

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」 が始まります。 日系人の観点から日本語と日本の文化を学ぶためのポッドキャストです。ホストのマリコです。

In the previous episode we discussed honorifics, for which there was almost no bias towards gender. In this episode however we discuss the various ways to say “You” and “I”, or what you technical people might refer to as pronouns, for which the majority of these words are gender-biased. While some people do cross the gender line, as a non-native speaker I would suggest avoiding crossing the gender line when you speak or you will come across as being ignorant of Japanese. And as always in Japanese, there are various levels of politeness and to not be polite is to be rude so please be aware to speak casually only with close family and friends.

Whenever there is a group of people, such as for “us” and “them”, you may add –tachi 達 to the person’s name or the word that refers to yourself or them to make the subject plural. If you want to talk about something about yourself or the other party, such as “my” or “your”, you may add the particle No の after the person’s name or the word that refers to yourself or them to show possession. More on particles will be discussed in the next episode.

With the example sentences I have included the pronouns but it is important to note that Japanese do not often use pronouns. Who is being talked about is known due to context. One way to spot someone who is new to Japanese is their overuse of the words “You” and “I”. In fact, instead of saying any word for “You” in Japanese, the best thing to do is call the person by their name and add –san.

Words that refer to yourself and those in your party.

Watashi 私 vs. Watakushi 私

わたし is the default polite way to refer to yourself for both genders. It’s English equivalent is “I”. To be more polite, one might say わたくし. Some women might omit the W and say あたし or あたくし, which in my personal opinion is a bit prissy and so I avoid it. Men should never say あたし unless you strongly identify with female gender roles.

Examples:

- I like Japan. 私は日本が好きです。
- I am not good with English. 私は英語が苦手です。
- My name is Naomi. 私の名前はなみです。
- My husband will be back home soon. あたしの旦那さんはやがて内に帰ってきます。
- We are going to go out tonight. 私達は今晚出かけます。
- We don’t do that sort of thing. 私達はそんな事しません。

Jibun 自分^{じぶん}

This word is used almost exclusively for talking about your belongings, feelings, and other things and thus is the equivalent of “my” in English.

Examples:

- I have to do it for (the benefit of) myself. 自分^{じぶん}の^{ため}為にやらないといけない。
- My feelings are... 自分^{じぶん}の^{きもち}気持ちは。。。。
- I have thought that too. 自分^{じぶん}も^{おも}そう^{こと}思った^{こと}事があります。

Ware 我^{われ}

我^{われ} is another polite way to refer to yourself for both genders, although I feel like I notice men say it more than women. The plural form is 我^{われ}ら, which means “we” or “us” in English.

Examples:

- My family. 我^{われ}の^{かぞく}家族。
- We came from the North. 我^{われ}ら^{きた}が^{きた}北^{きた}から^き来^きました。
- That belongs to us. それ^{われ}は^{もの}我^{われ}ら^{もの}の^{もの}物^{もの}です。

Ore 俺^{おれ}

This is a casual way to refer to yourself for males. It’s English equivalent is “I” but on the gender scale there is not an equivalent. Women should never say 俺^{おれ} unless you strongly identify with male gender roles. For the plural form, both 俺^{おれ}達^{おれたち} and 俺^{おれ}ら are acceptable and mean “we” or “us” in English.

Examples:

- Please don’t touch my things. 俺^{おれ}の^{もの}物^{もの}を^{さわ}触^{さわ}ら^{くだ}ない^{くだ}で^{くだ}下^{くだ}さい。
- Lately I don’t have anything to do. 俺^{おれ}は^{さいきん}最^{さい}近^{きん}や^{こと}る^{こと}事^{こと}が^{ない}ない。
- We go out drinking often. 俺^{おれ}達^{おれたち}は^{よく}よく^{さけ}酒^のを^の飲^いみ^いに^い行^いき^いま^いす。

Boku 僕^{ぼく}

This is a casual way to refer to yourself for males, especially boys and young men. It’s English equivalent is “I” but on the gender scale there is not an equivalent. Women should never say 僕^{ぼく} unless you strongly identify with male gender roles. For the plural form, both 僕^{ぼく}達^{ぼくたち} and 僕^{ぼく}ら are acceptable and mean “we” or “us” in English.

Examples:

- Why do I always do such stupid things? 僕はなぜよくこんな馬鹿な事するだ。
ぼく はなぜ よく こんな ばか な こと する だ。
- That is one of my bad habits. それは僕の悪い癖の一つである。
それは ぼく の わるい くせ の ひとつ である。
- Won't you play with us one day? いつか僕達と一緒に遊ばないか。
いつか ぼくたち いっしょ あそ ぶ ない か。

Kochira こちら vs. Kocchi こっち

Kochira is a very polite and formal way to refer to yourself. Kocchi is the casual form of こちら and literally means “here”. So when you talk about yourself to others, in a sense you are talking about “over here”. When you speak this way, perhaps one way to think of it is that you and the other person are both ambassadors, must speak with respect to each other, and when you talk of yourself and the other person you are talking about your side of the world versus their side of the world. When you are speaking in the more casual form, perhaps you are a junior ambassador who is not yet refined in the ways of diplomacy.

Example: When talking to someone whom you must give respect, if they offer to help you or be nice to you, the proper response is: こちらこそ, which is equivalent to the response in English, “likewise” or “same here”. It means that you are offering to do the same for them.

Uchi 家

Uchi is a casual way to refer to yourself that you might use among friends, especially in the southern portion of Japan, from Osaka to Okinawa. Since the kanji means house, it is often used when talking about something to do with your family.

Examples:

- My mother. 家の母。
うち はは の 母。
- The same thing happened in my family. 家の家族にもそんな事起こりました。
うち かぞく にも そんな こと お 起こり ました。

Words that refer to others.

Anata あなた vs. Anta あんた

あなた is the default polite way to refer to others and may be used by both genders. It's English equivalent is “You”. The casual way to say あなた is Anta あんた. Please be careful to only use あんた with close friends as it may be considered rough or rude speech. When saying the plural form in a casual manner, sometimes あん達は used. あなた and あんた is also used by couples when talking to each other and may be considered a pet name such as “honey” or “darling” in English.

Examples:

- What is your name? あなたの名前は何かですか。
あなたの なまえ は 何 ですか。
- Does this belong to you? これはあなたのですか。
これは あなたの ですか。
- Where did you guys come from? あん達はどこから来ましたか。
あんた たちは どこ から 来 ました か。

Kimi 君

君 is a masculine and casual way to refer to others. It's English equivalent is "You" but on the politeness scale there is not an equivalent unless you use slang. As masculine speech is considered rough, please be careful to use this 君 only with close friends or when hanging out with the boys.

Examples:

- I wrote a letter to you. 君への手紙を書きました。
- I don't want to play with you. 君と遊びたくない。
- You have it too, right? 君も持っているよね。

Omae お前

Despite having O- at the front, which shows respect, お前は a masculine and casual way to refer to others. It's English equivalent is "You" but on the politeness scale there is not an equivalent unless you use slang. お前は rougher than 君 so please be careful using this to address others.

For the plural form, both お前達 and お前らは acceptable and mean "they" or "them" in English. However, since this is a casual word, it may be translated as "you guys" in English, but it is a bit rougher than that.

Examples:

- Who (the hell) are you? お前はだれ。
- I don't like you. お前好きじゃない。
- Don't you guys ever come here again. お前達は二度こっちにくるな。

Otaku お宅

お宅 is a very polite way to refer to others. It's English equivalent is "You" but on the politeness scale there is not an equivalent unless you perhaps you use antiquated language such as "Thou" but still, I wouldn't call it the equivalent. Since the comic book boom in the 1980s, the meaning of お宅 has transformed into becoming a way to refer to comic book maniacs. This led to it becoming a blanket term for fanatics of all types, but especially for those outside of Japan who like Japanese comic books and animation. Due to this transformation, it may be considered the equivalent of "geek" in English. I would avoid using this word to mean "geek" around older people who still consider it to be the very polite way to say "You".

Examples:

- You have a kind face. お宅は優しいような顔してます。
- Have you ever been to Kyoto? お宅は京都に行った事ありますか。

- Where does your husband work? お宅のご主人はどこで勤めていますか。

Sochira そちら vs. Socchi そっち

そちら is the matching pair to こちら and is a polite way to refer to others. そっち is the casual form of Sochira and literally means “there”. So when you talk about the other person, in a sense you are talking about “over there”. If my ambassador analogy didn’t work for you when explaining こちら and こっち, then it’s not going to work for そちら and そっち either.

Examples:

- How are you doing? そちらは如何ですか。
- Do you smoke too? そっちもタバコ吸いますか。

Ano Kata あの方

あの方 is a polite way to talk about strangers or acquaintances. 方 may be added onto other words and conjugated as –gata 方, such as あなた方.

Example:

- That person is quite famous. あの方はけっこう有名な人。

Kanojyo 彼女

This is equivalent to “she” in English. It can also mean “girlfriend”. When using the plural form 彼女達, which means “them” or “they” in English, you are referring to a group of people with a female as the central figure.

Examples:

- She has been to Hokkaido numerous times. 彼女は北海道に何回も行った事あります。
- Her father past away due to cancer. 彼女のお父さんは癌でなくなりました。
- They are all single. 彼女達は皆皆独身です。

Kare 彼

This is equivalent to “he” in English. The plural form is 彼ら, which means “them” or “they” in English, and may be used when you are referring to a group of people with a male as the central figure. Of note, the word boyfriend is 彼氏。

Examples:

- He is tall. 彼は背が高い。
- His daughter is very cute. 彼の娘はとっても可愛いです。

- They participated in a mochi-making festival. 彼らは餅つき祭りに参加しました。

Yatsu 奴

This is a casual, if not masculine and rude way to refer to someone as “he” or “she” but since a rude version of “he” and “she” does not exist in English, it would probably be said with a certain mocking or sarcastic tone in English. Perhaps a degrading way in English is to refer to someone as “it”. There are variations of 奴 as well.

Example:

- Noisy jerks. うるさい奴ら。

Koitsu 此奴 vs. Soitsu 其奴 vs. Aitsu 彼奴

These are the variations of 奴. You may write these words in kanji or most likely in hiragana. I would reserve using these words for people you don’t like and not mentioning it to people whom you must be respectful with. こいつ is equivalent to “this one here” whereas そいつ and あいつ are equivalent to “that one there”. You may remember this by knowing the words for “here” and “there” in Japanese. “Here” is こっち. “There” is そっち or あっち. The plural form of each of these words is to add -ra at the end to form: こいつら, そいつら, and あいつら.

Examples:

- It’s because of this one that we were caught by the police. こいつの所為で警察に掴まえちゃった。
- I got bit by that one’s dog. そいつの犬に噛まれた。
- That one’s a strange guy. あいつは変な人だ。

Miscellaneous

There are other pronouns as well but most of these are archaic or very rough and masculine. For the archaic pronouns, knowledge of them is only needed for watching historical dramas. For the very rough and masculine ways to refer to other persons in Japanese, it’s best for now if we don’t cover those. These can be as rough as slang or curse words in English. If you are a fan of Japanese comics and cartoons then surely you have come across these words. Please be careful when using them as they are generally considered fighting words.

Let’s move on to the next segment.

Today’s topic on Kaa-chan Corner is: Shinto-ism and Buddhism.

[Kaa-chan Corner]

Thank you for listening to Naruhodo Japan and 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!