



# THE LANGUAGE OF JUDO

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By Steve Scott

I don't speak Japanese. However, I do speak Judo.

Here are some reasons you should learn Japanese terminology in judo.

1-When human beings place a value on something, they give it a name. For example, you don't call your children "Child One" or "Child Two." Each has her or her own name.

2-Japanese is the international language of judo. Every discipline, field of study or activity has its own nomenclature or language. I was once coaching at a training camp in Sweden and I didn't speak Swedish, but I did speak judo. When I said "Tai Otoshi" everyone on the mat knew what to expect and we all connected. Latin is used in the legal and medical professions; English is used by airline pilots. If an established language is not used, then the people doing the activity invent their own language. Baseball has the "home run," American football has the "touchdown." Chess has "checkmate."

3-Jigoro Kano renamed many jujutsu techniques, stripping most of them from their flowery or colloquial names (some names survive such as Tani Otoshi and Yama Arashi, but for the most part this isn't the case). In the place of these colloquial names, he named the various principles, movement and techniques of judo with more descriptive names. These descriptive names and terminology establish a baseline of cognitive thought that lends itself to teaching foundationally sound skills and movement. It also lends itself to innovative thought and action. There has to be a foundation of nomenclature that is accepted by everyone in the activity or discipline if there can be any future innovation or development of that activity or discipline. If we all want to be on the same page on any subject, we first must know how to read what's on that page.

4-By learning and knowing the names of the principles/concepts, movement and techniques of judo, we have a better understanding and appreciation on why, how and when these things work. There's a reason why Seoi Nage is called what it is. If you learn what Seoi Nage means, you will then be better able to understand how it works and how to make it work best for you.

However, all this being said, it's important to not go overboard on the use of Japanese terminology in judo. People on social media sites argue frequently on the proper terminology for any given technique. While it's important to know the Japanese term for a technique, it's more important to be able to functionally perform that technique. Don't be a master of Kuchi Waza. Unfortunately, there are quite a few of them out there. "Kuchi Waza" translates to "Mouth Technique." In other words, this describes someone who talks a good game but in reality, doesn't have a good game.

The best way for students to learn Japanese terminology is for the coach to continually and commonly use it (but don't force the issue). When teaching a technique, tell the students the English and Japanese name for it. Use the English name from time to time, but for the most part, use the Japanese term. And the coach should make sure that the term that is being used is the correct one. Again, it should be stressed that someone doesn't have to speak Japanese to be skillful at judo, but that person's skill, understanding and appreciation of judo will certainly increase if he or she can communicate with others in the commonly used and accepted use of Japanese terminology. If, as a coach, you choose not to use Japanese terminology and instead make up your own terminology, remember that if a student moves out of your area and goes to another club, you are hindering his or her future development. The odds are quite good that the new club where the student trains will use Japanese terminology.

Also realize that some names of techniques such as "Mune Gatame" are not recognized by the Kodokan. Mune Gatame translates to "Chest Hold" and accurately describes the pin, but it's not a recognized name by the Kodokan. Does this make Mune Gatame any less of a technique? No, it just means that some Japanese names are given to techniques even if the Kodokan hasn't done it. Generally, the Kodokan is the source people refer to on names of techniques or other terminology, but in recent years the Kodokan has given names to techniques that beforehand did not have an "official" name. Several years ago, the Kodokan recognized Obi Tori Gaeshi (Belt Grab Reverse Direction Throw) as a different technique than it is now. It used to be a technique resembling Hikkomi Gaeshi (Pull Down Reverse Direction Throw). What is now Obi Tori Gaeshi is a lifting throw that came from sambo made famous in the 1980s by Shota Kharbarelli and others. While many terms remain as foundational, new names, phrases and terms evolve. The best way to use Japanese terminology is to use it as a tool to identify and describe the different principles, movements and techniques of judo. As you will see, the Japanese language does not always translate smoothly to the English language.

The bottom line is that you don't have to speak Japanese to be skillful at judo, or to even have an understanding and appreciation of judo. Speaking Japanese is different than "speaking judo." But anyone who wants to have a serious understanding of judo must learn to speak the language of judo. Once he does that, everything falls into place.

Now, let's start at the beginning, with this thing called "judo."

JU: Adaptable, Flexible, Adroitness, Yielding DO: Philosophy, Way, Doctrine

We've been told for years that judo is the "gentle way." So, does judo translate to "gentle way?" In a sense, yes it does, but not in the intent of being soft or weak. Rather, gentle in the sense of being adroit, pliant or limber rather than hard or rigid. The concept of yielding when necessary and then being adaptable enough to take advantage of a situation. According to Donn Draeger: "For Kano, the principle of Ju was never without practical physical implications. For the body, directed by the flexible mind, is to react with similar mechanical flexibility as it adapts itself to a situation encountered suddenly." In all reality (and to be blunt), the use of "gentle" has been used for years in judo as a marketing tool with the intention of recruiting people wanting to overcome a lack of physical size or strength. Much like the old Charles Atlas ads in comic books aimed at the "98-pound weakling" who wanted to teach a lesson to the local bully, judo used the idea of "gentle" to attract people to judo. And, in a very real and practical sense, the principles of judo work, but not in a passive way as most people think of gentleness. Jigoro Kano advocated for the most efficient and well-directed use of force and strength. The misuse or total reliance on brute strength, to Kano, was inefficient and ineffective. Yield when necessary and then direct your strength in the most efficient way. Jigoro Kano based the development of judo techniques on two primary criteria: 1-Base all techniques on scientific principles. 2-Remove crude and dangerous practices from techniques.

JU NO RI: Principle of Flexibility (Developed by Jigoro Kano as the foundational principle of Kodokan Judo.)

KO: Lecture, Learn, Study DO: Philosophy, Way, Doctrine  
KAN: Hall, Place

KODOKAN JUDO: KODOKAN= "Studying the Philosophy of Adaptability or Flexibility"

JUDO= "Adaptable Philosophy." The name Jigoro Kano gave to his invention of judo.

KATA: Form, Pattern, Model, Method of, Sequence of Actions Kata is the structured training of judo.

KATACHI: Another word meaning form (same as Kata).

RANDORI: RAN= Riot, Disorder, Disturbance DORI= Take, To Take Up Something Called "Free Practice" in judo. Historically based on "ran o toru" from Kito-ryu Jujutsu, one of the primary systems of jujutsu that Jigoro Kano studied. "Ran o toru" translates to "take freedom of action." (Source is Donn Draeger.)

SHIAI: SHI= Test AI= Mutual SHIAI translates to mutually coming together to test.

MONDO: Lecture or Question and Answer Period in Training. Jigoro Kano taught that there are four phases in training and the development of students; kata, randori, shiai and mondo.

DOJO: "Doctrine Place or Hall." The training hall for judo.  
TATAMI: Mat, based on Japanese straw floor coverings.

SENSEI: Teacher (Used in the same way that the term "coach" is used to denote respect in judo. Also used to address older professional people as a sign of respect.)

SHIHAN: SHI= Expert, Teacher, Master, Model. HAN= Example or model of behavior. SHIHAN is often used as the title for Jigoro Kano, the founder of Kodokan Judo.

SEMPAI or SENPAI: Senior member, similar to a mentor.  
KOHAI: Junior member, similar to a protegee. The Sempai-Kohai system is an important cultural element in Japanese seniority-based relationships.

KIYOTSUKE: Commend for Attention. REI: Bow. RITSU REI: Standing Bow. ZA REI: Kneeling Bow.

YUDANSHA: YU= Implies possession of something material. DAN= Level, Grade or Step. SHA= Person. This term refers to anyone who is graded" or has achieved the level of SHODAN (Initial Grade).

MUDANSHA: MU= Implies a void or lack of something material. This term refers to anyone who has not achieved the level of Shodan.

DAN: Level, Step, Grade, Degree. KYU: Level, Step, Class.

### **The following are terms used to describe movement, posture and gripping.**

SHINTAI: Advance and Retreat, Moving Forward and Backward. SHINTAI is the generic term used in Kodokan Judo to describe movement. In Kodokan Judo theory, there are three primary movement patterns (each has different variations). They are the following.

AYUMI ASHI: Walking Forward or Backward (using a normal step). AYUMI= Walking, Step ASHI=Foot This is the "Normal Walking Movement Pattern" in Kodokan Judo.

TSUGI ASHI: "Follow Step." TSUGI= Following, Next, Subsequent. ASHI= Foot (Step implied). TSUGI ASHI is moving the back foot closer to the front foot and following with another step (source is Michael Hacker.) This is the "Follow Foot Movement Pattern" in Kodokan Judo.

TAISABAKI: TAI= Body. SABAKI= Management, Movement, Handling. TAISABAKI: Body Management. In Kodokan Judo, this is one of the three primary movement patterns and implies; "Moving in a circular pattern with the

intention of applying further action either defensively or offensively.”

SHIZENTAI: SHIZEN=Natural. TAI= Body. SHIZENTAI refers to the posture of the body that is erect and upright. This is the “natural” way of standing.

JIGOTAI: JIGO= A rather obscure word that implies a Defensive Attitude. TAI= Body. JIGOTAI is the defensive, crouched and bent-over method of standing.

AI YOTSU: “Mutual Position.” AI= Mutual. YOTSU= Position, Circumstance.

KENKA YOTSU: “Opposite Position.” KENKA= Antagonistic, Opposite. YOTSU= Position

SURI ASHI: Sliding Foot. SURI= Slide. ASHI= Foot. The act of sliding the feet across the mat.

OKURI ASHI: “Send Foot.” OKURI= Send, Send After. OKURI ASHI is the movement pattern where the foot in the direction of movement is moved first. As used in OKURI ASHI BARAI: Send-After Foot Sweep. This is a movement pattern used in other martial arts but not in judo. This OKURI ASHI pattern is included in the TSUGI ASHI movement pattern, although they differ in which foot leads the action of movement. I could not find why Jigoro Kano did not include this as one of the basic movement patterns in Kodokan Judo.

SHIKKO: Moving on the mat by sliding on the knees.

DE ASHI: “Lead Foot.” DE= To Lead or to Advance. ASHI= Foot.

FUMIKOMI: “Stomp Apply.” FUMIKOMI is the back step or stomping step used in a throwing technique.

TSURIKOMI: “Lifting Apply.” TSURI= To Lift, To Suspend in the Air, To Hang. KOMI= To Apply. TSURIKOMI is to apply the lifting action in a throwing technique and often translated to “Lifting Pulling” action.

HIKITE: “Pulling Hand.” HIKI= To Pull. TE= Hand. HIKITE is the pulling hand used in judo techniques. (Also called the “sleeve hand.”)

TSURITE: “Lifting Hand.” TSURI= Lift, Suspend, Hang. TE= Hand. TSURITE is the lifting hand used in judo techniques (also called the “power hand” or “steering hand.”)

SHISEI: “Figure Strength.” SHISEI: The Posture, Stance, Pose, Position of Body. SHISEI is the posture of the human body.

TACHIAI: “Stand Mutual.” TACHI= Stand. AI=Mutual. TACHIAI is the initial face-off or Rising from a crouch. In Sumo, TACHIAI is the initial contact of the wrestlers. This isn’t a term used often in judo.

MA-AI: MA= Distance. AI= Mutual. MA-AI is the space between the bodies of the judoka.

KOGEKI NO KATACHI: KOGEKI=Small space or slit (implies attacking or offense). NO= Of. KATACHI= Form. This is the space between the bodies of the attacker and defender that is the area of engagement when making an attack.

BOGEKI NO KATACHI: BOGEKI= Small space or slit (implies defense). This is the space between the bodies of the attacker and defender that is the area of engagement when defending against an attack.

KUMI KATA: “Engage Form.” KUMI= Join Together or Engage. KATA= Form. This is the basic neutral method of gripping devised by Jigoro Kano in order for his students to better learn the skills of throwing.

KUMITE: “Engage Hands.” KUMI= Engage or Join Together. TE= Hand or Hands. Gripping the partner or opponent with the hands. Not often used today in judo, but in the past it was. Used in karate as the name of sparring.

KUMI KATSU: “Engage Have the Advantage.” KUMI KATSU is the superior or dominate grip.

KUMI MAKERU: “Engage Losing.” KUMI KATSERU is the inferior grip.

KUMITE ARASOI: “Engage Hand Compete.” Grip fighting. KUMI=Engage. TE= Hand. ARASOI= To Contend or to Compete. KUMITE ARASOI is the grip fighting in judo. Not often used today as KUMI KATA is now often used as the generic term for any gripping action in judo.

JUDOGI: Judo Garment. The correct way to describe the training uniform is to refer to it as a “judogi” and not simply use the term “gi.” This is the case with any practice uniform in the martial arts. Other terms are: KEIKOGI= Practice Garment and DOGI= Doctrine Garment.

UWAGI: Jacket. ZUBON: Pants. OBI: Belt. SODE: Sleeve. SUSO: Apron or bottom part of the jacket.

**The following (not in alphabetic order) are some commonly used terms for the different positions, actions and directions in judo.**

UKEMI: “Receive Body.” UKE= To Receive or be the Recipient of Something. MI= Body. The skills of falling safely commonly called Breakfalls. Initially developed by Jigoro Kano in order to reduce injuries in practice and to enhance learning throwing techniques, Ukemi is an essential skill in judo.

UKE: “To Receive. To be the Subject of.” In judo, the person on the receiving end of a technique.

TORI: “To Seize or Take.” In judo, the person applying the technique.

NEWAZA: “Supine Techniques.” NE=Supine or Reclining Position. WAZA= Technique. This deserves some explanation. Today, this name refers to groundfighting or ground grappling in general, but it has its roots in a specific approach to grappling on the mat. Historically, judo people (especially the Kosen judo exponents) engaged in mat grappling by starting sitting on the buttocks or lying on the hip or flank; what the BJJ people call the “guard.” In most of judo’s history, engaging in ground grappling was done in this way. It really wasn’t until judo became more of an international sport and influenced by western wrestling, Russian sambo and other non-Japanese influences that fighting off the flank in this way became less prominent. In the book “Newaza of Judo” (by Kotani, et al) referred to “Newaza no Semekata.” This translates to “Attacking Forms of Supine Techniques.” So, historically, what we now generically call “Newaza” is a descriptive and specific term for attacking an opponent in the supine position. This attacking is done by both the judoka on the bottom and the judoka on the top.

KOSEN JUDO: KOSEN is shortened from KOTO SENMON GAKKO, the name used for the technical or higher specialty colleges in Japan. The Kosen schools started judo competitions in 1898 and the emphasis was on groundfighting. Some people regard KOSEN JUDO as a different style of judo.

OMOTE: Front Facing Position.

MAE: Front Direction.

USHIRO: Rear (Often used to describe action in a rear direction.)

URA: Behind or Back. Opposite side, Reverse side.

KOHO: Backward Direction (as in Koho Ukemi or Backward Ukemi).

SOKUHO: Side Direction (as in Sokuho Ukemi or Side Ukemi).

ZEMPO: Front Direction. KAITEN: Rolling (as in Zempo Kaiten or Front Rolling Ukemi).

YOKO: Side, From the Side Direction. SAYU: Sideways, Lateral, Right and Left.

TATE: Vertical.

KAMI: Top, Upper Part. UE: Upper

UKI: To Float, To Straddle.

MIGI: Right. HIDARI: Left.

SOTO: Outer or Outside.

UCHI: Inner or Inside.

JODAN: Upper Level. CHUDAN: Middle Level. GEDAN: Lower Level.

AGE: To Lift or to Raise.

OTOSHI: To Drop or to Trap.

UTSUBUSE: To Lie Face Down on the Mat.

AOMUKE: To Lie Face Up on the Mat.

FUSEGI: To Resist or Repel.

NOGARE: To Escape or Avoid.

SUKASHI: To Avoid. (Often confused with SUKOSHI: “A Little.”)

KAESHI: Reverse Direction, Counter Movement.

KAESHI WAZA: “Counter or Reverse Technique”

GYAKU: “Opposite or Reverse Action.”

DAKI: To Hug or Embrace.

KEIKO: “Practice.” RENSHU: “Drill or Practice.”

SOTAI RENSHU: “Partner Practice.” SOTAI= Partner. RENSHU= Practice or Drill.

TANDOKU RENSHU: “Solo Practice.” TANDOKU= Solo, Alone, Single.

UCHIKOMI: “Strike Apply.” UCHI= To Strike or Hit. KOMI= Apply (Repeatedly). The repetition drill using in judo training.

BUTSUKARI: “Battering Practice.” BUTSU= “To Collide, Bump Into.” KARI= “To Drive Together.” BUTSUKARI is the name of the training drill that is now commonly called UCHIKOMI.

HON: “Original.” The basic application of a technique or movement in judo. KIHON: “Fundamental or Foundation.”

HENKA: “Change or Variation.”

KUZURE: “Irregular, Out of Shape.” Often referred to in English as “Modified.”

**The following are names of techniques, principles and technical concepts.**

NAGE WAZA: “Throwing Techniques.” NAGE= To Throw, to Project, To Fling. WAZA= Techniques. This term is used to identify a throwing technique and is also used to describe the classification of all throwing techniques in judo. The concept here is to project the opponent over or around the body and to the ground or mat.

TACHI WAZA: “Standing Techniques.” TACHI= To Stand.

KOSHI WAZA: “Hip Techniques.” KOSHI= Hip.

ASHI WAZA: “Leg or Foot Techniques.” ASHI= Leg or Foot.

TE WAZA: “Hand Techniques.” TE= Hand.

SUTEMI WAZA: “Sacrifice Techniques.” SUTEMI= “To Sacrifice.”

KATAME WAZA: “Holding Secure Techniques.”  
KATAME= “To Tie Tightly, To Fasten, To Stabilize, To Make Secure, Fortifying or Firm.” While not often used today, this is the classification of all ground grappling techniques in judo.

OSAEKOMI WAZA: “Pin Apply Techniques.” OSAE= “To hold, pin, press down or immobilize.” KOMI= “To apply.”

SHIME WAZA: “Squeeze or Pinch Shut Techniques.”  
SHIME= “To tighten or squeeze shut.” Today, the only area that Shime Waza is applied is on the neck or throat, but in the early years of Kodokan Judo, Shime Waza was used to constrict; 1-the neck. 2-the body, and 3-to smother the opponent. DOJIME: “Body Squeezing.” This was one of the techniques in Shime Waza where the trunk of the body was constricted by the opponent’s legs.

KANSETSU WAZA: “Joint Techniques.” KANSETSU= “Joint of the Body.”

ATEMI WAZA: “Striking Body Techniques.” ATE= “To Strike.” MI= “The Human Body.”

OWAZA: Major Technique. This refers to throwing techniques such as Uchi Mata, Harai Goshi, Seoi Nage and others that require major body action or movements often where the opponent is lifted.

KOWAZA: Minor Technique. This refers to throwing techniques such as Ko Uchi Gari, Okuri Ashi Barai and others that require less body action or movements and are generally foot throws, sweeps or reaps.

SEOI NAGE: SEOI= To Carry Over or Across the Back.  
NAGE= To Throw, Project or Cast. (Often referred to as the “Shoulder Throw,” SEOI NAGE is one of the most misunderstood terms used in judo. It’s cumbersome to use the term “Carry Over the Back Throw” when translating the Japanese name to English and easier to say “Shoulder Throw.”)

**The following terminology is used to describe the application of technical skills in judo.**

KUZUSHI: “To Break.” Kuzushi refers to causing a destabilization of the integrity of the body’s structure, causing

collapse or weakness in the posture, balance, movement and stability. Specifically, when we say “break the balance,” this is BARANSU WO KUZUSHI: Breaking Balance. BARANSU= Balance. WO= Indicates direct object of an action. KUZUSHI= Break.

TSUKURI: “To Build or Construct.” Tsukuri refers to the building or creation of a structure or shape (in the case of judo, the shape of a technique). This term directly implies that KUZUSHI has been used to break down the stability of the defender and TSUKURI immediately constructs or builds a technique by the attacker. There is an immediate, almost simultaneous (if not actually simultaneous) transition from Kuzushi to Tsukuri. Before Jigoro Kano conceived Kuzushi, Tsukuri was considered to be the initial movement phase in applying a technique.

KAKE: “To Suspend or to Hang.” This implies the controlling of the body in the process of moving it. The process of hanging or suspending something in the air. Kake is the result of Kuzushi and Tsukuri. In Kodokan Judo theory, Kake is the final phase in the application of a technical movement with the actual finish of the technique being implied. Let’s look at one more phase in the practical application of a technical skill.

KIME: “To Decide, to settle a Matter, To Finish, to Clinch a Victory, To Focus (this implies Finality).” Kime is the follow-through or finish to a technique in the same way a golfer follows through on the swing of a club or the batter follows through on the swing of a bat when he hits the ball in baseball. Kime is not part of Kodokan Judo theory but is in practical terms, the “Third and a Half” element of technical skill application. In Kodokan Judo theory, Kime is not included as a specific action but rather is implied as being part of Kake. In some martial arts, this final phase of a technical skill is called ZANSHIN. ZANSHIN= “Remaining Mind.” To remain aware after the execution of a technique. However, this word does not accurately describe the finishing action used in judo.

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