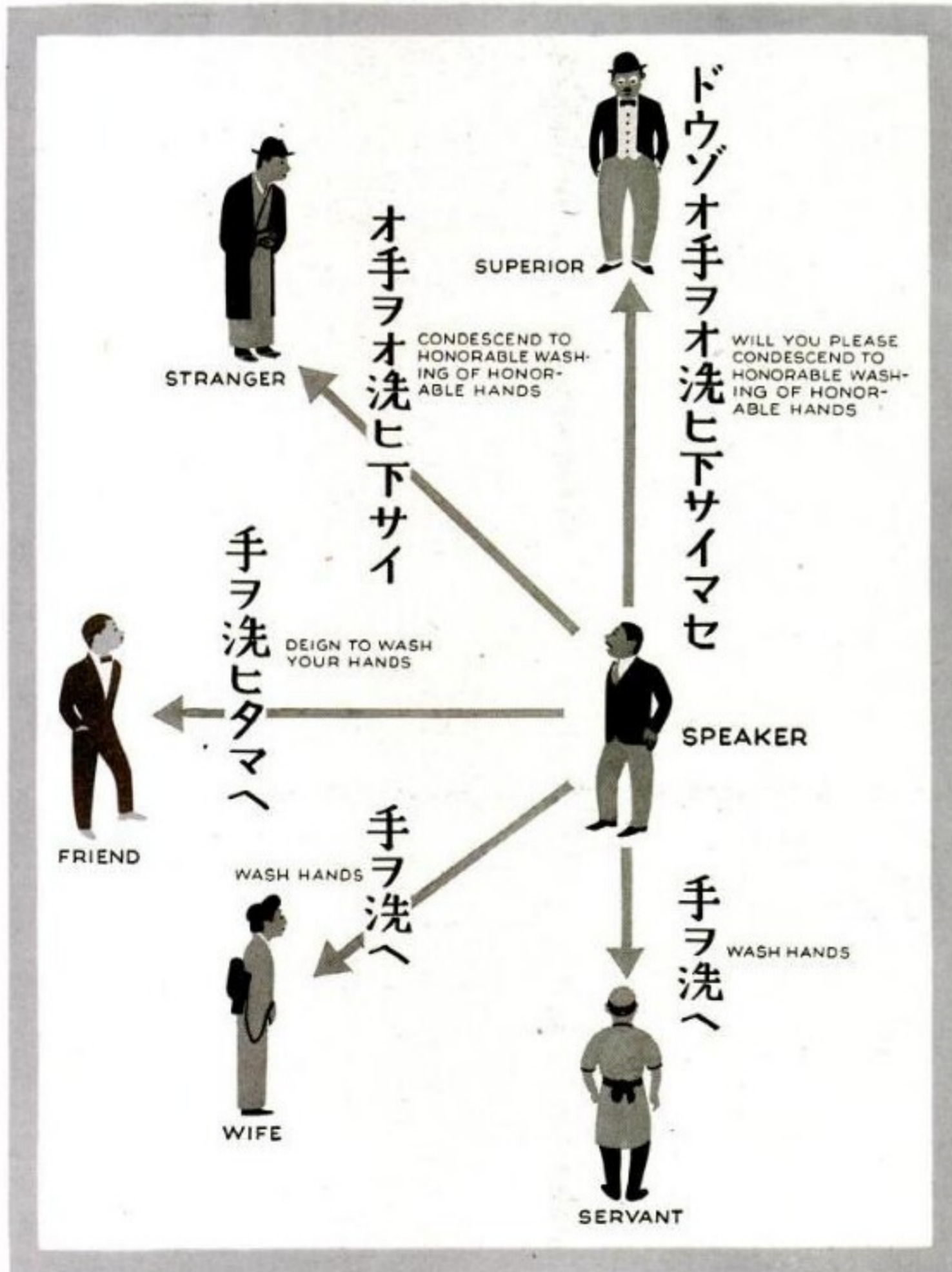


Word for Japan is combination of two ideographs, *ni* (sun) and *hon* or *pon* (foundation, source). Ideograph for source is made by drawing stylized tree and then

adding a second horizontal line at the base to indicate root, source. With a sun, it becomes "sun source," or land where sun rises, finally "Land of the Rising Sun."



Etiquette of address complicates the Jap language. Verb endings, vocabulary and sentence structure vary according to who is talking and how polite he wants

to be. In this diagram, one Jap tells another to wash his hands in anywhere from ten words to two, depending on social standing of the person he is addressing.

THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE

A national secret code, it is perfect for hiding facts or saying what you don't mean

by FRANCIS SILL WICKWARE

One of the most troublesome war shortages faced by the U. S. since Pearl Harbor has been the acute lack of non-Japanese American citizens who understand the Japanese language. Various Government agencies have been combing the country for months, trying to find men and women qualified to serve as interpreters, code-room assistants and censors. The results of this hunt have been depressing. Archibald MacLeish of the Office of War Information recently stated that there are only three Americans with full command of the language, and the most optimistic estimates from Washington put the number at less than 100 persons.

For many years bodies like the American Council of Learned Societies and the Institute of Pacific Relations have been agitating for a Government-sponsored program to create a reservoir of Japanese linguists, and they regard it as deplorable—and unnecessary—that only 1/13,000 of 1% of the population has any grasp of the language of a nation with which war seemed inevitable for so long. Until recently, only a handful of colleges—notably Harvard, Columbia, the University of Michigan and the University of California—had any courses in Japanese and these were attended by tiny classes. Eleven or twelve students usually made up the enrollment at Columbia, with perhaps the best Oriental Language Department in the country.

Today most of the larger colleges have organized or are trying to organize Japanese courses, and at least 300 ambitious students are wandering dazedly through the introduction to the complications of the most confusing language in the world. The hopes and the chances are that the war will be over long before these students learn to read or speak Japanese, for they will be taking lessons for years. A hard-working student who studies and recites four or five hours a day for 12 to 15 weeks generally can compose simple sentences like "The man is a big man" without the aid of a dictionary. In a year's time he should be able to read the simpler passages in Japanese newspapers and after several years' practice he may become fairly fluent. In ten years he ought to know as much about the language as the average Jap. That isn't saying much, because even native Japs have a hard time understanding each other. The literacy rate is high in Japan but public letter writers do a big business and even highly educated persons hire amanuenses for their correspondence instead of coping with it themselves.

Instead of trying to simplify their language, the Japs actually are proud of its complications. They regard it as a sort of national secret code and are always surprised when a foreigner makes an accurate translation. Jap officials—especially diplomats—insist that it is impossible to make correct translations of many documents and statements. This is a handy bit of propaganda, because they can argue that when they meant to say "black" in Japanese the translation made it appear that they were saying "white" or vice versa or something in between. However, not even a Jap could believe that translation difficulties alone accounted for the discrepancy between peace overtures in Washington and war at Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7.

One trouble with the Japanese language is its terrific bulk. In English, a 26-letter alphabet is sufficient to express any thought or shade of meaning and, though no one realizes it, this is a great luxury. Japanese consists of more than 25,000 separate characters or ideographs borrowed from the Chinese. Each character represents an object or an idea. Probably no one in Japan has memorized all the characters but the leading scholars have a vocabulary of perhaps 6,000. The Japanese newspapers carry

CONTINUED ON PAGE 51

about 3,000 characters in type and the average Jap-in-the-street must know at least 2,000 characters in order to get along. The reason so many Japs wear spectacles is that they exhaust their eyes trying to learn the characters during childhood.

Until the Chinese characters were introduced by way of Korea around the 5th Century A.D., the Japanese had no written language, and their pronunciation of the spoken language was entirely different from Chinese. For example, the Japanese spoken word for "man" is *bito*, whereas the Chinese character of "man" is pronounced *jen*. The Japanese had to choose between taking the character for "man" and pronouncing it *bito*, thus ignoring the original Chinese pronunciation altogether, or combining the two Chinese characters pronounced *hi* and *to* and arbitrarily making a new word out of them. Actually, the Japs did both. They used the original Chinese characters and pronunciation, and in addition created a basic phonetic alphabet or syllabary of their own called *kana*. Words are formed by compounding ideographs and *kana*. Thus, the Japanese take the Chinese character *hi* meaning "fire," and *ko*, meaning "child," insert the *kana* possessive *no* between them and get *binoko*, literally "fire's child," their rather charming expression for spark.

Japanese therefore has two languages, one used to explain the other. There may be as many as 14 equally correct pronunciations of every ideograph, and anywhere from two to ten ways of writing a given phrase or sentence. Theoretically it is possible to get along with *kana* exclusively, but for practical purposes ideographs must be used because the language is full of homonyms with identical pronunciations but many different meanings. Thus, if you write the word *kigen* in *kana* only, there is no way of telling (except by context) whether you mean "era," "epoch," "origin," "beginning," "term," "period," "paradox," "a play on words," "plain speaking," "outspoken advice," or "state of health." The various Chinese ideographs with these meanings are all pronounced *kigen*.

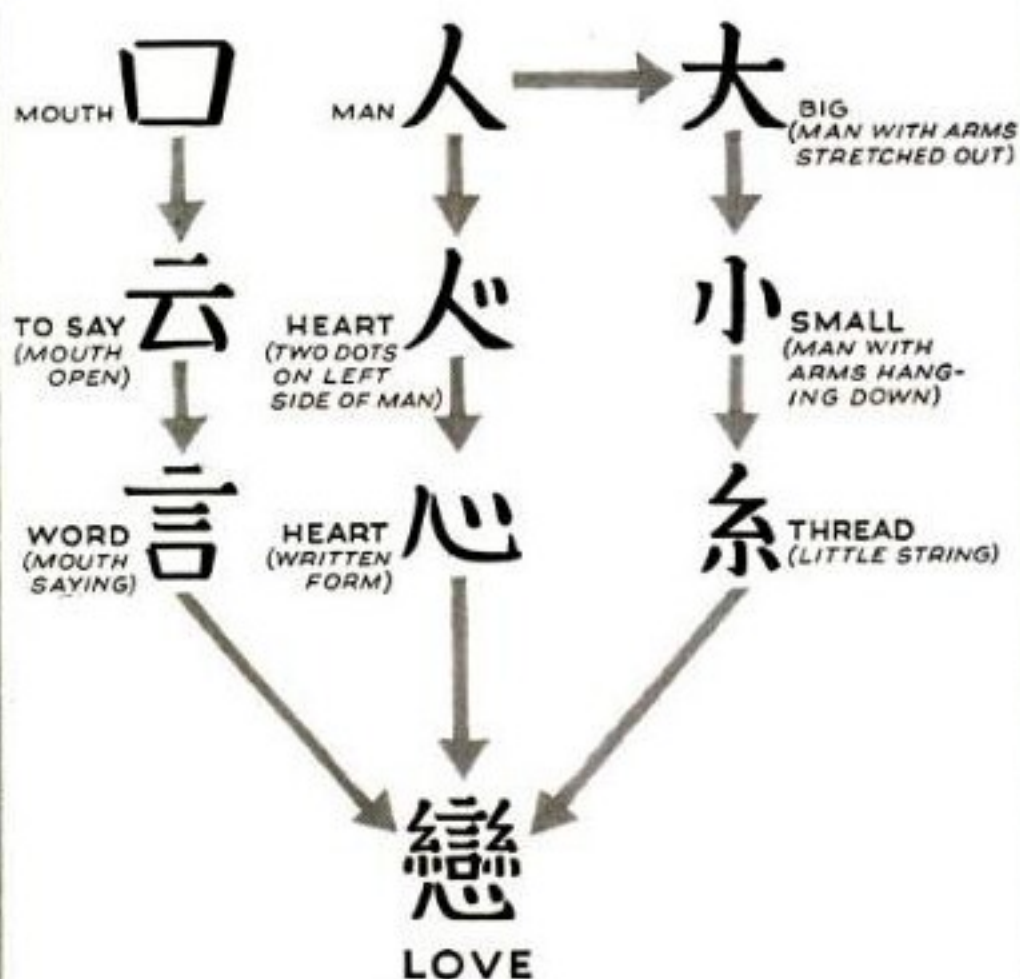
On the other hand, the *kana* frequently must be written alongside the ideographs to indicate pronunciation. For example, the Chinese character *ge* may, in Japanese, be pronounced *ka*, *moto*, *shimo*, *kudaru*, *o*, *oro*, and about a dozen other ways. All these express the idea of "down," "lower," or "under," but—depending on the pronunciation—*ge* is used as noun, adjective, adverb or verb, and the *kana* must accompany the character to explain the intended usage.

Rank and etiquette change words

The ideographs and *kana* are difficult enough, but more difficult is the philosophy of the Japanese language, which is not only a means of communication but part of an elaborate ritual which governs the daily life of the Japs. For many centuries Japan has had a feudal society not unlike that which prevailed in 13th Century Europe. At the top were the samurai, the warriors, and from them the entire population descended in rank and standing down to shopkeepers, artisans, beggars. The class lines were—and are—rigidly drawn, and an enormous amount of kowtowing goes on. This is especially noticeable in the language, which has one set of forms for talking to superiors, another set for addressing inferiors, and a third for chatting with equals. Most of this is sheer hypocrisy, but it has a powerful tradition. In earlier times a samurai was entitled to behead an inferior who failed to use the proper terms of flattery in his speech.

The Japanese language is strongly influenced by the Japs' strange notions of etiquette. It is considered polite always to deprecate yourself and praise the other fellow, no matter how insincere this may be. Consequently, the language is full of special noun and verb forms which sharply distinguish between what *I* do and what *you* do. For example, a verb for "I saw" is *mimashita*, meaning just that, whereas "you saw" is *goran nasaimashita*, literally "you made an honorable glance." One verb for "I give" is *ageru*, meaning "to up" (freely, "I offer up"), while "you give" is *kudasaru*, "to down" (or "You condescend to hand down"). The polite response when someone offers you something—food, for instance—is *Itadakimasu*, which implies "Thanks very much" but actually means "holding it to my forehead," a holdover from the old Japanese custom of bowing low and raising a gift to the forehead to express appreciation.

Tenses are ambiguous, and verb forms are tremendously complicated. Suppose you are at a party and want to say, "We ought to leave now." The nearest Japanese equivalent is *Yuku boga ii*, which means "Go-side is good." In polite conversation it is bad form to be too blunt about the future. "I'm going to the baseball game tomorrow" thus might become something like "Possibly I am at the baseball game when the players assemble again if they are intending to do so."



"Love" is complicated pictograph of elements involved—literally, "word," "heart" and "thread," or words and heart tied together. Both "thread" and "heart" stem from man.

THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE (continued)

The word *San* ("Honored one") is always attached to the names of other persons but never is used with one's own name. Even more polite is *Sama*, from which *San* was derived. The affix *o* ("honorable") is joined with a large number of common nouns—*o yu*, "honorable hot water," *o cha*, "honorable tea," *onaka*, "honorable inside" (stomach), etc. It is significant that Japanese women use the "honorables" and the verb forms for self-abasement far more commonly than men. This is because the women are taught to regard themselves as inferior to practically everything and scarcely fit to live in the same world with men. A Japanese man referring to a friend's wife uses the noun *okusan*, "honorable hidden one," but when speaking of his own wife the word is *kanai*, "person within the house." When a man speaks to his wife he uses the same language as in addressing a servant, and when a woman speaks to her husband *her* language is that of a servant addressing her master. The Nazi campaign to debase German women evidently has borrowed heavily from the Japanese but Hitler still has a long way to go.

Along with the ritual of *o* and *San* and the various complementary word forms, the Japanese go in for a great deal of hissing, especially when talking to superiors. "Honorable boss-San (*bsst!*) honor humble and insignificant me by drinking honorable tea (*bsst!*) with me and no-good-wife-not-worthy-to-look-up-to-your shoes (*bsst!*) in my falling-down house (*bsst! bsst!*)." This peculiar *bsst!* is considered very elegant. It isn't produced like an ordinary hiss but consists of a sharply indrawn gulp of air. The sound is about the same as that made by a noisy soup eater.

To insult someone, you simply omit the *o* and *San* from the conversation, dropping the polite verb endings, referring to a man's wife as a *kanai* instead of an *okusan*, and otherwise implying that you think you're just as good as he is. Even this is rather crude. Refined Japanese prefer instead to bow and scrape twice as much as usual and step up the flattery to the point where it becomes unmistakably sarcastic. Sir Hubert Wilkins relates that when he was in Tokyo last summer

讀 一 二 三 四 五 六 七 八 九 十

FIRST KANA
アノヒトノココロハチヒサイ

SECOND KANA
あのひとのこころはちひさい

FIRST KANA &
IDEOGRAPH
MIXED
アノ人ノ心ハ小イ

SECOND KANA &
IDEOGRAPH
MIXED
あの人の心は小さい

FIRST KANA &
IDEOGRAPH EX-
PLAINED BY
PHONETIC KANA
アノ人^{ヒト}ノ心^{ココロ}ハ小^{チヒサ}イ

SECOND KANA &
IDEOGRAPH EX-
PLAINED BY
PHONETIC KANA
あの人^{ひと}の心^{こころ}は小^{ちひさ}い

THAT MAN IS MEAN
(THAT MAN'S HEART IS SMALL)

Six ways of writing the same sentence. Kana can be used alone in two versions (first is more formal) or mixed with ideographs. The fifth version above is newspaper style.

the Jap Army and Foreign Office men customarily used this technique when talking to the numerous German emissaries in the capital. In private they referred to the Germans as "pigs" but were extravagantly polite to them in public. Their attitude toward the Germans (and all other foreigners) was one of hatred and contempt. "We flatter them excessively," Wilkins was told, "because it is excessively rude."

Among some of the more sophisticated elements there has been a tendency to ignore the polite forms when talking with persons of equal rank. Thus in club locker rooms and other masculine hangouts, officers and members of the nobility sometimes are heard addressing each other in the most vulgar language possible. This actually is a backhanded kind of flattery, implying that all the boys are good scouts and don't need to stand on ceremony. The dividing line between flattery and insult here is pretty thin, and these liberties can be taken only among tried and true friends.

Japanese grammar is something that the reader will do well to avoid at all costs. The language has no articles or prepositions, and personal pronouns are seldom used. The Japs almost never speak of "you," "he," "she," "it," etc. Instead, they use verb endings which indicate—more "politeness" again—the social standing of persons involved in the conversation.

The wrong affix can scramble a sentence

Another complication is that affixes must be used in conjunction with numerals. The Japs have two sets of numbers from one to ten. One of these sets is of Chinese origin, and the Chinese numbers usually require an affix. If you are talking about pencils, sticks, canes, trees or other cylindrical objects, you use the affix *bon* (literally, "tree trunk"). The affix for automobiles, streetcars, carriages and other conveyances is *dai*, literally "platform." Animals take the affix *biki* ("foot"), birds take *wa* ("wing" or "feather") and socks, shoes and stockings have *soku*. A mistake in affixes does weird things to the meaning of a sentence. In his humorous essay, *An Affix For Birds*, St. Clair McKelway describes how he once tried with a dictionary to

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CONSISTS OF TWO IDEOGRAPHS, "WORD" AND "SOLD," REQUIRES 22 STROKES

make this sentence: "What an ancient temple bell you are ringing there beside the pond!" Due to a slight error in affixes, he actually said: "Dogs, keep barking until we have put our mother under water." Japanese is like that

To Westerners, the most annoying features of the Japanese language are "inclusive reckoning" and the method of answering questions. "Inclusive reckoning" in Japan means that if a child is born on Dec. 31, 1941 he is considered two years old on Jan. 1, 1942 because he has lived during a part of both years. According to our custom, therefore, every Jap is a year or two younger than he thinks he is. The Japs use the Gregorian calendar to divide the year into months and days, but years are numbered according to the reign of the current Mikado.

Questions and answers in Japanese are reminiscent of the old *Yes, We Have No Bananas* song. The Japs habitually answer "no" when they mean "yes," and vice versa. Suppose you ask a Jap, "Aren't you going to work today?" He will say "no" if he is going and "yes" if he isn't. The logic of this (if it can be called logic) is as follows: if he is going to work and answers "no," he means "The suggestion implied by your negative question is not correct. I am going to work." Or, in the case of a "yes," "You have suggested that I am not going to work today. That is right."

Another source of confusion is the Japanese "psychic answer," which is not so much a reply to a question as an attempt to deal with the thought which prompted the question. For example, if you say, "*Doko de katta no desu ka?*" (Where did you buy it?), the answer is likely to be "*Iie, jibun de koshiraeta no desu*" (No, I made it myself). The logic of this is, "Your question tells me that you think I bought it but that is not true. I made it myself." The safest procedure for an amateur at this game is to put all questions in the affirmative. Thus, "You bought it, yes?"

Between the "psychic answer" and the "yes" and "no" shambles and the Japs' natural tendency to avoid direct statements, U. S. immigration men had a fine time trying to interview thousands of alien Japs in the weeks after Pearl Harbor. A good many of the Japs were cross-examined and invariably it was the immigration men—not the Japs—who emerged sweating, shaken and exhausted from these sessions.

The Japs get tangled up in English

However, the Japs have almost as much trouble with English as Americans have with Japanese. They can't get used to prepositions and pronouns, and since there is no "l" in Japanese their pronunciation is mystifying. Their nearest approach to an "l" sound is "r" and both in writing and speaking English they use "r" for "l," with the result that "look" becomes "rook," "long" is "rong" and so on. English language books published in Japan invariably are filled with strange mix-ups of this kind.

The thing that Japs find most difficult about English is the precision and simplicity of the language. Even Japs who have acquired a fair knowledge of English persist in making devious constructions as they would in Japanese. Thus, one Jap grocer in San Francisco conveyed the idea of "eggs" with the sign "Extract of Fowl." A 17-year-old girl in one of the fashionable Japanese schools was asked to describe, in English, an erupting volcano. "Great rocks flew from the under to the upper with smoke on their behinds," she wrote. A popular anthology of English literature used by advanced English students in Japanese schools has perhaps six lines of English text on each page. The rest of the space is taken up with long-winded footnotes in Japanese, explaining the meanings of various words. For example, a simple sentence like "The man stepped down from the curb" would call for a footnote to define "curb." There are few curbs in Japan and no word for curb in Japanese so the definition is in fact a brief essay on highway construction, the utility of sidewalks and gutters, etc.—all intended to give the student an idea of what a curb looks like, what it is used for and why it is necessary and desirable to have a curb in the first place.

According to some authorities, language is one reason for the Japanese hatred of foreigners. The Japs are taught to believe that they are the chosen leaders for all humanity, the master race, and it annoys them when they have to struggle so with "inferior" foreign tongues. They compensate for this annoyance (so the theory goes) by working up a grudge against the foreigners who concocted these impossible languages in the first place. Nevertheless, it is—or was—considered very refined in Japan to sprinkle English expressions or derivations through one's conversation and a good deal of Japanese slang is borrowed from English. The common word for "butter" is

bata, "beer" is *biru*, a "modern girl" is *moga*, "modern boy" is *mobo* and "proletariat" is *puro*. Children address their fathers as "Papa-San" and the Japanese are much given to the use of *o kei*, as they pronounce "okay." They use "all right" too, but make it *orai*. Funniest Jap slang words are *steki*, which means "swell, nifty," and *baikara*, for "putting on airs." *Steki* comes from *stekki*, the Jap pronunciation of "stick"—cane or umbrella which is standard equipment for the well-dressed Englishman, and *baikara* is Japanese for "high collar."

Like 13 in the U. S., the numbers four and 49 are avoided by the Japs. Number four is pronounced like the ideograph for "death," and number nine means "suffering." Forty-nine, by some necromancy, becomes "always suffering."

The vagaries of native Japanese make it unsuitable for exact scientific thinking. Hence Jap scientists are forced to work almost exclusively in pure Chinese, avoiding the native elements of their language. On the other hand, Shinto, the national religion, is couched in the ancient spoken tongue of Japan and frowns on the imported Chinese words. Shinto does not interfere with technical scientific work but, being based on mythology, discourages pure research as carried on in this country. Shinto in a word means worship of Japan, of the Mikado and all his ancestors and implies complete belief in the official version of Japan's origins. Anthropologists know that the aboriginal Japs were a peculiar race called the Ainus, possibly of Caucasian origin, who were the hairiest people on earth and are now practically extinct. The islands then were overrun by an unknown people—probably Mongolian, and Malaysians—sometime before 300 A.D. But no scholar in Japan could say this. Japanese children are taught that in 660 B.C. the Sun Goddess sent the Emperor Jimmu to Japan to found "the master race."

The Chinese have a different story: that in 300 B.C. the Emperor Shih Huang Ti sent a shipload of youths and maidens to Japan to find a proverbial fountain of youth. The ship never returned and the youths and maidens intermarried with the monkeys on the island, thus producing the Japanese. Even today the Chinese refer to the Japs as "monkey thieves" or "dwarf thieves," and in *Inside Asia*, John Gunther states that as late as 1900 the Dowager Empress of China always referred to the Japs as "island monkey people" in her official correspondence.

Although the Japs may not be aware of it yet, the language is going to have a few significant additions before the war is over. The Jap cities are notoriously inflammable and Japanese has special terms for different kinds of fires. Thus:

<i>tsuke-bi</i>	an incendiary fire
<i>soso-bi</i>	an accidental fire
<i>jikabi</i>	fire starting from one's own house
<i>morai-bi</i>	fire caught from a house next door
<i>ruisho</i>	a fire which one shares with others
<i>shita-bi</i>	a fire which is burning to an end

It will be interesting to see what phrases the Japs concoct to designate "fire started by Flying Fortress," "fire from medium bomber," "fire from carrier-based fighter plane" and other novel kinds of fire. There is going to be a real need for such terms, and quickly.



Japanese typewriter, really a miniature typesetting machine with 2,450 characters, yet it types only simplified Japanese. This machine at the OWI is one of 30 in the U. S.