

## Preface

---

This textbook grew as a response to a specific need. Although a number of introductions to Japanese were and are readily available, none of them happened to fit the particular situation we found ourselves in, which demanded that students be able to tackle a short story written in Japanese within six months of starting the language, and that they should be in a position to at least attempt newspaper articles within a year. It was found that the commonest approach to language teaching today, which rightly stresses oral skills and communicative competence based on situational drills in a social context, demanded far more time than was available and, for good reasons, tended to ignore the written form of the language, especially in the early stages. So it was that we were forced to create something very different. Although the results will not be to everyone's taste, it is hoped that many students of the language will find it useful. What we can say with certainty is that it has proved to be effective in practice.

Recent years have seen a startling increase in the number of publications designed to introduce the language to an ever-expanding market. They can be broadly divided into those that operate exclusively in romanised Japanese, and those that do not. Foremost among the first group is undoubtedly Eleanor H. Jordan's new book *Japanese: The Spoken Language* (Yale University Press, 1987–). The care and scholarship that has gone into its preparation is such that it fully deserves to outsell her earlier textbook, *Beginning Japanese* (Yale University Press, 1962–3), which itself went through no less than thirty reprints. It is a model of its kind; but Jordan's premise has always been that the written and spoken forms of the language must be quarantined off from each other, and that a good knowledge of the spoken is an absolute prerequisite before the rigours of the written form can be attempted. It is perhaps a measure of the difficulty of the writing system that such a step should be thought necessary, for no serious teacher of Sanskrit or Arabic would ever consider it desirable, if it were indeed considered possible. By and large, students who learn with this method certainly have good oral skills, but it takes a long time before they really come to grips with the written form. As it was our duty to cater for the student who was willing and able to move fast, and who had to come to grips with the written form of the language as soon as possible, such a course was of little help.

For many students the writing system itself is one of the major fascinations of Japanese, and despite the formidable obstacles it presents in the early stages, it seems perverse to throw away such an important motivational factor at the outset. It is also our experience that early familiarisation with the script helps prevent the habit of visualising Japanese in its romanised form. The guiding principle of this textbook, therefore, is almost the exact reverse of Jordan's: namely, that despite the undoubted difficulties of the script, reading and speaking are mutually reinforcing activities that should and can be presented together.

There are, inevitably, a number of problems associated with this approach. First, the complexity of the Japanese writing system means that the student of the language is faced with not only an alien grammatical structure and an alien lexicon, but also a large number of characters to be memorised. It must be admitted that Jordan's answer is kinder; given that we aim to provide a comprehensive introduction to both spoken *and* written Japanese, this textbook is certainly not for the faint-hearted. The greatest drawback is that the student may be slowed down too much by the burden of characters and begin to feel frustrated by a lack of general progress.

Second, there is the fact that we have reverted to some extent to a more traditional grammar-based approach, for which we make no apology. The primary purpose of book 1 is indeed to introduce the basic elements of Japanese grammar and to monitor grammar, basic vocabulary, and characters, so that all three are introduced in a coordinated manner. It is undoubtedly the presence of the characters that has provided us with the greatest problem: not only are some of the commonest words written with complicated characters, but the visual logic of the characters themselves is by its very nature unconnected to matters of grammar. The compromise that has been reached is that the introduction of various readings of specific characters has been strictly controlled, so that a certain amount of repetitive learning is automatically built into the course.

Third, an inevitable result of such a grammar-based approach is that the student usually gains a strong foundation for understanding the structure of sentences at the initial expense of oral skill and fluency. Partly this is a natural result of not having enough time and of not living within a Japanese speaking environment. The exercises provided in book 2 may help to some extent, although they are not rote drills; they have been designed to make the student think, rather than simply repeat certain patterns.

The conscious decision to use romanisation as little as possible brings with it another decision that will be immediately apparent to someone used to the 'Jordan' approach. Matters of pronunciation, intonation and pitch accent, although they have not been entirely disregarded, are treated in far less detail. Although certain aspects of this course do lend themselves to self-study, it is generally assumed that the textbook will be taught by a native speaker of the language, and that correct pitch accent cannot really be learned from a series of diacritical marks. Accent is therefore not marked in the romanised keys, which are in any case hidden away on purpose at the back of each lesson so as to try and force the student to concentrate on the Japanese script. Any deeper discussion of the morphophonemic structure will not be found either, because the very nature of the Japanese syllabary precludes such analysis.

One advantage of being able to concentrate on the grammar, however, is that certain tricky problems such as *wa* versus *ga* and *-eba* versus *-tara*, which are often finessed, have been met head-on and treated in considerable detail in the belief that they are 'problems' precisely because they represent facets of the Japanese language that mark its real difference from our own, and that the earlier an awareness of the differences inherent in each linguistic system is signalled, the better for the student. As an academic subject, the teaching of Japanese as a foreign language is still in its infancy, and to anyone coming from learning a European language the lack of ready-made satisfactory grammatical rules is surprising. This does *not* mean that Japanese is either vague or intrinsically less ordered than a European language. It does mean that until quite recently no particular need has been felt to delve very deeply into those aspects of the language that often trouble those of us approaching the language from the outside. Mistakes made by learners are sometimes explained away as being a matter of 'nuance' where in actual fact they involve fundamental misconceptions. It is freely admitted that an uncomfortably large number of these problem areas still remain unclear, but it is to be hoped that the many long hours of discussion and disagreement as to exactly why 'X is acceptable when Y is not' have resulted in a certain degree of helpful clarification. A textbook is not the place to experiment too much with new grammatical analyses, but there are still so many fuzzy areas left in Japanese grammar and usage that some new suggestions and approaches were considered essential.

Book 1 is the heart of the course; it comes with a detailed contents list and a grammar index. Book 2 contains exercises, word lists for each lesson and

comprehensive vocabularies. The course is designed for classroom teaching by a native speaker. Students should try and work through the Introduction and learn *hiragana* before attempting the course proper. The lessons take the form of an initial text, usually but not always a conversation, followed by detailed grammatical notes. The conversations have been designed to be as natural as possible, within the constraints imposed by the order in which the grammar is introduced, and they are worth memorising before the next lesson is tackled.

Each lesson has been designed to build on its predecessor, so the temptation to jump ahead should be resisted. To repeat, the exercises in book 2 are not simply pattern practices, but are at times quite complicated. Time spent on them will be repaid. As far as learning characters is concerned, we recommend either F. Sakade, ed., *A Guide to Reading and Writing Japanese* (Tokyo: Tuttle, rev. edn, 1961) or W. Hadamitzky and M. Spahn, *A Guide to Writing Kanji and Kana*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1991).

Many people have helped with this textbook over some six years of work and more drafts than either of us care to remember. Most of all, the authors wish to thank Mr Okazaki Tomomi, who was lector in Japanese at Cambridge during three years of its gestation. He devoted many hours to the production of exercises and examples in the penultimate draft, although he was not able to participate in the final product and so should not be held responsible for any of its oddities or shortcomings. We also wish to thank our students, past and present, for their patience and for their awkward questions, some of which they may now find answered within these pages.

For those interested in technical details, camera-ready copy was produced by the authors using Microsoft Word 4 and Sweet Jam, with laser output from an NTX-J printer.