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なかみ INSIDE



FLOWER POWER!

Quick—can you name the flower you shouldn't give to Japanese? Yukiko Ishikawa explains. [Page 2](#)



THE TOKYO YOU NEVER KNEW

You think Tokyo is nothing but skyscrapers? Think again! Mitsuyo Kato, a Tokyo native, shows us another side of the city. [Page 4](#)



IS JAPANESE VAGUE?

Everyone says "the Japanese are vague and indirect." No way, says Steve Cooper. We just need to listen more carefully. [Page 7](#)



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嬉しいけれど...

たんじょうび はは ひ せ わ れい なに いわ はな
お誕生日に、母の日に、お世話になったお礼に、何かのお祝いに、お花をあげたりも
らったりすることは多いですね。お花をもらって嬉しくない人はあまりいないと思
います。

みな なまえ にほんご し いちばんゆうめい
皆さんは花の名前を日本語でいくつ知っていますか？一番有名なのは「サクラ」で
すね。また、花にはそれぞれ花言葉があります。赤いバラは「情熱」、ユリは「純潔」、
オリーブは「平和」、どうしてこんな花言葉が付けられたのかを 考 えてみるのも面白
いと思います。

しゃしん
この写真の花の名前を
わかし
知っていますか。私が
いぜんがくせい
以前学生からもらったお
花です。とても嬉しかった
のですが、実は少し複雑
きもち
な気持ちでした。

白と黄色の花の名前は
きく こうき
「菊」。花言葉は「高貴」で
わる い み
す。悪い意味ではありま

とく しろ にほんじん おく すす
せんね。でも、菊(特に白い菊)を日本人に贈るのはお勧めできないんですよ。なぜ
なら、白い菊は亡くなった人に捧げる花だからです。菊は 昔 から日本人に愛されて
いる花で、縁起の良い柄として着物に描かれたりもします。菊で形作る菊人形も
ゆうめい ほか ほう よろこ
有名です。でも、やはりプレゼントには他の花の方が喜 ばれると思います。

す ばあい
ちなみに私が住んでいるロシアでは、亡くなった人に花を捧げる場合は、

にほん よんほん ごうすう かなら きすう はなたば
2本や4本など偶数にするので、プレゼントには 必 ず奇数の花束を贈るそうです。

くに ぶんか しゅうかん
言葉だけではなくその国の文化や習慣を知ること、
わ あ き
もっとその国の人たちと分かり合えるような気がします。



ISHIKAWA Yukiko
Nihongo-Pro Teacher

Yukiko Ishikawa-sensei teaches private lessons at all levels except advanced, as well as JLPT N4 and Basic 1 group classes.

Yukiko-sensei (as we call her because of another teacher with the same last name) speaks Russian and English. In addition to teaching Japanese in Russia, she is experienced in instruction for speech-giving and singing in Japanese.

Yukiko-sensei is originally from [Kanagawa prefecture](#), located just southwest of Tokyo. Rich in Japanese history, Kanagawa is a must-see on any Japan itinerary.

Yukiko-sensei's teaching style is focused and practical, and she welcomes email from her students.



I'm glad, but ...

It's common to give and receive flowers on birthdays or Mother's Day, in thanks to people who have helped us in some way, or in celebration of something. I doubt there are many people who wouldn't be pleased to receive flowers.

Do you know some names of flowers in Japanese? The most well-known is the *sakura* (cherry blossom). There is a "language of flowers"—a word or concept associated with each flower. A red rose means "passion," a lily means "purity," and the olive blossom means "peace." It's interesting to think about why these particular concepts have been chosen for each flower.

How about the flowers shown in this picture—do you know their name? These are flowers I received from a student. I was very happy to get them, but actually had some mixed emotions.

The white and yellow flowers are called *kiku* (chrysanthemum). They are associated with "honor and nobility." This isn't a bad meaning. Nonetheless, I can't recommend giving *kiku* (particularly white *kiku*) to Japanese people. The reason is that white *kiku* are given to people who have passed away. From ancient times, *kiku* has been a flower beloved by Japanese and often appears patterned on kimonos as a sign of good luck. A "*kiku* doll" wearing clothes made from *kiku* is also famous. Still, for a gift, I think other flowers will be more welcomed.

By the way, here in Russia, when someone passes away, they always give an even number of flowers; therefore, when giving flowers as a gift, they always give an odd number of flowers.

I believe that understanding of a country's people comes not just from understanding their language, but from knowing their culture and customs as well.



私のふるさと 東京・葛飾

わたし う にほん しゅと とうきょう
私が生まれたのは日本の首都、東京です。

みなさんは東京というとどんなイメージを持っていますか。高いビルが立ち並び、
よる あか て ひと い か だいとかい そうぞう
夜でも明るくネオンサインに照らされていて、人がせわしなく行き交う大都会を想像
する人が多いのではないのでしょうか。

でも、それは東京の中心地のこと。同じ東京でも私が生まれ育った葛飾というところ
まったら あ しず たてもの
ろは全くそのようなイメージには当てはまりません。とても静かで高い建物があまり
ことば はな ばしよ
ない、大都会という言葉からはかけ離れた場所です。

とうきょうと ひがし い ち したまち おとこ ふる えいが
葛飾は東京都の東に位置する下町です。「男はつらいよ」という日本の古い映画
ぶたい ゆうめい でんとうこうぎょう さか いま しょくにん す
の舞台としても有名です。伝統工業が盛んで、今でも多くの職人さんが住んでいま
の や ぜんぜん やす
す。古い飲み屋も多く、全然おしゃれじゃないし、きれいでもないですが、安くて、ユニ
イ たの かよ
ークなマスターがいるところも多く、飲みに行くと楽しくて、通いたくなります。



KATO Mitsuyo

Nihongo-Pro Teacher

Kato-sensei teaches private lessons at all levels, as well as JLPT N3 and Basic 1 group classes.

As she writes here, Kato-sensei was born, raised, and still lives in [Katsushika, Tokyo](#), one of Tokyo's many and varied neighborhoods.

She teaches full time at a Japanese language school. Her hobbies include playing the *taiko* (Japanese drum) and carrying *mikoshi* (portable shrines) during area festivals. *Mikoshi-hakobi*, as it is called, is not an easy task, but Kato-sensei is undeterred: "It's non-stop fun!" she adds with a wide grin.

In addition to English, Kato-sensei also speaks some Spanish, which she put to good use during her foreign-exchange study in Argentina.



(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

昔^{むかし}ながらの商店街も多くあり、小さいお店が立ち並んでいます。私の実家も商店街の中にある花屋^{はなや}です。「東京^{とうきょう}の人は冷たい^{しょうてんがい}」とか「人間関係^{にんげんかんけい}に無関心^{むかんしん}で隣の人の名前^{なまえ}も知らない^し」などと言われますが、私の家^{いえ}は商売^{しょうばい}をしていることもあり、近所^{きんじょ}の人とは顔見知り^{かおみし}です。子供の頃^{こどもころ}は学校^{がっこう}の行き帰りに家族^{かえ}だけでなく、近所^{きんじょ}の人にも「行ってきます」「ただいま」と必ず挨拶^{あいさつ}をしていました。私の高校^{こうこう}や大学^{だいがく}の合格^{ごうかく}の時には「光世^{みつよ}ちゃん、おめでとう！よく頑張ったわね！」と、留学^{りゅうがく}をする前^{まえ}には「気^きをつけて行ってらっしゃい！」とせいちよう^{せいちよう}みまも成長^{みまも}を家族のように見守^{みまも}ってくれていました。

最近^{さいきん}は大型^{おおがた}の商業施設^{しょうぎょうしせつ}やスーパー^{きやく}ができて小さいお店のお客^{きやく}さんが減^へったり、お店の後^{あと}を継^つぐ人がいなくな^しったりと、お店を閉^しめてしまう人も多く、商店街は少し寂^{さび}しくなりました。それでもまだ温^{あたた}かい街^{まち}の雰^{ふん}囲^い気^きはそこかしこに残^{のこ}っています。

東京^きへ来^きたら、まず渋谷^{しぶや}や新宿^{しんじゅく}などのにぎやかな楽しい街^{あそ}で遊^{おも}ぶ人^{つか}が多いと思いますが、遊び疲^{つか}れたら、ぜひ葛飾^{にんじょう}へ来^きてください。下町^{やま}人情^{やま}のあふれる優しい街^{やさ}でのんびりできると思いますよ。



葛飾の商店街 (A shopping area in Katsushika)

My Hometown: Katsushika, Tokyo

I was born in Katsushika, Tokyo.

What comes to mind when you think of Tokyo? Tall buildings, bright neon lights day and night, people hurrying and scurrying—a big city is what most people picture.

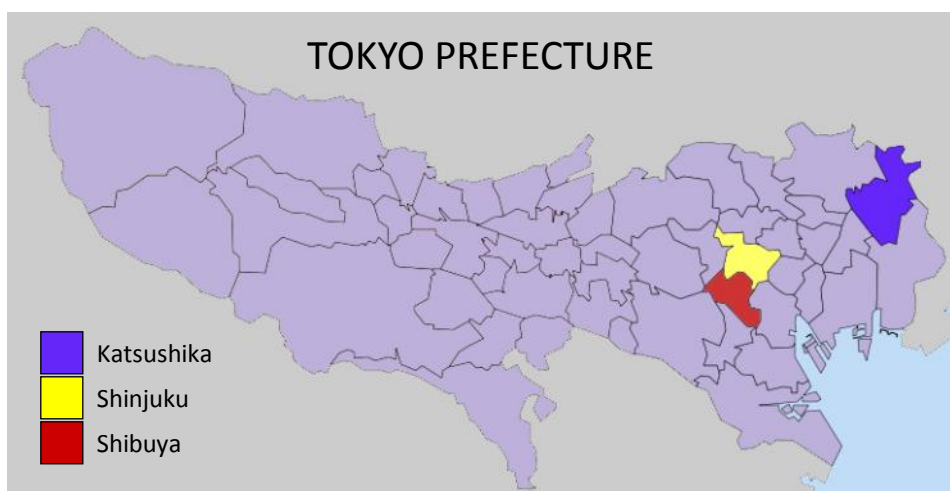
But that's just Tokyo's central area. Katsushika, where I was born and raised, is also a part of Tokyo, but doesn't fit that kind of image at all. It's a very quiet place with few tall buildings, far apart from a "big city."

Katsushika is a *shitamachi* (a traditional area of town) on the east side of Tokyo prefecture, famous for the setting of the old film "Otoko-wa tsurai yo" ("Men are so tiresome"). There are many traditional shops and factories, and many tradespeople live here. With many old pubs, it's neither trendy nor particularly pretty; however, with lots of inexpensive places to eat and drink, plus interesting and unique barkeeps and the like, it's a fun place to hang out.

Katsushika has many *shootengai* (shopping areas), where you'll find lots of small mom-and-pop shops. My family runs a flower store in one of these shopping areas. It is often said that Tokyoites are unfriendly or don't even know the name of their next door neighbor. However, with my family running a business, we know everyone in the neighborhood. When I was a kid and left for school in the morning or came home in the afternoon, I would call out to neighbors along the way, "Itte kimasu" (when going) or "Tadaima" (on my way home). *(Translator's note: When leaving home for school or errands, it is customary in Japan to say "Itte kimasu" to the people staying behind, who will reply, "Itte rasshai." Likewise, when returning home, Japanese say, "Tadaima", and those already home will reply, "O-kaeri" or "O-kaeri-nasai." Kato-sensei is emphasizing that, during her childhood, those greetings were exchanged not only among her family, but between her and her neighbors as well.)* When I did well or got a good grade in high school or college, neighbors would congratulate me with "Good job, Mitsuyo-chan!" Before I left on my foreign exchange, they said, "Take care and hurry back!" In this way, they watched over me much like my own family.

In recent years, as big stores, factories, and supermarkets have moved in, customers at the mom-and-pop shops have dwindled. Some shops with aging owners have no one in the next generation to take over the business, and many have had to close. With these changes, the *shootengai* have waned, but here and there you can still find the Katsushika with that warm, inviting atmosphere.

When visiting Tokyo, most people first choose Shibuya or Shinjuku to enjoy its lively entertainment. If you get tired of that, please come visit Katsushika. It has the easy-going, kindhearted soul of a *shitamachi* town, so kick back and relax.



VAGUE JAPANESE? NOT!

Japanese and non-Japanese alike, everyone says that the Japanese language is vague, indirect, imprecise.

I'm here to convince you they're wrong—or, at least, it's all in your head.

Certainly, when turning down an invitation or request, Japanese are loathe to say flatly, “No.” When disagreeing with someone’s opinion, they might express their own opinion in the form of a rhetorical question, such as, “それもそうですが、うまく対応できるでしょうか。” (literally, “That’s true, but can we handle it well?”, or, more directly, “I see your point, but I doubt we can handle it well.”)

It’s also true Japanese are reluctant to flaunt their own abilities, even if they have attained a high level of skill. In a social situation, it’s hard to imagine a Japanese —

even one with exceptional English speaking skills—responding to a question, “英語も話せますか？” (“Do you speak English, too?”) with something like, “はい、話せます” (“Yes, I do.”); your Japanese friend is more likely to say, “まあ、日常会話ぐらいはできますが。” (“Well, I can get by in everyday conversation, but..”)

Plus, as [Nagatomi-sensei pointed out last time](#), certain phrases in Japanese like “いいです” and “大丈夫です” can mean either “yes” or “no,” depending on the context.

Compared to many languages (including, notably, English), the Japanese language, as it is practiced by Japanese, relies on relatively more non-verbal communication. In other words, Japanese leave things unsaid or express their thoughts through non-verbal means, such as tone or body language. The people of Japan, with its long, rich history, share an enormous body of customs, ways of doing things, and ways of thinking. As a result, they can enter into conversations with more “shared expectations” of what will or won’t be said. (If you listen carefully, you’ll often hear Japanese finishing one another’s sentences.)

To a Japanese, another’s statement may be perfectly precise, but to an unwitting non-Japanese looking for a direct, verbal “yes” or “no”, the Japanese expression feels vague.

Therein lies the problem: Any vagueness we sense is because we are literally interpreting what our Japanese friends are saying and ignoring the non-verbal cues—wrongly assuming that the verbal element is the whole of their communication. To put it another way, the Japanese aren’t being vague—we just aren’t listening closely enough.



Steve Cooper
Nihongo-Pro Support

Steve helps out with the website. If you take lessons at Nihongo-Pro, you’re sure to meet Steve online at one time or another.

