

TRANSCRIPT · EPISODE 67

Ancient Japanese Techniques to Learn English

Full episode script · English

297 lines

Your English Toolbox

Welcome to Your English Toolbox, your slow English podcast where we train your ears step-by-step.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Julia, what are we going to talk about today?

Today we are exploring five ancient Japanese techniques that will completely change how you learn English.

We are going to take the wisdom of martial arts, Zen philosophy, and traditional craftsmanship and apply it directly to your language studies.

If you feel stuck at the intermediate level, these five millennial concepts will help you break through the plateau.

By listening to the end of this episode, you will get three huge benefits.

First, you will learn how to build automatic muscle memory so you stop translating in your head.

Second, you will discover why silent reading is hurting your speaking skills and how to fix it immediately.

Third, you will learn how to completely eliminate the stress of studying by changing your mindset.

This is a very special episode.

We are going to do things a little differently today.

For each of the five Japanese techniques, I will tell the traditional story to explain the philosophy.

Then we will explain exactly how to apply that philosophy to your English learning.

There will be no conversation during those sections.

Just pure focus, pure storytelling, and deep learning.

Let us begin with our first concept, kata, the power of patterns.

Hundreds of years ago, a young man traveled across Japan to

find the greatest sword master in the country.

He finally found the master, living in a quiet temple on a mountain.

The young man begged the master to teach him the secret techniques of the sword.

He wanted to learn how to fight multiple enemies.

He wanted to learn how to defend himself in complex battles.

The master handed the young man a heavy wooden sword.

He told the student to stand in the courtyard.

Then the master showed him

one simple basic downward strike.

He told the student to repeat that single strike until the sun went down.

The student was disappointed, but he obeyed.

The next day, the master told him to do the exact same strike again.

This continued for months.

The student became angry and frustrated.

He felt he was not learning anything new or advanced.

But after a year, something changed in the student's mind and body.

When he lifted the sword, he no longer

thought about his hands or his feet.

The movement happened before his brain could even process the thought.

The sword had become a natural extension of his arm.

This is the concept of kata.

In traditional Japanese arts, from martial arts to the tea ceremony, kata refers to a detailed pattern of movements.

The goal is not to think about the movement.

The goal is to repeat the form so many times that it bypasses the conscious brain.

It becomes

pure instant muscle memory.

You do not construct the action.

You simply execute the pattern.

Now, let us apply the concept of kata to your English learning.

The biggest problem for intermediate learners is cognitive overload.

When you try to speak, you usually try to build sentences from zero.

You search your brain for one isolated vocabulary word.

For example, you want to use the verb depend.

Then your brain has to painfully assemble the rest of the sentence word
by word.

You start asking yourself grammar questions in the middle of the conversation.

You think, is it depend in, is it depend at, is it depend on.

This mental translation drastically slows down your speech and makes you hesitate.

The fix is to stop memorizing single words.

You must start memorizing linguistic kata.

These are patterns or chunks of language.

Instead of learning the word depend, you memorize the entire structural form.

You learn the chunk.

It depends on

the weather.

You practice this exact phrase over and over again.

You write it down 10 times.

You say it out loud 20 times.

You treat it like a physical movement in martial arts.

When you learn a new vocabulary word, you instantly plug it into a kata.

By speaking this exact formula repeatedly, it becomes automatic.

Your brain stores it in your long term memory as one single item.

It no longer sees four separate words.

It sees one

fluent thought.

This method of chunking completely eliminates the need to translate in your head.

It drastically speeds up your vocabulary recall.

And best of all, it naturally hardwires correct grammar into your brain without studying rules.

Part 3 Ondoku Activating physical memory In the ancient temples of Kyoto, the monks do not study sacred texts in silence.

If you walk past a Buddhist monastery early in the morning, you will hear a deep rhythmic sound.

You will hear dozens

of voices chanting the sutras together.

For centuries, the Japanese have understood that knowledge cannot only live in the eyes.

It must live in the body.

When the monks chant, they feel the vibration of the words in their chests.

They feel the shape of the syllables in their mouths.

They control their breathing to match the rhythm of the sentences.

The text stops being ink on a piece of paper.

It becomes a physical experience.

If a monk forgets

a word during a ceremony, his eyes might panic and his mouth will often remember the next sound automatically.

The physical body remembers what the conscious mind forgets.

This ancient practice is deeply connected to the modern Japanese educational concept of ondoku.

Ondoku translates directly to reading aloud.

In Japanese schools, students do not just read text silently to comprehend it.

They are required to perform ondoku repetitively.

It is the deliberate practice of engaging the physical body to anchor knowledge.

Here is how you must apply ondoku to your English practice.

Many of you listening right now have fantastic reading comprehension.

You can read a news article or an email in English perfectly.

But when you try to speak in a meeting, you freeze.

Your tongue feels heavy.

You stumble over your words.

This happens because you have only trained your visual memory.

You have completely ignored your auditory and motor memory.

English vocabulary should never exist just as

text on a page.

When you learn a new word or a sentence pattern, you must practice ondoku.

You must read the English text out loud repeatedly.

You are not just testing your memory.

You are literally going to the gym for your face.

You have muscles in your jaw, your lips, and your tongue.

These muscles are trained to speak your native language.

They are not used to the physical shapes required for English pronunciation.

By reading out loud,

you mimic the rhythm and intonation of native speakers.

You train the physical muscles of your mouth.

At the same time, you are training your auditory processing because you are hearing your own voice speak English.

This multi-sensory repetition is powerful.

When you combine sight, sound, and physical movement, the brain creates much stronger neural connections.

Recalling vocabulary becomes significantly faster than silent studying ever could be.

So, close the grammar book, open your mouth, and start making noise.

Part

4 Kaizen Continuous Small Improvements There is a famous story about a master swordsmith in Japan.

This man made the sharpest, most beautiful katana blades in the world.

A foreigner visited his workshop to discover his secret.

The foreigner expected to see magic techniques or extreme physical feats.

Instead, he saw the master sit in quietly by the fire.

The master took a piece of hot steel.

He folded it.

He hammered it gently.

He put it back in the

fire.

He repeated this process.

He did not strike the metal with massive, violent force.

He used small, consistent, precise hits.

The foreigner asked the master how he achieved such perfection.

The master explained that the strength of the sword does not come from one giant hit.

It comes from folding the steel thousands of times.

Every single fold removes a tiny amount of weakness.

Every single day of work adds a microscopic layer of strength.

This is the philosophy

of Kaizen.

Kaizen translates roughly to change for the better.

It is the core philosophy behind Japan's greatest industries and arts.

Rather than attempting massive, sweeping transformations overnight, Kaizen focuses on something else.

It focuses on tiny, daily, incremental improvements.

Over time, these micro changes compound into massive results.

Applying Kaizen is the most important favor you can do for your English.

The biggest problem language learners face is burnout.

You get a sudden burst of motivation.

You decide you

are going to master English this year, so you sit down on a Sunday and study grammar for three hours straight.

You feel productive, but your brain is completely exhausted.

By Tuesday, you are too tired to open the book.

By Friday, you have abandoned the habit entirely.

Kaizen offers a much healthier and more effective solution.

We must encourage you to build an environment of micro-learning.

You should study for just 15 to 20 minutes every single day.

sounds too small to make a difference, but it is actually the secret to fluency.

You could learn just one new phrasal verb daily.

You could read exactly one page of an English book before bed.

You could listen to half of a podcast episode while drinking your morning coffee.

The human brain retains information much better through consistent, daily spaced repetition.

It does not absorb information well through infrequent binge studying.

When you practice Kaizen, English stops feeling like

a giant mountain you have to climb.

It becomes just one single step you take every day.

And before you know it, those tiny steps have carried you miles away from where you started.

Part 5 Shoushin – The Beginner's Mind During the Meiji era, a highly educated university professor visited a famous Zen master.

The professor wanted to learn about Zen philosophy.

However, as soon as he arrived, the professor started talking.

He talked about his own theories.

talked about all the books he had read.

He tried to show the master how intelligent and advanced he was.

The Zen master listened patiently.

Then the master began to serve tea.

He poured the hot tea into the professor's cup.

The cup became full, but the master did not stop pouring.

The tea spilled over the edges of the cup and onto the table.

The professor jumped up in shock.

He shouted that the cup was full and could

not hold anymore.

The Zen master smiled calmly.

He said, You are exactly like this cup.

You are full of your own opinions and ideas.

How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?

This beautiful story illustrates the concept of Shoushin.

Shoushin means the beginner's mind.

It means approaching a subject with a completely open and eager mind.

You must do this even if you are already at an advanced level.

It is about dropping your

ego and your preconceived notions.

Shoushin is the exact mindset you need to break through the intermediate plateau.

Intermediate learners often hit a wall because they think they already know how English works.

You have studied the grammar rules for years.

You have a solid vocabulary.

Because of this, your ego gets in the way of your learning.

You start trying to force English to behave exactly like your native language.

When you encounter a strange pronunciation, you get frustrated.

When an idiom makes no logical sense, you argue with it.

You complain that English spelling is stupid.

You resist the language.

To truly advance, you must empty your cup.

You must teach yourself to absorb English like a child.

Children learn languages effortlessly because they have no ego.

They do not analyze why a word sounds a certain way.

They just copy the sound.

If a pronunciation feels silly to you, do not fight it.

If a grammar rule

seems completely illogical, do not overanalyze it or judge it.

Accept it for what it is.

Shoushin allows you to absorb native accents and natural idioms without resistance.

When you stop judging the language, your brain stops creating barriers.

You become like a sponge again, open to whatever the language wants to teach you.

Part 6 Tadoku The Art of Extensive Reading Imagine a traveler who needs to cross a massive, dense bamboo forest.

This traveler wants to understand the forest perfectly.

So, he stops at the very first bamboo tree.

He takes out a magnifying glass and examines every single leaf.

He writes down the exact dimensions of the tree trunk.

He spends an hour analyzing the roots.

Then, he takes one step forward and does the exact same thing to the next tree.

After three days, he is completely exhausted.

He has only moved ten meters into the forest.

He hates the forest now, and he gives up
and goes home.

Now, imagine a second traveler.

This traveler walks quickly along the path.

He looks at the sunlight shining through the leaves.

He feels the wind.

If he sees a strange plant, he glances at it.

But he keeps walking.

He flows through the environment.

By the end of the day, he has crossed the entire forest.

He enjoyed the journey, and he has a true understanding of what the forest feels like.

The first traveler represents traditional,
intensive studying.

The second traveler represents Tadoku.

Tadoku translates directly to reading a lot.

It is a wildly popular language learning movement in Japan.

Unlike traditional studying, where you analyze every sentence, Tadoku is about volume and enjoyment.

Let us look at how you can use Tadoku to revolutionize your reading skills.

When most English learners try to read, they attempt intensive reading.

They pick up a complex novel or a complicated newspaper article.

They read one paragraph and stop

15 times to look up words in the dictionary.

It becomes exhausting homework.

It breaks their flow state, and they usually quit after just one page.

We want you to use the Tadoku method instead.

Tadoku is governed by four strict golden rules.

Rule number one, start with very easy materials.

Rule number two, read without a dictionary.

Rule number three, skip over words you do not understand.

Rule number four, stop reading if it gets boring or too difficult,
and pick a new book.

You should be reading graded readers, young adult fiction, or even comic books.

You should choose books where you already understand 90% of the words.

By skipping the dictionary, you train your brain to guess the unknown words from context.

Because you are reading high volumes of easy English, you will encounter the most common vocabulary repeatedly.

You will see the grammatical kata we talked about earlier over and over again.

This naturally hardwires the

vocabulary into your memory without ever using a single flashcard.

You will start reading for pleasure, not for punishment.

We are back.

Julia, these five concepts really change the entire perspective on language learning.

They absolutely do, Martin.

We covered a lot of ground today, so let us do a quick recap for our friends listening.

First, we talked about kata.

Stop memorizing single words and start learning language in chunks or patterns.

Second, we explored on doku.

You have

to read out loud to train your physical muscles and build auditory memory.

Third, we learned about kaizen.

Forget the three-hour weekend study sessions.

Commit to 15 minutes of English every single day.

Fourth was shoshin, the beginner's mind.

Let go of your ego, stop judging the language, and absorb it like a child.

And finally, we discussed tadoku.

Read a massive amount of easy material, throw away the dictionary, and just enjoy the flow.

Martin, what I love most

about these techniques is that they are deeply human.

They respect how our brains and bodies actually work.

Exactly.

They remove the artificial stress of the classroom.

They remind us that learning English is not an academic test.

It is a physical habit, a mental mindset, and a lifelong journey.

Remember, you do not have to apply all five of these today.

Just pick one.

Maybe tomorrow morning you practice kaizen and just listen to English for 15 minutes.

maybe you practice on doku and read your emails out loud.

Whatever you choose, approach it with shoshin.

Keep your mind open, keep your cup empty, and keep moving forward.

Thank you for spending your time with us today.

We will see you in the next episode.

Sayonara.