The Invisible Man's Family Reunion

If the invisible man married the invisible woman and several generations later their offspring decided to have a family reunion, this would not only pose a terrible problem for the photographer, but choosing partners for the three-legged race could waste the entire day.

This is not as irrelevant as it may seem. Izanagi and Izanami, the creators of the Japanese islands, were probably invisible before they descended to earth, where they acquired physical bodies. We can be fairly certain that it was this original invisibility that gave rise to the zero pronoun in Japanese.[1]

When they contain just one invisible subject or object, Japanese sentences are easier to keep track of, but things start to get tricky when directional verbs of giving and receiving enter the action, and by the time you get to causatives, passives, passive-causatives, and causatives combined with directional verbs, the number of zero pronouns running around the Land of the Reed Plains can be positively overwhelming.

The following is intended to help you work backwards from what you might find on the page, operating on the assumption that you have already come through the material in the other direction.

The best advice I can offer you is to go back to the textbook. It's all there and it's probably all clearly explained in terms of both direction and levels of respect. When you study it this time, though, don't worry so much about politeness as direction. The most important thing is to keep track of *who initiates the action*. Because the verbs themselves make it perfectly clear who is doing the giving or receiving or causing or doing of an action, there

is often no need to mention the parties involved overtly. Whether mentioned or not, they are *always there*.

GIVING IN TWO DIRECTIONS:
Yaru, Ageru, Sashiageru; Kudasaru, Kureru

First, the giving-away verbs: *yaru*, *ageru*, and *sashiageru*. I have listed them in ascending order of respect, but they all mean the same thing, "to give," and they all indicate giving that moves away from the speaker. Whether that giving is down and away, up and away, or up-up and away, the crucial thing is that the speaker describes the giving as being done by himself or someone he identifies with (if only momentarily).

X o ageta, then, is usually going to mean "I gave him X" or "I gave her X" or "I gave them X." If the giver is not the speaker but a third-person member of our group, it could mean "He gave him X." It will *never* mean "He gave me X" or "They gave us X," because that would have the direction wrong. The giving never moves toward us: we are the ones who initiate the action of the giving. *Ageru* is especially clear in this regard, because it literally means "to raise up"—to raise something up to someone who is above you in the hierarchical Japanese view of social relationships (though in fact this may not be true: the important thing is the direction away).

The direction remains fixed whether the verb of giving takes a noun object (*Sētā o ageta* / "I gave him a sweater") or is used as an auxiliary verb after another verb in its *-te* form (gerund) to indicate the "giving" of the "doing" of the verb to someone else, as in *Kaite ageta* / "I gave her [my doing the] writing," "I wrote it for her").

Notice it's *I* gave her *my* writing. "I" does both the writing and the giving. You'll see why I emphasize this in a minute.

Kudasaru and *kureru* also mean "to give," but the direction of the giving is always from the other person to the speaker or someone in his group, exactly the opposite direction of *ageru* etc., but still "giving" and not "receiving." The speaker describes the giving as being done by someone else—someone outside his group—toward him. *X o kureta*, then, is usually going to mean "He gave me X" or "She gave us X" etc. It will *never* mean "I gave him X," and perhaps more importantly, it will never mean "I got X from him." The other person is the subject, the doer, the giver, the one who initiates the action of giving.

Notice what you're doing when you politely say *kudasai* to someone. You are actually *ordering* that person to do the verb *kudasaru*—literally, to "lower" something down to you, the direction opposite to *ageru*'s "raising up." (*Kudasai* is an imperative evolved from the regular imperative, *kudasare*). Because the verb implies that you are grovelling down here in the dirt, waiting for the exalted other person to take the initiative to "lower" whatever it is you want down to your filthy place, you can get away with issuing such a command. It is ALWAYS the OTHER person who performs *kudasaru* and the less polite *kureru*, which places the other person at a less elevated altitude, thus preventing nosebleeds.

Be very careful here, though. When textbooks or teachers say that *kudasaru* and *kureru* mean "someone gives to me," this does not mean "someone—anyone—some floating, unspecified person gives to me," but either "the stated subject gives to me" or "the unstated but known subject gives to me." In English, known subjects are not called "someone," they are referred to by pronouns—he, she, you, they.

As with *ageru*, *kureru* can follow a *-te* form to indicate

the "giving" of the action described by the *-te* verb, but of course the action is initiated by the other person for "me." *Inu o aratte kureta* without a stated subject does not mean "Someone washed the dog for me," and it especially does not mean "The dog was washed for me." It means "He (or she, etc.) washed the dog for me." The direction of the giving is fixed, always *from* the other person. Thus, even though no subject may be stated within the Japanese sentence, we know from the meaning of the verb that it is somebody else, and we know from the particular context whether it is "he" or "she" or "you" or "they." "Someone" is always wrong as a translation for a known but unstated subject, though it may be okay as a paraphrase, as in "Someone pledges allegiance to the flag of the United States of America. . . ."

Be as vigilantly on guard against translating such a sentence into the passive voice as you would against committing murder. If you translate a Japanese sentence that means "He washed the dog for me" into an English sentence, "The dog was washed for me," you kill the invisible subject of the original Japanese sentence. "He" simply disappears in the translation process and fails to show up in English, even as an agent—"The dog was washed for me by him." What's worse, he is replaced as subject by a dirty dog, which in the original was an object. The action didn't just happen. We know who did it, and we are telling.

Now, here is something really important, so pay attention. Notice that, when we are trying to figure out who's doing what among a bunch of verbs consisting of a *-te* form followed by one of these directional auxiliaries, we start with the subject of the verb that comes *last*. In a *-te kureru* construction, *kureru* is the final verb, and in *-te ageru* constructions, *ageru* is the final verb. The final verb forms our base of operations.

When verbs of giving—in either direction—are used as auxiliaries after a *-te* form, the same person does both the *-te* verb and the auxiliary, whether I *ageru* to him or he *kureru*'s to me:

Tegami o kaite kureta. / "He wrote a letter for me (or to me)."
Tegami o kaite ageta. / "I wrote a letter for him (or to him)."

With verbs of receiving, however, there will be a split. Let's move on to the next section and see what that is all about.

RECEIVING IN ONE DIRECTION: *Morau, Itadaku*

In one sense, verbs of receiving are simpler than verbs of giving since receiving happens in only one direction. Whereas one set of verbs of giving means "I give to him" and the other set means "He gives to me," *morau* means *only* "I get from him" (as is true, of course, for its humbler equivalent, *itadaku*, to which all comments on *morau* apply). There is no form for "He gets from me." Third-person descriptions of receiving will always mean "He gets from him/her/them," *never* "He gets from me."

In spite of its single direction, however, when *morau* is used an auxiliary after *-te*, it causes students much more trouble than *ageru* because there is a crucial split between the doer of the *-te* verb and the doer of the auxiliary of receiving. In *-te morau* constructions, "I" is the subject of the final verb (the *morau*), while the one who does the *-te* verb is the other person. You can't receive from yourself the doing of a verb: *Inu o aratte moratta* / "I had him/her/them wash the dog for me."

As with verbs of giving, the final verb, the *morau*,

forms our base of operations in keeping track of which invisible actors are doing what. A literal translation of a *-te morau* construction will always begin with the subject of the final verb, "I" (or we, or Tarō, if he is one of us): "I get from the other person his doing of the *-te* verb."

Notice how the same situation can be described from two points of view: *Kaite kureta* and *Kaite moratta*. In *Kaite kureta*, the subject initiating the action is the other person: "He wrote it for me." In *Kaite moratta*, "I got him to write it for me," or "I had him write it for me." While *Inu o aratte kureta* is "He washed the dog for me," *Inu o aratte moratta* is "I got him to wash the dog for me."

Notice, too, how the identity of the doer of *morau* or *kureru* limits the possible uses and meanings of certain everyday expressions. You can, for example, ask another person if he/she will *kureru* for you, but since you are the one who *morau*'s, you can't ask him if he will *morau* from you, and since only you can take the initiative to *morau*, you can't ask him if you will *morau* from him. So these are possible: *Kaite kuremasu* (*kuremasen / kudasaimasu / kudasaimasen*) *ka* / "Will you please write it for me?" But you can't ask, *Kaite moraimasu* (*moraimasen / itadakimasu / itadakimasen*) *ka* / "Am I going to take the initiative to get you to write it for me?" which sounds a little like the soggy camper's lament, "Are we having fun yet?" You *can*, however, ask the other person, *Kaite moraemasu* (*itadakemasu*) *ka* / "*Can* I get you to write it for me?" = "Will it be possible for me to get you to write it for me?"

Again, since you are the one who does *morau*, you can add the subjective ending *-tai*, expressing desire, to it and make the subjective statement that you want to *morau* as in *Kaite moraitai* / "I'd like to receive from you your writing this for me" = "I'd like you to write this for me." But because the other person is the one who *kureru*'s, you

can't say something like *Kaite kuretai,* which looks as though it should translate "I'd like you to write it for me" but which is in fact impossible because—even if you are a clairvoyant—you can't say "I feel that you want to give me your writing of it."

The warning about murdering your subjects by translating *-te kureru* constructions into the passive applies with even greater urgency to *-te morau* constructions. You would only see *Inu o aratte kureta* in situations where the identity of the subject of the final verb *kureta* is quite clear. But since *you* are the subject of *Inu o aratte moratta,* there can be less emphasis on the doer of the washing, so you might use the expression in contexts where the washers are not clearly specified: "I had them wash the dog for me," which slides all-too-easily into a passive such as "I had the dog washed." Beware of English "equivalents" for such forms that resort to the old "someone," too: "I had the dog washed by someone." This is not what's going on in the Japanese. The actors involved are present as zero pronouns: "I had him/her/them wash the dog for me." This may sound terrifically picky, but I guarantee that if you resort too uncritically to the passive and "someone" at this stage, a *real* someone in the text or conversation is sure to get bumped off when you have to deal with more challenging material.[2]

There'll be more on this later under the discussion of the passive.

THE CAUSATIVE, WITH AND WITHOUT DIRECTIONALS

Besides *-te itadaku* and *-te morau,* another way one person can get another to do something is with the causative. Usually, this is not a very polite way to go about getting people to do things because if you talk about causing people to perform actions, as if they are entirely subject to your will, there can be a good bit of arrogance implied. A *-te morau* construction at least implies that, although you initiated the receiving of the action, the other person did it of his own free will for your benefit.

Since we had people signing autographs in the above paragraphs, let's keep the verb "to write" as our illustration. This time, it's *kakaseru,* in which I (or another known subject, but let's keep it "I" for now) either "make" or "let" somebody else write something. In English translation, we choose either "make" or "let" depending on whether the person wants to do the writing or not. The causative form in Japanese, however, makes no such fine distinctions regarding the will of the person we are "causing" to do something, though context and meaning will usually make it clear enough. For example, if the verb is *yasumu,* made causative as *yasumaseru,* it's not likely we are going to *force* someone to rest against his will. (More on this tantalizing concept later.) Japanese people often fumble with "letting" or "making" people do things in English, precisely because the distinction is missing in the Japanese verb form.

The form may not tell us anything about whether the other person wants to be "caused" or not, but it *does* tell us that there are two people involved, one causing the other to perform the verb to which the causative ending has been added. Your textbook no doubt tells you that the person who is caused to do the action will be indicated with a *ni* or *o,* but more often than not, there won't be any overt mention of anybody since it's all clear from the context and from the verb forms themselves. Even when the causative is itself put into the *-te* form before a *kureru* or *morau,* the zero pronoun is often all that's given. As far as I'm concerned, this is where the real fun begins.

So far, we've been talking about situations in which

Mr. A makes Mr. B write something: *kakaseru*. What's going on in *kakasete kureta*? Remember that in the *kaite kureru* type of construction, the other person does both the final verb of the clause or sentence, *kureru*, and the action in the *-te* verb form for us. In *kakasete kureta*, the other person does the *kureru* for us as always but he only does the *causing* for us in the *-te* verb form: he causes *someone else* to do the writing. Here, you can have either two or three people involved. "He gave me his causing to write" does not specify who does the writing, but the context will make this clear. If we've been talking about Sally, it could mean "He gave me his causing Sally to write" ("He did me a favor and got Sally to write it," "He kindly had Sally write it for me"), but if only the two of us are involved, it could mean "He gave me his causing me to write" ("He did me a favor and let me write it," "He kindly allowed me to write it"). In any case, "He," the subject of our final verb *kureru*, does not do the writing; he only does the causing, and he does it for me.

"He" doesn't do any writing in *kakasete moratta*, either. You should recall how, in *-te morau* constructions, "I" do the receiving but the other person does the verb in the *-te* form. In *kakasete moratta*, "I" do the *morau* as always but the other person only does the causing: he still causes *someone else* to do the writing. "I got from him his causing to write" can mean either "I got from him his causing me to write" ("I got him to let me write it") or (in actual usage, the far less likely) "I got from him his causing Sally to write" ("I got him to let Sally write it," "I got him to make Sally write it.") The Japanese want to know what's going on just as much as you do, so they will not use forms like this unless the verbal or real-world context makes it clear who is involved. As long as you realize how many players the verb forms require and you look for

them, you'll find them.

Here are a few examples of causatives with auxiliaries of giving *from* the speaker rather than *to* the speaker. Notice that they suggest situations of dominance or familiarity:

Itai me ni awasete yatta. / "I gave him the causing of him to meet up with a painful experience." = "I put him through a tough time." = "I kicked his butt."
Kakasete yatta. / "I (showed him who's boss and) made him write it."
Tomodachi ga komatte ita no de, watashi no jisho o tsukawasete ageta. / "My friend was in a pinch, so I let her use my dictionary."
Kakasete ageta. / "I let her write it."
Tarō-chan ni chotto yarasete agete kudasai. / "Please let little Tarō do it (try it, play baseball, etc.)."

Let's look at some texts, starting with an example that uses the causative by itself without any directional verbs. This is from an essay (*zuihitsu*) by Watanabe Jun'ichi, in which the writer describes his own angry outburst at a Sicilian innkeeper. Watanabe had asked the man to combine the room's two single beds into a double, but there had been no move to accommodate him. When Watanabe asked for the fifth time, he was told the "person in charge" (*kakari*) was at lunch and would do the job tomorrow—which was the day Watanabe would be checking out. At this, Watanabe blew up and yelled (among other things), *Sugu kakari o yonde kite yarasero.*[3]

Yarasero ends with a blunt imperative (*-ro*), making it a command to the listener, i.e., the innkeeper at the front desk. Here, Watanabe is ordering the innkeeper to cause somebody to *yaru*, which in this context means "to do," so

together it means "make him (or her) do it." The sentence could be translated, "Go get the person in charge and make him do it." Altogether there are three people involved: the speaker issuing the command, the listener at the front desk, and the room clerk whom the listener is supposed to make put the two single beds together. Unless you take the zero pronoun into account, you might end up with translations such as these actual examples by certain unnamed acquaintances of mine:

"Call the room attendant right away." "Go call and get the person in charge quickly, goddammit!" "Call the person in charge immediately and have him come." "Immediately go and speak to the person in charge." "Hurry up and get the duty person!" "Go and tell the room clerk immediately, then come back!" "Call the front desk right now and make him do it." "Go get ahold of the attendant right now (literally, 'Call him, come back, do it!')." "Go get the person in charge and tell him to do it (*yarasero* is 'I cause you to tell him *yaro*')" (In fairness to these translators, it must be pointed out that there is an idiomatic usage giving them some difficulty. See "Go Jump in the Lake, But Be Sure to Come Back.")

Now here's a very short text with a causative in the *-te* form followed by *itadaku*, which differs from *morau* only in being more polite. The single sentence is engraved on a narrow, foot-long white plastic sign that I bought long ago in a Japanese department store to hang in my office. Its graceful black characters proclaim to anyone who can read it my shameless determination to have the day off: *Honjitsu wa yasumasete itadakimasu.* The wish it expresses is genuine enough, but that's not why I bought it. I bought it—and still love it—for its verb forms. (No kinkiness intended.)

At the time I bought it, I suppose I was feeling pleased

with myself that I could actually understand a verbal expression so different from anything in my native tongue, Lower Slobovian. As I've said elsewhere, one of the great pleasures in learning Japanese comes in those moments of reflection *after* you have spoken or understood one of these strange expressions automatically, and you realize that you have learned to make your mind work in ways your mother never could have imagined. Even now, after more years at this business than I care to count at the moment, such verbal agglomerations still have the power to fascinate me, and whenever they come up in class, I like to pause over them to make sure the students are getting the idea of just how outrageous Japanese can be.

Honjitsu wa yasumasete itadakimasu. Two verbs. No subjects, no objects, no agents, nobody. And the *Honjitsu wa* tells us only that these two incredible verbs are happening "today." Despite this, the sentence is both complete and perfectly clear. As the great Zen master Dōgen himself might have translated it, "Gone fishin'."

Is *that* all it means?! Well no, not literally, but it is just as much of a cliche in its culture as "Gone fishin'" or "Closed for the Day" might be in ours. It can be a lot more fun, though, if we look at it closely.

The final verb of the sentence is *itadakimasu*, which tells us that the unnamed subject is going to humbly receive something from someone more exalted. And what the subject is going to humbly receive is the exalted person's doing of the causative part of the *-te* form verb that immediately precedes the *itadakimasu*.

So, what's going on in this *yasumasete* that the more exalted person is going to do? *Yasumu* is the verb meaning "to rest," and it is in the causative form, which means that our exalted individual will cause *someone else* to rest, i.e., he is going to *let* the humble receiver do the resting.

If we go back to our final verb and call the unknown subject of that X and the exalted other person Y, we've got something like "X will humbly receive Y's letting X rest."

Now, who are X and Y? How can a sign like this, with no surrounding text, mean anything to anybody? Here, the context comes from the real world. The sign hangs in a shop window and the would-be customer finds the place closed, the sign telling him that "(We, the shopkeepers,) humbly receive (from you, the exalted customer,) (your) letting (us) rest today."

This is all phrased in tremendously polite language, but the fact remains that the shop owner is telling the customer that, whatever the customer may think of the matter, the owner is closing the shop for the day. *Itadaku* is performed by the subject, at his own discretion, and it carries the message "I take it upon myself in all humility to get from you . . ." It's like those signs "Thank you for not smoking," which always impress me as having an underlying growl that makes them even more intimidating than a plain "No Smoking."

A completely naturalized translation for the sign might simply be "Closed," though that way we lose the interesting cultural difference. Perhaps "We thank you for allowing us to have the day off" or "We appreciate your permitting us to have the day off" would begin to convey some sense of the respectful tone of the Japanese in natural-sounding English. But make no mistake about it: the owner has gone fishin'.

Now, give this one a try. It comes from a story by the writer Hoshi Shin'ichi. A door-to-door salesman has just been told by the lady of the house that, since her husband isn't home, she can't buy the automatic backscratcher he

has been trying to sell her today. He gives up and says, *De wa, chikai uchi ni, mata o-ukagai sasete itadaku koto ni itashimashō.*[4] In the *o-ukagai sasete itadaku,* who does the *ukagai* part, the *sasete* part, the *itadaku* part?

Start from the *itadaku,* the final verb of the clause modifying *koto.* The speaker is the only one of the two present who could do *itadaku,* which the other person never does. Thus, he wants to get her to cause him to do whatever comes before the causative. *Ukagai* comes from *ukagau,* to humbly visit—again, a humble verb that only the speaker would do. A painfully literal translation of the phrase might be: "I shall humbly receive from you your allowing me to humbly visit you." A less painful version might be, "I will call upon you again if I may," which retains some of the force of the speaker's initiative implied by the *itadaku.*

Unless you keep track of the zero pronouns performing the parts of the sandwich, you might come up with such "literal" translations as these: "Please make yourself stop by for me," or "May I cause you to receive my visit again?" or "I will cause you to receive my calling on you (honorable person)," or "Perhaps you will give me letting me visit again soon," or "Please allow me to cause another visit," or "Perhaps I'll visit again, since you've caused me to (by not buying the product)."

There are some real problems here. If you recognize them, take a hard look at your textbook.

PASSIVES, PASSIVICATION, AND THE PASSIVE-CAUSATIVE

The biggest problem surrounding the Japanese passive comes not so much from the form itself as from the overuse of the English passive to interpret active Japanese statements, a bad habit that can be developed long before

the textbook ever gets to the passive.

I spend so much energy warning my students not to translate active Japanese verbs into English passives that one bright young fellow named John Briggs invented a grammatical term for my own exclusive use: "passivication." (He was so pleased with himself for coining the word that he grew a moustache.) Now, what is wrong with passivication? The answer is almost shockingly simple. If you make an active verb passive, you tend to forget that the active verb had a subject. In fact, getting rid of that subject is precisely what we often use the passive for in English. In a fit of modesty, an author may tell us in his preface, "This book was written during the Klench Rebellion," making "book" the subject, rather than coming right out and admitting that "I wrote this book" himself. This is the same process that killed off our subject when our dog was washed for us above in the discussions of *kureru* and *morau*.

An English verb is in the active voice when its subject is the actor, while a verb is in the passive voice when the subject receives the action. "Melvin ate his french fries" is active, while "Melvin was eaten by his french fries" is passive (if not tragic).

Note here that it is the relationship of the subject and the verb that determines the difference. Let's look at a few more. "Laura was arrested." Laura is the subject, and the verb is being done to her, so it's passive. If we further specify that "Laura was arrested by the police," Laura is still the subject, and the police are the agents, the ones by whom Laura has the verb done to her. "The police arrested Laura." Now it is the police that are doing the verb, so they are the subject and Laura is the object. If the subject is doing the verb, it is an active verb. We should also note that if the subject is doing the verb *to* something, the

verb is not only active but transitive: the police didn't simply "arrest," they arrested *Laura*. If, when they came for her, "Laura ran," she would have been doing an intransitive verb: she wouldn't have been running *something*, just running.

In English, only a transitive verb can become passive. Japanese is a little different, but we don't have to go into that yet. The important thing to remember is that, both in English and Japanese, transitive verbs always have subjects and objects: "Cameron slugged the intruder," "Baskin married Robbins," "Bob got it," "It got Bob," "Iwata killed Terry," "She counted them," "They met her." The one big difference, of course, is that in Japanese those pronominal subjects and objects won't be mentioned in the sentence.

Almost invariably, when a student has trouble finding the subject of an active verb, he or she will panic and quickly transform the verb into an English passive to make the problem go away. And when the all-important connection between subject and verb is lost, the sentence enters the twilight zone.

Just to confuse things further, Japanese has a different kind of passive, using the same passive ending, *rareru*, often somewhat misleadingly called the "suffering (or adversative) passive," in which the subject does not have the verb done to it but "suffers" the doing of the verb. Although the form is often used in unpleasant situations, genuine "suffering" is not inherent to it, and in fact the distress usually has to be explicitly expressed with an additional *komatta* or *hidoi me ni atta* or some such complaint. The important thing is that the subject gets passively *rareru*'ed, but it doesn't get acted upon by the rest of the verb. This is tough because there's nothing quite like it in English, but we just make it that much tougher on ourselves when we lose track of the unnamed subject. Let's

see how this works by stealing a suitcase.

1. *Kaban o nusunda.* / "X stole the suitcase."
2. *Kaban ga nusumareta.* / "The suitcase was stolen."
3. *Kaban o nusumareta.* / "X suffered the Y-stole-the suitcase."

Number 1 contains an ordinary active transitive verb and it makes complete sense only in a context that tells us who X is. As a transitive verb, *nusumu* must have both a subject and an object. Here, the sentence doesn't name the subject because it assumes we already know who the subject is. This is a typical unstressed statement using the silent Japanese zero pronoun. This could be "I, you, he, she, we, you-plural, or they stole the suitcase," depending on the identity of the perpetrator (i.e., the subject).

Number 2 is like the English passive (and, in fact, the widespread knowledge of English in Japan has probably contributed to the acceptability of the form). The subject is named, marked with the subject marker *ga*, and the whole verb is done to it: "The suitcase was stolen."

Number 3 is an example of the Japanese "suffering passive," a form that can be used with both transitive and intransitive verbs, and thus one that is very different from the English passive. The subject is the one who gets *rareru*'ed whether the passive Japanese verb is transitive or intransitive. For example: *Ame ni furarete komatta* / "Being fallen on by rain, I was distressed" = "Damn, I got rained on." The passive is working the same way in sentence number 3. Marked by *o*, however, the suitcase is labeled as an object, and this means it cannot be *rareru*'ed (or, here, for phonetic reasons, *mareru*'ed): only a subject can be *rareru*'ed, and *kaban* cannot be a subject when followed by *o*. For this reason, the sentence can-

not mean "The suitcase was stolen."

So, what was stolen?

Well, as a matter of fact, the suitcase *was* stolen.

So why don't we just translate it "The suitcase was stolen" and be done with it?

Well, if *your* suitcase had been stolen and the police didn't try to find it for *you*, you'd not only be very resentful, you'd probably never get your suitcase back. The suitcase itself may have been stolen, but the victim of the crime was *you*, and the use of the Japanese passive tells you that, whether it is mentioned or not, there is a subject who is "suffering" the doing of the verb. Used with a transitive verb, the passive is a neat way of saying that the victim/subject "suffered" the doing of the verb *by* someone else (the agent, marked with a *ni* when mentioned, though often a zero pronoun) *to* something else (the object, marked with an *o* when present, also often a zero pronoun). The subject remains *you* (or whoever else the context has established as the subject), so *you* get *rareru*'ed by somebody, but you don't get stolen.[5]

"Pardon me, officer, but I've just been *rareru*'ed," you say to the policeman.

"Oh, sorry to hear that, sir, but what were you *rareru*'ed?"

"I was *rareru*'ed somebody's having stolen my suitcase."

"How's that again?"

"I was stolen my suitcase!"

"What an odd way to put it!"

"Of course it's odd. I'm Japanese, and that's how we phrase these things when our English is a little shaky!"

As the officer says, your expression may be odd, but it's perfectly clear. From it, he knows that you are the victim, that someone did the stealing, and that the someone

stole your suitcase. *Kaban o nusumareta*, then, is a clear statement involving you, the robber, and the suitcase, though only the suitcase is actually mentioned.

In translating a sentence like *Kaban o nusumareta*, don't resort to something like "The suitcase was stolen and I was distressed." The suitcase was *not* passively stolen: the unmentioned "I" was the one passively affected. Much closer to the original would be a "literal" equivalent such as, "I was unfavorably affected by someone's having stolen the suitcase," or "I suffered someone's stealing my suitcase." These are pretty awkward, of course, and not for consumption beyond the walls of the classroom. Since "I was stolen my suitcase" is probably even worse, you might finally want to go as far as "Oh, no, they stole my suitcase!" or "Damn! The rats took my suitcase!" or any number of other expressions of dismay befitting the overall tone of the translation.

Here, by the way, is an example in which the "suffering passive" implies no suffering. The narrator of Murakami Haruki's "Tony Takitani" informs us that Tony's father was a somewhat widely known jazz trombonist in the prewar days: *Kare no chichioya wa Takitani Shōzaburō to iu, senzen kara sukoshi wa* ***na o shirareta*** *jazu-toronbōn-fuki datta* / "His father was a jazz trombonist by the name of Takitani Shōzaburō who 'suffered' the knowing of his name somewhat from before the war."[6]

Much of the trouble with the passive, as I have said, starts long before it ever makes its appearance in the textbook. Let me add a word here to Japanese language teachers on this matter while the rest of you leave the room.

If students have been arbitrarily translating active Japanese into either active or passive English depending upon whether the subject is more obvious or less obvious, they will not see that the introduction of the Japanese passive voice allows them to say things in a whole new way. One good method to prepare students for the coming of the Japanese passive is to demand that all translating in the course before the passive is introduced, even at the most elementary level, be done into the English active voice, passive translation being called to their attention as an error or, when unavoidable, as a poor compromise. (This will also provide grammar-starved students with some grounding in what the passive is before they have to deal with it in Japanese.)

This might put some strain on the naturalness of the translating, but it would help students to remember that active verbs always have doers. Even something as naturally passivized as the verb *iu* should be kept active.

All right, students can come back in now. *Japanese: The Spoken Language* says "The verbal *iu* has two basic meanings: 'say' and 'be named' or 'be called,'" but one illustration further down the page gives a good approach for avoiding such misleading passivication: *Kore wa, Nihongo de nan to iu n desu ka* / "What is it you call this in Japanese?"[7]

Who, we might ask, is the "you" in this translation? Certainly it isn't the person being addressed by the speaker. It's people in general, the same ones who show up in "They say that falling in love is wonderful," where they are called "they." By now, of course, we know that "they" in Japanese is the zero pronoun, and that is exactly who is doing the verb *iu*. They do it again in the phrase *Itō to iu hito*, which most of us (or at least those of us who had seen the movie "A Fish Called Wanda") would translate "a man called Itō," but which, in the original, is closer to "a man they call Itō." Better to get away from the Japanese entirely with something like "a man by the name of Itō" than to passivize.

Probably the most widely known passivized translation from Japanese is one that has been made from the inscription engraved on the monument in Hiroshima to those who were killed by the atomic bomb.[8] The original inscription, which contains what may be the most broadly inclusive zero pronoun, is a sobering one, with far greater impact in the Japanese original than in its weakened English translation:

> *Yasuraka ni nemutte kudasai. Ayamachi wa kurikaeshimasenu kara.* / "Rest in peace, for X will not repeat the mistake."[9]

This has been rendered, "Rest in peace, for the mistake will not be repeated," which is far less problematical than the original. "*Who* will not repeat the mistake?" people wanted to know when the monument was unveiled. "And who made the mistake in the first place—the Americans when they dropped the bomb, or the Japanese when they started the war?" The transitive Japanese verb in the active voice calls for a subject—a responsible actor. The passivized translation makes far less stringent demands. With its unnamed subject, the Japanese sentence seems discreetly to avoid placing the blame on anyone, but it is far more thought-provoking than the English translation would suggest, for the inescapable conclusion to the unavoidable search for a subject is "we."

Many intransitive Japanese verbs present another type of problem, more one of translation than understanding. These verbs often demand the English passive for natural translation. Someone can "straighten up" a room with *katazukeru*, but in Japanese we can also speak of the room as "becoming straight," *katazuku*, without reference to who does the straightening, even as a zero pronoun. Then

it is difficult to avoid saying something like, "The room has been put in order." *Naoru* is another tricky verb, easy to translate when used with people—*Naotta* / "He got well," but hard to avoid passivizing when describing broken radios, which in English we do not characterize as having "gotten well": *Naotta* / "It got fixed" = "It was repaired."

Another form that is virtually impossible not to passivize in translation is a transitive verb inflected with *-te aru*. *Mado **ga** shimete aru* (or *Mado **o** shimete aru*, putting more emphasis on a person's having done the deed) may literally mean "The window is in a state of someone's having shut it," but the passive is unavoidable if we are going to keep the window as the subject in a normal English translation: "The window has been shut." Otherwise, to make the translation natural, we would have to turn the window into an object, "Someone has shut the window." The trouble here is that this particular Japanese construction focuses on the state of things *after* someone has performed an active verb, something we just don't do in English. It is neither passive ("The window was shut") nor active ("Someone shut the window"), but it forces us to choose one or the other in English. Again, in *preparation* for the eventual appearance of the true passive, students should be informed when this construction appears that it is not passive and that they are being allowed to passivize it in translation only as an expedient.

And finally, some good news. If you've got the causative and the passive down, the passive-causative is easy. The form is mainly used in complaints by the speaker that he was forced by someone to do something, so the subject is almost always "I." "I" is the one who gets *rareru*'ed, and of course someone else does the causing.

Being fired from a job, for example, is commonly described by the firee in terms of his having been forced to

quit, *yameru* ("to quit") becoming *yame-sase-rareta* ("I suffered X's forcing me to quit"). If the president of the company is to be named as the one who did it, we get *Shachō **ni** yamesaserareta*, but his participation is implied even without such specific reference. In the case of a transitive verb like *toru* ("to take"), made into the sentence *Toraserareta* ("I suffered X's forcing me to take it" = "I was made to take it"), not only "I" and the one who forced "I" but also the thing "I" took can be present only as zero pronouns. Keeping score of the players works the same way in third-person narratives.

THE NATURAL POTENTIAL

I said in the introduction to this book that, "All too often, students are subtly encouraged to think that Japanese verbs just 'happen,' without subjects, deep within some Oriental fog. In the world represented by Japanese, actions 'occur,' but nobody does them," and I've said a lot since then to lay to rest such "twilight zone" notions about the Japanese language. Now I take it all back. There really *is* a twilight zone in Japanese, and the "natural potential" is it, that misty crossroads where the passive and potential intersect, where things happen spontaneously or naturally. Another term for the "natural potential" (*shizen kanō*) is the "spontaneous passive" (*jihatsu ukemi*).

We encounter this form most commonly when an essayist, after supposedly regaling us with objective facts, suddenly ends a sentence with *kangaerareru* or *omowareru* or *omoeru*, any of which would seem to mean "it is thinkable" or "it is thought," but not "I think." What is he doing? Ducking responsibility for his own ideas?

"Passive and potential forms are sometimes used in a way which might strike the English speaker as strange," says Anthony Alfonso. "When something is *left*, or *thought*,

or even *done* involuntarily or naturally by a person, the action is described in an OBJECTIVE manner and by means of either the potential form or the passive form with a potential meaning."[10]

Take, for example, this somewhat spooky recollection of a childhood incident by the narrator of a story called "Man-Eating Cats." The day his cat disappeared into the garden's pine tree, he says, he sat on the verandah until late in the evening, unable to take his eyes off the upper branches of the tree in the brilliant moonlight. *Tokidoki sono eda no naka de, tsuki no hikari o obite neko no me ga kirari to hikatta yō ni omoeta. Demo sore wa boku no sakkaku ka mo shirenakatta.* "Every now and then, the cat's eyes *seemed to be* flashing in the light of the moon. Maybe it was just a hallucination of mine."[11] The italicized phrase translates the natural potential expression *yō ni omoeta*, which certainly does not mean "I was able to think that . . . " and certainly does mean something more like "It seemed that . . . ," "One couldn't help feeling that," "One could not but think that . . . ," etc.

I'm not sure if such a description is entirely "objective," but it does seem to be removed from the observer's exclusively subjective domain, perhaps floating somewhere in the middle between pure subjectivity and pure objectivity. The implication is that the environment naturally leads the speaker to think or feel something. These forms don't translate properly as either passive ("It was thought by me") or potential ("I could think that").

A few more examples: When a sad occasion brings forth an involuntary gush of tears, the verb *naku*, "to cry," is routinely inflected as a potential, *nakeru*, as in *Nakete kichatta* / "I just couldn't help crying." When a Japanese fisherman pulls a fish out of the water he doesn't take the credit for it as English speakers do. Instead of shouting

"I've got one!" he inflects the verb *tsuru* (to fish) with the potential ending and says *Tsureta!* / "It has spontaneously caught itself on my line!" And when a Japanese writer talks about the successful completion of a novel, he will often say *Shōsetsu ga kaketa*, meaning not boastfully "I was able to write it," but far more modestly, "It was writable," "It wrote itself."

Good luck with this one.

*

Here is a chart summarizing the forms treated in this chapter. These are all *complete sentences*, with implied subjects, objects, and agents, using the transitive verb *kaku* (to write), which appeared prominently in the explanations above, and supplying a *tegami* in two cases to illustrate the different uses of the passive. I have put all the verb forms into the perfective *-ta* form as you would most likely encounter them, in statements about actual actions having been performed by known people, and translated the examples using first-person singular subjects and masculine third-person singular pronouns for simplicity, employing the feminine at two points to indicate the presence of a third party. The emphasis here is on the number of players involved and direction of the action, not levels of respect.

Kaita.	I wrote it.
Kaite yatta/ageta.	I wrote it for him.
Kaite kureta/kudasatta.	He wrote it for me.
Kaite moratta/itadaita.	I got him to write it for me.
Kakaseta.	I made/let him write it.
Kakasete kureta/kudasatta.	He did me the favor of making/letting her/me write it.
Kakasete moratta/itadaita.	I got him to let me write it, or I got him to make/let her write it.
Kakasete ageta/yatta.	I let/made him write it.
Kakareta.	It was written, or I was adversely affected by his having written it.
Tegami ga kakareta.	The letter was written.
Tegami o kakareta.	I suffered the consequences of his writing the letter.
Kakaserareta.	I was forced by him to write it.
Kaite atta.	It had been written. (false passive)
Kaketa.	It successfully wrote itself.

The Explainers
Kara Da, Wake Da, No Da

Notwithstanding their reputation as lovers of silence, the Japanese do an awful lot of explaining. Sometimes it seems as if they try to explain *everything*. They certainly do a lot more explaining than we do in English, even to the point of explaining when there's almost nothing to explain, just to give the impression that they're explaining objective reality when in fact they're just stating their personal opinions like everybody else. Now, after having given you an opening paragraph like this, I've got an awful lot of explaining to do myself.

What I'm talking about are those little phrases that seem to pop up at the ends of sentences or clauses to tell