

Hello and welcome to Naruhodo Japan, the podcast for learning about the language and culture of Japan from a Nikkei perspective. I am your host, Mariko.

ようこそ。 「なるほど JAPAN」が^{はじ}始まります。 ^{につけいじん}日系人の^{かんてん}観点から^{にほんご}日本語と^{にほん}日本の^{ぶんか}文化を^{まなぶ}学ぶためのポッドキャストです。ホストのマリコです。

Good manners and proper etiquette is a cultural value very important to Japanese society. Key components of this are greetings said throughout the day and in various situations, such as “good morning” or “good evening”. Knowing these greetings and when to say them will be quite useful when speaking with Japanese or visiting Japan. Not only will Japanese appreciate your knowledge of these greetings and will think that you have good manners, they might even be impressed or shocked that you know them. Either way, one thing is for certain, knowing some of these phrases and using them at the appropriate moment will impress the average Japanese person. The word for greetings in Japanese is “aisatsu” あいさつ.

In this episode’s transcript I have included romaji for the greetings. I have not been using romaji heavily because I think it’s important to learn how to read and write in Japanese. I feel that the greetings covered in this episode are very important, especially if one was to travel to Japan. That is why I included the romaji for these phrases, to be sure that you could read them and didn’t rely upon hearing them alone.

Phrases for meeting people

The first thing you want to say when you meet someone is:

- hajime mashite ^{はじ}初めまして

This is equivalent to “Nice to meet you”. In this case, “hajime” means the “first time” so you definitely want to say this only when you are meeting someone for the first time. It is completely appropriate for both parties to say this phrase.

Next, you might want to introduce yourself:

- _(name)_ to moushimasu (^{なまえ}名前) と^{もう}申します
This means “I am called _(name)_”.

Example:

- I am called Mariko. まりこと^{もう}申します。

The final phrase you are likely to say when meeting someone is roughly “Please look kindly upon me” in English, but I like to explain it in more natural terms such as “I look forward to working with you” or “Pleased to have made your acquaintance.”

- yoroshiku onegai shimasu よろしく^{ねが}お願いします
The casual version is simply: yoroshiku よろしく

よろしく really is a context sensitive phrase and its usage is not isolated to meeting people. You'll notice that I always say this at the end of each podcast. A more generic way to translate this phrase is "I am looking for your favor in the matter", whatever the context of the scenario may be. When I sign off from this podcast, I am kindly asking that you leave feedback and tune in again. In that way I am asking for your favor in the matter.

At some point while introducing yourself, it is appropriate to bow. If you're not sure when to bow, just follow the lead of the other person. Japanese bow with each other but if you are a foreigner, they are likely to shake your hand or do both. To write about the etiquette of bowing in Japanese culture could fill volumes so I will not cover it extensively here. Instead, you should check out some links I will provide on our website. It is not unheard of for new employees of a company to receive a thick book on company etiquette, including pages upon pages of the proper bows to various employee ranks, associates, and customers. Basically when men bow they keep their arms to their sides and when women bow they place their hands together in front of them. Do not look at the person as you bow like you are about to take them out in a fight. Lower your head and bend forward a certain amount of degrees, depending on how much respect you need to show someone. Don't get carried away with the bow unless the situation calls for it. A 20-30 degree bow or an extended nod will suffice for most situations.

Phrases for greeting people at different times of day

In the morning, one should say "good morning":

- ohayou gozaimasu おはようございます

The casual version is simply: ohayou おはよう

English speakers often mishear this phrase and add an extra vowel, confusing it as "ohaiyo", similar to the American state of Ohio.

At noon and in the afternoon, one should say "good day":

- konnichiwa こんにちは

This phrase also means "hello".

At night, one should say "good evening":

- konbanwa こんばんは

For both konnichiwa こんにちは and konbanwa こんばんは, you will notice that the "wa" sound at the end of each phrase is written not with the letter わ but with は functioning like a particle and thus being read as "wa". One way to remember the correct spelling in Japanese might be to consider the phrase literally. You'll recall that when は is a particle at the end of a sentence, it may function as a question marker. Therefore, you could translate the phrases as "How is today?" and "How is this evening?" respectively.

When it is late enough that by saying "good night", one is implying that it is time to go to sleep, then the appropriate phrase is:

- oyasumi nasai お^{やす}休みなさい

The casual version is simply: oyasumi お^{やす}休み

For saying “hello” on a telephone and on a telephone only, one should say:

- moshi moshi もしもし

English speakers often mishear this phrase as “mushi mushi” which is completely incorrect and will either puzzle Japanese or make them laugh as it means “insect insect”.

Phrases for greeting people whom you have not seen in a long time

This is the equivalent to “long time no see” but may also be used over the phone for when you haven’t spoken to someone in awhile.

- (o)hisashiburi (お)久^{ひさ}しぶり

You may say “o” in front to be more respectful.

Phrases for parting or ending a conversation

When saying good-bye, the formal way is:

- sayo(u)nara さよ(う)なら

This may be spelled with a regular “Yo” (よ) or a long “You” (よう).

In more casual situations, one might say “later”:

- mata ne またね

To make this even more casual, you could say “well later”

- jya mata ne じゃまたね

“Mata” actually means “again” but in this context it makes more sense to translate it as “later”. “Ne” is a casual ending particle and will be discussed in a follow up episode on particles. Saying “mata ne” or “jya mata ne” is a shortened version of a couple of possible phrases, depending on if you are talking in person, on the phone, or via letter. It could mean “let’s meet again”, “let’s talk again”, etc. Here are some of the full phrases:

- Let’s meet again: mata ai mashou また会^あいましょう
- Let’s talk again: mata hanashi mashou また話^{はな}しましょう
- Let’s play again: mata asobi mashou また遊^{あそ}びましょう

A phrase ending in “shou” しょう is equivalent to “let’s” in English. In English, “let’s” is a polite way to tell someone to do something. This is no different in Japanese and is actually a very Japanese thing to say. You’ll notice Japanese say “let’s do something” a lot. I’ll expand upon how to use “shou” しょう in another episode.

One might prefer in some situations to say other “see you again” type phrases:

- (see you) again tomorrow: mata ashita また明^{あした}日
- (see you) again next week: mata raishuu また来^{らいしゅう}週

English and other foreign words are being incorporated into daily Japanese use, especially with the younger generations, at what some might consider an alarming rate. For at least 20 years or more, Japanese have also used the adopted English phrase “bye-bye”:

- baibai バイバイ

These parting phrases may be combined, especially on a late night phone call. It is not uncommon to end such a conversation by saying most or all of the following: じゃまたね、おやすみ、さようなら、バイバイ。

Phrases for leaving from and returning to your home

If you live alone then these won't matter so much but you should still practice them. When a person leaves the house, they say a “I'm leaving” phrase and the others in the house have a matching response of “good-bye”. When a person returns home, they say a “I'm back” phrase and the others in the house have a matching response of “welcome back”. These phrases and responses are quite similar to “Hi honey, I'm home” or “Goodbye dear” except that it may be said by anyone to anyone who lives together, not just couples.

- I'm leaving (the residence): ittekimasu 行ってきます
- Good-bye (response): itterasshai 行ってらっしゃい
- I'm back (at the residence): tadaima ただいま
- Welcome back (to the residence): okaeri nasai お帰りなさい

The welcome back phrase may be shortened down to simply “okaeri” お帰り to make it casual.

Phrases for someone else's home or room

When you visit someone else's home or visit their room, there is another phrase entirely to say and it literally means “I will disturb you” but it is better translated as “Sorry to disturb you” or “Please excuse me for bothering you”.

- oiyama shimasu お邪魔します

Another common phrase in this situation literally means “Please forgive me”. It may be thought of in some situations as “excuse me” or “is anybody home?”

- gomen kudasai ごめんください

A third common phrase in this situation literally means “I will be rude”.

- shitsurei shimasu 失礼します

I think with these 3 particular phrases, you can begin to see just how polite Japanese are when dealing with each other and how important good manners are to its culture. Of course, there are rude people in Japan but the Japanese ideal is to be polite. It is not uncommon for elderly people to chastise the young for being rude but that may be true of all cultures.

When you are done visiting someone or bothering someone at work or on the phone, you could use some of the phrases for disturbing someone, but used in the past tense, such as:

- shitsurei shimashita 失礼しつれいしました
- ojyama shimashita お邪魔じやましました

Phrases for leaving work

Japanese workplaces have other phrases that they use altogether. In the Japanese working culture, it is quite typical that the employees should get there before their boss and not leave until after their boss leaves. Also, in general it is not so much important as the quality or quantity of work one did in a given day, merely the amount of time actually spent at the workplace. Therefore, to leave before others indicates slacker tendencies, which is probably why Japanese workplaces use the following phrases:

- I'm leaving (workplace): osaki ni shitsurei shimasu お先さきに失礼しつれいします

This may be shortened to simply “osaki ni” お先さきに for a more casual feel.

This means “I’m leaving before you” but is more literally saying that you are being rude by leaving first.

- Good-bye (workplace response): otsukaresama deshita お疲れ様つかさまでした

This means “What hard work you did” or “Thank you for your hard work” but more literally it’s like saying “you must be tired”.

“Osaki ni” can be used in other situations as well since it literally means “to go first”. Let’s say you arrive at a door at the same time as another person. Neither of you is sure who should go first and it may be awkward with each person trying to let the other go first. In English, one might say several things such as “go ahead”, “after you”, or “ladies first” and then the other person might say “no, after you”, “go ahead”, “thank you”, or say nothing at all. In Japanese, it is likely that both people would say “osaki ni”. It should be noted that the “o” at the beginning of “osaki ni” is one of those cases of polite speech where an “o” was added in front so it may be omitted for casual speech. I’ve been dropping hints about formal vs. casual Japanese here and there throughout the various episodes but we’ll cover it more thoroughly in a future episode.

- You first / go ahead: osaki ni douzo お先さきにどうぞ
- (Thanks) I’m going first: saki ni ikimasu 先さきに行いきます

Phrases of welcome

When you arrive at a destination, particularly tourist destinations such airports, hotels, and other attractions, you will be welcomed with:

- Youkoso: ようこそ

Whenever you walk into a shop or restaurant in Japan, you can expect an employee or all the employees to greet you with welcome and sometimes they do shout it:

- Irrashimase: いらっしゃいませ

Phrases of thanks

Just as in English there is the full formal phrase of “thank you very much” which can be casually shortened all the way down to “thanks”, so does Japanese have variations on saying “thank you”.

- Thank you very much: doumo arigatou gozaimasu どうもありがとうございます
- Thank you: arigatou gozaimasu ありがとうございます
- Thank you much: doumo arigatou どうもありがとう
- Thanks: doumo / arigatou どうも / ありがとう
- You’re welcome: douitashi mashite どう^{いた}致しまして

This is the phrase that English speakers often joke as “don’t touch my moustache”.

Phrases of apology

Some days it may seem that Japanese are always apologizing for something. Here are the most common phrases and contexts. It is very common for Japanese to bow as they apologize. Small apologies may be a regular bow at about an angle of roughly 20 degrees. Deep apologies might go so far as the person to be on their knees and bow until their forehead touches the floor and hold that position for quite awhile.

When you need a general phrase of apology for small things, such as bumping into someone:

- I’m sorry (general): gomen nasai ごめんなさい

It may be shortened to “gomen” ごめん for casual situations.

- I’m sorry / pardon me: sumimasen deshita すみませんでした

It may be shortened to “sumimasen” すみません for casual situations.

“Sumimasen” すみません may also be said when you want to say “excuse me” to get someone’s attention, such as when you want to ask a stranger a question, get the attention of an employee at a store, or get the attention of a server at a restaurant.

To the person who went out of their way to help you in some manner, Japanese tend to say “I’m sorry to have been of trouble” or “I’m sorry to have been a bother”.

- (go) meiwake wo kakete (doumo) sumimasen deshita (ご) ^{めいわく}迷惑をかけて (どうも) すみませんでした

(Include the words in parenthesis for a more formal version.)

When you really need to lay it on thick with the apology, then one could say:

- moushiwake masen deshita ^{もう わけ}申し訳ませんでした

(The casual version is to shorten it to “moushiwake masen”.)

“Moushiwake masen” ^{もう わけ}申し訳せん is also the phrase used on some websites as the 404 error pages. You could also use it when you need to apologize to a customer or perhaps have wronged someone close to you and “gomen nasai” ごめんなさい just isn’t cutting it. “Gomen nasai” ごめんなさい is more like “I’m sorry” whereas “moushiwake masen” ^{もう わけ}申し訳せん is closer to “I apologize” or “I offer my apologies”.

The last 2 phrases may also be combined to form:

- (go)meiwaku wo kakete moushiwake masen ^{めいわく}ご迷惑を^{もう}かけて^{わけ}申し訳ません

When you are very sorry, the way to add “very” is to say “taihen” ^{たいへん}大変, which can mean “troublesome, grave, terrible, horrible, difficult” but when apologizing, it means “very” or “extremely”. It is similar to the English phrase “my deepest apologies”.

- taihen sumimasen deshita ^{たいへん}大変すみませんでした
- taihen moushiwakemasen deshita ^{たいへん}大変^{もう}申し^{わけ}訳ませんでした

Phrases when offering guests refreshments

Another time when Japanese apologize, which is very much a trait of Japanese culture, is when they offer someone something, such as drinks or snacks to guests. They may also apologize when giving a gift to someone. It’s like saying “Sorry this isn’t very much” in English. No matter how great a cook the person may be or how nice the gift may be, in Japanese culture the person who offers it downplays the item and/or themselves and at times it might almost seem like they are insulting the item and/or themselves. Even if the other person shows appreciation or praise, the person who offered it might say a small thank you and shun the compliments by disagreeing with it.

- (Sorry) this isn’t much but... taishita mono jyanai desu kedo... ^{もの}たいした物じゃ
ないですけど。。。。
- (Sorry) this isn’t tasty but... oishiku demo nai desu kedo... ^{おいし}美味しくでもない
ですけど。。。。

After downplaying what the person is offering, they might say “douzo” どうぞ which means “please” as in “please have some” or “please partake of this”. But they might also say a full sentence. Since there are several things the person might say, I will first break it down into pieces and then give example sentences.

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|----------------------------------|
| please | douzo | どうぞ |
| have one | hitotsu wo | ^{ひと} 一つを |
| try it (eat) | tabete mite | ^た 食べて ^み 見て |
| try it (drink) | nonde mite | ^の 飲んで ^み 見て |
| try it (taste) | ajimi shite | ^{あじ} 味 ^み 見して |
| eat it | tabete | ^た 食べて |
| drink it | nonde | ^の 飲んで |
| please (sentence ending) | kudasai | ^{くだ} 下さい |

Examples:

- Please eat and try one. douzo hitotsu wo tabete mite kudasai どうぞ一つを食べて見て下さい。
- Please have a drink. douzo nonde kudasai どうぞ飲んで下さい。
- Please taste it. douzo ajimi shite kudasai どうぞ味見して下さい。

Phrases for meal times

Instead of saying a prayer or saying grace before a meal, Japanese have a one sentence phrase said before and after meals. Saying these phrases is an absolute must in Japan for good manners. I expect that if foreigners know and use these appropriately, the average Japanese will be delighted.

- Before you eat, please say: itadaki masu いただきます
Literally this could be translated as “I am about to feast” or “I will eat”.
- After you eat, please say: gochisousama deshita ごちそうさまでした
Literally this could be translated as “It was a feast” or “It was quite a meal”.

Please note that the after meal phrase might differ with colloquialisms. It may be said by some as:

- gochisousan deshita ごちそうさんでした
- gotsuosama deshita ごつおさまでした
- gotsusousama deshita ごつそうさまでした
- itadaki mashita いただきました
- and if you travel around Japan, you might notice other local variations as well.

Well, I think that's plenty of greetings to arm you with proper Japanese etiquette for various situations so let's move on to the next segment.

Today's topic on Kaa-chan Corner is: Japanese government.

[Kaa-chan Corner]

Thank you for listening to Naruhodo Japan and if you have any questions or comments, please leave feedback on the website naruhodojapan.com. Please tune in again for the next episode. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!