

BASIC JAPANESE through comics

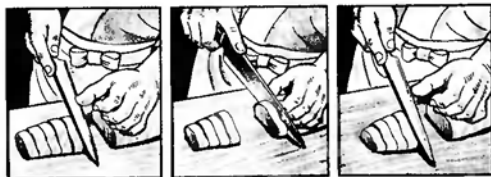
Lesson 31 • Sasuga

When translating a foreign language, there are some words that have a neat and tidy English equivalent, and some that don't. *Sasuga* is one of the latter. The concept of *sasuga*, however, is quite simple and a few good manga examples and a little explanation should be sufficient to clarify it, even for beginners.

Sasuga is translated most simply as "as you'd expect." It's generally an expression of awe or admiration, used when someone who is expected to be good at something proves to be truly skillful or gifted. For example, when Michael Jordan makes a game-winning 3-point shot at the buzzer, you could say, "*sasuga*," meaning, "That's just what you would have expected from Michael Jordan." *Sasuga* does have some similarity with *yappari* (Basic Japanese #27), since it indicates that an outcome is "as expected," but *sasuga* is usually more specifically linked to someone or something's reputation, rather than the expectations of the observer. It's also used mostly in a positive sense, although two of our examples illustrate exceptions. Get this concept down and your Japanese friends will be saying, "*Sasuga nihongo ga umai!*" ("As would be expected of you, your Japanese is good!")

"That's a pro for you."

Watching a pro at work can lead to exclamations of *sasuga*. Here, a customer at a *ryōtei* (traditional Japanese restaurant) is awed by the chef's sashimi-slicing technique.



Customer: さすが、うまい もん です ね。
Sasuga, umai mon desu ne.
 as expected skillful (emph.) is colloq.
 "As you'd expect, he's really good."
 "That's a pro for you, he's really good!"
 (PL3)

Shachō: あたりまえ や。
Atarimae ya.
 a matter of course is
 "Of course!" (PL2)

- *mon* is a contraction of *mono*, which in this usage serves mainly as emphasis.
- *ya* is a dialect version of *da*.



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Sasuga + position or title

The experienced caddy Chitta rates a *sasuga* when he tells his client that the opponent's shots are all going left, and points out that this is a good chance to take the lead. Using *sasuga* implies that he fulfills the expectations that people have because of his position/reputation.



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Okita: さつすが 名キャディ! コース だけでなく
Sassuga mei-kyadi! Kōsu dake de naku
 as you'd expect famous/great caddy course not only
 相手の ゴルフ も 読んでる んだ。
aitē no gorufu mo yonderu n da.
 opponent's golf also is/are reading (explan.)
 “Just as you'd expect from a great caddy. You're not just reading the course, but the opponent's game as well!” (PL2)

Sound FX: ポン
Pon
 (sound of a pat on the shoulder)

Chitta: にやはは、それほどでも...
Nya ha ha, Sore hodo demo...
 (laugh) to that extent even
 “Ah ha ha. It's not such a big deal.” (PL2-3)

- saying *sasuga* (doubling the “s” sound) adds emphasis.
- adding the prefix 名 (*mei*, lit. “name”) to a title or position is like saying, “the noted/distinguished/celebrated...”
- yonde-ni* is a contraction of *yonde-iru*, from *yomu*, “read.”

Determined to earn money to help her grandfather build a house, Izumi takes on a part-time job with some other students helping one of her professors. Her previous training as an OL (office lady) stands her in good stead and her efficiency elicits a *sasuga* from her co-workers.

Sound FX: ガー ガー
Gā gā
 (sound of a copy machine)

“Sound” FX: ささささ
Sa sa sa sa
 (effect of repeated quick motions)

Sound FX: とんとん
Ton ton
 (sound of tapping papers on table)

“Sound” FX: てきぱき てきぱき
Tekipaki tekipaki
 (effect of doing something quickly and efficiently)

Sound FX: カタ カタ カタ カタ カタ
Kata kata kata kata kata
 (sound of clacking computer keys)

Co-worker: さすが もと OL だけあって...
Sasuga moto o-eru dake atte...
 as might expect formerly office lady as might be expected from
 “True to form for an ex-OL...” (PL2)

- dake atte* (“as might be expected from...”) is similar in meaning to *sasuga* and is frequently used in combination with it.



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For someone you look up to

In this example from *Urusei Yatsura*, Ton-chan has been implanted with a seed that bestows super-human strength as long as the sun is shining on him. In a fight, he rips a tree out of the ground by its roots, but then clouds block the sun, he loses his power, and the tree falls on him. When the sun comes out again seconds later, he regains his strength and pushes the tree off with one hand. His little sister expresses her admiration with *sasuga*—implying she never doubted he could do it.

© Takahashi Rumiko / *Urusei Yatsura*, Shogakukan

“Sound” FX: ばっ
Ba!
 (effect of a sudden movement)

Asuka: さすがは おにいさま。
Sasuga wa onii-sama.
 as expected as for older brother
 “That’s my big brother, alright.” (PL3-4)

- the *wa* after *sasuga* is optional in this kind of usage.

Seizō has tracked down his older brother Keikichi, who left his son’s home eight years ago to live alone. Keikichi had felt restricted living with his son, and decided to move out and continue his career as a roofer even though he was almost sixty years old. Seizō has just tried to convince him to go back with his son, but finally realized that Keikichi was happy and doing well on his own. Now Seizō has a new respect for his older brother.

Seizō: いくつ になっても さすが、兄貴だ。
Ikutsu ni natte mo sasuga, aniki da.
 how many (years) becomes even after all big brother is
 “No matter how old we get, he is, after all, my big brother.” (PL2)

- ikutsu* is literally “how much,” but when used with a person refers to age.
- in this example, *sasuga* is similar to *yahari* (“as expected,” see Basic Japanese #27), but implies a feeling of respect.
- aniki* is a slang/informal word for “older brother.”

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Outcome is what one would expect

When referring to an **outcome**, *sasuga* usually has positive implications, but this example is an exception. In this case, *sasuga* gives something of a sarcastic tone.

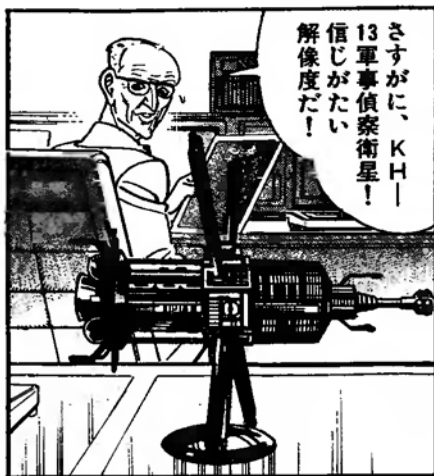
Employee: 会社 に 2 晩 泊まる と
Kaisha ni futa-ban tomaru to
 company/office at 2 nights stay over if/when
"Staying at the office two nights in a row ..."
 さすがに 汗くさい な。
sasuga ni ase-kusai nā.
 of course/really stinking of sweat (colloq.)
"... just as you'd expect, I really stink of sweat!" (PL2)

Sound FX: くん
Kun
 (sound of smelling/sniffing)
 • *sasuga ni* could be replaced with *yahari yappari* ("as expected/naturally") in this example, but *sasuga ni* feels a bit more emphatic — "I really stink."



© Akizuki Ritsu / OL Shinkaron, Kōdansha

This scientist is an expert at analyzing photos taken by spy satellites. His crew has just used satellite photos to locate a missile site in the Middle East, and he is amazed at the satellite's capabilities.



© Saito Takao / Gorugo 13, Shogakukan

Dr. Bellmeyer:

さすがに、KH-13 軍事 偵察 衛星！
Sasuga ni, kei-etchi jusan gunji teisatsu eisei!
 as you'd expect (name) military reconnaissance satellite

信じがたい 解像度 だ！
Shinjigatai kaizōdo da!
 hard to believe resolution is
"That's a KH-13 military reconnaissance satellite for you! Unbelievable resolution!" (PL2)

- adding the suffix *-gatai* to a verb gives the meaning "hard to ...". The verb here is *shinjiru*, "believe," so *shinjigatai* = "hard to believe."
- the scientist's name is written ベルマイヤ (*Berumaiya*) in katakana, so the English spelling Bellmeyer seems like a reasonable guess.

Living up to a reputation

Mr. Nakamura appears to be a harmless, aging Japanese tourist, but he is actually an assassin. His camera is booby-trapped to jab the user in the eye with a poisoned needle when the shutter button is pressed. He asks his unsuspecting victim, the vice-president of an electronics company, to take his picture. The victim is impressed that there seems to be a zoom feature built into the small, automatic camera.

Victim:

さすが メイド・イン・ジャパンです な。
Sasuga meido in Japan desu na.
 as you'd expect made in Japan is (colloq.)

"This certainly lives up to the reputation of 'made in Japan'." (PL3)

Mr. Nakamura:

セントポール 寺院 が 入る ように お願いします。
Sen-to Pōru jūin ga hairu yō ni o-negai shimasu.
 Saint Paul cathedral (subj) enter so that please

"Please get Saint Paul's Cathedral in the background." (PL3)



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Two rival companies are in the beginning stages of preparing bids for an important construction project. They each want to find out what the other is up to, so one of the company presidents gives the other a ring.



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Suzuki: (on other end of phone)

電々の件で 動いてる そうだが、本気 か？
Denden no ken de ugoite-ru sō da ga, hanki ka?
 (name) 's affair on are moving (hearsay) but serious ?
 "I hear you're moving on the NTT project; are you serious?" (PL2)

- the man pictured in this panel is Amakasu.
- ugoite-ru* is a contraction of *ugoite-iru*, from *ugoku*, "move."
- 電々 (*denden*) is short for *Denden Kōsha*, which is short for *Nippon Denshin Denwa Kōsha* (Nippon Telegraph and Telephone Public Corporation).

Amakasu: (on other end of phone)

ほう、さすが 地獄耳!!
Hō, sasuga jigoku-mimi!
 well, as you'd expect hell-ears
 "Well, no wonder they call you *jigoku-mimi*!" (PL2)

- the man pictured in this panel is Suzuki.
- jigoku-mimi*, lit. "hell-ears," is used to refer to very sharp ears, and by extension, to someone who always seems to be in touch with events, and from whom no secrets can be kept.

Sasuga no

Faithful readers of *Mangajin* are familiar with Tanaka-kun, the salaryman antihero of a four-frame manga series bearing his name. Here, Tanaka-kun asks his boss if there is something he can do, but the boss is reluctant to give him anything difficult or important. This is another example of *sasuga* in a negative context.

Boss: この手紙をポストに 入れてきてくれ!
Kono tegami o postou ni irete kite kure!
 this letter (obj.) post box to put in for me and come back
 これなら さすがの 田中くん も
Kore nara sasuga no Tanaka-kun mo
 this if it is reputable/notorious (name-hon.) even/also
 ミス は しない だろう。
misu wa shinai darō.
 mistake as-for won't do probably/surely
"Go mail this letter for me. Even you with your reputation surely can't bungle that." (PL2)

FX: ガックリ

Gakkuri

(effect of being disappointed)

- *irete kite kure* is from the *-te* forms of *ireru* ("insert") and *kuru* ("come"), plus *kure*, which after a *-te* form makes an abrupt request or relatively gentle command. The *-te* form of a verb followed by a form of *kuru* means "(go) do the action and then return to the present location."
- *misu* is an abbreviation of the English word "mistake." *Misu o suru* means "Make a mistake," and *Misu o/wa shinai* is the negative form.
- Tanaka-kun still manages to botch this task, putting the letter in the wrong post box.



© Tanaka Hiroshi / Tanaka-kun, Take Shobō

A tasty conclusion

These people were all helping Tagawa move out of his office, and it came time for a lunch break. Just as they were trying to decide what to eat, they received a surprise delivery of food from one of Tagawa's friends, a restaurant proprietress.



Tagawa: うまい!!

Umai!

"(These are) delicious!"

Friend: 本当 おいしい。

Hontō oishii

really delicious

"You're right, they're good!"



Tagawa: さすが 一流の 料亭 の おにぎり だ。

Sasuga ichi-ryū no ryōtei no onigiri da.

as you'd expect first class restaurant 's rice balls are

"Now that's a first class restaurant's onigiri."

- *ryōtei* are traditional Japanese restaurants.
- *onigiri* are balls of rice, often with *umeboshi* (dried, pickled plums) or salmon, etc., in the middle. They are standard fare for any kind of "take along" lunch in Japan, much as sandwiches are in the U.S.

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