Breakthrough Language Series

JAPANESE

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HOW TO USE THIS COURSE

Following this course will help you understand and speak the kind of Japanese that you are likely to need on vacation or business trips. The course is based on recordings made in Japan of ordinary people in everyday situations. Step by step you will learn first to understand what they are saying and then to speak in similar situations yourself.

Before producing the course, we talked to hundreds of people about why and how they learn a language. We know how important it is for learning to be enjoyable—and for it to be usable as soon as possible. Again and again people told us that there was not much point in knowing all the grammar if they were unable, for example, to exchange simple greetings at different times of the day. Therefore, the only explanations of grammar in this course will be ones that actually help you understand and use the language.

Our main goal is to help you speak and communicate in Japanese. Since Japanese is very different from most languages, we will demonstrate how some conversations can be simplified and still convey the same idea. When you arrive at Narita Airport and hear Japanese spoken by Japanese people, you will be glad that you had familiarized yourself with native speaker conversations as you prepared yourself for the trip by studying this course.

General hints to help you use the course

- Have confidence in us! Real language is complex, and you will find certain things in every unit which are not explained in detail. Don't worry about this. We will build up your knowledge slowly, selecting only what is most important to know at each stage.
- Try to study regularly, but in short periods. 20–30 minutes each day is usually better than 3½ hours once a week.
- To help yourself learn to speak, say the words and phrases out loud whenever possible.
- If you don't understand something, leave it for a while. Learning a language is a bit like doing a jigsaw or crossword puzzle: there are many ways to tackle it, and it all falls into place eventually.
- Don't be afraid to write in the book and add your own notes.
- Revise frequently.
- It helps to get somebody to test you—even someone who does not know Japanese.
- If you can study with someone else, you will be able to help each other and practise the language together.
- Learning Japanese may take more time than you thought. Just be patient with yourself.

Suggested study pattern

Each unit of the course consists of approximately 14 pages in the book and 12 minutes of recording. The first page of each unit will tell you what you are going to learn and suggest what we think is the best method for going about it. As you progress with the course, you may develop a method of study which suits you better—that's fine, but we suggest you keep to our pattern for at least the first two or three units, or you may find you are not taking full advantage of all the possibilities offered in the material.

The book contains step-by-step instructions for working through the course: when to use the book on its own, when to use the recording on its own, when to use them both together, and how to use them. On the recording our presenter Aoki Tatsu will guide you through the various sections. Following is an outline of the study pattern proposed.

Dialogues

Listen to any dialogue first without stopping the recording and get a feel for the task ahead. Then go over it again in conjunction with the vocabulary and the notes. Items marked with an arrow are most important and you should concentrate on these particularly. Stop the recording to give yourself time to think, and don't hesitate to go back to listen to the dialogue a number of times. Don't leave a dialogue until you are confident that you have at least understood it.

Practise what you have learned

This section contains a selection of exercises which focus your attention on important phrases in the dialogue. You will need to work closely with the book and often use the recording. Sometimes you are asked to do a short writing exercise and check your answers. Some exercises require that you listen to the recording and fill in the answers in the book. In other exercises you will be given opportunity to practise speaking what you have learned, aided by prompts and directions on the recording.

Key words and phrases

Study this list of the most important words and phrases from the dialogues. If possible, try to learn them by heart. They will be practised and used throughout the book.

Grammar

Since Japanese grammar is very different from English, it will be helpful for you to read through this section, even if you don't particularly care for grammar as a subject of study. Only the most important points are explained, and the explanations have been kept as simple and pertinent as possible.

Read and understand

Since the Japanese writing system is very different from the English alphabet, you will not learn to read or write Japanese in this course. However, in this section you will become familiar with signs, menus, etc., that you might come across in Japan and that it will be helpful for you to recognize.

Did you know?

In this section you will be given practical background information on Japanese customs and culture.

Answers

The answers to all the exercises (except those given in the recording) can be found on the last page of each unit.

If you haven't learned a language using a recording before, just spend a few minutes on Unit 1 getting used to the mechanics: practise stopping the recording and see how long it takes to recap different-length phrases, and so forth.

Don't be shy—take every opportunity to speak and listen to the Japanese language. Try talking to any Japanese people in your area, and watch any TV programmes about Japan.

Ganbatte!

You will find...

- a pronunciation guide for learning the sounds of Japanese and how they are written in the Roman alphabet in this unit and at the end of Unit 1. (pp. ix, 13 and on the recording at the end of Unit 1);
- a simple overview of the basics of Japanese grammar (pp. 11, 31, 43, 57, 74, 103, 117, 131, 145, 159, 173, 185, 199 and 213);
- an introduction to the Japanese writing systems (p. 13);
- a concise listing of Japanese numbers and special “counters” (pp. 216–218);
- an index of the grammar principles taught in the course and where to find them in the text (pp. 219 and 220);
- a Japanese–English vocabulary list containing all the words presented in the text (pp. 221–232).

Symbols and abbreviations

If you have a counter, set it at zero at the beginning of the recording. Check the counter at the beginning of each dialogue and write that number in the rectangle beside the number of that dialogue in the book. This will help you find the right place quickly when you revise.

m. masculine speech

f. feminine speech

Japanese nouns are not divided into masculine, feminine and neuter groups as those in some European languages are. However, certain vocabulary and verb forms are commonly used primarily by men or primarily by women. These are noted by (*m.*) or (*f.*) wherever appropriate.

pol. polite

inf. informal/casual

Japanese speech patterns change according to the formality or informality of the occasion, the relative social status of the speaker and listener, and the relationship between them. These differences are noted by (*pol.*) or (*inf.*) where appropriate and necessary.

humb. humble verb

norm. normal-polite verb

exal. exalted verb

Similarly, certain verbs require that the subject be the person speaking; these are noted as “humble” (*humb.*) verbs. Others require that someone other than the speaker be the subject; these are noted as “exalted” (*exal.*) verbs. In between these two types of verbs are verbs in the “normal-polite” (*norm.*) level of speech, which can have either the speaker or someone/something else as the subject. These verbs are noted only when the differentiation is deemed necessary.

dic. the dictionary form of a verb or adjective

eq. equivalent (another way of saying the same thing)

or. origin (of a word borrowed from another language)

lit. literally (a more literal translation of the same phrase)

col. colloquial form

dim. diminutive (endearment) form

Pronunciation Guide

Japanese is fairly easy to pronounce. Unlike Chinese and some other Asian languages, it has no “tones” that change the meaning of a word. It also does not have accented syllables like English and other Western languages. Sometimes accent or emphasis may be put on a syllable or a word, but this is simply to convey feeling or to give emphasis and does not change the basic meaning.

There are only 5 vowel sounds in Japanese, pronounced as follows:

A as in FATHER
I as in MACHINE
U as in TUTU
E as in SET
O as in DOG

With few exceptions, a consonant is always followed by a vowel. The charts below show the basic Japanese “syllabary”—the Japanese equivalent of an alphabet.

BASIC SYLLABARY					COMBINATION SYLLABLES ¹		
A	I	U	E	O	KYA	KYU	KYO
KA	KI	KU	KE	KO	GYA	GYU	GYO
GA	GI	GU	GE	GO	SHA	SHU	SHO
SA	SHI	SU	SE	SO	JA	JU	JO
ZA	JI	ZU	ZE	ZO	CHA	CHU	CHO
TA	CHI	TSU	TE	TO	(JA	JU	JO)
DA	JI	ZU	DE	DO	NYA	NYU	NYO
NA	NI	NU	NE	NO	HYA	HYU	HYO
HA	HI	FU	HE	HO	BYA	BYU	BYO
BA	BI	BU	BE	BO	PYA	PYU	PYO
PA	PI	PU	PE	PO	MYA	MYU	MYO
MA	MI	MU	ME	MO			
YA		YU		YO	RYA	RYU	RYO ²
RA	RI	RU	RE	RO ²			
WA				(w)O ³			
				N ⁴			

Pronunciation of these syllables is presented on the tape at the end of Unit 1.

¹These are called “combination syllables” because they are written in the Japanese script by combining the character for YA, YU or YO with a character that represents a syllable that includes the vowel “I” (i.e., KI, GI, SHI, CHI, etc.). The “Y” sound in the middle of these syllables is not a separate vowel sound, but a soft sound connected with the consonant that precedes it. In other words, the word KYAKU (“guest/customer”) is two syllables (KYA-KU), not three (KEE-YA-KU).

²Although the letter R is used to romanize these syllables, the Japanese “R” sound is nothing like the English “R” of “rat”, “rabbit”, etc. It is the same as the single-tap “R” of Spanish and some other languages (NOT the trilled “RR”) and is made by placing the TIP of the tongue at the top of the mouth and flipping it downward. It occurs in American English in the middle of words like “better”, “little”, “paddle”, etc.

³(w)O This sound sometimes is given the slightest hint of a “W” in front of it as in the Irish pronunciation of “what” and “whether”. This is not crucial, however, and you will not go wrong if you always pronounce it “O”. In the text it will be represented simply as O.

⁴N This is a soft, nasal sound, and it is the only consonant sound that is considered a syllable by itself (except for double consonants, as noted below). Occasionally it will be followed by a vowel or YA, YU or YO as a separate syllable. When that occurs, it will be written as N' to distinguish it from NA, NI, NU, NE, NO and NYA, NYU, NYO. (Ex.: HON'YA—pronounced HO-N-YA.)

Other points to remember:

“Long” or multiple words

Every sound/syllable of Japanese, as written in the Roman alphabet, is pronounced. That means that when two or more vowels come together, each is pronounced. For example, the word NAMAЕ (“name”) is pronounced NA-MA-E; OTOOSAN (“father”) is O-TO-O-SA-N; ONEESAN (“older sister”) is O-NE-E-SA-N; etc. In this book, long vowels are doubled in their written form (OHAYOO, SAYOONARA), except in proper names where they are indicated by a vowel with a bar above (TŌKYŌ, KYŌTŌ, SHŌDA).

Double consonants

Only certain consonant sounds ever occur as doubles in Japanese. They are romanized as KK, SS, SSH, TT, TCH, PP, NN. When a word includes a double consonant sound, both consonants are pronounced, and each is considered a separate syllable or part of a separate syllable. For example, KEKKOO is four syllables (KE-K-KO-O), ISSHO is three (I-S-SHO), KONNICHI is four (KO-N-NI-CHI), etc.

Note: To represent foreign words in Japanese-style romanization, some other consonants may be doubled: BEDDO (bed), HOTTO DOGGU (hot dog), etc.

Unstressed vowels

The vowels I and U are often unstressed, which makes them nearly silent, especially when they come between two “voiceless consonants” (k, s, t, f, p) or at the end of a word, as in the following sentences: (Underlined vowels are nearly silent.)

1. Ohayoo gozaimasuu.
2. Watakushi wa Shōda to mooshimasu.

Japan Rail Travel Service Centre in Tokyo Station