

CAREFREE ENGLISH

By Wallace W. Smith

For many years, English has been a common subject of study in Japan. Students begin to study it in the seventh grade, and most continue studying it through the second year of college, a total of eight years. Those especially interested in English often continue their work after the eight years and outside the classroom. By the time most students either reach the university or by the time they have graduated and are working in companies, they have an average reading ability (if reading ability means the power to puzzle through a page of prose with a dictionary), an aural comprehension ability that is adequate only for daily banalities, and an utterly deplorable ability to speak. Worse, they have lost interest in English. The subject has become something to take in college because it's required, or it's something to work at because it's needed in the business world. No one seems to study English because it's stimulating and enjoyable. No one thinks English is fun.

To counter this, the good English teacher in Japan has often used interesting topics to try to liven up the class. But he is faced with problems that would discourage even the most dedicated teacher—classes often numbering over 100 (one class I had started with 250 students), classes meet only once a week, extremes of ability are present (some students had lived in English speaking countries and were quite fluent; others could not even handle "How are you?"), classes were for 90 to 100 minutes, in some classes attendance was voluntary so that there was a shifting membership (often even half the class was different for each session). Worse, the materials used were often literary texts, such as Thomas Hardy's *Alicia's Diary* and Bullfinch's *Mythology*, which neither taught useful, modern English nor stimulated the students into thinking. Quite naturally, students from the high teens through the middle twenties lost interest in English.

To help solve this problem of a lack of interest, I decided to write my own materials, which turned into twenty-four

lessons about lively, modern topics which hopefully would appeal to young adult Japanese. Since most of my university classes and all of my company classes were for men, the subjects I chose had to reflect such a class membership. What are young Japanese men interested in?" They are interested in....girls (of course), so I created lessons about the Miss America contest, burlesque, dates, and getting married. They are interested in drinking, so I wrote a lesson about beer drinking and one about cocktails. They are interested in clothes, so I wrote a lesson about buying a suit and the basic points of style, color, and cut. There are also lessons about George Gershwin and jazz, the world famous Liar's Club (very useful for discussing humor), pickpockets, bowling, gestures, the origin of names, and getting a driver's license. Basically, young people in Japan want lively subjects which relate to their daily life.

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The lessons are all eminently successful with young adult males. Although there is nothing risqué about the lessons, some might better be omitted with high school students and all-girl classes. For example, the lessons about Las Vegas, beer drinking, cocktails, and burlesque will probably interest the teacher more than the students. But any teacher can make his own judicious choices.

The purpose of these articles is not to give information, although that may be a useful part of the material. More important, there is an attempt to stimulate students into understanding speech and into speaking

themselves. My theory is that if we can stimulate their interest enough, students will forget about "speaking English" as such, and just speak. The lessons are basically instant sociology, for which I make no apologies. The material presents aspects of American life, and the teaching technique is basically to compare what happens in Japan (from the students' own experiences and knowledge) with what happens in America (from the text and any other source of information the students may have). Keeping the material up to date is a serious problem, and I hope this year to bring the lessons more in line with modern America in a new edition.

Because the membership is shifting in many classes, I designed the lessons to be completely independent of each other. There is no progress or increase in the degree of difficulty between Lesson I and Lesson XXIV. The student merely gains wider experience with more material. Further, there is no testing in the lessons. As Dr. Albert Marchwardt of Princeton University so aptly said about classes of this kind, "The only adequate test is--do the students speak, and do they keep coming?"

Each lesson has three parts. Part I is a reading selection.

Part II is called "Important Words and Phrases" and covers five useful expressions with which Japanese often have difficulty. A short, non-technical explanation and examples are given, and a place is provided in the lessons for the student to write in his own example. The items for Part II are taken from Part I and are underlined in the reading. Part III is a list of twenty questions based on the reading, with the last question usually aimed at discussion, for which there is no approved answer.

The lessons were mimeographed first, and used in the actual classroom for three or four years. They have now been published commercially. It would be most valuable if a native speaker from each of the other English speaking countries of the world would do something of the same. Imagine a series of books: *Carefree English* for Canada, *Carefree English* for Australia, *Carefree English* for New Zealand...

A lesson from the book follows.

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WHAT'S YOUR NAME?

Lesson 8

Part I. Text

Long ago in England, only the nobility* used two names; common people had only given names.* In small towns and in the country, everyone knew who "Ralph" and "Robert" were. Then, in 1066 A. D., the Normans from France conquered England. The new king, William the Conqueror, decided that if everyone had a family name as well as a given name, it would be easier to find out who they were and where they lived, and to collect their taxes. So, he ordered everyone to choose a family name.

There were four main ways that the common people chose their family names. First, they used their father's name: if a boy's name was "Tom" and his father's name was "John," he called himself "Tom, son of John," or "Tom, John's son," which gradually became "Tom Johnson". Some other examples of this are Emerson, Jackson, Jefferson, Robinson, Stevenson, and Wilson.

Second, some people were easily identified by physical characteristics:

a man who was very short might be called "little John." If he was very strong, he might be called "Jack of the strong arms." If his skin was very dark, he might be called "black Jerry," or if he could run fast, "swift Tom." After a while, the order was reversed so that these men became "John Little," "Jack Armstrong," "Jerry Blackman," and "Tom Swift."

Third, some people chose the place they lived as their family name: if one Robert's house was on a hill, he might call himself "Robert Hill," and if another Robert lived between two rivers, he might call himself "Robert Rivers." Some other examples of this are Winston Churchill, Henry Ford, and Shirley Temple.

Fourth, and most common, people took the name of their job as a family name. A blacksmith* might call himself, "Walter, the smith," but people gradually stopped calling him that and just called him "Walter Smith." Some other common examples of this are Baker, Barber, Brewer, Carpenter, Cooke, Dyer, Farmer, Fisher, Gardener, Hunter, Miller, Porter, Potter, Shoemaker, Weaver, and Wheeler.

From this we see that a name was often taken from a thing and given to a person. Today, however, the process is sometimes reversed; a name is sometimes taken from a person and given to a thing. For instance, almost everyone knows how some meat between two pieces of bread got its name—from the Earl of Sandwich and his love of gambling. We can look up in any good English dictionary the origin of the following words:

- | | | |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. boycott | 5. guillotine | 9. ohm |
| 2. cardigan | 6. lynch | 10. sadism |
| 3. diesel | 7. masochism | 11. saxophone |
| 4. fahrenheit | 8. nicotine | 12. watt |

What are the most common family names in America? The Social Security Agency* of the U.S. Government says that the following names, listed in order, are the ten most common ones:

- | | | | |
|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Smith | 4. Williams | 7. Davis | 10. Moore |
| 2. Johnson | 5. Jones | 8. Anderson | |
| 3. Brown | 6. Miller | 9. Wilson | |

The Agency estimates that there are close to 1,350,000 Smiths in America, 976,000 Johnsons, and 896,000 Browns.

Why is the name "Smith" so common? First, the name does not refer

The nobility—貴族

Given name—(姓に対する) 名

Blacksmith—かじ屋

The Social Security Agency—社会保障局

to blacksmiths only, because there are also goldsmiths, silversmiths, locksmiths, tinsmiths, and gunsmiths. The original meaning refers to the action of striking metal as the smith made things. Second, in the early days on the American frontier, if a man wanted to change his name to Smith, he could do so easily. Third, many immigrants to America wanted to become like other people, so they changed their long, difficult foreign names into easier English ones. A German named Kallenschmidt would soon become simply Smith.

Some people have nicknames as well as given and family names. There are two kinds of nicknames; one is the short form of the name, such as "Bob" for "Robert," "Will" or "Bill" for "William," and "Steve" for "Stephen." The other kind is the true nickname, which has nothing to do with the given name but describes a person, such as "Slim," "Red," "Curly," "Lefty," "Speedy," or "Tiger." Many nicknames are good because they show a friendly feeling, but other nicknames are bad because they describe a person with cruel words.

Having a third, or middle, name is an American custom. When parents choose a middle name for their new baby, they sometimes honor a relative by giving the baby a middle name which is the relative's given name. Or the parents may use a famous person's name, thinking that the baby will grow up to be famous too. When Churchill died, many boys were named "John Winston Smith."

So, what's your name? Have you ever stopped to think about it? Ask yourself, "What's my name? What does it mean?"

Part II. Important Words and Phrases

1. as well as

"...everyone had a family name as well as a given name,..."

Note: AS WELL AS here means IN ADDITION TO or ALSO. Be careful when you use this; the following sentence is awkward because it has two meanings:

I speak English as well as Japanese.

This can mean either "I speak English in addition to Japanese," or "I speak English as well as I speak Japanese."

I'm going to Hong Kong	AS WELL AS	Manila on my vacation.
We study economics	" " "	English at this school.
He took his wife	" " "	his children to the zoo.
You'd better write	" " "	telephone.

as well as

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2. find out

“...it would be easier to find out who they were...”

Note: FIND OUT means TO LEARN A FACT, TO COME INTO KNOWLEDGE OF SOMETHING, TO DISCOVER INFORMATION.

Do not confuse FIND OUT and “find.”

How did you	FIND OUT	her birthday?
Can you	” ”	if they’re ready?
Please	” ”	when the next train leaves.
Did she	” ”	why her husband came home so late?

_____ find out _____

3. stop

“...people gradually stopped calling him that...”

Note: The word STOP can be followed by either an —ING form or by a TO+verb form. However, they do not mean the same thing. Notice the different meanings:

Stop thinking about it = Don’t think about it anymore.

Stop to think about it = Pause in order to think about it.

I can’t stop smoking = I must continue to smoke.

I can’t stop to smoke = I don’t have time to smoke.

Japan will soon	STOP	importing rice.
You should	”	complaining and do something.
The bus	STOPPED	to let off some passengers.
We	”	to rest for a few minutes.

_____ stop _____

_____ stop _____

4. close to

“...there are close to 1,350,000 Smiths in America...”

Note: CLOSE TO means NEARLY, ALMOST, ABOUT. It is used mainly in conversation and informal writing. It is usually followed by a number. Do not confuse this with CLOSE TO meaning “near” (in location).

They work	CLOSE TO	350 days a year.
We have	” ”	two thousand employees here.
Bus drivers make	” ”	¥50,000 a month.
He offered me	” ”	\$20 for my old TV set.

close to _____

5. ever

“Have you ever stopped to think about it?”

Note: Be careful when using the word EVER. Study the following examples.

QUESTION: Have you ever eaten *fugu*?

ANSWER: Wrong: Yes, I have ever.

Wrong: Yes, I have ever eaten it.

RIGHT: YES, I HAVE.

RIGHT: YES, I HAVE EATEN IT.

QUESTION: Have you ever been to Hong Kong?

ANSWER: RIGHT: NO, I HAVEN'T.

RIGHT: NO, I HAVEN'T EVER BEEN THERE.

RIGHT: NO, I'VE NEVER BEEN THERE.

Does your wife	EVER	get mad at you?
Have you	”	studied German?
She hasn't	”	been kissed.
Do you	”	play ping-pong?

ever

Write answers to the following questions:

1. Have you ever studied English? Yes, I _____.
2. Has she ever been abroad? No, she _____.
3. Has he ever gone skiing? Yes, he _____.
4. Do girls ever play football? No, they _____.
5. Do you ever feel lonely? Yes, I _____.

Part III. Questions

1. What does the title of this lesson mean?
2. What does the word "nobility" mean?
3. Who was William the Conqueror? What did he do?
4. What were the four ways that common people chose family names?
5. Originally, what was the name "Johnson"?
6. Originally, what was the meaning of the name "John Little"?
7. Originally, what was the meaning of the name "Robert Hill"?
8. Originally, what was the meaning of the name "Paul Barber"?
9. Who was Henry Ford? Winston Churchill? Shirley Temple?
10. Where does the word "sandwich" come from?
11. Give three examples of a person's name being given to a thing.
12. What are the three most common names in America?
13. How many Smiths, Johnsons, and Browns are there in America?
14. What is the meaning of the word "Smith"?
15. Why is the name "Smith" so common in America?
16. Why did American immigrants often change their names?
17. What are two kinds of nicknames?
18. What is the nickname for Robert? William? Stephen?
19. How do parents in America often choose a middle name for their children?
20. What is the meaning of your family name?

Editor's Note: **QUESTION**
Mr. Smith's book *Carefree English (Nonki Eigo)* may be ordered direct from the Tokyo

publishers The Eihosha Co. 1-1-18,
Misaki-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan
101-91 for \$3.00 postpaid