

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。

Honorifics, known as ^{けいしょう}敬称 in Japanese, are similar to such titles as Mr., Mrs., and Miss in English. In English these are placed before the person's name but in Japanese honorifics are placed after the name, which is why they are also known as suffixes for addressing people. Just as you would never call yourself Mr/Mrs/Miss in English, you would never refer to yourself with an honorific in Japanese. In this episode I am going to discuss the most common suffixes used today: -san, -sama, -chan, -kun, and -sensei.

Which suffix to use depends on a few factors, namely your relationship to the other person. Japanese is a very polite and context sensitive language. When speaking Japanese, you must be aware of your relationship to the other person. You must respect everyone who is older or a higher rank than yourself. You may speak respectfully to those on the same tier as you. You may be a bit more casual with close friends and family. You may be even more casual to those younger than you and below your rank. To not follow these rules is to be rude in Japanese. The ways to talk to people in different tiers and what is considered formal versus casual will be discussed in a later episode. For now, let's get off on the right foot by using the correct suffix when addressing people.

-san さん

This is the default honorific that you should use. You may use this with anyone to whom you must show respect. Add -san to the person's last name. Once you become more familiar with the person, you may stop referring to them by their last name and add -san to their first name. Once you get to know them on a more intimate level, such as very close friends and family, you may drop -san altogether.

Examples:

- Any customer may be called ^{きやく}お客様さん
- A bride may be called ^{よめ}お嫁さん
- When speaking to someone about their daughter you may call her ^{むすめ}お娘さん
- You meet Mr. Junichi Yamada for the first time, who is or may be older than you, address him as ^{やまだ}山田さん
- Your boss at work is Mrs. Rie Adachi, address her as ^{あだち}足立さん
- You speak of your friend Miss Megumi Hoshino to a new acquaintance, refer to them as ^{ほしの}星野さん
- You are working on a project with a co-worker friend Mr. Daisuke Watanabe, it may be alright to address them by their first name ^{だいすけ}だいすけさん

- Your father, お父^{とう}さん
- Your mother, お母^{かあ}さん
- Your uncle or an older man whose name you do not know, おじさん
- Your grandfather or an elderly man whose name you do not know, おじいさん
- Your aunt or an older woman whose name you do not know, おばさん
- Your grandmother or an elderly woman whose name you do not know, おばあさん
- You are a child and are talking to a young woman, you may call her お姉^{ねえ}さん which means “older sister” but it can also mean “Miss”. You may also do the same for a young man and call him お兄^{にい}さん which means “older brother” but it can also mean the male equivalent of “Miss”, which does not exist in English. In English, there is only one way to address a man based on his marriage status. In English, a woman knows she has aged when strangers stop calling her Miss or start calling her Ma’am. The same is true in Japanese. A woman goes from お姉^{ねえ}さん to おばあさん and then finally おばあさん.

Sometimes –san maybe be used for animals, especially when telling a story to a child or if the child is talking about animals. If your children’s story is about a turtle, it might be referred to as 亀^{かめ}さん. In English we say that there is a man in the moon and one might think this is true of Japanese when they refer to the moon as お月^{つき}さん.

-sama 様

Sama is even more respectful than –san. Use this with anyone to whom you must show great respect. Often this is used in writing, such as in a letter or on an envelope. You may place this after the person’s full name.

Examples:

- A kid’s meal at a restaurant is often called お子^こ様^{さま}セット
- Any customer may be called お客^{きやく}様^{さま}
- An envelope addressed to 左藤^{さとう}いずみ^{さま}様
- A king is called 王^{おう}様^{さま} in Japanese.
- God is called 神^{かみ}様^{さま} in Japanese.

-chan ちゃん

This honorific is used for addressing persons younger than you or those that you are intimate with. Using –chan is an affectionate term and is often used with one’s children, parents, grandparents, close friends, and romantic partners. Often –chan is added to the first name, which may be modified to give it a quality similar to that of a nickname. In English this might be Mikey for someone whose name is Michael. No matter how old a child gets, if you are older than the

child, even when they are an adult, you may still refer to them using their childhood nickname with –chan.

Examples:

- Your younger sister Erika, えりかちゃん
- Your boyfriend Yuuji, ゆうじちゃん or ゆうちょう
- Your wife Noriko, のりこちゃん or のりちゃん
- Your best friend Kazumi, かずみちゃん or かつちゃん
- A baby, ^{あか}赤ちゃん

-chan may replace –san for your family members:

- Your father, ^{とう}お父ちゃん
- Your mother, ^{かあ}お母ちゃん
- Your uncle or an older man whose name you do not know, おじちゃん
- Your grandfather or an elderly man whose name you do not know, おじいちゃん
- Your aunt or an older woman whose name you do not know, おばちゃん
- Your grandmother or an elderly woman whose name you do not know, おばあちゃん
- Your older brother, ^{にい}お兄ちゃん
- Your older sister, ^{ねえ}お姉ちゃん

You may even give pets and other objects affectionate nicknames with –chan

- Any dog may be called わんちゃん where わん is short for how dogs bark in Japanese, わんわん.

When you really want to be cute, then you can combine –chan and –sama to create –chama.

Example:

- You may call your mother ^{かあ}お母ちゃま

-kun くん

This honorific is very much like –chan except it is to be used with males only. There are some very butch girls who use –kun but this should be avoided so that you do not appear ignorant or accidentally insult a girl.

Examples:

- Your younger brother Takeshi, たけしくん or たっくん
- You are in elementary school and your friend is Osamu, おさむくん
- You are a Japanese pop star in your late teens or early 20s named Makoto, the media and even fans younger than you might refer to you as まことくん
- If you are the owner of the company and you are talking to a junior staff member named Mr. Tatsuo Suzuki, then you might call him ^{すずき}鈴木くん

-sensei 先生

Sensei means “teacher” in Japanese. You may use this with the last name or by itself to address anyone in a teaching profession as well as other professionals such as doctors. When you use sensei by itself, it is generally when you are speaking directly to the person.

Examples:

- Your piano teacher is Kouji Sakurai, さくらいせんせい 桜井先生
- Your math tutor is Mayumi Kondo, こんどうせんせい 近藤先生
- Your dentist is Akira Kobayashi, こばやしせんせい 小林先生

Those are the most common honorifics that everyone needs to know. There are others of course and I will mention a few of them. I often see -senpai せんぱい 先輩 listed as an honorific but I disagree. It means “senior” or “elder” and may be often used when referring to someone in your school in a grade above you or a co-worker who has been around longer. While it may be a good word to know, as a foreigner you’re highly unlikely to call anyone -senpai unless you start working at a Japanese company, for which I would recommend addressing everyone with –san unless they are of a particularly high rank. In that case, you might refer to them by their job title, such as company president shachou しゃちょう 社長 or department chief buchou ぶちょう 部長. There are other titles and honorifics for specific professions, martial arts, and royalty. Unless you work in these professions or dabble in martial arts then it is not worth worrying about. For royalty, it cannot be avoided that you will hear certain ones such as -heika へいか 陛下 for the emperor as in てんのうへいか 天皇陛下, His Majesty the Emperor, or -hime ひめ 姫 for Princess. Often a princess will simply be called ひめさま お姫様.

That is it for honorifics. Let us move on to the next segment.

Today’s topic on Kaa-chan Corner is: stereotypes of the different regions of Japan.

[Kaa-chan Corner]

Thank you for listening to Naruhodo Japan. If you liked this episode or have any questions, please leave feedback on the website naruhodojapan.com. This podcast was created by your host Mariko. Please tune in again for the next episode. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!