

# いま、日本語がブーム!

## The Japanese Language Boom

Renewed appreciation for the beauty and pleasure of the language

▶▶▶ <http://www.tjf.or.jp/takarabako/>



Four pages of *Takarabako* will be devoted to introducing and providing resources and information, mainly about the lives and culture of Japanese young people. Three pages will present ideas and teaching plans for using these materials in the classroom. In this issue, we take up topics on the Japanese language that are attracting attention in Japan today.

## 声に出して読みたい日本語

*Koe ni dashite yomitai Nihongo* and the television program, "Nihongo de asobo": A huge hit among adults and children.

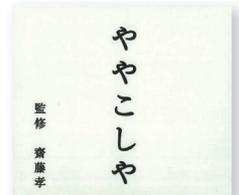
*Koe ni dashite yomitai Nihongo* [Japanese One Wants to Read Out Loud], a selection of famous quotes and texts from *kabuki*, *rokkyoku* ballads, poetry, passages of classical literature, and *rakugo* comic stories, as well as tongue twisters and other texts, for the purpose of recitation has sold over 1.5 million copies and became a best seller in 2002. This book went far to reawaken appreciation among Japanese of the beauty and pleasures of their language.

Author Saito Takashi, professor of literature at Meiji University, is a specialist in the fields of education, studies of the body, and communication. He explains that the recitation and reading aloud of phrases that have been developed and nurtured throughout history provides the physical body with a vitality that leads to emotional strength, and argues that educators should focus more of their efforts on the reading and recitation of texts that nourish both mind and body.

Professor Saito is a consultant to "Nihongo de asobo" [Let's Have Fun with Japanese], a television show geared towards children in the lower grades of elementary school, which made the *rakugo* story "Jugemu" and the *kyogen* play "Machigai no kyogen" hugely popular throughout the country among children. Many children memorized well-known lines from these stories.



*Koe ni dashite yomitai Nihongo* (Soshisha, 2001)



"NHK 'Nihongo de asobo' Yayakoshiya version & Jugemu version (Warner Music Japan, 2004)." CDs that include recitation of texts featured on the television show. Samples can be heard at <http://www.wmg.jp/nihongo/>

## Let's read out loud!

じゅげむ  
**寿限無**  
"Jugemu"

じゅげむじゅげむごころ  
寿限無寿限無、五劫のすりきれ、  
かいじやりすいぎよ すいぎょうまつ うんらいまつ ふうらいまつ  
海砂利水魚の水行末、雲来末、風来末、  
くねす  
食う寝るところに住むところ、  
やぶらこうじのぶらこうじ、  
パイポパイポ、パイポのシューリンガン、  
シューリンガンのグーリンダイ、  
グーリンダイのポンポコピーのポンポコナの  
ちようぎゆうめい ちようすけ  
長久命の長助

はやくちことば  
**早口言葉**  
Tongue twisters

かえる み  
蛙びよびよ三びよびよこ  
あ  
合わせてびよびよこ六びよびよこ  
Frogs jump, jump. Three jump, jump  
They all jump, jump. Six jump, jump.

となり きやく かきく きやく  
隣の客はよく柿食う客だ  
The guest next door is a persimmon gobbler guest.

あかまきかみあかまきかみ きまきかみ  
赤巻紙青巻紙黄巻紙  
Red rolls of paper, blue rolls of paper, yellow rolls of paper

なまむぎなまごめなまたまご  
生麦生米生卵  
Raw wheat, raw rice, raw egg

つ た ことば  
**付け足し言葉**  
"Piled-on" words

おと がってんしょうち の すけ  
おっと合点承知之助  
Yep, I understand. I'm Mr. Understand.

おどろ もも きさんしょう き  
驚き桃の木山椒の木  
Surprise, peach tree, pepper tree.

なに よう このかとおか  
何か用か九日十日  
What do you want, eh? nine, ten days.

うそ つきじ ごもんぜき  
嘘を築地の御門跡  
You're lying, a big Tsukiji temple lie.

From the *rakugo*, "Jugemu." The title means what the *kanji* represent: *ju* or *kotobuki* (good fortune) is everlasting. The story tells about parents who want to give their newborn child a name with auspicious meaning. After much debate, they ended up giving him this long and involved name.

"Piled-on" words [Rhythmic words]: *Tsuketashi kotoba* are words that have been added to original phrases for their rhythmic compatibility or punning effect. The words have a momentum that makes them fun to say out loud.

まちがいの<sup>きょうげん</sup>狂言  
"Machigai no kyogen"

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
So very confusing, confusing,

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
Oh, so confusing, confusing,

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
Very, very confusing.

わたしがそなたで、そなたがわたし、  
I'm you, and you are me.

そも、わたしとは、なんぢやいな。  
What in the world am I?

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
Oh, so confusing, confusing,

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
Very, very confusing.

おもてがござれば、うらがござる。  
There is front. There is back.

かげがござれば、ひかりがござる。  
There is shadow. There is light.

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
It's all very confusing, confusing,

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
So very, very confusing.

ひとりでふたり、ふたりでひとり。  
One person is two. Two persons are one.

うそがまことで、まことがうそか。  
Lie becomes truth. Truth becomes lie.

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
It's all very confusing, confusing,

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
So very, very confusing

ややこしや、ややこしや。  
Very, very confusing.

Taken from "Machigai no kyogen" [The Kyogen of Errors] based on Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors." The author is Takahashi Yasunari, a renowned Japanese scholar of Shakespeare. It was performed in Tokyo and London in 2001, directed by *kyogen* performer Nomura Mansai.

出典:『声に出して読みたい日本語』齋藤孝[著]草思社 2001年、『まちがいの狂言』高橋康也[著]白水社 2003年

らくご  
落語

*Rakugo*: A traditional Japanese art both old and new

*Rakugo* is a traditional performing art in which one performer, seated on stage, impersonates numerous parts to tell comical stories, tales of human foibles, and ghost stories using words and gestures and sometimes a folding fan or *tenugui* towel that substitutes for various items such as chopsticks or a *kiseru* pipe. *Rakugo* stories consist mostly of the characters' dialogue. The art form is said to have originated in the mid-seventeenth century, and matured in the late Edo to Meiji periods. In Tokyo, *rakugo* performances are held almost every day in a Japanese vaudeville theater (*yose*) in Asakusa, Ikebukuro, Ueno, and Shinjuku. Occasional performances are also held in various theaters throughout Japan.

Tatekawa Shinosuke, one of the most popular *rakugo* performers today, hosts an NHK information program and radio shows while holding successful *rakugo* performances every year at PARCO Theater in Shibuya, Tokyo, capturing the hearts of a wide range of fans.

The *rakugo* presented by professional performers are of two major types. One is *koten rakugo* (traditional *rakugo*), stories passed down for generations whose main characters are Edo period townspeople. The other is *shinsaku rakugo* (new *rakugo*), which are created by contemporary *rakugo* storytellers and take place in the present day. Shinosuke, however, is not much concerned about sticking to these categories, calling all of his *rakugo* "Shinosuke *rakugo*." He adds his own interpretations to the stories, extracting and performing universal themes from comedies or heartwarming talks. The themes vary, covering everything from philosophy of life, education, communication, the nature of Japanese, to modern civilization. This is the source of his great appeal with audiences.

For example, in the famous *koten rakugo* "Shinigami" [The God of Death] based on a Grimm's fairy tale, "The Grim Reaper," there appears a candle said to represent a person's lifespan. In his performance, Shinosuke replaces "lifespan," a concept somewhat difficult to grasp, with "luck." Hence, he rewrites the original story into something more easily understood and convincingly explains that "human beings die when they use up the luck with which they were born into this world."

In his *shinsaku rakugo*, he satirizes contemporary society's dependence on information technology through a story called "Odoru fakkusu" [The Fax Fiasco], about the turmoil created by a mistakenly faxed note. There is also "Midori no madoguchi" [The Green Counter; the name of JR ticket reservation offices], about the odd things that people do and that happen to them mostly unnoticed through a story of an idiosyncratic passenger in a train station.



Suehiro-tei, yose in Shinjuku, Tokyo



Tatekawa Shinosuke

[写真]橋蓮二 [協力]オフィスはたるいか

# 俳句

Haiku

Haiku are Japanese verses arranged in three lines of 5, 7, 5 syllables. The poems must include *kigo*, or words that express the season.

Itoen, a drinks manufacturer, holds the "Oh-i-ocha shin haiku taisho" [Oh-i-ocha New Haiku Grand Prize Competition]. In 2004, 1,401,095 entries were submitted to its 15th contest, and 2,500 prizewinning haiku are selected that are then used on Oh-i-ocha packaging. The Itoen contest accepts "shin haiku (new haiku)," allowing haiku submissions without *kigo* or with a few too many syllables than are generally permitted, making it easier for a wide audience to participate.



**Itoen shin haiku website** ⇨ <http://www.itoen.co.jp/new-haiku/>

たいよう ひかり さかあが  
太陽の 光めがけて 逆上り  
Doing a back-flip over the bar, aiming for the sun  
大阪府 古家葉月 16歳

まだ知らない ころろがまざる しろ いき  
White breaths, is it the mist of innocence?  
北海道 中川治香 17歳

てんたか おも かつ な  
天高し 思わず靴を 投げてみる  
The heavens are high; on impulse I hurl a shoe up into the blue.  
愛知県 平岩麻美 15歳

カマキリは カンフー上手で ポーズ決め  
The praying mantis is a kung fu king, posing like an expert.  
福島県 大竹淳平 11歳

伊藤園「お〜いお茶 新俳句大賞」第15回入選作品より

# 短歌

Tanka

Tanka are five-line poems composed of 31 syllables arranged in 5, 7, 5, 7, 7 syllables. Collections of 100 poems by 100 poets are called *hyakunin isshu* (100 poets, one poem each), of which the *Ogura hyakunin isshu*, said to be compiled by Fujiwara no Sadaie (1162-1241), is the most famous. Since the Edo period, it has been played as a card game that is a popular part of New Year celebrations.

Toyo University holds the *Gendai gakusei hyakunin isshu* [Modern Students *Hyakunin Isshu*] contest every year, inviting tanka submissions on the subject of modern students' perspectives and lifestyles. In its eighteenth year, the contest recorded a total of 63,330 submissions in 2004.

**Toyo University Gendai gakusei hyakunin isshu website**

⇨ [http://www.toyo.ac.jp/event/issyu/2004\\_100nin.htm](http://www.toyo.ac.jp/event/issyu/2004_100nin.htm)

なや た ど ある なや  
悩んでも 立ち止まったりは もうしない ゆっくり ゆっくり 歩いて悩む  
I don't know what to do, but I won't stand still any more. Slowly, slowly, I'll keep moving while I figure out what to do.  
長崎県 山下朋也 17歳

あきかぜ きみ わたし かえ て て りゆう  
秋風が 君と私の 帰りみち 手と手をつなぐ 理由をくれた  
The autumn wind gave us an excuse to hold hands on our way home.  
香川県 日比さくら 18歳

こうそう わかい ちず ぶんかつ あか そ せかいしねんびょう  
抗争と 和解が地図を 分割し 赤ペンで染まる 世界史年表  
Strife and peace divide the map. The time lines of world history are stained with red pen marks.  
岡山県 藤澤恭行 16歳

東洋大学「現代学生百人一首」第18回入選作品より

# 川柳

Senryu

Senryu are short poems that became popular around the middle of the Edo period. There are no regulations on *kigo* or *kireji* (exclamatory words), and are composed in colloquial language. They capture the amusing and ironic in human foibles, the times, and popular culture.

The insurance company, Dai-ichi Seimei, runs the "Sarariman senryu konkuru" [Salaryman Senryu Contest] for which 100 poems are selected each year. These senryu must be written about things that occur in the home or workplace, and many of the poems are poignant reflections of the times. There were 21,878 submissions in 2004, the eighteenth year of the contest.

**Dai-ichi Seimei Sarariman senryu konkuru website**

⇨ <http://www.dai-ichi-life.co.jp/>

つま こえ むかし いまどうき  
妻の 声 昔ときめき 今動悸  
My wife's voice calls. Once it was charming; now it is dreadful.  
紙風船 (第17回)  
Kamifusen [Paper Balloon]

まえむ ちゆうしやじょう ほげ  
『前向きで』 駐車場にも 励まされ  
"Face forward." We are admonished even in the parking lot.  
プラス思考 (第17回)  
Purasu shiko [Positive Thinker]

いれぼみ め まご  
入歯見て 目もはずしてと せがむ孫  
Seeing my false teeth on the table, my grandson begs me to take out my eyeballs, too!  
ハッスル爺さん (第11回)  
Hassuru Jisan [Hustling Grandpa]

第一生命「サラリーマン川柳コンクール」入選作品より

The sixth edition—the newest—of the best-selling Japanese dictionary in Japan, *Shin meikai kokugo jiten*, went on sale in November 2004, and has been attracting widespread attention since. The first edition went on the market in 1972, and a total of 20 million copies have been sold so far. This comes out to an average of 300,000 copies per year. This is a startling figure in a market where a book of general content is considered a best-seller when it sells 100,000 copies.

The key to *Shin meikai kokugo jiten*'s appeal is that it is enjoyable to read. In addition to general meanings and interpretations, it includes commentary based on the experiences and opinions of its authors and editors. These commentaries are at times philosophical and humorous.

*Shin meikai kokugo jiten*,  
6th edition  
(Sanseido, 2004)



Let's compare entries!

▼common meanings or connotations/ ▼meanings or interpretations given in the *Shin meikai kokugo jiten*

よ なか  
世の中 [yomonaka]

▼the realm of human interaction. The world (cf. *seken*). Society.

▼The environment of adult society in which people must make their way through life according to the circumstances (fate) in which they find themselves. Generally, it has contradictions arising from complex human relations and changes occurring from political/economic activity. It can be said that there is an intermingling of aspects that can be tolerated and aspects that arouse anger and disappointment.

読書 [どくしょ dokusho]

▼Reading.

▼Reading, unlike that for research or entrance-exam studies, that momentarily removes one from immediate realities, allowing one's mind to roam in unknown worlds, and helping one to develop a mature understanding of life. (Lolling in bed reading comic books and leafing through magazines on the train are not considered *dokusho* in the true sense of the term.)

幸福 [こうふく kofuku]

▼A state of contentment in which there is no dissatisfaction. Happiness.

▼An (emotional) state in which one feels peace of mind and sense of spiritual fulfillment towards one's circumstances now (up to the present) and wishes for no more but that the state continue.

恋愛 [れんあい ren'ai]

▼Love between a man and a woman, or the feeling one feels in such a situation.

▼To feel an affection for an individual of the opposite sex so intense that one would not regret sacrificing anything for that person; the person is constantly on one's mind, prompting the wish to always be together and share a private world; one feels happy when that desire is satisfied and anxious or depressed should the slighted doubt about that person's affections arise.

出典:『新明解国語辞典(第6版)』三省堂 2004年  
\*Entries translated by the Japan Forum.

も じ  
ギャル文字

Gyaru moji: Word play in the cell-phone age

Picture icons and *kao moji* (facial expressions created from a combination of symbols on a keyboard) have become common through the use of cell phones and e-mail. In recent years, however, code-like characters that resemble handwritten characters have begun to attract attention on television, magazines, and the Internet.

Examples of *gyaru moji*

おれㄥヨウ	ㄹωにちれㄥ	け//ω(≠?)	走召±レ、ㄹ→
⇓	⇓	⇓	⇓
おはよう [Good morning.]	こんにちは [Hello.]	げんき? [How are you?]	超さいこー [Awesome!]

These characters are called *gyaru moji* (gal characters) or *heta moji* (poorly written characters), using combinations of symbols and the alphabet to make them look like *hiragana* or *katakana*. They are said to have been created by junior and senior high school girls through cell phone e-mail exchanges starting around 2003, but it appears that these characters are not commonly used; rather, they are enjoyed as a type of word play.

There are cell phone services that convert messages into *gyaru moji* before reaching the recipient, and some websites provide *gyaru moji* translation functions.



\*Please refer to "Japanese Culture Now" published in *The Japan Forum Newsletter* for information about cell phones.  
[http://www.tjf.or.jp/newsletter/pdf\\_en/Nl21\\_JCN.pdf](http://www.tjf.or.jp/newsletter/pdf_en/Nl21_JCN.pdf)  
<http://www.tjf.or.jp/eng/ge/ge16keitai.htm>