter than 'eat')
u	<i>cook, took</i>
e	<i>enter, meadow</i>
o	<i>coin, oil</i> (shorter than 'awful,' 'oh...')

aa	(seen before a vowel) or	
ah	(seen before a consonant)	prolonged a as <i>ahh...</i>
ii		<i>eat, meet</i>
uu		<i>cool, soup</i>
ee	(seen before a vowel) or	
eh	(seen before a consonant)	prolonged e as <i>ehh...</i>
oo	(seen before a vowel) or	
oh	(seen before a consonant)	<i>all, taught, awful</i>

k	<i>country, kitchen</i>
s	<i>sound</i>
t	<i>take, hit</i>
n	<i>name, sun</i>
h	<i>he, hot</i>

m	<i>man, mode</i>
y	<i>yet</i>
r	<i>radio, lion</i>
w	<i>worry</i>
g	<i>get</i>
z	<i>zone, possess</i>
d	<i>day</i>
b	<i>boy</i>
p	<i>peace</i>

ky	<i>cute</i>
sh	<i>she, wash</i>
ch	<i>cheat, chat</i>
ny	<i>cognac (French)</i>
fu	<i>hood (not food)</i>
hy	<i>huge</i>
my	<i>mute, community</i>
ry	<i>failure</i>
gy	<i>gather</i>
j	<i>joke, jar</i>
by	<i>beautiful</i>
py	<i>computer</i>

Lesson 1

Konnichiwa!



One of the first things you'll probably want to be able to say in Japanese is 'hello.' In fact, a greeting is the least important thing you will have to learn, because saying hello, smiling, and acknowledging the presence of others are all international. When you smile and make some gibberish sounds (like "Hello," "Hi, there," or "How do you do?") as you greet a native Japanese, he or she will surely understand what you mean. Even gibberish has a way of being understood!

Though you really don't need to learn how to say hello in Japanese, you may still want to impress your Japanese friends with your understanding of their language. Here are some typical greetings that you can learn if you like.

When somebody says hello in English, it is usually responded to with another hello. This is the case with Japanese too. When a person says—

Konnichiwa!

the other person just repeats the word.

Now let's pronounce the word **Konnichiwa!**

Japanese does not use stressed syllables in each word as English does. Konnichiwa is *not* pronounced—

KONnichiwa, KoNIchiwa, KonnichiWA, etc.

It is pronounced flatly, like—

ko-n-ni-chi-wa.

Certainly you can give emphasis to your phrases by applying intonation (rising or falling), and when asking a question you will use a rising intonation, just as you do in English.

Another thing you should know is that Japanese vowels are pronounced clearly and distinctly. Native speakers do not run all the sounds together as English speakers do. So don't say—

Knchwa!

Even if you have difficulty pronouncing these set phrases, you don't have to worry. People are very patient with any foreigner who is trying to learn their language. Since Japanese and English are so far apart in construction and Japanese people have tremendous difficulty in learning English, they will certainly sympathize with your awkward speech. They will even go as far as to praise you by saying "You really speak good Japanese!" when you have managed to say "**Konnichiwa,**" (even if you pronounce it in a funny way). But, if you can say the following, they may well regard you as a grand master of the Japanese language!

Here are some other ways of saying hello. Try pronouncing them. Don't forget a rising intonation at the end of the phrase.

Genki?

(Are you fine?) [plain]

Yah, o-genki desu ka?

(Hi, how are you?) [casual]

Go-kigen ikaga?

(How are you doing?) [polite]

Go-kigen ikaga desu ka?

(How are you feeling today?) [very polite]

You may wonder how you should respond to these greetings. A correct response would be . . . well, you can just smile! English speakers usually respond verbally when asked "How are you?" Japanese may simply smile in the same situation and make a short 'gibberish' sound like—

Ee, Hai, Mah, etc.

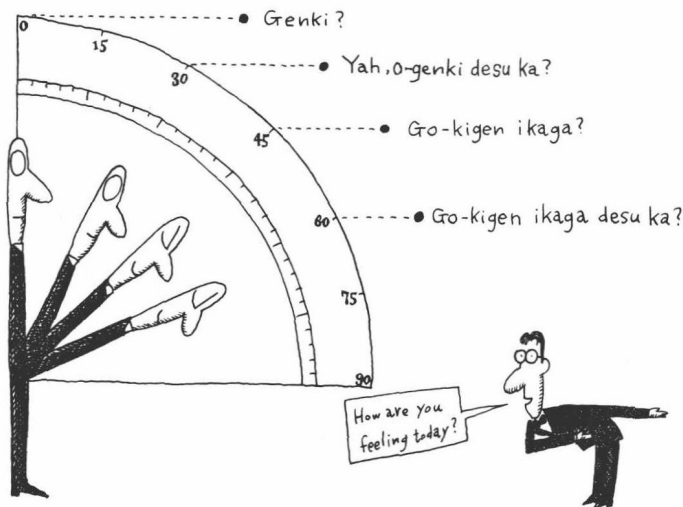
If you feel more comfortable responding to these questions verbally, you can say—

Hai, genki desu.

(Yes, I'm fine.)

Ee, okagesama de.

(I am doing well, thank you.)



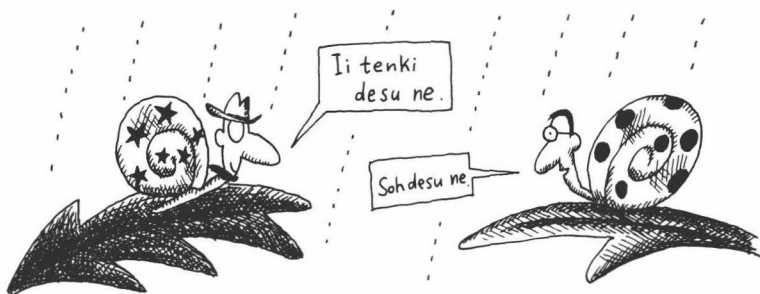
Do you want to learn how to say that you feel lousy? Don't bother. Let's talk about the weather.

Ii tenki desu ne.

(Nice day, isn't it?)

I suppose you want to learn how to talk about bad weather. Don't bother. Things like feeling lousy and bad weather are not a part of

light conversation, and you won't be involved in heavy conversation with your limited knowledge of Japanese, or will you?



To respond to “**li tenki desu ne,**” you need only say—

li tenki desu ne.

(It is a nice day.)

Soh desu ne.

(It is.)

Hontoh-ni.

(Really.)

Mattaku.

(Exactly.)

It is almost time to say goodbye to Lesson 1. Before moving on, there is something you need to know. In English speaking countries you can say “Hello” any time of the day, but in Japan you can say “**Konnichiwa**” only while the sun is up. Once the sun sets, you should greet people with—

Konbanwa!

(Good evening.)

When saying goodbye, say—

Sayohnara.

(Goodbye.)

Jah, kore de.

(Bye for now.) [slightly formal]

Mata ne.

(See you.) [casual]

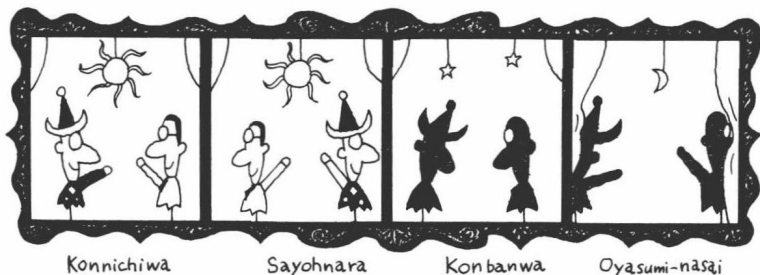
Shitsurei-shimasu.

(Goodbye for now.) [formal]

Unlike “**Konnichiwa**” and “**Konbanwa**,” these parting words are good twenty-four hours a day. But if you want to specifically say “Good night,” you can say—

Oyasumi-nasai.

(Good night.)

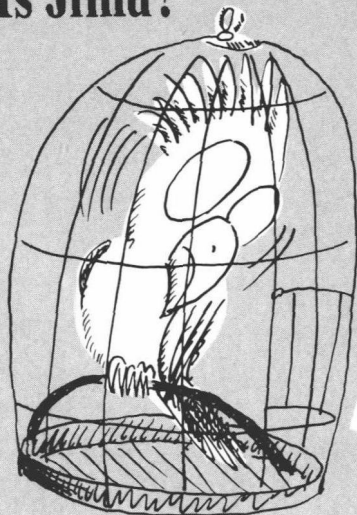


A Bit of Grammar—a summary for your reference

- (1) Some examples may not be fully explained when they first appear. They will usually be explained later, unless it would be too confusing to do so (like in the case of conversational set phrases). Who needs to know how and why ‘goodbye’ came to mean ‘goodbye’?
- (2) ... **ka?** shows QUESTION.
- ... **ne.** [falling intonation] shows AGREEMENT or CONFIRMATION, expecting no answer.
- ... **ne?** [rising intonation] shows RECONFIRMATION, expecting an answer.
- ... **desu.** indicates the end of a statement.

Lesson 2

Who Is Jimu?



Words in Japanese do not end in consonants except those words ending in **n**. For this reason, when a person calls your name in Japanese, he or she may change it. Jim becomes **Jimu**. Pat becomes **Patto**. Jack is **Jakku**, Bob **Bobu**. To confuse you more, he may not be able to pronounce 'th' and 'r' sounds properly; Arthur becomes **Ahsah**, and, **Besu** means you, Beth. So don't be alarmed if while visiting Japan you find that someone has changed your name.

While people may change your name (without your permission), they will make up for it by adding **-san** on the end. By adding **-san** to your name, like—

Jimu-san

they are showing that they respect you. Being respectful is very important to the Japanese people. To you too, I hope. So always put **-san** at the end of a person's name.

Well, **Jimu-san**, soon after you say "**Konnichiwa!**" to someone, will you want to say "**Sayohnara!**"? Never! Why would you say goodbye so soon? OK, let's learn how you can add some meat to your conversation. Introduce yourself.

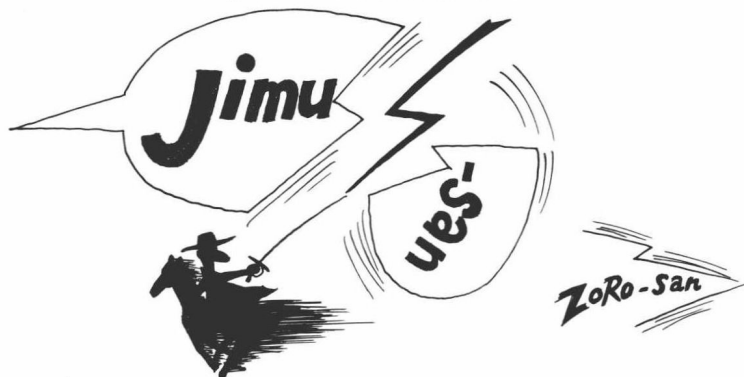
Watashi wa Jimu desu.

(I am Jim.)

You should not call yourself **Jimu-san**, however proud you may be of your own name. If you want to introduce yourself a little bit more elaborately, you can choose to say—

Watashi no namae wa Jimu Majison desu.

(My name is Jim Madison.)



OK, now that you have introduced yourself, the next thing will be your nationality.

Watashi wa Amerika-jin desu.

(I am an American.)

Learning this much, you may begin to guess that the **wa** or '**wa + desu**' combination should mean 'to be.' You are almost right, but only almost.

[[A]] wa [[B]] desu.

What this very basic sentence pattern really means is—

As for [[A]], the information is [[B]].

[[A]] is our topic. [[B]] is the content.

Input=[[A]], Output=[[B]]

Well, in most cases (especially in the elementary level), you may safely assume "[[A]] **wa** [[B]] **desu**" means "[[A]] is [[B]]," but as you advance in learning Japanese, you will realize that it is not the whole