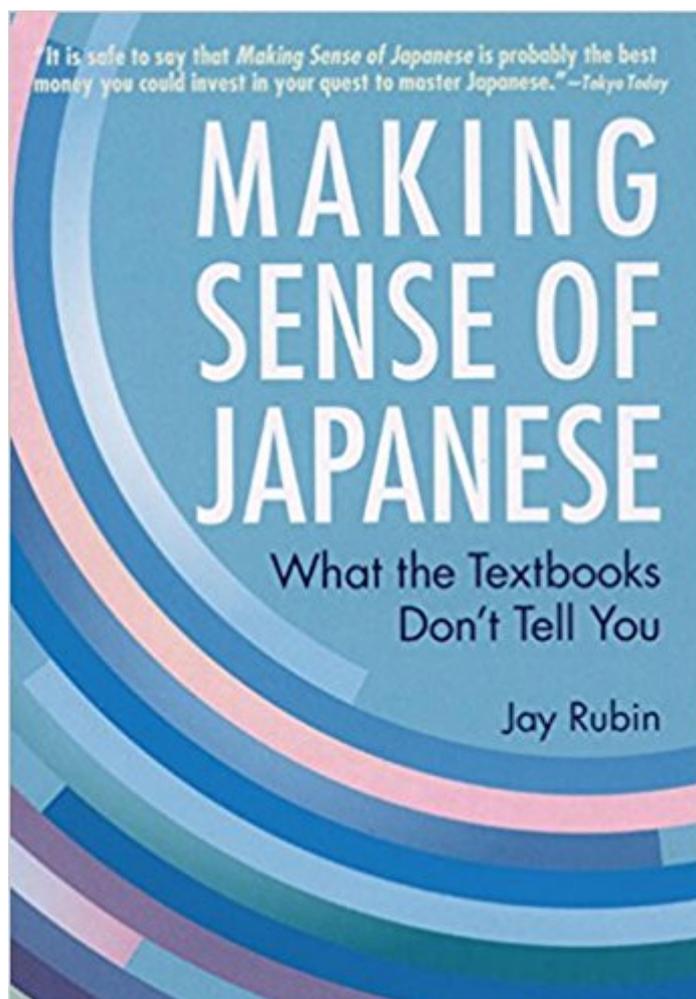


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# Making Sense Of Japanese: What The Textbooks Don't Tell You



## Synopsis

Making Sense of Japanese is the fruit of one foolhardy American's thirty-year struggle to learn and teach the Language of the Infinite. Previously known as *Gone Fishin'*, this book has brought Jay Rubin more feedback than any of his literary translations or scholarly tomes, "even if," he says, "you discount the hate mail from spin-casters and the stray gill-netter." To convey his conviction that "the Japanese language is not vague," Rubin has dared to explain how some of the most challenging Japanese grammatical forms work in terms of everyday English. Reached recently at a recuperative center in the hills north of Kyoto, Rubin declared, "I'm still pretty sure that Japanese is not vague. Or at least, it's not as vague as it used to be. Probably." The notorious "subjectless sentence" of Japanese comes under close scrutiny in Part One. A sentence can't be a sentence without a subject, so even in cases where the subject seems to be lost or hiding, the author provides the tools to help you find it. Some attention is paid as well to the rest of the sentence, known technically to grammarians as "the rest of the sentence." Part Two tackles a number of expressions that have baffled students of Japanese over the decades, and concludes with Rubin's patented technique of analyzing upside-down Japanese sentences right-side up, which, he claims, is "far more restful" than the traditional way, inside-out. "The scholar," according to the great Japanese novelist Soseki Natsume, is "one who specializes in making the comprehensible incomprehensible." Despite his best scholarly efforts, Rubin seems to have done just the opposite. Previously published in the Power Japanese series under the same title and originally as *Gone Fishin'* in the same series.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"It is safe to say that Making Sense of Japanese is probably the best money you could invest in your quest to master Japanese."  
—Tokyo Today  
Brief, wittily written essays that gamely attempt to explain some of the more frustrating hurdles [of Japanese].... They can be read and enjoyed by students at any level.  
—Asahi Evening News

JAY RUBIN is a professor of Japanese literature at Harvard University, where he has employed the pedagogical techniques contained in Making Sense of Japanese "as infrequently as possible." He has authored Injurious to Public Morals: Writers and the Meiji State and Haruki Murakami and the Music of Words, edited Modern Japanese Writers, and translated Soseki Natsume's Sanshiro and The Miner and Haruki Murakami's The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle, Norwegian Wood, and After the Quake (Knopf and Harvill, 2002).

I started studying Japanese a decade ago. I never really put a lot of time into studying the language, and that made it very difficult to grasp certain concepts. This book makes those concepts much clearer (though I'm still confused about the positive use of hodo). I would say it's helpful no matter what your level is. Obviously certain examples will not be understood early on, but it's a very nice reference to have once you do get to the necessary level. This is by far my best read for any language book.

Cleverly written, and makes a number of things I had puzzled about a lot clearer (such as the habit of plunking "ndesu" at the end of everything). I found it extremely helpful, but I think it would probably be comprehensible (hence helpful) only if the reader has already invested some considerable time in studying Japanese. Give it a try; it takes on some of the eternally knotty issues such as the vanishing subject, the different verbs for "give", and several others we've all stumbled over.

Clarifies a lot of things (though not all) in a very nice writing style. The way Jay writes makes it seem like he is sitting across the tatami from you while you both take tea. Delightful reading, and easy to understand. It's a thin book, though, so obviously there are many things about the Japanese language that are not mentioned here (example: counting!). However, the ones that are will probably never trouble you again!

I enjoyed this book. It is important to emphasize that this is not a textbook or a book for basic instruction. Instead it is a pleasant book that expands on some topics you have already learned by explaining them in a different way. If you approach it from that way it is a good read. I am an intermediate student. I had more or less learned the bulk of the points discussed in the book but reading his explanation expanded my understanding of even concepts that I thought I was pretty squared away on. Another selling point for me is that this book allowed me to "study" Japanese without feeling like it since it is light reading. I think that a beginning student would benefit from many of the portions of the book (the discussion on wa and ga for example) and then could read the book again a year later to pick on the rest. So, as long as you understand that this is simply a pleasant supplement to Japanese study you will probably enjoy this book.

So far I've been loving this book, some concepts are a little above my Japanese level (I'm sort of a JLPT N4), but I'm learning a lot and comprehending a little about the culture, which is very important to understand a language.

This is a book of nuances. All those little fiddly bits of Japanese that seem impossible to grasp, the mystery of wa and ga, the disappearing subject, Shiru or Wakaru...Jay Rubin has performed a kind of magic trick and made sense of the senseless. "Making Sense of Japanese: What the Textbooks Don't Tell You" is bridge, spanning the gap from Advanced Beginner to Intermediate, dealing with all the barriers at that level. Using humor and a clear insight into the language, Rubin explains the minor issues that, while seemingly tiny, are the difference between fluency and gibberish. The only drawback is that the book is perhaps a bit too small. Rubin's explanations are clear but brief, and could soon be forgotten. Most of the important bits require re-reading, and a serious student will probably pull "Making Sense of Japanese" off the shelf quite a few times when encountering something. Beefing the tiny tome up with some exercises and quizzes would help solidify Rubin's points, making it even more useful than it already is. As it stands, I would qualify this book as "essential" to Japanese learners at a certain level. Raw beginners probably won't get much out of it, but to Advanced Beginners/Intermediate learners, it will be exactly what they need.

A wonderful book for those who have some study of Japanese under their belt. The discussion of 'wa' vs. 'ga' vs. no (apparent) subject is alone worth the price of the book. This is NOT a text book - it is a commentary on some of those aspects of the language which are certain to give the student lots of trouble. The writing is delightful, at time hilarious.

Full of a lot of clear explanations that are hard to find elsewhere. Good insight on translating from one of the best J->E translators out there.

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