



Japanese Language & Culture

As seen in the translation industry

Introduction

When writing about Japan there are so many things one can tell that a few large tomes are hardly enough. It is enveloped in beauty, traditions, cherry blossoms, and wisdom. And yet, here we are compiling bits and pieces of Japanese culture in a small ebook. That is probably not going to be the last one but it is more the beginning of our lovely cultural and linguistic journey in this intriguing piece of Asia. So we invite you to enjoy the pink, the red, and the gold along with the knowledge of centuries-old culture, we have the honor to glimpse.

Welcome to Japan!

Gergana Toleva
(Global Marketing Manager)





Nohgaku

One of the most intriguing parts of the Japanese culture is the Traditional Japanese theater. It includes a few different styles called noh, kyogen, kabuki and bunraku.

Noh and Kyogen are collectively called “Nohgaku”. The word ‘Noh’ in Nohgaku stands for talent or ability. It has a deep connection to gods and the actor performing with a Noh mask is actually a spirit from the past.



Ever Wondered Which Japanese Fonts You Should Use?

Japanese language is a fascinating topic, and inspired by our Japanese week we decided to keep things going and provide you with some practical information regarding it. One of the most important factors when preparing marketing materials or any written document in another language is the way you choose to display text.

Asian languages are very specific in this regard, and can actually be quite difficult to handle. Due to the difference in the writing system and the space distribution of the language itself, we often perform desktop publishing after translation so we can adjust the way the information is displayed in the target language.

We've chosen to share some practical advice based on our previous experience working with Japanese fonts.

Japanese language & Fonts

Let's start with the basics and see which options are suitable for serif and sans serif fonts in Japanese.

Our first choice is Mincho, and we recommend it when you need to use a serif font. “Min” in “**Mincho**” stands for “Ming”, and the “Cho” particle stands for dynasty. It's based on an ancient writing method, which is why the style of this font can be considered historic.

When you look at the “Mincho” font, it's comprised of contrasting vertical and horizontal strokes. Mincho typefaces often are recognizable by the small triangle nestled into the stroke. Most of the times it can be found on the top or top-right edge of the stroke and it adds a bit of a more traditional



touch to the way the text is written. The triangle itself is called “uroko”. It represents the exact moment of “pause” after performing the brush stroke, when the writer prepares to continue the stroke or has completed it.



When it comes to Japanese fonts, **Gothic** is our recommendation for when you need to use a sans serif font. These typefaces, similar to western sans-serif fonts, often have consistent stroke-weights – as well as more simplistic strokes. You can’t spot an “uroko” on these guys. Gothic is often used in digital marketing materials, other online content and if a modern look is what you want to embody, this is a typeface that will allow you to do so.



There are Japanese fonts that come with various font styles, some of which are very easily distinguishable from one another. **Maru** and **Kaku** font styles, in particular, appear to be polar opposites, at least when compared directly. If you’re looking for a font style to complement a typical Gothic font or other sans serif fonts, you should use ones with the Maru font style. The name of the font style itself means circle (or round), and as you might be able to guess, this is because most “maru” typefaces have rounded corners.



Kaku, on the other hand, literally means “corner”. Fonts using the Kaku style represent a distinctly different style: sharp, with pointed corners, and are thus a good choice to use when you’re aiming for a simpler, non-serif look.

“P” stands for Proportion

You’ve probably seen the letter “P” next to a font while you were searching for one that matches your requirements. In this case, you’ve stumbled upon a font where each character



has been condensed independently, which results in tighter letter-spacing. If you are still wondering why this is important – the big advantage is that the characters take less space but remain readable.



Do not use italics with Japanese text!

Unlike European fonts – where italics developed from cursive hand-written script – in Japanese the very structure and creation of the language by hand doesn't support the use of an angle when writing in cursive at all. In Japanese, writing incursive does not lead to the characters being displayed in an angled fashion.

You can replace the Italics by using font-weight variations (e.g. light or bold), brackets, or writing the word in katakana (if appropriate) to emphasize the text. For titles of books, publications, media, etc.; use the Japanese double quotation marks. For introducing terms, use the Japanese single

quotation marks. In other instances where italics are used in English, it's usually safe to use the Japanese single quotation marks.

About Font Size

The full-cap height and square profile of Japanese characters make them appear larger, so you may reduce the font size by 10 to 15%. You may reduce them by a smaller percentage for body text and a higher percentage for headings.

For the same reason, the leading should be increased by 10 to 15%, so the lines of text don't appear too tightly stacked together and have some breathing room between them.

In conclusion, when we talk about designing text – it's a highly preferential thing. Asian languages, however, generally have their limitations and requirements.

Japanese audiences are highly sensible to the way information is displayed, and choosing the proper fonts will definitely help you with reaching and impressing such an audience. That choice of a suitable Japanese font is like everything else that relates to Japan – you should know the culture and the differences between the markets in order to be successful.





Kokeshi dolls

These dolls have existed for more than 150 years and are made of pieces of wood and decorated with various paints.

Kokeshi Dolls originated centuries ago in Japan when wood craftsmen would make children's toys from the leftover wood after making plates and bowls. They would go to onsen, or hot springs, where farmers from nearby areas would come to rest. Eventually, the purchasing of Kokeshi Dolls became so popular that there was a decision made at the All-Japan Kokeshi Exhibition in 1940 which decided on the name "Kokeshi" and it has been used as the common name for them ever since.

Here are a few facts about them:

- There are 11 types of traditional dolls
- They are present in Nintendo and Playstation games
- There is a Japanese wrestler named "Everybody's Kokeshi" — he is famous for his diving headbutt

Is the Culture Behind Anime Translatable?

We have all seen some of these wonderful stories like Yu-Gi-Oh! and Pokemon. In the last few decades, manga and anime have become more and more popular around the world. But how such a different culture has its message transmitted to the rest of the world? In this article, we are going to tackle and see what might be the challenges when trying to translate Anime into other languages.

Translating Japanese Language

There has always been rivalry whether an anime show should be dubbed or subtitled into another language. The result is always the same – it is very hard to achieve a suitable and clear translation using any of the two methods. The reason for that lies within the language itself not only the capability of the people who do the translation. Here are some of the reasons behind:

Transmitting Emotions

If you are not familiar with the language itself, it is hard to grasp the differences but the fans of anime know all about it. The Japanese language has specific ways to express ideas, emotions, and even concepts. In western languages, the most common way to express emotions like anger, surprise and shock are words (swear words, exclamations and etc.), while in Japanese there are grammatical rules that you use in order to achieve that. You may even hear people refer to it as a “non-swear” language.

Role language for different characters in Japanese

When it comes to anime, we are all aware of the variety of characters in different shows. That is one of the great things in this genre, right? While English tends to have the same – high-



class English, different and specific words and expressions that various classes in society use, in Japanese – these are 100 times more. And we mean it – the grumpy old man, the princess, the small boy who is particularly passionate about something, the hero ready to protect others – all of them and whatever other characters you can think of has a specific language – vocabulary, nuances in the expressions, tone of voice, the way sentences are formed and so many others, that we can hardly mention them all.

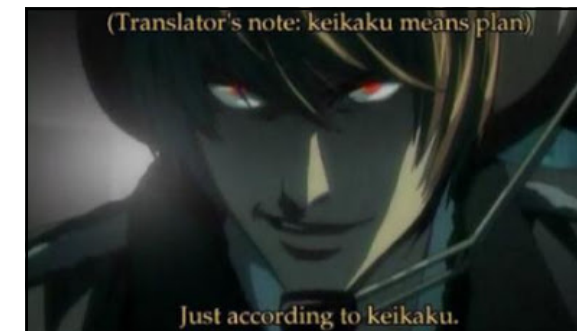
Cultural Differences

Last but not least there are the differences between the cultures from the East and the West. This refers to the small things incorporated in the speech and lifestyle that are bearing messages. For example “rice balls” was translated as “doughnuts” in Pokemon for the better understanding of the message it brings. The same applies to “ramen” transmitted as “pizza” and so many others. These are only a few examples of localization for anime which is a necessary action when it comes to getting the translation right.

In conclusion

While translating literally would produce a decent and accurate result in most languages, the literal translation of

Japanese to English is a no-go zone. It takes a lot of knowledge and efforts in both – the target and source language and cultures in order to do a good quality translation, subtitling or dubbing of an anime. There are so many variations of one and the same sentence depending on the translator’s skills and knowledge. Various people can provide various translations of one and the same thing and they may all be valid and correct. The challenge comes when you have to assemble a team to do a translation of a **Japanese** anime show and they all have to be on the same page. Believe us, we have been there.





Kawaii

Straight out of Japan, there is no way you are gonna miss this one because it is simply said “Kawaii”!

It is said that the word originated from long ago during the Golden Age of Japan. The term is presumably derived from the word “kaohayushi” (かほはゆし), which was then used to describe instances such as somebody’s face being flushed with embarrassment.

Later, “kaohayushi” evolved to “kawayushi” (かわゆし), describing people or objects that are small, vulnerable pitiable or lovable. With society changing, the final form of the term now describes tiny, harmless and adorable people or objects.

Ikigai – the Japanese “Reason for Being”

Every person has their own pace of life and each of us decides for themselves just how much work is enough work. There are some that prefer leisure to hard work, and there are others who prefer the opposite, but this article is for those of you who have always been struggling with finding the perfect work-life balance.

Ikigai (生き甲斐) is a Japanese concept of finding joy and satisfaction in everything you do and everything that surrounds you. The literal translation of “ikigai” is “a reason for being”. Some say it is very similar to the Danish “hygge” or the Swedish “lagom”, and while there might be something in common between those terms, the Japanese ikigai is a whole wide concept and not simply a term describing a moment or a feeling.

The concept behind ikigai is to find the balance between your passion, your mission, your profession and your calling by in-

roducing small but important changes to your daily life. Ikigai, however, shouldn’t be pursued as an aim. It should rather be viewed as a place in the distance, which you may reach by altering the way you do things. Here are some of the most important principles of ikigai and finding the perfect work-life balance.

1. Begin with small changes

What this means is to make small changes in your life that will gradually make it better. You can start with getting up earlier in the morning, sparing an hour a day for physical activity or an interesting hobby, preparing and consuming more healthy food, etc.





2. Free yourself

To better understand this principle, you can imagine children. A child is free from society's expectations, it does not need to chase a profession or a social status, and because of this, everything a child does is pure and untainted. Likewise, you should free yourself from the fear of what people might say and just keep doing what you love, regardless.

3. Find harmony and stability

Ikigai in Japanese culture is directly related to living in harmony with your environment, the people around you and society as a whole, without which there can be no stability. In other words, personal desires can be fulfilled by understanding and accepting the state of society and environment you live in.

4. Enjoy the little things in life

In Japan people usually have a cup of green tea with something sweet for breakfast. The idea is that they start their day with their favorite things. You can adopt this habit as well – reward yourself for waking up with something that brings you happiness for happiness can be found everywhere around us. It can be a yummy breakfast, a sunny day, a

compliment for a job well-done or just spending time with your loved ones – whatever it is, make sure to bear it in mind and be conscious of it.

5. Live in the moment

This means to be devoted to what you're doing every single minute. You can find just as much joy in your job as in sunbathing on the beach if you simply learn how to enjoy it. Even if your workplace isn't the perfect one, try to be conscious about how the things you do there are helpful in many ways. Find the balance between doing what you love and doing what you're good at and you will easily begin to live in the moment (even at work)!

A final word

It is important to understand that there is no universal or optimal path to ikigai. Everybody must forge their own way, deciding just how much change their life needs. The formula of the ideal work-life balance includes the right amounts of doing what we love, doing what we are good at, and doing what we can help the world with. Why not choose today and start with the simple **changes**?



Geta

Geta (下駄) is traditional Japanese footwear, which you can even see today people wearing on the streets in Japan. This footwear is made of one solid piece of wood usually carved into the traditional shape — one flat piece forming the sole and two wooden blocks (teeth) underneath. A V-shaped thong usually made of fabric finishes the design. Sometimes metal can be attached to the bottom that touches the ground to improve durability.

Do they look familiar?

- Geta are inspiration for a lot of modern footwear and some of the old styles of geta look like contemporary accessories straight out of the catwalk.
- Geta sandals are worn with traditional Japanese kimono or a yukata and a pair of white socks called tabi.
- They have a very distinctive clicking noise when worn, so they are easy to recognize.

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