

IV. Grammar Explanation

1. 敬語 (honorific expressions)

You learn けいご in Lesson 49 and 50. けいご are expressions used to show the speaker's respect for the listener or the person being referred to. The speaker is expected to show respect depending on his/her relationship with the listener or the person being referred to. There are the following three factors that should be considered in deciding the use of けいご: (1) When the speaker is junior or lower in social status, he/she uses けいご to show respect to the person senior or higher in social status. (2) When the speaker does not have a close acquaintanceship with the listener, as is typical when the speaker first meets the listener, he/she uses けいご to show respect to the listener. (3) The ウチ・ソト relationship should also be taken into consideration with regard to the use of けいご. The speaker's group such as his/her family and company, etc., are considered as ウチ, and other groups are considered as ソト. When the speaker talks about ウチの ひと (an insider) to ソトの ひと (an outsider), the insider is treated like the speaker himself/herself. Therefore, even if the insider is senior or higher in status, the speaker cannot use けいご in the way that shows respect to the insider.

2. Types of 敬語

けいご are classified into three types: そんけいご (respectful expressions), けんじょうご (humble expressions) and ていねいご (polite expressions). Lesson 49 deals with そんけいご.

3. 尊敬語 (respectful expressions)

そんけいご are expressions used to describe the listener or the person referred to, as well as things connected with him/her and his/her actions.

1) Verbs

(1) Respectful verbs (See Main Textbook, Lesson 49, p. 196, 練習A1.)

The same verbs used in the passive are used as respectful verbs. They are Group II verbs.

① 中村さんは 7時に 来られます。

Mr. Nakamura is coming at seven.

② お酒を やめられたんですか。

Have you given up drinking?

(2) おVます-formになります

This pattern is considered politer than the respectful verbs mentioned above. Verbs whose ます-form consist of one mora (みます, ねます, etc.) and Group III verbs cannot be used in this pattern. As for the verbs which have special equivalents (see (3) below), note that the special equivalents rather than this pattern are used.

③ 社長は もう お帰りになりました。

The president has already left for home.

(3) Special respectful words (See Main Textbook, Lesson 49, p. 196, 練習A5.)

Some verbs have special respectful equivalents. They are considered to show the same level of respect as (2) above.

④ ワット先生は 研究室に いらっしゃいます。 Professor Watt is in the office.

⑤ どうぞ 召し上がって ください。 Please help yourselves.

[Note] いらっしゃいます, なさいます, くださいます and おっしゃいます are Group I verbs, but except for the ます-form, they change their form in the ら-row when they conjugate.

⑥ ワット先生は テニスを なさいますか。 Does Professor Watt play tennis?
…いいえ、 なさらないと 思います。 …No, I don't think so.

(4) おVます-form ください

This is the respectful way of instructing or inviting someone to do something.

⑦ あちらから お入り ください。 Please enter from over there.

[Note] The special words you learned in (3) above cannot be used in this pattern. The exceptions are めしあがります and ごらんになります, which are changed to おめしあがり ください (Please help yourself) and ごらん ください (Please have a look at it) respectively.

2) Nouns, adjectives and adverbs

In addition to verbs, some nouns, adjectives and adverbs can be turned into そんけいご by attaching お or ご to the front of the word. The choice between お and ご depends on the word. Basically お is attached to words of Japanese origin, while ご is attached to words of Chinese origin.

Examples of words to which お is attached:

(N) お国、 お名前、 お仕事
(な-adj) お元気、 お上手、 お暇
(い-adj) お忙しい、 お若い

Examples of words to which ご is attached:

(N) ご家族、 ご意見、 ご旅行
(な-adj) ご熱心、 ご親切
(adverb) ご自由に

4. 敬語 and style of sentence

A sentence can end with a plain form of けいご, which makes the sentence a plain style sentence. This kind of sentence appears on occasions such as when the speaker is talking with a close friend about a person to whom the speaker wishes to show respect.

⑧ 部長は 何時に いらっしゃる? What time will the general manager come?

5. Uniform level of 敬語 in a sentence

In honorific expressions, replacing some of the words in a sentence with けいご does not suffice. It is necessary to keep a uniform level of けいご throughout the entire sentence.

⑨ 部長の 奥様も ごいっしょに ゴルフに行かれます。

The general manager's wife will go golfing together with him.

In ⑨, おくさま and ごいっしょに are used instead of おくさん and いっしょに in order to be consistent with the respectful verb いかれます.

6. ～まして

You change Vて-form to Vます-form まして when you want to be very polite. In a sentence with けいご, ～まして is often used for consistency.

⑩ ハンスが ゆうべ 熱を 出しまして、 けさも まだ 下がらないんです。

Hans became feverish last night and still has a fever this morning.