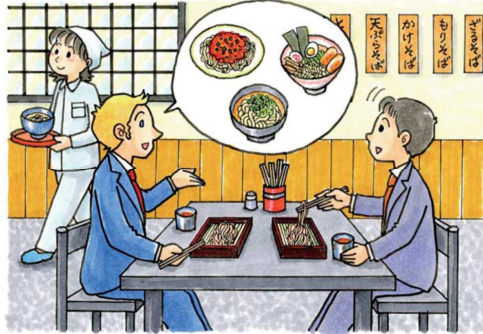


日本語流 11

The Nihongo Way 11

< Today's dialogue >

You (U) are having lunch with a Japanese friend, Mr. Suzuki (J), at a sobaya, noodle shop.



U: そばは鈴木さんはよく食べますか。①	<i>Soba wa Suzuki-san wa yoku tabemasu ka?</i>
J: はい、月1回は食べますねえ。②	<i>Hai, tsuki ikkai wa tabemasu nê.</i>
U: うどんは？③	<i>Udon wa?</i>
J: うどんもしょっちゅう食べますよ。 めん類はどれも好きです。④	<i>Udon mo shocchû tabemasu yo. Menrui wa dore mo suki desu.</i>
U: じゃ、ラーメンも？	<i>Ja, râmen mo?</i>
J: ええ、大好きです。それに、スパゲティもよく食べます。	<i>Ê, daisuki desu. Soreni, supageti mo yoku tabemasu.</i>
U: 僕も、ラーメンもスパゲティもよく食べますよ。昨日も、彼女とスパゲティ食べました。	<i>Boku mo, râmen mo supageti mo yoku tabemasu yo. Kinô mo, kanojo to supageti tabemashita.</i>
J: そばやうどんはどうですか。⑤	<i>Soba ya udon wa dô desu ka?</i>
U: そばは時々食べますけど、うどんはめったに食べません。⑥	<i>Soba wa tokidoki tabemasu kedo, udon wa mettani tabemasen.</i>

Probably the greatest difficulty that foreign students of Japanese confront is use of the “joshi” – Japanese particles. Over the coming months, I will focus on basic particles found in Japanese.

Today, I have chosen three common phrase-particles (*wa*, *mo* and *to*) to discuss in some detail.

DIALOGUE OVERVIEW

Here are English equivalents of today's dialogue.

U1: Do you eat *soba* often, Mr. Suzuki?

J1: Yes, I eat it once a month at least.

U2: What about *udon*?

J2: I eat *udon* a lot, too.

I like all sorts of noodles.

U3: Then, *rahmen* as well?

J3: Yes, I love it.

And, I often eat spaghetti also.

U4: I, too, eat both *rahmen* and spaghetti very often.

Yesterday I had spaghetti with my girlfriend, too.

J4: How about *soba*, *udon* and so forth?

U5: I have *soba* from time to time, but rarely eat *udon*.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

Nouns

<i>menrui</i>	noodles [generic]
<i>râmen</i>	Chinese noodle
<i>soba</i>	buckwheat noodle
<i>supageti</i>	spaghetti
<i>udon</i>	wheat noodle

Adverbial nouns

<i>shocchû</i>	frequently, all the time
<i>yoku</i>	often
<i>tokidoki</i>	sometimes
<i>mettani</i>	seldom, rarely [always used in negative]

GRAMMAR FOCUS

The Japanese particles, *joshi*, are all POSTpositions, as opposed to PREpositions, which are found in English. The *joshi* are always placed immediately AFTER the relevant noun X. They indicate how X interacts with the ending predicate, which is most often the verb in the sentence, though the predicate could also be an adjective or noun.

X-wa: regarding X, as for X, X at least, X for one

When people talk, there are always many possible things to focus on. And, when talking, people almost unconsciously choose one topic for the moment.

By saying "X-wa," X is highlighted momentarily and governs the entire sentence as its topic.

X-*wa* has a completely different concept from the English subject or object in the grammatical senses of those words. It is best not to try to understand *wa* in English's grammatical terms, even if an example usage happens to be equivalent.

In J1, "Suzuki-san *wa*" happens to coincide with the subject in English, but "soba *wa*" is equivalent to the object of the English equivalent. And certainly "tsuki ikkai *wa*" (once a month at least) in J1 is neither subject nor object in the English grammatical sense. "Udon *wa*?" (What about *udon*?) in U2 shows *wa*'s function as a topic marker by simply highlighting X (*udon*). "Menrui *wa*" in J2 represents the object of the English verb "like," and in U5 both "soba *wa*" and "udon *wa*" represent the object of "eat" in the English equivalent. The "udon *wa*" in J4 is neither a subject nor object in English. How confusing!

An easy pitfall to fall into when looking at a foreign language is to use the lens of one's native language. You will soon find, however, that reliance on English grammar to explain Japanese does not work. The important thing is to grasp the true function of *wa* as it is, and follow Japanese logic. This makes it simple.

X-*mo*: X as well, X in addition, X also, even X

When X is presented in addition to something already introduced, X is followed by *mo*.

This is quite simple as it is like "X too" or "X also." Note, however, that *mo* must immediately follow the X in question – it is attached to X. "Too" and "also" do not have such a rule, and they can be placed almost anywhere in a sentence ("I also like spaghetti" or "I like spaghetti also").

Compare the positions where *mo* is placed with where "too" and "also" are placed in the English equivalents.

Comparing *wa* and *mo* we can see that the former keeps our focus on a topic of our choice ("X, at least") while the latter allows mentioned things to be included ("X, in addition"). In this sense they are somewhat opposite each other in meaning.

X-*to*: together with X

Many Nihongo learners equate the phrase-particle "to" with the English "and" because you can say "X to Y" to mean "X and Y."

Essentially, however, "X to" is equivalent to "(together) with X" rather than "X and." In fact, "X to Y" basically means "Y with X."

So, you can say:

Kanojo to tabemashita. (I ate with my girlfriend)

Maiasa inu to sanpo-shimasu. (I take a walk with my dog every morning)

Suzuki-san to Yamada-san to hanashimashita. (I discussed with Mr. Suzuki and Mr. Yamada) {With Yamada with Suzuki, (I) talked}

Note: you cannot use "to" to connect verbs or adjectives!

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

X ya Y: X and Y for example, things like X and Y

While “X to Y” indicates “X and Y (and nothing else),” “X ya Y” reserves room for something else, without limiting things to the two.

Whether “X to Y,” or “X ya Y,” you can name any number of items: A to B to C to D, or A ya B ya C ya D, each utterance carrying a different nuance. The former limits things to the four items mentioned, while the latter indicates the four as typical of the type of thing being discussed.

CULTURE FOCUS

Japanese people like noodles, whether they are Japanese, Chinese, Korean, or Western (Italian). They are considered a light meal to take when not very hungry.

Within Japan, buckwheat noodles (*soba*) are typical in Kanto (Tokyo and vicinity), while people in Kansai (Osaka and vicinity) typically eat *udon* (wheat noodles). Noodle shops are called *soba-ya* in Kanto, and *udon-ya* in Kansai, therefore.

Apart from these two, there are *sohmen* and *hiyamugi*, both typically eaten in summer as they are served cold. A flat noodle called *kishimen* is famous in Nagoya.

Rahmen is a Japanese version of a Chinese noodle, which has been re-exported back to China and enjoyed there.