

Politeness levels In the Japanese Language

This article will show you how to get someone to do something for you in Japanese. After you get the hang of these constructions it is advised to use any verb you learn from here on out by making sentences of your own.

Be creative as best you can, even making the way you learn the verbs and constructions you put them into sound out-landish, extravagant, or otherwise. The more bizarre you make the image of the meaning of words and the way you associate word terms and meanings together the more memorable will be their image and greater will be your vocabulary retention.

Remember, it isn't always the total amount of words that make one fluent. It is on the founded only after mastery of the various grammar forms are handled as well as total amount of vocabulary held at the locutors disposal as well. My advice to any do-it yourself-er Japanese language learner will greatly benefit from practicing Japanese with sentences which the student creates from scratch. Using in a sentence some grammatical construction featuring verbs which are well retained, and at one's disposal for usage.

There are mainly three levels of politeness in Japanese. There is also any shade in between these levels which can be obtained and implied through the various endings each verb in a sentence can take. There are three distinct latitudes or heights (Or depths as some may see it) at which spoken Japanese can be vocalized and interpreted, all different yet all manifesting meaning. Politeness levels are in large part determined by the age difference between locutors in a two way conversation.

In Japanese, one would speak in more respectful ways to persons who are upwards of your age. It is natural to speak less formally to people who are in your same graduating class or to people younger than you. It is usually all right to speak in plain form to people your age or less unless it is people who you have just met or the boss of your company, grandparent or god-father. The *Shacho[^]san* or boss of a company is always spoken to in the highest possible forms of politeness in Japanese.

In these constructions, aru ある is replaced by its specialized counterpart gozaru, so instead of arimasu あります(polite aru ある. (base II) + masu ます) you would use

gozaimasu. (Super-polite form of aru ある.) On first meeting with someone in Japan, it would be rude to automatically assume that you were well acquainted with them or assumed that you knew him/her.

When first meeting someone always assume that he or she is your great uncle who had died and left you his fortune. Don't automatically assume enough familiarity with them to speak to them in the plain form or lower levels of speech. Remember plain form is the type of language that is spoken to dogs, so how much respect does a human being deserve over a dog.

It is important to understand the distinctions made between the levels of politeness in speech. Plain form just isn't polite, try to avoid it by always keeping your mouth clean and out of trouble. If you are a gaijin, your mouth and manners are already out of whack with the customs and traditional courtesies of the Japanese nation. When in Rome we do as the Romans do and when in Japan our feet can't stink.

In order to avoid sounding like a beast with no manners, try always speaking in Japanese at higher more respectful levels. There are two levels of speech and 2 conditions of the verbs + future, - future, past +, past -. plain form. One above that level and another beneath. In all three levels. We can make sentences that are crystal clear and come out in our speech imbued with beautiful hues and hints of wonderful meanings making our Japanese not different from a samurai overlord.

In the present tense, plain form verbs always end in one of five vowels, a, i u e, or, o which corresponding to the five bases (I,II,III,IV,V) of a verb.

The polite form of a verb is made up of a verb in base II or the i line of the syllabary and by adding ~masu ます. The ~masu ます ending is always adequately polite. Speaking in plain form or leaving the verb in dictionary form or base (III) is less polite and could be construed as very rude speech.

*In my Ghetto Grammar lesson plain form is denoted **P.F.**)

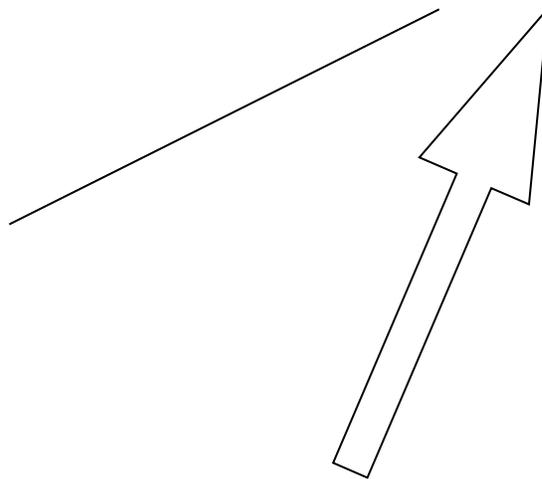
Polite form is also categorized in degrees ,or levels of politeness. In Japanese there are 4 basic states or tenses a verb can take. There are 2 present tense verb forms that are polite and 2 in the past tense, each tense having its' affirmative or + side, and, or, - negative , {future / present ,+, or, - } and {past, +, or, -}.

In Japanese, the latter part of the verb is where the conjugations occur; at the tail of a verb, not the stem. There are many endings which can be constructed. Each ending can change the meaning of the Japanese words ever so subtly, yet significantly. In other words, there are many levels of politeness possible even *using* the same word(s).

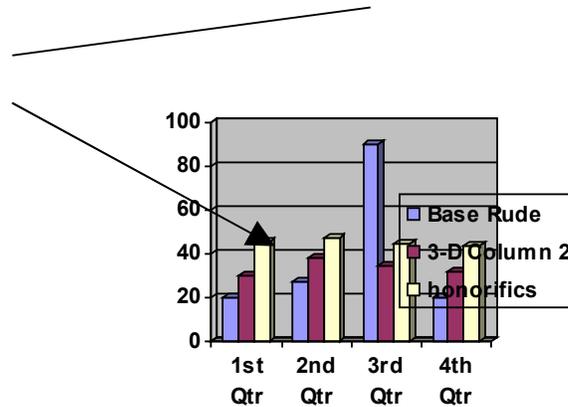
When asking a favor of someone, you'll have to consider how polite you'll want to sound with that person. You won't get very far by getting your boss to give you a raise when speaking to him in less polite language which equivocal to what is know as plain form Japanese. Not being careful of your politeness level can really get you into trouble. With the boss example it could give him more reason to dislike you or even fire you for insubordination.

Sometimes speaking in the plain form Japanese can be dangerous, making you sound even barbaric at times, childish at others, straight out rude at times, piggish, bossy, arrogant to name a few of the ways you jeopardize your potential to speaking fluid, beautifully perfect Japanese speaking. Be mindful that respect to others is shown through the Japanese language via the levels of speech:

Politeness levels in the Japanese Language - From low to high:



1. Base speech (rude, raunchy and raw Japanese, spoken to lesser creatures, animals,



underlings, fledglings and disciples.

2 . Plain form or basically neutral status speaking Japanese, or the humble and exalted levels of speech. Humble and exalted levels of speech considered from the same tree and is globally known as

3. Honorifics

In getting a commitment for your request, use the verb **ITADAKU**, the same verb that is used in the expression, “Itadakimasu” before eating.

You will put this with a verb in base TE to get a yes or no answer. However, if your demands weren't that impending, or is not in need of immediate attention, then there are 3 further choice of verbs for those requests to become actions. The verbs involved in getting someone to do an action for you in Japanese, are these:

MORAU もらう - (to get, be given, receive),

KURERU くれる - (to receive from)

KUDASARU 下さる - (to be so kind as to receive from)

with the masu ending being the highest.

- **ITADAKU** いただく - means literally to humbly partake of something or someone doing something for you that equates to a will you...? Or similar type English sentence.

Constructions for "Will you *verb* (for me)?" in Japanese.

Verb (base TE) + **MORAU** V (て) + もらう

Do you think you could *verb* for me?

Verb (base TE) + **YARU** V (て) + やる

I will *verb* for you. (This is least polite and only said amongst the closest of friends, more masculine.)

Verb (base TE) + **KURERU** V (て) + くれる-

Would you *verb* for me? (Either because I physically or otherwise can't do it myself or simply because you are kind or respected by me).

Verb (base TE) + **AGERU** V (て) + あげる

I'll *verb* for you.

Verb (base TE) + **KUDASARU** V (て) + 下さる

Will you kindly *verb* for me?

***Kudasaru** くださる is one of the first learned Japanese words. It's kanji represents the word meaning *below*, *underneath*, *under*, or *down*. The meaning is opposite to that of the word UE 上 (Up, on top, above etc.)

This is where the construction for -please verb- or verb (base TE) + kudasai comes from. Verb (base TE) + itadaki 頂く (The commitment word, itadaki, evokes only a yes or no answer). Equivalent to "Will you ...verb?" in English.

1. Will you quit smoking.

Tabako o su[^] no o yamete itadakemasu ka?

たばこを吸うのを止めて頂けますか

2. Can I get you to turn the light off for me?

Denki o keshite moraimasu ka?

電機を消してもらいますか

3. Could you turn the light off for me?

Denki o keshite kuremasu ka?

電機をけしてくれませんか

4. Will you kindly lend me \$1000 dollars Grandmother?

Oba[^]chan@ ano 1 sen doru o kashite kudasaimasu ka?

おばあちゃん! あの 一千\$貸してくれますか

5. Could you tell me your phone number?

a. Denwa bango o oshiete **kudasaimasu** ka?

電話番号を教えてくださいませんか?

b. Denwa bango o oshiete **kuremasu** ka?

電話番号を教えてくださいませんか

c. Denwa bango o oshiete **itadakemasu** ka?

電話番号をいただけますか

a.,b.,c. Will you tell me your phone number?

Itadaku - the **yes** or **no** verb

Itadaku 頂く is special in that it forms changes from the itadaki いただき to itadake いただけ form. Only either Yes, or, No? Using the verb itadaku いただく is ultimately polite yet it elicits only two answers from which to form a reply..

6. Shall I open it for you?

Akete yaro[^] ka? (Less polite form V of verb yaru, *downward* politeness)

開けてやろうか?

7. Shall I read it for you?

Yonde agemasho[^] ka? (masho[^] is more polite, spoken to peers and above)

読んで上げましょう

8. Lets get him to pay for us.

Haratte moraimasho[^]

払ってもらいましょう

9. I wanted him to draw a picture for us.

E o kaite moraitakatta n' desu.

絵を画いてもらいたかったのです。

10. I am going to need you to come in on Sunday (too).

Nichiyoubi nimo kaisha ni kite moraitakatta no desu ga...?

日曜日にも会社に来てもらいたかったのですが

That is straight out of "office space" yo!

Until next time, that's the end of this short lesson in Japanese grammar. As always, I wish you the best in your endeavors towards better Japanese ...

Ganbatte Ne!

頑張ってね

Do Your Best!

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