

LEARN JAPANESE WITH MANGA

A SELF-STUDY LANGUAGE BOOK FOR BEGINNERS
Volume One

Marc Bernabé



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Marc Bernabé, the author of the two-volume course *Learn Japanese with Manga*, is a manga and anime translator who teaches Japanese language and etiquette courses for non-Japanese. He is the co-founder of the manga- and anime-specialized translation agency Daruma Serveis Lingüistics SL and the Japan culture center Espai Daruma. He has also published several Japan-related books.

Gabriel Luque is the illustrator of the manga story *Rakujō*. Professor of Visual Arts, his work has appeared in various publications including the *World of Warcraft* and *Starcraft* manga series from Tokyopop. In 2011 his artwork was selected for Udon Entertainment's Megaman Tribute Artbook. In 2017 he was nominated for Best Comic Artist in the Carlos Trillo Awards in his native Argentina. He currently works as a storyboard creator for movies and advertisements, as a freelance comic artist, and as a concept artist for animation, video games, toys and collectibles. www.artstation.com

Ken Niimura is the illustrator of the manga story *Kage*, co-written with Marc Bernabé. A Spanish-Japanese cartoonist and illustrator, he has a unique style informed by his international background. He has worked with clients such as Amazon, Google, McDonald's, Marvel Comics, Apple, L'Oreal, DC Entertainment, Shogakukan, Slate, The Apatow Company, Tezuka Pro, Image Comics, Kodansha and NHK Broadcasting Station among others. His book *I Kill Giants*, written by Joe Kelly, won the International Manga Award and was adapted into a film in 2019 starring Zoe Saldana. His series *Umami* earned him an Eisner Award to the Best Digital Comic. Ken Niimura's work has been translated into twelve languages. He lives and works between Japan and Europe. www.niimuraweb.com

Other illustrations in volumes 1 and 2:

Guillermo March

Studio Kōsen

Xian Nu Studio

Translation: **Olinda Cordukes**



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Introduction

It is possible that some readers, not acquainted with the manga and anime world, will wonder why Japanese manga comic strips have been chosen to illustrate the lessons in these two volumes of books *Learn Japanese with Manga*.

The first reason is that the lessons that make up this course were originally published in a well-known Japanese comic book and anime magazine in Spain. When the magazine's editor-in-chief at the time asked me to produce a monthly Japanese course, I thought this should somehow be in line with the general subject matter of the magazine. Drawing inspiration from the lessons in the now defunct American magazine *Mangajin*, where every month a linguistic subject was explained using manga as examples, I managed to find a formula, which involved developing a course in Japanese with a fixed structure. This structure consisted of a page of theory with vocabulary and grammar tables and a page of examples taken directly from Japanese manga, to illustrate and expand what had just been explained. To my surprise, the idea worked perfectly well, allowing the course to be published without a break for thirty issues of the magazine (almost three years). All this allowed for the publication of these books, a largely improved compilation of the contents in the magazine.

The second reason we use manga to teach Japanese in these two volumes is because manga is a big phenomenon, not only in Japan, but throughout the world. Manga, with its enormous subject variety, is an ideal window through which to observe Japanese society and its mentality.

The word *manga* literally means “spontaneous and meaningless drawings.” By extension, the West has adopted this word with the meaning of “Japanese comic-book.” However, the popularity of manga in Japan is incomparable to similar genres in Western countries. If a comparison must be made, the manga phenomenon could possibly meet its match in the movie industry. A successful manga author is able to charge a real fortune and, in fact, the best-known authors are among the wealthiest people in Japan.

Here are some facts you may not know about the Japanese manga industry:

- a) The sales value of comics, or manga, in Japan was estimated at almost 676 billion Japanese yen in 2021, up by more than 10 percent compared to the previous year. The market size increased for the fourth year in a row (*Annual Report on the Publication Market 2022*).
- b) Weekly manga magazines and manga serials have amazing sales figures in Japan. The manga series *Jujutsu Kaisen* (lit. "Sorcery Fight") sold approximately 30.9 million volumes in Japan from November 2020 to November 2021, making it the best-selling manga series in the country during that time period (statista.com).
- c) In Japan there are manga of all genres, for all ages and social strata, including children, teenagers, older women, laborers, office workers, etc. There are even erotic and pornographic manga.

In Japan manga tend to be published initially in thick and cheap weekly magazines, in the form of serials of about twenty pages per episode. When a weekly series is successful, it's usually then compiled in a volume of about two-hundred pages called a 単行本 *tankōbon*. This ecosystem is maintained in digital form. Actually, in 2021, the digital manga market size was already almost double than the traditional printed book market.

All in all, manga is a very important phenomenon in Japan. Through these comic books—with a degree of caution and an analytical spirit—we can study not just the Japanese language but Japanese culture and idiosyncrasies too!

Be sure to read through the next section carefully to get an idea of how this method works and how this two-volume course is structured. I hope *Learn Japanese with Manga* will help you to learn about Japanese language culture. It is a great honor for me to be your *sensei*.

How to use *Learn Japanese with Manga*

This two-volume series is designed for the self-study of the spoken, colloquial Japanese used in manga, so that you will be able to understand a Japanese comic book or anime series in the original, with the help of a dictionary.

With the focus on the informal oral language of manga, you will study many aspects of Japanese not usually taught in conventional courses or textbooks at such an early stage, for instance, the different personal pronouns (Lesson 7), emphatic particles at the end of sentences (Lesson 17), or verbs in their simple form (Lesson 20). Difficulty increases as the lessons progress, so I recommend studying the lessons in order, and moving on to the next lesson only when you are familiar with the contents of the previous lessons. To make studying easier and speedier, you'll find Roman alphabet (*rōmaji*) transcription of all words and sentences in lessons 1–30 in this first volume, even though we recommend that you learn the hiragana and katakana alphabets as soon as possible so as not to get into bad habits which will be difficult to correct later on.

The thirty-five lessons

Volume 1 consists of thirty-five lessons, each divided into three main parts:

- a) **theory:** a detailed explanation of the lesson's subject matter often with grammar or vocabulary tables which help summarize and reinforce what has been explained.
- b) **manga examples:** from real Japanese manga, to illustrate and expand what has been explained in the theory pages. The system used to analyze each sentence is the following:

Tenchi: この本はとても面白いですね。

kono hon wa totemo omoshiroi desu ne.

this book SP very interesting EP

This book is very interesting, isn't it?

- First line:** exact transcription of the original Japanese text.
Second line: transcription of the text into the Western alphabet (*rōmaji*).
Third line: literal translation, word for word. (The meaning of the abbreviations **SP**, **EP** and others can be found in the glossary on page 9.)
Fourth line: translation of the text into natural-sounding English.

From Lesson 31 onwards, manga example sentences are not given in *rōmaji*, as we expect that by now, you can read hiragana, katakana and many kanji easily. For more difficult kanji, hiragana transcriptions, known as *furigana*, are written directly over the kanji.

- c) **exercises:** these are always related to the lesson's subject matter, and the answers can always be obtained or deduced from the content of the lesson they belong to. The answers to the exercises can be found online by following the link on page 9.

On translations

There are many example sentences throughout the book, as well as many manga examples, with their corresponding word-for-word translations into English. Sometimes, the sentences we offer may not sound very natural, since we have chosen more literal translations for an easier understanding of their formation. Trying to create a more natural English translation of every sentence would be a good exercise: it would help you consolidate concepts, make an in-depth analysis of the Japanese sentence, and think about it as a whole rather than a mere group of words and grammatical patterns.

Online materials

This book comes with comprehensive online materials which can be accessed using the link on page 9:

- 1 **Answers to the Exercises:** detailed answers to all the exercises included in the book.
- 2 **Kanji Compilation:** a compilation of 160 kanji characters, with stroke order and five compound words each. The study of these characters is essential to acquire a sound basis for a subsequent, more in-depth study of the language.
- 3 **Glossary of Onomatopoeia:** a useful reference tool for readers of manga in their original version.
- 4 **Vocabulary Index:** an index of almost 1,000 Japanese vocabulary words that appear throughout the book, in alphabetical order.
- 5 **Audio Files:** Key words and sentences recorded by native Japanese speakers to help you achieve authentic pronunciation. Sections of the text that have online audio recordings are indicated by the headphones logo.