

Google translation says:

My father was a person who walks of life extraordinary. He has a great impact on her daughter, I grew up with him continues to be enlightened. The person died of liver cancer. The ultimate in epic also a way to die. He seemed to deliberately refuse to endure the pain by his morphine. Many years ago, lost in sorrow and pain of cancer too late to all the world seems to love him forever. My father seemed to share the pain in her right mind to endure the pain until the end of times suffer severe pain from cancer is diagnosed.

My translation:

My father lived an extraordinary life. He had a great influence on me. I grew up enlightened with his wisdom. He died of liver cancer. His death was as extraordinary as his life was. He deliberately refused to take morphine and choose to endure pain instead. Many years ago he also lost his one and true love who died of cancer discovered too late. It seems the sadness and pain of her passing never faded from his heart. Ever since my father was diagnosed to have cancer, he seemed to share my mother's pain and endured severe pain until the very end clinging barely on to his sanity.

Reasons why a machine translator like Google has great difficulty with Japanese sentences:

- Japanese has no verb conjugation and therefore the person speaking cannot be determined by the grammar. It can only be determined by human logic based on the content.
- Japanese is a language of metaphors. Ideas are expressed differently using different words than would be used in most European languages.
- The subject of a Japanese sentence is often dropped because it is supposed to be already understood by the listener.
- Nouns have no gender and the only two pronouns with gender, kare, kanojo (he, she) are often dropped from the sentence when supposed to be understood. And these two pronouns can even be interpreted by the listener as one's boyfriend or girlfriend according to the context it is used!
- The predicate and main verb of the sentence comes at the very end of the sentence, not immediately after the subject as in English. There may be several clauses in between. A machine translation of a long sentence is often nonsensical.

Back in the mid '90s I once read an article that predicted by the year 2000, voice machine translators would be so good that a voice of a person in Tokyo speaking in Japanese on the phone would come out in English to the other party in America! I cannot foresee that ever happening when even text only translations are still very poorly done.

I often have to add words not present in the original to my translation because I know that is probably what the person meant to say. In other words, a percentage of the translation is really interpreting what the writer means. It's only because I know the author personally that I can interpret the author's text with a good degree of accuracy, something that no machine or software no matter how sophisticated could ever do. Are my translations OK? The author seems to think so. ☐

Ten day hitchhike adventure circling central Japan



The red line is the route I traveled by hitchhiking.

October 24 to Nov. 3, 2010: I hitchhiked 1390 kilometers in 18 vehicles to cities in the Kanto plain (Tokyo and vicinity), Osaka, and then returned home by a different route along the Sea of Japan. As you can see from the map, I didn't hitchhike the entire distance. On two occasions friends happened to be going toward my destination and gave me a lift, and several times I had to take trains for expediency sake.



Tokyo Bay
Aqua-Line

I traveled along the Tokyo Bay Aqua-Line for the very first time, a bridge and tunnel that crosses Tokyo bay. By car this is the fastest way to get from southern Chiba to Kawasaki bypassing the traffic congested Tokyo area and

saving 65 kilometers in distance. I had wondered how it could be possible to build a bridge that spans the bay at one point and goes into the bay midway, but as you can see from the photo on the right, the bridge reaches a man made island at the point the tunnel begins.

Because I had to take three trains from Kawasaki after getting off the Aqua line to get back to the expressway at Kokuho parking area on the Tomei, I wondered if I really *did* save time. It was a case of a “bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” because the driver just happened to be going that direction and getting rides through Tokyo was far less certain. I wanted to be in Osaka that evening to avoid the rains of a coming Typhoon, and so spending 770 yen train fare to help speed my journey seemed worth the money.

I met a hitchhiker while heading toward Osaka at the Kohoku parking area on the Tomei expressway, a lady from France who was going to Shimoda, the southern city of the Izu peninsular in Shizuoka Prefecture. It’s very rare to see other hitchhikers in Japan, and this is the first time ever to find a female hitchhiking, an older lady at that! She said she’s older than me so that would be in her mid 60s. I felt sorry for her because her Japanese is not very good though she says she’s lived in Japan already for 10 years, and because her destination was rather hard to get to, mostly by low road. I told her it would be better if we hitchhike together. I found the Japanese are more apt to pick up male/female couples. The first car, a married couple, took us to Ebina service area past Atsugi, and the second driver took her as far as Ashigara near Mt. Fuji.

[Hitchhiking on a rainy day to Saitama](#)



Hisami and Toshio Yamaguchi. They went out of their way to take me to Sakae PA on the Hokuriku Expressway

October 15, 2010: Today was cloudy with light showers from time to time. I needed be in the city of Kumagaya in Saitama Prefecture by 10:30AM the next day for important business. My destination was Noda city in Chiba Prefecture, about 300 kilometers from home. Noda is close to Tokyo to the northeast. From there I would make it in two trains to Kumagaya in plenty of time if I left by 8AM.

The first ride, Mr. and Mrs. Yamaguchi who were heading to Nagaoka City by regular road, went out of their way for me to take me to Sakae Parking area on the Hokuriku expressway. After waiting slightly over an hour at Sakae and getting a bit impatient, a man from the Tohoku Power Co. offered to take me to Muika Machi, nearly a 1/3 of my journey. He took me to the Muika Machi interchange.

After a few minutes it started to rain. I spotted a Jusco department store only a couple hundred meters away and walked to it. By the time I got there, it began raining pretty hard. I was glad to have shelter and eat lunch at the Jusco.

Thirty minutes later the rain stopped and I walked back to the interchange. After about 15 minutes, a Noodle shop man took me to Echigo Yuzawa, about 22 kilometers further. He looked different from most Japanese because of his long sideburns, something uncommon in Japan. There is a Parking Area called Ishiuchi about 6 kilometers before Echigo Yuzawa, but I didn't want to get off there because there were only a dozen cars parked in the area. That might have been a mistake because things did not go according to expectation at Echigo Yuzawa! Half a dozen drivers offered me rides, but they were all going back in the direction I just came from. This is just the opposite of what I experienced at the same place a couple years ago! I was heading home to Niigata, but all the drivers where going the opposite way toward Tokyo.

After waiting over an hour, it was getting dark just a little after 5PM. I checked the train time with my cell phone's Internet connection and found a train leaving at 5:56PM. This train with its connections would get me to Noda before midnight. The station was about a 20 minute walk from the interchange and I started walking toward it going up route 17 with traffic heading to Saitama and still holding out a paper sign showing my destination in a last ditch effort to catch a ride. It paid off! A kind man who sells Japanese pastries took me as far as Shinmachi Station on the Takasaki line in Saitama Prefecture! This saved me over 2000 yen and at least an hour of time because he took the expressway which is much faster than local trains.

[Monday adventure from Aomori to](#)

Niigata



Mr. Kato who took
me to Kuroishi on
the Tohoku
Expressway

April 19, 2010: I had intended to hitchhike back home on Sunday morning but stayed in Aomori city in northern Honshu an extra day to deal with a friend's PC problem. Hitchhiking on a weekend or a holiday is always easier. There are more cars on the road with families traveling longer distances. Weekdays, and especially a **Monday** mean people traveling for business reasons, and they are usually not in a happy mood.

But this morning I had help to get started. Rather than walk to the highway and try to hitchhike 5 kilometers to the Aomori Chuo entrance of the Tohoku expressway, the friend with whom I stayed with offered to drive me there. This gave me a 30 minute head start. My home in Niigata is 580 kilometers distance via the Tohoku and Ban'etsu expressways and I hoped to return the same day.



The Kitayama
brothers who took
me to Hirosaki
Owani interchange.

The first driver, Mr. Kato, said he would only go as far as Kuroishi, about 20 kilometers down the road. The traffic at Kuroishi was only a tiny fraction of Aomori Chuo, and I wondered if I made a mistake taking the ride from Mr. Kato. I knew the next expressway entrance at Hirosaki Owani would be much better for me, and headed that direction on foot. I knew it was too far to

walk all the way, but nevertheless I continued walking down the road until I caught the next ride nearly an hour later. Twin brothers with the family name of Kitayama picked me up! They are highly skilled carpenters who make Buddhist temples and Shinto shrines. One of them said when he was young just after graduating from university, he traveled in Europe for 3 months hitchhiking from place to place. Japanese who have traveled overseas, and the ones who themselves have experienced hitchhiking will usually stop for me.



Former Sumo
wrestler, Yoshi

The most interesting person to pick me up today was Yoshi, a former Sumo wrestler. He said he lived in a Sumo world from 8 years old till 20, and all he wanted to be in life was a professional sumo. But that dream suddenly ended with an injury to his knee. The doctor told him he couldn't wrestle anymore. In despair he left Japan and moved to San Diego to start a new life. There he grew fond of the local Mexican people, and learned to speak Spanish. He also met a Japanese girl in San Diego with whom he fell in love with and expressed that love. She told him, "Yoshi, you know nothing about real love! Come to church with me tonight and learn about love." So he went with her to a Spanish speaking church in San Diego, heard the Gospel of Jesus for the first time in his life, and was so moved with [the Message](#) he wept with emotion! God came into his life that night and by and by, he felt called to become a missionary to Peru! Yoshi described to me in detail life in Peru, the poverty and the lack of morals. And I thought Japan is tough! The Japanese are hard to sell but they do have a strong sense of morals in their culture. Though they don't know the teachings of the New Testament, many Japanese live by its principles better than Westerners who do know the Bible.

Yoshi took me to the Adatara parking area just before the junction of the Ban'estu expressway that goes to Niigata. It was 4:30PM and I still had an hour and a half of sunlight left. The previous time standing at Adatara I caught a ride in only 20 minutes, but 3 hours later by 7:30 I still hadn't caught a ride and was standing in the dark unable to even read the license plates until the car was about to pass me. Over 95% of the traffic was heading toward Tokyo, not toward Niigata. I realized rather than wait for cars to come to me, I would have to walk up to drivers in the parking area, the ones that have Niigata license plates. Normally I don't do this because drivers who do give me rides this way are usually not friendly or talkative, but I was in a desperate situation! The first driver I asked did give me a ride, and I was so grateful to know I would be home in two hours and not have to try to figure out how to sleep at Adatara that night. □

Picked up by two Nichiren ladies



November 29, 2009: While hitchhiking to town I noticed a lady walking toward me from a distance with what appeared to be her car parked by the side of the road behind her. I correctly assumed she was going to offer me a ride. She had another lady friend with her who was the driver. They seemed a bit overly impressed to meet me which caused me to become suspicious.

I asked them, "Do you want to sell me something?"

"No!"

"Are you folks into some kind of religion?"

"No!"

They asked me if I had eaten lunch yet and invited me to a restaurant to talk. I accepted the invitation because I wasn't in any hurry and knew it would give me an opportunity to share my faith with them.

In the restaurant I offered to give them two Activated magazines. As soon as I pulled them out of my briefcase, they turned them down. The only kind of Japanese who refuses to accept literature from me are people into some type of religion, and sure enough, these two ladies turned out to be [Nichiren Buddhist](#) people, and their intent was to try to convert me!

Most Buddhists are very tolerant of other religions, and they have no problem toward Christians in general. The Nichiren sect is the **notifiable exception**. They will flatly tell you to forsake Jesus Christ and pray to their idol using their chant instead. Every time they chanted that horrible chant to me, I started to pray the "Our Father" prayer and told them that prayer works for me. To their credit, they did listen when I told them why Jesus died on the cross, and for what reason, to save all of mankind from sin.

Normally when a Japanese person invites me to a restaurant or coffee bar, they will pick up my tab. I fully expected this to happen but to my embarrassment I walked halfway out of the restaurant and was told I hadn't paid my bill yet! Next time I'll be more wary when a person seems overly interested in talking to me even though we just met. Either they want to

convert you or sell you on some network marketing type of product. ☐

Hitchhike adventure to Ikebukero



Ikebukero is one of the large commercial centers in Tokyo with one of the busiest train stations. I intended to spend the night with a friend in Ikebukero so that I could easily go from there the next day to the American Embassy to renew my passport. It's been ten years since I got the passport in Hawaii.



Typical night scene in Ikebukero, Tokyo

The first driver was a off duty policeman who specializes in the Japanese mafia known as the "Yakuza". I hear these days the Yakuza are not very powerful. I hardly see them anymore. The Chinese and Russian mafia have taken over.

I talked to the policeman about my experiences with the Yakuza – usually OK. They normally don't bother the common people. I've been treated to lunch by at least two of them. One thing that strikes me about mafia type of people is that they usually think they are pretty righteous and that society is wrong, not them. The policeman agreed with that point. I then brought out that man in general has this same attitude toward God. It's called "self-righteousness". We often think we know better than God. Many people even think they are "gooder" than God! But in reality, we are all sinners and criminals in God's sight. Only Jesus did no sin and therefore paid the price for our crimes of ungratefulness toward God and unloving actions toward our fellow man. He paid the price with His own death!

The concept of "sin" is pretty clear in Western cultures, but very vague in the Japanese mind. Even Japanese who have come to know Jesus Christ and are still young in faith don't understand very clearly what sin means. The

policeman identified with what I had to say about the average criminal, but did not include himself as a “sinner” in his relationship with his Creator.

Unfortunately many church people in America seem to equate sin mainly with sexual pleasures, or even any type of pleasure while at the same time justifying truly horrible crimes in the eyes of God such as the occupation of Iraq! But Jesus didn't condemn the drunks and harlots. In His eyes, the self-righteous **religious leaders** of His time were the real sinners!

I forgot my hat in the policeman's car without giving him any way to contact me. I don't think he even knew my last name. Somehow he figured out where I live and brought the hat back!

Wedding for Nobuo and Miwako



I attended a Shinto wedding ceremony of my good friends from Kashiwazaki, Nobuo and Miwako. I first met Nobuo's father while hitchhiking on August 11, 2006, a very hot summer day. I was making no progress that day on my way to Tokyo and actually purposely caught a car going the opposite direction so that I could at least be in an expressway service area and drink as much water as I needed. It was definitely one of God's setups because that day of suffering a couple of hours in the sun resulted in some of the best Japanese friends I have with every increasing possibilities to make new friends! It has also turned into a possible English teaching job in the near future.

Weeks earlier Nobuo asked me to do a speech at the wedding party so I had much time to prepare. Nevertheless, I dreaded having to do it. Talking to large groups of people is something I don't particularly relish doing but I knew God would give me the grace for it. It would have been hard enough to give a speech in English, but I had to give it in Japanese! The ladies at my table asked me if I was nervous to give the speech, and I replied I was. Nevertheless, I gave it with everything in me and even ad-libbed adding things I didn't even have written down on the paper I was holding. The audience just loved it! The ladies at the table said that I made everybody happy. I told them that was exactly my intention. Nobuo commented, "A perfect speech!"

Please check out the [photos I took at the wedding party](#).

The wedding was traditional Japanese Shinto style. I felt honored to be invited to attend the ceremony. I was the only non-Japanese person in attendance and I'm only a friend of the family. Such ceremonies traditionally are open only to close relatives of the bride and groom.

Watch the YouTube video and you will hear some of the highly unusual music I heard during the ceremony.

[Interesting facts about the Japanese Language](#)



The character above is the Chinese/Japanese ideograph meaning love.

I've lived in Japan about half my life or about 27 years at the time of this post. I have been called a good speaker of what is considered one of the most difficult languages to learn in the world.

Is there *anything* easy about Japanese?

Yes!

- No verb conjugation!
- No gender of nouns!
- No articles (a, the)
- Number (singular and plural) not important and barely exists!
- Not hard to learn to pronounce as there are only 48 sounds consisting of 5 vowels and 11 consonants!
- Syntax or the word order of a sentence, excepting the final verb, is totally free!

Why then is Japanese considered difficult to learn?

- The written language has 3 methods of writing: Thousands of Chinese characters called *Kanji* and 2 Japanese syllabaries of 48 characters each called *Hiragana* and *Katakana*. Japanese is therefore considered the most complex written language in the world. In order to get barely by, you need to learn all of the Hiragana and Katakana and at least a few hundred Kanji. Kanji is used for words, hiragana for verb endings and particles after nouns to denote the case of the noun, and katakana is used for foreign loan words and names.
- Most words have two roots of pronunciation, a Chinese root and a Japanese root. They are totally different sounds. So learning Japanese is almost like learning the vocabulary of 2 languages at once!



All of the 8 Kanji characters above are pronounced “*shin*” and all 8 of them are totally unrelated to each other in meaning! They are from left to right: God, advance, believe, new, true, stretch, heart, and parent. There are no tones in Japanese as there are in Chinese, and so the pronunciation of *shin* is exactly the same for all the above. Besides these, there are **many more** Kanji that are also pronounced “*shin*”! The Japanese way to pronounce the characters above are, “*kami*”, *susumu*, “*shinjiru*”, “*atarashii*”, “*makoto*”, “*nobasu*”, “*kokoro*”, and “*oya*”. Notice that the Japanese way of pronouncing a word is multi-syllabic, whereas the Chinese way is a single syllable.

- The main verb comes at the end of the sentence. This can result in the meaning of a long sentence being hard to grasp. Imagine a sentence in English like “A storm system plowed through the central Appalachians into the Eastern Seaboard with heavy rain Wednesday, causing flooding that blocked roads and drove some people from their homes” and put the words “plowed through” at the very end of the sentence.
- Particles follow nouns to denote their usage. This is often hard for foreigners to learn unless you happen to be Korean or Mongolian.
- Ideas are expressed in way that is unrelated to European languages.
- Because there is no verb conjugation according to person, the subject of a sentence can be unclear at times. And because the subject is often *assumed* to be already understood, it is frequently dropped entirely adding to the confusion and ambiguity. This is why Japanese is considered by some a “fuzzy” language. One Japanese linguist, however, says that it is not really the language that is fuzzy but the way it is used as a result of the culture.
- There are several levels of polite language to learn. These words are called “honorifics”. If you don’t learn them, you will never rise above the rank of “dumb foreigner”.

Is learning Japanese easier for some nationalities than others?

As far as I know, it is easier only for Koreans and Mongolians as their grammar is related to Japanese. It is **not** especially easy for Chinese people to learn. Though the Chinese can already read and understand the meaning of

most Kanji characters, they have to learn to pronounce them the Japanese way and learn an entirely new way of expressing themselves using a totally different grammatical sentence structure.

Is it important to learn to read Japanese?

Yes, if you really want to learn the language well. There are many homonyms in Japanese or words that sound the same but have totally different meanings. (As brought out in the 8 meanings of the word "shin".) Unless you learn to read at least several hundred Kanji (Chinese characters used in Japanese), you cannot understand meanings of words nearly as well as a person who can read Kanji. There is only one sure way you will learn to read Kanji – take a course in a school for at least a year like I did. I just didn't have the discipline to learn on my own. I don't know of *any* foreigner who learned Kanji well without a formal school course.

Is it possible to write Japanese in the Roman alphabet?

Yes, possible but not practical. Japanese written in Roman characters is called *romaji*. Romaji is used primarily for foreigners to study Japanese. If General MacArthur had pushed his will to change the written language to the Roman alphabet, Japan would never have advanced to the technological nation it is today. The immense amount of homonyms in the language would have made technological papers and documents hard to understand. Whereas by using Kanji there is always a specific character available out of the thousands at hand.

Are there different dialects of Japanese?

Yes! Tokyo and Sapporo are considered the main 2 centers of the standard national language but all other areas have their own accents and even different words. The Osaka accent is one of the most recognizable. Once at an airport in Paris France I heard 2 Japanese girls speaking and I could tell they were from Osaka. You should have seen the look of surprise on their faces to hear me, a stranger, tell them so! The Tsugaru area of Aomori is considered to be one of the most different dialects of all the dialects of Japan. It is not necessary to learn the local dialect. Most missionaries don't learn them, only their kids who go to school have picked them up.

Will learning Japanese make it easier for me to learn Chinese later?

Yes! Well, somewhat easier. If you learn to read Kanji, you will be able to already read many signs in either Taiwan, Hong Kong or China even if you never study Chinese. You will be able to communicate basic ideas with the Chinese people just by using Kanji. Most the meanings of the Chinese characters that Japan shares with China are the same.

Some weaknesses of the Japanese language

- Considered a "fuzzy" language. The Japanese people don't like to be blunt or rude. Consequently, they hesitate to express opinions in a strong and clear manner. Politicians like to use this to their

advantage!

- Very few words of affection or endearment as in all European languages! Most Japanese either cannot or will not say “I love you” to their loved ones. These words do exist in Japanese, but are not part of daily vocabulary.
- No such thing as rhyming poetry!
- It takes about twice as long to say something as compared to English. English song lyrics have to be cut in half when translated into Japanese in order to keep the same rhythm.

One strength of the Japanese written language

The cool thing about using Chinese ideograph characters called Kanji is that the meaning of words becomes clear as a bell. There is no need for an etymology dictionary of Japanese words that are written in Kanji. This includes names of people as well. Most first names in any language have meanings that are often forgotten in time and can only be learned through special dictionaries, but nobody in Japan can ever forget the meaning of a Kanji. For example, how many people would know that my name, James, comes from the Hebrew name Jacob which means “deceiver”? But there is no Japanese person who does not know the meaning of famous Ichiro Suzuki’s name. It means “first man” The names of towns and cities, rivers and mountains can also be translated to English or any other language. Of course this applies to the Chinese language as well.

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10 things you didn't know about

Japanese

Some fun facts about the language spoken in the Land of the Rising Sun.



Japanese has many dialects. They're grouped into **Kyoto-Osaka** dialects and **Tokyo** dialects. Mutual intelligibility varies.



9th

MOST SPOKEN LANGUAGE

The majority of the speakers are in Japan or in the Japanese diaspora.

The origins of the language are unknown, since its earliest written records show a fully-formed system.



88 weeks

According to the US Department of State, that's how much it would take for an English-speaker to learn Japanese.

HONORIFICS: suffixes that express the relationship the speaker and person in question have.

- san:** most commonly used, similar to "sir" or "ma'am".
- chan:** An endearing female honorific, used for children of both genders.
- sama:** A respectful way to address someone.

3 WRITING SYSTEMS

HIRAGANA: syllabic, phonetic and used for native words, conjugations and particles.

KATAKANA: used for loanwords.

KANJI: imported from China in the 6th Century AD. Thousands of letters, of which approximately 2000 are most commonly used.



WORD ORDER IN JAPANESE



THE FASTEST LANGUAGE..

The average native Japanese speaker produces

7.84 Syllables per Second

The number for English is 6.19 syllables per second.

MIMETICS = words that resemble the source of the sound it represents.

- むしゃり** (Mushari) [Taking a big bite]
- ぼーぼー** (Bo-Bo-) [fire burning]

...BUT DOESN'T SAY MUCH

A 2010 study concluded that, among the major languages **Japanese conveys the least amount of information per syllable.**



This illustration is courtesy of [Day Translations Inc.](#)