

Japanese – A Fuzzy Language

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I had three books I wished to present as a gift to a Japanese friend. I intended to give them as is without any formal wrapping paper to cover them, but a Japanese co-worker suggested that they be wrapped together in a bundle with decorative wrapping paper. The co-worker had only a couple minutes for the job and it looked rather haphazardly done. “Just tell her you did it!” she suggested.

Japanese people always make allowances for foreigners, and especially for Americans, Canadians, and Europeans.

I replied, “Well, I don’t want to lie and say I wrapped the gift when I didn’t actually wrap it myself!” But then it dawned on me that I could tell my Japanese friend the same thing using the Japanese language and yet **not be lying!**

You may ask, “How is this possible?” It’s because the Japanese language has **no verb conjugation according to person or number** as do most Indo-European languages. Not only does Japanese not have verb conjugation, but it also drops the sentence subject (who is speaking) when it’s supposedly understood! This means I could say in Japanese, “Isoide tsutsumimashita” (was wrapped quickly) which would be interpreted that I wrapped it in a hurry when it could also mean, “he”, “she”, even “they”, wrapped it in a hurry!

Politicians in the West often make what sounds to be statements of fact and yet are not saying anything truly meaningful at all. Just think how even easier it is for a Japanese politician to be ambiguous in a language with no verb conjugation, and which also drops the sentence subject because it’s already *assumed* to be understood!

Japanese is much more specific when you put it in writing. Chinese characters are very specific in meaning. The characters at the top of the page are pronounced omikoshi, the ceremonial box the Japanese carry during the Obon festival. Many people believe the Japanese got that idea from people from Israel who migrated to Japan two centuries ago! It resembles the Ark of the Covenant!