

Making Sense of Japanese Grammar

A Clear Guide Through Common Problems

BY ZELJKO CIPRIS AND SHOKO HAMANO

HONOLULU: UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII PRESS, 2002

199 PAGES. HARDCOVER, ISBN: 0-8248-2497-0

PAPERBACK, ISBN: 0-8248-2583-7

When using Japanese, do you hesitate to use the same verb over and over? Does the apparent complexity of lengthy, Faulkneresque sentences in Japanese stymie you? Do you still struggle to differentiate between the usage of particles –wa and –ga, or more egregiously, find it a challenge to clearly explain their usage to your Japanese language students? How about the locational particles –de and –ni?

Would you love to delve into a unit entitled “Reality consists of continuous-grade scales; language makes things discrete”?

Those who have studied and love studying the Japanese language will recognize and appreciate the above questions (and will look forward to discovering what the last question is all about!). *Making Sense of Japanese Grammar* does a masterful job of living up both to its title, and its subtitle: *A Clear Guide Through Common Problems*. Authors Zeljko Cipris, assistant professor of Japanese at the University of the Pacific, and Shoko Hamano, associate professor of Japanese at George Washington University, have carried the theme of clarity throughout the book, beginning with the straightforward title. Similarly, the table of contents not only organizes the book, but it is also a veritable study guide in itself. Some sample unit (authors’ term) entries:

Unit 2: Use the verb at the end!

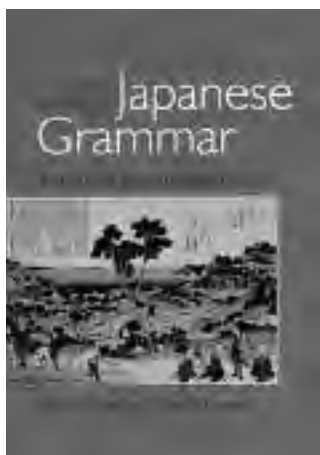
Unit 16: The particle -wa identifies what the sentence is about and urges the listener to pay attention to the part that follows

Unit 22: Only one direct object particle –o appears per verb

Unit 47: No is for a familiar event; koto is for an abstract idea

Unit 50: Te- forms connect very closely related events

The entries are similarly informative and/or memory-jogging for all of the book’s sixty-six units.



The authors have also included an equally clear and succinctly written introduction, which begins with the following paragraph:

The purpose of this book is to explain basic principles underlying a wide range of phenomena in Japanese. We hope that our readers will realize that many phenomena which at first look idiosyncratic and Japanese-specific are closely connected to general principles which are not so exotic.

At the end of each unit they include a quick, one-sentence reference to related topics in other units, and in nearly all units there is one or more comprehension questions, with answers provided in the back of the book. There is also a glossary of fairly basic (and mostly English) grammar terms and an index. Finally, a quick leafing through the book impresses the observer with the book’s uncluttered, simple layout, characterized most notably by double-spacing between paragraphs and examples. This in itself creates a relaxed atmosphere in which frequently complex Japanese grammar concepts somehow seem more accessible.

By sheer volume, the emphasis of the book is on modeling the correct application of the grammar points. To this end, half or more of the entire book consists of sentence examples illustrating the applicable grammar concepts. These are each presented in triptych fashion: in characters and kana, romaji, and English, making them helpful to all levels of learners. The sentences are practical and up to date, and unobtrusively add to the learning experience. Not limited to simple conversation topics, the examples touch on economics, literature, sumo, Japanese mythology, classroom situations, and many more.

Making Sense of Japanese Grammar is neither a book for an absolute beginner nor for the advanced linguistics student looking for detailed explanations using terms of art from that field. Cipris and Hamano have intentionally eschewed terms like “verbal aspect” or “modality” in favor of terms they feel are more accessible to the intermediate, non-specialist Japanese language learner. They even state that “If you have never heard of the difference between transitive and intransitive verbs, but are genuinely interested in learning the Japanese language, this book is for you.”

Obviously, then, this book may leave some college or secondary instructors wishing for more technical explanations, either for them or for their advanced students who might be referencing the book, but that is not the audience the authors are targeting. As a high school Japanese teacher with fifteen years experience teaching the language, I find this book a valuable reference for myself, and a worthwhile book to consider making available to or using as a supplemental text with third-year or higher high school students (or perhaps a precocious second-year student, with judicious excerpting). Not quite as familiar with current college courses, I would nonetheless recommend the book for similar levels there, with more comprehensive and in-depth use and application.

The beauty of a book such as this is, paradoxically, both its completeness and its incompleteness. By that I mean that it cannot compare with a grammar guide such as Seiichi Makino and Michio

BOOK REVIEWS

Tsutsui's *A Dictionary of Basic Japanese Grammar* or other such exhaustive examinations of the details and nuances of the structure and usage of Japanese. Nevertheless, in its own context, it is a thorough overview of the language. The reader can, in less than 200 pages, study the concepts the authors deem fundamental to a good understanding of beginning, intermediate, and even advanced Japanese, all rolled up into one package of steadily increasing complexity. The book doesn't cover everything, but it does give a manageable presentation of many grammatical structures and terminology in a manner that will keep the reader engaged and looking forward to coming back for more.

When pursuing fluency in Japanese and constructing one's own framework for coming to grips with the language's abstruse, unique—and even peculiar—aspects, one cannot have too many tools, and *Making Sense of Japanese Grammar* is one of the more useful and valuable I've come across in recent years. I highly recommend it for Japanese teachers at any level, and for excerpting at varying levels of comprehensiveness for intermediate and advanced students at the secondary level and above. ■

RAYMOND STEIN has taught Chinese, Japanese, and Pacific Rim Cultures at Mt. Edgecumbe High School in Sitka, Alaska, for seventeen years. He received his MA in Asian Studies/Chinese from Washington University after teaching seven years in Japan, China, Australia, Fiji, and Thailand.

Cornell East Asia Series

NEW TITLES

Dragonflies
Fiction by Chinese Women in the Transcultural Context
EDITED BY SHU-KING SCIBAN AND FRED EDWARDS

The Nob Ominameshi
A Hidden World from Mount Fuji
EDITED BY MAE J. SMITHLEST AND CHRISTINA LAFREN

BACK IN PRINT

Ankoku Budo
The Transcultural and Postmodern Influences
on the Dance of 19th Century
SUSAN BEARLEY KEVIN

Women and Millenarian Protest
Dejishi Nao and Omotokyo
EMILY GROSZOS OJIMA

CEAS Distribution, 369 Pine Tree Road, Ithaca NY 14853
www.oriental.cornell.edu/eastasia/CEASbooks
807-255-8038 Orders, 807-255-5071 Editorial, 807-255-7534 Fax

The Japanese Model of Schooling

Comparisons with the United States

BY RYOKO TSUNEYOSHI

NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGEFALMER, 2001

190 PAGES + APPENDIX + BIBLIOGRAPHY + INDEX

HARDCOVER, ISBN: 0815336411



Since the American Occupation of Japan (1945–52), international recognition of Japanese education has grown tremendously. The academic success and discipline of Japanese students have warranted further investigation into the Japanese education system and deemed it a worthy model. Yet, as Ryoko Tsuneyoshi, author of *The Japanese Model of Schooling*, submits, Japanese education is not without problems, and in this sense, there are noticeable similarities between Japanese and American education. Both

countries are undergoing societal changes brought on by a globalizing economy, political shifts, and uncertainty about the future. These issues have translated into louder calls for educational reform, as these societies grapple with the best way to raise and socialize their members. Tsuneyoshi's book addresses the questions such conditions and attempted reform elicit, such as: What is the role of school? How are our children best educated? What should we teach our children? It is Tsuneyoshi's belief that cross-cultural comparisons will help illuminate the commonalities, alternatives, and future directions of education in Japan and the US.

Tsuneyoshi, an associate professor at the University of Tokyo's Graduate School of Education, has a unique perspective on the topic at hand: born in the United States, she moved to Japan with her parents when she was in the fifth grade. Thus, in her words, "[t]he fact that a society's education reflects its culture was a personal realization for me" (xi). As Volume 27 of the "Reference Books in International Education" series, edited by the renowned Edward Beauchamp, *The Japanese Model of Schooling* developed from Tsuneyoshi's earlier book entitled *Human Development in Japan and the United States: The Hidden Curriculum*, which was first published in 1992 and is now in its twelfth edition in