

日本語流 8 The Nihongo Way 8

< Today's dialogue >

You (U) are invited to dinner by Mr. Suzuki (J1) and are at a table with him and his daughter, Ayami (J2). Next to her is their dog, Mocha.



[Scene 1]	[Scene 2]	[Scene 3]
J1: さあさあ、どうぞどうぞ。 <i>Sâsâ, dôzodôzo.</i>	U: あやみちゃんも、刺し身よく食べる？ <i>Ayami-chan mo sashimi yoku taberu?</i>	U: モカちゃんはどう？ 魚は好き？ <i>Moka-chan wa dô? Sakana wa suki?</i>
U: ありがとうございます。いただきます。 <i>Arigatô gozaimasu. Itadakimasu.</i>	J2: ううん、あまり食べない。 おいしくないから。 <i>Uun, amari tabenai. Oishikunai kara.</i>	J2: モカも魚はあまり好きじゃない。 肉は大好きだけど…。 <i>Moka mo sakana wa amari suki janai. Niku wa daisuki da kedo...</i>
J1: 刺し身は大丈夫ですか？ <i>Sashimi wa daijôbu desu ka?</i>	U: あ、そう。 <i>A, sô.</i>	U: やっぱり犬だからねえ。 <i>Yappari inu da kara nê.</i>
U: ええ、もちろん。よく食べます。 とてもおいしいですよ。大好きです。 <i>Ee, mochiron. Yoku tabemasu. Totemo oishii desu yo. Daisuki desu.</i>		

Today, I'd like to focus on two speech styles in Japanese. I promised previously that I would devote one installment to this, and today is the day – more precisely, today is one of the two days because I'll need the next installment to complete the picture.

When speaking, we all unconsciously gauge “distance” from our counterparts so as to maintain or eliminate “psychological distance.” We do this for comfort, and all languages have tools for it. For instance, most European languages have two different words for “you,” with corresponding verb conjugations.

As already discussed in this series, Japanese has no single word for “you.” The language, however, has distinct style differences: “distal-style” and “direct-style.” These style differences control and express “psychological distance.”

In today's dialog, when the two adults (U and J1) talk, they maintain a respectful distance. Note that when U talks to J1's daughter, a primary schoolgirl, U switches to direct-style. The girl also uses direct-style, which is not unexpected because people learn distal-style as they grow older and more socially aware.

DIALOGUE OVERVIEW

[Scene 1: You and Mr. Suzuki are talking.]

J1: Come on, please go ahead (and eat).

U: Thank you very much. I'll have some (humbly).

J1: Are you alright with *sashimi*?

U: Why, of course. I have it often. It's delicious. I love it.

[Scene 2: Now, you are talking to his young daughter, Ayami.]

U: Do you eat *sashimi* often, too, Ayami?

J2: No, I don't eat it much. It doesn't taste good, so...

U: Oh, is that so.

[Scene 3: You are asking her about her dog.]

U: Then, how about Mocha? Does she like fish?

J2: Mocha doesn't like fish much, either; she loves meat, though.

U: Well, after all is said and done, she is a dog, so (you see).

VOCABULARY FOCUS

Nouns

<i>sakana</i>	fish
<i>niku</i>	meat
<i>inu</i>	dog
<i>suki</i>	like
<i>daisuki</i>	love

* It may seem strange that *suki* and *daisuki* are considered nouns when their English equivalents are verbs. These words are nouns in Japanese because they behave as nouns. You need to know this to use them correctly. Their respective antonyms, *kirai* (dislike) and *daikirai* (hate), are also nouns.

Adverbs

<i>mochiron</i>	of course
<i>yappari</i>	after all is said and done, as we might have suspected
<i>yoku</i>	well; often
<i>amari</i>	(not) very much [always used in negative]

Others

<i>sâsâ</i>	[used to prompt or hasten someone to action]
<i>dôzodôzo</i>	[used to emphatically offer something]

GRAMMAR FOCUS

1. Distal-style and Direct-style

For some reason the ending suffixes *mas* (for verbs) and *des* (for adjectives and nouns) give rise to psychological distance between speaker and counterpart. This is why we call the style “distal,” jargon created from the word “distance.” As distance often indicates politeness or respect, many textbooks call it “polite form.”

The form without these suffixes is, therefore, “direct-style,” which does not create distance.

(1) Verbs:

Taking two verbs you are already familiar with as examples, let’s compare style differences:

<u>Distal-style</u>	<u>Direct-style</u>
<i>Nomimasu.</i>	<i>Nom-u.</i> (I drink it)
<i>Nomimasen.</i>	<i>Nomanai.</i> (I don’t drink it)
<i>Tabemasu.</i>	<i>Taberu.</i> (I eat it)
<i>Tabemasen.</i>	<i>Tabenai.</i> (I don’t eat it)

Nom-u is called a “Consonant Verb” as its stem ends in a consonant – [m] in this case; some textbooks call it “Group One.” The other verbs, here represented by *taberu* are “Vowel Verbs” as their stems end in a vowel – either [e] as in *taberu* or [i] as in *mi-ru* (see). These are sometimes called “Group Two.” Some call the former “*u*-Verbs” and the latter “*ru*-Verbs.”

The only exceptions are *suru /shimasu* (do) and *kuru / kimasu* (come), which have irregular conjugation patterns.

<i>Shimasu.</i>	<i>Suru.</i> (I do it)
<i>Shimasen.</i>	<i>Shinai.</i> (I don’t do it)
<i>Kimasu.</i>	<i>Kuru.</i> (I come)
<i>Kimasen.</i>	<i>Konai.</i> (I don’t come)

(2) Adjectives:

To create direct-style adjective sentences, delete the suffix *desu*, and you’re done.

Oishii <i>desu</i>	Oishii. (It tastes good)
Oishikunai <i>desu</i> .	Oishikunai. (It doesn’t taste good)

(3) Nouns

For noun sentences, *desu* is replaced by *da* in the affirmative, but is simply deleted for the negative:

<i>Inu desu.</i>	<i>Inu da.</i> (It’s a dog)
<i>Inu janai desu.</i>	<i>Inu janai.</i> (It’s not a dog)

ADDITIONAL REMARKS

1. Does *da* sound blunt?

For some reason, Japanese avoid the *da* sound, especially when ending sentences. While the basic way to say “It’s a dog” is *Inu da*, this Japanese sounds rather blunt. So, one adds the phrase-particle *yo* (*Inu da yo*) to mitigate the bluntness. Or, the *da* is dropped and one says only *Inu*.

Recall these from the dialogs above:

...*daisuki da kedo*...

...*inu da kara ne*.

These two noun sentences do not sound blunt at all as they are “wrapped up” by the subsequent clause-particles *kedo* (but) and *kara* (so). In such instances, *da* is never deleted.

2. Questions in direct-style

Technically it is possible to say “*Suki da ka?*” or “*Suki ka?*” to mean “Do you like it?” but we don’t. These sound either too rural or awfully blunt. Simply raising the ending intonation makes for an interrogative, hence: *Suki?*