

A Book with a 40-Syllable Title

By Jillian Yorke

How the Book Evolved

A book I have co-authored with my husband Hitoshi Morishita, with the very long title of *Moto Keizaisangyoushou Eibun Kouetsusha ga Kaita, Bijinesu Eigo ni Yoku Kiku Eigo no Hon* (translation: *A Book of English That Is Very Useful in Business and Was Written by a Former English Checker at METI*; 223 pages, soft cover, ¥2,376 including tax), was published by the Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (*Keizai Sangyou Chousakai*) on May 23, 2018.

During my more than a decade working as a “native English checker” in the Public Relations Office of the Minister’s Secretariat of Japan’s Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), I noticed that the same types of English mistakes kept recurring in the documents I was reviewing. So, in an effort to improve the overall English level there, I created a weekly online “one-point English lesson” to address these mistakes and other issues related to English usage, which I continued throughout my period of employment.

My position as *kouetsusha* was very broad-ranging, including proof-reading, rewriting, editing, telephone advice, coaching on giving speeches in English, general consultation and advice related to English, help with university applications, interpretation for top-ranking members of METI at the annual New Year parties (which were attended by numerous international diplomats and other VIPs), and translation for and interpretation at high-level conferences.

Taken together, the weekly online lessons amounted to a considerable body of work, and I often thought at the time that I would like to share this material with a larger audience, in particular, Japanese businesspeople. Several years later, with the release of this publication, my dream has come true.

Part One of the book is based on the above online lessons, expanded and adapted to be of use to Japanese learners of English in general, especially those in business. Topics covered include advice and suggestions on: what to say in various situations, telephone conversations, speech-making, English writing, business terminology, presentations and negotiations, and useful expressions when eating out and entertaining. I also discuss easily mistaken pairs of words (e.g., “massage” vs. “message”, “cooperation” vs. “corporation”, and “personal” vs. “personnel”), the vital difference between expressions such as “I am boring” and “I am bored”, non-sexist language, and punctuation, and address many examples of mistakes that Japanese people often make, such as the use of “Mr.” or “Ms.” with a person’s first name rather than their surname. Rather than simply listing these mistakes, we explain why they occur, from the cultural background of



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Japanese society. For example, in Japan it is generally unthinkable to address a person without adding “-san” or some other form of address to their name, making it very difficult for Japanese people to use a person’s first name in English, with no title or modifier attached, in a natural manner.

A Hug or a Handshake?

Should I hug him, shake his hand, or kiss him on the cheeks? How can I bridge the gap between the strong praise often given in the English language, and the modesty that usually marks the Japanese tongue, and if I am overly praised, how should I respond? When should I send a greeting card, apart from at Christmas? When should I use “Esquire”? If I invite a non-Japanese to my home for dinner, should I show her around my house? Does “smoke-free” mean that I am free to smoke? How do you write Japanese addresses in English?

These and many other cultural-linguistic issues that Japanese people often confront when they use English are addressed in Part Two, by my husband Hitoshi. They are based on not only his own extensive experiences and doubts, but also his observations of the common difficulties frequently encountered by many of his compatriots. There is also a *benrichou* (“convenient guide”) section, which covers issues such as how to write dates and times, measurements, addresses, abbreviations, and how to pronounce and write the English names of countries, cities, and famous people. The book can thus be used as a reference or partial dictionary.

The front and back cover illustrations were created specially by Australian artist Peter Stephens. Other unusual features of the book include our utilization of the *obi* (wraparound book band) to entice readers with a three-question English quiz, with the answers on the back of the *obi*, and the introduction of an “*Eigo SOS*” service, whereby we offer to answer any readers’ email enquiries about English.

Writing this book together, our first effort at co-authorship, was a long and complex process, but also mutually enlightening, as we made discoveries and found new approaches that neither of us would ever have achieved on our own. We hope it proves of use to many Japanese people in their never-ending quest for deeper English understanding and fluency. The book can be ordered at any bookshop or online through Amazon: <http://goo.gl/Cmp2Vo>. **JS**

Jillian Yorke is a translator, writer and editor who lived in Japan for many years and is now based in New Zealand, where she is the curator of the Japan Library: Pukapuka.