

日本語流 6

The Nihongo Way 6

< Today's dialogue >

On your morning walk in the park you (U) meet a Japanese walker (J) you often see.



U: おはようございます。暑いですねえ。	<i>Ohayô gozaimasu. Atsui desu nē.</i>
J: そうですねえ。少し蒸しますねえ。	<i>Sôdesu nē. Sukoshi mushimasu nē.</i>
U: 昨日は、ぼくは北海道にいましたけど、 全然暑くなかったですよ。 とても気持ちよかったです。	<i>Kinô wa boku wa Hokkaidô ni imashita kedo, zenzen atsuku nakatta desu yo. Totemo kimochi-yokatta desu.</i>
J: 東京は、昨日も蒸し暑かったですよ。	<i>Tôkyô wa kinô mo mushi-atsukatta desu yo.</i>
U: あ、そうですか。同じ日本ですけど、 違いますねえ。	<i>A, sô desu ka. Onaji Nihon desu kedo, chigaimasu nē.</i>
J: 日本は小さいですけど、細長いですから…。	<i>Nihon wa chiisai desu kedo, hoso-nagai desu kara...</i>

Following our discussion of verb behavior last month, we focus today on the adjective sentence. I also introduce a few basic Japanese particles.

DIALOGUE OVERVIEW

Here is the English translation:

<Dialogue>

U: Good morning. How hot it is! [lit. It's hot, isn't it!]

J: Yes, that's right. It is a little muggy, isn't it! [lit. It steams up a little.]

U: It is hot and humid indeed, isn't it!

Yesterday I was in Hokkaido and it was not hot at all. It was quite nice.

J: In Tokyo [Regarding Tokyo] it was very hot yesterday as well.

U: Oh, is that so. It's the same Japan, but (the climate) is different, isn't it!

J: Though Japan is small, it is long and narrow, so...(the climate differs).

VOCABULARY FOCUS

Adjectives

<i>hayai</i>	early, fast
<i>atsui</i>	hot
<i>mushi-atsui</i>	muggy; hot and humid [combination of <i>mushi</i> (stem of the verb <i>mushimasu</i>) and <i>atsui</i>]
<i>kimochi-ii</i>	feel good; nice, comfortable [Originally <i>kimochiyoi</i> , a combination of <i>kimochi</i> (feeling) and <i>yoi</i> (good), but <i>yoi</i> has weathered into <i>ii</i> in modern Japanese, thus <i>kimochi-ii</i>]
<i>hosonagai</i>	long and narrow, slender [combination of <i>hosoi</i> and <i>nagai</i>]
<i>hosoi</i>	slim, thin, slender, narrow
<i>nagai</i>	long

Verbs

<i>mushimasu</i>	it steams, it is muggy
<i>imasu</i>	be, stay [<i>X-ni imasu</i> : is/stay in/at X]
<i>chigaimasu</i>	is different, differ; is wrong [Though its meaning is adjective-like, the word is a verb because it behaves as a verb; e.g., <i>chigaimasen</i> (it is not different/wrong) or <i>chigaimashita</i> (it was different/wrong).]

Adverbs

<i>sukoshi</i>	a little
<i>totemo</i>	very, quite
<i>zenzen</i>	(not) at all, utterly [used to be used to emphasize negative statements only, but nowadays it is also used for the affirmative as well. The misuse is gaining, or has gained, citizenship.]
<i>hontōni</i>	truly, really, indeed

Nouns

<i>boku</i>	I [used only by males, often younger]
<i>hontō</i>	true
<i>onaji</i>	same
<i>Nihon</i>	Japan [Nippon is also used.]

GRAMMAR FOCUS

1. Japanese adjectives are not mere words.

Just as a Japanese verb can be a complete sentence on its own,* so can a Japanese adjective.

Atsui means “It is hot” (a sentence), rather than just the word “hot.” The difference between “*atsui desu*” and “*atsui*” is the former has an expression of psychological distance between the speaker and his counterpart. So, technically you can say “*Atsui nee*” without *desu*, but in such a situation as in today’s dialogue, that would sound too direct and possibly be rude.

* When I made this statement last month, a reader kindly responded, saying that English also uses verbs on their own, such as “Go,” “Come,” etc. This is true; however, this use is the imperative form where the subject “you” is understood and unmentioned.

2. Form conformity

If you are linguistically sensitive, you may have noticed a certain pattern to Japanese adjectives by looking at today’s list: They all end in *ai*, *ii*, *ui* or *oi*. Unless the word conforms to this pattern, it cannot be an adjective.

Now, the behavior, as shown by *atsui*:

<i>Atsui desu.</i>	It is hot.
<i>Atsukatta desu.</i>	It was hot.
<i>Atsukunai desu.</i>	It is not hot.
<i>Atsukunakatta desu.</i>	It was not hot.

To recognize the pattern, let’s study another adjective:

<i>Nagai desu.</i>	It is long.
<i>Nagakatta desu.</i>	It was long.
<i>Nagakunai desu.</i>	It is not long.
<i>Nagakunakatta desu.</i>	It was not long.

So, you can see that the core of adjectives is the part before the last *i*, i.e., *atsu* and *naga*, respectively, in the above examples. This part remains unchanged. The suffix *katta* makes the adjective past (more precisely perfective), and the suffix *kunai* makes it negative. The newly created negative words, here *atsukunai* and *nagakunai*, are yet other adjectives in effect, and their past forms follow the same pattern; hence, *atsukunakatta* and *nagakunakatta*. This is because *nai* is yet another adjective meaning “nonexistent.” (So, *nai-desu* and *arimasen* (does not exist) mean the same thing.)

3. Japanese particles

There are three types of particles in Japanese: (1) phrase-particles, (2) clause-particles and (3) sentence-particles. In contrast to English particles, such as articles (the, a) and prepositions (in, at etc.), which are placed BEFORE the relevant word, Japanese particles are always placed AFTER the relevant word, clause or sentence. Today’s dialogue contains all three types.

- (1) Phrase-particles attach to nouns and indicate the nouns' relationship to the predicate of the sentence. In dialogue, *X-wa* shows that X is the topic for the moment, while *Y-mo* indicates that Y is "in addition."
- (2) Clause-particles attach to a preceding sentence A and connect it to the subsequent sentence B; in today's dialogue, *kedo* connects A to B slightly contrastively. *Kara* has a different function and shows that its preceding sentence A is a reason for the subsequent sentence B (which sentence is often omitted when obvious).
- (3) Sentence-particles attach to the end of a sentence to determine the sentence's entire mode. You have already seen *ka*, which changes sentences into questions, and *yo*, by which the speaker indicates new information. The newly introduced particle, *nee* (elongated *ne*), seeks agreement; it is used when the speaker seeks to share a feeling.

CULTURE FOCUS

When listening to Japanese people talk, you will notice frequent use of *nee* in their conversations. This is a periodic, almost ritual, seeking of agreement between the parties to the interaction; Japanese people typically speak as though moving along hand in hand, carefully avoiding confrontation.

This mentality can also be found by studying the verb *chigaimasu*. In English, to be different and to be wrong are two entirely different things, but *chigaimasu* means both at the same time in Japanese.