Design: Masako Ban

# Pera Pera Penguin's

5-minute Japanese Class by Hitomi Hirayama

Vol. 17

# ue ? shita ?

(upper) (lower)

I went to a friend's party the other day, and met a Japanese woman. I introduced myself, saying, "Pole desu." (I'm Pole.) She asked me, "ue no (upper) namae desuka, shita no (lower) namae desu ka?" (Is it your upper name or lower name?) Ms. Hirayama, does that mean names are ranked as upper class or lower class? If so, how are they classified? Is my name upper class, or what?

■■■ Japanese names are not ranked in any way. The Japanese had only given names until they started to use family names in the Meiji era. Japanese names are traditionally written vertically, and family names are placed above given names. Thus, given names are called shita no namae (lower names), and family names ue no namae (upper names). Interestingly, the Japanese Emperor's family has no family name. Several years ago, I heard a Japanese couple tried to name their baby akuma (meaning devil), but the city hall refused to accept their registration.

## Introducing oneself

Japanese people usually avoid saying, "watashi" (meaning I) because it may sound arrogant if it is used too much. Try not to say "watashi" unless you wish to emphasize yourself.

e.g.,

My name is [first name and last name]. I work for [company name].

[company name] の (no) [first name and last name] です。 (desu)

で ございます。 (de gozaimasu) (very polite)

と もうします。 (to mōshimasu)

If you don't belong to a company, you can skip this part.

(This is a very formal expression usually used when introducing oneself for the first time. After that, it is fine to say, "...desu")

① どうぞ よろしく。 (dōzo yoroshiku) (implying, "please keep a good relationship with me") or どうぞ よろしく おねがいします。 (dōzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu) (polite)

■ Japanese people will understand if you say "dōzo yoroshiku." Even though there is no similar expression in English, you will find many Japanese people use the phrase every day. They try to avoid asking favors directly, and using this phrase is a subtler way of making a request.

These are several ways of using the phrase.
Simply add the phrase at the end of the conversation, when...

1) you are introducing yourself. (implying: please keep a good relationship with me)
2) you want to ask a favor in a subtle way.
3) you want to ask the person to do his/her best in a subtle way.
4) you want to avoid telling someone what to do step by step.
5) you want to wrap up the conversation.
6) you want to imply "Thanks" or "Good bye."

② ■ When you write the Japanese language vertically, you start writing from the top-right corner of the paper, and go downward. When you reach the bottom of the page, you move to the next line on the left, and write from top to bottom.

e.g., Mr. Masanori Kobayashi
(first name) (last name)

小 Ko
林 bayashi — ue no namae (upper) (name)

雅 Masa
典 nori — shita no namae (lower) (name)

What is your last name ?
うえ の お名前 は
ue no onamae wa

What is your first name ?
した の お名前 は
shita no onamae wa

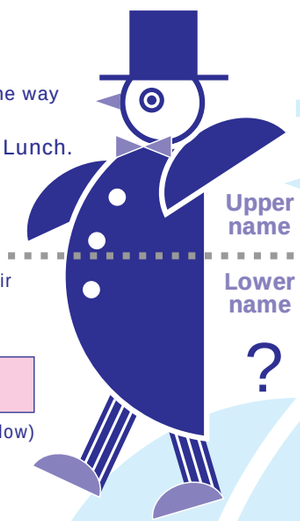
Mr. Pole : My name is James Pole. I work for Ice Co.
アイス会社 の ジェームス ポール です。
Ice-gaisha no James Pole desu
Ice company of
Say your name just the way it is in your country.

Hirayama : My name is Hirayama. I work for Japanese Lunch.
シャパニーズ ランチ の 平山 です。
Japanese Lunch no Hirayama desu
Japanese people usually introduce themselves with their last names alone

① Please keep a good relationship with me.

Mr. Pole : Excuse me, but what is your first name?
失礼ですが
shitsurē desu ga
② what is your first name?
When you ask personal question (see below)

Hirayama : It's Hitomi.
ひとみ です。
Hitomi desu




There are two ways of saying "excuse me" in Japanese:

1. "shitsurē desu ga" (implying: I don't mean to bother you by asking personal questions, but...)
It means that you want to ask a personal question.
2. "suimasen/sumimasen" (implying: Allow me to have your attention.)
Used to attract someone's attention.

e.g., Excuse me, may I have some water, please?
③ 水 お願いします。 (mizu onegaishimasu)

Excuse me, but may I have your name, please?
④ お名前 は。 (onamae wa) (polite form)

Excuse me, is anybody here? (looking for a staff at a shop, etc.)
⑤ 。

Excuse me, but how old are you? (polite form)
⑥ おいくつ ですか。 (oikutsu desu ka)

answers :
④⑥ shitsurē desu ga
③⑤ suimasen

# 新入社員 new staff

shin nyū sha in

A 一 人 前 (one)(person)(deserve) — ichi nin mae
Being advanced, skilled, independent, mature, full-grown, etc. Someone who can do good work without help from others. This expression is used for people who have technical skills. (carpenters, chefs, etc.), but it's also applied to workers in general. Another meaning is "Food for one person."

B 半 人 前 (half)(person)(deserve) — han nin mae
未 熟 者 (not yet)(immaturity)(person) — mi juku mono
Being intermediate, immature, etc. Someone who does not have enough skills to complete his or her work alone. "han nin mae" is an expression for someone whose technical skills are imperfect, whereas, "mijuku mono" is for general use.

C 石の上にも3年 (stone) (on) (three years) — ishi no ue nimo san nen
Perseverance prevails. "Sit on a rock for three years." If you sit on a rock for three years, you will get used to it, and feel comfortable. This means that perseverance brings good results.

D 右も左もわかりません (right)(left)(don't know) — migi mo hidari mo wakarimasen
Being a complete novice. "I don't know which way is right or left." Someone who doesn't know what to do because he or she is in a new environment (a new house, or a new location, etc.)

① It takes about 10 years to learn to make sushi, while it takes about 15 years to become an excellent Japanese chef

寿司 は 約 10年、 和食 は 約 15年 で [skilled worker] に なります。
sushi wa yaku jū nen washoku wa yaku jū go nen de ni narimasu
about 10 years Japanese food 15 years become

② Please be patient with me because I'm a complete novice. (This is a good phrase when you introduce yourself.)

[being a complete novice.] ので これから よろしく お願い致します。
node kore-kara yoroshiku onegai-itashimasu
so from now

③ Oh, no, no… I'm still intermediate. (Use this phrase to show your modesty when a Japanese person praises you.)

いえいえ まだまだ [being intermediate]
ie ie mada-mada
Oh, no, no still, not yet

④ I know that perseverance prevails. I won't give up doing my best!

["Perseverance prevails."] 。あきらめないで 頑張ります。
akiramenaide gambarimasu
don't give up hard to do that

⑤ Excuse me! May I have yakitori (grilled chicken) for one person? (at a restaurant.)

すいません 焼き鳥 [food for one person] お願いします。
suimasen yakitori onegaishimasu
Excuse me I order

answers : ①… A ②… D ③… B ④… C ⑤… A

With cooperation from Yasuhiro Koga

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