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.

ようこそう。「なるほど JAPAN」が始(はじ)まります。日系人(にっけいじん)の観点(かんてん)から日本語(にほんご)と日本(にほん)の文化(ぶんか)を学(まなぶ)ぶためのポッドキャストです。ホストのマリコです。

Particles, known as 助詞(じょし), are probably one of the trickiest aspects of Japanese language for a beginner to master. I see countless questions on Yahoo Answers regarding particles. Sometimes I see similarities between English and Japanese but this is one of the cases where this is a Japanese issue that cannot be explained simply. Particles are the glue that hold sentences together in Japanese. Perhaps any word that is not a noun, verb, or adjective could be described as a particle. Some say they are like English prepositions but since they occur after the word or subject, they are post-positions. As I've mentioned, I'm not a technical person when it comes to language so "preposition" means nothing to me. If you're not big into grammar like that then you've come to the right place. At least I hope so.

Particles are like the English words "to", "is", "am", and "at" but cannot be placed in Japanese in a word-for-word translation as Japanese is a context sensitive language. Rather, I think it is easier to understand particles by grouping together examples sentences so that you understand the context of how the particle is used within the sentence. Once you get a feel for the different particles, you should be able to create sentences on your own using the correct particle. Don't worry if you make mistakes, just keep practicing. If you are really frustrated with particles, you may be able to omit a few of them in your sentences and though you will be speaking casual or broken Japanese, most people should get the gist of your meaning. Just be sure that you have a sense of where the particles should go. Then you can go over the various particles and decide which fit and why.

I have seen lists of particles that include words I would not classify as a particle. In my opinion, particles are a single letter in Japanese, such as Wa は, Ga が, Ni に, and Wo を . Since they are single letters, these are things that cannot be learned by searching dictionary entries. Some of the two letter particles are easy to define as words, which is why I am ambivalent to call them particles. Particles are difficult because they can be a mystery. If you can find a definition, then there is no mystery about it. I will cover the two letter particles later on but today's episode is all about single letter particles.

Overall, there may be several particles in a sentence but you will probably only use each one once, just like in English you might only say "to", "is", "am", and "at" once each in a sentence. I will now try to explain each particle and give example sentences for context.

To と

と is very much like the English word "and". You would place the particle と inbetween the words you are linking, just like "and" in English.

Examples:

- You and I. あなたと私。
- The sun and the moon. 太陽と月。
- Vegetables and meat. 野菜と肉。

When describing doing things with other people, then と may be translated as “with” when it is not grammatically correct to translate it as “and” in English.

Examples:

- I played with Kenji. (or: Kenji and I played together.) けんじと遊びました。
- I live with my grandfather. (or: My grandfather and I live together.) おじいさんと暮らしています。
- I fought with my older sister. (or: My older sister and I had a fight.) お姉さんと喧嘩しました。

と can also indicate when one is quoting speech or assuming things about someone. In English, one could start off the sentence with “He said” or quote the speech followed by a comma and “he said”. Both ways may be done in Japanese as well but usually the construct follows the latter format in my opinion since the word that indicates it is a quote is always placed after the quoted speech in Japanese, not before.

Examples:

- They cried, “I can’t take it anymore!”「もういやだ！」と叫びました。
- He said he is going for a walk. かれが散歩しに行きますと言いました。
- I don’t think Mr. Tanaka is that kind of person. 田中さんはそんな人じゃないと思います。

Finally, と can also function as the English word “if” when it is placed after certain words such as “suru” する which means “to do” or other words that mean “to do” something. If a person says “suru to” すると then it means “if you do something”.

Examples:

- One may become skilled with practice. 練習すると上手になれます。
- If you clean then the room will become tidy. 掃除すると部屋がきれくなります。
- If you take medicine then your cold will get better. 薬を飲むと風邪がよくになります。

No の

の is used to show possession. In English it is like “of” or “’s”. Although I have not studied these other languages, I think it functions much like “de” in Spanish, “do” in Portuguese, “di” in

Italian, and “du” in French. In English however we tend not to say “of” as much. Example: we might say “book of poetry” or “poetry book”. Here are some Japanese

Examples:

- My car. 私(わたし)の車(くるま)。
- The flowers of evil. 悪(あく)の花(はな)。
- Tomoko’s book. ともこの本(ほん)。
- Dog food. 犬(いぬ)の餌(えさ)。
- Japanese songs. 日本(にほん)の歌(うた)。
- The house next door. 隣(となり)の家(いえ)。

Na な

な is used when you describe something so you might say that it assists adjectives. You would first say the adjective, then the particle な, followed by the object you are describing.

Examples:

- A strange country. 変(へん)な国(くに)。
- A useful tool. 便利(べんり)な道具(どうぐ)。
- Foods one likes to eat. 好(す)きな食(た)べ物(もの)。

な may also be used with “mitai “みたい to create “mitai na” みたいな when you use it in the same manner as “like” in English to describe something is like another thing.

Examples:

- A person like you. あなたみたいな人(ひと)。
- An animal (that is) like a human being. 人間(にんげん)みたいな動物(どうぶつ)。
- A job that is like playing. 遊(あそ)びみたいな仕事(しごと)。

Please note that if the adjective ends in “i” い then you can probably get away with not saying the particle な.

Examples:

- A beautiful place. きれいな場所(ばしょ)。きれい場所(ばしょ)。
- A dark room. 暗(くら)いな部屋(へや)。暗(くら)い部屋(へや)。
- A dreadful way to do something. 恐(おそ)ろしいなやり方(かた)。恐(おそ)ろしいやり方(かた)。

な might follow the phrase "no you" のよう to create "no you na" のような, which is equivalent to English "like", "-ish", or "-esque". First you say what it is like, then のような, then the actual object itself.

Examples:

- A diamond like a star. 星(ほし)のようなダイヤモンド。
- A cake like a flower. 花(はな)のようなケーキ。
- A child like the devil. 悪魔(あくま)のような子供(こども)。

De で

で is like the English word "at" but sometimes it means "in" when it is not grammatically correct in English to translate it as "at". When whatever you are talking about occurred at a location, then you would use the particle で after the location.

Examples:

- I learned it at school. 学校(がっこう)で習(なら)いました。
- I ate at a restaurant. レストランで食(た)べました。
- I bought it in Japan. 日本(にほん)で買(か)いました。

で can also be used when describing several attributes or items. In English one would use a comma to separate the attributes but in Japanese you would say で before the comma.

Example:

- Someone who likes the rain, who likes the night, and so forth. 雨(あめ)が大好(だいすき)きで、夜(よる)が大好(だいすき)きで、その他(た)。

Ya や vs. Shi し vs. Mo も

The particles や, し, and も also function like で in that they can be used when describing several things. In the last example sentence, you could replace で with や or し. However, も would not be appropriate. も can be thought of like the English word "and" but the nuance of it is a bit difficult to describe. Perhaps it is best to say that it means "including".

Examples:

- Apples and oranges and plums and… りんごもオレンジもうめも。。。
- He and she both want to go. 彼(かれ)も彼女(かのじょ)も行(い)きたい。

も can be thought of like the English word "too" or "also" when it is used once in the sentence.

Examples:

- I want to go too. 私も行きたいです。
- Children also cried. 子供達も泣きました。
- He also slept. 彼も寝ました。

Wa は vs. Ga が

は and が can be tricky ones to differentiate because they are very similar. Both function like "is" and "am" in English. However, が shows emphasis. If you have a sentence that you think requires the particle twice, think carefully about it as you will actually only use each particle once, with が in the place where emphasis is needed. Emphasis in English is usually shown by stressing the word or typing it in italics. In Japanese, just say が.

Examples of は:

- I am German. 私はドイツ人です。
- My hair is brown. 私の髪は茶色です。

If someone spoke about the wrong person, then you could correct them using が for emphasis. For example, if someone said the Emperor of Japan is German and their hair is brown, then you would simply change the は to が. Doing so implies that you disagree with their statement and it's just as if you said "No, *I* am German" or "*I'm* the one with brown hair".

Examples:

- 私がドイツ人です。
- 私の髪が茶色です。

By default it is probably better to use は but when you discuss your likes and dislikes, such things should be spoken with emphasis.

Examples:

- I hate spicy foods. 辛いな食べ物が嫌いです。
- I love dogs. 犬が大好きです。

E へ vs. Ni に

へ and に can both be used when talking about going somewhere so it may be translated into English as "to". You use this particle after saying the place.

Examples:

- He is planning to go to the second floor. 彼は二階へ行く予定です。
- I am going to Japan one day. いつか日本に行きます。

- She went to the library. 彼女(かのじょ)は図書館(としょかん)に行(い)きました。

に is used for dates and time and may be translated into English as “on” for dates and “at” for time.

Examples:

- I am returning on January 28th. １月(がつ)２８日(にち)に帰(かえ)ります。
- Let’s meet at 3 o’clock. ３時(じ)に会(あ)いましょう。
- I will graduate next year. 来年(らいねん)に卒業(そつぎょう)します。

Furthermore, に can function like な in the phrase “no you na” のような, which is equivalent to English “like”. First you say what it is like, then のように, then the verb which shows how it is like the object, then the actual object itself.

Examples:

- A diamond that shines like a star. 星(ほし)のように光(ひか)るダイヤモンド。
- A cat that cries like a baby. 赤(あか)ちゃんのように泣(な)く猫(ねこ)。
- A child that does bad things like the devil. 悪魔(あくま)のように悪(わる)い事(こと)をする子供(こども)。

Wo を

を might be the hardest particle of all to explain since there is no possible translation for it. It is a word that does not exist in English. This particle assists other words when an action is taking place. You place this particle inbetween the object and the corresponding verb.

Examples:

- I cooked rice. ご飯(はん)を炊(た)きました。
- I drank water. 水(みず)を飲(の)みました。
- I have a turtle as a pet. 亀(かめ)をかっています。

Bringing it all together. Here are some sentences with multiple particles so that you might get an idea of how each particle functions.

Examples:

- She has eyes like a cat. 彼女(かのじょ)は猫(ねこ)のような目(め)をしてます。
- I played with her child at the park. 彼女(かのじょ)の子供(こども)と公園(こうえん)で遊(あそ)びました。
- Keigo and Keisuke both like to eat (foods including) sushi and fruit. けいごもけいすけも寿司(すし)や果物(くだもの)を食(た)べるのが好(す)きです。

- I am the one who is going to the hospital at 2 o'clock. 私(わたし)が２時(じ)に病院(びょういん)へ行(い)きます。

Question Particles
There's one more type of particle I want to talk about: the particles found at the end of sentences. Others refer to them as particles but I'm not sure if they should be called particles as the majority of them are used in casual speech, which will be covered in a later episode. I will discuss just one type of them at this time, the ones which may be added when you ask a question. Take any sentence in Japanese that declares something and add a question particle to turn it into a question. A proper sentence ends in "desu" です or "masu" ます and you can add Ka after this to turn the sentence into a question. For casual speech, you may omit です / ます and inflect your voice as you would when asking any question. Another way to pose a question casually is to use the particles は, の, or も. To illustrate this, I am going to turn some of my example sentences into questions.

Ka か
The default particle for asking a question is か.

Examples:

- You and I? あなたと私(わたし)ですか。あなたと私(わたし)か。
- The sun and the moon? 太陽(たいよう)と月(つき)ですか。太陽(たいよう)と月(つき)か。
- Vegetables and meat? 野菜(やさい)と肉(にく)ですか。野菜(やさい)と肉(にく)か。
- Did you play with Kenji? けんじと遊(あそ)びましたか。

Men may speak more roughly when asking a question and say Kai かい instead of Ka か.

To ka とか
Some particles may be joined together such as とか. This compound particle functions like や and し. The particle links various items when listing or describing more than one thing.

Examples:

- I love (things like) Chinese food. 中華料理(ちゅうかりょうり)とかが大好(だいす)きです。
- I have interest in (places like) Korea, England, and Peru. 韓国(かんこく)とか、イギリスとか、ペルとかに興味(きょうみ)があります。
- Music, and movies, and books… 音楽(おんがく)とか、映画(えいが)とか、本(ほん)とか。。。

Wa は
When asking a question using は, the ending verb of the sentence is omitted. What is being asked is already known due to the context of the conversation. If the context is not known, then the question may be misinterpreted.

Examples:

- Where is my car? 私(わたし)の車(くるま)は(どこですか)。(has been omitted)
- (What is) a useful tool? 便利(べんり)な道具(どうぐ)は(何(なん)ですか)。

If you are talking about a variety of the same thing such as books, you could say ともこの本(ほん)は。 It could mean "Do you like Tomoko's book?" where the full sentence is ともこの本(ほん)は好(す)きですか。 Or it could mean "What do you think about Tomoko's book?" where the full sentence is ともこの本(ほん)をどう思(おも)いますか。 In this case when you shorten the sentence to make it casual, the を is changed to は. The full sentence cut down may be translated as "What about Tomoko's book?"

No の

To say a question by using the particle の tends to be reserved for feminine speech.

Examples:

- Do you live with your grandfather? おじいさんと暮(く)らしていますの。 Casual version: おじいさんと暮(く)らしてるの。
- Did you fight with your older sister? お姉(ねえ)さんと喧嘩(けんか)しましたの。 Casual version: お姉(ねえ)さんと喧嘩(けんか)したの。
- Did he say he is going for a walk? かれが散歩(さんぽ)しに行(い)きますと言(い)いましたの。 Casual version: かれが散歩(さんぽ)しに行(い)きますと言(い)ったの。

Mo も

When you want to ask if someone or something else is also included, then you would pose the question by using the particle も.

Examples:

- And the dog too? 犬も。
- You too? あなたも。

Are you tired yet? That was a lot of particles! I know that particles are tricky and we are likely to cover them again in the future.

Kaa-chan Corner is again on hiatus for this episode as my mother is still away in Japan for a funeral.

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!