

## PREFACE: A NOTE ABOUT LEARNING JAPANESE

Japanese is partly an inflected language, like Latin, French, German, Spanish, and many others, but only the verbs and adjectives inflect. Japanese nouns, instead of using inflections, are accompanied by “joshi” or particles to show what their connection is to the rest of the sentence. The problem the learner, and especially a native English speaker, faces in learning an inflected language, is that unless you know how to go from any inflected form to the form that is found in a dictionary, you are at the mercy of the author of your text or of your teacher, as to when and what vocabulary you are taught. Furthermore, even if you know the base form or dictionary form of an inflected word, you will not know how to use the inflections to say what you want with that word, unless the text or the teacher has seen fit to introduce it already.

With UJVA, you learn the patterns of the inflections as a systematic whole. This precisely, is the goal. You will then be able to use dictionaries to find any word you want to use, you will be able to convert it to the inflection you need to say what you want and be able to do these things without waiting for your teacher or text to cover that particular point. (There is a video to teach you how to find words in a Kanji dictionary, see “supporting materials” on the opening card.) As you learn to do this you will come to appreciate how much a systematic approach to the mastery of the inflections helps you to communicate in Japanese beyond the often childlike or artificial sentences of many textbooks and courses. You learn more quickly to link ideas in a normal adult way and to use the vocabulary you need in order to say what what is of interest to you.

UJVA is different from many Japanese courses in that it does not need you to learn lots and lots of words. Rather, it shows you how to find any word in a dictionary, even from an inflected form which you do not know, and how to use those words when you have found them. We believe that if you can do this, you will soon learn the words you often want to use and you will not waste time learning words which are not useful.

Ignoring if one can, both the undeniable beauty and also the frustrations of the Japanese writing system, there are two other high hurdles for native English speakers to clear. They are:

- i) the particles and particularly the distinction between the case particle or kakujoshi (ga, wo, ni ,de etc) and the kakarijoshi such as wa, mo, sae, koso.
- ii) the system of inflections (katsuyo) which govern how verbs and adjectives are incorporated into sentence structures.

It is this author’s opinion that these two aspects of Japanese are difficult for English speaking students of Japanese because English has neither of them but that the difficulty has been compounded by the methods of language teaching and aspects of presentation of Japanese adopted by textbooks which have been fashionable for the last several decades in our education systems.

This programme is concerned primarily with the second, that is with the system of inflections, though a student will find that the distinction between and significance of substituting a case particle for a kakarijoshi or vice versa in a sentence is regularly noted.

It is the author’s opinion that in the longer run many students benefit greatly by learning some at least of the descriptive rules about the way Japanese sentences are put together. I hesitate to admit that I am really advocating the early teaching and learning of grammar and syntax as aids to learning, but in fact I am. This text and the computer programme which preceded it are both unashamed testimony to that philosophy.

Even if they are difficult to grasp at first, a good knowledge of these systems has many practical advantages for the learner. The learner will no longer be so dependant on teachers, texts, or any particular syllabus. He or she can learn to find the dictionary form of inflected words in dictionaries, can then adapt that form to the needs of new sentence structures beyond the confines of an institution’s syllabus and can begin with confidence to be creative.

I am not pretending that it is necessarily easy for the student to gain these advantages but more than three decades of teaching Japanese prove to my satisfaction that the effort soon has practical rewards for serious students,

Over the page is a chart showing how Japanese differs basically from English and other European languages