

# 日本語流 1

## The Nihongo Way 1

< Today's dialogue >

*It is early in the evening. Actors and actresses are gathering for a rehearsal. Actress A has just arrived.*



A: おはようございます。

*Ohayo gozaimasu.*

Others: おはようございます。

*Ohayo gozaimasu.*

After six years of contributing my monthly “Japanese in Depth” column to The Daily Yomiuri, I am privileged to have been asked to continue to participate in the renewed Language Connection pages. This time I have been asked to be a little more “textbookish.”

My first task was to think of a good title for the new series. I did not want to make it too academic, and I have sought to give a little twist to my title (and columns) so as to entertain a bit while educating my readers. At the same time, I must consider that people visiting these pages are likely to be more linguistically oriented than average.

The title I first thought of is my own jargon, 日本語流(Nihongo-ryu), in Japanese. The suffix “ryu” is used to refer to “school” or “style” when discussing cultural activities. For example, samurai learned their skills through various schools, each developed by the old masters. Presently, Japanese flower arrangement, ikebana, is performed by a variety of schools, such as Ko-ryu and Obararyu.

After choosing this title, I next faced the question of how it should be translated into English. If I chose “school” for “ryu,” I would end up with “Nihongo school!” Oh, no—that’s not what I meant at all. So, I have chosen “The Nihongo Way.” This English could in turn be translated back to 日本語道(Nihongo-do) in Japanese. As seen in the names of martial arts, such as judo, kendo and aikido, “do” indicates the way or road to the achievement of skill, both physically and spiritually.

I see my task as leading Nihongo learners along the path of increased skill in Japanese. Please send me your feedback. It is my humble honor to have this opportunity, and my great hope that my efforts here will be of some benefit to you, the reader.

## DIALOGUE OVERVIEW

The above dialogues can be translated into:

**A:** Good evening.

**Others:** Good evening.

Most of you must have learned that a “Ohayo gozaimasu” means “Good morning,” so you may have thought the above dialog was wrong. If so, please correct your understanding because it is indeed good Japanese as actually used.

Not just actors and actresses but other people who normally work in the evening or at night will greet each other by saying “Ohayo gozaimasu” when they meet to work for the first time in a day, no matter what time it may be.

## GRAMMAR FOCUS

Packaged in polite language, “Ohayo gozaimasu” does not mean “(I wish you) good morning.” There is no word that suggests “morning” at all. Instead, it literally means “it is early” or “you are early” in a polite language package. Its original form is an adjective sentence, “hayai desu.” When putting it in a polite package, the polite prefix “o” is added to the adjective “hayai” to make “ohayai,” and when it is connected to the polite verb “gozaimasu” it is conjugated into “ohayau,” whose pronunciation in turn transforms into “ohayo.”

## CULTURE FOCUS

Even if the meaning is as dry as “it is early” or “you are early,” it becomes a hearty greeting by virtue of being packaged in a polite form. This is the same effect as wrapping a gift with nice wrapping paper (or a cloth called a *furoshiki* in a Japanese tradition) and maybe with a ribbon. Whether nicely wrapped or not, the content is the same. But when it is wrapped, the feelings of the giver’s heart will also be conveyed.

Most of you living in Japan would agree that Japanese wrap things more elaborately than is common elsewhere in the world. In many cases the sophistication of the Japanese wrapping goes beyond its original functional purpose of protecting the contents. It is a way to show one’s feelings toward the recipient.

## OTHER FOCUS

### **Dialogue 1:**

*On a hot summer day two ladies, A and B, meet and greet each other.*

A: 今日はお暑うございますね。

B: そうですねえ。お暑うございますねえ。

A: Kyo- wa oatsu- gozaimasu ne-.

B: So desu ne-. Oatsu- gozaimasu ne-.

**Note 1:** The adjective “atsui” is packaged in the same polite form.

**Note 2:** The sentence-ending particle “ne-” is used when the speaker is trying to express a feeling in common with the counterpart.

### **Dialogue 2:**

*In a boutique, the salesclerk A talks politely to a customer.*

A: これはお安くございますよ。

B: そうですねえ。

A: Kore wa oyasu- gozaimasu yo.

B: So- desu ne-.

**Note:** The adjective *yasui* is packaged in the same polite form.