
Notes on Japanese Culture and Communication

The objective of Pimsleur's Japanese II is to introduce you to the language and culture of another country primarily through your ears, and only secondarily through your eyes. This approach is based upon the fact that more than 95 percent of our lives is spent in listening and talking - and less than five percent in reading and writing. The most effective and productive way to begin acquiring these necessary communication skills is by actually working with the "language in use," as demonstrated by native speakers of the language being learned.

Efficiency is greatly increased when what you learn first is the most-frequently-used structures and vocabulary, so that you practice with the basic communication tools you require every day. This carefully-selected "core-language" keeps you focused entirely on the vocabulary and structures you need for daily communication. This is self-motivating because you will begin to speak immediately and successfully.

As you learn the language you are absorbing the culture. Language and culture are so closely intertwined that learning them separately can make you literally "culturally-deprived" and unable to produce appropriate and meaningful language. For this reason you must carefully notice the different (read "cultural") ways the Japanese "act" in the various situations you will experience as you proceed through the units of this course. Being sensitive to "who is doing what to whom, and why," is what you have learned to do almost unconsciously in your native tongue - you will have this same sense of "awareness" as you gain proficiency in your new language.

This implicit instruction will come from the audio sessions, as you learn to identify the intonation and melody of the speakers. We provide this booklet to provide additional explicit instruction to further confirm what you have learned.

Acquiring the culture, "the map of the territory," is like acquiring the terminology of a subject: it enables you to operate as a fellow member in that society. Your success in working with native speakers of Japanese will depend upon how sensitive you become to the accumulated heritage that is Japan.

Unit 31

shirimasen vs. wakarimasen/saa

In Unit One, you learned two ways to say "I don't know": *shirimasen* and *wakarimasen*. While both mean "I don't know," they differ from each other in nuance; if you use them inappropriately in conversation, you risk offending the person you are speaking to and embarrassing yourself. *shirimasen* is used when you have no information about, or knowledge of, the matter being discussed and therefore have no way of knowing how to answer the question and are unable to comment. *wakarimasen*, on the other hand, indicates your inability to respond to the other person with confidence despite the fact that you have information. For example, if you are asked whether you like beer or wine, but you like both of them, you may say *wakarimasen*, implying that you are not sure, and perhaps it depends on the occasion. If you answered *shirimasen*, it would sound rude and might hurt the other person's feelings, as it could be interpreted as your unwillingness to respond to or even consider the question. It is equivalent to the English, "How should I know?" or "Who cares!" Until you are comfortable with the difference between these two words for "know," a safe rule is to respond using the same form the speaker used in the question addressed to you.

You will notice that Japanese people often respond to your questions by saying *wakarimasen* or with a long hissing sound of *saa*. The Japanese prefer to leave their intentions and opinions ambiguous and indirect, especially in situations where there is the possibility for two or more different ideas or points of view. You may be frustrated over the frequent use of *wakarimasen* or *saa*, even when the answer appears perfectly obvious to you. This is a Japanese communication strategy to leave room for imagination and individual interpretation. The Japanese use extra caution not to hurt another individual's feelings, causing the other person to lose face; consequently, they avoid losing face themselves.

Unit 32

Introductions

Suppose you were an American named "Bill." When introduced to someone, a proper way to identify yourself would be to say, *Bill to mooshimasu*. This means "(I am) called Bill"; literally it says, "I say myself Bill," expressed in a humble fashion. This expression is appropriately modest and shows your sensitivity toward whatever difference in social status there may be between you and the other person. The Japanese are very much concerned about hierarchical human relationships, and *mooshimasu* is a safe way to identify yourself when meeting someone whose position you do not know. You identify yourself humbly, elevating the status of the other person.

In social situations Americans almost always automatically introduce strangers to one another. However, many Japanese are not accustomed to doing so, and you may sometimes need to take the initiative and introduce yourself. Do not feel offended if you are not introduced, since your Japanese host is probably unaware of the Western custom of introduction. The Japanese, on the other hand, will customarily exchange business cards when they meet someone for the first time. When you receive a card, it's considered polite to study the card long enough to understand and appreciate all the information on it, such as the person's name, title, company s/he is working for, etc. You can use some of this information as initial topics of your conversation. If you intend to conduct business in Japan, it will be very important to always carry your own business cards with you.

Unit 33

Coffee Shops

You will find many coffee shops in Japan. The shops have fancy names, such as Renoir, implying the ambiance of the shop. In a "coffee shop" you can have not only coffee, tea, fruit juice, and other assorted drinks, but also light meals such as sandwiches, spaghetti, and pilaf. The price for a cup of coffee is higher than in the U.S., ranging from 300 yen to 450 yen (approximately \$3.00 to \$4.50). Portions are small, and there are usually no free refills, but you are really paying for the use of the shop's space and time. Japanese people will sometimes spend hours in a coffee shop, talking to friends, having informal business discussions, or simply reading magazines and newspapers.

Unit 34

ocha wa doo desu ka?

In this unit you heard, *ocha wa doo desu ka?* ("How about some tea?") While *ocha* literally means "tea;" which is normally green tea in Japan, this expression is used for a variety of drinks, such as coffee, brown tea, and even many kinds of soft drinks. By saying *ocha wa doo desu ka*, the person is suggesting not so much that you have tea, but that you take a break and have something to drink to relax.

When visiting someone's house or office, you are usually offered a cup of tea before you ask for it. You may find that it is too bitter for you, but it's considered impolite to add cream or sugar. It's also in poor taste to ask for a different beverage, as this implies criticism of the host or hostess' chosen offering. If your host or hostess notices you are not drinking and asks if you would prefer another kind of drink, you could ask, for instance, *kohi wa arimasu ka?* ("Do you have any coffee?")

Unit 35

kohi ga hoshii n desu ga.

In this unit you learned how to ask for coffee by saying, *kohi ga hoshii n desu ga*. The *ga* at the end literally means "but," and it is added to soften your request and make it less direct. It implies, "I would like some coffee, but I don't want to put you to any trouble, and if it is too much trouble for you, that is all right." It shows your modesty and respect for the other person's time and effort.

Unit 36

Riding a Bus in Japan

In this unit the American man took a bus to *Shinjuku*. Buses are a very common means of public transportation in Japan. There are both local buses and long distance express buses that connect large cities such as *Tokyo*, *Nagoya*, *Osaka*, and *Fukuoka*. When using Japanese buses, you will need to know the routes that a local bus system serves, the fares, and also whether to pay when you get on or when you get off. On Tokyo buses, for instance, there is generally one flat rate and you pay when you get on. In addition, you are required to have the exact change. Just ask a person waiting at the bus stop, *ikura desu ka?* ("How much is it?")

Prepaid Cards

You can avoid the difficulty of always having to have the exact change when you get on a bus, or when you make a telephone call, by using the "prepaid cards" which are widely available in Japan. They are quite handy and economical. These are a kind of credit card, with a limited amount of credit equal to the price of the card. Most prepaid cards are designed for one type of transaction and are available at many stores or vending machines. A telephone card, for example, is a plastic card with a magnetic strip that can be inserted in a green public telephone to pay for a phone call. Each telephone card costs 1,000 yen and credits you with 105 units. After each use, the card records the number of units spent on the call and subtracts them from the original value. You will find the card convenient when making long distance or even international calls.

There are many types of prepaid cards, among them bus cards, highway cards, train cards, and cards designed for use in various department or convenience stores. Prepaid cards have rapidly become popular in Japan, and they can be very convenient for an American visitor.

Unit 37

gaijin

You have learned how to identify yourself by your nationality, for example, *watashi wa amerika jin (kanada jin, chugoku jin) desu*. Most foreigners in Japan, however, particularly those from Western countries, are simply called *gaijin*, literally meaning "people from outside." As an island nation, the Japanese were a self-contained society culturally and politically for many years, with only infrequent contact with the rest of the world. More recently, Japan has become an active member of the global business and political community, but to some extent, the island's unique and independent character is continued today. You may be pointed at and called *gaijin* as you walk down the street, especially by children in small cities unused to seeing many foreign visitors, but it is a matter of curiosity and is not meant to be disrespectful.

Unit 38

ok

In the conversation in this unit, you heard one of the Japanese speakers say *ok*. As you guessed, it has the same meaning as the English "OK." It is frequently used even by Japanese speakers whose English is not very fluent. You too can use some very simple English words and phrases, such as OK, yes, no, all right, excuse me, etc. An important tip, however, is that these expressions do not always carry exactly the same meanings and nuances as they do in English. You will notice that although a Japanese person often says *ok* when conversing with you, s/he may not be indicating to you that s/he understands or agrees with what you are saying. "Yes" may mean only "Yes, I am listening to you," rather than "Yes, I agree with you and accept what you are saying."

nomi ni ikimashoo

If you stay in Japan for an extended period of time, doing business rather than simply traveling, you may be approached on any number of occasions with *nomi ni ikimashoo*, ("Let's go for a drink") or, more politely, *nomi ni ikimasen ka?* ("Won't you go for a drink?") "A drink" in such a context does not mean coffee, tea, or soda, but rather, it refers to alcoholic drinks. You may have heard that much business in Japan is done in bars after 5:00 P.M. It is believed that you can communicate your personal feelings more directly and conduct business more smoothly when relaxing in a social situation. When people ask you to join them for "a drink," you can safely interpret it as an invitation to full scale socializing including drinks, hors d'oeuvres, or dinner, extending over several hours. "Drinking" in Japan is important in social as well as business functions.

Unit 39

Days of the Week

You've been introduced to the Japanese words for several days of the week. Here is the week in total: *nichiyoobi* is Sunday, *getsuyoobi*, Monday; Tuesday is *kayoobi*. The rest go *suiyoobi*, *mokuyoobi*, *kinyoobi*, and *doyoobi*, respectively. You'll notice that they all end in the same way: *yoobi*, meaning "day of the week." In fact, people sometimes omit the *yoobi* and may simply say, *getsu*, *ka*, *sui*, etc.

Words and Phrases Indicating Time

There are many words and phrases that indicate time in Japanese. One distinct characteristic in Japanese, however, is that these words are usually placed at the beginning of a sentence instead of at the end, as in English. For example, "Are you busy today?" is *kyo wa isogashii desu ka?* literally translated as, "As for today busy is?" *kayobi wa tenki ga warukatta desu* is "As for Tuesday, weather bad was." Japanese people tend to continue to place these words and phrases in the beginning of a sentence when they speak and write English. You will notice that many of them say, "Today, what shall we do?" or "Last Monday we went to Disneyland," keeping the pattern of putting the time words first.

Unit 40

Politeness: *imasu ka?* vs. *irasshaimasu ka?*

The significance of observing the appropriate levels of politeness when you speak to Japanese people, especially those whose social status is apparently different from yours, cannot be overstressed. Although as a foreign speaker you are not always expected to know subtle nuances, if you wish to get ahead in business, for instance, having some knowledge concerning the levels of politeness and actually practicing them in your communication will surely help you in your attempt to attain your personal and professional goals.

In this unit you learned *imasu ka?* and *irasshaimasu ka?* They both mean "Is ... here?" The latter is far more polite than the former. If you are telephoning to a close friend's home, and you ask another person in the family for your friend, you may safely ask ... *wa imasu ka?* When speaking to a business associate, however, you would generally use *irasshaimasu ka?* You will find it necessary to make a distinction between the way you address your close friend and your business associate, or even your friend's family members.

Initially, you may find the concept of using different expressions to convey different levels of politeness difficult to understand and remember. But stop and think for a moment about your regular English usage. While you may use the same words or phrases in different situations, you express your politeness by subtle changes in your tone, your intonation, or even sometimes your voice. You do not say, "How are you?" in exactly the same way when you see your friend, your grandmother, or when you greet an extremely important guest to your company or family.

Unit 41

ii desu ne

When you say *ii desu ne* in response to someone suggesting you have something to eat at a restaurant, as you heard in this unit, it means, "That's a good idea. I'd love to." The same expression can also be used when you wish to give an affirmative answer to someone's inquiry. For example, if you're trying on some new clothes in a department store, a clerk may say, *ikaga desu ka?* ("How is it?") You can respond by saying, *ii desu ne*. The *ne* at the end will implicitly ask the clerk whether she agrees. *ii desu ne* in this context implies, "I like it. Don't you?" The clerk will probably say *hai*, indicating "I agree."

You must be careful, however, when you say *ii desu* without the *ne* at the end. The meaning changes drastically, and instead it shows the speaker's refusal and withdrawal. If you say *de, ii desu* in response to "Let's eat something at a restaurant," it means, "No, thank you. I'll pass." Whether you put the *ne* at the end or not turns the meaning around completely, so you need to be careful, especially when you are offered something.

chotto

chotto as in *chotto hima ga arimasu ka?* ("Do you have a little time?") literally means "a little," and you can use it in much the same way as its English counterpart. For example, you can use *chotto* before adjectives: *chotto atsui* ("a little hot"), *chotto nagai* (a little long), *chotto omoi* ("a little heavy"), etc.

Depending on the context and the way you say it, however, *chotto* carries a very different meaning. When used alone in response to someone's request, *chotto* may show the speaker's reluctance. You will often hear Japanese people say *chotto* in response to an invitation, implying that they cannot accept it, and further that they do not wish to be asked why. Used this way, *chotto* is a polite and indirect way of saying, "No, thanks." Here's an example.

Takako: *issho ni bangohan o tabemasen ka?* ("Won't you have dinner with me?")

Kenji: *kyo wa chotto.* ("As for today, a little.")

Literally, Kenji's response may not make much sense in English, but by answering *chotto*, in a soft and hesitant tone, he's saying that for some unstated reason he can't make it. Don't pursue the matter further.

Unit 42

tsumetai and samui

In this unit you heard, *tsumetai* which means "cold." This is used to describe cold objects such as drinks, food, etc. When you visit Japanese people in their home, you may be asked whether you want *atsui ocha* ("hot tea") or *tsumetai ocha* ("iced tea"). Hot tea is served most of the time, but during the summer cold tea that is made from roasted barley or cold Chinese oolong tea may be served.

You can also use *tsumetai* for a person who is coldhearted. You may hear some Japanese people say *tsumetai hito* ("a cold person"). Depending on the context it may be a joke or a serious accusation.

If you want to talk about cold weather, on the other hand, you must say *samui* instead of *tsumetai*.

Unit 43

Climate in Japan

Despite Japan's small size, the climate varies dramatically since it stretches lengthwise (some 1,500 miles) from North to South. When visiting, you must be careful to plan what kind of clothes you will need, depending on which part of the country you will be visiting. In Hokkaido, the northernmost island, and the northern and mountain areas of Honshu, for example, it gets quite cold. In fact, the winter Olympics were held in Sapporo in 1974 and held again in Nagano in central Japan in 1998. If you are in Okinawa, the southernmost part of the country, you will find a subtropical climate.

Except for these extreme climates, the rest of the country has four distinct seasons. Generally speaking, Japan gets a fair amount of rain every year, particularly during the rainy season that lasts from mid-June to mid-July. The rain is of course indispensable to rice, the nation's staple diet. The summer in Japan is generally hot and humid. If you are traveling to Japan for pleasure, you should plan to be there either in the spring or fall, if possible.

Unit 44

English Newspapers and Magazines

Keeping abreast of what is happening in your home country is an important concern, particularly if you conduct business for extensive periods of time abroad. Most major English newspapers and magazines are readily available in large cities in Japan. If you cannot find the ones you would like to read at a kiosk, a large bookstore, which you should find in virtually every town, is very likely to have them. You can also subscribe to English papers published by Japanese news companies. They are mostly English versions of Japanese papers and give you information on what is occurring in Japan and your local community. And thanks to the advanced satellite and cable systems, in major hotels you can watch TV news from over ten different countries in their original languages.

Unit 45

musume and musuko

We have stressed that showing your politeness is important in Japanese communication. The words used to describe family members change in a rather complex manner, depending on whether you are speaking of your own family or the family of the person you are speaking to. In this unit you heard *musume* ("daughter") and *musuko* ("son"). These words can be used when you refer to your own children. You use different sets of words when you talk about other people's children, with differing levels of politeness. Since this is complex, you are not expected to be able to use all of them correctly. If you are to stay in Japan for a long time, however, you will find such knowledge in politeness quite useful.

Unit 46

kaisha

kaisha, literally means a company or an enterprise but it is used in various ways in Japanese. It usually refers to a physical setting, including the building and office space where people go to work. It also symbolizes a social unit with which many people identify and to which they feel loyalty. When Japanese people look for jobs, many of them consider it more important to find the "right" organization for them, where they feel secure about their jobs, with steady promotions and pay raises, rather than to find a place where they can grow rapidly as individuals through many challenges.

If you ask a young Japanese boy, for instance, what his father does, he is likely to say, "My father works at a *kaisha*." When you ask him what his father's *kaisha* is, he may say it is Mitsubishi, Sony, Toyota, etc. You have no idea whether his father is the president of the company or a chauffeur. What he does for the company is not as important as what company or *kaisha* he works for. Even though life-long employment is no longer a common practice in many companies, people's commitment and loyalty to their organization is still highly valued.

Unit 47

Gasoline and Gas Stations

In comparison to the U.S., the price of gasoline is quite high in Japan. Gas is sold by the liter instead of by the gallon. One liter is a little more than a quarter of a gallon, and the price ranges from approximately 110 yen to 125 yen per liter. These prices translate roughly to \$1.00 to \$1.15 per liter or approximately \$3.80 to \$4.40 per gallon. The price varies depending on whether you are in a large city or in a small and remote village.

Other than the price of gas, the services provided at a gas station in Japan are quite different. The gas stations are, indeed, "full service." You will seldom, if ever, pump gas. Most gas stations have a number of attendants on duty, and they will not only pump gas for you, but also clean the windows, empty the ashtray, dispose of any other garbage you may have in the car, and even stop the traffic for you to pull out of the gas station.

Unit 48

Even More Ways to Avoid Saying "No"

In this unit you heard the shopkeeper say *kitte desu ka? sumimasen, kitte wa* in answer to the inquiry as to whether he has stamps at the store. This response is literally translated as "Stamps, is it? I'm sorry, stamps." This person is trying to imply that he cannot accommodate the other person's request by obscuring the end of the statement, rather than clearly ending it. We have repeatedly stressed that the Japanese tend to be indirect in their communication. A major reason for this is their great dislike of having any direct confrontation that may lead to the other's loss of face, which will consequently result in damaged human relations. Whatever the reason may be, you will find Japanese speakers making ambiguous statements far more often than people in the U.S. Vaguely finishing a statement is just one such example.

Unit 49

Hospitals and Clinics in Japan

Whenever you travel to a foreign country, you certainly hope to stay healthy and away from hospitals. However, you must have some basic knowledge as to how you can get medical care in case the need arises. You will find as many hospitals in Japan as in the U.S., and the Emergency Rooms operate in much the same way in the two countries. Should you need an ambulance, you call 119, which is the number for a fire station all across Japan. You must be able to describe what is wrong with you. Here are some basic expressions: *byoki* ("sick"), *kibun ga warui* ("I feel bad"), *nettsu ga aru* ("I have a fever"), and *itai* ("hurt"). *atama ga itai* is

"my head hurts" or "I have a headache"; *onaka ga itai* is "I have an abdominal pain"; and *ashi ga itai* is "my legs hurt."

Aside from large hospitals, you will find many small clinics with doctors whose specialties are clearly identified: internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics, gynecology, dermatology, etc. You can simply walk into these clinics without an appointment. Though to a limited extent, many Japanese doctors have a minimal working knowledge of English.

Unit 50

Drugstores

Drugstores in Japan are much the same as those in the U.S., except that they are less spacious and therefore the variety of merchandise available is limited. In most drugstores, you can purchase over-the-counter as well as prescription drugs; items such as soap, shampoo, toothbrushes, and toothpaste; and some household goods such as detergents and pesticides.

You will also find small drugstores adjacent to many clinics. These drugstores usually only supply medicines prescribed by the doctors in the clinics. While you are likely to find most of the common cold and stomach medicines that you see in the U.S., you may want to pack certain brands that you find especially effective when you travel to Japan.

Unit 51

desu ne

As you have heard frequently in the units, and as you will hear in actual conversations, people very often end their sentences with ... *desu ne*. This is a Japanese tag question (similar to "aren't you?," "isn't it?," or simply "right?"). Again, this is a manifestation of the Japanese tentative attitude toward others. By adding *desu ne* at the end of a sentence, the Japanese try to reduce the degree of their assertiveness. You may even hear someone say *ne* not only at the end of a sentence, but in the middle and/or the beginning as well. *kyo desu ne* ("As for today, right?"), *watashi wa desu ne* ("I, right?"), *netsu ga atte desu ne* ("have a fever, right?"). Many Japanese speakers do not seem to pay much attention to how frequently they use *ne*, or *desu ne* in their conversation since it has become habitual. You may not wish to imitate blindly what the native speakers say, but if you can learn to use *ne* in an appropriate manner, it will facilitate your communication in Japanese.

Trains in Japan

Japan is known for its well-developed, efficient railroad system. Most cities are connected by the Japanese Railways (JR). There are several classes of trains, determined by the number of stops that they make. They are, in ascending order, *futsu* or "Regular Train" which provides local service and will make every stop on a line. After that you have the *kaisoku*, or "Limited Express Train," which makes fewer stops and runs primarily for commuters. The *kyuukoo*, or "Express Train," and the *tokkyuu*, or "Super Express Train," make successively limited stops. And at the top of the line, you have the *shinkansen* "Bullet Trains" which usually run from one end of the line to the other with no stops in between. They run in the northern part of Japan between Morioka and Tokyo; the central part, between Niigata and Tokyo; and the western part between Fukuoka and Tokyo via Osaka, Kyoto, and Nagoya. *shinkansen* services are still limited to the metropolitan areas of Japan.

When you use either the *tokkyuu* or *shinkansen*, you must pay for special express tickets in addition to the regular fare. If you know in advance that you will be using train services in Japan, you can save yourself quite a bit of money by purchasing a Japan Rail Pass, prior to your departure from the U.S. Only foreign visitors can take advantage of this pass, which is valid for unlimited travel on JR lines.

Unit 52

homu at a Train Station

There are many words that the Japanese use in their conversation which they have borrowed from English. While some of them are used in the same way or have a similar meaning, many others have been adapted to suit the needs of the Japanese speakers. The pronunciations of many such words are also altered, so you may not even notice that they came from English. One such example which you will find at a train station is the word *homu*, pronounced like "home." It is the word for "platform," and it is used alternately with *sen*, "track." You need to find out which platform you are to proceed to when you ride a train. Some stations in the nation's capital (such as the *shinjuku*, *shibuya*, *shinagawa* and *tokyo* stations) are huge and have up to twenty tracks or platforms. Just ask someone at the station, *yokohama wa nanban homu desu ka?* or *yokohama wa nanban sen desu ka?*

Jim san no kuruma wa?

You heard in this unit, *Jim san no kuruma wa?* Strictly speaking from the grammatical perspective, this is not a complete sentence. Translated word for word, the statement only says "Mr. Jim's car?" If we were to make it grammatically complete, it would be *Jim san, anata no kuruma wa dou shimashita ka?* ("Mr. Jim, what did you do with your car?") You will notice that many Japanese statements are seemingly incomplete and even appear grammatically incorrect in English terms. Being able to read the speaker's mind and to let others read yours is an important skill in Japanese daily communication. If you speak in Japanese using clear, complete, precise sentences, which is an important communication competency in American discourse, you might be considered as a legalistic, aggressive, or even an offensive person. After some experience and practice, you will learn how to leave your language vague and "incomplete" in actual social situations.

Unit 53

National Holidays in Japan

There are quite a few national holidays in Japan. Since all schools, government offices, post offices, banks, and most businesses - except stores - are closed on these holidays, you may wish to take note of them. The Japanese holidays are as follows:

- January 1 New Year's Day
- January 15 Coming-of-Age Day
- February 11 National Foundation Day
- March 21 (approx.) Vernal Equinox Day [The date varies depending on astronomical conditions.]
- April 29 Green Day (Formerly the *showa* Emperor's birthday)
- May 3 Constitution Day
- May 4 National Holiday
- May 5 Children's Day
- July 20 Ocean Day
- September 15 Respect-for-the-Aged Day
- September 23 Autumnal Equinox Day (approx.)
- October 10 Health-Sports Day
- November 3 Culture Day
- November 23 Labor Thanksgiving Day
- December 23 Emperor's Birthday

In case a holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday becomes an alternate holiday.

Unit 54

zuibun isogashii n desu ne.

In this unit you heard *zuibun isogashii n desu ne*, meaning "You're awfully busy, aren't you?" addressed to someone who will be going on a business trip. In the Japanese society, which highly values work, this statement is often taken as a compliment. The implication behind the statement is that the busier you are, the more important a person you are in your *kaisha*. Business people in Japan spend a considerable amount of time traveling. Because of the size of the country, it is quite possible to be in Nagoya on Wednesday, Osaka on Thursday, and Kobe on Friday. It is only a one-hour ride on *shinkansen* from Nagoya to Kobe.

The Weekend in Japan

Up until the early 1990's, most Japanese people would work or go to school on Saturdays. Given some pressure from the international community and sensitivity to the accusation of being workaholics, the Japanese government and businesses have started adopting a "two-days off" practice. As a result, government offices, post offices, and banks are now closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Most schools are, however, still ambivalent about every Saturday being a "holiday." They have adopted the two-day-weekend system every other week. This means that the students have every other Saturday off, usually the second and the fourth of the month. The school policies vary from one prefecture (equivalent to a state or a political subdivision in the U.S.) to another. In some prefectures schools may be off only on the second Saturday of each month. Since most stores are open throughout the weekend, many people spend their weekends shopping.

Unit 55

kedo

In this unit *yamada san* was asked by the speaker whether she wanted to join him for *ocha*. She said in response *ainiku ... chotto ... san ji ni kaigi ga arimasu*. ("Sorry, a little, there is a meeting at 3:00"). *Chotto*, as discussed in Unit 11, is added to indicate that the speaker may be willing to, but is unable to accommodate the other person's request. It is often used to avoid hurting the other person's feelings, and is another way to imply "no."

Later, *yamada san* says, *ee, demo sono ato wa chotto hima desu kedo*. ("Well, but after that a little free time exists though"). She tries to make up for the necessary rejection by saying that she might perhaps be able to join him after the meeting. Note the *kedo* at the end of the sentence. Also note that the man says later, *denen wa? chotto tooi desu kedo*. ("How about Denen? It is a little far, though").

You will notice that the Japanese often end their statements with *kedo*. This is yet one more of the many ways to soften the tone and imply that they would not terribly mind if the other person did not agree with their ideas, requests, or suggestions. *kedo* also suggests that the speakers are willing to accept and adapt to the other person's ideas.

Many Japanese do not feel comfortable isolating themselves in any social settings, including meetings where Americans would readily expect to see open confrontation and clashes of ideas. You may wonder how the Japanese make group decisions. It certainly entails a long process in which subtle exchanges of ideas take place. Hierarchical relationships among the people involved in the process also play an important role.

However, do not let the frequent use of *kedo* fool you. Many people attach the word only in order to make their assertions sound tentative, while in reality they may indeed be strongly committed to their ideas and not at all ready to change their positions. While they will not refute openly, *kedo* functions as a façade in many situations.

Unit 56

Geography of Japan

Japan is an island country, but how many islands the country comprises is not so widely known. There are four main islands. Going from the north to the south, you have Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu.

Honshu is the largest island in size, population, and economic strength. Many metropolitan areas are concentrated along the Pacific coast on Honshu: Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Osaka, Kobe, and Hiroshima. While some fairly large cities, such as Niigata and Kanazawa, are on the Japan Sea, this coast is often referred to as *ura nihon*, or the back side of Japan.

Hokkaido is the northernmost island and it has acres and acres of farmland. Many agricultural and dairy products support the economy of Hokkaido. The largest city is Sapporo where the winter Olympics were held in 1974.

Shikoku is an island across the Setonaikai (the Inland Sea of Japan) from Honshu. It is the size of all the Hawaiian islands put together.

Kyushu is the southernmost of the four main islands and is connected with Honshu by a tunnel and a bridge. The largest city is Fukuoka.

Other than the four main islands, there are some 2,000 smaller ones, including the Okinawa Islands. The size of the entire country is about the same as that of the state of California. Considering that the population of Japan is about one half of that of the U.S., and that half of the population is concentrated in metropolitan areas such as Tokyo and Osaka, you can imagine how crowded the large cities are.

Unit 57

Public Transportation in Japan

Although business people may frequently make sales trips by car, the majority of people do not travel by car in Japan. There are many reasons that account for this. First of all, public transportation is well developed. You can usually choose among airplanes, trains, and buses. Airfares in Japan are higher than in the U.S., but the service is good and the planes are usually on time. The trains are probably used most often. Now that the country has completed its primary highway system, buses have become an inexpensive, alternate means of long distance public transportation. A trip from Tokyo to Fukuoka, some 800 miles in distance, takes an hour and a half by airplane, five hours by the fastest *shinkansen* train, called *nozomi*, and fourteen hours by bus.

Traffic congestion is another reason why many people do not drive long distances, especially on a trip when punctuality is very important. The high price of gas is yet another reason.

Unit 58

jaa, mata itsuka

In this unit you heard *jaa mata itsuka*, which means, "Well then, some other time." The expression is used to show social politeness, and it is equivalent to "Let's get together sometime." In this case, you would not ask, "What exactly do you mean by 'sometime'?" If you did, you might be considered socially incompetent and rude. In Japanese society, with the extreme concern for politeness in human relations, you will come across many such expressions. *chikai uchi ippai yari masho*, for instance, means "Let's go for a drink some time soon." In most cases, the person is likely to be saying it just to be polite, so the safest response is something like *ii desu ne*. or "That sounds good."

go and o as Polite Prefixes

When you refer to your own family, you say *kazoku*, while you need to call someone else's family *gokazoku*. When you talk about your own house, you say *watashi no uchi* ("my house"). However, you say, *anata no o uchi* ("your house") when you talk

about someone else's house. The rule concerning when to use *go* and *o* is quite hard even for native speakers to explain clearly. You just have to know it, since there is no clear-cut straight rule. (It may be somewhat similar to "a" and "the" in English.) Principally *go* precedes a word that originally comes from the Chinese language and *o* is used for those that are originally Japanese. Whether the word comes from Chinese or Japanese is a very difficult question even for the Japanese. As a non-native speaker, you do not need to worry too much about making a mistake between the *go* and *o*, although you should show your politeness by making the attempt to add the correct prefix.

Unit 59

osokunatte sumimasen

In this unit you heard *osokunatte sumimasen*, which means "I'm sorry, I'm late." Peoples' conceptualization of time is different from culture to culture, and their expectations vary accordingly. In some cultures, for instance, keeping someone waiting for fifteen minutes is a sign of insult, while in others showing up one hour late for an appointment is a common practice. Japan, in general, is classified into the former group of cultures. If you have a business appointment with someone to whom you must show respect, a prospective customer or employer, for instance, you should plan to arrive early. If you are invited to someone's house for a party, on the other hand, being a little late, say ten to fifteen minutes, is considered acceptable, and even polite. If you are late for more than half an hour, it is appropriate to say *osokunatte sumimasen*. You should by all means avoid having to use this expression when you have a business appointment.

Unit 60

Gift Giving

Gift giving is a very popular social practice in many settings in Japan. People customarily give gifts twice a year to their superiors, such as senior members at the work place and teachers. The gift in the summer is called *ochugen* and the one in winter is called *oseibo*. The *o* at the beginning of either word is the honorific prefix. People also bring gifts when they visit someone's house for a get-together, when they visit an office on business, and when they visit family members, relatives, and friends at a hospital.

In this unit the person visiting a Japanese home brought some chocolate for the host's children. Items such as candies and chocolates, flowers, and wine would make appropriate gifts to bring to someone's house when you're invited for dinner. The Japanese very rarely, if ever, have a potluck party. When invited for dinner, you may ask what, if anything, you may bring, but the chances are that you will be told "nothing." These customs are very similar in Japan and the U.S., but one difference you may need to be aware of is that you are expected to show your appreciation again the next time you see your host or hostess. *kono mae wa arigatou gozaimashita* is an appropriate thing to say. ("Thank you for the other day.")

shitsurei shimasu / ojama shimasu

shitsurei shimasu means roughly, "I'm going to commit a rude thing." The Japanese use this expression when they enter somebody's room or house. A similar expression, *ojama shimasu*, whose literal meaning is "I'm going to interfere with you," can also be used in the same situation. When you take your leave, on the other hand, you simply make these expressions into the past tense and say *shitsurei shimashita* or *ojama shimashita*. *sayonara* is considered as rather crude for an adult when you're leaving someone's house.

Acknowledgments

Japanese 2

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