

日本語流 14

The Nihongo Way 14

< Today's dialogue >

It's lunch break in the office where you (U) work. On your PC you are showing a few pictures taken in your home country, to your Japanese colleague (J).



J: うわあ、きれいな写真ですねえ。これはどこですか。	<i>Uwâ, kirei na shashin desu nê. Kore wa doko desu ka?</i>
U: 僕の家そばです。	<i>Boku no ie no soba desu.</i>
J: へええ、いい所ですねえ。	<i>Hê, ii tokoro desu ne.</i>
U: ええ、とっても静かな所ですよ。 はい。次の写真です。	<i>Ê, totemo shizuka na tokoro desu yo. Hai, tsugi no shashin desu.</i>
J: これもきれいですねえ。どこの山ですか。	<i>Kore mo kirei desu ne. Doko no yama desu ka?</i>
U: 僕の家裏の山です。 この山の近くには小さい湖もありますよ。	<i>Boku no ie no ura no yama desu. Kono yama no chikaku niwa chiisai mizu-umi mo arimasu yo.</i>
J: へええ、湖ですか。いいですねえ。	<i>Hêe, mizu-umi desu ka! Ii desu nê.</i>
U: ほら、これがその湖です。	<i>Hora, kore ga sono mizu-umi desu.</i>
J: うわあ、美しい湖ですねえ。	<i>Uwâ, utsukushii mizu-umi desu nê.</i>
U: これは春の写真ですが、秋の紅葉のときも素晴らしいですよ。	<i>Kore wa haru no shashin desu ga, aki no kôyô no toki mo subarashii desu yo.</i>
J: そうでしょうねえ。	<i>Sô deshô nê.</i>

Before we move on to discuss more *joshi* (phrase-particles) in later columns, let me discuss an important grammatical aspect of Japanese – how nouns are modified.

DIALOGUE OVERVIEW

English equivalents to today's dialog are as seen below:

J: Wow, what a pretty picture! Where is this?

U: It's near my house.

J: Oh, how nice a place!

U: Yes, it's a very quiet place.

Here is the next picture.

J: This is pretty, too! Which mountain is it?

U: It's the mountain in back of my house.

There is a small lake near this mountain, too.

J: Wow, a lake! How nice!

U: Look, this is the lake.

J: Oh, it's a beautiful lake!

U: This is a spring picture, but it's wonderful at the time of autumn colors, too.

J: I bet it is.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

Nouns

<i>aki</i>	aki
<i>chikaku</i>	vicinity, nearby place
<i>haru</i>	springtime
<i>mizu-umi</i>	lake
<i>shashin</i>	photo
<i>soba</i>	vicinity, nearby place
<i>toki</i>	time
<i>tokoro</i>	place
<i>tsugi</i>	next
<i>ura</i>	backside, behind
<i>yama</i>	mountain
<i>kôyô</i>	autumn colors
<i>kirei</i>	pretty
<i>momiji</i>	Japanese maple

Adjectives

<i>subarashii</i>	wonderful
<i>utsukushii</i>	beautiful

GRAMMAR FOCUS

Adjective modifies Noun: A-i N

In today's dialog, we see the following noun phrases that are modified by an adjective:

<i>ii tokoro</i>	a nice place
<i>chiisai mizu-umi</i>	a small lake
<i>utsukushii mizu-umi</i>	a beautiful lake

As you see here, when an adjective modifies a noun, the adjective is placed BEFORE the noun with no exception, just like English.

Noun-1 modifies Noun-2: N1 no N2 or N1 na N2

Now, let us see how a noun modifies another noun. Such examples from today's dialog are as follows, in the order of appearance:

<i>kirei na shashin</i>	a pretty picture
<i>boku no ie no soba</i>	{vicinity of my house}* near my house
<i>shizuka na tokoro</i>	a quiet place
<i>tsugi no shashin</i>	next picture
<i>doko no yama</i>	{mountain of where} which mountain
<i>boku no ie no ura no yama</i>	mountain in back of my house
<i>kono-yama no chikaku</i>	{vicinity of this mountain} near this mountain
<i>haru no shashin</i>	{picture of spring} spring picture
<i>aki no kôyô no toki</i>	time of the autumn colors

* { } indicates literal translation.

Having seen these phrases, have you noticed a distinct rule even though there is no particular word order in the English equivalents?

In Japanese the modifying noun is always placed BEFORE the modified noun, and they are necessarily connected by a connective, either *no* or *na*. (The only exception is the noun, *onaji*, which takes neither *no* nor *na* when it modifies a noun; e.g., *onaji tokoro*, 'the same place').

Which connective to use depends on the noun's meaning. A rule of thumb is that if you think of its meaning and it refers to a quality rather than representing a thing (tangible or intangible), then the noun is most likely a *na*-noun. Thus, both *kirei* (pretty) and *shizuka* (quiet) take *na* as a connective - these are 'na-nouns.'

While most other nouns are *no*-nouns that take *no* as a connective, there are quite a few nouns for which both *no* and *na* are used as a connective. *Dame* (no good), *daijôbu* (OK) and *masshiro* (snow-white) are among such examples. Some such *no/na*-nouns change nuance, depending on whether they are used with *no* or *na*, as below:

<i>ashita dame no/na hito</i>	people who are unavailable tomorrow
<i>kyô daijôbu no/na hito</i>	people who are available today
<i>shizuka na umi</i>	{the sea that is tranquil} quiet sea
<i>shizuka no umi*</i>	Sea of Tranquility
<i>burû no kuruma</i>	a blue car
<i>burû na kibun</i>	blue feeling (as in, "I have the blues.")

* Notice that *na*-nouns, such as *shizuka*, could be used as *no*-nouns, too, with a changed nuance.

Note that Japanese nouns can be connected together in long sequences. For example: *Tomodachi no ie no ushiro no yama no kôyô mo kirei desu*. (“The fall colors of the mountain behind my friend’s house are also beautiful.”) The limit to connection is imposed by the comprehensibility of the construction.

Sô deshô. vs Sô desu.

By changing *desu* into *deshô*, the statement becomes tentative instead of definitive. So while “*Sô desu*” would translate to “That’s right,” “*Sô deshô*” adds a nuance - something like “That’s probably right,” “I’d suspect so,” etc.