

# *Reading Japanese with a Smile*

*Nine Stories from a Japanese Weekly  
Magazine for Intermediate Learners*



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*Nine Stories from a Japanese Weekly  
Magazine for Intermediate Learners*

TOM GALLY

*Japan & Stuff Press*

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this book was first published  
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## INTRODUCTION

Most Japanese-language textbooks make language learning simple and systematic. They carefully limit the number of kanji introduced at each level. They present new vocabulary and grammatical patterns step by step. Most important of all, they choose topics that are easy for readers to understand and unlikely to offend any teachers or students. The only problem with these textbooks is that they generally are very, very dull.

The boredom induced by textbooks contrasts sharply with the rich and stimulating variety of the Japanese press. Some fifty thousand books are published every year in Japan on subjects ranging from philosophy to pornography. Thousands of magazines clog the racks of bookstores and newsstands, offering entertainment and debate, scandal and libel, the high, the middlebrow, and the very low. It is this world, the world of Japanese as it is really written, into which this book is intended to provide a glimpse.

The nine stories in this book were chosen from the “Dekigotology” column that appeared in the magazine 週刊朝日 *Shūkan Asahi* for many years. The word *dekigotology* (デキゴトロジー) is a combination of 出来事 *dekigoto*, which means “event” or “happening,” and the Greek/English suffix *-logy*. Dekigotology, in other words, is the study of things that happen. Each week, the column carried a half dozen stories, all purported to be true, about interesting events that had happened to people recently. The stories generally concern subjects that are familiar or topical, and their interest lies in the way they reveal what happens behind the scenes of everyday life.

The stories are often surprising and usually funny.

The stories on the following pages were selected from the hundreds that ran in “Dekigotology” in the early 1990s. To be chosen, each story had to meet two criteria: it had to be interesting, and it couldn’t be so topical that it would quickly go out of date. There was also an attempt to choose a variety of topics.

## Organization

Each story is presented first in its entirety, exactly as in the paperback book edition, with kanji pronunciations marked only when they appeared in the original. An English translation appears on the facing page. This translation is intended to help the reader understand the Japanese, so it is more literal in places than a smooth literary translation would be. Students of Japanese may want to avoid looking at the translation until they have finished reading the text and notes.

Next, the story is presented again a sentence or two at a time, with the reading of every kanji marked with furigana. Each of these text excerpts is followed by several groups of notes.

The first notes, marked with the kanji 語 (short for 語彙 *vocabulary*), consist of short glosses of words and phrases that appear in the preceding sentence. Every word is explained except basic grammatical function words (は, が, を, etc.) and words that have appeared earlier in the same story.

The second group of notes, marked with the kanji 動 (short for 動詞 *verb*), consists of reverse derivations of declined verbs and adjectives. The first word in each derivation is the form that appears in the sentence, while the last word is the form that would normally appear in dictionaries. For example, the series 疑わなかった ⇨ 疑わない ⇨ 疑う *utagau* goes from the past-tense negative to the nonpast negative to the nonpast affirmative (or dictionary) form of this verb.

The third group, marked with 注 (short for 注釈 *an-*

notation), consists of detailed notes on the vocabulary and grammar. Special attention is given to identifying the subjects of verbs and to showing which nouns are modified by which adjectives, relative clauses, etc. These notes also include remarks on usage, related words, and typographical conventions, the last being a topic rarely mentioned in Japanese textbooks.

The notes in the final group, marked 文 (short for 文化 *culture*), provide information and commentary about the cultural background of the stories. When necessary, they also explain what makes the stories particularly interesting or funny to the Japanese reader.

Pronunciations are marked in the notes using romaji, not furigana. There are several reasons for this. Furigana are sometimes hard to read, especially when the type is small. Romaji are useful for showing word divisions and identifying the readings of the particles は and へ, such as in the phrase というのは *to iu no wa*. And for students who have learned Japanese from teachers who prohibit the use of romaji, the romaji scattered through the notes will familiarize them with this method of representing Japanese pronunciation, which is still essential for scholars and for others who use both Japanese and English in international contexts.

## Acknowledgments

I am grateful to many people for their help in the preparation of this book. I first learned of “Dekigotology” over two decades ago from Tomoko Iwai, who was one of my Japanese teachers at the time, and her enthusiasm for making language learning interesting as well as educational was one of the inspirations for this book. I am also thankful to Hiroko Fukuda and Kazushi Ishida, who made valuable contributions to an early draft, to Michael Brase and Shigeyoshi Suzuki of Kodansha International for their helpful suggestions during the planning stages and for their careful editing of the first edition in 1997, and again to Michael Brase, now executive director of Japan &

Stuff Press, for offering to publish this expanded edition.

Special gratitude also goes to the *Asahi Shimbun* for kindly granting permission to reprint the stories here and to Shinchosha for permission to use the versions published in book form. Readers who wish to read more of these stories are encouraged to purchase the paperback anthologies in the 朝日文庫 *Asahi Bunko* and 新潮文庫 *Shinchō Bunko* series.

I would also like to thank the participants in the Honyaku mailing list for their wise and informative discussions on many matters related to Japanese and English translation. For their responses to questions I posted about this book, I am particularly indebted to Sara Aoyama, Adrian Boyle, John Brannan, Regina I. A. Brice, John Bryan, John De Hoog, Alan Gleason, Graham Healey, Rich Higgins, Brian Howells, Sako Ikegami, Dan Kanagy, Yosuke Kawachi, J. C. Kelly, Mamoru Kondo, Bill Lise, David J. Littleboy, John Loftus, Tammy J. Morimoto, Gururaj Rao, Adam Rice, Karen Sandness, Fred Uleman, Rodney Webster, and John Zimet.

As always, I am indebted to my wife, Ikuko Gally. She provided many comments and suggestions about each of the stories in this book, and her insights greatly improved the accuracy and depth of the notes.

Although all of these people did their best to help me, I fear that I have betrayed their kindness by persisting in many errors, for each of which I take full responsibility.

Tom Gally

## まえがき

日本語を学ぶ外国人にとって、最大の悩みの一つは教科書の内容が面白くないということだ。初級レベルでは、基本語彙、日常会話などを修得する必要があるから、仕方がないのかもしれないが、中級以上のテキストになっても、楽しんで読めるものがほとんど載っていない。「日本の経済について」とか「平和を守ろう」という、百科事典や新聞の社説に出るような一般論や建前論、あるいは「スミスさんは靴を買う」のような、役には立つかも知れないが、実際には退屈な話ばかりが載っているからだ。そのような教科書で日本語を勉強すると、日本はつまらない国だ、日本人は感情に乏しい人種だ、といった誤解さえ生じかねない。

しかし、日本に住み、日本の映画、テレビ、漫画などを見ていると、この国が他の国に負けないぐらい複雑な面を持っているということがわかる。上品で優雅な面もあるし、下品でけばけばしい面もある。

私は東京で日本語を勉強していたとき、日本語学校で使っていた教科書が嫌になると、よく近くの本屋に行って立ち読みした。まだ日本語がほとんど読めなかった頃でも、そこに並んだ本、特に雑誌の多様性、面白さに強い魅力を感じた。一日も早くそのような生の日本語を読みたかった。上級クラスになると、やっと教科書以外の読み物が使われるようになった。それが「デキゴトロジー」だった。

「デキゴトロジー」が初めて週刊朝日に載ったのは昭和53年頃だった。当初からは、このコラムのポリシーは本当の出来事を面白く伝えることにある。その内容は色々

な分野に渡っているが、私たちが日常経験する恥ずかしいこと、いやらしいこと、ずるいことなどが中心となっている。建前ばかりの教科書を読んでいた私にとっては、クラスで知った「デキゴトロジー」の生々しい人間性が新鮮な空気のように感じた。今でも「デキゴトロジー」を紹介してくださった岩井智子先生に感謝している。

以上の理由で、この本を作った。平成に入ってからのお話を九つ選んで、翻訳と詳細な注釈を付けた。対象読者は日本語を学習する外国人だが、日本のことを英語でどういうふうに説明するか、または外国人の目で日本語や日本人はどのように見えるか、ということに興味のある日本人にも読んでいただければ大変嬉しい。